

Atonement Celebration

Introduction for the Participants

This liturgy celebrates the complete atoning work of Jesus Christ, drawing inspiration from the Jewish Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Following that theme, it highlights Jesus' once and for all high priestly function, replacing both the offering of incense and a blood sacrifice to atone for sin.

It also incorporates a modified reenactment of part of the Jewish water-drawing ceremony (Simchat Beit HaShoeivah) and the accompanying illumination of the temple courtyard – both of which Jesus himself used to illustrate his being the ultimate answer to man's spiritual need. Although these two ceremonies were both part of the Feast of Booths (Sukkot, the inspiration for next week's celebration), they are included here due to their connection to this week's theme.

The fact that the water-drawing ceremony uses both water and wine is particularly appropriate for Christians because these liquids represent the two things that allow us to fully live as the people of God. The wine represents the blood of Jesus, which makes us right with God; and the water represents the Holy Spirit which empowers us to become God's representatives. (see Mark 14:23-24 & John 7:38-39)

Similarly, the lamps in the four corners of the room follow Jewish tradition but have a special symbolism for us as Christians: our commission, as the redeemed people of God, is to take the light of the Gospel to the four corners of the world.