

The most important events in Christianity are the death and later resurrection of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe is the Son of God, and whose life and teachings are the foundation of Christianity. The most solemn week of the Christian year, Holy Week, is the week leading up to Easter. This is the week which Christians particularly remember the last week of Jesus's life. Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday.

Palm Sunday commemorates Christ's arrival in Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowd. (Later in that week many of the people in that cheering crowd would be among those shouting that Jesus should be executed.) Christian clergy often use the Palm Sunday story to help people think about the strength of their own commitment to their faith. They may ask believers to think about times that they have been unfaithful to Christ, or been hypocritical in proclaiming their support. In many churches, during Palm Sunday services, large palm branches are carried in processions. In Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, members of the congregation hold small crosses made of palm leaf, both to remember the palm leaves which the people of Jerusalem waved when Jesus arrived, and to remember the cross on which he died. The crosses are burned at the start of Lent the *next* year to provide the ash for Ash Wednesday.

Maundy Thursday is the Thursday before Easter. Christians remember it as the day of the Last Supper, when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. The night of Maundy Thursday is the night on which Jesus was betrayed by Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The word *Maundy* comes from the command (mandate) given by Christ at the Last Supper, that we should love one another. In many other countries this day is known as Holy Thursday. In Britain, the sovereign takes part in the Ceremony of the Royal Maundy. This ceremony, held at a great cathedral, involves the distribution of Maundy money to deserving senior citizens (one man and one woman for each year of the sovereign's age), usually chosen for having done service to their community. They receive ceremonial red and white purses which contain coins made especially for the occasion. The white purse contains one coin for each year of the monarch's reign. The red purse contains money in place of other gifts that used to be given to the poor.



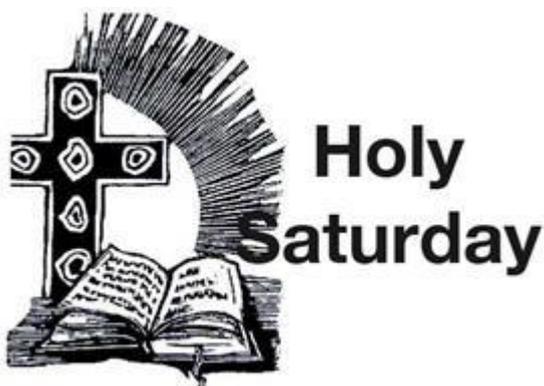
In the 17th century, and earlier, the King or Queen would wash the feet of the selected poor people as a gesture of humility, and in remembrance of Jesus' washing the feet of the disciples. The last monarch to do this was James 2. The ceremony of the monarch giving money to the poor on this day dates back to Edward 1.

Roman Catholic church services feature a ceremony in which the priest washes the feet of 12 people to commemorate Jesus' washing the feet of his disciples. It was common in monasteries throughout history for the Abbot to wash the feet of the monks in a similar gesture. Some other churches nowadays also have foot-washing ceremonies as part of their Maundy Thursday services. In Roman Catholic churches, Maundy Thursday is usually the day on which the supply of anointing oil to be used in ceremonies during the year is consecrated.

In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the day is called *Zelený čtvrtek* or *Zelený štvrtok* respectively, again meaning "Green Thursday". It is because the typical meals of this day were made of fresh, green vegetables etc. In Sweden Maundy Thursday (*skärtorsdagen*) is connected to old folklore as the day of the witches. Young children often dress up as witches and knock on doors getting coins or candy for Easter eggs. In Bulgaria Maundy Thursday is called *Veliki Chetvurtuk* (Great Thursday), and is traditionally the day when people color their Easter eggs and perform other household chores geared toward preparing for *Razpeti Petuk* (Crucifixion Friday), *Velika Subota* (Great Saturday) and *Velikden* (Easter Day).



Good Friday is the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Passion; the execution of Jesus by crucifixion. Good Friday is a day of mourning in church. During special Good Friday services, Christians meditate on Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, and what this means for their faith. In some countries, there are special Good Friday processions, or re-enactments of the Crucifixion. The main service on Good Friday takes place between midday and 3pm. In many churches it takes the form of a meditation based on the seven last words of Jesus on the cross, with hymns, prayers, and short sermons.



Holy Saturday is the Saturday after Good Friday which is often, but wrongly, called Easter Saturday. The Easter Vigil service is the first Easter service, and takes place on the night of Holy Saturday. The

idea behind the service is for faithful Christians to wait and watch, hopeful and confident that Christ will return at midnight. The Easter, or Paschal, candle is lit during this service. The service traditionally begins outside the church, where minister and some worshippers gather around a fire. After readings and prayers, the Paschal candle is lit from the fire using a taper, while a prayer like the one below is said. The lit candle is now a symbol of Christ, risen as the light of the world, and come into the midst of the people. After being lit outside, the candle is carried into the church, where most of the worshippers are waiting in darkness, which symbolises the darkness of Christ's tomb. After more prayers and readings, the candles held by the congregation are lit from the Paschal candle.

Easter Sunday follows Holy Saturday. Christians celebrate the resurrection of the Jesus Christ. It is typically the most well-attended Sunday service of the year for Christian churches. Christians believe, according to Scripture, that Jesus came back to life, or was raised from the dead, three days after his death on the cross. Through his death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus paid the penalty for sin, thus purchasing for all who believe in him, eternal life in Christ Jesus.



Why Easter Eggs and the Easter bunny? Originally eating eggs was not allowed by the church during Holy week, leading up to Easter. Any eggs laid that week were saved and decorated to make them 'Holy Week eggs', then given to children as gifts. The story of the Easter Bunny is thought to have become common in the 19th century. Rabbits usually give birth to a big litter of babies (called kittens), so they became a symbol of new life. Legend has it that the Easter bunny lays, decorates and hides eggs as they are also a symbol of new life. In Switzerland, Easter eggs are delivered by a cuckoo, and by a fox in parts of Germany