

Holy Week

Easter

Week of April 9

And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “**Hosanna** to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! **Hosanna** in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9)

Devotional

A few years ago, our Aurora Campus had a pretty traumatic week. The week kicked off with a flood that ruined the lower level, then the copper was stolen from the air conditioning units, and to cap it off, the church laptop was stolen! Talk about a terrible week! However, some great things came out of it: new air conditioning units, a new laptop, and the lower level was able to be remodeled and from that we were able to host ESL classes for World Relief which led to people starting to come to our church from all over the world!

The same is true with Passion Week. It went from an extreme high with Jesus entering into Jerusalem as the crowds cried, “Hosanna!” to an all-time low with Jesus’ betrayal, arrest, desertion, trials before the Jews and Romans, conviction, and finally His death on the cross. It was a week that seemingly ended in great tragedy—loss on a massive scale. But the week ended with the dawn of hope as Jesus rose from the dead. Sin was defeated, death had turned backwards, and hope was alive forevermore.

Passion Week (also known as Holy Week) is the time from Palm Sunday through Easter Sunday (Resurrection Sunday). Also included within Passion Week are Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday, Spy Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Passion Week is so named because of the passion with which Jesus willingly went to the cross in order to pay for the sins of His people. Passion Week is described in Matthew chapters 21–27; Mark chapters 11–15; Luke chapters 19–23; and John chapters 12–19. Passion Week begins with the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday on the back of a colt as prophesied in Zechariah 9:9.

Passion Week contained several memorable events. Jesus cleansed the Temple for the second time (Luke 19:45–46), then disputed with the Pharisees regarding His authority. Then He gave His Olivet Discourse on the end times and taught many things, including the signs of His Second Coming. Jesus ate His Last Supper with His disciples in the upper room (Luke 22:7–38), then went to the garden of Gethsemane to pray as He

waited for His hour to come. It was here that Jesus, having been betrayed by Judas, was arrested and taken to several sham trials before the chief priests, Pontius Pilate, and Herod (Luke 22:54–23:25).

Following the trials, Jesus was scourged at the hands of the Roman soldiers, then was forced to carry His own instrument of execution (the Cross) through the streets of Jerusalem along what is known as the Via Dolorosa (way of sorrows). Jesus was then crucified at Golgotha on the day before the Sabbath, was buried and remained in the tomb until Sunday, the day after the Sabbath, and then gloriously resurrected.

It is referred to as Passion Week because in that time, Jesus Christ truly revealed His passion for us in the suffering He willingly went through on our behalf. What should our attitude be during Passion Week? We should be passionate in our worship of Jesus and in our proclamation of His Gospel! As He suffered for us, so should we be willing to suffer for the cause of following Him and proclaiming the message of His death and resurrection.¹

We take time to reflect on Holy Week because the Gospels spend a great deal of time on it. Since almost 40% of the Gospels focus on the last week of Jesus' life, it appears we should pause and reflect on it. And while many Christians the world over celebrate Holy Week through various services, its observance isn't commanded anywhere in Scripture.

Holy Week is not an obligation. It is an opportunity. In the chaos of our increasingly fast-paced and hectic society, the annual coming of Holy Week each spring is a reminder to pause and ponder, to carefully mark each day, and not let this greatest of all weeks fly like every other.

It is a chance to walk with the church throughout the world and throughout time as she accompanies her Bridegroom through the eight most important days in history. And it is an opportunity to focus our minds on, and seek to intensify our affections for, the highest and most timeless realities in the universe.²

It's a time to pause and reflect together to see the last moments of Jesus with His disciples, how He prepared them for His leaving, and what lessons He made sure were taught both to them and for us today.

Open it

1. Describe a memorable week in your life. What made it so memorable?

Explore it

Take a few moments to look over the chart below that highlights some of the major event in Holy Week.

¹“What Is Passion Week/Holy Week?,” <https://www.gotquestions.org/Passion-Week.html>, accessed on 29 March 2017.

²David Mathis, “Your Sorrow Will Turn to Joy,” 2016, <https://document.desiringgod.org/your-sorrow-will-turn-to-joy-en.pdf?1457392245>, p. 1, accessed on 29 March 2017.

MAJOR EVENTS OF HOLY WEEK

Sunday through Wednesday Jesus spent each night in Bethany, just two miles east of Jerusalem on the opposite slope of the Mount of Olives. He probably stayed in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Jesus spent Thursday night praying in Gethsemane, Friday and Saturday nights Jesus' body lay in the garden tomb.

DAY	EVENT	REFERENCES
Sunday	Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem	Matt. 21:1–11; Mark 11:1–10; Luke 19:29–40; John 12:12–19
Monday	Jesus clears the Temple	Matt. 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; Luke 19:45–46
Tuesday	Jesus' authority challenged in the Temple	Matt. 21:23–27; Mark 11:27–33; Luke 20:1–8
	Jesus teaches in stories & confronts the Jews	Matt. 21:28–23:36; Mark 12:1–40; Luke 20:9–47
	Greeks ask to see Jesus	John 12:20–26
	The Olivet discourse	Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21:5–38
	Judas agrees to betray Jesus	Matt. 26:14–16; Mark 14:10–11; Luke 22:3–6
Wednesday	The Bible does not say what Jesus did on this day; He probably remained in Bethany with His disciples.	
Thursday	The Last Supper	Matt. 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14
	Jesus speaks to the disciples in the upper room	John 13–17
	Jesus struggles in Gethsemane	Matt. 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:3; John 18:1
	Jesus is betrayed and arrested	Matt. 26:47–56; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:47–53; John 18:2–12
Friday	Jesus is tried by Jewish and Roman authorities	Matt. 26:57–27:2, 11–31; Mark 14:53–15:15;
	and is denied by Peter	Luke 22:54–23:25; John 18:13–19:16
	Jesus is crucified	Matt. 27:31–56; Mark 15:20–41; Luke 23:26–43; John 19:17–30
Sunday	The Resurrection	Matt. 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–11; Luke 24:1–12; John 20:1–18 ³

³ Chronological Life Application Study Bible (NLT).

