



## Ealing Agreed Syllabus: guidance for teachers

### KS2.8: Initiation practices

**Overall aim:** to develop an understanding of a rite of passage, and explore various ways of marking these important transitions.

<b>Starting something new</b>	<b>Pupils will</b>	identify the increased responsibilities that follow when starting something new.
<b>Aim:</b> to introduce the concept of an important life transition.	<b>SEN</b>	
	<b>Gifted</b>	
<b>Possible activities</b>		<b>Suggested resources</b>
<p><b>Note:</b> There are seven possible lessons in this unit. If you teach this unit in years 5 or 6 you might want to replace one of the earlier lessons with the final lesson looking at the historical origins of certain rites of passage.</p>		
<p><b>Starter:</b> Encourage pupils to think about the times in their lives when they have done something new, e.g. started school, joined a club or team, had a new baby in the family, gone on holiday and so on. This activity can be carried out in pairs or larger groups with pupils recording the key events in their lives.</p>		
<p><b>Activity 1:</b> Taking one or two of the examples that pupils suggest, illustrate that new events bring with them different expectations of behaviour. For example what are the differences pupils notice about how they behave after they started school from how they behaved at home? What are the differences/ expectations of pupils' behaviour when they join a team or club, and so on?</p>		
<p><b>Activity 2:</b> Ask pupils to discuss with each other examples of life transitions they have witnessed in others, e.g. an older sibling transitioning to high school, or a parent starting a new job. Did the family mark these events in any way?</p>		
<p><b>Activity 3:</b> Ask pupils to record in their books one of the transitional events in their life. It may be helpful to suggest to pupils a model for their writing. This could include a title such as Starting School and a paragraph indicating behaviour that needed to be changed and why it needed to be changed at school as compared to at home. For less able pupils, teachers may wish to suggest a writing frame in boxes.</p>		
<p><b>Plenary:</b> When drawing this lesson together, teachers may ask pupils to read their work to each other. Following this, teachers could then make the link to the context of religious or philosophical belief by illustrating that people who join—or leave—a belief community or group often change their behaviour because they have changed the way they think about life. The purpose of introducing this at this stage is to set the scene for the remainder of the unit.</p>		

<i>Rites of Passage</i>	<i>Pupils will</i>	understand what 'rite of passage' means; they will be able to identify times when they have participated in such a ceremony.
<i>Aim:</i> to look at transitional events and their associated rituals.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<p><b>Starter:</b> Look at a picture of Japanese children dressed up for the visit to the shrine on Shichi-go-san and consider the significance of the ages 3, 5 and 7 for Japanese children. Discuss the festival in terms of a ritual marking specific moments in life as milestones. Ask pupils to think of other days when children are given gifts, such as their birthday. Ask them to name other significant age milestones e.g. 18<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup> birthdays. Ask pupils to think about times when they might wear a special piece of clothing for the first time e.g. new school uniform, turban, hijab, wedding dress.</p>		<p>Google for appropriate images. Ask students to bring photos from home of milestone events such as baptisms, first communions, weddings, funerals.</p>
<p><b>Activity 1:</b> Look at some common milestones that are marked by ritual: birth, coming of age, marriage, starting a new job, entry into the religious life, death.</p>		
<p><b>Activity 2:</b> Introduce the term 'rite of passage'. Tell class that a French anthropologist came up with the term to describe the ceremonies he observed that were used to mark the passage of a person from one group to another. And that these rites usually resulted in a change in that person's status: for instance when a young man or woman was considered ready for marriage, or when they were considered old enough to learn the group's beliefs.</p>		
<p><b>Activity 3:</b> Ask pupils to discuss in pairs or larger groups their own experiences of traditional milestone ceremonies—either as witness or participant—that involve belonging to groups outside their families e.g. wedding, baptism, first communion, confirmation, bar/bat mitzvah.</p>		
<p><b>Activity 4:</b> Ask pupils to write about one of these rites of passage. The structure for this would include a title of the event, a description of the event and the responsibilities incurred by going through this rite of passage. (For example, joining a group—including a philosophical or religious group—might involve special learning or training).</p>		
<p><b>Plenary:</b> Ask pupils to read their work to their neighbour. The teacher then questions the class about whether the objectives of the lesson have been met.</p>		

