



Year 8 Rites of Passage/Festivals



1. Is life a journey? What is the purpose of your life? Are you on a journey? Are there certain milestones that we all go through? Many people see life as a journey where certain events are 'marked' and celebrated such as birth, first day at school, last day at school, graduation from college/university, first job, first home, marriage, family, end of life etc. For religious people, they too see life as a journey, from the gift of life given by God at birth to Judgement Day where hopefully eternal life will be granted. Many of the significant events along the way are marked as commitments to the religious way of life.



2. Birth ceremonies

At an **Infant baptism** or christening the priest pours water on the baby's head and says, 'I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' It symbolises new life, cleansing from sin and admission to the Church, and godparents make promises on behalf of the child. Some have a dedication service instead of infant baptism, as they believe that children should make the choice for themselves.

In Islam, the father whispers the Adhan (Muslim call to prayer) in the ear of the new-born baby. Then something sweet like sugar or a date is put on the baby's tongue. After seven days, the **Aqiqah** (Birth) ceremony takes place. This involves shaving the baby's head, naming the child and donating to the poor. For boys, khitan (circumcision) may take place any time after eight days. At the age of four years, four months and four days, the **Bismillah** initiation ceremony occurs. This marks the start of the child's religious education.



4. Wedding ceremonies

Christian marriage is in the presence of God and usually takes place in a church. The bride and groom promise to 'love and cherish, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health till death us do part.' The priest explains the importance of marriage in providing a stable and loving home for bringing up children.

Sikhs make their wedding vows in front of the Guru Granth Sahib. The groom promises to protect the bride and she undertakes to fulfil her obligations. They hold the groom's scarf and walk clockwise around the Guru Granth Sahib while four hymns (lavan) are sung. Prayers are said, karah parshad eaten and presents given to the couple.

A **Muslim** wedding is led by the imam and includes readings from the Qur'an and Hadith. There is a spoken and written contract and the groom gives his bride money or property (mahr) After a feast, the bride and groom go to their home and the next day family and friends attend the marriage celebration.



3. Initiation ceremonies

Christian believers can be baptised as adults. **Believers' baptism** includes full immersion in a pool, symbolising cleansing from sin and being born again in Christ.

Confirmation, or membership ceremonies confirm the promises made during infant baptism. A bishop usually takes the service and the individual believes that they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. Roman Catholics anoint each person with oil.

A Jewish boy has the **Brit Milah** (circumcision ceremony) when eight days old. This recalls the covenant that God made with Abraham. The child is named and some wine is placed on his lips and a celebration follows. Now the baby is seen as religiously pure and a part of God's chosen people- the Jews. Girls, aged 12 have a **Bat Mitzvah** initiation ceremony and become a 'daughter of the commandment'. Boys have their **Bar Mitzvah** aged 13, taking on the responsibilities associated with being a Jew.



5. Festivals

The festival of **Christmas**, held on 25 December, is when most Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus. The festivities last 12 days. Christians look forward to receiving presents. Shops, trees and homes are decorated with lights and nativity scenes. Families get together, cards are sent to friends and relatives and feasts take place. Special foods are prepared including Christmas cake, Christmas pudding and mince pies, and roast turkey is often eaten on Christmas Day. Special services are held where carols are sung, the nativity scene is acted out and Midnight Mass takes place on Christmas Eve. It is seen as a time of 'peace and goodwill' and giving to charity as God gave the gift of his Son. **Easter** is the most important Christian festival as it celebrates the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The week leading up to Easter Day is known as Holy Week, and Christians remember the events that led to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Jesus was crucified on 'Good Friday' and laid in the tomb. Special services are held and processions in the streets are led by a person carrying a wooden cross. On Easter Sunday the churches are filled with flowers and special hymns are sung celebrating the resurrection. Many churches hold a night vigil on the Saturday that begins in darkness and includes lighting a large Paschal candle to symbolise the risen Christ and ends in Holy Communion. Many Christians eat eggs, a symbol of new life.

Diwali is celebrated by Hindus and Sikhs and is known as the Festival of lights. It symbolises the victory of good over evil. Lights are lit in the home and some are floated down the river. This symbolises the person's inner light (atman) outshining the darkness and overcoming ignorance and obstacles, bringing an awareness of spiritual things. Hindus remember the story from The Ramayana of Rama and Sita's welcome home after their victory over the evil king Ravana.

Keyword	Meaning
Rites of passage	Ceremonies associated with the major moments in life such as birth and marriage.
Initiation	Being entered formally into a religion.
Infant Baptism	Initiation into the Church of babies and young children, where promises are taken on their behalf by adults.
Confirmation	The sacrament in which the faith of the believer is 'confirmed' or strengthened by the Holy Spirit.
Believers' Baptism	Initiation into the Church, by immersion in water, of people old enough to understand the ceremony and willing to live a Christian life.
Testimony	A talk describing how God has worked in a person's life.
Marriage	A legal union between two people.
Vows	Promises made between two people at a marriage ceremony.
Advent	The period beginning four Sundays before Christmas in which Christians look forward to the coming of Christ at Christmas.
Christmas	The feast day celebrating the birth of Jesus.
Christingle	A decorated orange that represents the love of Jesus.
Lent	The 40-day period before Easter, in which Christians pray, fast and give to charity.
Easter	The religious season celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
Diwali	Hindu Festival of lights .
Id ul Fitr	Festival to mark the end of Ramadan.
Id-ul-Adha	Festival of sacrifice celebrated at the end of Hajj.