

Easter

Easter is a significant festival during the Christian calendar, during which followers around the world remember the death and resurrection of Jesus – who they believe to be the son of God. The exact date on which Easter Sunday falls changes each year, as it is always celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon which comes after the spring equinox.



Most Christians worldwide refer to the week before Easter, which begins with Palm Sunday, as Holy Week. During this week, more so than ever, Christians reflect upon the last week of Jesus's life.

Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday, also occasionally referred to as Passion Sunday, is always celebrated exactly one week before Easter Sunday. According to the Bible, Jesus, accompanied by his disciples, travelled to Jerusalem for a Passover meal on this day. As many people had become aware of Jesus's impending arrival, a sizeable crowd had congregated to welcome him. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the crowd removed their cloaks and placed them in the road to line the donkey's path. They also removed palm leaves from the trees, laying them on the ground and waving them in the air shouting, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel!"

In remembrance of this, crosses made from palm leaves are given out at the special church services held annually on Palm Sunday.

Maundy Thursday

On Maundy Thursday, Jesus and his disciples are believed to have gathered together to eat their final meal, The Last Supper. Unusually, as his friends gathered at the house, Jesus washed their feet – a task normally done by servants. Jesus did this as an opportunity to teach his friends that they should show their love for one another in meek and humble ways.

Jesus then shared bread and wine around the table, explaining that, after his death, his friends should do the same as a means of remembering him. This is the origin of the bread and wine used within the Eucharist during church services around the world today.

In remembrance of Jesus's acts of humility and kindness at The Last Supper, the king or queen of England would wash the feet of the poor in London, in a tradition which continued up until the 18th century.

Good Friday

The Bible records that, on Good Friday, Roman guards nailed Jesus to the cross, which he had been forced to carry to a hill in the city of Golgotha (the 'place of the skull'). Humiliatingly, the guards placed a crown made of thorns on Jesus's head and left him to die. Some Christians believe that, as Jesus suffered, the sky turned black to mirror his anguish.

Christians across the world mark the anniversary of this day in many different ways. Some choose to fast, others attend dedicated church services and many remove floral decorations from their place of worship in commemoration of Jesus's sacrifice.

Holy Saturday

Christians believe that it was on Holy Saturday that Jesus's body was placed in a tomb. The entrance was covered by a large, heavy stone and guarded by a team of Roman soldiers, who regularly changed shifts to ensure that they were attentive, alert and awake. No one would have been able to approach, let alone enter, the tomb in which Jesus laid at rest.

On Holy Saturday, Christians around the world light an Easter candle (sometimes known as a Paschal candle) and spend the day in reflection and prayer.

Easter Sunday

Christians joyously celebrate Easter Sunday in the belief that it marks the day on which Jesus was resurrected. According to the Bible, when arriving at Jesus's tomb to cleanse and anoint his body, the Myrrhbearers found that the stone guarding the entrance of the tomb had been rolled away. Peering inside, they found that Jesus's body had vanished.

That same day, and for forty days afterwards, Jesus's disciples believed that they saw Jesus on no fewer than ten occasions and realised that God had raised him from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is crucial to Christians because it confirms the promise of eternal life in heaven.

In celebration of Jesus's resurrection, church services are invariably held on this day. Easter cards and small gifts, such as Easter eggs and chocolate rabbits, are given and the church is filled with flowers to symbolise new life.

Questions

1. '... church services are invariably held on this day.'

What does the word **invariably** mean? Tick one.

- ☐ never
☐ usually
☐ sometimes
☐ always

2. What is sometimes lit on Holy Saturday? Tick one.

- ☐ The Sacred Fire
☐ The Paschal Candle
☐ The Easter Lamp
☐ The Holy Lantern

3. Fill in the missing words from this sentence:

'The exact day on which _____ falls changes _____, as it is always celebrated on the _____ after the _____ which comes after the _____.'

4. What is Palm Sunday sometimes referred to as?

5. Find and copy one word which means **to have a modest view of one's own importance**.

6. What is the significance of the Eucharist in church services today?

7. What reaction may the Myrrhbearers have had when they found Jesus's body was gone?

Explain your answer.

8. Explain how new life is symbolised by Christians on Easter Sunday.

9. Why is the presence of the heavy stone and the Roman guard outside of Jesus's tomb important to the Easter story?

10. Why is the cross an important symbol to Christians?
