

Lent

The next two pages will help you to:

- explain why **Lent** is important to Christians
- explore different ways Christians might observe Lent
- evaluate the significance of Lent for Christians.



In the United Kingdom it is traditional to race with pancakes on Shrove Tuesday.

Lent

Lent lasts 40 days, not including Sundays, and is a time of preparation for **Easter**. Lent finishes on Easter Sunday morning. It begins the day after **Shrove Tuesday** (Ash Wednesday); in some parts of the world Shrove Tuesday is called 'Fat Tuesday', in France 'Mardi Gras' and in the Caribbean 'Carnival' (Latin for 'going without meat').

In Britain, Shrove Tuesday is better known as Pancake Day. For Christians this means one last party and celebration, eating up all the nice, sweet, enjoyable things in the cupboard before beginning Lent. For some Christians this means no meat, no chocolate and cakes, no alcohol and no dairy products, for example cheese. Other Christians are more lenient and just give up eating their favourite food.

Shrove Tuesday used to be called Shriven Tuesday, an old word meaning 'to be forgiven of your sins' because Christians go to church to confess their sins to the priest and be 'shriven' or forgiven.

AO1 skills ACTIVITIES

Is religious observance, attending church regularly and fasting, for example, more important for a Christian than having a Christian lifestyle, forgiving and showing kindness to people? What do you think?

Why is Lent important to Christians?

Lent reminds Christians of Jesus' time of temptation and fasting (going without food) in the desert which lasted for 40 days and nights. Christians believe that by copying Jesus' example they can become better Christians. By eating less, fasting at certain times or giving up their favourite food they will have more time to focus and think about their faith, to read the Bible and pray.

They become more self-disciplined and stronger willed at resisting all types of temptation. They appreciate all the things they do have and become more aware of other people's needs. Many churches have 'hunger lunches' where Christians have soup and a bread roll and donate the money that they would have spent on lunch to charities helping in poorer countries. Other Christians give money to charities.

Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday**. In the Bible if you were really sorry for something you had done you would wear sackcloth and put ashes on your head so everyone could see you meant it. Today Roman Catholics and many members of the Church of England go to church where the priest will burn last year's Palm Sunday crosses and use the ash to put a mark on a person's forehead. There might also be a Mass or Holy Communion. The church may be decorated in purple.

AO2
skills

ACTIVITIES

Looking at the statements below, can you give arguments for and against the statements? Discuss with the rest of the class.

- If you say sorry you should do it in public where other people can hear you.
- Fasting or giving something up for a period of time is a good thing to do.
- Why should I give money to a charity helping people in other countries? People in Britain need help.

On Ash Wednesday many Christians receive the sign of the cross in ashes on their foreheads as a sign of repentance at the beginning of Lent.



Holy Week and Easter

Why is Holy Week important for Christians?

Lent is a time of spiritual preparation for **Easter**. The final week of Lent is known as Holy Week. During Holy Week Christians attend special services which help them to reflect on the events leading up to the death and resurrection of Jesus. During the week they experience a wide range of emotions from deep sadness to great joy and happiness.

What happened during Holy Week?

Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday and ends at midnight on Saturday. Information about the events of Holy Week is recorded in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The writers of the four Gospels were writing from different perspectives, drawing on information from different sources, and so their accounts of the events differ in some ways. It is possible to put together a timeline showing the sequence of events, drawing on these accounts.

How do Christians observe Holy Week?

Many Christians try to relive the events in this last week in the life of Jesus to try and understand his suffering, death and resurrection more deeply. The most important days are:

Palm Sunday

Christians remember the triumphant entry of Jesus into **Jerusalem**. Jesus rode on a donkey and was welcomed by cheering crowds who threw down their cloaks in the road and waved palm branches shouting 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!' (John 12:13). In some towns and villages there is a procession through the streets to the church, with a donkey ridden by a child dressed as Jesus. Palm crosses are given to worshippers during the service.

The next two pages will help you to:

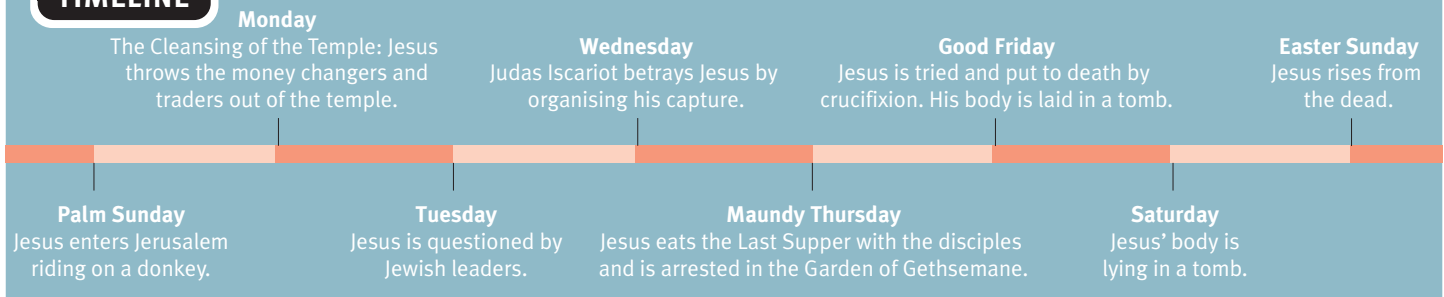
- recall and recount the key events in the last week of Jesus' life
- investigate and evaluate the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus for Christians today.

