

THE CHURCH



on questions you may have.

Lent and Easter are an important part of the Christian calendar. A season (from Ash Wednesday until Easter Eve) of self-examination, penitence, self-denial, study, and preparation for Easter. Its duration (forty days plus Sundays) recalls the temptation of Christ in the wilderness.

Learn more about the significance of Lent and Easter to Christians, and find out the answers to common questions you may have.

What is Shrove Tuesday?

Shrove Tuesday is the traditional last opportunity to celebrate before the beginning of Lent.

For many centuries it has been the custom to observe some form of fasting during Lent, and many Christians today continue the practice of doing without a particular kind of food. Shrove Tuesday is the opportunity to use up rich food, including eggs and fat which could be used in making pancakes – hence the nickname, 'Pancake Day'.

Shrove Tuesday is always 47 days before Easter, a date which changes every year.

What is Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent and marks the start of forty days of penitence and fasting, remembering the forty days Jesus fasted in the wilderness.

On Ash Wednesday, many Christians attend church and receive the sign of the cross marked in ash on their foreheads as a sign of penitence and an expression of trust in God.

Often, the ashes used on Ash Wednesday are made by burning the previous year's palm crosses.

Why does the Church mark the season of Lent?

Lent is an important part of the Christian calendar as it is a time when Christians can prepare for the celebrations of Easter by reflecting on their behaviour over the last year and finding ways to live a life based on the teaching of Jesus. People do this in different ways: some people fast, eat frugally, give up treats, or give to charity.

During Lent, many people also set aside time to study the Bible and meet with other Christians to reflect on Jesus's life and prepare for the events of Holy Week and Easter.

Why does Lent last for 40 days?

Lent lasts for 40 days because this is the amount of time Jesus fasted in the wilderness before he began his public ministry. Sundays, which always celebrate the resurrection, are excluded from this total of forty.

Why do people often give up something during Lent?

People often give up something during Lent as they are following the example of Jesus who fasted in the wilderness before he began his public ministry.

What are the Stations of the Cross?

The Stations of the Cross are 14 images that depict Jesus's journey to the cross. They are used by Christians as a focus for devotion and are arranged in a numbered order along a path to allow worshippers to go on their own pilgrimage, just as Jesus did. Each marks a specific event, starting with Jesus' condemnation and concluding with his burial.

What is the significance of Palm Sunday?

Palm Sunday is celebrated on the Sunday before Easter Day. It marks the triumphal entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem, an event that is recorded in all four Gospels.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, while the crowds waved palm branches and shouted: "Hosanna!" (an exclamation of praise).

To mark this, Palm Sunday is often celebrated with a procession, either inside the church or through the streets outside. Congregations carry palm branches or other greenery, sometimes decorated with flowers. Some churches or cathedrals even involve a real donkey in their procession.

What does 'Maundy Thursday' mean?

Maundy Thursday is the day when Christians remember the Last Supper shared by Jesus and his disciples before he was betrayed and arrested.

Maundy Thursday takes its name from the Latin word 'mandatum' meaning 'commandment'. During the supper Jesus told his disciples: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." (John 13.34 – NRSV).

He also got up from the table, poured a basin of water and washed the disciples' feet. This was the act of a servant. He also told them to do the same for others.

Many churches recreate this act at special services on Maundy Thursday as a reminder of how Jesus served others and of how Christians should also serve others.

Why is it called 'Good Friday'?

Good Friday is the most sombre day of the Christian calendar when the crucifixion and death of Jesus is commemorated in churches and cathedrals so it can be difficult at first glance to see what is 'good' about it. Some sources suggest that it may be a corruption of 'God's Friday' which has evolved over time. But – more importantly – Christians see the death of Jesus as the means by which God's people are invited to share in new life.

Why do some churches do a 'walk of witness' on Good Friday?

Many congregations take part in a public 'walk of witness' before the start of service on Good Friday to remember that Jesus had to carry his cross through the streets of Jerusalem.

Each church's walk will be slightly different. People might give out hot cross buns or enact the actual events of Jesus' walk through the streets of Jerusalem or someone might carry a cross.

What date is Easter 2024?

Unlike Christmas, the date of Easter changes every year. This is because Easter always falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the Spring equinox.

The equinox always falls on 21 March. In 2024, the first full moon of spring occurs on 25 March and thus Easter Sunday is 31 March.

Why is Easter so important to Christians?

Easter is important to Christians as it is the celebration of Jesus dying for our sins and then rising again. In so doing, he offers us new life in him. On the third day after his crucifixion, Jesus's tomb was found to be empty. He had risen from the dead. Life triumphs over death! The joy of resurrection is possible only because Christ endured death and conquered it.

Why do we celebrate Easter with eggs?

There are many possible reasons for celebrating Easter with eggs but Christians focus on the fact that they represent new life, offered through Jesus's death and resurrection. Some people suggest that they resemble the stone at the entrance to Jesus's tomb.

What should I wear at church this Easter?

You can wear whatever is most comfortable to church. Some people like to dress smartly, others more informally. You are welcome in whatever you prefer.

What services and events happen during Lent and Easter?

During Lent and Easter, churches may hold special services and events. These could include services for Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and a vigil on Easter Saturday. To find out what is happening near you visit [AChurchNearYou.com](https://www.AChurchNearYou.com).

If I'm visiting church for the first time, how will I know what to do?

When you arrive you will normally be greeted by a member of the congregation who will be able to answer any questions you may have.

Depending on the church there will either be a screen or a service booklet that will tell you when to stand, sit, sing, etc. The person leading the service will also give clear directions.

How will I follow along or join in with the service?

Churches normally have either a service booklet or a screen with the words of the service that will allow you to follow along and join in.

How long does Easter last?

Easter lasts for 50 days, from the Easter Sunday to the Day of Pentecost. During this time the Church celebrates the resurrection of Jesus and looks towards his ascension into heaven.

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/faith-life/what-we-believe/lent-holy-week-and-easter/significance-lent-and-easter>