



Celebrations



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1. Eastern Catholicism

1.1. Introduction

The characteristic celebrations of Eastern Catholics are very close to those of the Orthodox, rather than to the traditional celebrations of Latin Catholics. All the celebrations are included in a liturgical calendar, called "synaxarion", which includes the celebrations related to the life of Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints. The fundamental celebration is that of Easter, on which many other variable celebrations depend, while others are fixed on a specific day of the calendar; there are also celebrations, linked above all to the cult of the Virgin and of the Saints, which depend on local traditions, and which are specific of a Church. In addition to Easter, the most important celebrations, common to all the Eastern Churches, are twelve; but each particular Church celebrates with great solemnity some saints.

In the celebrations of the Eastern Churches the celebrant is free to use vestments of any colour, according to the tradition of his own region, differently from what happens in the Latin Catholic Church, where the use of liturgical colours is very strict and codified, and they are the same all over the world; if there are more celebrants, they can also use different colours. Some ceremonies are reserved to bishops, while others may be carried out by any priest or even by a deacon, and different vestments are used for each hierarchy. The faithful who participate in a ceremony are almost always standing, only the old and young children can sit down.

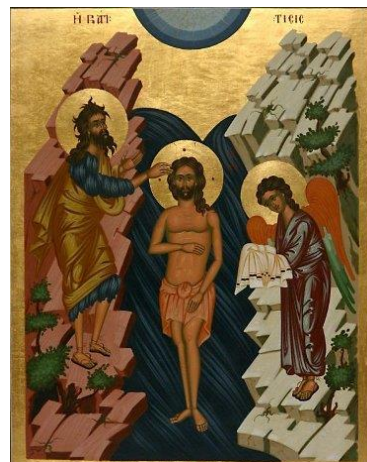


1.2. The Holy Theophany of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ

The celebration of Theophany is placed on January 6th of the liturgical calendar, since in the Eastern Churches on that date the Epiphany of Jesus is not concerning the Magi who bring the gifts, but the

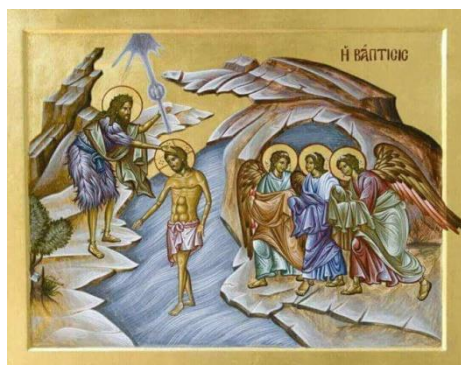
Epiphany of the Trinity during the Baptism of Jesus. The term Theophany (manifestation of God) is therefore preferred, and originally the name of the festivity was Theophanies, in the plural, to indicate the manifestations of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit to the world, which took place in a manner specific to each person. It is a festivity that has remained unchanged since the fourth century, while in the early centuries it was joined to the festivity of the Nativity of the Lord, then anticipated to December 25th.

The day of Theophany, baptism of Jesus, is one of the great twelve festivities of the Byzantine liturgical year. It is one of the days indicated for the baptism of the faithful. On this day the Great Blessing of the waters takes place, similar to the blessing of the water for the baptism of each faithful. The Cross is immersed in the blessed water, a sign of the baptism of Christ, the paradigm of the baptism of every Christian. This blessing is usually celebrated on the 5th of January at the end of the vespers, in the church, while on the day of the festivity, on 6th January, it is repeated in the village fountain, or in a nearby river, or, where it is, in the sea, in imitation of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. With blessed water then, on this day and in the following days, the houses of individual families are blessed, extending God's blessing to the whole community of the faithful and to the environment in which they live. The blessed water on the day of Theophany confirms the proclamation of the faith in the Trinity for the whole community, recalling the veneration that each of the faithful owes to it.



Icon in the parish church of S. Giorgio Albanese (CS – Italy)

Pictures



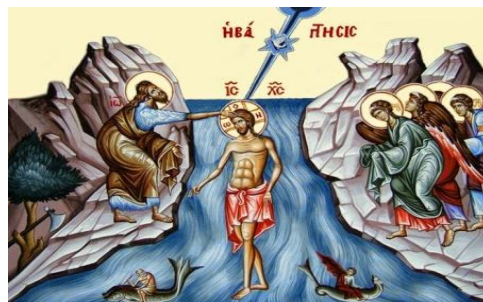
Greek icon of the sacred Theophany



Icon in the parish church of S. Nicola Mezzojuso (PA - Italy)



Fresco of Christ's Baptism – Giotto school - 13th century



Orthodox icon of the Saint Theophany

Video



Celebration of the Saint Theophany at Carpignano Salentino (LE - Italy)

1.3. Dormition of the Mother of God

All the Eastern Churches - both Catholic and Orthodox - celebrate the Dormition of Mary as the greatest Marian festivity: the "feast of feast days" of the Mother of the Lord.

According to the liturgical calendar, it falls on August 15th, the same day on which, instead, the Latin Church celebrates the Assumption of Mary to Heaven; the Dormition is the most important Marian feast: for the Eastern Churches the Dormition is considered and celebrated as "the Easter of the Mother of God"; and the fourteen days preceding it are called "little Lent of the Virgin" in analogy with the great Lent that prepares the Passover of Christ. On these days the faithful go to church and sing the office of supplication to the Mother of God, the "Paraclysis", which is an integral part of the liturgical books, both Catholic and Orthodox, Greek and Slavic: it is indeed one of the most popular expressions of the Byzantine cult of the Virgin Mother.

The festivity of the Dormition has no foundation in the Scriptures, but since the 4th century it has been mentioned in



N. Poussin "The death of the Virgin" – a baroque representation of the Dormition (17th cent.)

the works of the Fathers of the Church, such as Ephrem the Syrian and Epiphanius of Salamis (Panarion, Volume II, book III).

At the beginning of the 7th century the festivity of the Dormition was established in Constantinople, with the decree of Emperor Maurice (582-602), and soon the main object of the festivity became the entrance of the Body of Mary into glory. The festivity of the Assumption was introduced in Rome around the year 650, becoming the object of a solemn commemoration made at first on January 18th and later on August 15th.

Pictures



Statue of the Dormition exhibited on 14th August in the Roman church of Aracoeli



Wax statue of the Dormition, 17th century, Church of San Cataldo (CL)



P. Cavallini, Passage of the Virgin Mary – Mosaic in the Basilica in Santa Maria in Trastevere, Roma



Fresco of the Panaghia Phorbiotissa in Asinou (Cyprus)

Video



Video on the places of the Dormition

1.4. Feast of the Holy, Glorious, and Praiseworthy Chiefs of the Apostles, Peter and Paul

The feast day of Saints Peter and Paul is an "ecumenical" feast, which is celebrated on the same date (June 29th) by all the Eastern Christian Churches, both Catholic and Orthodox, and by the Latin Church. It dates back to the first centuries of Christianity, and since 3rd century there have been testimonies, both archaeological and literary, of this celebration.

The Byzantine tradition calls Peter and Paul "the first coryphaei" (those who occupy the first place, the highest dignity) and also "the first in dignity".

The celebration of this day is preceded by a period of fasting, of variable duration as taking place after the Sunday of Pentecost. It foresees a particular ceremony in the prayers of the whole day, and the veneration of an icon in which the Saints Peter and Paul are represented together, often in the act of supporting the Church.

Linked to the present feast day of the two Apostles the celebration of the Twelve Apostles, disciples of the Lord, taking place the following day, in the Byzantine tradition can be found.



Icons of the Apostles supporting the Church

Pictures



Golden glass with the busts of Peter and Paul (4th century), Sacred Museum, Apostle Library, Vatican City



Meeting of Peter and Paul, mosaics of the Monreale Cathedral, Monreale, Palermo -Italy, 12th century

Video



Icon of the Saint Peter and Paul, 17th century, Aleppo, Syria

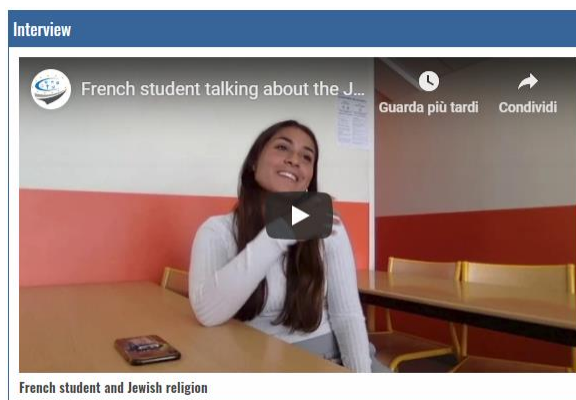


Divine Liturgy in the Saint Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church in Nice, during the Feast day of Saint Peter and Paul

2. Judaism

2.1. Introduction

This chapter shows some of the most important Jewish celebrations – Pesach (Passover), Yom Kippur and Chanukkah. These holidays show a lot about the roots of the Jewish culture and traditions and how religion is intertwined in everyday life of Jewish people, no matter where they are living in the world. The celebrations are a strong part of the connection to the old knowledge, traditions and relations that keep the Jewish community united.



The celebrations presented in this chapter are described both as historical roots and as contemporary manifestation of the Jewish religion. The pictures and videos can help the teachers and students on the one hand understand better the importance of the celebrations and on the other to be able to connect to Jewish people/students in a better way.



2.2. Pesach

Pesach, which commemorates the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt, is the foundation story of Jewish peoplehood. The first major festival instituted in the Torah not only celebrates national liberation but dramatizes the critical belief, recurrent throughout the Bible, that God hears the cry of the oppressed.

The key events are narrated in Exodus chapters 12 and 13. As Pharaoh obdurately continues to resist the release of his Israelite slaves, God resolves to bring the last and most terrible of the Ten Plagues, the smiting of Egypt's firstborn.

On the eve of their redemption, on the 14th of the month of Nisan, each Israelite household is instructed to roast a lamb at nightfall. They are to daub the animal's blood on their doorposts as a sign to ensure that their own firstborn will escape harm. "I will pass over you and there shall be no plague on you to destroy you," God says (Exodus 12.13) – hence the name of the festival, Pesach, "Passover". The lamb is to be consumed "in haste", with nothing left over till morning, and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Since there is no time to let the dough rise, the bread must be unleavened. The bitter herbs symbolise the bitterness inflicted on the captive Israelites by their slave-masters (Exodus 1:14). When the plague strikes even the royal household, Pharaoh finally capitulates and the Israelites go free. As they make their escape, they are commanded to "observe this day" henceforth in every generation.



Seder, religious meal served in Jewish homes on the 15th and 16th of the month of Nisan to commence the festival of Passover (Pesah).



Reading prayers at dinner at Pesach.

The commemoration of the festival covers the week from the Exodus to the Crossing of the Red Sea, where Pharaoh and the pursuing Egyptian chariots meet their doom. While Pesach lasts seven days in Israel and among Progressive Jews, traditional Jews in the diaspora keep it for eight. The first and seventh day are a Yom Tov in Israel and for Progressive Jews, when no work may be done, while Orthodox and Masorti communities in the diaspora observe Yom Tov on the first, second, seventh and eighth days. The most distinctive feature is to abstain from eating leavened foods, chametz, (made from the five species of grain associated with the land of Israel: wheat, barley, oats, spelt and rye). Instead, we re-enact the exigencies of the Exodus by making do with unleavened matzah, the "bread of affliction", as it is dubbed in Deuteronomy.

Pesach was originally a pilgrim festival and the paschal lamb was eaten in the precincts of the Temple in Jerusalem. But now the Temple no longer stands, lamb is not eaten at the Pesach meal and is instead symbolised by a roasted shankbone on the Seder plate. But bitter herbs remain one of the evocative tastes of Pesach. No festival involves so much preparation as Pesach because not only does the Torah command abstinence from leaven but it also stipulates that none shall be "found in your house". The night



Students celebrate Passover Seder, connecting with students in Israel.

before Pesach, the tradition is to scatter a few pieces of chametz around the house and collect them in a ceremonial search, using a feather, wooden spoon and candle (or torch). These are the formally burnt the next morning before the cut-off point when no chametz may no longer be consumed. The eve of Pesach is also the Fast of the Firstborn, which was instituted by the rabbis in gratitude of the deliverance of the firstborn Hebrews during the Tenth Plague.

Pictures



Shomronim to begin Pesach celebration tonight; On that evening Jews slaughter their korbanot pesach (lamb), an event that annually becomes a relatively significant tourist attraction.



Seder plate. There are at least five foods that go on the seder plate: shank bone (zeroa), egg (beitzah), bitter herbs (maror), vegetable (karpas) and a sweet paste called haroset. Many seder plates also have room for a sixth, hazeret (another form of the bitter herbs). All of them are meant to remind of the primary theme of Passover: the Jewish people's transition from slavery to freedom.

Video



The video shows how to hold a Pesach Seder (a Jewish ritual service and ceremonial dinner for the first night or first two nights of Passover)

2.3. Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year, when people are closest to God and to the essence of our souls. Yom Kippur means “Day of Atonement,” as the verse states, “For on this day He will forgive you, purify you, that you be cleansed from all your sins before God.”

Just months after the people of Israel left Egypt in the year of 2448 from creation (1313 BCE), they sinned by worshipping a golden calf. Moses ascended Mount Sinai and prayed to God to forgive them. After two 40-day stints on the mountain, full Divine favor was obtained. The day Moses came down the mountain (the 10th of Tishrei) was to be known forevermore as the Day of Atonement—Yom Kippur. This practice continued for hundreds of years, throughout the time of the first Temple in Jerusalem, which was built by Solomon, and the second Temple, which was built by Ezra. Jews from all over the world would gather in the Temple to experience the sacred sight of the High Priest performing his service, obtaining forgiveness for all of Israel. When the second Temple was destroyed in the year of 3830 from creation (70 CE), the Yom Kippur service continued. Instead of a High Priest bringing the sacrifices in Jerusalem, every single Jew performs the Yom Kippur service in the temple of his or her heart.



Yom Kippur celebration Jewish people reading Torah



2. Five prayer ceremonies take place over the course of the day: Maariv, Shacharit, Musaf, Minchah and Neilah.

Forty days before Yom Kippur, on the first of Elul, people begin blowing the shofar every morning and reciting Psalm 27 after the morning and afternoon prayers. In Sephardic communities, it is customary to begin saying **Selichot** early every morning (Ashkenazim begin just a few days before Rosh Hashanah)—building an atmosphere of reverence, repentance and awe leading up to Yom Kippur. Just as Yom Kippur is a day of fasting, **the day before Yom Kippur** is set aside for eating and preparing for this holy day. Here are some of the activities that people do on

the day before Yom Kippur:

Holiday candles are lit before the onset of the holy day.

