

# An Introduction to the Holy Week

---

 catholicnewsagency.com/resource/55487/an-introduction-to-the-holy-week



## What is it and how is celebrated?

Is the reenacting the Passion of Our Lord

Dates:

Holy Week is the last week of Lent.

Colors:

In most churches, the decorations are red to symbolize the blood of martyrdom. Some churches remove all decorations on Good Friday, veiling anything that can't be removed in black or purple. Holy water is also removed from the fonts in churches on Good Friday and Holy Saturday in preparation for the blessing of the water at the Easter Vigil. This removal also corresponds to those days on which the Eucharist is not celebrated.

Days:

Palm Sunday (or Passion Sunday)

Holy Thursday (or Maundy Thursday)

Good Friday

Holy Saturday

The time from sundown on Holy Thursday to sundown on Easter Day is also known as the Triduum, which is Latin for "three days."

## Some History

Holy Week observances began in Jerusalem in the earliest days of the Church, when devout people traveled to Jerusalem at Passover to reenact the events of the week leading up to the Resurrection.

Egeria was a Christian who traveled widely during the period of 381-385 and wrote about Christian customs and observances in Egypt, Palestine, and Asia Minor. She described how religious tourists to Jerusalem reenacted the events of Holy Week. On Palm Sunday afternoon, the crowds waved palm fronds as they made a procession from the Mount of Olives into the city. Of course, the observances must have begun quite a number of years before Egeria witnessed them, or they wouldn't have been so elaborate. It's just that

Egeria's description is the earliest we still have. The tourists took the customs home with them. Holy week observances spread to Spain by the fifth century, to Gaul and England by the early seventh century. They didn't spread to Rome until the twelfth century.

The purpose of Holy Week is to reenact, relive, and participate in the passion of Jesus Christ.

Holy Week is the same in the eastern and western Church, but because eastern Christians use the Julian Calendar to calculate Easter, the celebrations occur at different times. However, the following events in the week before Easter are the same, east and west, relative to the date of Easter:

- **Palm Sunday** (or Passion Sunday), the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem.
- **Holy Thursday** (or Maundy Thursday), the institution of Communion and the betrayal by Judas.
- **Good Friday**, the arrest, trial, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus Christ.
- **Holy Saturday**, the Sabbath on which Jesus rested in the grave.

## **Reconstructing the Holy Week from Scripture**

### **Friday: Preparation Day, the Passover**

The disciples arranged for the Passover meal, which took place after sundown on Thursday. We might call it Friday Eve, because by Jewish reckoning, the day begins with the previous sunset. That's why we call 24 December "Christmas Eve." Jesus and the disciples ate the Passover in the upper room. They ate it early, which was not uncommon. In that era, most Passover Seders did not include lamb, because most Jews lived too far away from the Temple to obtain a lamb that was kosher for Passover. Therefore the disciples, who were from Galilee, would have been accustomed to a Passover Seder without lamb. Judas left during the meal. Jesus and the remaining disciples adjourned to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed and the disciples kept falling asleep. Judas arrived to betray Jesus, who spent the rest of the night being tried by the Sanhedrin and by Pilate. The following morning, which was still the same day by Jewish reckoning, the Crucifixion significantly took place just as the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple. Matthew 27:62, Mark 15:42, Luke 23:55-56, and John 19:31 all inform us that this took place on Preparation Day, which is the Jewish name for Friday. Mark and John explain that the next day was the Sabbath. Later the disciples realized that in giving them the bread and pronouncing it His body, Jesus Himself had been the Passover lamb at the Last Supper. Thus Jesus, our Passover lamb, was sacrificed for our sins on Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7), and His blood protects us from the angel of death. Jesus died on the cross and was buried before sunset. So Friday was first day that Jesus lay in the tomb.

### **Saturday: the Jewish Sabbath**

Jesus rested in the tomb on the Sabbath. According to Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1-3, and Luke 23:56-24:3, the day before the Resurrection was a Sabbath. This is the second day that Jesus lay in the tomb.

### **Sunday: the first day of the week, the Festival of First Fruits**

On the third day, Jesus rose from the grave. It was the first day of the week and the day after the Sabbath, according to Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1-3, Luke 23:56-24:3. John 20:1 says the Resurrection took place on the first day of the week. He does not explicitly say that the previous day was the Sabbath, but there is no room in his narrative for any intervening days. The first day of the week is the Jewish name for Sunday. Sunday is also the eighth day after the creation in Genesis, so Paul describes Jesus' Resurrection as the first fruits of the new creation in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.

### **Biblical Foundations:**

- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all inform us that the Last Supper and the Crucifixion took place on Preparation Day.
- Mark and John inform us that the next day, the day after the Crucifixion, was the Sabbath.
- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John inform us that the Resurrection took place on the first day of the week.
- Matthew, Mark, and Luke inform us that the day before the Resurrection was the Sabbath, and John heavily implies it.

Ancient Christian writers confirm this reconstruction. In The Apostolic Constitutions, Book V, Section III, it says that the Last Supper occurred on the fifth day of the week (Thursday), that Jesus was crucified on the next day (Friday), and rose on the first day (Sunday), and it explicitly states that this constitutes three days and three nights. The Apostolic Constitutions uses Roman-style midnight-to-midnight days, so this squares with the New Testament's use of sundown-to-sundown days. It also says that Jesus gave the apostles a commandment to pass on to us, to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays; the first to commemorate His betrayal, the second to commemorate His passion on the cross.

Therefore, it is obvious that the Crucifixion took place on a Friday, that Jesus rested in the tomb on Saturday, and rose from the grave on Sunday. So, you might ask, why didn't the gospel writers just come right out and say that it was Friday, Saturday, and Sunday? The answer is that they did, for the circumstances under which they wrote. They were writing for an audience beyond Palestine, and in the Roman Empire of the first century, there was no general consensus about the names of the days of the week, the number of the current year, the names and lengths of the months, the date of the new year, or the time at which the day began. On that last point, the day began at midnight in Egypt, at sunrise in Greece, and at sunset in Palestine. So even though it is not what we are used to, the gospels are really worded in such a way as to make the dates and times comprehensible to anyone in the Roman Empire who was familiar with the Jewish Scriptures.

When you count days you get a different answer than when you subtract dates. If you go to a three-day seminar that begins on Friday, you expect it to end on Sunday, because Friday, Saturday, and Sunday are three days. However, if you subtract the date of Friday from the date of Sunday, the answer is two elapsed days. The ancients counted days instead of calculating elapsed time—in fact, Jesus Himself counted days this way in Luke 13:31-32. This is why the tradition is universal that Jesus spent three days in the tomb when He was buried on Friday and rose from the dead on Sunday. All intervals in the Jewish and Christian calendars are calculated the same way, which is why Pentecost falls on a Sunday and not on a Monday.

Source: <http://www.kencollins.com/holy-05.htm>