

THE FIRST EASTER

Easter is the biggest celebration of all in churches. Discover together with your child what happened on the very first Easter using this easy-to-read summary of the story that's right at the heart of the Christian faith.

There are so many symbols of new life in the shops at Easter, like eggs, chicks and spring flowers. The very first Easter story is about new life – despair turning into joy, an amazing miracle and the extravagant love of God for all of us. Here's what happened...

A special meal

Jesus gathered his friends around him for a special meal, and during the meal he tried to help them understand what was going to happen to him.

He took some bread, and broke it, and gave it to them, saying 'This is my body'. Then he poured some wine and shared it with them, saying 'This is my blood'. He knew he was going to die, and he wanted his friends to understand.

Then he took a towel and started to wash their feet, to show them that if he, their teacher, could wash their feet, then they should also learn to do kind and humble things for one another. He was showing them that a leader can also be a servant.

After supper, they went to a beautiful, quiet garden so that Jesus could pray about what was going to happen. He really needed his friends that night, but they kept falling asleep. He had never felt so alone.

Betrayed

Late at night, one of Jesus' friends, Judas, came to the garden, bringing with him soldiers from the temple to arrest Jesus – it was dark, so he told the soldiers he would show them which one was Jesus by kissing him. We don't know why Judas did it, but he wasn't the only one who betrayed Jesus that night. When the soldiers arrived, all Jesus' friends ran away, and then later, his best friend Peter was so afraid, he wouldn't even admit to knowing Jesus.

On trial

Jesus was put on trial – all night they questioned him. Early in the morning they sent him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, and asked him to kill Jesus for them – they said that Jesus was claiming to be a King, a rival to the Roman Emperor.

The Romans often crucified people – they knew it made everyone afraid of them. So when the crowds asked for Jesus to be crucified, Pilate eventually agreed. He didn't really care whether Jesus was a criminal or not.

Crucified

So Jesus was beaten, and given a crown made of thorns – the soldiers were mocking him as ‘King of the Jews’. Then they took him away and crucified him – they nailed him to a large wooden cross, and hung him there in the blazing hot sun, along with two criminals.

Gradually some of Jesus’ friends came back: John stood by Jesus’ mother Mary, and Jesus asked them to care for each other after he was gone.

Finally, there came a moment when the sky went dark, and Jesus took his last breath. Jesus’ friends buried him and rolled a large stone against the tomb entrance, and the soldiers stayed to guard it (they didn’t want anyone to steal the body and pretend that Jesus had come back to life).

The next day was the Sabbath – the holy day – and on that day Jesus’ body lay silent and cold in the tomb.

Tomb stone rolled away

Early on the first day of the week, when it was still dark, some friends of Jesus (both called Mary) went to the tomb with spices and herbs, so that they could care for Jesus’ body.

They had wondered how they would move the stone away, but they arrived to find the tomb open, and an angel who told them that Jesus was alive – well, they were not sure what to think! One of them went back to the city, but the other stayed in the garden.

She was crying, and it was still dark, so when she saw someone standing near her she thought it must be the gardener. Maybe he had moved the stone and taken Jesus’ body?

He’s alive!

Then the man said to her, ‘Mary’ and she recognised his voice. It was Jesus, and he really was alive! He said to her, ‘Go and tell my friends what you have seen,’ and she did – she ran all the way back to where Jesus’ friends were staying and said to them, ‘I have seen the Lord, and he is alive!’

They didn’t know what to think either, but over the next hours and days, they all saw Jesus – he came to them in the house, he met some of them on a journey, and then visited them again while they were fishing, and cooked them breakfast! There was no doubt about it, Jesus was alive, and they began to tell everyone the good news.