

# BRADFORD CATHEDRAL



## Easter

### Stories and Activities





## Setting the Scene

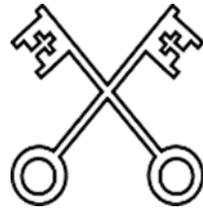
Jesus was born a Jew and probably called Yeshua; Jesus is the Greek translation of his name. He was born in modern day Palestine, in about the year 5CE. In his adult life Jesus was a travelling rabbi or religious teacher; some people recognised him as more than this, they believed that he was the promised Jewish Messiah or Saviour.

Jesus lived in a country which was occupied by the Romans. It was then known as Judea, in what we now know as Israel and Palestine; the Jewish people longed to overthrow the Roman occupiers. The Romans conquered Judea in 63BC. They appointed a Jewish puppet king called Herod; later his son, also called Herod, ruled the country; but in actual fact the Romans were always in overall control.

The Jewish scriptures, the Tanakh, teach that the Jews are God's chosen people (with as a result, certain responsibilities not privileges) and a Messiah, God's anointed or chosen one would come to the Jewish people, to fulfill God's promise to make them a powerful nation and establish God's Kingdom on earth. This hope was particularly strong at the time when Jesus was alive as the Jews wanted to be free from Roman occupation. Many people hoped that Jesus would be the one to set them free from Roman oppression and establish a Jewish Kingdom in their lifetime.

Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish festival of Pesach or Passover. He went with 12 friends or disciples. When he entered the city he was met by crowds waving branches. The crowd was welcoming Jesus as the Messiah. However, some people were disappointed that Jesus was riding on a donkey (a symbol of peace), even though it had been prophesied that the Messiah when he came would do so. The people wanted a man of action, not a man of peace. They expected a soldier or an obvious king riding on a white horse, not a peaceful teacher on a donkey!



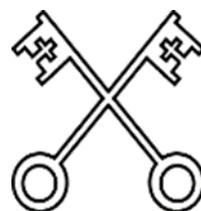


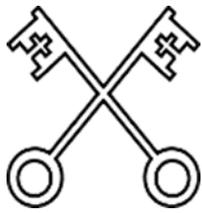
Jesus shared the Passover meal with his disciples in Jerusalem. At this meal he foretold his arrest and death; he gave the commandments that Christians still obey today to eat bread and drink wine to remember him and to love one another.

Some power remained in the hands of the Jewish religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees, who made up the Sanhedrin, or Jewish Council in Jerusalem. They enforced religious laws and customs. Anxious to retain their power, they co-operated with the Romans. The members of the Sanhedrin were worried by Jesus' popularity and saw him as a threat to their tenuous grip on power. As a result they plotted to arrest and charge Jesus with blasphemy under Jewish religious laws, accusing him of claiming to be the Messiah. He was duly arrested after his last meal with his disciples and tried and found guilty by the Sanhedrin, under Jewish law. This charge was then changed to treason in order to interest the Romans: the Sanhedrin claimed that Jesus was styling himself as the 'King of the Jews' and encouraging the people to overthrow Roman rule.

Jesus was taken to the Roman Governor Pilate, who didn't want to charge him; but also didn't want to antagonise the Jewish officials. He symbolically washed his hands of the blood of Jesus. Under pressure he sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion. As it was Passover however, Pilate offered to pardon a prisoner and gave a gathering crowd the choice of two condemned men, Barabbas or Jesus. The crowd chose Barabbas, who was a Zealot- a 'freedom fighter' or 'terrorist' depending on your opinion- imprisoned for fighting the Romans, a man of action not a man of peace. The crowd chose Barabbas, which meant that Jesus' sentence remained the same, death by crucifixion.

Crucifixion was the punishment for rebels e.g. Barabbas and Jesus. It was a brutal punishment. The condemned were beaten by soldiers and were publicly forced to carry their own cross to the place of execution outside the city walls. Bystanders were often forced to carry the cross too. The crucifixion ground was Golgotha, the Place of Skulls.





