

Walking through Holy Week...

PRAYER
STREAM

Living the Mission of Jesus

...with **Matthew**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, since early days Christians have observed with great devotion the time of our Lord's passion and resurrection and prepared for this by a season of penitence and fasting.

By carefully keeping these days, Christians take to heart the call to repentance and the assurance of forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel, and so grow in faith and in devotion to our Lord.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of this Holy Week, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy word.

God of glory,
by the raising of your Son
you have broken the chains of death and hell:
fill your Church with faith and hope;
for a new day has dawned
and the way to life stands open
in our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Day 8: Easter Day - Resurrection!

Read: Matthew 28:1-15

On Easter Day we reach the culmination of Passion Week. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event, of the Christian faith. The very foundation of all Christian doctrine hinges on the truth of this account.

Early Sunday morning several women (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna, and Salome are all mentioned in the Gospel accounts) went to the tomb and discovered that the large stone covering the tomb's entrance had been rolled away. An angel announced, "Don't be afraid! I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen." (Matthew 28:5-6)

On the day of his resurrection, Jesus Christ made at least five appearances. Mark's Gospel says the first person to see him was Mary Magdalene. Jesus also appeared to Peter, to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and later that day to all of the disciples except Thomas, while they were gathered in a house for prayer.

The eyewitness accounts in the Gospels provide undeniable evidence that the resurrection of Jesus Christ happened. 2,000 years after his death, followers of Christ still flock to see the empty tomb, one of the strongest proofs that Jesus Christ actually did rise from the dead.

(NB: The exact order of events during Holy Week is debated by Bible scholars.

This timeline represents an approximate outline of major events.)

Day 1: Palm Sunday's Triumphant Entry

Read: Matthew 21:1-17

Beginning with Palm Sunday we'll walk the steps of Jesus Christ this Holy Week visiting each of the major events that occurred during our Saviour's week of passion.

On the Sunday before his death Jesus began his trip to Jerusalem, knowing that soon he would lay down his life for the sins of the world. Nearing the village of Bethphage, he sent two of his disciples ahead to look for a donkey with its unbroken colt. Jesus instructed the disciples to untie the animals and bring them to him.

Then Jesus sat on the young donkey and slowly, humbly, made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, fulfilling the ancient prophecy in Zechariah 9.9 The crowds welcomed him by waving palm branches in the air and shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David ! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

When Jesus arrived at the Temple he found the courts full of corrupt money changers. He began overturning their tables and clearing the Temple, saying, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves." (Luke 19.46)

On Palm Sunday, Jesus and his disciples spent the night in Bethany, a town about two miles east of Jerusalem. In all likelihood, Jesus stayed in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

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Day 2: Monday Jesus Clears the Temple

Read: Matthew 21:18—22

Today, we continue tracing the footsteps of Jesus, on Monday morning he returned with his disciples to Jerusalem. Along the way, Jesus cursed a fig tree because it had failed to bear fruit. Some scholars believe this cursing of the fig tree represented God's judgment on the spiritually dead religious leaders of Israel. Others believe the symbolism extended to all believers, demonstrating that genuine, living faith is more than just outward religiosity. True faith must bear spiritual fruit in a person's life.

On Monday evening Jesus stayed in Bethany again, probably in the home of his friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

Day 7: Saturday in the Tomb

Read: Matthew 27:62-66

Jesus' body lay in the tomb where it was guarded by Roman soldiers throughout the day on Saturday, which was the Sabbath. When the Sabbath ended at 6 p.m.

"For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. He paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God." (1 Peter 1:18-19)

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Day 6: Good Friday - Trial, Crucifixion, Death, Burial

Read: Matthew 27:1-61

Today we'll trace Jesus' steps on Good Friday, the most difficult day of Passion Week. Christ's journey turned treacherous and acutely painful in these final hours leading to his death.

According to Scripture, Judas Iscariot, the disciple who had betrayed Jesus, was overcome with remorse and hanged himself early Friday morning.

