

HOLY WEEK

For many Christians, Holy Week is the most moving and enriching week of the whole Church Year for in it we celebrate those events which stand at the heart of our faith, the dying and rising of Jesus our Lord and Saviour.

? What do you value about the Holy Week services of your church? How do they help you to think about the meaning of Easter?

Origins and Chronology

About a third of each of the four Gospels is devoted to the last week of Jesus' life:

Matthew 21-28	Mark 11-16
Luke 19-24	John 12-20

In the early Church, as well as keeping the weekly observance of Sunday, Christians kept an annual celebration of the Lord's death and resurrection, the Christian Passover. This began on Saturday evening with a long vigil of bible readings, followed by the celebration of baptism and the Easter Eucharist at daybreak on Easter Day.

In the 4th century in Jerusalem, the creative Bishop Cyril reconstructed the events of Jesus' last week with services in the places where those events happened. His chronology was:

- ◆ Six days before the Passover, Jesus was anointed at Bethany (John 12:1); as Passover was a Thursday, this means that he was anointed on the previous Saturday.
- ◆ The next day, Sunday (John 12:12), Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey and the crowds cut palm branches - Palm Sunday.
- ◆ The Last Supper was held on the Thursday evening, hence Maundy Thursday.

- ◆ Jesus died on the day before the Sabbath Day or Saturday, hence Good Friday.
- ◆ He rested in the tomb on the Saturday (Sabbath Day).
- ◆ He rose from the dead on the first day of the week (the Jewish name for Sunday).

This framework was adopted by the Christian world, and so we have today's Holy Week.

The Liturgical Shape of Holy Week

Between the penitential Purple of Lent and the bare church of Good Friday and Easter Eve come a few days of colour (Palm Sunday to the Wednesday are Red, while Maundy Thursday is White).

Palm Sunday - the day Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey;

Maundy Thursday (from the Latin *mandatum novum*, 'a new commandment') - we commemorate the Last Supper when Jesus instituted Holy Communion, washed his disciples' feet, gave us the new commandment that we should love one another, and was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane;

Good Friday - we remember the crucifixion and death of Jesus, and his burial in the tomb;

Easter Eve - a day of watching and waiting as Jesus lay in the tomb;

There is an amazing correspondence between creation and redemption. For Jewish people each day begins with evening, as in Genesis 1 - 'there was evening and there was morning, the first day'. In the Genesis creation story:

- ◆ God begins his work of creation on the first day of the week (Saturday night - Sunday);
- ◆ He finishes his work of creation on the afternoon of the sixth day (i.e. Friday afternoon before sunset);
- ◆ He rests on the seventh day (Friday evening and Saturday).

In the Gospels:

- ◆ Jesus begins his work of redemption on Palm Sunday, the first day of the week as he enters Jerusalem;
- ◆ He finishes his work of redemption on the Sixth Day, as he dies at 3pm on Good Friday ('It is accomplished', John 19:30);
- ◆ He rests in the tomb on the Sabbath Day;
- ◆ He rises during the night of Saturday/Sunday, the first day of the week, the day of Light, the day of new creation.

Moreover, Jesus is raised in a garden, the new Eden, as the second Adam, and the first witness to the Resurrection is another woman, Mary Magdalene.

- ? The story of Jesus' passion and death is a very rich one. How could we engage with it more creatively? Could we give our services a continuing theme next year?
- ? How inclusive are all our Holy Week services? Is there a place for variety, for children and young people, for imagination?
- ? Could we set up some activities in a 'stations of the cross' style service for Good Friday, during which people of all ages could move freely around the church?

Celebrating Holy Week

There are now many excellent resources for Holy Week (see the resources leaflet). They can be used as they stand, adapted to suit local circumstances, or simply used as a library of suitable material for use in your services.

Some points to bear in mind are:

- ◆ The Palm Sunday Liturgy includes both Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and the (dramatic) reading of the Passion. We sing our 'Hosannas' but we also follow Jesus into the city where he will suffer and die for us.
- ◆ The Liturgy of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Day is really a **single sequence**: one celebration over three days. It is important to grasp this if the liturgical resources are to have their full impact.
- ◆ The Maundy Thursday evening eucharist may also include footwashing, and a 'Gethsemane' watch.
- ◆ The Good Friday Liturgy may include the reading of St John's passion narrative, the proclamation of the cross, intercession, and reception of Communion as well as the more traditional vigil at the foot of the cross. All-age activities should not be forgotten, to encourage children and young people to come to remember the cross before the great Easter festivities.
- ◆ It is worth making the most of the range of resources in *Times and Seasons* to make the contrast between the sorrow of Holy Week and the celebration of Easter Day as strong as we can.

Holy Week and Music

Music for Holy Week and Easter (McCrimmons) includes a variety of resources for Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. On Palm Sunday it may be helpful with an all-age congregation to use a repeated 'Hosanna' chant or short song while processing, though some will prefer to use the traditional hymn 'All glory, laud and honour'.

Maundy Thursday services which include the washing of feet give scope for singing one of the Taizé 'Ubi caritas' songs with solo verses, or a piece by a composer such as Stephen Dean, suitable for a group of singers and instrumentalists (eg 'If I, your Lord and Master'). 'This is the night, dear friends' is an ideal hymn (Common Praise, Sing Glory etc).



Good Friday is a good time for thinking creatively about the use of instrumental music, whether live or recorded, particularly if it is combined with images projected on a screen or displayed around the worship space. Reflective Taizé chants such as 'Jesus, remember me' can also contribute to a meditative and solemn atmosphere. The RSCM collection *The Way of the Cross* is worth exploring, particularly if a choir is available.

To think about

- ? Have you considered holding a 'Passover Meal' in Holy Week, using some of the Jewish prayers and liturgy alongside an explanation about what is going on and how it relates to the gospel narratives? The Diocesan Liturgical Committee and Carter House can both help with resources.

The Christian Year



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