This is what Jesus experienced. Painkillers were offered, but Jesus refused them. He was eventually nailed to the cross through the wrists and ankles and left to die of heat, thirst, loss of blood, asphyxia or exhaustion – a death which could take days. Crucifixion was designed to be a deterrent and was a horrific way to die.

Jesus was crucified on a Friday, so his death however couldn't be prolonged, it had to be relatively quick so that he could be placed in a tomb, before the Jewish Sabbath commenced at dusk. He was speared in the side by a Roman soldier to hasten his death. Bodies were normally left to rot on the cross (another deterrent), but Jesus' corpse was taken down and placed in a tomb belonging to a man called Joseph of Arimathea. This was probably because the authorities wanted to prevent his followers from stealing the body or making the claim that he wasn't really dead.

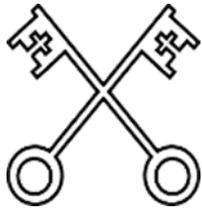
Normally a Jewish burial required the body to be washed and wound in strips of linen with embalming spices placed between them and then the tomb would be sealed. As it was the Sabbath, Jesus' body had to be placed quickly in the tomb until early on Sunday morning, the third day, when it could be prepared properly for burial, when the Sabbath restrictions no longer applied. Roman guards were posted outside the tomb, to deter Jesus' followers from tampering with the tomb.

After the Sabbath had ended, on the third day, some of Jesus' female friends went to the tomb; to their horror they found the stone rolled away from the tomb.



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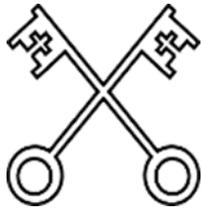


They were frightened at first and then terrified when they realised someone else was there, unsure of what they were witnessing; they then realised that they remembered what Jesus had once said:

*"The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified and on the third day rise again."*

They realised then that Jesus had risen from the dead, just as he promised. They also knew that they had been the first to hear the news of his resurrection; they went to tell Jesus' other friends and disciples the good news.





## Stories for the Classroom

The three stories which follow are fictional re-workings of parts of the Gospel stories, written for children. The first is told through the eyes of a Jewish boy called Saul. The second re-tells the story of the Last Supper through the eyes of Rivkah, a Jewish girl, and the third tells of the experiences of Jesus' special friends or disciples.

### Saul and Benjamin's Story



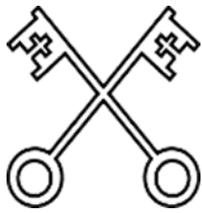
The first I heard about him was when they came for Benjamin, our donkey. I was watching Benjamin eating his supper of hay, beneath the olive tree in the courtyard of our house and they just appeared, some men wanting to borrow Benjamin. They said that they wanted him for their Master. I was very surprised and even more so when my father let them take him without any argument, sending me with them to take care of him. Who was this man, this

'master' I wondered? He must be very special if he could command our most important possession. I was soon to find out.

Benjamin and I had to go to a small house outside the walls of our great city Jerusalem and there we met a stranger, a kind man, who stroked Benjamin's nose and told his friends to bring me figs to eat, and freshly cut grass for Benjamin. This was Yeshua, the Greek-speaking people now call him Jesus. He was very kind, his friends told me that he was a great man. They told stories of how he healed the sick and told wonderful teaching stories and how he taught them to pray to God.

Jesus' friends also said that they very afraid for him, they thought he was in great danger, as he had made many enemies among the powerful Jewish leaders and the Romans (whose armies occupy our land). They were particularly worried, because the





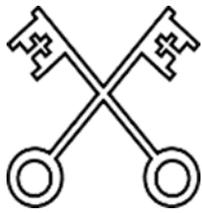
festival of Passover was drawing near and Jesus insisted on entering Jerusalem to celebrate the festival. This was a very dangerous thing to do. They were worried that Jesus would be arrested and imprisoned, or worse still, killed. I could tell that they were also worried about their own safety, they were scared about what was going to happen next.

