



Holy Week: a teachers' guide

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Introduction

This guide has been produced by Westminster Abbey to be used in conjunction with the primary or secondary short guides to Holy Week. Within this guide, you will find key information on the Christian festival of Holy Week, to support the delivery of Religious Education within your classroom.

Westminster Abbey has a distinctive role within the Church of England. It is neither a cathedral nor a parish church, and it stands outside the normal jurisdiction of bishops and archbishops. It is instead a 'Royal Peculiar', which was a status granted to it in 1560 by Elizabeth I, under which the Dean and Chapter are directly answerable to the Sovereign. This resource discusses Holy Week in broad terms based on the teachings of the Abbey.

All Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

What is Holy Week?

Holy Week is when Christians reflect on the week leading up to Jesus' death by crucifixion, known as the Passion of Christ. This is a very solemn period of time for Christians.

When is Holy Week celebrated?

Holy Week is the last week of Lent, and the week before Eastertide.

How is Holy Week celebrated?

Within the Church, Holy Week is celebrated across the full week, with four key Holy Days. Traditionally, Christians celebrate this period by attending Church services and may continue the elements of fasting (from food and festivities) undertaken during Lent. Special acts of devotion may include the Stations of the Cross.

The Station of the Cross is a walk that allows for reflection and re-enactment of Jesus' final journey, when he carried his cross to Golgotha, the place of his crucifixion. By taking part in the Stations of the Cross, some Christians feel that they have accompanied Jesus on his final journey and shared in his suffering.



Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday focuses on Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where he arrived on a donkey to observe the Jewish festival of Passover. This took place around three years after his temptation in the wilderness. This was an important moment, when Jesus was welcomed by huge crowds who spread their cloaks and laid palm leaves in his path and proclaimed him the Son of David. He is called the Son of David, as he was born in Bethlehem – David's city. This was a title for the Messiah. Many of these people would later turn on Jesus and call for his execution.

Today, most churches use palm crosses during the Palm Sunday service. You may see people carrying larger palm branches.

You can find reference to the events of Palm Sunday in St Mark 21: 1-11, St Mark 11: 1-11, St Luke 19: 28-44 and St John 12: 12-19.

Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday takes place on the Thursday before Easter. This is when Christians remember the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and when bread and wine is consecrated and shared with the congregation.

It was on this evening that Judas betrayed Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane which led to his crucifixion the next day.

The word *maundy* comes from the Latin *mandatum*, meaning 'commandment'. Traditionally this is the day when the monarch will give 'maundy money' to selected members of the public at a large cathedral.

You find reference to these events in St Matthew 26: 17-75, St Mark 14: 12-72, St Luke 22: 7-62 and St John 13: 1-38.

Good Friday

This is the most solemn of all the days in the Christian calendar – the day of Jesus' crucifixion. Christians will attend special services at their local church, where they will think about Jesus' suffering and death, and often venerate (or regard with great respect) a cross during the service, either by kissing it or kneeling by it. Many churches run a special service between 12 noon and 3pm, as this is the time Jesus was on the cross.

Some churches see congregations undertaking a procession through the local area with a replica of the cross. Sometimes there are services based on the last sentences uttered by Jesus.

The Lord's Seven Words, are the last sentences uttered by Christ on the cross:

THE FIRST WORD. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." St Luke 23:34

THE SECOND WORD. "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." St Luke 23:43

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THE THIRD WORD. "Jesus said to his mother: 'Woman, this is your son.' Then he said to the disciple: 'This is your mother.'" St John 19:26-27

THE FOURTH WORD. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" St Matthew 27:46 and St Mark 15:34

THE FIFTH WORD. "I thirst." St John 19:28

THE SIXTH WORD. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished;" and he bowed his head and handed over the spirit. St John 19:30

THE SEVENTH WORD. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." St Luke 23:46

Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday falls the day after Good Friday. Churches are silent on this day. Christians take part in a special evening service, a Vigil Eucharist where a new fire is blessed, baptismal promises are renewed, and where Jesus's resurrection is celebrated with great joy in the heart of the night.

A special Easter, or Paschal, candle is often lit from the new fire which symbolises the Risen Jesus as the light of the world. This candle will be used at christenings and baptisms for the forthcoming year, reminding worshippers of the life and death of Christ. It is also lit at funeral services, to remind Christians of Jesus' victory over death.

You will find reference to these events in St Matthew 27: 62-66, St Mark 16:1, St Luke 23:56 and St John 19:40.

Finding out more

You can find examples of previous sermons covering Holy Week on the [Westminster Abbey](#) website. These give an indication of how Holy Week is observed at Westminster Abbey and how Christians mark this period. The website also provides a [virtual tour](#) of the Abbey which may provide context for the supporting imagery provided in the Power Point presentation.

You may also wish to look at our [other Christian festivals teaching resources](#), which examine Lent and Eastertide in the same way.