<b>Birth and naming</b>	<b>Pupils will</b>	learn that most communities have ceremonies to mark the birth of a child; think about the need to accept guidance from the community.
<b>Aim:</b> to explore various rituals for welcoming newborns into the community	<b>SEN</b>	
	<b>Gifted</b>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<b>Starter:</b> Show video of elephants or giraffes welcoming birth of a new member. Discuss how animals in groups seem to cherish and welcome newborns. Mention that in species that live in such groups various members will share the task of looking after the young animals.		<p>Video of elephants welcoming birth of a new member of the herd:  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vb5-6-BQzII">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vb5-6-BQzII</a></p> <p>Baby photos from class members.</p> <p>Humanist naming ceremonies:  <a href="https://humanism.org.uk/ceremonies/humanist-namings/">https://humanism.org.uk/ceremonies/humanist-namings/</a></p> <p>TrueTube:  <a href="https://www.truetube.co.uk/rites-passage">https://www.truetube.co.uk/rites-passage</a></p>
<b>Activity 1:</b> Look at a display of baby pictures of members of the class, perhaps as a Powerpoint presentation. Ask pupils to discuss with each other what their name means and why that particular name was chosen (if known).		
<b>Activity 2:</b> Consider some of the various ways different groups use to mark the birth of a child e.g. infant baptism in Christianity, the Hindu Namkaran, Jewish Brit Milah, Muslim Aqiqah ceremony and Humanist naming ceremony. Draw on the experiences of pupils as appropriate or use videos.		
<b>Activity 3:</b> Look at gift-giving ceremonies, e.g. baby showers and the Pagan ritual of giving symbolic gifts to the child, e.g. intelligence, peace.		
<b>Activity 4:</b> Ask pupils to think about and discuss in pairs gifts they might wish for themselves or others, e.g. “good health”, “adventure”, “friendship” etc. Ask pupils to record these and say why they would choose them.		
<b>Activity 5:</b> Look at the tradition of appointing a member of the community as life-mentor to the new child, e.g. god-parents or guide-parents. In the light of the gifts they have chosen for themselves, discuss with pupils how these can be achieved, i.e. the responsibilities of parents and teachers in bringing up children.		
<b>Plenary:</b> Ask pupils to discuss in pairs briefly the responsibilities they have in accepting the guidance of parents and teachers to help them achieve the best for themselves. Discuss what responsibilities members of the class might assume to help someone new to their class or the school; if time, design a welcoming ceremony.		

<i>Becoming an adult</i>	<i>Pupils will</i>	understand that initiation into a belief community often involves learning about that belief in more detail; realise that reaching certain ages means both new privileges and additional responsibilities.
<i>Aim:</i> to explore the transition to adulthood.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<p><b>Starter:</b> As a class, have a discussion about what individuals look forward to being able to do when they are adults. What preparation will they have to undergo in order to be able to do these things? (E.g. Drivers' Ed for being able to drive a car.)</p>		<p>Judaism 101:  <a href="http://www.jewfaq.org/barmitz.htm">http://www.jewfaq.org/barmitz.htm</a></p> <p>You can find several explanatory videos about bat/bar mitzvah on YouTube, e.g.:</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEBnpxhb0rc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEBnpxhb0rc</a></p> <p>First communion video:  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZIEnKYndGvA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZIEnKYndGvA</a></p> <p>Access to internet and or relevant personnel for research.</p>
<p><b>Activity 1:</b> show class a video of a bar/bat mitzvah ceremony and/or a first communion ceremony.</p>		
<p><b>Activity 2:</b> Break class into groups, giving each group a different religion or tradition to research. Let them be creative in the ways they do their research. For instance, if the teacher or class support staff or older pupil has been through first communion or a similar rite of passage, let them interview that person.</p>		
<p><b>Activity 3:</b> Groups to present their findings to their classmates. How does the person undergoing the rite prepare, e.g. is there any new knowledge they must acquire? What happens to a person going through any of these rituals? Does it involve new/additional privileges and responsibilities?</p>		
<p><b>Activity 4:</b> Look at the ritual of confirmation in the various branches of Christianity.</p>		
<p><b>Plenary:</b> As a class, create a 'transition guide' of advice that they wish they had been given before they started school. What do the pupils think is the most important things that a pupil needs to learn to help them transition from life at home with the family to life in the classroom and life as part of the wider school community. Are there any new rules they must follow?</p>		

