



A guide to the Holy Week Services

Holy Week is a very special time in the calendar of the church. It's the time where we remember Jesus' passion – his journey into Jerusalem, his arrest, death and resurrection. It's a solemn time, but even in the midst of the solemnity, it's a time to remember that we know the end of the story – Jesus rises from the dead! This booklet is a guide to the special services we would usually have this week, if not for the Covid-19 Pandemic. These services are on **Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Day (including the Easter Vigil)** – this week we call **Holy Week**. Whilst some aspects of these services may seem familiar to you, some bits are unusual, and we do them differently to the rest of the year. We hope that having this booklet will help you as you journey through Holy Week to understand some of the deep symbolism that happens this week. May God's richest blessings be with you as you go.

PALM SUNDAY

Holy Week begins on the Sunday before Easter, known as **Palm Sunday**. Palm Sunday is named after the palm branches the Jews used to praise Jesus as he entered Jerusalem at the start of his Passion. Palms were an important symbol in Jewish history, symbolising victory over oppressors. Jesus entered Jerusalem during Passover, when the Jews were celebrating their freedom from Egyptian bondage – and longing for freedom from Roman control. The palm branches symbolised what they hoped for from Jesus – someone who would liberate them.

We begin our Palm Sunday service with a procession to remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Usually, the congregation of St Alban's meet at the community centre to begin with, and we start the service by blessing the palm branches and crosses we will carry. We ask that they would be to us a sign of Jesus' victory – to remind us that even though He entered Jerusalem to die, He also rose again, gaining victory over sin and death. We will then hear the story of Jesus entry into Jerusalem from the scriptures before we begin our procession to the church building, singing hymns on the way.

In some ways, the procession is a celebration – remembering the crowds praising Jesus – but it's one with a real sense of foreboding, as we know what will come next. Once we get to church, the mood changes. We begin our Eucharist as normal but note the words we will use in our collect will talk about being brought closer to Christ in his suffering – which is what we want in Holy Week – to understand more clearly both his suffering and his resurrection.

The readings and the sermon are also different. The first reading is read as normal, and then we hear the Passion story. This is the account of Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion. We will have the whole story in a dramatic form with the whole congregation taking part, and there won't be a sermon, because the messages in the story are so powerful. We remember as we hear it that the same crowd shouting "hosanna" on Sunday were shouting "crucify him!" by Friday.

The Palm Crosses we take home are a reminder of that – that the very crowds praising Jesus and waving their palm branches were calling for his death.

We share the Eucharist together as we would normally do, but the words of all the prayers will be reminding us about Palm Sunday and about Jesus' suffering and resurrection. As we go into the week from this mass, we meet again on Maundy Thursday...



MAUNDY THURSDAY

Maundy Thursday begins the Triduum – three days from Maundy Thursday to the Easter Vigil.

These three days are one continuous service (with breaks) so we don't start or end each day's service in the same way we would normally. It makes the endings feel disjointed – but part of its disjointedness reminds us of the chaos of Jesus' arrest and death. We begin with Maundy Thursday, which recalls the last meal Jesus had with his friends, just before he was arrested.

We begin the service in the same way we usually do, although one big difference is that this will be the first time we have sung the Gloria since Lent began. After the sermon however begins some of the most moving symbolism in the Christian calendar.

Washing of feet

At this meal we are commemorating – the last one Jesus had with his friends - Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. In a hot and dusty climate, with limited ability to wash, feet got rather dirty – so Jesus undertook an act of huge humility and servanthood. Jesus commanded us all to serve each other, and Christian leaders in particular must lead like he did – as a servant. After the sermon, 3 or 4 volunteers from the congregation will come to the front. The clergy will wash the feet of members of the volunteers, to remember Jesus' own actions, and to renew again their own commitment to being servant leaders. Whilst they are doing that, the congregation will sing the beautiful Taizé chant, Ubi Caritas – “where there is kindness and love, there God is”.

After the Eucharist

When the Eucharist is over, some unusual things will happen. First, there will be some bread and wine left over. Instead of consuming them as we would normally do, these are reserved (put aside) for the Communion on Good Friday. Whilst the Altar and the church are stripped of ornamentation-

all the cloths, candles, crosses, etc – someone will read Psalm 22, the great Psalm of desolation and the bread and wine will be taken in procession to the Lady Chapel.