The day after the Sabbath Jesus asked for Benjamin. His followers covered our little donkey's back in brightly coloured blankets and Jesus sat astride him. Then we set off for the city gates. What a noise, what a commotion! As Jesus entered the city crowds of people gathered to see him, they put palm leaves on the floor and waved them in the air shouting 'Hosanna'. Benjamin walked bravely on through all the noise and waving branches, carrying Jesus with great care, I was squashed in the crush and had to push my way through the crowd to keep up.

It was all so exciting. At last Jesus dismounted from Benjamin and went to talk to the people. Benjamin and I were ushered into a stable, with a room above it, where Jesus and his friends would be staying in Jerusalem. We were left alone to reflect on the things that we had seen and heard. Exhausted, I fell asleep in the warm straw, to the sound of Benjamin's gentle breathing beside me. I woke in the early hours of the morning and one of Jesus' friends brought me bread and fruit to eat and hay for Benjamin. Jesus was in the courtyard as I prepared for the journey home. He placed his hand on my head in a blessing and gently pulled on Benjamin's velvety ears (in the way that all donkeys love) with real affection. Then he turned and walked away, heading for the Temple.

Benjamin and I returned home eager to tell everyone about our adventure; it already seemed like a dream. I never saw him again, but I will never forget him, or the time that he entered Jerusalem in triumph on a donkey.

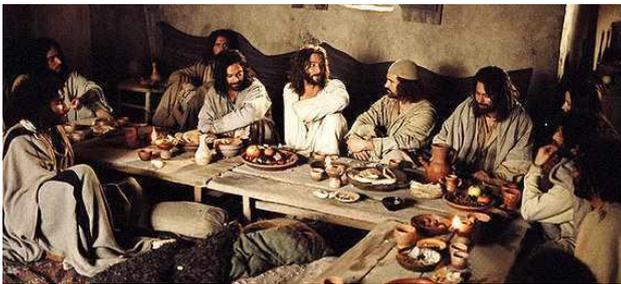




## Rivkah and the Passover Meal

I have just heard the news. He's dead. How can he be dead? He was here last night, in the upstairs room...I saw him, alive, well, sharing the Passover meal with his special friends. How can it be? He was so special. It was all so mysterious. Let me explain.

I am Rivkah (you might say Rebekah), I am nine years old and I live with Abba (my father) and my older sister and brother. We were all together at home yesterday preparing for Passover, when some people came and demanded that we let their 'Master' use the upstairs room to celebrate the Passover feast with his special friends. Abba agreed at once, he was very honoured, these people's 'Master' was the travelling rabbi Yeshua, the one they said was capable of healing the sick. Some even called him the Messiah (God's chosen one), although the Jewish authorities had forbidden this sort of talk.



I had to help my sister prepare the meal, the lamb and unleavened bread; my brother filled the wine jars and then we went too to the upstairs room, to help serve the food and wine. I got to see a lot of what was happening and I could listen to the stories that were being told

It was a strange Passover meal. Jesus' friends seemed scared and excited all at once. They called Jesus 'Master' and yet he washed their feet before the meal, like any servant would. Surely they should have knelt to wash his feet? Jesus was the most amazing person I had ever seen. He didn't look special, he wore ordinary clothes and his beard and hair were worn long, as any rabbi's would be, but there was something about him, he was so kind, so gentle and yet so powerful.

He talked of God and God's Kingdom and made it sound wonderful. He commanded his friends to 'Love one another'. He said this was the greatest mitzvot (commandment) from





God. I should have thought it strange, that he could speak as if he knew God's wishes, but somehow I thought he did know, although I wouldn't dare say so to anybody, particularly not now.

During the meal Jesus took the good fresh unleavened bread that we had baked and did a strange thing. He broke it in two and said 'Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you. Eat this in remembrance of me.' Then he raised his cup, which was filled with the best wine Abba possessed and said 'This is my blood which will be spilt for you. Drink this in remembrance of me'. His friend's drank and ate and promised to do as he said, although they were worried. What could all this mean? Was Jesus going to die?