AO1 skills

ACTIVITIES

As you study the events of Holy Week keep a colour diary of the emotions Christians have as they go from Shrove Tuesday through Lent, to Easter Sunday. If you had to express 'feeling sad' as a colour, what would you choose? What colour is a good choice to represent 'feeling tempted'?

TIMELINE



Can you summarise in one sentence why Easter Sunday is the most important day in the Church calendar? Go back to Topic 1 and read about the incarnation, atonement and redemption. How do these key beliefs link with the events of Holy Week and Easter?

Maundy Thursday

Many Christians regard this as the most solemn night of the year. They celebrate a special Eucharist service to remember the Last Supper, the last meal which Jesus ate with his Disciples before he was crucified. It was at this meal that Jesus instructed his followers to share bread and drink wine in his memory. This became the service of Holy Communion or the Eucharist which is of central importance to Christians. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples to show them how to be humble and serve each other. In some churches the priest or minister re-enacts this by washing the feet of the congregation.

Good Friday

In some places Passion Plays, which tell the story of the death of Jesus, are enacted and Christians often process through the streets carrying a large cross. Many churches hold special services to help Christians to reflect deeply on the crucifixion and death of Jesus. The service is called a 'vigil' and begins at 12 noon and lasts for three hours. Hymns about the death of Jesus may be sung, the Gospel accounts may be read and time will be spent in prayer and meditation. In Roman Catholic and some Anglican churches the congregation will make a **pilgrimage** by visiting the fourteen Stations of the Cross illustrated round the church, praying at each one.

What happened on Easter morning?

Christians believe that on the third day after Jesus' crucified body was placed in the tomb he rose from the dead and was seen by, and talked with, some of his friends and disciples. This event is called the resurrection. It is the most significant event in Christianity.

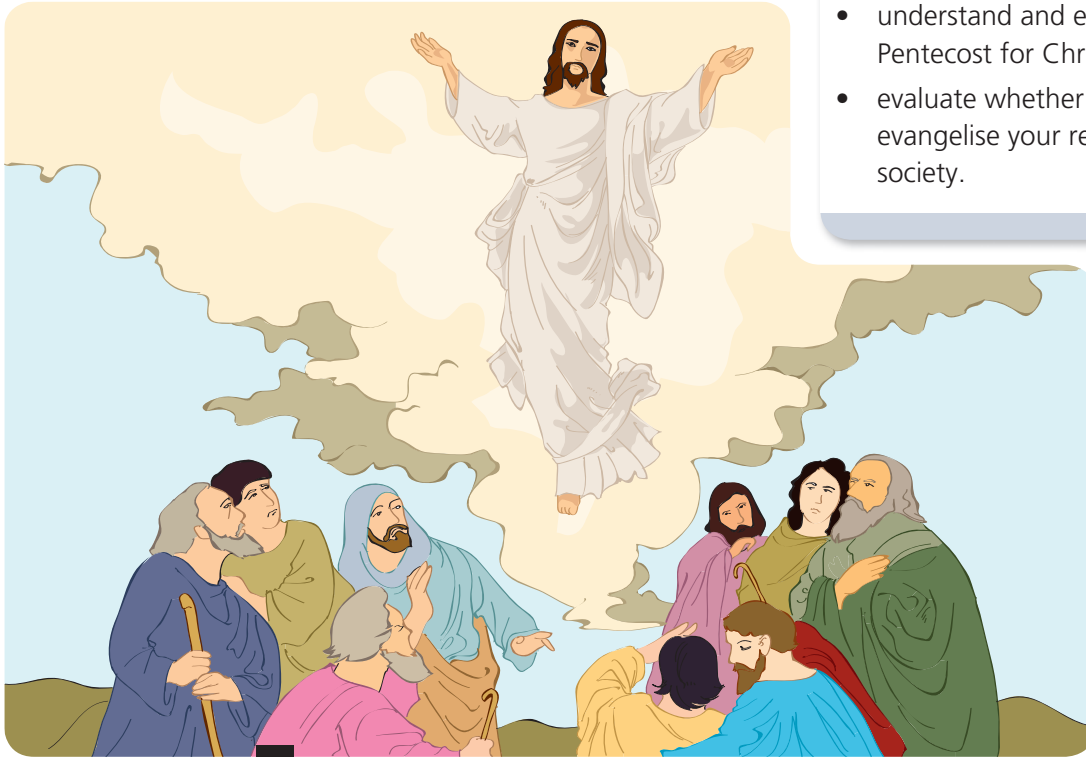
How do Christians celebrate Easter?

