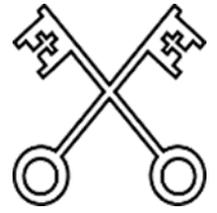
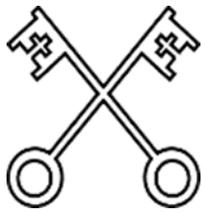


# BRADFORD CATHEDRAL



## Holy Week and Easter Background Information



## Introduction

This basic background information is meant for teachers and others who are introducing the festival of Easter to children and young people. Activities and Easter stories may be found on the Cathedral's website: [www.bradfordcathedral.org.uk](http://www.bradfordcathedral.org.uk)



Easter is the most important of all the Christian festivals. It is celebrated by all denominations (types) of Christians all over the world. It is a spring festival, but has no fixed date. All Western churches celebrate Easter on the first Sunday following the first full moon, after the spring equinox. The spring equinox marks the beginning of spring; it falls at the time when the days and the nights are of equal length. Protestant and Catholic Christians follow the sixteenth century Gregorian calendar, while Eastern Orthodox Christians follow the earlier Julian calendar; consequently the Orthodox churches' Easter celebrations may occur later than the March equinox.

In short, although all Christians celebrate Easter and recognize this as the most joyful and important festival of the Church year, they do not always do so on the same date.

The small photograph on the left shows part of the Christian story windows that may be seen in the South Transept at the Cathedral. It is a scene from the Gospel stories of the resurrection. Some of Jesus' female friends are at the tomb where Jesus's body was supposed to be. They find the tomb empty: 'He is risen!' They become convinced by events that followed, that Jesus had been killed, he had died on the cross, but that he had come back to life, he had conquered death. This is known as the resurrection and is the crux of the Easter story and is the reason why this time of year is so important to Christians.

At Bradford Cathedral and across the whole of the Christian world, Easter is the highlight of the year. During Lent, the build up to Easter, the Cathedral will be unadorned- no flowers, no bright colours (dark purple will be the only pallet seen, if any colour is evident at all)- and then on Easter Day there will be beautiful flowers everywhere; the altars and pulpit fall will be covered in gold and white cloth, priests will wear vestments (religious clothes) in the same colours; these are the colours of festival and celebration in the Anglican Church. A full programme of events and opportunities for worship will take place at the Cathedral during Holy Week and Easter; the week might look something like this:



**Palm Sunday:** Eucharist and the giving of palm crosses to the congregation (morning)

**Maundy Thursday:** Choral Eucharist with the washing of feet (evening).

**Good Friday:** 12noon, procession around Bradford City Centre, followed by meditations and the proclamation of the cross, with music and hymns.

**Holy Saturday:** Easter vigil, meditation and prayers (late evening into Sunday morning)

**Easter Day: 'Christ is risen!'**

A busy day of worship, celebrating and feasting after a period of fasting, penitence and prayer. The day at the Cathedral will look something like this:

Holy Communion - (early morning)

Choral Eucharist - (mid-morning); the biggest congregational worship event of the day

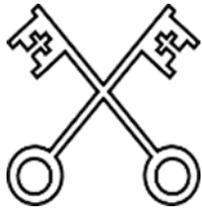
Choral Evensong - (evening)

**Important events during Holy Week and Easter**

Holy Week is the week before Easter. Palm Sunday (known as Willow Day in the Orthodox Church) is the first day of Holy Week; the week finishes with Christians remembering the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday and the events of Good Friday (God's Friday) which heralds the beginning of the Easter period. Easter is the commemoration of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. Good Friday is the day on which Jesus was condemned to death and was killed by being crucified on a cross.

Easter Sunday, or Easter Day, is the most important day of the Christian year. This is the day on which the resurrection of Jesus is remembered; it is a joyous occasion. Christianity is very much a world faith and Easter traditions vary greatly around the world, but all Christians celebrate and rejoice that Jesus conquered death, rising again on the third day after his crucifixion.

Christians believe that Jesus died to bring about a new creation; that he was a sacrifice, his death atoning (making up for) for all humanity's sins (the things people have done do wrong to the world and to each other) over many generations. These sins had spoiled God's original perfect creation. Through Jesus' death and resurrection Christians believe it is possible for people (if they believe in Jesus and follow God's way) to start again, to be born again and so gain entry into the Kingdom of God. In some churches people are baptized on this day, to show that they have been 'born again' in God's love.