No work is to be done on Yom Kippur, from the time the sun sets on the ninth of Tishrei until the stars come out in the evening of the next day.

On Yom Kippur, people afflict themselves by avoiding the following five actions:

- **Eating or drinking** (in case of need they consult a medical professional and a rabbi)
- Wearing **leather** shoes
- Applying **lotions** or creams
- **Washing** or bathing

- Engaging in **conjugal relations**

Beyond specific actions, Yom Kippur is dedicated to introspection, prayer and asking God for forgiveness. Even during the breaks between services, it is appropriate to recite Psalms at every available moment.

Pictures



3. An exploration of the weekly Torah portion, produced by the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem.



4. The wailing wall in Jerusalem at Yim Kippur

Video



5. Children blow their shofars (ram's horns). The Torah prescribes the sounding of the shofar but does not say when or how this ritual is to be performed. It is composed of three sets of blasts, each consisting of three repetitions of three notes.



The video explains how to prepare for Yom Kippur – fasting and other important steps.

2.4. Chanukkah

Chanukah, the Jewish festival of rededication, also known as the festival of lights, is an eight-day festival beginning on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev. The story of Chanukah begins in the reign of Alexander the Great. Alexander conquered Syria, Egypt and Judea, but allowed the people under his control to continue observing their own religions and retain a certain degree of autonomy.

Chanukah is not a very important religious holiday. The holiday's religious significance is far less than that of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot. It is roughly equivalent to Purim in significance, and here are not many non-Jews who have even heard of Purim! Chanukah is not mentioned in Jewish scripture; the story is related to the book of the Maccabees, which Jews do not accept as scripture.



Hanukkah Celebration & Menorah Lighting

The Chanukah candles are for pleasure only; they are not allowed to use them for any productive purpose. They keep an extra one around (the shamash), so that if they need to do something useful with a candle, they don't accidentally use the Chanukah candles. The shamash candle is at a different height so that it is easily identified as the shamash.

The only religious observance related to the holiday is the lighting of candles. The candles are arranged in a candelabrum called a Hanukkiah. Many people refer to the Hanukkiah incorrectly as a menorah. The name menorah is used only to describe the seven-branched candelabrum that was housed in the Jewish Temple. The Hanukkiah holds nine candles: one for each night, plus a shamash (servant) at a different height. On the first night, one candle is placed at the far right. The shamash candle is lit and three brachot (blessings) are recited: l'hadlik neir (a general prayer over candles), she-asah nisim (a prayer thanking God for performing miracles for our ancestors at this time), and shehekhianu (a general prayer thanking God for allowing us to reach this time of year). The first candle is then lit using the shamash candle, and the shamash candle is placed in its holder. The candles are allowed to burn out on their own after a minimum of 1/2 hour. Each night, another candle is added from right to left (like the Hebrew language). Candles are lit from left to right (because people pay honor to the newer thing first).

It is traditional to eat fried foods on this holiday, because of the significance of oil to the holiday. Among Ashkenazic Jews, this usually includes latkes (pronounced "lot-kuhs" or "lot-keys" depending on where your grandmother comes from), or "potato pancakes." Another tradition of the holiday is playing dreidel, a gambling game played with a square top. Most people play for matchsticks, pennies, M&Ms or chocolate coins. A dreidel is marked with the following four Hebrew letters: Nun, Gimmel, Heh and Shin. On Israeli dreidels, there is no Shin but rather a Peh, which stands for Po, meaning here. A traditional song of this holiday is "Maoz Tzur," better known to Christians as "Rock of Ages" (the tune is the same as one of the more popular ones; the Christian translation takes substantial liberties).

Pictures



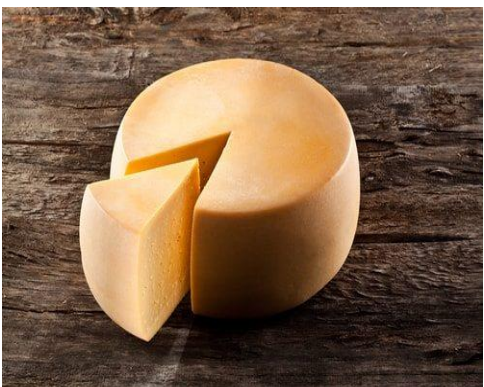
The celebration dates back to two centuries before Christianity began, and lasts for eight days. The word 'Hanukkah' means dedication, and honours one of the greatest miracles in Jewish history. The festival is a time for Jewish people to remember their victory in a battle against the Greeks over 2,000 years ago to practice their religion without restriction.



On each night of Hanukkah at sundown, a new candle is lit. Traditionally, on the first night, one candle is placed on the rightmost branch of the hanukiah. The shamash candle is then lit and used to light the first candle. On the second night, another candle is added to the right end of the hanukiah. The shamash candle then lights the candles left to right (the newest candle is lit first). A new candle is added each night and the process is repeated until the eighth night when all nine candles on the hanukiah are lit.



The dreidel is a spinning top with four sides. On each side is a Hebrew letter: Nun, Gimmel, Hey, or Shin. These letters are an acronym for the phrase, Nes gadol hayah sham, or in English, "a great miracle happened there."



Why Jewish people eat salty cheese on Hanukkah? To honour Judith.

Judith overcame Holofernes by feeding him particularly salty cheese. Holofernes was an extremely cruel and rude general of Assyria's emperor Nebuchadnezzar. He was invading Bethulia, and if Bethulia fell, so would the rest of the country. The city planned to surrender, with little choice or hope otherwise.

Judith, though, a young widow, reported to the enemy camp with a genius plan in mind. Judith was pretty. And Holofernes, like most men, had a weak spot for pretty, unwed women. He invited her to a banquet and the cheese-eating began. Holofernes was so thirsty after eating the particularly salty cheese that he downed glasses and glasses of wine until he passed out. Alone with him in his tent, Judith prayed to God for strength and then beheaded the guy. Clean sliced off his head. The Assyrian army was like a chicken with its head cut off without Holofernes. They quickly fell to a surprise attack by the Israelites.



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Video



The video explains how to celebrate Hanukkah.



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3. Roman Catholicism

A religious celebration is a time of special importance marked by adherents to that religion. Religious festivals are commonly celebrated on recurring cycles in a calendar year or lunar calendar. Hundreds of very different religious festivals are held around the world each year and a religious festival is about celebrating something that is special to that religion.

The celebrations proper to the Catholic liturgy recall and make present again an event of the past concerning the life of Jesus, of Mary his mother or of the saints. In the liturgy of the Roman rite of the Catholic Church the most important celebrations are called solemnity and are:

- *Advent* - the four-week season of preparation for the birth of Christ, and for the Second Coming. Often an Advent wreath is used as a focus for prayer during Advent.
- *Christmas* - Jesus' birth - often celebrated with nativity scenes, stories, pageants recalling the story of Jesus' humble birth in a stable surrounded by animals.
- *Epiphany* - the visit of the three wise ones to Jesus just after his birth and their subsequent spreading of the news of his birth throughout the world.
- *Lent* - the period leading up to Easter commemorating the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert fasting and praying. A time for personal reflection and improvement through prayer, fasting,



and study.

- *Holy Week* - the last week of Jesus' life, including Palm Sunday, which celebrates his triumphal entry into Jerusalem the week before he was crucified; Maundy Thursday, a

remembrance of the Last Supper with the disciples; and Good Friday, the day Jesus was crucified on a cross, which is the most recognized symbol of Christianity.

- *Easter* - Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Eggs are a major symbol of Easter since they symbolize new life. Crosses are often covered with flowers to symbolize Jesus' victory over death.
- *Ascension Day* - when Jesus' ascended into Heaven.
- *Pentecost* - the gift of the Holy Spirit, God's presence in the world, to Jesus' followers in the form of a mighty wind and tongues of fire.
- *Saints' Days* - official days celebrating people who have lived particularly holy lives and are recognized as official saints.

3.1. Easter

Easter celebrates the belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament of the Bible, the event is said to have occurred three days after Jesus was crucified by the Romans and died in roughly 30 A.D. The holiday concludes the "Passion of Christ," a series of events and holidays that begins with Lent—a 40-day period of fasting, prayer and sacrifice—and ends with Holy Week, which includes Holy Thursday (the celebration of Jesus' Last Supper with his 12 Apostles), Good Friday (on which Jesus' crucifixion is observed), and Easter Sunday.

Easter Sunday and related celebrations, such as Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday, are considered "moveable feasts,": Easter can fall on a Sunday between March 22nd and April 25th.

Easter is preceded by a week (called holy week) in which the facts concerning the passion and death on Christ's cross, his burial and the resurrection from the dead are commented; Thursday, Friday and Saturday constitute the sacred triduum. On the evening of Holy Saturday, during the great vigil, gradually one passes from mourning to the joy of the resurrection, recalled - after the baptism of the catechumens and numerous readings, songs and prayers - with the solemn Mass towards the dawn of Sunday, the Easter properly said, which intends to celebrate with the greatest solemnity the resurrection of Christ, the summit of his work of redemption.

The main Easter symbol is the cross, which recalls the death of Jesus and his resurrection. Since ancient times the cross has been adopted by Christians also as a gesture (the "sign of the cross"), which is obtained by touching the forehead with the three fingers, the navel and then, one after the other, the two shoulders. Other symbols are: the Alpha and Omega ($\Delta \Omega$), the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet, letters referring to Jesus, the beginning and end of the story, according to the Bible; the lamb because Jesus is the Lamb of God who offers his life for the salvation of humanity; the dove and the olive tree, symbols of peace that recall the episode of the universal flood described in Genesis and the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem when the crowd welcomed him joyfully; the egg that represents the birth of a new life.

Christians, by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ - the spotless lamb that offered himself so that men may have life and have it in abundance - have been redeemed to welcome the proposal of the God of Jesus and transform the rite into a genuine choice life, and not simply repeating gestures far from



the reality of everyday life. Celebrating Easter means, for the faithful, believing that there is no human reality, however ugly and terrible, alien to the possibility of salvation; it means continually renewing oneself in justice by taking on the sentiments of Christ: mercy, goodness, humility, meekness, patience.

The main sacred texts of reference are the stories of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus contained in the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Pictures

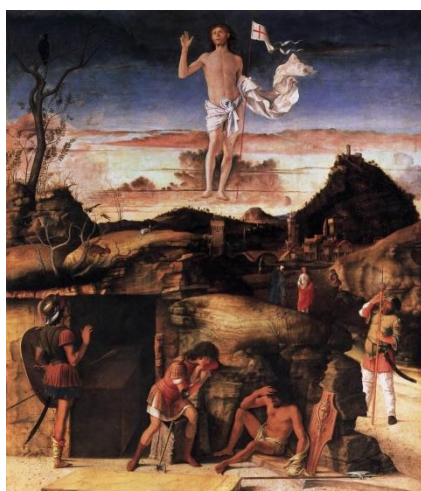


MASACCIO, *The Holy Trinity or Throne of grace*, 1426-1428, Santa Maria Novella Church, Florence.

The Holy Trinity is located in the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella, in Florence. To create a sense of depth and space, Masaccio uses linear perspective with a vanishing point, chiaroscuro, foreshortening and directional light. This was all new at the time. The figures are life-size, emotional, and so realistic they look sculpted. Jesus is especially realistic looking, with his body affected by gravity.

In the lower part of the fresco is located a skeleton on an open tomb. Painted to look carved in the stone is written «io fu' già quel che voi sete, e quel ch'ì son voi anco sarete» –I was what you are and you will be what I am. This is a Memento Mori, a reminder of our death.

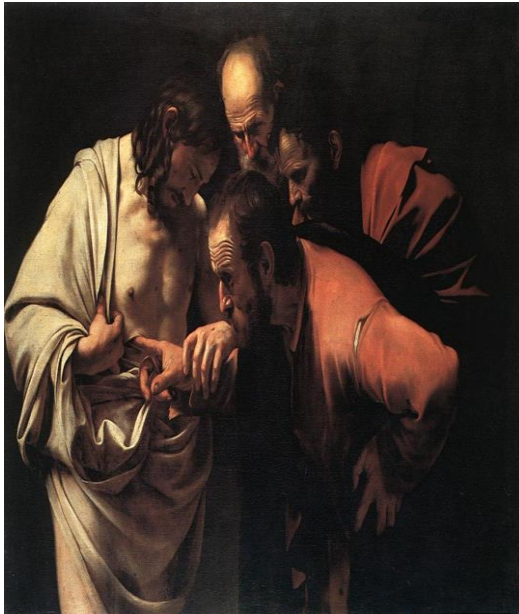
Thanks to the use of perspective, the believer who observes the fresco is "really" in front of Christ, who makes himself present with his body. This use of perspective reveals that the Trinity belongs to the world. That event did not happen only centuries before, but it is happening hic et nunc, it continues today in the life of the faithful who can thus find themselves before the Father, the Son and the Spirit, so that his life can be transformed, vivified.



GIOVANNI BELLINI, *Resurrection of Christ*, 1475-1479, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.

Three women approach the tomb from the background. One of them, Mary Magdalene, is dressed in white. They intend to anoint Christ's body. But the door is already open, and Christ floats above the world. Two soldiers look up in amazement; a third soldier is still sleeping.

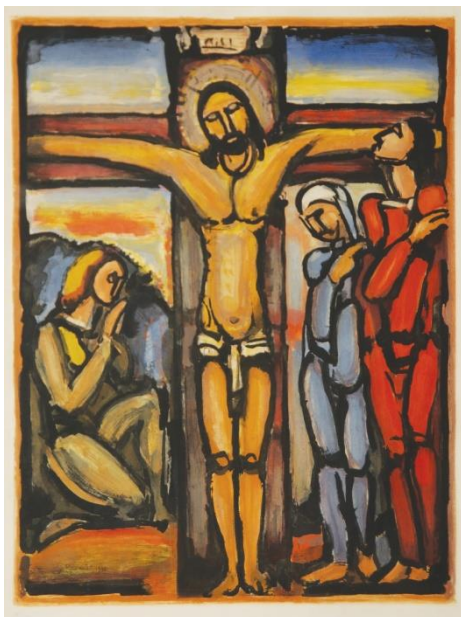
In this painting the artist follows Northern currents in his scrutiny of nature. Mystical yet realistic, his combination of faith and focus gives the painting a singularly convincing quality, its theme of resurrection a comforting one for the painting's funerary setting.



MICHELANGELO MERISI DA CARAVAGGIO *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, 1601-1602, Sanssouci, Potsdam.

The drama of disbelief seems to have touched Caravaggio personally. Few of his paintings are physically so shocking - his Thomas pushes curiosity to its limits before he will say, 'My Lord and my God.' The classical composition carefully unites the four heads in the quest for truth. Christ's head is largely in shadow, as He is the person who is the least knowable. He also has a beauty that had not been evident in the Mattei paintings of His arrest and appearance at Emmaus.