<b>Signs of belonging</b>	<b>Pupils will</b>	understand that symbols are important as signs of belonging; be able to talk about signs of belonging that are important to them.
<b>Aim:</b> to explore the symbolic signs that indicate that someone has undergone a rite of passage.	<b>SEN</b>	
	<b>Gifted</b>	
<b>Possible activities</b>		<b>Suggested resources</b>
<b>Before the lesson:</b> ask pupils to bring in some 'sign of belonging', either related to themselves or to a member of their family.		
<b>Starter:</b> Ask pupils to share the examples of signs of belonging that they have brought in from home, e.g. national flags, football scarves, school uniforms and badges. As a group try to identify which sign belongs to what group/organisation.		The BBC has two useful worksheets that look at the founding of the khalsa and the importance of the panj kakke: <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/worksheets/pdf/sikhism_ba_isakhi_5ks.pdf">http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/worksheets/pdf/sikhism_ba_isakhi_5ks.pdf</a> <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/worksheets/pdf/sikhism_ba_isakhi_belonging.pdf">http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/worksheets/pdf/sikhism_ba_isakhi_belonging.pdf</a>
<b>Activity 1:</b> Invite a Sikh parent or member of staff to speak to the class about the <i>Amrit Sanskar</i> . If there is a child in the class who wears the turban, ask them to describe the <i>Dastar Bandi</i> ceremony.		
<b>Activity 2:</b> Discuss the importance of the 5 Ks ( <i>panj kakke</i> ) to Sikhs. Be sure and point out that there are Sikhs who consider themselves to be Sikh and who attend worship in the gurdwara, but who do not wear the turban. Have a discussion about the fact that different people confirm their identity in different ways.		
<b>Activity 3:</b> Ask for examples of symbols of belonging from other groups or belief traditions. Show class images from the internet, e.g. football fans all wearing the colours of their team, people wearing a cross, men wearing the <i>yarmulke</i> (skull cap), a boy or a girl wearing the Jewish <i>tallit</i> (fringed shawl), and Muslim women wearing hijab.		
<b>Activity 4:</b> Introduce the idea that wearing a 'sign of belonging' is not always safe or a choice. For instance, in most schools with a uniform policy all pupils are required to wear a uniform; in some work places wearing a religious sign is breaking the law. In the most extreme situations (e.g. Nazi Germany) certain groups were put in mortal peril by being forced to wear a sign of belonging (e.g. the gold star of David). If you are teaching this class in years 5 or 6 you can make links here to moral dilemmas, i.e. decisions that are not always easy to make.		
<b>Plenary:</b> In groups, design and make a class badge that has symbolic significance. Share with the whole class, while having a discussion about rules that might be applied to wearing such a badge: e.g. that a new member of class has to be there for a certain amount of time before they are given such a badge, that the class only wear it on certain days, etc.		

<i>'Thinking time' as initiation</i>	<i>Pupils will</i>	understand that some religious and philosophical figures gained vision and insight through periods of withdrawal; understand how certain periods of isolation might help them develop inner resources.
<i>Aim:</i> to explore the idea that withdrawal from extroverted activity can have benefits.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
<b>Possible activities</b>		<b>Suggested resources</b>
<b>Starter:</b> Discuss the importance of 'thinking time' to help plan a work assignment or project. Link this activity to that of certain people who withdrew/continue to withdraw for significant periods of 'thinking time' to develop their ideas.		
<b>Activity 1:</b> Tell the story of Jesus' time in the wilderness as told in Matthew 4:1-11. Discuss the consequences of this ordeal i.e. how the strengthening of his faith during his 40 days in the wilderness prepared him for his subsequent mission. Compare this story with Muhammad's experiences of the angel Gabriel during his period of meditating in the cave. If pupils have been introduced to Buddhism remind them of the years the Buddha spent in meditation before achieving enlightenment.		
<b>Activity 2:</b> Tell the class about Charles Darwin, the famous British scientist (background information). In particular how, in his later years when he suffered from ill health, he was encouraged by his doctor to take exercise in the gardens of his house. As well as helping Darwin recover from his illness, these walks actually helped him to think and to come up with new ideas. People still visit Darwin's home, Down House, to walk along his 'thinking path'. Ask: when you go out for a walk, do you get any ideas or come up with solutions to problems that have been bothering you?		
<b>Activity 3:</b> Sometimes, a person might voluntarily submit to a period of reflection in order to develop their spiritual awareness e.g. through fasting during Lent or Ramadan. Ask pupils to discuss in small groups how periods of quietness have helped them think through difficult circumstances or plan what they are going to do.		
<b>Activity 4:</b> Ask pupils to think about when they think and reflect quietly, maybe at home, when playing or in school. Ask pupils to consider the creative importance of 'imaginary friends' as helpful sounding boards during periods of isolation. How have these times of quietness helped?		
<b>Plenary:</b> From pupils' responses, discuss how the principle of 'thinking time' could be applied more in class. What benefits might there be in taking time to 'reflect' and to process the day's learning?		

