

EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

The First 300 years

Special Topic

“Worship in the Early Church”

Worship in the Early Church

1. Where they Worshiped

- a) Anywhere they could—mostly large houses
 - Catacombs/cemeteries?
- b) Converted private homes into church meeting places
- c) First church buildings (A.D. 260—300)

2. When they Worshiped

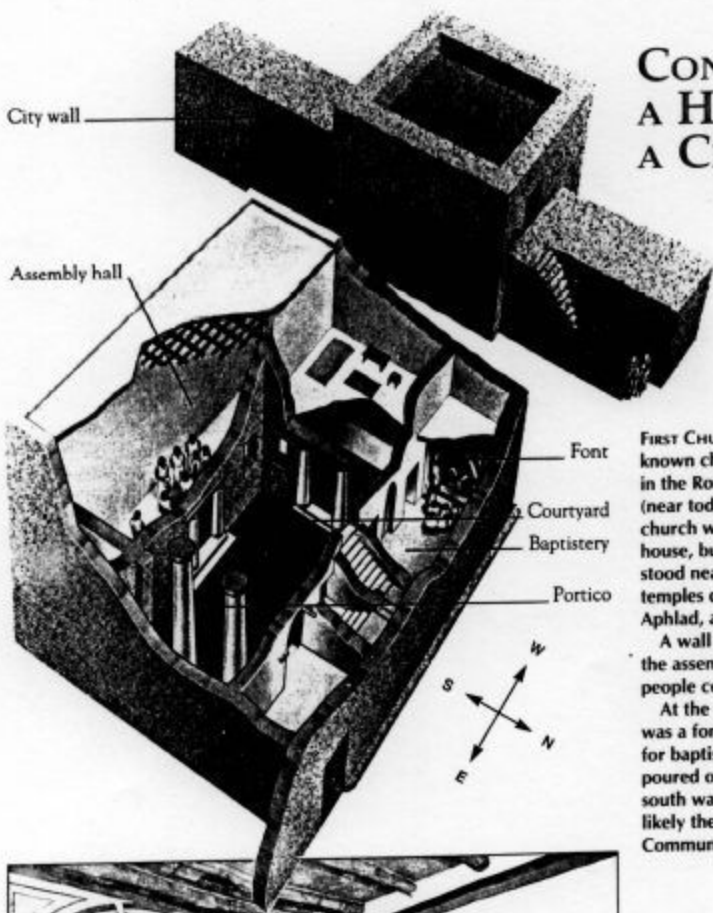
- “The Lord’s Day”—SUNDAY
- other times for instruction (week day mornings)

3. Elements of the Worship Service

- Reading Scripture
- Exposition/Admonishment
- Corporate prayer
- The Lord’s Supper/Eucharist
- Giving

(What about singing/songs?)

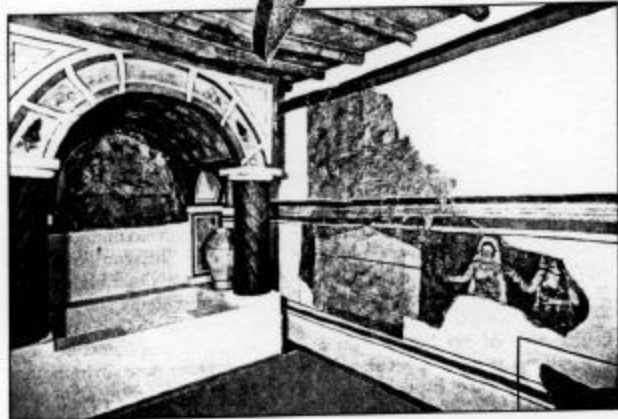
CONVERTING A HOUSE INTO A CHURCH



FIRST CHURCH OF DURA: The earliest known church building, c. 240, built in the Roman city of Dura-Europos (near today's Syria-Iraq border). The church was originally a Roman-style house, built around a courtyard. It stood near a Jewish synagogue and temples dedicated to the gods Zeus, Aphlad, and Mithras.

A wall was knocked out to create the assembly hall, where 60-70 people could gather.

At the west end of the baptistry was a font, into which candidates for baptism would step, water being poured or sprinkled over them. The south wall of the baptistry was likely the focal point for celebrating Communion.



MODEST MURALS. The Dura-Europos baptistry contains murals of Adam and Eve and the Good Shepherd (under the arch), three women fleeing the empty tomb (two are seen here) as well as of David and Goliath, the woman at the well, and others not pictured. The murals' modesty in quality and number suggests the congregation was neither large nor wealthy.

Worship in the Early Church

Baptism Ceremony

Baptism was the initiatory rite into full membership into the church

1. Preparation

- “The catechumenate”—period of instruction prior to baptism; usually 2 to 3 years
- Catechumens were allowed to participate in worship except for communion

2. Celebration

- Very significant—preceded by fasting and all-night vigil
- Renouncement of Satan and confession of Christ
- Always trine immersion
- Becomes more elaborate with church meeting places

Worship in the Early Church

Communion/Eucharist

1. Meal Format

- Jewish Sabbath meal transformed into the church's communion meal
- Format: initial prayer over cup and bread, meal, three-fold prayer over a cup of wine mixed with water

**Emphasis—“thanksgiving” (the Eucharist)*

2. Meal Removed

- Meal was removed—Eucharist was main part of the worship service
- Two eucharistic prayers set back to back, lengthened, included “consecration”
- Meal was moved to different time; used for instruction and charity (“agape meal”)

3. Significance/Emphasis

“Thank-offering” of the whole church

- a) consecrated elements represented the gifts of God which culminate in the death of Christ

- b) consecrated elements were presented as a thank-offering by the members of the church
 - sacrifice—these gifts were symbolic of the church’s living sacrifice