Interesting is the use of light, which streams into the image from the left hand side. Jesus is bathed in light and his white skin and robes also make his stand out. Thomas position in the canvas is reinforced by his red clothing and the light shining on it.



GEORGES ROUAULT, *Christ on the Cross*, 1936.

In this lucid image John and the two Marys no longer cry out, rather they seem to be worshiping—they kneel or look up at the drama unfolding. And, typically, the hope they feel is reflected in the orange-yellow sky behind the cross.

In this as in other prints, Rouault seeks, as he says, “a plastic transcription of his emotions.” His religious vision of human suffering led him to his dramatic style of light and shadows, and to his vivid colors. His style developed in pursuit of this spiritual vision.



SAFET ZEC, *The deposition of the body of the Lord from the cross*, 2014, Chapel of the Passion, in the Church of the Jesus, Rome.

The artist presents the deposition of Christ as an embrace. His hands that had washed the disciples' feet, broken the bread at their last meal together, his arms on the cross that had been spread out in a painful and loving abbraccio: now his disciples embracing his dead body and bringing it 'down to earth' from this wooden frame.

Videos



The Easter Triduum – Easter; Father Robert Gendreau explains the Easter Triduum and the Easter celebration in a short videos.



The Easter Triduum and Easter; This episode of Reason for the Season focuses on the Triduum, from Holy Thursday till the Easter Vigil. It explains why and what we celebrate during this highlight of the liturgical year.

3.2. Pentecost

Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit on Mary (the mother of Jesus) and the Apostles, following the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, and it marks the beginning of the Christian church's mission to the world.

The name "Pentecost" comes from the Greek word Πεντηκοστή (Pentēkostē) meaning "fiftieth". The reason is that Pentecost is the fiftieth day after Easter.

This name came into use in the late Old Testament period and was inherited by the authors of the New Testament. The Jewish feast of Pentecost, known as Shavu'ot (Hebrew, "weeks"), was primarily a thanksgiving for the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, but it was later associated with a remembrance of the Law given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.

In the early church, Christians often referred to the entire 50-day period beginning with Easter as Pentecost. Baptism was administered both at the beginning (Easter) and end (the day of Pentecost) of the Paschal season. Eventually, Pentecost became a more popular time for baptism than Easter in northern Europe, and in England the feast was commonly called White Sunday (Whitsunday) for the special white garments worn by the newly baptized. In The First Prayer Book of Edward VI (1549), the feast was officially called Whitsunday, and this name has continued in Anglican churches. In Catholic and other Western churches, priests often wear red vestments during Pentecost to symbolize the "tongues of fire" that descended on the disciples from the Holy Spirit.

The Pentecost represents the fulfillment of Christ's promise from the end of Luke's Gospel: «Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high» [Luke 24]. This "clothing with power" comes with the bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon the Church.

The symbols of the Holy Spirit are the elements of wind and fire. Wind is a basic symbol of the Holy Spirit, as the Greek word for "Spirit" (πνεῦμα) also means "wind" and "breath."

This Solemnity makes us remember and relive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and the other disciples gathered in prayer with the Virgin Mary in the Upper Room (cf. Acts 2:1-11). Jesus, risen and ascended into Heaven, sent his Spirit to the Church so that every Christian might participate in his own divine life and become his valid witness in the world. The Holy Spirit, breaking into history, defeats aridity, opens hearts to hope, stimulates and fosters in us an interior maturity in our relationship with God and with our neighbors.



Pictures



Giotto, Pentecost, 1303-1305, the Scrovegni Chapel, Padua.

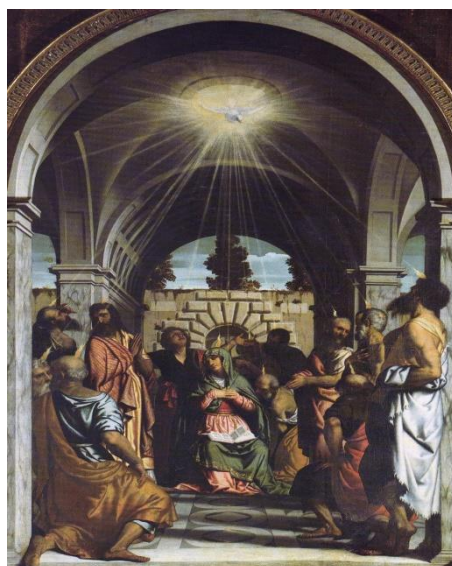
Pentecost is the last of the Stories of the Passion of Jesus frescoed in the Scrovegni Chapel.

Pentecost is being celebrated in a structure set obliquely in space, and whose Gothic arcades permit a view of the interior. The disciples have gathered, and rays from the Holy Ghost descend upon them. Their faces show astonishment and transfiguration. It is worth noting that the setting of the Pentecost is very nearly the only one at Padua that directly reflects contemporary Gothic architecture.



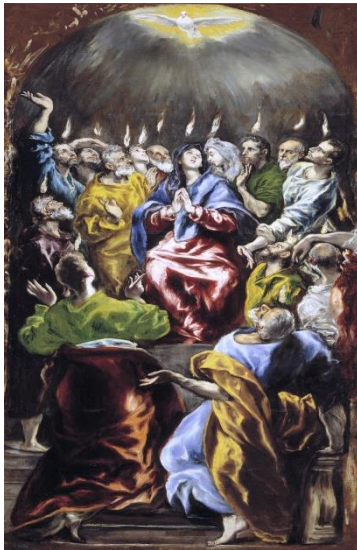
Beato Angelico, Triptych of the Last Judgment, Ascension and Pentecost, 1450-1455, Corsini National Gallery, Rome.

Inside the triptych, the side panel on the right is dedicated to Pentecost. Remarkable is the scroccio of the dove that is turned upside down on the disciples, because it coincides with the vanishing point corresponding to the mullioned window above, behind the dove itself. In this painting Beato Angelico lets the mystery of the action of the Holy Spirit emerge in the world that with his strength (δύναμις) acts in the life of man in a powerful way, but also discreet and silent.



Alessandro Bonvicino, called Moretto, Pentecost, 1543-1544, Tosio Martinengo Art Gallery, Brescia.

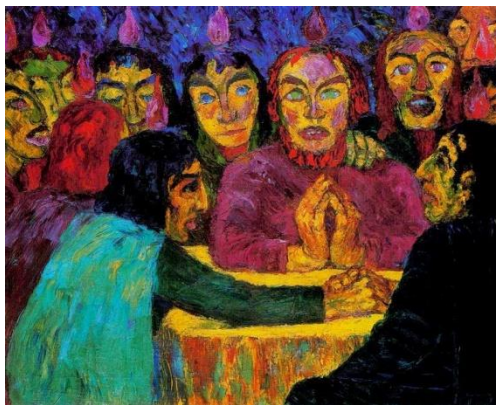
According to the canonical system, in the center is the Madonna surrounded by the Apostles, all those struck in the forehead by the rays coming from the Holy Spirit who, in the form of a dove, stands out on the upper part of the canvas. The scene takes place in an environment covered by a cross vault and open on all four sides.



Doménikos Theotokópoulos most widely known as El Greco, The Pentecost, 1597-1600, Prado Museum, Madrid.

El Greco made this painting as part of an altarpiece for the church of the monastery Lady Mary of Aragon in Madrid. The altarpiece also included an Annunciation, Baptism, Crucifixion and Resurrection.

The flames of the Holy Ghost descend on Mary, the apostles and some woman. The bald, bearded Apostle who looks out at the viewer from the right of the canvas has been identified as a self-portrait, or as a portrait of the artist's friend, Antonio de Covarrubias.



Emil Nolde, The Pentecost, 1909, Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

Nolde devoted 55 paintings to sacred themes from 1909 to 1951, thus bearing witness to his religious convictions, although in practice they were very personal. In this picture, while all have a tongue of fire on their heads, various faces express resignation, shock, exuberance, quiet prayer, and downright terror. It beautifully depicts a wide range of responses to the descent of the Spirit. So too, the life of faith admits of a variety of doubts, struggles, and challenges.

Video



What is Pentecost?

From the Greek meaning "fifty," the festival of Pentecost celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit to the apostles on the fiftieth day after Easter. On this day, we worship the Lord, who gives life to His Church, by decorating the church in red and by focusing on the work of the Holy Spirit.

3.3. Christmas

Christmas is a Christian festival that celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, the most important religious figure in Christianity and central figure of the New Testament, but also mentioned in the Surahs of the Coran. It is celebrated each year on December the 24th.

Since the 20th century, it is also a secular holiday associated with family meetings and gift exchanges. Gifts are especially given to children, who are often encouraged to believe that gifts come from Santa Claus or Saint Nicholas, and that those gifts are given to all children, unless they are naughty.

The gifts can evoke the visit of the three wise men, or Magi, mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew and often pictured as bringing gifts to the child Jesus. However, in popular folklore, Santa Claus is the most representative figure.

During Christmas period, lots of decorations are installed, in the city squares and roads, and inside houses.

The most prominent decoration is the Christmas tree, often highly decorated: children's gifts are usually placed under it. Other decorations include wreaths, illuminations in cities, in roads and squares.

Last but not least, nativity scenes are set up in houses or some buildings like churches or Christian institutions, and even outdoors sometimes. It depicts the biblical scene of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, with his mother Mary, Joseph, the three Magi, farm animals and various characters.

Overall, these days, Christmas is for most people a social and traditional event more than a religious one, even if its roots are religious.



Bartolomé Esteban Murillo
- **Adoration of the Magi-**
The painting Adoration of the Magi by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, depicting the three wise men with Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Pictures



Bronzino, Worship of the shepherds- The painting *Worship of the shepherds* by Bronzino, depicting a nativity scene with Cherubs.



Illuminated Regent Street- Regent Street, in London, United Kingdom, illuminated for Christmas.



Nativity scene- A nativity Scene.



Christmas tree in Braşov, Romania- Decorated Christmas tree in the town of Brasov, Romania

Videos



Origins of Christmas- A short video about Christmas and its origins.



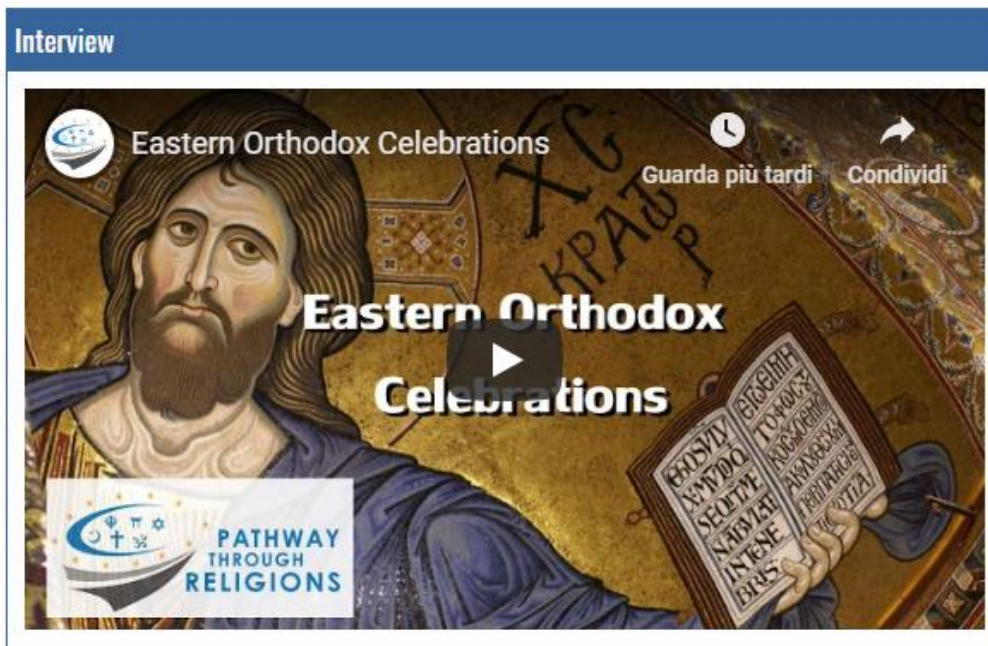
The History of Christmas- An ASMR video about Christmas.

4. Eastern Orthodoxy

4.1. Introduction

The church calendar is built around the first Christian holiday - the Resurrection. To it were added the most important events of the life of Jesus Christ and the Virgin, as well as the holy feasts that commemorate and celebrate people who have acquired piety and glorified Christ. The holidays celebrated by Orthodox Christians are divided into moving and fixed. Those related to Easter are moving, meaning each year they occur on different dates. The rest of the holidays are celebrated on the same date every year. The most important moving holidays are: Easter and the Holy Week, Palm Sunday, Ascension of Jesus, Pentecost, Saint Theodore's Day and the Feast of Orthodoxy.

There are three groups of immovable feasts – those dedicated to Christ, to the Holy Mother and to the saints. The most important feasts of the Lord are: Nativity (25 December), Circumcision of Jesus (January 1), Epiphany (January 6), Candlemas (February 2), and Transfiguration (August 6). The moving feasts of the Lord are Palm Sunday, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. More important feasts of the Blessed Virgin are: Nativity of Mary (September 8), Presentation of Mary at the Temple (November 2), Annunciation (March 25), and Assumption of the Theotokos (August 15). The Church honours the saints and martyrs as people have acquired virtue and overcame sin. Thus they became exemplary Christians, holy persons and divine protectors. As a tribute, the faithful set a special commemorative day for the saints, build temples in their honour, worship their holy relics, and portray their images on Holy Icons.



4.2. Easter and the Holy week

Easter is a religious festival celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, described in the New Testament as having occurred on the third day of his burial after his crucifixion by the Romans at Mount Golgotha.

Easter and the holidays that are related to it are moveable feasts which do not fall on a fixed date in the Gregorian or Julian solar calendars. Its date is determined on a lunisolar calendar similar to the Hebrew calendar. Easter is linked to the Jewish Passover Feasts by much of its symbolism, as well as by its position in the calendar.

Easter is the first and most important Christian holiday. The doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith. The death and resurrection of Jesus form the point in scripture where he gives his ultimate demonstration of power over life and death, and the ability to grant eternal life. By sacrificing himself, Christ has redeemed humanity from its sins and thus given the faithful the way to salvation.

Easter is the culmination of the Holy Week, which commemorates the Passion of Jesus – the final period in his life, beginning with the entrance in Jerusalem and leading to his crucifixion and resurrection.

The Holy Week is preceded by Great Lent, a forty day period of fasting, prayer, and penance. Great Lent ends on the Friday before Palm Sunday. The two days that follow, Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday, form a transition to Holy Week. Lazarus Saturday commemorates Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead, just before he went to Jerusalem himself. The main themes anticipate the Resurrection of Jesus, showing him as master over death.