<i>Historical origins</i>	<i>Pupils will</i>	understand that many traditional rite of passage ceremonies have historical beginnings; understand that certain profound life experiences may be considered initiations.
<i>Aim:</i> to explore the historical antecedents of modern day rites.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<b>Starter:</b> Review the unit to date and point out that many traditional rite of passage ceremonies have historical beginnings.		<p>“The baptism of Christ” by Joachim Patinir (1515)  <a href="http://www.wikiart.org/en/joachim-patinir/the-baptism-of-christ">http://www.wikiart.org/en/joachim-patinir/the-baptism-of-christ</a></p>
<b>Activity 1:</b> Look at a picture of the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist—e.g. the painting by the 16 <sup>th</sup> century artist Joachim Patinir—and read about his baptism in Matthew 3: 13-17. Discuss in terms of John’s call to believers to come to the River Jordan to have their sins washed away. Consider how Jesus’ baptism marked a milestone in his life and how he had a profound experience at the time of the baptism. What might the experience have meant to Jesus and what might it have meant to John the Baptist?		
<b>Activity 2:</b> Discuss the link between baptism in Christian churches and Jesus’ baptism by John. Explain that this is one way certain rites of passage have their origins, i.e. they ‘repeat’ a historical occurrence.		
<b>Activity 3:</b> Return to the lesson about signs of belonging and look at the story of the founding of the Sikh <i>khalsa</i> . Consider how the <i>amrit samskar</i> initiation ceremony reflects the historical event.		
<b>Activity 4:</b> Ask pupils to share with each other and then write about significant milestones in their own lives e.g. moving house, starting school or encountering someone who had a memorable effect on them. Do they have any little ritual that they perform on the anniversary of this event to remember it?		
<b>Plenary:</b> In pairs, ask pupils to read out their work to each other. Discuss that such significant experiences can be considered initiations because they have such a big effect on people.		

<b>Key words</b>	Initiation, baptism, rite of passage, panj kakke, amrit, hijab, first communion, bar/bat mitzvah, vision quest
<b>Points to note</b>	It is extremely important to ensure that members of the class understand that any role-playing activity (e.g. of baptism) is an educational exercise, not an actual initiation into that belief group.
<b>Expectations</b>	
<p>Pupils are working at an <b>emerging</b> level if they are able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ name a few rites of passage</li> <li>▪ give some details of one initiation practice</li> <li>▪ name some signs of belonging</li> </ul> <p>Pupils are working at an <b>expected</b> level if they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ understand the concept of rite of passage</li> <li>▪ are able to give several examples of initiation practices</li> <li>▪ understand the significance of signs of belonging</li> </ul> <p>Pupils are <b>exceeding</b> expectations if they can do all of the above. In addition they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ understand that certain initiations can give them access to new knowledge</li> <li>▪ are able to identify rites of passage important to several religions</li> <li>▪ understand how some initiation practices have evolved from spontaneous, historical occurrences</li> </ul>	



## Background information



Shichi-go-san  
[Wikipedia](#)

**Shichi-go-san**—literally “seven, five, three”—is celebrated in Japan as a day of prayer for the healthy growth of young children; according to the traditional Japanese calendar, 15 November is considered to be the most auspicious day of the year, and it is this day that has been chosen for this festival.

Boys and girls aged three, boys aged five, and girls aged seven visit a Shinto shrine with their parents. Most girls wear kimonos when making their Shichi-go-san visit, while boys wear *haori* (a short, kimono-style jacket) and *hakama* (skirt-like trousers or culottes).

