

What is Easter?

Easter is the most important Christian festival. Christians are followers of Jesus Christ who lived about 2000 years ago in a country called Palestine. They believe that Jesus was the son of God. At Easter time Christians remember the last week of Jesus' life.

How did Easter get its name?

One belief is that Easter got its name from the Goddess of Spring called Eostre who some people worshipped long before Jesus was born. At that time it was thought that the sun died in winter and was born again in spring when days would lengthen and the sun's power would return. In Europe, Eostre was honoured as the bringer of spring.

When and how long is Easter?

Easter Day is always on a Sunday, but the date varies from year to year unlike Christmas which is always on 25 December. Many years ago Christians decided that Easter Day should be always be on the Sunday following the first full moon after the first day of Spring on 21 March. This means that Easter can be as early as 22 March or as late as 25 April. For this reason Easter is called a movable feast.

In fact not only is Easter a movable feast but it happens on different dates depending on where in the world you live. In western churches such as in the United Kingdom, Easter will be celebrated on 08 April, 2012 whereas in Eastern Orthodox churches the date will be 15 April, 2012. The reason for this is that in the west the date is calculated using the Gregorian calendar which is different to the Julian calendar which is used in the east.

Shrove Tuesday

The long build up to Easter is called Lent. The day before Lent begins is called Shrove Tuesday. 'Shrove' means being forgiven for wrong-doings. It happens on a different date each year depending on when Easter is. This year Shrove Tuesday was on 21 February, 2012.

Another name for Shrove Tuesday is Pancake Day. Long ago this was a day for feasting and having a good time. People would go to church to confess the bad things they had done and would be 'shriven' or forgiven before the start of Lent. Since rich foods such as eggs were forbidden during Lent, one way of using them up would be to make pancakes.



Many people still make pancakes on Shrove Tuesday and in some parts of the UK people run in pancake races. This custom grew up because of the legend which dates from well over 500 years ago in 1445. On Shrove Tuesday one woman was still making her pancakes as the church bells rang out. Rather than be late she took her frying pan and pancake with her.

One of the most famous pancake races is held in Olney, Buckinghamshire. The race has been held for hundreds of years. Competitors need to be women over 18 years of age who must wear a skirt, an apron and head covering. They have to toss their pancake on the start line and again at the finish to prove they haven't lost it.

In France and the United States Pancake day is called Mardi Gras which means 'Fat' or 'Grease Tuesday'.

When is Lent?

Lent lasts for 40 days (not including Sundays). It is the time when Christians prepare for Easter by thinking of the things they have done wrong. It is a solemn time which reminds them of the time in Jesus' life when, after giving up his work as a carpenter, he began to teach people about God. Jesus prepared for this by spending 40 days without food alone in the desert.

Lent used to be a time for fasting or going without food as Jesus had done. Nowadays many people give up a favourite thing they enjoy like sweets and often give money to charity.

The colour purple is linked to Lent. In some churches the altar is covered with a purple cloth, the pulpit has a purple 'fall' and the vicar's garments are purple.

Purple is chosen for two reasons. One it is the colour associated with mourning and so it helps Christians think about the sadness of Jesus' death. The other reason is that purple is the colour linked to royalty and so it celebrates Christ's coming as a King.