Palm Sunday is a great religious feast, commemorating Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, an event mentioned in each of the four canonical Gospels.

Great Monday. On this day the Church commemorates the withering of the fruitless fig tree (Matthew 21:18-22), a symbol of judgement that will befall those who do not bring forth the fruits of repentance. The hymns on this day also recall Joseph, the son of Jacob, whose innocent suffering at the hand of his brethren (Genesis 37), and false accusation (Genesis 39-40) foreshadow the Passion of Christ.

Great Tuesday. On this day the Church commemorates the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), teaching about vigilance, and Christ as the Bridegroom. The bridal chamber is used as a symbol not only of the Tomb of Christ, but also of the blessed state of the saved on the Day of Judgement. The theme of the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) is also developed in the hymns of this day.

Great Wednesday relates to the gospel parable of the two debtors, in which Jesus Christ points out that forgiveness of sinners is more important than that of the righteous, (Luke 7:36:50) as well as Judas Iscariot's decision to betray Christ. The Holy Unction Mystery is performed in the evening,



following the Presanctified Liturgy. This commemorates the anointing of Jesus and prepares the faithful to enter with Christ into his death and Resurrection.

Great Thursday commemorates some of the most dramatic episodes of the Passion of Christ - The Last Supper, The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and the betrayal of Judas. Divine Liturgy of the Last Supper is held on the morning of Great and Holy Thursday, combining Vespers with the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great.

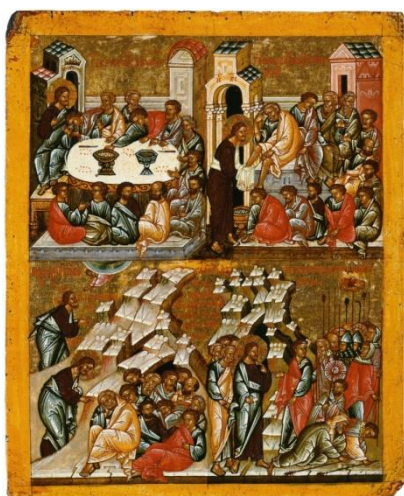
Great Friday commemorates the crucifixion and death of Christ. The faithful revisit the events from the Last Supper through the Crucifixion and burial of Jesus and sing hymns about Christ's death. Rich visual imagery and symbolism as well as mystical chanting are remarkable elements of these observances. In the Orthodox understanding, the events of Holy Week are not simply an annual commemoration of past events, but the faithful actually participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Holy Saturday begins with the Proti Anastasi (First Resurrection) service, commemorating the Harrowing of Hell. Just before the reading of the Gospel, the hangings and vestments are changed from dark Lenten colours to white, and the entire mood of the service changes from mourning to joy. The Easter Vigil is observed until the Good News of the resurrection of Jesus is announced at midnight. The celebrations of Eastertide begin.

On the afternoon of Easter Day, the joyful service Agape Vespers is celebrated and the Great Prokeimenon is chanted. A lesson from the Gospel is read in as many different languages as possible, accompanied by the joyful ringing of bells.

Eastertide continues for forty days and ends with the coming Feast of the Ascension.

Pictures



The production of this icon by an unknown artist from the Great Novgorod school has been dated 1484–1504. It depicts five scenes: the Last Supper, Washing of Feet, Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and the arrest of Jesus by the Sanhedrin priests.

*The Passion of Christ XV CE
Orthodox icon*



The Last Supper by Juan de Juanes

An artistic representation of the Last Supper, showing Jesus with the Eucharist, by the Spanish painter Juan de Juanes, 1562. In the front right, the traitor Judas, for better recognition he has been equipped with a money pouch. He is dressed in yellow, the colour of envy. He is also the only figure without halo. In the foreground a bowl for washing feet before supper. The panel was made for the altar of the church of San Esteban in Valencia, together with a series of paintings on the life of Saint Stephen. It was sided by panels showing *The agony in the garden* and *The Crowning with Thorns*.



Christ the Bridegroom

Icon of Christ the Bridegroom, sitting above the star at Golgotha in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem. The church contains the two holiest sites in Christianity: the site where Jesus of Nazareth was crucified and his empty tomb, where he is said to have been buried and resurrected. The Icon shows Christ humiliated by Pontius Pilate's soldiers (Matthew 27:27-31). In a cruel irony, the soldiers mockingly worshiped Jesus and through insults proclaimed Him rightly to be the King of the Jews. Crowned with thorns, cloaked in scarlet, bound and holding a reed, this is how Christ appears in the Bridegroom Icon. The crown is a symbol of Christian marriage in the Orthodox Church, and the ropes binding Christ's hands also allude to the sacred bond. The reed used as a mock-sceptre is a symbol of humility, of a person that does all possible to bend in service to others.



Washing of Feet

Byzantine mosaic depicting Jesus washing the disciples' feet, at the Monreale Cathedral, Italy, XII CE. According to the Gospels, after the Last Supper, Christ washed the feet of the Apostles. At the Mystical Supper Jesus revealed His divine identity and authority, offering Himself as Communion and life. By washing the feet of His disciples, He manifested His perfect love humility. Saint Peter was the first to have his feet washed. He was reluctant until Jesus said that if He did not wash His feet then Peter had no communion with Him. Saint Peter retorted: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Canonical depiction in icons of the scene shows the saint with hand raised to his head.



Holy week Epistyle

This XII c. CE Tempestone Epistyle from the St. Ekaterina monastery in Sinai, Egypt depicts three scenes from the Holy week – the triumphal entrance to Jerusalem, the Crucifixion and the Harrowing of hell.

Videos

European Easter: The Story through Art



This segment of Rick Steves' European Easter tells the Easter story — Jesus' Passion, Crucifixion, and Resurrection — illustrated by great European artwork.

Holy Week of Orthodox Christians in Jerusalem



The Holy Week celebrations of Orthodox Christians who have come to Jerusalem on pilgrimage from all over the world.

Christ's Passion - Journey to Pascha in the Orthodox Christian Church



The events of Holy Week and Pascha comprise the very heart of the Orthodox Christian faith. These presentations explore the history, traditions, services, and their meanings, of this central period. The enlightening interviews, music, hymns, icons, insightful commentary and beautiful visuals will inspire and provoke thoughtful exploration of this definitive period of the Church's liturgical year.

4.3. Theophany

Theophany is a great Christian feast commemorating the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River and his manifestation to the world as the Son of God. The holy day is a Trinitarian feast - one of the twelve great feasts of the Eastern Orthodox Church. It is considered the third most important date of the liturgical year, after Easter and Pentecost. The celebration takes place on January 6. However, denominations following the Julian calendar observe the feast on January 19 because of the 13-day difference today between that calendar and the generally used Gregorian calendar.

The baptism of Jesus is described in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. At the time when John the Baptist baptised Jesus in the Jordan River, the sky opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon Christ in the form of a dove, and the voice of God proclaims from heaven: "This is my beloved Son, in whom is my favour." Christ immerses three times into the waters of the River and comes out of them. This symbolizes the mystery of death and resurrection: the earthly man dies along with his sins and the divine person rises for a new life.

The baptism of Jesus is one of the five major milestones in the gospel narrative of the life of Jesus, the others being the Transfiguration, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension. The Sacrament of Baptism has been established following the Great Theophany of the Lord.

In the Orthodox tradition, the emphasis at this feast is on the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Second Person of the Holy Trinity at the time of his baptism. According to the Sacred Tradition, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by St. John the Baptist marked one of only two occasions when all three Persons of the Trinity manifested themselves to humanity simultaneously: God the Father by speaking through the clouds, the Son being baptized in the river, and the Holy Spirit appearing as a dove descending from heaven. The only other occasion found in scripture is the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor.

The liturgical Forefeast of Theophany begins on January 1, and concludes with the Paramony on the eve of January 5. Paramony is observed as a strict fast day with a single dinner allowed in the evening. On this day the Royal Hours are celebrated, thus tying together the feasts of Nativity and Good Friday. The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil is served. During the Vespers, fifteen Old Testament lections which foreshadow the Baptism of Christ are read, and special antiphons are chanted. If the Feast of the Theophany falls on a Sunday or Monday, the Royal Hours are chanted on the previous Friday, and on the Paramony the Vespertine Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is celebrated and the fasting is lessened to some degree.

Eastern Orthodox Churches perform the Great Blessing of Waters rite on Theophany. It is done twice: once on the Eve of the Feast—usually at a Baptismal font inside the church—and then again on the day of the feast, outdoors at a body of water. Following the Divine Liturgy, the clergy and the faithful form a procession with the cross to the nearest body of living water. At the end of the ceremony, the priest will bless the waters by casting a cross in it. Volunteers dive to recover the cross. The person who gets the cross first swims back and returns it to the priest, who then delivers a special blessing to the swimmer and their household.



The priest then blesses the entire church and congregation with the newly consecrated water and sets out to bless the homes of the parish.

Theophany is a traditional day for receiving the Mystery of Baptism.

The Feast is followed by an eight-day Afterfeast on which the normal fasting laws are suspended. The Saturday and Sunday after Theophany have special readings assigned to them, which relate to the Temptation of Christ and to penance and perseverance in the Christian struggle. There is a liturgical continuum between the Feast of Theophany and the beginning of Great Lent.

Pictures



*The Baptism of Christ XV CE
Orthodox icon*

Iconostasis piece from the Assumption Cathedral of the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery, Russia. By an unknown master, circa 1497. This fine example features all the key elements of the Orthodox Theophany iconography. The composition centers on the figure of Jesus, revealed as the divine person. He is portrayed almost or fully naked as a sign of His spiritual purity. Saint John the Baptist bows in recognition of the Savior. This also signifies the Old Testament giving way to the New Testament. At the top, the Holy Spirit is descending upon Jesus as a dove, the Holy Spirit is depicted in a Mandorla. The angels on the right side are the divine witnesses of this holy moment. They are waiting to attend to Christ and dress him after the baptism is over.



Epiphany XVII CE mural

Seventeen century mural from the Church of St Elijah, Boboshevo, Bulgaria. In canonical Orthodox iconography, Christ's hands are not shown in prayer, but in a sign of blessing. Rather than the waters of Jordan cleansing Christ, it is Christ Who cleans the waters. This is why in the bottom of most Theophany Icons, little creatures appear to be fleeing from the feet of Christ. This is a reflection of the words of the Psalmist regarding the Messiah (Christ): "the sea saw and fled, the Jordan turned back"



*Angel of the Desert XVII
CE Orthodox icon*

This elaborate masterpiece of the Orthodox religious cannon shows Saint John the Baptist adorned with a pair of angelic wings. No other saintly figure is ever portrayed with this attribute, reserved only for the angels and this heavenly man. Known as “glorious prophet and forerunner of Christ”, Saint John holds the highest standing among the Christian Saints. He is described as the “Angel of the Desert” in the inscriptions of Eastern Orthodox icons for two reasons. First, he proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, becoming a herald of God like the angels. Second, Saint John lived a life of chastity, abstinence, and prayer with his mind fixed firmly on heaven. This is the life of the angels and example for the pious to follow. For this reason Saint John is the patron of monastics, hermits, and ascetics.



The site of Theophany

Qasr el Yahud in the West Bank, and Al-Maghtas in Jordan on the east bank, is considered to be the original site of the baptism of Jesus and the ministry of John the Baptist.



The Baptism of Christ by Verrocchio

Here is one of the most celebrated interpretations of the biblical scene of the Baptism in Western art. Made in the studio of the Italian Renaissance painter Andrea del Verrocchio at circa 1472. The painting was completed by Verrocchio in collaboration with his apprentice, Leonardo da Vinci who painted and finished the details of some parts of the painting, particularly one of the angels. The painting was an altarpiece commissioned by the monks of the San Salvi Church near Florence.

Videos

Theophany - Exploring the Feasts of the Orthodox Christian Church



In this video, we learn about event of Christ's baptism. We also explore the ways in which this great feast continues to be celebrated in the Orthodox Church, as we continue to bless the waters and reconnect this created world to God.

Understanding Icons: Theophany



An example of a theologically rich icon of the baptism of Christ with detailed interpretation of the canonical imagery and symbolism.

Epiphany troparion in different languages and melodies



In this video troparion (short hymn presenting the essence of the feast/ saint day) is chanted by various choirs in: English (Byzantine chant), Church Slavonic (Byzantine chant), Greek, Arabic, Church Slavonic (Russian chant), Romanian, Spanish, Ukrainian, Albanian, Church Slavonic (Serbian chant), Georgian, French, Japanese, Swahili (Kiswahili; pictures also from Ethiopia), Arabic (quick melody), Indonesian, Church Slavonic (modern Bulgarian chant, Polish subtitles), English (modern arrangement).

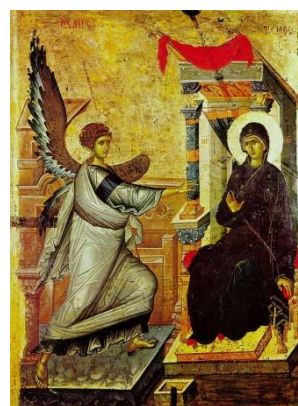
4.4. Feast of the Annunciation

The feast of the Annunciation marks the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, during which he told her that she would be the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is celebrated on 25 March each year – exactly 9 months before Christmas. It is one of the Great Feasts in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. It is counted as one of the 8 great feasts of the Lord, and not among the 4 great Marian feasts, although some prominent aspects of its liturgical observance are Marian. The date of the holiday is never transferred, even if it falls on Pascha (Easter). The concurrence of these two feasts is called Kyriopascha. Presently, Kyriopascha is possible only among the churches that observe the old style or traditional Julian calendar or the Gregorian calendar.

According to the Gospel of Luke 1:26-38, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce to her that she would conceive and bear a son, even though she "knew no man." According to holy tradition Mary had come home to her parents when she was only fifteen when she was visited by Gabriel.

Because the feast of the Annunciation normally comes during the season of Great Lent, the manner of celebration varies from year to year depending upon the particular day on which it falls. If the feast comes on a weekday of Lent, which is the most common case, the Divine Liturgy of the feast is served in the evening with Vespers and thus is celebrated after a full day of total abstinence. When this happens, the fasting rules for the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts are followed.

The Feast of the Annunciation of the Theotokos is celebrated with the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom which is conducted on the morning of the Feast and preceded by a Matins (Orthros) service. A Great Vespers is conducted on the evening before the day of the Feast.



The Annunciation XIV CE Orthodox icon. From the Church of St Clement in Ohrid, Macedonia. Unknown artist, first quarter of the 14th century.



Annunciation of Ustyug. By an unknown twelve century artist of the Novgorod iconography school in Rus.