### **Why do Christians celebrate Easter?**

Christians believe that a Jewish man, a teacher, or rabbi, probably called Yeshua, but widely now known by the Greek version of his name Jesus, was crucified by Roman soldiers at the behest of the Jewish religious authorities. He had amassed a great following and was seen by the Jewish authorities as a threat as he spoke out against ritual and practice; he encouraged people to love one another and worship God and do His will, rather than follow the rules and laws as prescribed by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish authorities. His death on the cross was hastened by a Roman soldier, because Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath) began at dusk on the Friday; his body was taken down from the cross and placed in a heavily guarded tomb. Shabbat ends on a Saturday evening as dusk falls, so his body could not be prepared for proper burial due to Jewish religious law until the third day, Sunday; when his friends and followers went to the tomb on the Sunday, Jesus' body was not there. A series of events then occurred that convinced his followers that Jesus was not dead, but alive. He had 'risen from the dead'.

Traditional Christian belief is that these events were the most important moments in the history of the world and that in his death and resurrection Jesus was fulfilling his purpose on earth. Peter, one of Jesus' disciples and one of his dearest friends (but who through fear had abandoned Jesus at the time of his trial), went out preaching as an apostle (someone who went into the towns and countryside, to tell others the good news about Jesus) and is recorded (about 8 weeks after Jesus' resurrection), as saying these words to a large crowd:

*"In accordance with his own plan, God had already decided that Jesus would be handed over to you; and you killed him by letting sinful men crucify him. But God raised him from death, setting him free from its power, because it was impossible that death should hold him prisoner."*

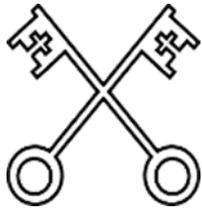
Acts 2

Peter is saying here that God intended Christ's death (and his resurrection) to be part of his plan for the world. Early Christians (many of whom were Jews like Peter) believed that on the cross, Christ was not merely suffering the agony of physical pain, but that this was of his own choice bearing the punishment for the wrongs of the whole world; making the ultimate sacrifice to take away the sins of normal people. Paul, one of the apostles (who was not Jewish, but a Gentile and who converted to Christianity after Jesus' resurrection), stated:

*"I passed on to you what I also received, which is of the greatest importance: that Christ died for our sins, as written in the Scriptures; that he was buried and that - he was raised to life three days later, as written in the Scriptures."*

I Corinthians 15

This may have been difficult for some Gentiles to grasp (although sacrifice was a common feature of many pagan religions), but for Jews the idea of a substitute sacrifice to atone for sins committed by people, was very familiar.

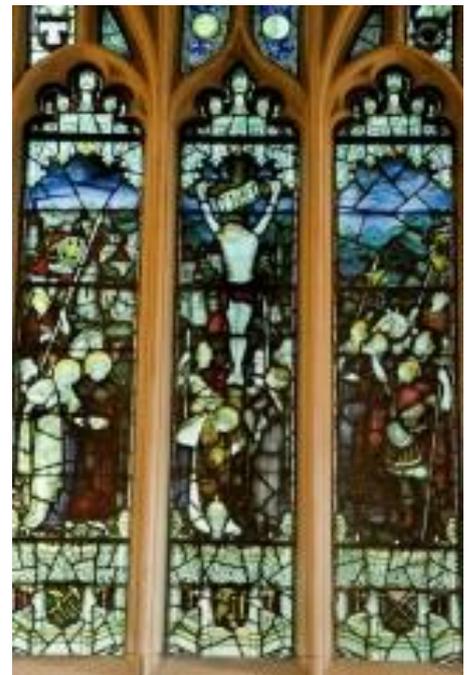


From the time of Exodus onwards 'scapegoats' (pure animals on which were symbolically placed the sins of the people) had been sacrificed or set free to wander in the desert, to take with them the sins of the world. Hence the idea of Jesus being the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" made perfect sense. The wrongs which human kind had perpetrated were met by the love of God in human form in Jesus Christ (Christos is the Greek word for saviour), suffering abuse, physical pain and ultimately paying the penalty with his own body.

