



A HOLY WEEK

Q & A

by William Weedon



Why Do We Celebrate Easter When We Do?

Over the years Christians have had serious disagreements about the day to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. In the early years, Christians even excommunicated each other over this question.

Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Protestants determine the date of Easter by assigning it to the Sunday following the first full moon after March 21.

Sounds simple, but in practice, it is a little more complicated. The full moon is called an "ecclesiastic" moon and may not exactly correspond to what we see in the sky (though it often does). So, Easter—a "moveable feast"—wanders around and can occur anywhere between March 22 and April 25.

Eastern Orthodox Christians use the actual moon in the sky at the latitude of Jerusalem to determine the date of Easter, and that is why they often observe it on a different day.



How Did Holy Week Become Part of the Church Year?

Holy Week came together in the fourth century through the practices of the church at Jerusalem. In the days leading up to Easter, the Christians living in Palestine gathered at the various sites where the events recounted in the Gospels took place. There they offered prayers and hymns and relived through Scripture readings the events of that momentous week.

Pilgrims from other parts of the world who visited Jerusalem carried home the customs they observed. Thus Holy Week gradually spread across the Christian world.



Do All Christian Churches Celebrate Holy Week and Easter the Same Way?

No, of course not. Christians vary in how they celebrate Holy Week and Easter, though there has been a growing trend toward a fuller observation of these special days. In Lutheranism, you will find that some parishes conduct services every day of Holy Week; others observe only Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter.



How Does Holy Week Prepare Us for Easter, The Pinnacle of the Church Year?

Each of these days provides a liturgical experience that enables Christians to spiritually follow along and become witnesses to the great events of that most important week in all of human history.

For example, on Palm Sunday, we join in waving our palms and singing to the King who comes into our midst. On Maundy Thursday, we witness the institution of the Eucharist and partake of the feast. On Good Friday, we stand in the darkness beneath the cross and worship Christ as He offers His life in exchange for our own, destroying death by death. On Holy Saturday, we watch the light of a never-ending day break from death, and we know that, baptized into the Risen One, we will have a life that never ends.



How Did Foot-Washing Come to Be Associated With Maundy Thursday? What Does It Signify?

Foot-washing is fairly new to Lutherans. The practice visually sets before us exactly what our Lord did on the night of His betrayal. (Read John 13:1-15.) Lutherans know that Christ did not institute foot-washing as a sacrament; after all, He said, "That you should do as I have done for you," not "*what* I have done for you."

Some parishes have found the practice useful as a reminder of our Lord's service to us, and His call for us to serve one another.



How Do the Colors of Easter Help Us Understand the Significance of the Resurrection?

When the myrrh-bearing women arrived at the tomb, they found an angel in white. Ever since, white has been the joyous color of the Resurrection. It is with this in mind that, beginning in ancient times, the church clothed the newly baptized in white garments as a visual confession that by Baptism God has clothed these persons in the very resurrection of Christ Himself. Death will never be the end of the baptized. They belong to Him who trounced sin, hell, and the grave. They belong to Him who promises His people a life that never ends.

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