The Annunciation is one of the most frequent subjects of Christian art. It appears invariably in cycles portraying the Life of the Virgin, and is often included as the initial scene in those of the Life of Christ. The composition of depictions is very consistent, with Gabriel, normally standing on the left, facing the Virgin, who is generally seated or kneeling. Typically Gabriel is shown in near-profile, while the Virgin faces more to the front. Very often the angel is posed at a respectful distance from Mary, separated by a real or pictured architectural detail such as a column. The two may even be placed in separate wings of a polyptych or on opposite sides of a physical arch. Annunciation images often include lilies, symbolizing purity.

The scene is portrayed either indoors, or in a porch or a garden. The building can be the Virgin's home, but it often represents the Jerusalem Temple, as some legendary accounts placed the scene there. The Virgin may be shown reading, or engaged in a domestic task.

Pictures



Da Vinci Annunciation. By Leonardo da Vinci possibly together with Andrea del Verrocchio circa 1472–1475.



Cestello Annunciation.

Italian renaissance artist Sandro Botticelli completed this definitive masterpiece in 1489. The dramatic tension comes from the gesture of Mary who moves away from Gabriel while reaching toward him at the same time.



Van Eyck Annunciation. The Annunciation is an oil painting by the Early Netherlandish master Jan van Eyck, from around 1434-1436. It is a highly complex work, rich in symbolism that is still debated by art historians.

Videos

The Annunciation of the Theotokos - Exploring the Feasts of the Orthodox Christian Church



In this video, we follow the Orthodox Church's commemoration of the event, and the different elements involved in its celebration.

Icons Explained: The Annunciation



An example of a theologically rich icon of the Annunciation with detailed interpretation of the canonical imagery and symbolism.

Fra Angelico, The Annunciation,



Dr Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker discuss the famous fresco on Khan academy.

The Basilica of Our Lady of the Annunciation in Nazareth

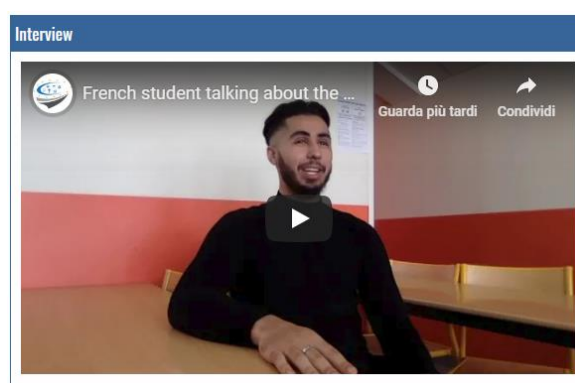
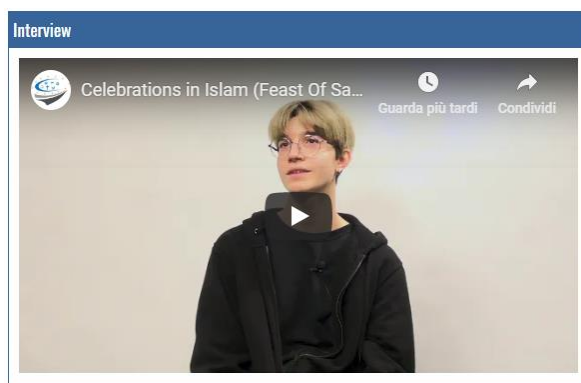


Short documentary about the Christian temple in Nazareth built upon the grotto that has been identified as the place of the annunciation.

5. Islam

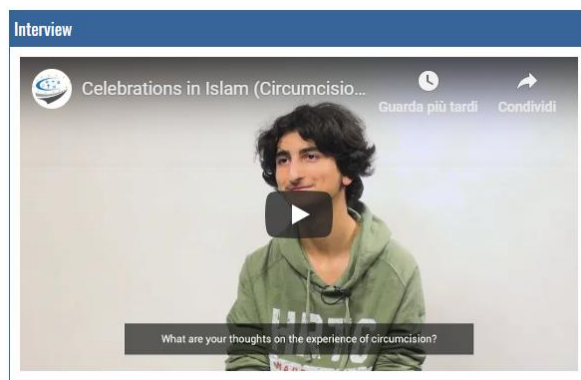
5.1. Introduction

Celebrations in Islam are important occasions when people, families and friends get together forming a social solidarity. Ramadan Feast (Eid al-Fitr) and Feast of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha) are the most two important celebrations observed by all Muslims. Ramadan Feast is 3 days feast following the last day of fasting during the month of Ramadan during which the Muslims follow strict rules of fasting from sunrise to sunset. Since religious calendar of Islam is a lunar calendar, which is 11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar, every Islamic celebration starts 11 days earlier each year.



Feast of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha) is related to pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecca and Medina and the pilgrims (as well as Muslims living in the rest of the world) sacrifice animals such as sheep, goat, calf or camel commemorating prophet Abraham and how his faith was trialled by the God asking him to sacrifice his own son, Isaac.

Having the foreskin taken away from their penis, circumcision becomes a major issue for the boys in Islam to have a sign of their puberty as well as a sign of membership to the community.



5.2. Ramadan Feast (*Eid al-Fitr*)

As the new moon defines the start of the month of Ramadan, another new moon defines the end of it, which also means the start of a three days festivity called Eid al-Fitr.

The day before the feast starts (the last day of fasting), people visit cemeteries, do shopping buying new clothes especially for the children and prepare food. In Turkey people visit the cemeteries in the first day as well.



It is customary to visit one's relatives, especially older ones, and kiss their hand as a sign of respect. In return the kissing of the hands, elder people give some money or candies to children.

During the three days of the feast people visit family, relatives and friends. In Turkish the fest is also called Şeker Bayramı (Sugar Feast) and almost every women prepare desserts to serve to the visitors. Candies are kept at home to give the children who go from one house to another for greeting. In some cases a little cash is given to them, who joyously spend this pocket money on different food or in the fairground.

Because all of the community must be included the poor are not forgotten and that they get a fair amount of alms from everyone. This is always emphasized especially in the *Eid-al-Fitr* sermon, since the *Zakat-ul-Fitr* seasonal poor-due should

have been given by the time it takes place. The breaking of the Ramadan fast is also the best time to donate the annual zakat in support of underprivileged members of the society. This act is also another one of the five pillars of Islam.

The feast starts with the morning prayer, which is supposed to be attended by the males. Dressing up clean (often new clothes is one of the social codes of the feast. Since the congregation is very crowded it is quite normal to see people lined up outside of the mosque on carpets they brought. After the prayer, families have breakfast together.

Tradition related to the feast may vary depending on the geography.



Ramadan feast starts with the morning prayer, which is supposed to be attended by the males.

Pictures



One of the tradition of children is going around in their neighbourhood, from door to door and wishing people a happy eid. As a reward, they receive candies, chocolates, or even a small amount of money.



Neighborhood children go door to door together to collect money and candies.

Video



It is customary to serve desert during the Ramadan Feast (Eid al-Fitr) visits and traditional Turkish baklava is the most commonly served desert along with Turkish coffee or tea.



A video about how Muslim people break the Ramadan fast all over the world.

5.3. Eid al-Adha

Eid-al-Adha means the Feast of Sacrifice. It is on the day that pilgrims to Mecca sacrifice a sheep, a goat, or a camel to commemorate Abraham's divinely arranged sacrifice of a ram in place of his son. According to Islamic tradition this was the firstborn son Ishmael who is also regarded as the Arab nation's legendary ancestor. According to the Old testament this was the younger son of him, Isaac. Although *Eid al-Fitr* is a three days feast, *Eid al-Adha* lasts four days.

The feast starts with the morning prayer at the mosque, which is followed by the ritual of sacrificing an animal. The greatest Islamic feast of the year, which also coincidence with the Hajj to Mecca.

Generally, either a lamb or sheep is sacrificed on behalf of each household. In case of an ox or a camel up to 7 people may gather for the sacrifice. The animals must be good in health.

The heretical Druze sect of Lebanon and Syria also follows this practice, although it is in memory of the sacrifices of Cain and Abel.

According to Muslim faith the sacrifice of animals is a way to ask God for the forgiveness of sins and somehow partake of His eternity. According to Muslims this is not an act of wanton cruelty, but a symbol of thanksgiving for the gift of food. Therefore portions of the sacrificed animal are shared with the others. Usually, a third of the meat is kept at home while one part is given to the poor. The rest is sent as a gift to the relatives or friends.



During Eid al-Adha, It is customary to visit one's relatives, especially older ones, and kiss their hand as a sign of respect.

The sacrifice is performed after the early morning prayer at the mosque, either by the head of the family or by a butcher, following a strict ritual. The animal must be facing in the direction of the Kaaba while its throat is being cut and the slaughterer says the invocation with which every sura (chapter) of the Koran begins: "In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful!" (Holy Quran, 1946).



After the sacrifice it is customary to cook some of the meat early in the morning and serve braised meat along with the breakfast.

Having skinned and gutted the animal, the butcher then takes a bath and dresses up for the occasion of an open-air gathering to praise God. This event starts at eleven in the morning and may last several hours. In places where the division of the animal is not left to the next day, wives stay at home to start sorting and preparing the meat.

The rest of the feast is like *Eid al-Fitr* that people visit relatives, friends and enjoy the holiday with different kinds of entertainment.

Pictures



The Feast of the Sacrifice, Eid al-Adha, commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son to show his faithfulness to Allah. God interrupted the act and Abraham used a sheep instead. Therefore a sheep or goat is sacrificed on behalf of each household.



Animal bazaar is where the sheep or other animal for sacrifice are sold. Men of the household go to animal bazaar to buy a sheep. It is customary to bargain for discount by holding and shaking hands of the seller until he agrees the discount amount.

Video



In Turkey, it is customary to send a decorated sheep to bride-to-be's (fiancée) home as a gift. The groom's family buys a sheep with large horns and decorate sheep's horn with red ribbons and hangs a gold necklace between sheep's horn. Then sends it to bride-to-be's home as a gift.



A short video about Sacrifice Feast in Turkey and how it's celebrated, from food to decorations.

5.4. Circumcision (*sunnah*)

For male Muslim children circumcision is an essential ceremony. It's biblical background goes back to times of prophet Abraham. It involves the removal of the foreskin of male organ.



In Turkey, special white suit with cape, hat and a wand is bought for the boy to be circumcised.

Islamic scholars do not come to an agreement on what age the circumcision should be made but prophet Mohammed recommended it at an early age. The age that is performed may vary depending on the geography. The operation may be performed after few days of the birth until 15 years of age. Preferred age is seven. On the other hand it is widely accepted that conversion to Islam also requires to have circumcised so no matter what the age it, this operation may be performed.

Circumcision is no mentioned in the Qur'an but it is highlighted by the Sunnah (the Prophet Mohammed's recorded words and actions) according to which circumcision is a "law for men".

This is quite an important phase of the boy through which he leave behind the childhood and become an adult member of the society. Even the Jews also perform circumcision, it became widespread due to conversion of quite a large number of societies into Islam from Far East to the West.

It used to be done by a circumciser but today mostly the operation takes place in the hospitals and performed by the doctors. The occasion requires a celebration again differing according to geography. It was an important occasion during the Ottoman Era that the circumcision of the princes were celebrated at *At Meydanı* (Hippodrome of the Byzantine Era) not next to Haghia Sophia Mosque and Sultan Ahmet Mosque (Blue Mosque) in Istanbul. Manuscripts from that era show that the celebration were quite lavish that the whole population of the town could participate and enjoy the food and entertainment.

It is also a big occasion of celebration in Turkey especially in the summer time when the schools are off. Even the boy is circumcised at an early age, families arrange a festivity when the boy is old enough. He is dressed up like a prince, which you can buy the costume in the shops generally located in the traditional bazaars. There are special old American cars to hire for the occasion into which the boy and the parents ride followed by a long line of other cars joining the festivity. Honking is a must in this ride. Then food is served at home. Some families hire a certain local for the celebration and celebrate the occasion with the invited guests. The guests are required to give presents, mostly banknotes or gold coins.



Before the circumcision the child and his peers and relatives get in a decorated car and take a tour around the city. Other people also follow them behind.

Pictures



The bed of the circumcised boy is decorated with laces, balloons and ribbons. The boy lays in this decorated bed and accepts relatives' visits and gifts.



In these visits relatives, neighbors or guests present money, gold or a gift to the

Video



Brothers with small age difference are usually circumcised together on the same day.



Video about Circumcision celebration parties in Turkey. Families throw huge parties with elaborate costumes to mark the occasion of a boy becoming a man.

6. Anglicanism and Protestantism

6.1. Anglicanism (Church of England)

Christmas, Easter, Lent in the Church of England have the same meanings as the Protestant churches.

Christmas – the celebration on the 25th December that celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ and one of the most Important dates in the Church of England Calendar.

Easter – Celebrates the death of Jesus and the beginnings of the Christian faith. As with all Christian Denominations it is the most celebration in the Church of England Calendar.

Lent - **Lent** is the Christian season of preparation before Easter. The Lenten season is a time when many Christians observe a period of fasting, repentance, moderation, self-denial and spiritual discipline and is solemn season for all Christians.



6.1.1. Christmas

Christmas is marked on the 25th of December. Christmas is a Christian holy day that marks the birth of Jesus, the son of God.

The story of Christmas

Jesus' birth, known as the *nativity*, is described in the New Testament of the Bible.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke give different accounts. It is from them that the nativity story is pieced together.

Both accounts tell us that Jesus was born to a woman called Mary who was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter. The Gospels state that Mary was a virgin when she became pregnant.

In Luke's account Mary was visited by an angel who brought the message that she would give birth to God's son. According to Matthew's account, Joseph was visited by an angel who persuaded him to marry Mary rather than send her away or expose her pregnancy.

Matthew tells us about some wise men who followed a star that led them to Jesus' birthplace and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Luke tells how shepherds were led to Bethlehem by an angel.

According to tradition, Joseph and Mary travelled to Bethlehem shortly before Jesus' birth. Joseph had been ordered to take part in a census in his home town of Bethlehem.

All Jewish people had to be counted so the Roman Emperor could determine how much money to collect from them in tax. Those who had moved away from their family homes, like Joseph, had to return to have their names entered in the Roman records.

Joseph and Mary set off on the long, arduous 90-mile journey from Nazareth along the valley of the River Jordan, past Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Mary travelled on a donkey to conserve her energy for the birth.

But when they arrived in Bethlehem the local inn was already full with people returning for the census. The innkeeper let them stay in the rock cave below his house which was used as a stable for his animals.

It was here, next to the noise and filth of the animals, that Mary gave birth to her son and laid him in a manger.

Date of Christmas and precursors

The first Christmas

The Gospels do not mention the date of Jesus' birth. It was not until the 4th century AD that Pope Julius I set 25th December as the date for Christmas. This was an attempt to Christianise the Pagan



Christmas is a special time in a Church with many people attending services in local Church of England churches.

celebrations that already took place at this time of year. By 529, 25th December had become a civil holiday and by 567 the twelve days from 25th December to the Epiphany were public holidays.