So for Christians, Good Friday (God's Friday) is as important as Easter Sunday. In fact, the two are inseparable as the resurrection is the evidence to Christians that Christ conquered sin and death, enabling his followers to do the same through belief in Him. This is the heart of the Christian message and all the Easter symbols- eggs, chicks, flowers and rabbits- only take on meaning as symbols of new life if one realises that Christians believe Jesus's resurrection enables a fresh start, a new life for everyone.

A good Gospel based account of the Easter story for children may be found in the Lion Children's Bible. Please note though, that this book has been designed for Christian children, so is confessional as one would expect; all the same, it is a good starting point for teachers who wish to familiarise themselves with the Easter story.

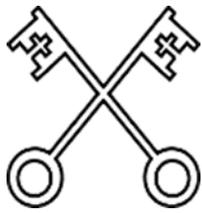
The picture on the right shows the crucifixion scene from the Christian story windows in the South Transept at the Cathedral.



### **The Easter story in the Gospels**

The records of the Easter events are contained in the four Gospels (Gospel means 'the good news'); the accounts of Jesus' life were written down by his followers after his death and resurrection. Each of the Gospels gives a large proportion of their content to dealing with the death and the resurrection of Jesus. It is important to remember that the Gospels were not actually written by journalists reporting the events or by people who took part in what is chronicled. So the accounts in the Gospels of the Easter Story are not diaries or eye witness accounts. At first, because the early Christians believed that Jesus would return again within their lifetime rather than years hence, the memory of Jesus' life and work was kept orally. This reflected the Jewish practice of learning scripture by heart. It was a good few years later that the 'Jesus stories' or 'Jesus Memories' or 'Gospels' were actually written down. There are four recognized gospels and they are known as the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Matthew wrote specifically for those early Christians who were Jews. He emphasises the fulfilment of the



Old Testament promises about the coming of a saviour, a messiah; he shows Jesus to be a great teacher who teaches about God and his kingdom. Mark begins his account with the words "This is the Good News about Jesus..." He presents a simple concise story accessible to all. Luke's Gospel is often referred to as the 'Gospel of love'. He portrays Jesus as the Saviour of Israel (the Jews) and of all humankind. The narrative is very warm and affectionate, emphasising prayer and forgiveness, but above all joy. It was a book written for people who were not necessarily Jewish. John writes about Jesus as "The eternal Word of God, who became human and lived among us." He wants his readers to recognise Jesus as the Son of God; he says about the Jesus stories: "These have been written down in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life."

Each of the four Gospels therefore has a slightly different feel and they do differ in detail, picking out what the author thought to be particularly important; but each of the Gospel writers (known collectively as Evangelists) is recounting the same story and each one wishes to convey that it is a story of the utmost importance and to convince the reader to follow Jesus as the Christ.

### Frequently asked questions

#### Q: Is it possible to re-enact the Easter story?

A: Christian tradition means that the re-telling of the Easter story through role play and drama is acceptable. However, Muslim children should not be asked to represent any prophet through role play or drama (Jesus is recognized by Muslims as the Prophet Isa) and Jewish children may also not wish to take part in such activities.

#### Q: Do Jews accept that Jesus was the Messiah?

A: No. The first followers of Jesus were Jewish, but soon their ranks were swelled with Gentiles; they collectively became known as Christians sometime in the first century CE. The name Christian comes from the Greek word for Messiah which is Christos, Christ. There is a small sect of people with Jewish ethnicity that believe that Jesus was the Messiah. They are known as Messianic Jews.

#### Q: Do Christians worship Jesus?

A: Yes. Christians believe that Jesus is God in human form, or God incarnate. He is understood to be part of the Trinity: God the **Father**, Judge, Ruler, King, Creator; God the **Son**, Teacher, Healer, Helper, Saviour; God the **Holy Spirit**, God's unseen, constant power at work in the world. This is a very difficult concept, but it might help if you think about H<sub>2</sub>O. H<sub>2</sub>O may be experienced and exist in liquid form (water), as vapour (steam), or as a solid (ice). Although H<sub>2</sub>O is experienced differently, when in its different forms, it is still the same unchanged thing. This is like the Christian concept of God as expressed in the Trinity; one and the same, constant, but experienced in different forms.



**Q: Do all Christians celebrate Easter?**

A: Yes. Easter is celebrated by all Christians.

