

Church Traditions

Lent, Holy Week and Easter

ASH WEDNESDAY

The Season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. As we begin this penitential season we will have the opportunity to receive the blessed Sacrament of Holy Communion and also the Imposition of Ashes. The Imposition of Ashes is an ancient custom of the church which is used to remind us of our own human frailty and humanity as we contemplate the suffering and death of our Lord who was sent to take our place under punishment of sin. The participation in this rite is left entirely to the discretion of each worshiper.

PALM SUNDAY

Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday which derives its' name from the spreading of Palms in Jesus' path as He entered Jerusalem. Matthew 21:8 tells us: "Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road." Revealed in Leviticus 23:40 and Revelation 7:9, we see palms used as symbols of gladness and victory, and in 2 Kings 9:13, the spreading of garments is recognized as an act of homage.

Palm Sunday has occasionally been called "**Hosanna Sunday**". "Hosanna" is the first word of the office for the blessing of the palms and was shouted in acclamation by the crowds which welcomed Jesus as He entered Jerusalem. In **Matthew 21:9**, we are told,

*"And the crowds that went before Him
and that followed Him shouted,
'Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the Highest!'"*

By the fourth century, the Jerusalem Church began to have Palm Sunday processions in imitation of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It was then consecrated palm boughs were carried in the procession. Today palm boughs are often distributed to worshipers on Palm Sunday to remind them that "*Christ is their King.*"

MONDAY, TUESDAY, AND WEDNESDAY

Monday of Holy Week is thought to be the day when Jesus cleansed the temple as it is written in Matthew 21:13. Tuesday is ascribed as the incident between Jesus and the Pharisees when the churchmen tried to trap Him into making a blasphemous statement as described in Matthew 22:15. Wednesday is sometimes known as "*Spy Wednesday*", the day when Judas Iscariot agreed to show the chief priests where they could capture Jesus.

THE HOLY WEEK TRIDUUM (Three Days)

Maundy Thursday begins a very long church service. So long that it takes three days! These three days are called the TRIDUUM, and are the most important days of the year for a Christian.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

commemorates two events in Christ's life: the institution of the Lord's Supper and His washing of the disciples feet. The word "*maundy*" according to most authorities stems from the Latin word "*mandatum*" (*commandment*) the first word in Christ's statement at the Last Supper. In Latin this begins: Mandatum movem do vobis...In English:

**"A new commandment I give you,
love one another. As I have loved you,
so you must love one another.
By this all men will know that you are my disciples,
if you love one another." (John 13:34-35.)**

The liturgy of the service is devoted to the Sacrament of Holy Communion in celebration of the day Christ instituted the Lord's Supper.

GOOD FRIDAY

was not separated from Easter until the fourth century. However, since then all the days of Holy Week have become distinct from one another.

There is no certainty where the name "*Good Friday*" came from. Some feel the name "*good*" is a corruption of "*God's*" -- God's Friday. Another theory holds that "*good*" refers to the good gift of salvation from sin that was bestowed on men due to the sacrificial death of Christ.

Many Lutheran churches hold two services on Good Friday. One in the afternoon at the time or during the hours Christ was on the Cross. The other, the Tenebrae Service, or Service of Darkness, is held in the evening. This service symbolizes the temporary victory of the forces of darkness.

HOLY SATURDAY

became a separate feast day in the latter half of the fourth century in Jerusalem. It was then a day for initiates to receive the Sacrament of Baptism, and following that, their first communion. Today Lutheran Churches recognize it as a day to renew their Baptismal vows and one of an Easter Vigil.

EASTER SUNDAY

is not only the earliest of the annual Christian festivals, but it is also the most important festival of the year. It commemorates the resurrection of Our Lord after He had been in the tomb for three days (forty hours).

That Jesus Christ was resurrected, after having suffered and died is the belief most central to the Christian faith. We believe that by His dying Jesus accomplished a reconciliation between God and man. *1 Corinthians 15:12-14* says:

**"But if it is preached that Jesus Christ
has been raised from the dead,
how can some of you say that
there is no resurrection of the dead,
then not even Christ has been raised,
and if Christ has not been raised,
our preaching is useless and so is your faith."**

On the third day -- Sunday -- Mary Magdalene came to the tomb with Mary the mother of James.

**"There was a violent earthquake,
for an angel of the Lord came down
from heaven and going to the tomb,
rolled back the stone and sat on it.
His appearance was like lightning,
and his clothes were white as snow,
the guards were so afraid of him that
they shook and became like dead men.**

The angel said to the women,

**"Do not be afraid, for I know that you
are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.
He is not here; He has risen, just as He said.
Come and see the place where He lay.
Then go quickly and tell His disciples:
"He has risen from the dead
and is going ahead of you into Galilee.
There you will see Him.
" Now I have told you."
- *Matthew 28:2-7***

THE EASTER SEASON

Easter is followed by six Sundays. The first Sunday following Easter is designated the Second Sunday of Easter and the last Sunday is called the Seventh Sunday of Easter. Between the Sixth and Seventh Sundays of Easter is [Ascension Day](#). Ascension Day falls on the 40th day after Easter and commemorates when the risen Lord ascended into heaven. It is always on a Thursday. The conclusion of the Easter season is the [Feast of Pentecost](#), the 50th day after Easter. On Pentecost we commemorate the sending of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, to the disciples who were waiting in Jerusalem after the ascension of Jesus. Because it is through the work of the Spirit that we receive the benefits of Christ's work for us, Pentecost is also a time of great celebration and joy.