Following the trip to the shrine, parents generally give their children *chitose-ame* (“longevity candy”). This candy is shaped like a stick and comes in a bag decorated with cranes and turtles, symbols of longevity; both candy and bag are expressions of parents’ wishes that their children should lead long and prosperous lives.



Brit Milah, *Minhagim*, 1707

Circumcision is an initiation rite for **Jewish** newborn males. This usually takes place in a ceremony called a Brit (or Bris) milah witnessed by family and community members. *Milah* is Hebrew for ‘covenant of circumcision’. The ritual is an ancient practice that has been carried out by Jewish parents for more than 3,000 years. Such is the importance that circumcision can take place on the Sabbath or a holy day even though the drawing of blood is not normally allowed on these days under Jewish law.

Originally, there was no special celebration to welcome female infants into the covenant. In Reform synagogues, a baby-naming ceremony involving both parents was celebrated most commonly 30 days after the birth. A few congregations began to create their own ceremonies for girls, and the popularity of the idea quickly made it a widespread practice among many Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist families.

For more information see: <http://www.reformjudaism.org/brit-bat-ceremony-welcoming-baby-girl> and [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/jewishethics/circumcision\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/jewishethics/circumcision_1.shtml)



Whispering the *adhan* in newborn's ear  
[blogspot.com](http://blogspot.com)



Sikh naming ceremony  
[aboutsikhs.com](http://aboutsikhs.com)

**Islam:** There are several stages associated with the birth of a child: welcome into the *Ummah*, community of Muslims (this is accomplished when the head of the family whispers the *adhan*, or call to prayer, into the infant's right ear: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IU3ywwtUSeI> ), the *Tahnik*, the practice of blessing a newborn infant with religious piety (prayers asking for a sweet disposition are said as the child's gums are rubbed with crushed date or sugar), *Aqiqah* (the naming ceremony, which takes place seven days after birth: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgYy\\_GWPuhA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgYy_GWPuhA) ), and for male children *Khitan* (circumcision).

**Hinduism:** There are sixteen *samskaras* or important steps in the life of a Hindu, four of which occur before birth. The first nine *samskaras* are: prayer for a child, prayer for the health of the child, prayer for calmness, choosing a name, naming the child, the first time outside (e.g. being taken to the temple for naming), a special meal, piercing the ears, the first haircut (occurs between age 1-3). It is also traditional to write the sacred symbol Aum on the tongue of the newborn in honey, using a gold ring. Information about the Hindu naming ceremony (*namkaran*): <http://festivals.iloveindia.com/rituals/naamkaran.html>

**Sikhism:** When a baby is born a special prayer is read and a drop of *Amrit* (sweetened water symbolising the essence of divinity) is placed on the baby's tongue. At a ceremony at the *Gurdwara*, the name of the baby is chosen by opening the *Guru Granth Sahib* at random: the name chosen must begin with the first letter of the first word on the left hand side of the page. *Singh* ('lion', a reminder to be courageous) is added to boys' names, while *Kaur* ('princess', to stress dignity) is added to girls' names.

**Humanist:** Naming ceremonies are relatively new and increasingly popular amongst humanists, who may want to mark their child's arrival but who want to do so in a way that isn't religious. They are individually tailored and can include a variety of elements, such as readings, words about the importance and responsibility of parenting, parental promises to the child; appointment of 'guide parents' and reasons for the choice of the child's names.



### ***Bat Mitzvah***

by Landis

[www.art.co.uk](http://www.art.co.uk)



### ***First communion, Austria***

by Layne Jackson

### **Bar/bat mitzvah**

The term *bar mitzvah* literally means “son of a commandment,” and *bat mitzvah* means “daughter of a commandment.” A Jewish girl is considered responsible for keeping the commandments of the Torah when she reaches the age of 12, for a boy it is 13. The bar/bat mitzvah ceremony involves the young person chanting the blessing and reading from the Torah at a service in the synagogue, followed by a party or reception. In orthodox and Chasidic Judaism women are not permitted to participate in the services, so a girl’s bat mitzvah in these traditions is generally confined to the party.

Jewish confirmation is a somewhat less widespread coming of age ritual that occurs when a child is 16 or 18. Confirmation was originally developed by the Reform movement, which promoted an additional ceremony (influenced by the Christian catechism) focussing on knowledge of the principles of the Jewish faith.