**Q: Why are eggs, rabbits, chicks and lambs associated with Easter?**

A: These are ancient pagan symbols of fertility, new life and spring. The actual word Easter is a corruption of the word Ostara, or Eostre or Eastre, the name of a pagan Goddess of fertility, who prior to Christianity was worshipped across much of Europe. However, all these symbols have now taken on significance symbolically for Christians; eggs are both symbolic of new life and also remind Christians of the stone which was rolled in front of Jesus' tomb. Chicks, lambs and rabbits have all come to represent new life.

**Q: Why do Christians worship on a Sunday and not on the same day as the Jewish Sabbath?**

A: God commanded that Jews should rest on the seventh day: 'Observe the Sabbath day and keep it Holy' (Holy means separate from the ordinary and mundane). The first Christians kept the Jewish Sabbath and also Sunday, they expected Jesus to return again in their lifetime and as he had risen on a Sunday, they expected that this would be the day of his return. On this day they shared bread and wine as Jesus had commanded them to do and when he didn't return, went out in the world for another week to spread the word. As Christianity in the first century CE became a distinct religion, keeping the Sabbath on a Sunday made a clear distinction between the Jewish people (who kept the Sabbath as a weekly festival. from dusk on Friday, until dusk on Saturday) and the followers of Jesus, who by this time were known as Christians and consisted of Gentiles and Jews. The sharing of bread and wine is still part of Christian worship and is now known by many different names, for example: Holy Communion, Eucharist, the Lord's Supper.

**Glossary of terms**

**Ash Wednesday**

This is the first day of Lent, forty days that lead up to Easter, a time for Christians to reflect and fast; traditionally Christians gave up all meat and dairy produce (the last of which were eaten on Shrove Tuesday, better known as Pancake Day). On Ash Wednesday many Christians will go to church and confess their sins and show their willingness to atone (make up) for any wrong doing; in some tradition ash is placed on a penitent's forehead (in some traditions this ash is made by burning palm crosses from the previous year).

**Christ**

The word Christ comes from the Greek word Christos, which means Messiah or God's anointed or chosen one.

**Christians**

Christians are those who believe that Jesus was the Messiah; God in human form; fully God and fully man.

**Good Friday**

Good Friday or God's Friday; the day on which Jesus was crucified and died.



### **Easter Sunday**

This is the day on which Christians commemorate and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Churches hold services and the church which may have been devoid of all colourful things and flowers during Lent in many traditions (for example at the Cathedral) will be decorated in gold and white and adorned with flowers. It is the most joyous day of the year for Christians.

### **Eucharist**

Eucharist is sometimes called Mass, Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper. This is when Christians obey Jesus' commandment to share bread and wine: 'Do this in remembrance of me.' For many Christians this is a symbolic act. For others (Orthodox and Catholic Christians in particular) a great mystery takes place during the Eucharist. Once blessed, 'transubstantiation' occurs and the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.

### **Lent**

Forty days (not including Sundays) before Easter. It reminds Christians of the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness. It is a penitential time, a time when Christians say sorry to God for the things which they have done wrong. Traditionally Christians fast from meat and animal produce during Lent.

### **Maundy Thursday**

The word Maundy comes from the Latin "mandatum", which means commandment. It commemorates the last meal that Jesus shared with his friends (known as his disciples) and the commandment given by Jesus that his disciples should share wine and bread and remember him. It also commemorates Jesus washing his disciples' feet as a servant would; in many churches members of the clergy may do this for members of their congregations.

### **Palm Sunday**

Palm Sunday is the day on which Christians remember the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem prior to the events of Holy Week. In many churches (the Cathedral for example) the congregation receive palm crosses or willow fronds on Palm Sunday; these are burnt the following year on Ash Wednesday and ashes placed in the sign of the cross on believers' foreheads as a sign that they repent of their sins.

### **Sabbath**

For Christians the Sabbath is Sunday; it is a time to remember Jesus and to share in the Eucharist (although not all Christians do this every Sunday and in some churches (such as the Cathedral) it happens more than once a week). The Jewish Shabbat begins at dusk on a Friday and finishes at dusk on a Saturday. In both religious traditions the Sabbath is a time for ceasing work, being with one's family and worshipping God.