2. On what day of the week did Jesus enter Jerusalem?

3. On what day did Jesus celebrate the Passover Feast with His disciples? What practice do we have today that came from that night?

4. Did you grow up in a tradition that observed all or some of the events in Holy Week (e.g. Palm Sunday, Tenebrae, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Vigil, sunrise service)? What did you do? Was it special?

5. Was there anything in the chart that you didn't know happened during Holy Week? What was it?

Apply it

6. We have a tendency to place a greater emphasis on Christmas than we do on the events of Holy Week and Easter. Which do you think is more significant and why?

WHICH IS MORE IMPORTANT?

Both Christmas and Easter are vitally important in regard to our Christian faith, but in regard to Scripture, Easter has a greater emphasis. Only two of the Gospels refer to Jesus' birth (Matthew and Luke; John has a cosmic approach, and Mark begins his gospel with the baptism of John), but each one spends a great deal of time highlighting the last week of Jesus' life, especially His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. In fact, the early church didn't celebrate Jesus' birth because the Caesars set aside their birthdays as holidays and the church fathers didn't want to have Jesus compared to Caesar, so they gave greater prominence to the crucifixion and resurrection.

7. Why do we spend a greater amount of time and energy highlighting Christmas than Easter, even though the early church did exactly the opposite? How might our faith change if we highlighted the resurrection more than we do the incarnation?

8. Read Luke 22:14–15. Why do you think Jesus was so eager to eat the Passover with His disciples?

9. What is the significance of the Lord's Supper coming out of the Passover Seder (meal)?

FROM PASSOVER TO THE LORD'S SUPPER

Jesus declared that the bread spoke of His body which would be broken. There was not a broken bone, but His body was so badly tortured that it was hardly recognizable (Psalm 22:12–17; Isaiah 53:4–7). The wine spoke of His blood, indicating the terrible death He would soon experience. He, the perfect Son of God, became the fulfillment of the countless Old Testament prophecies concerning a Redeemer (Genesis 3:15; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53). When He said, “Do this in remembrance of me,” He indicated this was a ceremony that must be continued in the future. It indicated also that the Passover, which required the death of a lamb and looked forward to the coming of the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world, was fulfilled in the Lord's Supper. The New Covenant replaced the Old Covenant when Christ, the Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7), was sacrificed (Hebrews 8:8–13). The sacrificial system was no longer needed (Hebrews 9:25–28). The Lord's Supper/Christian Communion is a remembrance of what Christ did for us and a celebration of what we receive as a result of His sacrifice.

10. Matthew 26:14–16: We often betray God for things that are fleeting and insignificant. What are some of those things we choose every day over God?

11. Read and compare the stories of Judas (Luke 22:3–6; Matt. 27:3–5) and Peter (Luke 22:54–62; John 21:4–7). What similarities do you see between Judas and Peter? What are the differences?

12. Do you think that the same forgiveness was available to Judas? Or were their situations different?

13. Who do you relate to better, Judas or Peter? Why?

14. Read John 18:1–11. What caused the soldiers to fall over? What was it about Jesus that drew such a reaction? Have you ever encountered Jesus in such a way that caused you to be overwhelmed?

15. Read John 18:33–38. Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this world. Why do we have such a hard time believing this truth? Why do we fight so hard in politics, culture, and other areas of our lives when this world is clearly not our home?

16. Read John 19:1–11. Knowing that God establishes authorities, how does it make you feel to know that God grants authority to earthly powers over us even when it involves the possibility of our suffering?

17. Who killed Jesus: Jews, Romans, or us?

WHO KILLED JESUS?

Martin Luther contended that “we killed Christ.” It ultimately wasn’t the Jews or the Romans, but we who killed Him. Luther wrote, “...you are in fact the one who killed Christ. Your sins did this to Him. When you look at the nails being driven through His hands, firmly believe that it is your work. Do you see His crown of thorns? Those thorns are your wicked thoughts.”⁴

Matthew Block commented,

Luther’s point is an important one: If we do not see ourselves as the persecutors of Christ in the passion narratives, then we read them wrongly. As the disciples failed to keep watch with the Lord in Gethsemane, we too in sloth ignore Him. As Judas betrayed Him with a kiss, so in our thoughts, words, and deeds we betray Him daily. We reject Him like Peter, wash our hands of Him like Pilate, call for His death like the crowds, and lead Him out to Golgotha. We crucify Him and hurl insults at Him as He hangs dying on the cross. We kill God.

“Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” go the words of the old spiritual. “Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?” And while there is a place for such songs, a steady diet on them is unwise: they externalize too much the story as something “they” did. We must never forget that *we* were there—that *we* crucified the Son of God.

18. Does thinking that you were there when Christ was crucified make you look at the crucifixion differently?

19. In light of the fact that He was crucified for our sins and took the wrath of God upon Himself, how should we now then live?

⁴Matthew Block, “The Right Way to Meditate on Christ’s Sufferings,” March 27, 2013, <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2013/03/the-right-way-to-meditate-on-christs-sufferings>, accessed on 30 March 2017.