Christmas is not only a Christian festival. The celebration has roots in the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, the festivals of the ancient Greeks, the beliefs of the Druids and the folk customs of Europe.

The crib and the nativity play

The telling of the Christmas story has been an important part of the Christianisation of Christmas. One way that the Christmas story has been maintained is through the crib, a model of the manger that Jesus was born in.

The tradition of crib making dates back to at least 400 AD when Pope Sixtus III had one built in Rome. In many parts of Europe in the 18th century crib making was an important craft form. This was not the case in England until much later, suggesting that British Christmases were less Christian than those in other parts of Europe.

The tradition of Nativity plays began in churches where they were used to illustrate the Christmas story as told in the Bible.



As part of the Churches celebrations for Christmas a Nativity Scene is set up with the baby Jesus being placed in the crib on Christmas day.

Advent

Advent is the period of preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus and begins on Sunday nearest to 30th November. The word *Advent* comes from the Latin *adventus* meaning *coming*. Traditionally it is a penitential season but is no longer kept with the strictness of Lent and Christians are no longer required to fast.

Advent wreaths are popular especially in churches. They are made with fir branches and four candles. A candle is lit each Sunday during Advent.

Christmas Day is the Christian festival most celebrated by non-churchgoers, and churches are often completely full for the service late on Christmas Eve. Today Christmas remains the biggest holiday in the calendar. It is a largely secular holiday, with the main element the exchange of gifts on Christmas day.



Palm Sunday is often remembered by Church of England congregations with a parade around the local community holding palms, palm crosses and sometimes a donkey.

6.1.2.Easter and Holy week

Holy Week

The most solemn week of the Christian year, Holy Week is the week leading up to **Easter**, and is the week during which Christians particularly remember the last week of **Jesus's life**. Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday.

Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday commemorates Christ's triumphant arrival in Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowd. Later in that week many of the people in that cheering crowd would be among those shouting that Jesus should be executed.

Symbolism

Christian clergy will often use the Palm Sunday story to help people think about the strength of their own commitment to their faith. They may ask believers to think about times that they have been unfaithful to Christ, or been hypocritical in proclaiming their support.

Church services

In many churches, during Palm Sunday services, large palm branches are carried in processions. In Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, members of the congregation hold small crosses made of palm leaf, both to remember the palm leaves which the people of Jerusalem waved when Jesus arrived, and to remember the cross on which he died. Some Christians display the crosses from that service in their homes during the year as a symbol of their faith. The crosses are burned at the start of Lent the *next* year to provide the ash for **Ash Wednesday**. Hymns for Palm Sunday generally include *Ride on, Ride on in Majesty* and *All glory, laud and honour*. Songs may include *Make Way, Hosanna*, and (for children) *We have a King who Rides a Donkey*.

Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday is the Thursday before Easter. Christians remember it as the day of the **Last Supper**, when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and established the ceremony known as the **Eucharist**. The night of Maundy Thursday is the night on which Jesus was betrayed by Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane. The word *maundy* comes from the command (mandate) given by Christ at the Last Supper, that we should love one another. In Roman Catholic churches the anthem *Mandatum novum do vobis* (a new commandment I give to you) would be sung on Maundy Thursday. In many other countries this day is known as Holy Thursday.

Maundy Thursday ceremonies

In Britain, the sovereign takes part in the Ceremony of the Royal Maundy. This ceremony, held at a great cathedral, involves the distribution of Maundy money to deserving senior citizens (one man and one woman for each year of the sovereign's age), usually chosen for having done service to their community.

They receive ceremonial red and white purses which contain coins made especially for the occasion. The white purse contains one coin for each year of the monarch's reign. The red purse contains money in place of other gifts that used to be given to the poor. In the 17th century, and earlier, the King or Queen would wash the feet of the selected poor people as a gesture of humility, and in remembrance of Jesus' washing the feet of the disciples. The last monarch to do this was James 2. The ceremony of the monarch giving money to the poor on this day dates back to Edward 1.

Pedilavium: the washing of the feet

Roman Catholic church services feature a ceremony in which the priest washes the feet of 12 people to commemorate Jesus' washing the feet of his disciples. It was common in monasteries throughout history for the Abbot to wash the feet of the monks in a similar gesture. Some other churches nowadays also have foot-washing ceremonies as part of their Maundy Thursday services.

Good Friday

The most important events in Christianity are the death and later resurrection of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe is the Son of God, and whose life and teachings are the foundation of Christianity. Good Friday is the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Passion: the execution of Jesus by crucifixion.

Learning Zone video: **Why do Christians call such a sad day Good Friday?**

Services

Good Friday is a day of mourning in church. During special Good Friday services Christians meditate on Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, and what this means for their faith. In some countries, there are special Good Friday processions, or re-enactments of the Crucifixion.

The main service on Good Friday takes place between midday and 3pm. In many churches it takes the form of a meditation based on the seven last words of Jesus on the cross, with hymns, prayers, and short sermons.



After the solemn services of Good Friday Easter Sunday churches are decorated with flowers and symbols of a new beginning to celebrate the begins of Christianity.

The last words from the cross

The Bible quotes seven last sentences that Jesus spoke from the Cross. Easter Sunday is the culmination of **Holy Week**. Easter commemorates the resurrection of **Jesus Christ**. It is the most important Christian festival, and the one celebrated with the greatest joy. The date of Easter changes each year, and several other Christian festivals fix their dates by reference to Easter.

Churches are filled with flowers, and there are special hymns and songs. But not all Easter customs are Christian; some, such as the Easter Bunny, are pagan in origin.

The Easter story is at the heart of Christianity

On **Good Friday**, Jesus Christ was executed by **crucifixion**. His body was taken down from the cross, and buried in a cave. The tomb was guarded and an enormous stone was put over the entrance, so that no-one could steal the body. On the following Sunday, some women visited the grave and found that the stone had been moved, and that the tomb was empty. Jesus himself was seen that day, and for days afterwards by many people. His followers realised that God had raised Jesus from the dead.

Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday is the Saturday after Good Friday which is often, but wrongly, called Easter Saturday.

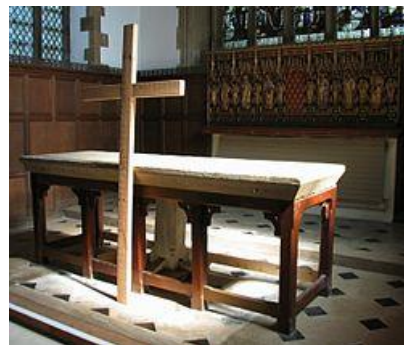
Easter vigil service

The Easter vigil service is the first **Easter** service, and takes place on the night of Holy Saturday. The idea behind the service is for faithful Christians to wait and watch, hopeful and confident that Christ will return at midnight. The Easter, or Paschal, candle is lit during this service. The service traditionally begins outside the church, where minister and some worshippers gather around a fire - a charcoal brazier is common. The service begins with words like these:

Brothers and sisters in Christ, on this most holy night, in which our Lord Jesus Christ passed over from death to life, the Church invites her members, dispersed throughout the world, to gather in vigil and prayer. For this is the Passover of the Lord, in which through word and sacrament we share in his victory over death.

Traditional Easter vigil liturgy

After readings and prayers, the Paschal candle is lit from the fire using a taper, while a prayer like the one below is said. The lit candle is now a symbol of Christ, risen as the light of the world, and come into the midst of the people. After being lit outside, the candle is carried into the church, where most of the worshippers are waiting in darkness, which symbolises the darkness of Christ's tomb. After more prayers and readings, the candles held by the congregation are lit from the Paschal candle. The readings at the service tell of the creation of humanity, how humanity fell from grace, and was repeatedly rescued by God. The readings remind people of God's promise to be with them always.



Churches remember the death of Jesus by stripping Alters and in some cases covering the Alter in black cloth.

The Paschal candle

The Paschal candle is made of pure white wax and is marked with a cross, an Alpha, and an Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. The 4 numbers of the year are marked between the arms. This symbolises that Christ has been, is now and always will be with humanity.

Paschal candles are usually large, and can cost over £100. For much of the year many churches stand the paschal candle near the font used for baptisms. Here it provides a reminder that baptism is a symbolic death and rebirth with Christ; just like **Christ's death** and **Resurrection**.

Holy Saturday is followed by **Easter Sunday**.

6.1.3. Lent

Lent is the period of 40 days which comes before **Easter** in the Christian calendar and observed by the Church of England. Beginning on Ash Wednesday, Lent is a season of reflection and preparation before the celebrations of Easter. By observing the 40 days of Lent, Christians replicate Jesus Christ's sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days. Lent is marked by fasting, both from food and festivities.

Whereas Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus after his death on the cross, Lent recalls the events leading up to and including Jesus' crucifixion by Rome. This is believed to have taken place in Roman occupied Jerusalem.

The Church of England use it as a time for prayer and penance. Only a small number of people today fast for the whole of Lent, although some maintain the practice on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. It is more common these days for believers to surrender a particular vice such as favourite foods or smoking. Whatever the sacrifice it is a reflection of Jesus' deprivation in the wilderness and a test of self-discipline.

Why 40 days?

40 is a significant number in Jewish-Christian scripture:

- In Genesis, the flood which destroyed the earth was brought about by 40 days and nights of rain.
- The Hebrews spent 40 years in the wilderness before reaching the land promised to them by God.
- Moses fasted for 40 days before receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.
- Jesus spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness in preparation for his ministry.

Most Christians regard Jesus' time in the wilderness as the key event for the duration of Lent.

Why is it called Lent?

Lent is an old English word meaning 'lengthen'. Lent is observed in spring, when the days begin to get longer.

The colour purple

Purple is the symbolic colour used in some churches throughout Lent, for drapes and altar frontals.



Purple is used for two reasons: firstly because it is associated with mourning and so anticipates the pain and suffering of the crucifixion, and secondly because purple is the colour associated with royalty, and celebrates Christ's resurrection and sovereignty.

East and West

Both the eastern and western churches observe Lent but they count the 40 days differently. The western church excludes Sundays (which is celebrated as the day of Christ's resurrection) whereas the eastern church includes them. The churches also start Lent on different days. Western churches start Lent on the 7th Wednesday before Easter Day (called Ash Wednesday). Eastern churches start Lent on the Monday of the 7th week before Easter and end it on the Friday 9 days before Easter. Eastern churches call this period the 'Great Lent'. The last week of Lent is called Holy Week.

Shrove Tuesday

Shrove Tuesday is the day before Lent starts: the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. It's a day of penitence, to clean the soul, and a day of celebration as the last chance to feast before Lent begins. Shrove Tuesday is sometimes called Pancake Day after the fried batter recipe traditionally eaten on this day. But there's more to Shrove Tuesday than pigging out on pancakes or taking part in a public pancake race. The pancakes themselves are part of an ancient custom with deeply religious roots.

Penitence

Shrove Tuesday gets its name from the ritual of *shriving* that Christians used to undergo in the past. In shriving, a person confesses their sins and receives absolution for them. When a person receives absolution for their sins, they are forgiven for them and released from the guilt and pain that they have caused them.

Videos



Christmas – Church of England Christmas Service.



Easter – Church of England Easter Service.



Lent – A video explaining the meaning of lent.

6.2. Protestant Church

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Christmas is marked on the 25th of December. Christmas is a Christian holy day that marks the birth of Jesus, the son of God.

The story of Christmas

Jesus' birth, known as the *nativity*, is described in the New Testament of the Bible. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke give different accounts. It is from them that the nativity story is pieced together. Both accounts tell us that Jesus was born to a woman called Mary who was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter. The Gospels state that Mary was a virgin when she became pregnant. In Luke's account Mary was visited by an angel who brought the message that she would give birth to God's son. According to Matthew's account, Joseph was visited by an angel who persuaded him to marry Mary rather than send her away or expose her pregnancy.

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During Advent candles are lit leading up to the 25th December.

Date of Christmas and precursors

The first Christmas

The Gospels do not mention the date of Jesus' birth. It was not until the 4th century AD that Pope Julius I set 25th December as the date for Christmas. This was an attempt to Christianise the Pagan celebrations that already took place at this time of year. By 529, 25th December had become a civil holiday and by 567 the twelve days from 25th December to the Epiphany were public holidays.

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6.2.2. Easter and Holy week

Holy Week

The most solemn week of the Christian year, Holy Week is the week leading up to **Easter**, and is the week during which Christians particularly remember the last week of **Jesus's life**. Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday.

Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday commemorates Christ's triumphant arrival in Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowd. Later in that week many of the people in that cheering crowd would be among those shouting that Jesus should be executed.

Symbolism

Christian clergy will often use the Palm Sunday story to help people think about the strength of their own commitment to their faith. They may ask believers to think about times that they have been unfaithful to Christ, or been hypocritical in proclaiming their support.

Church services

In many churches, during Palm Sunday services, large palm branches are carried in processions. In Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, members of the congregation hold small crosses made of palm leaf, both to remember the palm leaves which the



An Ash cross is drawn on a forehead and this is done on Ash Wednesday to signify the start of Lent

people of Jerusalem waved when Jesus arrived, and to remember the cross on which he died. Some Christians display the crosses from that service in their homes during the year as a symbol of their faith. The crosses are burned at the start of Lent the *next* year to provide the ash for **Ash Wednesday**.

Hymns for Palm Sunday generally include *Ride on, Ride on in Majesty* and *All glory, laud and honour*. Songs may include *Make Way, Hosanna*, and (for children) *We have a King who Rides a Donkey*.

Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday is the Thursday before Easter. Christians remember it as the day of the **Last Supper**, when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and established the ceremony known as the **Eucharist**.

The night of Maundy Thursday is the night on which Jesus was betrayed by Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane. The word *maundy* comes from the command (mandate) given by Christ at the Last Supper, that we should love one another. In Roman Catholic churches the anthem *Mandatum novum do vobis* (a new commandment I give to you) would be sung on Maundy Thursday. In many other countries this day is known as Holy Thursday.

Maundy Thursday ceremonies

In Britain, the sovereign takes part in the Ceremony of the Royal Maundy. This ceremony, held at a great cathedral, involves the distribution of Maundy money to deserving senior citizens (one man and one woman for each year of the sovereign's age), usually chosen for having done service to their community. They receive ceremonial red and white purses which contain coins made especially for the occasion. The white purse contains one coin for each year of the monarch's reign. The red purse contains money in place of other gifts that used to be given to the poor. In the 17th century, and earlier, the King or Queen would wash the feet of the selected poor people as a gesture of humility, and in remembrance of Jesus' washing the feet of the disciples. The last monarch to do this was James 2. The ceremony of the monarch giving money to the poor on this day dates back to Edward 1.