This leads us into a vigil in front of the “Altar of Repose” – the altar that the sacrament is placed on (so called because it reposes there). Doing this vigil reminds us of the time Jesus spent praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the agony of deciding to do the will of his Father. We stay there for an hour, watching with Jesus (which is why the vigil is sometimes called a watch), and we end with a short reading, which talks of Jesus’ arrest. We leave quietly.



GOOD FRIDAY

The Triduum is one continuous service, so we start our Good Friday service slightly unusually, with the Collect (prayer for the day)– we don't do any of our normal welcoming and confession, and the priest will not process in, because we have already done that on Maundy Thursday.

We have our readings, sermon and intercessions (prayers), and we then move on to the veneration of the cross. A large wooden cross will be brought into the church. We place it at the front, and we invite the congregation to approach the cross if they would like to. Some people genuflect, some kiss it - you can respond as you feel appropriate. It is a very tactile and visceral way of reminding ourselves that Jesus took on death on the cross – a notoriously horrific form of execution – for us.

After this we move to communion. Good Friday is the one day of the year where, across the entire global church, mass is not offered – which is why we consecrated extra bread and wine on Maundy Thursday. The Eucharist we share will be the reserved sacrament from that service. This is because, during the Good Friday service we are remembering Christ's death as it happened – and so we don't represent it in the liturgy of the Eucharist.

This is also a service of mourning, which is why we leave in silence. Tomorrow we will come back together in the Easter Vigil, to wait together and to watch for the coming of Easter.



EASTER VIGIL

The principal symbols used in this service are light, fire and water. This is a service of several parts.

The service of light

At the start of the service, we will gather outside the church door and light a bonfire. This serves two purposes – to remind us that we are watching and waiting for the resurrection, like watchmen who often lit a fire to keep warm by, and to symbolise the victory over death that is brought about by Christ's resurrection.

From this bonfire we will light the Paschal (Easter) Candle, after we have marked it – it is marked with a cross made of incense studs and the Greek letters Alpha and Omega to recall Jesus' words that He is the first and the last (Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek Alphabet). We will bring the candle into the dark church, with the acclamation – "The Light of Christ!" and the congregation will light their own small candles from the Paschal Candle to remind them of their baptism. The gradual lighting of the church as the candles are lit symbolises the victory of Christ over death. A cantor will sing the Exultet. This is a beautiful song which has been sung throughout the history of the church and talks about how Jesus has rescued us from the powers of darkness.

The Vigil

The second part of the service is a vigil which means that we are waiting for the Resurrection. Whilst we wait, we listen to several readings about God's 'saving acts' – the acts through which he saved his people. We start with the creation, and continue through the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, until the time of Jesus' victory over evil and death.

After these readings will come some silence – and then it's time to celebrate! We will hear the Easter Acclamation – Christ Is Risen – and we respond with "He is risen indeed! Alleluia!"

All the church lights will come on at the same time, and we will ring the bells in celebration. The organ will start playing and we sing the Gloria. Then we will hear our New Testament reading, as well as the Resurrection Gospel. We then have a sermon.

Renewal of Baptism Vows

During the next hymn, we process to the font where we will renew our baptismal vows together.

Many of us were baptised as babies, but these promises are for the whole of our lives. St Paul describes us as being baptised into Christ's death – we die to our sins and our old life – but that also means we get to share in Christ's new life as he is resurrected. Easter is the perfect time to remember that! We will make our baptismal vows together and will be sprinkled with water from the font as a reminder of our baptism. We will then share a sign of God's peace with each other – usually by shaking hands.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

This is the final part of the service, and it runs similarly to a normal Sunday Eucharist.



Easter Day

Easter Day is a time for celebration. At the beginning of the service we will bless the Easter garden, which reminds us of Jesus meeting his great friend, Mary Magdalene, in the garden after his resurrection. This is a joyful service, and the children will play a big role throughout, often helping with the talk and the prayers, as well as helping with the music. We will celebrate the Eucharist together, remembering not only Jesus' death but his resurrection. And there may even be Easter eggs...

