

What is Holy Week?

The Events and Services celebrated at Easter

Easter is the most important festival in the Christian calendar. It celebrates Jesus rising from the dead, three days after he was put to death on a cross outside of the walls of Jerusalem.

The date of Easter Sunday varies from year to year. It is celebrated on the first Sunday after the full moon, on or after 21 March.

The whole week before Easter is a special time of remembering Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem and the events that took place before, during and after his death. It is called Holy Week.



Holy Week

Palm Sunday

This is the Sunday before Easter Sunday.

It is the first day of Holy Week and celebrates Jesus's arrival in **Jerusalem** riding on a donkey. Crowds of people came out of the city to greet him, throwing down **palm branches** on the road and shouting 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' They were honouring Jesus as their Messiah – the anointed one of God.

Read the account in Matthew 21.1-11

On Palm Sunday, churches give out **small crosses** made from palm leaves, as a reminder of Jesus's entrance into Jerusalem and his death on the cross. Some Christians keep these in their homes all year as a symbol of their faith.



Maundy Thursday

This is the Thursday before Easter Day.

On Maundy Thursday Christians remember when Jesus ate the **Passover meal** with his disciples, breaking bread and drinking wine. We refer to this meal as the **Last Supper**. At this meal x important things happened:

- Jesus identified that his disciple Judas would betray him.
- Jesus took the symbolic elements of the Jewish Passover and he said that the broken bread and the poured-out wine now represented his body and blood. He said that his death would be a sacrifice to end all sacrifices so that everyone who trusted in him would receive forgiveness for their sins.
- Jesus washed his disciples feet – an act usually done by a servant – in order to show that he would humble himself to a place where he would give his life to wash his friends clean. He commanded his disciples to follow his example of humility in loving one another.
- After the supper was over, Jesus went to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane and there he was arrested.

Read the account in Matthew 26 and John 13

We often celebrate Maundy Thursday at church either by sharing a meal together and remembering the Last Supper, or by having a ceremony of foot-washing where everyone can experience this symbolic act of service.



Good Friday

Good Friday is the Friday before Easter Sunday. It commemorates Jesus' death by crucifixion.

Good Friday is a sombre and thoughtful day in church. During special Good Friday services we remember Jesus's suffering and death on the cross, and what this means for our faith. In particular, we think about our need for a Saviour (both personally and across the world) and of our gratitude that God provided a way back to him through Jesus' Christ.

Many important things happened at Jesus' death. Here are some of them:

- He asked God to forgive the soldiers crucifying him.
- As he suffered on the cross, he felt the weight of God's judgement for the sins of the world upon him and said 'My God, why have you forsaken me?'
- At the moment of his death he said 'It is finished'. Meaning that everything that God had sent him to do had been accomplished.
- At his death, there was a solar eclipse, an earthquake, and the curtain in the temple which separated the people from the most holy place was torn in two from top to bottom. The separation between God and his people was ended.
- When the soldiers came to remove Jesus' body later in the day, they stuck a spear in his side and out came water and blood – medical evidence that Jesus really had been dead for some hours.

Read the account in Matthew Chapter 27



Easter Sunday

Easter Sunday marks Jesus's **resurrection**. After Jesus was crucified on the Friday his body was taken down from the cross and buried in a cave tomb. The tomb was guarded by Roman soldiers and an enormous stone was put over the entrance.

On Sunday, some of Jesus's followers visited the tomb. They found the stone had been moved and that Jesus's body had gone. Jesus was seen later that day by Mary and the disciples, and for forty days afterwards by many people. His followers realised that God had raised Jesus from the dead. We call this the resurrection and it is the most important part of our faith because it shows that Jesus really is who he claimed to be – God's son, the Saviour of the world, in whom we have forgiveness of our sins and the promise of eternal life with God, if we trust in him and follow his teachings.

Read Matthew 28

We celebrate Easter Sunday with a joy-filled service and proclaim 'He is risen! Hallelujah.' It is traditional to share chocolate Easter eggs with friends and family as a sign of our new life in Jesus, and many people eat a celebratory meal together in their homes.