### **Confirmation**

For many Christians, confirmation is one of the three rites of initiation that incorporate an individual into the Body of Christ—i.e. membership in the Church. The other two are baptism and communion. The purpose of confirmation is to welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit into the life of the child or adult. Instruction into the faith—or catechism—is part of the preparation before confirmation and first communion.

### **First communion**

A child’s first communion is traditionally a big event for Catholic families. Special clothing—often white to symbolise purity—is usually worn. Girls wear fancy dresses and often a veil attached to a headdress, as well as white gloves.

*'Thinking time' as initiation*



*Christ in the wilderness*

Ivan Kramskoy, 1872

[www.auburn.edu](http://www.auburn.edu)



Darwin's 'thinking path'

[wikimedia](https://www.wikimedia.org/)

From the age of 35 **Muhammad** used to withdraw outside Mecca to a cave on Mt. Hira for solitary meditation. It was during one of these times of meditation that Muhammad said an angelic being appeared to him. At first he feared that he had been visited by a jinn, who were at the time believed to be invisible demons created from fire. Eventually, however, he came to believe that the presence was the angel Gabriel, who commanded him to 'recite'. The subsequent recitation—revealed over time—became the Qur'an. It is said of his encounters with the angel that at times Muhammad would see Gabriel, other times he would only hear him, and on yet others he would hear the words of the angel coming through the sound of a bell.

*Native American vision questing* can take place as early as 10 years old. A young person retreats to the wilderness to wait for a vision that will give them an idea of their gift: the quality/talent/action that would be their contribution to their society. For more on the Native American vision quest: <http://native-americans-online.com/native-american-vision-quest.html>

*Charles Darwin* is famous for his theory of evolution which was published in a book called *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin believed that all species (plants and animals) have descended from a common ancestry. Through natural selection individuals develop characteristics that make them more likely to survive. They would then pass these characteristics on to their offspring, and so on.

Darwin developed his theory through a voyage he took when he was a young man. He spent five years on a ship called The Beagle and visited countries as far away as South America. During his voyage he collected a huge number of geological and biological specimens many of which you can still see in the Natural History Museum in London.

Darwin suffered from bad health in later years and this kept him confined at home. It was at this time that he satisfied his great curiosity with experiments involving plants, for instance insect pollination and the movement of climbing plants. He would walk through the grounds of his estate at Down House three times a day, both for exercise and because it helped him ponder the questions that were bothering him: he called it his 'thinking path.'



*The baptism of Christ*  
Joachim Patenier (1515)  
[Web gallery of art](#)



*Vaisakhi 1699*  
*Guru Gobind Singh and the panj piare*  
[sikhgurusandgurdwaras.info](http://sikhgurusandgurdwaras.info)

### *Historical antecedents*

#### *Christian baptism*

“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’” *Matthew 3: 16-17*

#### *Sikh amrit ceremony*

In 1699 CE, the tenth Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh, chose Vaisakhi as the occasion to pass the mantle of authority from the succession of human gurus to the collection of Sikh scriptures; previously known as the *Adi Granth* (‘original collection’), this set of texts would henceforth be known as guru, specifically the *Guru Granth Sahib* (‘collection of sacred wisdom’).

At the time, the Sikh community was under assault by the Muslim ruler of India. Addressing the assembly gathered for the Vaisakhi celebrations, Gobind Singh highlighted this threat, proclaiming that weakness would have to be replaced with unity and strength if they were to survive. With uplifted sword, he asked if there were any in the crowd so loyal that they would offer up their heads to him. At first there was no response. And then one man stepped forward and was led into the guru’s tent. When Gobind Singh emerged with a bloodied sword, there was hushed silence, and then four more brave souls ventured forward. They followed him into the tent and the crowd waited, expecting that only the guru would emerge. But when he did finally appear, he was not alone; all five volunteers came with him, their heads solidly attached.

Stirring sugar into water, he used the resulting *amrit* to initiate into the *khalsa* (‘pure order’ of believers) the five men who had taken the leap of faith and risked all. The five men in turn offered the amrit to Guru Gobind Singh. Thousands of men and women were subsequently initiated on that day, pledging to stay true to the code of discipline set down by Gobind Singh.

For more on the importance of Baisakhi to Sikhs: [www.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/register.nsf/p/BaisakhiHistory](http://www.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/register.nsf/p/BaisakhiHistory)