

## Worship on the Web



### CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS

#### Holy Week

Holy Week is the week preceding Easter and the period in the Christian year when Christians remember the last week in Jesus' life. It is also known as *Passion Week*.

There are four main holy days during Holy Week: Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Easter Sunday is often preceded by a vigil through the night on Saturday.

Since the fourth century Christians have come to Jerusalem as a pilgrimage during Holy Week and the festival of Easter to worship God and see for themselves the places where the events in this story took place. To this day in Jerusalem and throughout the world there are street celebrations and processions to mark this important week in the Christian calendar.

#### Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday is the day Christians remember Jesus entering Jerusalem to take part in the Passover festival. Palm or Passion Sunday Palm or Passion Sunday is the first day of Holy Week, the week preceding Easter. When celebrated as Palm Sunday, it is the day Christians remember Jesus entering Jerusalem to take part in the Passover festival. Jesus rode into Jerusalem and the people of the city laid palm fronds and clothing on the road, lining his path, cheering and celebrating his arrival. (Mark 11:1 to 11:10). Christians to this day hold processions waving palm branches on this day to re-enact the event. Any left over palms are burned and the ashes used in the subsequent year's Ash Wednesday. In countries without palm trees, branches of different trees are often used. When celebrated as Passion Sunday, the events of Holy week are recalled.

#### Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday is the day when Jesus had his last meal with his disciples (Matthew 26:26 to 26:29), was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39 to 22:46), and put on trial through the night (Matthew 26:46 to 26:50). Maundy Thursday is a special day during Holy Week, the week preceding Easter. It is the day when Jesus had his last meal with his disciples (Matthew 26:26 to 26:29), was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39 to 22:46), and put on trial through the night (Matthew 26:46 to 26:50). The word maundy comes from the Latin word *mandatum* meaning commandment. This is a reference to the words Jesus said at his last meal, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (John 13:34)

Jesus' last meal with his disciples is usually referred to as the *Last Supper*. It was a special meal to celebrate the Jewish festival of Passover. Jesus gave a new meaning to this celebration for Christians. He told his disciples to eat the unleavened bread and drink the wine as though they were his body and blood. Jesus was referring to his crucifixion the next day when his body would be broken and his blood poured out.

Today most Christians celebrate this with a service in church called the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion or Mass. This ritual gives participants a feeling of closeness with God and their fellow Christians both now and in the past. Different churches celebrate Holy Communion in different ways - some use unleavened bread as Jesus would do at the Last Supper, whilst others like to use our everyday bread; some drink from individual glasses, others, more traditionally, from one common cup.

## Good Friday

On Good Friday Christians remember the day Jesus was arrested, put on trial and executed by crucifixion. Good Friday is a special day during Holy Week, the week preceding Easter. On Good Friday Christians remember the day Jesus was arrested, put on trial and executed by crucifixion. (John 18:1 to 19:42).

It is a day of mourning and in some traditions there are sombre processions or re-enactments of the events of Good Friday.

Christians, across the world, pause to reflect on the pain and suffering Jesus endured on the cross and its meaning for their life and faith.

Services are usually held between midday and 3pm symbolic of the three hours of darkness that fell when Jesus was on the cross (Luke 23:44).

In many churches the service is a series of hymns, prayers, and short sermons based around the seven last words of Jesus on the cross: 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' (Luke 23:34)

'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'  
(Luke 23 :43)

'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit'  
(Luke 23:46)

'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' meaning 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34)

'Woman, here is your son....Here is your mother'  
(John 19:26)

'I am thirsty'  
(John 19:28)

'It is finished'  
(John 19:30)

In Catholic and Anglican Churches the service may follow the 'stations of the cross' which are fourteen images representing the last journey of Christ. The participants move from one to the other, stopping at each one for reflection. The idea of the stations emerged as Christianity spread when they developed as a devotional substitute for actually following the *Via Dolorosa*, the route in Jerusalem that Christ followed to Calvary.

The events depicted are:

1. the condemnation of Jesus by Pilate;
2. Jesus' acceptance of the cross;
3. his first fall;
4. the encounter with his mother; (John 19:25 to 19:26)
5. Simon of Cyrene helping Jesus; (Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26)
6. Veronica wiping Jesus' face;
7. his second fall;
8. the encounter with the women of Jerusalem; (Luke 23:27 to 23:31)
9. his third fall;
10. Jesus being stripped of his garments; (Luke 23:34, John 19:23)
11. the crucifixion;
12. Jesus' death;
13. Jesus' removal from the cross; and
14. the burial of Jesus.

Sometimes an additional station is added:

15. Jesus rises from the dead.



## Saturday in Holy Week

Holy Saturday is the day after Good Friday. It is a day of waiting. At this point in the Easter story Jesus is dead and for the disciples, the world is a dark place. Holy Saturday is the day after Good Friday, a special day during Holy Week, the week preceding Easter. It is a day of waiting. At this point in the Easter story Jesus is dead and for the disciples, the world is a dark place. The day before they saw Jesus, who they believed to be the promised messiah, arrested, crucified on a cross and buried in the tomb of a friend (Luke 23: 44 to 23:56).

Services held on this day are the most sombre of the Holy Week services. The Easter Vigil service, observed in some traditions, is the first Easter service, and takes place on the night of Holy Saturday.

The idea behind the vigil is for faithful Christians to wait and watch, hopeful and confident that Christ will return at midnight. The service traditionally begins outside the church around a fire, commonly a charcoal brazier. The participants process into the church where all is in darkness until the Easter, or Paschal, candle is lit symbolising the light of Christ that cannot be extinguished by death.

## Easter Sunday

Easter Sunday is the day Christians celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead and is the most joyous occasion in the Church year. Easter Sunday is the first day of Easter and comes at the end of Holy Week.

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According to the gospel account in the Bible, Jesus' friends arrived at the grave to find the stone moved and angels standing nearby saying that his body was no longer in the grave and that he had been raised from the dead (Luke 24: 1 to 24:12; John 20: 1 to 20:30).

The New Testament gospel accounts of what happened next vary slightly but all conclude that Jesus was no longer in the tomb on the following Sunday and had risen from the dead.



Mark and Luke say Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James went to the grave with some women in order to embalm his body and found that the stone had been moved, and angel(s) standing nearby saying that his body was no longer in the grave that he had been raised from the dead (Luke 24: 1 to 24:12; Mark 16: 1 to 16:8) John adds that Simon Peter on hearing the women's report ran to the tomb to see for himself (John 20: 1 to 20:10).

Matthew and John both say that Jesus himself was first seen that day by Mary Magdalene (Matthew 28: 1 to 28:10; John 20: 11 to 20:18), and for days afterwards by his disciples and many other people (Luke 24: 13 to 24:53: John 20: 19 to 21:14).

In many churches outdoor Easter services take place at sunrise to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. For the Christian, resurrection means that, becoming united with Christ, people can triumph over evil, sin, and all that brings death, rising to new life, a new life that is promised to all of creation.