

## WHY DO CHRISTIANS CELEBRATE THE EASTER EVENT?

Christians celebrate Easter to commemorate Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave. Easter is a season that makes us mindful of our sinful nature and the forgiveness of God. It expresses joy and hope, as a reminder of God's love for people.

### Preparing for Easter

#### ***What is Lent?***

Lent is the time period before Easter when Christians reflect on their lives as a holy gift from God. It is like looking into a mirror and seeing who you really are. People usually take an introspection of their lives and go into a time of fasting, where they give up certain foods, beverages and habits to live a clean and holy life. During this time, many people experience a change of heart. Many people do good deeds to others, to show the love of God for people. The duration of Lent is 40 days and 40 nights.

*The celebration of Easter is connected to the celebration of Passover.  
Open your Bible and read about Passover in Exodus 12.*

#### ***What is Ash Wednesday?***

In most churches, the Easter events start with Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday is also known as the Day of Ashes.

The ashes symbolise both death and repentance, in order to begin Lent in a sincere, humble way. This act allows people to reflect on their sins during the time of Lent, before Easter takes place.

Where do the ashes come from? Palm leaves from the previous year's Palm Sunday service or mass are burnt, the ashes are mixed with olive oil and used to make ash marks on the foreheads of the people, in the sign of a cross. This is done while uttering the words, "From dust you came and from dust, you will return."

We do not find the event of Ash Wednesday in the Bible, but churches celebrate it to remind people that ashes are often used as a symbol of guilt for sin or mourning during a time of sorrow in the Bible.

*Note: Not all churches celebrate Ash Wednesday.*

*Read the following: 2 Samuel 13:19; Esther 4:1; Jeremiah 6:26; Ezekiel 27:30; Daniel 9:3; Matthew 11:21.*

#### ***What is Palm Sunday and Holy Week?***

Palm Sunday is the last Sunday before Easter when Christians commemorate the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and his praise as the Son of God. Palm Sunday is the event that marks the end of Lent and the start of Holy Week, the time when the passion, crucifixion, death and resurrection of Christ are celebrated.

*The events of Palm Sunday are found in the four Gospels. Read Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19.*

## Celebrating Easter

### **Good Friday and Easter Sunday**

Good Friday is one of the most important days in the Christian calendar and it is commemorated by millions of Christians worldwide, together with Easter Sunday. On these days, Christians remember the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as the core of their faith.

*Read the account of Jesus' crucifixion, burial and resurrection in the following Bible passages: Matthew 27:27–28:10; Mark 15:21–16:11; Luke 23:26–24:12; John 19:16–20:18.*

### **The Easter Event is full of symbolism**

The term symbolism simply means that something is being used to convey meaning related to something else. In the Easter Event, the following symbols are used to celebrate Jesus as our Saviour and our faith in God.

### **Holy Communion**

The night before the Roman soldiers arrested Jesus, he shared a meal with his disciples. This meal is also called the Lord's Supper or the Last Supper. The supper consisted of bread and a cup of wine. During this last supper, Jesus blessed and broke the bread and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in memory of me." He then took the cup, blessed it and said to them, "This cup is God's new covenant sealed with my blood, which is poured out for you."

The Last Supper became an important symbol of celebrating our faith in Jesus. The eating of bread and drinking of wine or grape juice (Communion) became an important remembrance of Jesus' death on the cross, his resurrection from the tomb and his forgiveness of our sins.

*Read Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-23; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.*

### **The crown of thorns**

The crown of thorns, evidently, served a double function as intended by the Roman soldiers: to mock and humiliate Jesus with a misrepresentation of royal honour and to increase the physical torture that was inflicted upon him. The crown of thorns was not gently laid upon his head; it was forced down with cruel violence.

*Read Matthew 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-20; John 19:2-4.*

### **The wooden cross**

In ancient times, crucifixion was a well-known practice of executing persons in the most horrific way possible. Crucifixion took place outside the city and the accused had to carry his own cross to the place of crucifixion.

The cross is not only a symbol of Jesus' death, it is also a symbol of Jesus' life, of how he lived. Death on the cross is a shameful death and, therefore, a symbol of the curse of the sin that Jesus bore on our behalf. It is also a symbol of Christ's victory over evil.

Jesus invites his followers to take up their burdens and problems, and follow him. He knows the heaviness of carrying a cross, therefore, he knows how to help people when they feel they cannot cope with their life situations.

*Read Matthew 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; 14:27; Romans 6:6; 1 Peter 2:24.*

### ***The tomb***

Jesus was in the tomb for three days. Early on the third day, Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the wife of Cleopas, went to the tomb (grave) to balm the body of Jesus. The women found the stone rolled away from the entrance of the tomb. They went in and could not find the body of the Lord Jesus inside it. While they were standing there, an angel appeared to them and said they should not be afraid. He told them that he knew they were looking for Jesus and that he was not there; he has been raised.

The message of the empty tomb is God's promise that he is going to restore this physical world. The empty tomb also symbolises our hope for eternity.

*Read Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-10.*

### ***The lamb that was killed***

Why do we refer to Jesus as the Lamb that was killed? Let us go back to the Old Testament when God punished Adam and Eve because they were disobedient. The bad behaviour of Adam and Eve caused sin to enter our world and brought with it the curse of death. The crown of thorns on Jesus' head became the curse of sin and death, because he took our sins upon himself. He hung on a wooden cross. Why? Because through his death, he took our curse of sin and death upon himself. Through this loving act of Jesus, the whole world was set free from sin.

*Read Genesis 3:1-24.*

Further in Genesis, we read about how God tested Abraham's faith. He told Abraham to kill his son as an offering to God. The Israelites would kill a lamb and offer its blood to God, so that God could forgive their sins. At the point of killing his son, Isaac, God spoke to Abraham and told him not to kill his son as an offering. When Abraham looked around him, there was a ram with thick horns stuck in the bush. He then offered this ram as a sacrifice to God, rather than his son. Later, Jesus became the slain lamb.

*Read Genesis 22:1-14.*

### ***The seven words that Jesus spoke from the cross***

Jesus spoke seven times from the cross, which is called the "Seven Words from the Cross". During this time, his body was so damaged that people at the foot of the cross thought he was dead. Then, all of a sudden, Jesus started to speak.

**First word:** To God: "Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing." Luke 23:34

**Second word:** To one of the criminals on the cross: "I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me." Luke 23:43

**Third word:** To Mary, his mother: "He is your son ... she is your mother." John 19:26-27

**Fourth word: To God:** "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?" Mark 15:34

**Fifth word:** "I am thirsty." John 19:28

**Sixth word:** "It is finished." John 19:30

**Seventh word:** "Father! In your hands I place my spirit!" Luke 23:46

Lent and Easter are times of great significance for Christians. It is the celebration of Jesus Christ who was crucified and died for our sins; he who conquered death, rose from the grave and gives us life. Like the early Christians, we greet each other with joy on Easter Sunday with: "The Lord is risen; he is risen indeed!"

*The complete Easter story can be read in Matthew 26–28; Mark 14–16;  
Luke 22–24 and John 18–20.*