Pedilavium: the washing of the feet

Roman Catholic Church services feature a ceremony in which the priest washes the feet of 12 people to commemorate Jesus' washing the feet of his disciples. It was common in monasteries throughout history for the Abbot to wash the feet of the monks in a similar gesture. Some other churches nowadays also have foot-washing ceremonies as part of their Maundy Thursday services.

Good Friday

The most important events in Christianity are the death and later resurrection of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe is the Son of God, and whose life and teachings are the foundation of Christianity. Good Friday is the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the **Passion: the execution of Jesus by crucifixion**.



Learning Zone video: **Why do Christians call such a sad day Good Friday?**

Services

Good Friday is a day of mourning in church. During special Good Friday services Christians meditate on Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, and what this means for their faith. In some countries, there are special Good Friday processions, or re-enactments of the Crucifixion. The main service on Good Friday takes place between midday and 3pm. In many churches it takes the form of a meditation based on the seven last words of Jesus on the cross, with hymns, prayers, and short sermons.

The last words from the cross

The Bible quotes seven last sentences that Jesus spoke from the Cross. Easter Sunday is the culmination of **Holy Week**. Easter commemorates the resurrection of **Jesus Christ**. It is the most important Christian festival, and the one celebrated with the greatest joy. The date of Easter changes each year, and several other Christian festivals fix their dates by reference to Easter.



Churches are filled with flowers, and there are special hymns and songs. But not all Easter customs are Christian; some, such as the Easter Bunny, are pagan in origin.

Palm crosses are given out to worshippers on Palm Sunday to represent Jesus entering Jerusalem and the beginning of Holy week.

The Easter story is at the heart of Christianity

On **Good Friday**, Jesus Christ was executed by **crucifixion**. His body was taken down from the cross, and buried in a cave. The tomb was guarded and an enormous stone was put over the entrance, so that no-one could steal the body. On the following Sunday, some women visited the grave and found that the stone had been moved, and that the tomb was empty. Jesus himself was seen that day, and for days afterwards by many people. His followers realised that God had raised Jesus from the dead.

Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday is the Saturday after Good Friday which is often, but wrongly, called Easter Saturday.

Easter vigil service

The Easter vigil service is the first **Easter** service, and takes place on the night of Holy Saturday. The idea behind the service is for faithful Christians to wait and watch, hopeful and confident that Christ will return at midnight. The Easter, or Paschal, candle is lit during this service. The service traditionally begins outside the church, where minister and some worshippers gather around a fire - a charcoal brazier is common. The service begins with words like these:

Brothers and sisters in Christ, on this most holy night, in which our Lord Jesus Christ passed over from death to life, the Church invites her members, dispersed throughout the world, to gather in vigil and prayer.

For this is the Passover of the Lord, in which through word and sacrament we share in his victory over death.

Traditional Easter vigil liturgy

After readings and prayers, the Paschal candle is lit from the fire using a taper, while a prayer like the one below is said. The lit candle is now a symbol of Christ, risen as the light of the world, and come into the midst of the people. After being lit outside, the candle is carried into the church, where most of the worshippers are waiting in darkness, which symbolises the darkness of Christ's tomb. After more prayers and readings, the candles held by the congregation are lit from the Paschal candle. The readings at the service tell of the creation of humanity, how humanity fell from grace, and was repeatedly rescued by God. The readings remind people of God's promise to be with them always.

The Paschal candle

The Paschal candle is made of pure white wax and is marked with a cross, an Alpha, and an Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. The 4 numbers of the year are marked between the arms. This symbolises that Christ has been, is now and always will be with humanity.

Paschal candles are usually large, and can cost over £100. For much of the year many churches stand the paschal candle near the font used for baptisms. Here it provides a reminder that baptism is a symbolic death and rebirth with Christ; just like **Christ's death** and **Resurrection**. Holy Saturday is followed by **Easter Sunday**.

6.2.3. Lent

Lent is the period of 40 days which comes before **Easter** in the Christian calendar and observed by the Church of England. Beginning on Ash Wednesday, Lent is a season of reflection and preparation before the celebrations of Easter. By observing the 40 days of Lent, Christians replicate Jesus Christ's sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days. Lent is marked by fasting, both from food and festivities.

Whereas Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus after his death on the cross, Lent recalls the events leading up to and including Jesus' crucifixion by Rome. This is believed to have taken place in Roman occupied Jerusalem.

The Church of England use it as a time for prayer and penance. Only a small number of people today fast for the whole of Lent, although some maintain the practice on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. It is more common these days for believers to surrender a particular vice such as favourite foods or smoking. Whatever the sacrifice it is a reflection of Jesus' deprivation in the wilderness and a test of self-discipline.



Why 40 days?

40 is a significant number in Jewish-Christian scripture:

- In Genesis, the flood which destroyed the earth was brought about by 40 days and nights of rain.
- The Hebrews spent 40 years in the wilderness before reaching the land promised to them by God.
- Moses fasted for 40 days before receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.
- Jesus spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness in preparation for his ministry.

Most Christians regard Jesus' time in the wilderness as the key event for the duration of Lent.

Why is it called Lent?

Lent is an old English word meaning 'lengthen'. Lent is observed in spring, when the days begin to get longer.

The colour purple

Purple is the symbolic colour used in some churches throughout Lent, for drapes and altar frontals.

Purple is used for two reasons: firstly because it is associated with mourning and so anticipates the pain and suffering of the crucifixion, and secondly because purple is the colour associated with royalty, and celebrates Christ's resurrection and sovereignty.

East and West

Both the eastern and western churches observe Lent but they count the 40 days differently. The western church excludes Sundays (which is celebrated as the day of Christ's resurrection) whereas the Eastern Church includes them. The churches also start Lent on different days. Western churches start Lent on the 7th Wednesday before Easter Day (called Ash Wednesday). Eastern churches start Lent on the Monday of the 7th week before Easter and end it on the Friday 9 days before Easter. Eastern churches call this period the 'Great Lent'. The last week of Lent is called Holy Week.

Shrove Tuesday

Shrove Tuesday is the day before Lent starts: the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. It's a day of penitence, to clean the soul, and a day of celebration as the last chance to feast before Lent begins. Shrove Tuesday is sometimes called Pancake Day after the fried batter recipe traditionally eaten on this day. But there's more to Shrove Tuesday than pigging out on pancakes or taking part in a public pancake race. The pancakes themselves are part of an ancient custom with deeply religious roots.

Penitence

Shrove Tuesday gets its name from the ritual of *shriving* that Christians used to undergo in the past. In shriving, a person confesses their sins and receives absolution for them. When a person receives

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absolution for their sins, they are forgiven for them and released from the guilt and pain that they have caused them.



Churches at Christmas open up to the local community and often raise money for the needy at Christmas or invite the elderly to have Christmas lunch.

Videos



Palm Sunday – A video showing how to make a Palm Sunday Cross -



Christmas - A video of the Salvation Army playing Christmas Carols for the community and raising money for the needy -



Advent – A video explaining Advent -

7. Other major religions

7.1. Buddhism

Dharma day - Dharma Day is observed among Buddhists worldwide. The Buddhist festival Dharma Day celebrates the day the Buddhist religion became established, also known as Asalha Puja Day.

Wesak – celebrates the birth of Buddha and is one of the most important days in the Buddhist calendar.

Losar – is the festival to celebrate the Buddhist new year and is celebrated on the first day of the lunisolar Tibetan calendar

7.1.1. Dharma Day

Dharma Day is celebrated in Theravada countries on the full moon day of July. It marks the beginning of the Buddha's teaching. Soon after the Buddha's enlightenment, he went to find his disciples and tell them about his experience. The Buddha's first sermon is believed to have taken place in the Deer



Below Buddhist monks marking Dharma day in a traditional temple.

Park at Sarnath. This event is usually seen as the beginning of Buddhism and is what Dharma Day celebrates.

The first teaching to the Buddha's original five disciples is known as **The First Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma**. In this first sermon the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths.

The time around what has now become Dharma Day marks the beginning of the rainy season, called the

'vassa'. Traditionally, in early Buddhism, at this point, the Buddha and his monks and nuns would suspend their nomadic lifestyle for three months. They would shelter together until the rainy season was over, and use this time as a period of further meditation and reflection. At the end of this time, they would resume their travelling, passing on the Buddha's teachings to those who were interested. Modern monks still spend the 'rainy season' in a monastery rather than travel.

Dharma Day is now seen as a chance to express gratitude that the Buddha and other enlightened teachers have shared their knowledge with others. Dharma Day is usually celebrated with readings from the Buddhist scriptures, and is an opportunity to reflect deeply on their content.

If an individual practises Buddhism within a monastic tradition, Dharma Day is usually celebrated in a temple, Buddhist centre or monastery in the presence of monks or nuns. Dharma Day is important to Buddhists today as it reminds them of the Buddha's teachings and what they can learn from his enlightenment and apply to their own lives.

7.1.2. Wesak

This most important Buddhist festival is known as either Vesak, Wesak or Buddha Day, and is celebrated annually on the full moon of the ancient lunar month of Vesakha, which usually falls in May, or in early June.

At Vesak Buddhists commemorate the birth of the Buddha-to-be, Siddhattha Gotama, his Enlightenment at the age of 35 when he became the Buddha and his final 'passing' into Nirvana at the age of 80, no more to be reborn. Buddhist scriptures relate that each of these three significant events occurred on a full moon of the Indian lunar month of Vesakha.

Traditionally, his birth is supposed to have been in 623 BC but the Buddhist calendar is counted from his final passing, eighty years later. The older tradition of Vesak is to celebrate all three events but there are some more recent Buddhist schools and groups that celebrate just the birth and others only the Enlightenment.



As part of Wesak lights are traditionally floated on water.

In Buddhism, death is not the end of life; it teaches rebirth and differentiates it from reincarnation because Buddhism does not recognise a self or soul that is continually reappearing in a new form. Death for the unenlightened, whose minds are still infected with desire, is followed by yet another life. But for the Enlightened who have extinguished all desire, including the desire to be born again, there is no more rebirth. So Buddhists don't usually refer to the Buddha's death but to his passing, into Nibbana or Nirvana.

Only by passing into Nirvana can a person end the cycle of death and re-birth.

'The Buddha' is not a personal name but a title, and can be translated as 'the Enlightened One' or 'the One Who Knows'. He was not born the Buddha but became the Buddha through his realisation of full and perfect Enlightenment. This state is also known as Nirvana (Sanskrit) or Nibbana (Pali) and occurs when a person sees and understands the true nature of all things.



The lighting of incense and going to the temple is an important part of Wesak

As a result, all their greed, hatred and delusion is extinguished, which in turn means that there will be no more re-birth. The Buddha achieved the state of nirvana and this is celebrated on Vesak.

There are some cultural and local differences in how the various Buddhist groups and nations celebrate Vesak, but broadly speaking devout Buddhists will try to attend

their local temple for at least part of the day, while some remain there throughout the day and night of the full moon. The celebration will include the practices of Giving, Virtue and Cultivation and the doing of good and meritorious deeds.

Giving usually involves bringing food to offer and share, as well as supplies for the temple and symbolic offerings for the shrine. Virtue is observed by reaffirming commitment to the moral precepts. Cultivation can include chanting, meditation and listening to sermons.

7.1.3. Losar

The most important holiday in Tibet is Losar, which celebrates the Tibetan New Year. It's celebrated in February, but the exact date varies each year according to the lunar calendar.

Losar is a three day festival. On the first day celebrations are usually restricted to the family, with the second and third days being the time to visit and exchange gifts with friends and more distant relatives. This is also a time for Tibetans to visit monasteries and make offerings.



Losar as traditionally celebrated in Tibet.

Losar is marked with activities that symbolise purification, and welcoming in the new. Buildings are whitewashed and thoroughly cleaned, people wear new clothes and special food is prepared.



The offering made to celebrate Losar.

Buddhist monks adorn the monasteries with the finest decorations, and conduct religious ceremonies. Rituals are performed to drive away evil spirits, and people celebrate with feasts and dancing.

The festival of Losar can be traced back to the pre-Buddhist period in Tibet. In the times when Tibetans practiced the Bon religion, every winter a festival was

held where people offered large quantities of incense to please local spirits and deities.

This festival eventually became the annual Buddhist festival we know today.

Video



Dharma Day - a video showing how this day can be celebrated -

7.2. Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world, It does not have one God but thousands of gods and goddesses. Hindu's choose who to worship and this may be influenced through tradition, culture and family life. So the tree ceremonies below are the most popular in the Hindu religion.

Hindus have many Holy days and these depend on which god or goddess they follow. Diwali is the best known and celebrated by many Hindus followed by Holi (**Sikh** celebration of the return of the sixth Nanak from detention in the Gwalior Fort coincides with Hindu festival of **Diwali**). Hindus will then celebrate Holy days connected to their chosen gods and goddesses such as Lord Ganesh.

7.2.1. Diwali

Diwali, Deepavali or Dipavali is the Hindu festival of lights, which is celebrated every autumn in the northern hemisphere (spring in southern hemisphere). One of the most popular festivals of Hinduism, Diwali symbolises the spiritual "victory of light over darkness, good over evil and knowledge over ignorance." Light is a metaphor for knowledge and consciousness. During the celebration, temples, homes, shops and office buildings are brightly illuminated. The preparations, and rituals, for the festival typically last five days, with the climax occurring on the third day coinciding with the darkest night of the Hindu lunisolar month Kartika. This usually falls in the months October and November.



Below are Diya's, the traditional lamps that are lit to celebrate Diwali.

In the lead-up to Diwali, those celebrating will prepare by cleaning, renovating, and decorating their homes and workplaces. During the climax, the celebrants adorn themselves in their finest clothes, illuminate the interior and exterior of their homes with Diya's (oil lamps or candles), offer puja (worship) to Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and wealth, light fireworks, and partake in family feasts, where mithai (sweets) and gifts are shared. Business people regard it as a favourable day to start a new accounting year because of the festival's association

with Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Diwali is also used to celebrate a successful harvest.

The name of the festival comes from the Sanskrit word *dipavali*, meaning row of lights and has many legends attached to it.

Two of the legends of Diwali show the triumph of Good over Evil and tell of the destruction of two monsters that preyed on humanity.

The killing of the demon Narakaasura

The demon Narakaasura was the evil king of Pragjyotishpur, near Nepal. He ruled with a reign of terror, abducted 16,000 daughters of the gods and stole the earrings of Aditi, mother of the gods. The gods asked Lord Krishna for help and after a mighty battle he killed the demon, freed the girls and recovered the earrings. The rescue of the 16,000 girls is said to be the origin of the story that Krishna had 16,000 wives. After his victory Krishna returned very early in the morning and was bathed and massaged with scented oils. Taking an early morning bath with oil is still a Diwali tradition.