Altar Frontal

Ash Wednesday

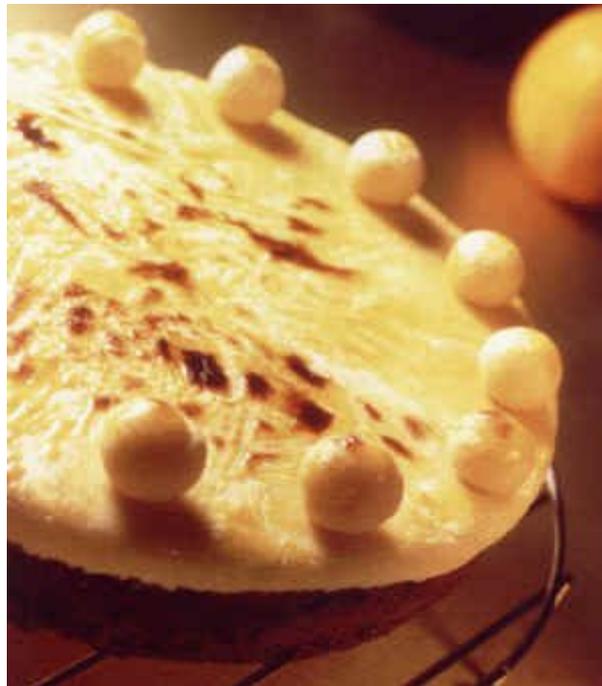
The first day of Lent is known as Ash Wednesday. Ashes are something that are left when something is burned. Christians use them as a symbol of being sorry for things they have done wrong and want to get rid of forever. In many Christian churches there are special services where the vicar or priest makes the shape of a cross with ash on the forehead of each person. The ashes come from last year's palm crosses which are burned and mixed with holy water.

Mothering Sunday

Mothering Sunday is on the fourth Sunday of Lent. It is often called Mother's Day in Britain. However it has no connection with the American festival which is also known by the same name.

On this day children often give their mothers gifts and cards as a way of saying thank you for their hard work. In church, prayers are said for mothers at a special service.

In the past girls who worked as domestic servants were given the day off work to visit their mothers. They often took a simnel cake as a present. Simnel cake is especially associated with Mothering Sunday. It is a fruit cake with two layers of almond paste. On top there are eleven balls of marzipan, one for each faithful disciple, Judas not being included as he betrayed Jesus.



Source: www.showcook.com

Photographer: Franz Lauinger

The last week of Lent is known as [Holy Week](#).

Holy Week

The last week of Lent is known as Holy Week. It is when Christians remember the last week of Jesus' life and is the most important time in the Christian year. There are many church services and processions.

Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday marks the start of Holy Week. It reminds Christians of the journey Jesus made into Jerusalem on a donkey. Jesus was going there to celebrate the Jewish festival of Passover (Pesach). Jesus chose a donkey to show that he had come in peace. On that day many people welcomed Jesus by shouting, waving palm branches and throwing branches down in the path of the donkey. They hoped that Jesus was the Saviour who the Bible had promised.

Palm Sunday is both a happy and sad day. Christians are happy because they are singing praises to Jesus but also sad because they know Jesus died less than a week after his arrival in Jerusalem.

In churches on Palm Sunday Christians are given small palm crosses made from palm leaves. Left over palm crosses are kept to be burnt so that their ashes can be used in a special service on the first day of Lent (Ash Wednesday) the following year. This ash is put on people's foreheads.

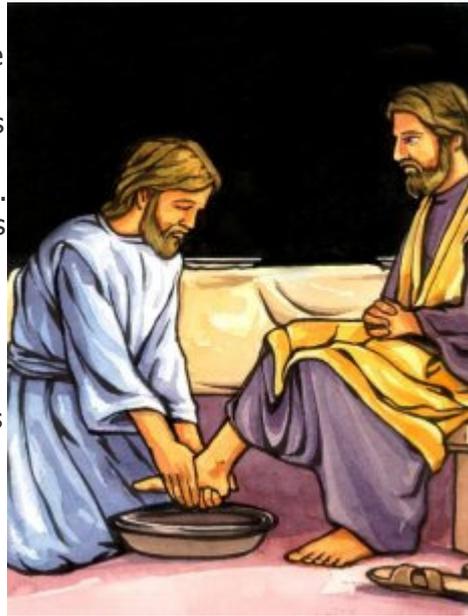


Maundy Thursday

On the night before his death Jesus had a final meal with his friends. This meal was one of the festival meals for Passover. Before the meal Jesus did something which surprised his friends. He washed the feet of every person, a task which was normally done by a servant. By doing this he wanted to show his followers that they should love one another in humble ways.