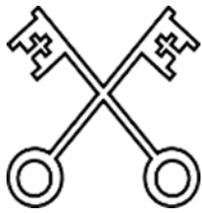
Not long after this, one of them, a man called Judas who looked even more worried than most, left the group of friends early, as if he had some secret business to attend to. I grew very tired, I didn't understand everything that was happening, but I knew I had seen a very important event. It was a mystery, the meaning of what I had seen, but a wonderful mystery. My last memory was of Jesus leaving to go into the garden to pray.

That is the last I saw of this remarkable man and now they say he is dead. Crucified. It seems so sad, so unnecessary. He was such a special person. I wonder what will happen now?

### **Mary's Story**

We were all so very sad. Mary and Salome were sad, Peter and Andrew were sad, James and John were sad and me, Mary, they one they call Magdelene, I was devastated. My eyes were red and sore from crying and I felt all tight and twisted up inside, like you do when you've lost something, or somebody very special. But you see, we had lost somebody very special, Yeshua. The soldiers had come and taken him away. They had beaten him, and laughed at him; they called him 'King of the Jews', they hung him on a cross and then speared him in his side. He died, I found it hard to believe, but he was





dead. We had placed his body in a tomb in a garden near the city walls. I felt all alone and very frightened. What if the soldiers came for me next? What if they arrested Jesus' friends.

It was all so strange. Jesus had never hurt anybody in his life, he had made blind people see, lame people walk (I'd seen it with my own eyes); he had picked up little children in his arms and hugged them. He told us all wonderful stories that God wanted us to love each other. Jesus always told people how much God loved them, however angry or miserable they felt. Miserable? I had never been so miserable. Jesus was dead, his body in a grave, a great, great rock that had been rolled across the entrance. He was gone, I knew I had to accept that I wouldn't walk or talk with him ever again.

On the Saturday night after Jesus' execution I couldn't sleep, I paced the room like a caged tiger and then sat wrapped in my cloak thinking about what I needed to do. The only thing I could do now was to make sure that Yeshua's body was properly laid to rest in a grave, in the way that it should be according to Jewish laws, so that's what I decided to do.

On the other side of the city my friends Mary and Salome were thinking the same thing; they crept quietly from the house in which they were staying and headed towards my lodgings. It was the day after Shabbat (the Sabbath), the first day of the week and as I

joined them in the street, the sun was just creeping over the city walls, welcoming in the new week.

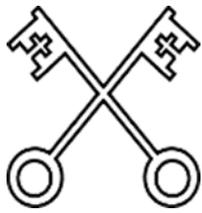


If we hadn't been so sad, we might have noticed how beautiful it all was, how new and fresh it looked, but we could think of nothing except the



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distressing tasks we had to perform; the last things we could do for Yeshua.

We made our way down the empty streets, carrying with us precious spices and winding cloths and worrying: Yeshua's body had been placed quickly in the cave-like tomb and a large rock had been rolled in front of the entrance. 'Who will roll away the rock for us?' we said to each other. 'Will we be able to manage? What if the soldiers are still there? Will they let us into the tomb?'

As we got closer to the place, something felt, well, not quite right. It's hard to explain, but it was a bit different, something had changed. The garden where the tomb was looked beautiful in the morning sunshine, it was peaceful- and then we saw it. We stopped in our tracks, Salome screamed, Mary nearly dropped the spice jar, I was just frozen to the spot. The rock wasn't there, it was no longer covering the entrance to Yeshua's grave. It had had been rolled away. 'They've taken him!' I cried. Together we rushed towards the tomb.

I was right. We peered inside and to our distress, the tomb was empty, there was just the sheet that his body had been hastily wrapped in on the Friday, before dusk. The tomb was quite, quite empty. Salome began to cry, Mary put her arm around our friend to comfort her and then I saw him, a young man in a white robe. He was standing, smiling at us, three hearbroken women. Yeshua had been taken and he thought it was funny. I was more angry now than scared. 'Where is he?' I asked, my voice shaking, 'What have you done with my Master's body?' Tears of anger and sadness flowed down my cheeks.

Then he spoke and he said quite kindly, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?'