The killing of the demon Ravana

Ravana, who had ten arms and ten heads, was the wicked king of the island of Sri Lanka, who kidnapped the wife of Rama. Rama had been in exile for 14 years because of a disagreement as to whether he or his brother should be the next king in **Ayodhya**. After a great battle Rama killed the demon and recovered his wife. Rama's return with his wife Sita to Ayodhya and his subsequent coronation as king is celebrated at Diwali. When Rama and Sita first returned to Ayodhya it was a dark moonless night and they couldn't see where they were going. Their people put little lamps outside their houses so that the new king and queen could find their way, thus beginning the tradition of the festival of lights.



Diwali celebrations in Leicester with all the community celebrating with lights and parades

7.2.2. Holi

Holi was originally a spring festival of fertility and harvest. Now it also marks some Hindu legends, which provide some of the ingredients for the celebrations.

Holi is an ancient festival which is referred to in the 7th century Sanskrit drama, *Ratnavali*.



Picture that depict the paint throwing aspect of the Holy day and the joy of the participants and how all ages are involved.

The Legend of Prahalad and Holika

This is the main Holi legend. Holika was a female demon, and the sister of Hiranyakashyap, the demon king. Hiranyakashyap considered himself ruler of the Universe, and higher than all the gods. Prahalad was the king's son. His father hated him because Prahalad was a faithful devotee of the god **Vishnu**.

One day the king asked him "Who is the greatest, God or I?"

"God is," said the son, "you are only a king."

The king was furious and decided to murder his son. But the king's attempts at murder didn't work too well. Prahalad survived being thrown over a cliff, being trampled by elephants, bitten by snakes, and attacked by soldiers. So the king asked his sister, Holika, to kill the boy. Holika seized Prahalad and sat in the middle of a fire with the boy on her lap. Holika had been given a magic power by the gods that made her immune to fire, so she thought this was a pretty good plan, and Prahalad would burn to death while she remained cool. But it's never wise to take gods' gifts for granted! Because Holika was using her gift to do something evil, her power vanished and she was burned to ashes.



Picture that depict the paint throwing aspect of the Holy day and the joy of the participants and how all ages are involved.

Prahalad stayed true to his God, Vishnu, and sat praying in the lap of his demon aunt. Vishnu protected him, and Prahalad survived. Shortly afterwards, Vishnu killed King Hiranyakashyap and Prahalad ruled as a wise king in his father's place. The moral of the story is that good always wins over evil, and those who seek to torment the faithful will be destroyed.

To celebrate the story, large bonfires are burned during Holi. In many parts of India, a dummy of Holika is burned on the fire.

Known as the festival of Colours Holi is the Hindu festival that welcomes the Spring and celebrates the new life and energy of the season. Although Holi has religious roots, not much religious activity is involved in its celebration. Holi is the most energetic Indian festival, filled with fun and good humour; even the strict rules of separation between castes are abandoned. Holi is also called 'The Festival of Colours', and people celebrate the festival by smearing each other with paint, and throwing coloured powder and dye around in an atmosphere of great good humour. Holi is seen by some as the Hindu festival that is nearest in spirit to St. Valentine's Day.

Holi is A spring festival, usually celebrated in March. It also celebrates Krishna, and the legend of Holika and Prahalad. Although Holi has religious roots there are few religious things to do. Holi is a very exuberant festival, with dancing, singing, and throwing of paint. Bonfires are lit during the evening of the full moon and food offerings are roasted. These bonfires not only purify the air of evil

spirits, but mark the story of Holika and Prahalad. The festival is then officially celebrated on the day after full moon during the month of Phalunga, which falls in February-March. With people of all ages going into the streets to celebrate by throwing coloured paint.

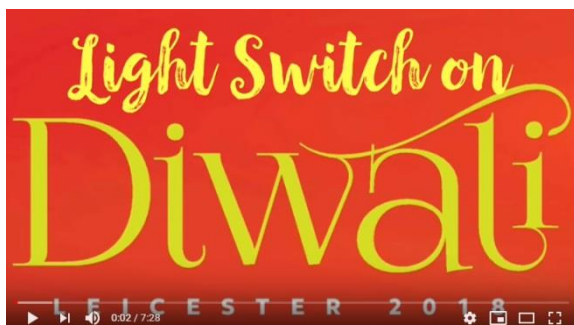
7.2.3. Ganesh Chaturthi

This celebrated the birth of Lord Ganesh and is one of the most popular deities for Hindus to worship. Ganesh is also known by the names Ganapati, Ekadanta, Vinayaka, Pillaiyar and Heramba. Ganesh is depicted with an elephant's head on a human body and in the Hindu tradition he is the son of **Lord Siva** and the Goddess Parvati. He is known as the Remover of Obstacles and is prayed to particularly when people are beginning a new enterprise or starting a new business. Ganesh is also known as the patron god of travelling. In places such as Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra (in India), the festival is celebrated for ten days and is a joyous event and regarded as a public occasion. In other places it is simply celebrated at home and hymns are sung and offerings made to Ganesh. Sweets are also distributed because in Hindu legend Ganesh liked them.



Statue of Ganesh in a Hindu home that has been decorated to celebrate the birth of Ganesh

Videos



Diwali – A video showing the Diwali celebrations in Leicester -



Holi – A video showing Holi celebrations in India -



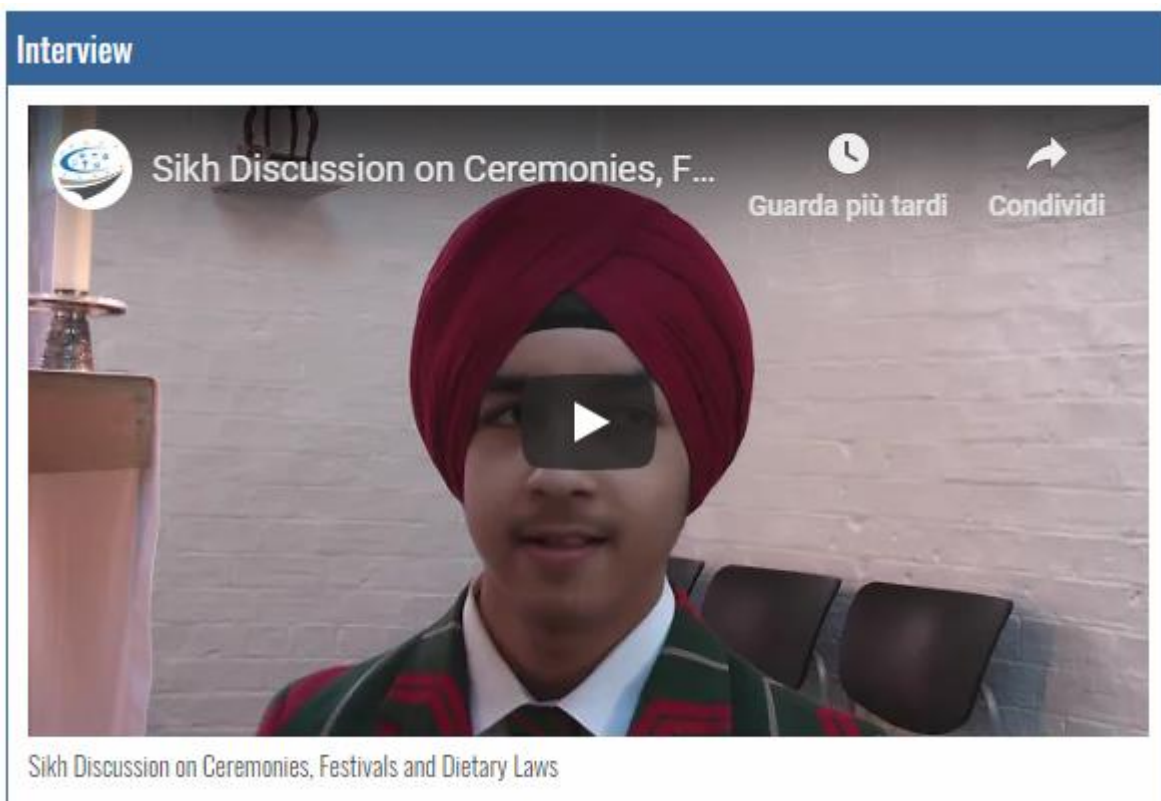
Ganesh Chaturthi – A video showing the story of Ganesh -

7.3. Sikhism

Vaisakhi – or Baisakhi is a double celebration to mark the harvest festival and Sikh New Year. Celebrate nature's bounty with vegetable dishes and simply prepared dahls.

Gurpurbs - celebrate all events connected with the Sikh Gurus, these include the birthdays of the Sikh Gurus, Gurus leaving for heavenly abode or the martyrdom days of the Sikh Gurus.

Diwali - The **Sikh** celebration of the return of the sixth Nanak from detention in the Gwalior Fort coincides with Hindu festival of **Diwali**.



7.3.1. Vaisakhi

Vaisakhi, also spelled Baisakhi, is one of the most important dates in the Sikh calendar. It is the Sikh New Year festival and is celebrated on April 13 or 14. It also commemorates 1699, the year Sikhism was born as a collective faith.

History

Vaisakhi is a long established harvest festival in the Punjab. It had been celebrated long before it gained an



Vaisakhi being celebrated in British towns and cities with a traditional parade.

added dimension for Sikhs. In 1699 the tenth guru, **Guru Gobind Singh**, chose Vaisakhi as the occasion to transform the Sikhs into a family of soldier saints, known as the Khalsa Panth. Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa in front of thousands at Anandpur Sahib.

During the Vaisakhi festival Guru Gobind Singh came out of a tent carrying a sword. He challenged any Sikh who was prepared to give his life to come into the tent. The Guru returned alone with his sword covered in blood. He then requested another volunteer and repeated the same action four times until five men disappeared into the tent. The crowd was very concerned until they saw five men return wearing turbans with the Guru.



Vaisakhi being celebrated in British towns and cities with a traditional parade.

brotherhood on this day.

These five men became known as the *Panj Piare*, or 'Beloved Five'.

The men were then baptised into the Khalsa by the Guru. He sprinkled them with *Amrit* ('immortalising nectar': the Sikh term for holy water) and said prayers. This is the basis of the **Sikh baptism ceremony**.

Vaisakhi is celebrated in much the same way as **Gurpurbs**. **Gudwaras** are decorated and visited. Parades, dancing and singing happen throughout the day. Many Sikhs choose to be baptised into the Khalsa

Nagar Kirtans

The festival is marked with *nagar kirtan* processions: processions through the streets (*nagar* means "town") which form an important part of Sikh culture and religious celebrations. *Kirtan* is a term meaning the singing of hymns from the Guru Grath Sahib, the Sikh holy book. Celebrations always include music, singing and chanting scriptures and hymns. The processions are led by traditionally dressed Panj Piaras. The Guru Granth Sahib will be carried in the procession in a place of honour.

7.3.2. Gurpurbs

Gurpurbs are festivals that are associated with the lives of the Gurus. They are happy occasions which are celebrated most enthusiastically by Sikhs.

The most important Gurpurbs are:

- The birthday of **Guru Nanak**, founder of Sikhism (April or November)
- The birthday of **Guru Gobind Singh**, founder of the Khalsa (January)
- The martyrdom of **Guru Arjan** (June)
- The martyrdom of **Guru Tegh Bahadur** (November/December)

Sikhs celebrate Gurburbs with an *akhand path*. This is a complete and continuous reading of Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, that takes 48 hours and finishes on the day of the festival. This is also performed in times of ceremony such as birth, death, marriage and moving into a new home.

The reading is done by a team of readers, who may be professionals or family members (in the case of family rites). Each reads for two to three hours.

The Akhand Path originated in India in the mid 18th century, when there were few copies of the Guru Granth Sahib. Sikhs were at war and hid in the jungles. They gathered round to hear readings from the sacred text before the text was moved on to be read to other groups of Sikhs.



Sikhs in a Gurdwara in Manchester celebrating the Gurburbs.

Gurdwaras are decorated with flowers, flags and lights, and Sikhs dress up in new or smart clothes and join together for special services. Hymns are sung from the Guru Granth Sahib, poems are recited in praise of the Gurus and there are lectures on Sikhism.



Sikh school pupils celebrating Gurburbs in an academy in Britain.

In India and parts of Britain, there are processions where the Sikh Scripture is paraded around. Five people representing the first five members of the **Khalsa** (the Panj Piaras or Five Beloved Ones) head the procession carrying the Sikh flag. Musicians, singers and martial artists follow. Outside some Gurdwaras, free sweets are offered to the general public, regardless of their faith.

Food is important in this festival. Sikhs come together to eat special food such as Karah Parasaad, a sweet-tasting food which has been blessed and is served warm. Free meals (*langars*) are served at the Gurdwaras.

7.3.3. Diwali

The Festival of Light, comes at the end of October or early November. It's a festival that Sikhs, **Hindus** and **Jains** celebrate.

Diwali for Sikhs

For Sikhs, Diwali is particularly important because it celebrates the release from prison of the sixth guru, Guru Hargobind, and 52 other princes with him, in 1619.

The Sikh tradition holds that the Emperor Jahangir had imprisoned Guru Hargobind and 52 princes. The Emperor was asked to release Guru Hargobind which he agreed to do. However, Guru

Hargobind asked that the princes be released also. The Emperor agreed, but said only those who could hold onto his cloak tail would be allowed to leave the prison. This was in order to limit the number of prisoners who could leave.

However, Guru Hargobind had a cloak made with 52 pieces of string and so each prince was able to hold onto one string and leave prison.

Sikhs celebrated the return of Guru Hargobind by lighting the **Golden Temple** and this tradition continues today.

The Festival of Lights

The name of the festival comes from the Sanskrit word *dipavali*, meaning row of lights.

Diwali is known as the 'festival of lights' because houses, shops and public places are decorated with small earthenware oil lamps called Diyas. These lamps, which are traditionally fueled by mustard oil, are placed in rows in windows, doors and outside buildings to decorate them.

In towns in India (and in Britain) electric lights are often used in Diwali displays.

In India oil lamps are often floated across the river Ganges - it is regarded as a good omen if the lamp manages to get all the way across. Fireworks are also a big part of the Diwali celebrations, although some Sikhs prefer not to use them because of noise, atmospheric pollution and the risk of accidental deaths and injuries.

Like Christmas in the West, Diwali is very much a time for buying and exchanging gifts. Traditionally sweets and dried fruit were very common gifts to exchange, but the festival has become a time for serious shopping, leading to anxiety that commercialism is eroding the spiritual side of the festival. In most years shopkeepers expect sales to rise substantially in the weeks before the festival. Diwali is also a traditional time to redecorate homes and buy new clothes. Diwali is also used to celebrate a successful harvest.



Celebrating Diwali with candles and light at the Sikh holy shrine at Amritsar.



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Videos



Vaisakhi – A video of the parade in a Leicester Gurdwara -



Gurpurbs – Celebrating in Leicester -



Diwali – celebrating Diwali in Southall London



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