Later in the meal which is known to Christians as 'The Last Supper', Jesus passed round bread and wine. He said the bread was his body broken for them and the wine was his blood shed for them. He was telling them that he was going to die and that when they share bread and wine they should remember him. Christians share bread and wine at their church services all year round, but it is even

more special on Maundy Thursday. Jesus also told his friends that they should love one another. It was later on this night that Judas betrayed Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.



As a way of showing love for others, there was a custom in England before 1689 for the king or queen to wash the feet of the poor in Westminster Abbey every Maundy Thursday. They also gave them gifts of food and clothing. In Queen Victoria's time men received clothing, shoes and stockings and women 35 shillings.

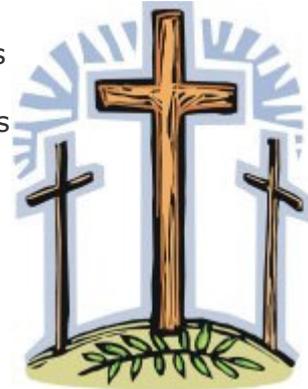
Today our Queen does not wash feet or give clothing. Instead she gives out something called Maundy money, which is specially made for the occasion. In 2012 this is given to 86 male and 86 female pensioners, because she is 86 years old this year. The coins are given in special white and red leather purses. The white purse contains silver Maundy coins matching the Queen's age in pence - 86p, while the red purse contains ordinary money. The service takes place at a different cathedral or abbey each year and people are chosen to receive the money because of good work they have done in their community.

Good Friday

On Good Friday Christians remember the day that Jesus was killed on the cross. He was nailed to a wooden cross by Roman soldiers. This is the reason why the cross is an important sign for Christians today. There are crosses in churches and many Christians wear a cross on a chain. At Easter people eat hot cross buns which have a cross shape on the top.



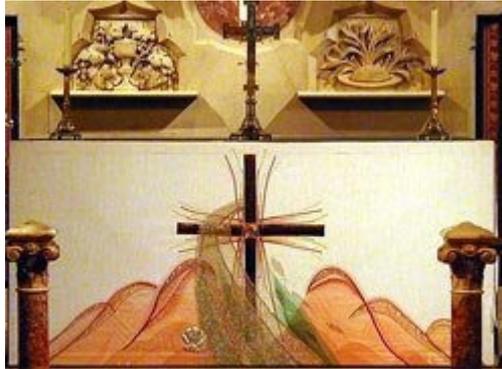
Good Friday is a sad day and churches never have flowers or decorations on this day. The church is left dark and there is just a simple cross on the altar. It is known as Good Friday because Christians believe that Jesus gave up his life for the good of everyone.



The Crucifixion is remembered in Jerusalem even today. Large crowds of Christians take the same path as Jesus. In some countries people act out the story of Jesus' last day while others watch and think about the events which happened long ago.

Easter Sunday

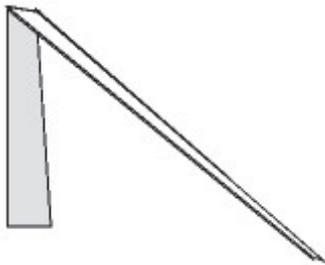
Easter Sunday is a happy day for Christians because they believe that Jesus rose from the dead on this day. They believe that Jesus' resurrection or coming alive shows that death is not the end of everything. Many go to church to thank God for Jesus' life. Church bells are rung and churches are decorated with flowers such as white lilies which are associated with Easter. The colours in the church change to white or gold which are thought to be the best colours.



How to make a paper 'Palm' Cross



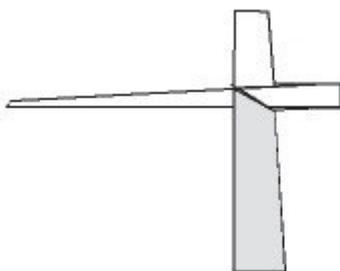
Take a strip of paper that is about 2 feet long and 1/2" wide. Cut one end of the strip so that it tapers into a point. Hold the paper upright, so the tapered end points toward the ceiling.



