

Vaisakhi, is one of the most important dates in the Sikh calendar. It is the Sikh New Year festival and is celebrated on April 13 or 14. It commemorates 1699, the year Sikhism was born as a collective faith. The Khalsa is the name for the Sikh order or community into which all followers of the religion are baptised or initiated. Vaisakhi is a long established harvest festival in the Punjab. It had been celebrated long before it gained an added dimension for Sikhs.

In 1699 the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh, chose Vaisakhi as the occasion to transform the Sikhs into a family of soldier saints, known as the Khalsa Panth. During the Vaisakhi festival, Guru Gobind Singh came out of a tent carrying a sword. He challenged any Sikh who was prepared to give his life to come into the tent. The Guru returned alone with his sword covered in blood. He then requested another volunteer and repeated the same action four times until five men disappeared into the tent. The crowd was very concerned until they saw five men return wearing turbans with the Guru. These five men became known as the *Panj Piare*, or 'Beloved Five'. The men were then baptised into the Khalsa by the Guru. He sprinkled them with *Amrit* ('immortalising nectar': the Sikh term for holy water) and said prayers.

Vaisakhi is celebrated with parades, dancing and singing happening throughout the day. Many Sikhs choose to be baptised into the Khalsa brotherhood on this day.



For the Hindu community, Vaisakhi marks the time of the spring harvest and is a time for bathing in sacred waters as this was the date when river goddess Ganges came down to Earth.

It's also the start of the Hindu new year and some followers know it by the name Vishu