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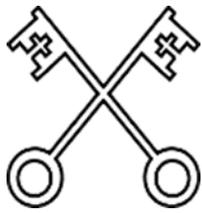


'If you have carried him away,' I said, 'tell me where you have put him.' It just seemed so important to know where he was; then he spoke my name, 'Mary', I couldn't believe it. I cried out 'rabboni!' (teacher!). It was Jesus, alive and talking to me. 'Do not hold on to me,' he said; 'instead go to my brothers and sisters and tell them what you have seen and what I have said. I am ascending soon to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God,' and then he was gone.

Mary and Salome were in shock, we hugged each other close and then we went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' I said, 'He is alive! We are not alone, he has not left us, he is among us!' At first they laughed in disbelief, then they remembered that Yeshua had promised he would return on the third day (just like it said the Messiah would in the Jewish scriptures) and that he would go on loving us and helping us. He had said that he would always be with us; he had not lied! Some like the twin Thomas, were less ready to believe that Jesus was alive and with us ...that is until they saw him for themselves, later, then they believed.

Me? I knew what we had seen in the tomb, what we had felt in the garden, I knew who had spoken to me. I had no doubts, Salome and Mary likewise; the beautiful morning was like a new creation, the world was new and fresh and Yeshua, who the whole world would come to know as Jesus, was still with us. Salome, Mary and myself made our way back through the now bustling city streets, hugging this knowledge to ourselves and saying to each other 'Hallelujah! He is risen!'





## Activities and ideas for the classroom

Easter is a national holiday, in Britain and other countries, and it is also celebrated as a secular (non-religious) festival, so most people are aware of Easter in one form or another. However, the majority of children in schools will not be Christian, so it is important that teachers try to help children to understand what Easter means to Christians. Easter is not just about Easter eggs and the Easter Bunny, although these are useful teaching aids. There is more information about Easter around the world in our booklet with that title.

## Early Years

All the children can think about new life and the joy and happiness of the returning spring; read the Very Hungry Caterpillar– sometimes things that are still and lifeless, actually are alive and have a new beginning; plant an Easter garden in the classroom or playground; paint eggs, plan an Easter egg hunt, using clues from the Easter story.

## KS1 and KS2

### 1. Lent

**Themes:** sacrifice; prayer and saying sorry.

- Make pancakes and other festive food for Shrove Tuesday or Fat Tuesday
- Discuss how this is celebrated in Caribbean and South American countries with Mardi Gras (French for Fat Tuesday) and Carnival (from the Latin carne vale, 'farewell to meat')
- Watch Carnival videos; make carnival masks and costumes; use dance and movement to express carnival feelings.
- Explore why people celebrate the beginning of Lent in such a way in some countries through circle time discussion.
- Make a list of all the children's favourite food things. Which would it be hardest to give up for Lent? Why?
- Try to 'fast' from one thing for a day e.g: milk, or no pudding at lunchtime.





## 2. Palm Sunday and Holy Week

Share Benjamin and Saul's Story

The children could make palm crosses

## 3. Maundy Thursday

Share Rivkah's Story

Make and taste unleavened bread

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/user/1159751/recipe/authentic-unleavened-bread>

## 4. Good Friday

Write 'I was there' stories

## 5. Easter Sunday

Read Mary's Story

Make and decorate real Easter eggs, Easter Trees and make an Easter garden.

Find out and make a book about Easter around the world.

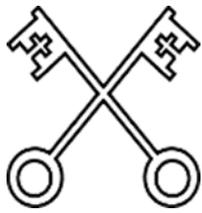
## 6. General:

Christian children could perform an Easter drama for other children to watch; role play one of the fictional stories.

Make and taste Hot Cross Buns <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/hot-cross-buns>

and Simnel Cake <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/easter-simnel-cake>





## How to Dye Eggs for Easter

This activity needs *close adult supervision at all times*.

In many countries hard boiled eggs are dyed different colours, or decorated with beautiful patterns. It is possible to dye egg shells different colours, if you hard boil them in water containing different things. Below is a list of what things turn the shells different colours.

Spinach Leaf	=	Green
Beetroot	=	Red
Tea Bag	=	Dark Brown
Onion Skin	=	Yellow / Gold