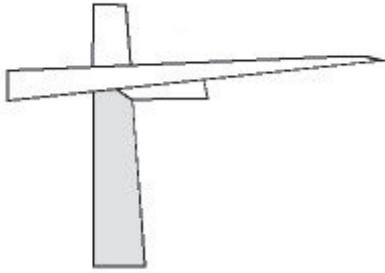
Then bend the top end down and toward you so that the bend is about 5 or 6 inches from the bottom of the paper.



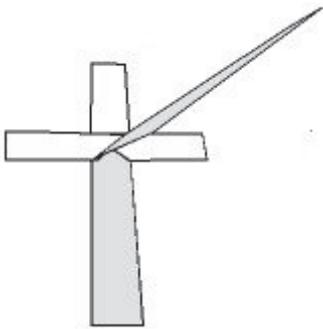
About a third of the way from the bend you just made, twist the section you've pulled down to the right, forming a right angle.



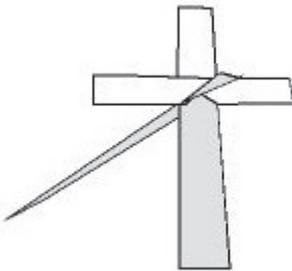
About an inch and a half away from the "stem" of the cross, bend this arm of the paper back behind the stem so that it is now facing to your left. Make the bend at a good length to form the right arm of the Cross.



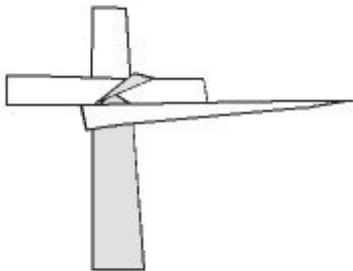
Folding that same section at a point that equals the length on the right side, bend it on the left side and bring the end forward over what is now the front of the cross.



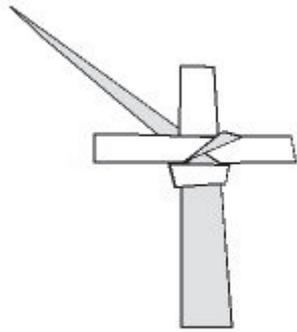
From the very center of the Cross, fold that arm up and to the upper right (in a "northeast" direction) so that it can wrap around where the upright post of the Cross and the right arm intersect.



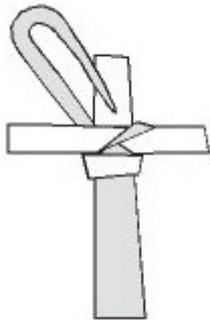
Fold this down and to the left behind the Cross...



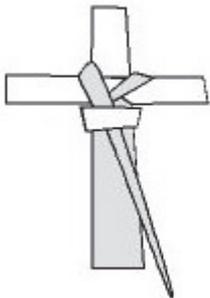
...and then fold it toward the right so that it is parallel and under the transverse arms of the Cross.



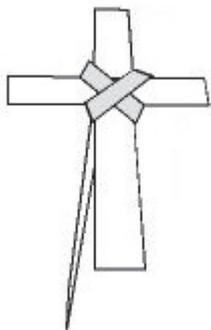
Bring it up behind the Cross again, this time folding it up toward the "northwest" direction.



Tuck the tapered end into the transverse section you made in step 7...



...and pull through.



Turn the Cross over; this side will be the front. Trim the tapered end if necessary. The end can be secured with a small piece of sellotape.



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ASH WEDNESDAY

MAUNDY THURSDAY

PALM SUNDAY

MOTHERING SUNDAY

GOOD FRIDAY

EASTER SUNDAY

SHROVE TUESDAY

LENT