

Stop 11 – Mass and Mitotes

For a brief period during mission time a church stood in this area. The Works Progress Administration reconstructed the low walls you see today over established foundations. The rituals of the church transformed native life. Religious customs provide great insight into the spiritual world of a people. The natives practiced their spirituality in rituals called *mitotes*. Shaman or healers were believed to have supernatural abilities to connect with the spirit world. They led *mitotes* and tended to the sick. Most native rituals involved the liberal use of peyote, a hallucinogenic drug derived from cactus. It heightened perceptions and induced hallucinations.

Once eaten or drunk as tea, peyote led to an all-night dance and feast. Many events were celebrated in this way—a youth's passage into adulthood, thanksgiving for bountiful times, or victory in battle. *Mitotes* were often held to welcome other groups of Indians or celebrate the return of kinfolk. A mating ritual *mitote* might be held for young men to find suitable wives.

Typically the guests, dressed in their best finery, would assemble sometime before dark. A large fire was started to roast the hunters' harvest. Music and singing was essential. A gourd rattle, a flute, and a drum made by stretching animal hide over a wooden hoop pounded the air with celebration. Dancers circled the fire, bodies close together, shoulders moving slightly, progressing by a series of hops in time with the drumbeat. *Mitotes* continued until dawn.

Mission life brought different rituals. Many remain today. *Los Pastores* – the celebration of the shepherds' search for the baby Jesus – is held at the missions every year during Christmas. In early November *El Dia De Los Muertos*, Day of the Dead, represents a mixture of pre-Hispanic and Christian beliefs to celebrate the deceased. Although some mission Indians continued to sneak off to the woods to hold their ancient *mitotes* they added new Catholic and Spanish traditions to mark the great milestones of life.