On Holy Saturday Christians prepare for Easter Day by cleaning the church. Many churches will have a miniature Easter garden made by the children with a model of the tomb of Jesus with the stone rolled away.

Easter Sunday is the most important day in the Christian calendar. On Easter Sunday the feelings of sadness and loss experienced during Holy Week are transformed into great joy as Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Some Christians may keep a quiet vigil in the church throughout the night.

In Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches the celebrations begin just before midnight as people go outside, leaving the church in darkness. The congregation waits outside and a great cry goes up: 'Christ is risen!' The doors of the church are opened and everyone lights lamps and candles passing them to each other, bringing light into the darkened church. A large candle (the Paschal [Easter] candle) is carried through the church, a symbol of the light of the risen Jesus shining in the darkness and the triumph of life over death. Sometimes a baby is baptised, symbolising new life. Then the first Easter Communion is celebrated.

Easter Sunday and Pentecost



After the resurrection, Jesus ascended back into Heaven.

The next two pages will help you to:

- understand and explain the significance of **Easter** for Christians
- explore and analyse the significance of music in Christian celebrations of Easter
- understand and explain the significance of Pentecost for Christians
- evaluate whether it is acceptable to evangelise your religion in a multi-faith society.

Easter Sunday

Easter Sunday is the most important day in the Christian calendar. It comes after Holy Week, a week when Christians remember with sorrow all the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus. On Easter Sunday morning their sadness is turned to joy as they celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

How do Christians celebrate Easter Sunday?

- Sunrise services are held out of doors.
- Churches are decorated in white and gold.
- Candles are lit to represent Jesus as the light of the world.
- Churches are decorated with spring flowers as a symbol of new life.
- Hot cross buns and Easter eggs are eaten.
- Many Christians celebrate by attending Mass or Holy Communion.
- Special Easter hymns are sung.

AO1
skills

ACTIVITIES

Music is a powerful way of expressing beliefs and emotions. Read the words from the Christian hymn below and make two lists. What beliefs are shown? What emotions can you identify? Share your ideas with the class.

*“ Thank You, Jesus,
Thank You, Jesus
Thank You, Lord, for loving me
You went to Calvary
And there You died for me
Thank You, Lord, for loving me
You rose up from the grave
To me new life You gave
Thank You, Lord, for loving me. ”*

Thank you Jesus, Alison Huntley

What happened after the resurrection?

Over the next 40 days Jesus appeared to different groups of people before ascending back into Heaven. This is celebrated on Ascension Day. The story of the ascension is in Acts 1:8–9. His last words to his disciples were that they were to wait in **Jerusalem**, but for what? The disciples and other friends of Jesus were afraid and confused. They spent the time after Jesus had ascended into Heaven in the upper room of a house in Jerusalem. They prayed and waited as Jesus had told them.

Before his ascension Jesus promised that the disciples would receive the power of the Holy Spirit. This happened on the day of the Jewish Feast of Shavuot which celebrated the harvest and the giving of God's Law to Moses. Christians now celebrate this event as Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. The experience of the Holy Spirit that the disciples had on that day was so powerful that it changed their lives forever. The story of this event is a dramatic one. It is found in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

How Christians celebrate Pentecost

Christians celebrate Pentecost as the birthday of the Church because the Holy Spirit descended in tongues of fire to the disciples. Their fear vanished. They were inspired to begin preaching and talking to people about Jesus and to encourage them to become Christians. They found that they were able to speak in strange languages and that the people who had come to Jerusalem for the festival from all over the ancient world could understand them!

That day many people were converted to Christianity and were baptised in the name of Jesus. Today Pentecost is also called Whitsun (short for 'White Sunday') because new converts to Christianity are often baptised into the Church, wearing white as a symbol of purity and a new beginning. It was also traditionally a time to buy new clothes. The story of the first Pentecost is read in churches on Whit Sunday to remind people of the roots of their faith. In some places groups from the different Christian churches come together in a procession through their towns on 'Whit walks' as a way of witnessing to their Christian faith. Christianity is a missionary religion. Jesus commanded his followers to preach the Gospel (good news) all over the world.



RESEARCH NOTE

Research the Turin shroud. Do you think this is evidence for Jesus rising from the dead? Would there be Christianity if Jesus didn't rise from the dead?



ACTIVITIES

How acceptable do you think it is for Christians or members of other religions actively to evangelise (try to convert others to their faith) in Britain's multi-faith society?

Explain how you think Christians or members of other religions would respond to this?