Meanwhile, before the third hour (9 a.m.), Jesus endured the shame of false accusations, condemnation, mockery, beatings, and abandonment. After multiple unlawful trials, he was sentenced to death by crucifixion, one of the most horrible and disgraceful methods of capital punishment. Before Christ was led away, soldiers spit on him, tormented and mocked him, and pierced him with a crown of thorns. Then Jesus carried his own cross to Calvary where, again, he was mocked and insulted as Roman soldiers nailed him to the wooden cross.

Jesus spoke seven final statements from the cross. His first words were, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34). His last were, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:46)

Then, about the ninth hour (3 p.m.), Jesus breathed his last and died. By 6 p.m. Friday evening, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, took Jesus' body down from the cross and lay it in a tomb.

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Day 3: Tuesday in Jerusalem, Mount of Olives

Read: Matthew 21:23-25:46

Today our journey with Jesus through Holy Week takes us back to the Temple in Jerusalem and then to the Mount of Olives.

On Tuesday morning, Jesus and his disciples returned to Jerusalem. They passed the withered fig tree on their way, and Jesus taught them about faith.

At the Temple, the religious leaders aggressively challenged Jesus' authority, attempting to ambush him and create an opportunity for his arrest. But Jesus evaded their traps and pronounced harsh judgment on them: "Blind guides! ... For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness...Snakes! Sons of vipers! How will you escape the judgment of hell?" (Matthew 23:24-33)

Tuesday afternoon Jesus left the city and went with his disciples to the Mount of Olives, which overlooks Jerusalem due east of the Temple. Here Jesus gave them an elaborate prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age. He taught in parables using symbolic language about end times events, including his Second Coming and the final judgment.

Scripture indicates that Tuesday was the day Judas Iscariot negotiated with the Sanhedrin to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16).

After a tiring day of confrontation and warnings about the future, once again, Jesus and the disciples stayed the night in Bethany.

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Day 4: Silent Wednesday

Read: Matthew 26:1-16

The Bible doesn't say what the Lord did on Wednesday of Passion Week. Scholars speculate that after two exhausting days in Jerusalem, Jesus and his disciples spent this day resting in Bethany in anticipation of the Passover.

Bethany was about two miles east of Jerusalem. Here Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha lived. They were close friends of Jesus, and probably hosted him and the disciples during these final days in Jerusalem.

Just a short time previously, Jesus had revealed to the disciples, and the world, that he had power over death by raising Lazarus from the grave. After seeing this incredible miracle, many people in Bethany believed that Jesus was the Son of God and put their faith in him. Also in Bethany just a few nights earlier, Lazarus' sister Mary had lovingly anointed the feet of Jesus with expensive perfume.

While we can only speculate, it's fascinating to consider how our Lord Jesus spent this final quiet day with his dearest friends and followers.

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Day 5: Maundy Thursday, The Last Supper

Read: Matthew 26:17-75

From Bethany Jesus sent Peter and John ahead to the Upper Room in Jerusalem to make the preparations for the Passover Feast. That evening after sunset, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples as they prepared to share in the Passover. By performing this humble act of service, Jesus demonstrated by example how they were to love one another. Today, many churches practice foot-washing ceremonies as a part of their Maundy Thursday services.

As the Lamb of God, Jesus was about to fulfil the meaning of the Passover by giving his body to be broken and his blood to be shed in sacrifice, freeing us from sin and death. During this Last Supper, Jesus established the Lord's Supper, or Communion, instructing his followers to continually remember his sacrifice by sharing in the elements of bread and wine:

"And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.' " (Luke 22:19-20)
Later Jesus and the disciples left the Upper Room and went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed in agony to God the Father. Luke's Gospel says "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (Luke 22:44)

Late that evening in Gethsemane, Jesus was betrayed with a kiss by Judas Iscariot and arrested by the Sanhedrin. He was taken to the home of Caiaphas, the High Priest, where the whole council had gathered to begin making their case against Jesus.

Meanwhile, in the early morning hours as Jesus' trial was starting, Peter denied knowing his Master three times before the cock crowed.