



Children's National<sup>®</sup>

# Holy Days, Celebrations, and Observances of March 2018

## Chaplaincy Services

### *Holy Days With No Fixed Date*

***Athabascan Stick Dance*** The Athabascan Stickdance is part of Native American religious tradition. The history of this and other Native American cultures dates back thousands of years into prehistoric times. According to many scholars, the people who became the Native Americans migrated from Asia across a land bridge that may have once connected the territories presently occupied by Alaska and Russia. The migrations, believed to have begun between 60,000 and 30,000 B . C . E . , continued until approximately 4,000 B . C . E . This speculation, however, conflicts with traditional stories asserting that the indigenous Americans have always lived in North America or that tribes moved up from the south.

The historical development of religious belief systems among Native Americans is not well known. Most of the information available was gathered by Europeans who arrived on the continent beginning in the sixteenth century C . E . The data they recorded was fragmentary and oftentimes of questionable accuracy because the Europeans did not understand the native cultures they were trying to describe and the Native Americans were reluctant to divulge details about themselves.

The Athabascan Indians take their name from Lake Athabasca in Canada, which in turn takes its name from the Cree word for the way plants or grasses grow in the shallow end of a lake.

The stickdance is named after the *SPRUCE POLE* that is its central symbolic object is a weeklong ceremony held by Alaska's Athabascan Indians to mourn for the male members of the tribe who have died and to provide comfort and support for their grieving families. Observed nowadays only at Nulato, in western central Alaska on the banks of the Yukon River, and at Kaltag, about thirty-five miles further downriver, the stickdance rotates each March between Nulato and Kaltag.

The widows of the deceased, with the help of other family members, sponsor the ceremony, which takes place in the tribe's community center. Starting on a Monday, people gather there for four consecutive evenings to participate in the ceremonial feast known as a *POTLATCH* or to share food in a less formal way. There is singing and dancing, and people get together in small groups to talk about their memories of the deceased. The stickdance itself takes place on Friday night, and because it can honor a number of male tribal members simultaneously, there may be hundreds of people in attendance.

The men put up a tall spruce pole in the center of the hall, while the family and friends of the deceased decorate it with their gifts. Then everyone joins in a slow, shuffling dance around the pole, chanting *RITUAL SONGS* repeatedly all night long and meditating privately about those who have died.

On Saturday morning the pole is taken down and carried past each house in the village before being broken up and thrown into the Yukon River, which is usually still frozen at this time of year but which will eventually melt and carry the pole's shattered remains to the sea. The rest of the weekend is devoted to rituals designed to help the living come to terms with their loss. Men who have been specially selected to represent the dead dress up in their clothes and bid a final farewell to their family and friends. Gifts that have been made or purchased by the family are distributed to every person attending the stickdance to show appreciation for their friendship and support, and there is more feasting on traditional foods.

Although a few years may elapse between the loss of a loved one and the stickdance that honors his memory, the Athabascan approach to dealing with grief and loss seems to be particularly effective. *Photo: from JudysOutpost.com*



**Navajo Mountain Chant** The Navajo call themselves *Diné* (or *Dineh*), meaning "people." Their deities are known as the Holy People and include Changing Woman, Talking God, the Sun, Earth, Moon, and Sky. Navajo religious practices emphasize healing rituals, in terms of curing diseases as well as healing relationships among all living things.

The nine-day Mountain Chant marks a transition in the seasons. It takes place in late winter, at the end of the thunderstorms but before the spring winds arrive. Members of the Navajo Nation believe that if this ceremony were to be held at any other time of year, the result would be death from lightning or snake-bite. The chant is also considered a curing ceremony, performed not only for individuals who are sick, but also to restore order and balance in human relationships.



The legend on which the Mountain Chant is based chronicles the adventures of Dsilyi Neyani, the eldest son of a wandering Navajo family. He is captured by the Utes while hunting one day, but he manages to escape with the help of the gods (known as the *Yei*). During his long journey to rejoin his family, he encounters many hazards and learns a great deal about magic and ceremonial acts. For example, he learns how to make the *SAND PAINTINGS* that are used in the Mountain Chant, how to make the feathers dance, how to swallow swords, how to make a weasel appear and do magic, how to handle *FIRE* without getting burned, and how to make the mystical "hu-hu-hu-hu" cry used in the Mountain Chant dance.

When Dsilyi Neyani returns to his family, he discovers that they have grown into an entire tribe during his long absence. It takes him four days and four nights to tell the story of his wanderings, but the rituals he brings back are so compelling that messengers are immediately sent out to invite guests to witness what he has learned. Even today, the Mountain Chant remains an event to which visitors from outside the Navajo Nation are especially welcome.

The Mountain Chant consists of four ceremonies, all based on the same legend but differing considerably in terms of their presentation and the wording of the songs that are sung. Perhaps the most moving ceremony takes place on the final day. The medicine man emerges from the lodge or hogan at sunset and begins to chant, while a *CIRCLE OF EVERGREENS* eight to ten feet tall—each concealing the man who handles it—rises as if by magic and forms a circular enclosure about 100 feet in diameter with only one opening, facing east. The ground within this circle is considered sacred, and there is a cone-shaped bonfire in the center.

The final ceremony begins when the central bonfire is lit. Dancers with their bodies whitened by clay rush into the circle, leaping wildly and waving their arms and legs. They circle the fire from south to west to north and then south again, the white clay on their bodies protecting them from the heat of the flames. Sometimes they throw sumac wands tipped with rings of fluffy eagle down into the fire. The down flares briefly and burns away, but the dancer conceals a second ring of fluff, which he then shakes to the end of the wand, creating the impression that the fluffy ball has been magically restored. A similar illusion is involved in the "yucca trick," in which a yucca plant appears to grow miraculously from a bare root, then blossoms, and finally reveals its fruit.

The Fire Dance takes place just before dawn, when the central bonfire has burned down to embers. Young men drag in huge trees to feed the central fire, and the dancers make a sound with their tongues that imitates the sound of a hot fire. They carry large bundles of shredded cedar bark, which are ignited with coals from the base of the fire. Once they are burning, the bundles are thrown over the fence to the east first and then in the other three directions. The men dance in a circle around the fire, beating their own and each others' bodies with the flaming brands. Spectators later gather up bits of the burned cedar, which is believed to offer protection against fire for the coming year.

Photo: [quantumnavigation.com](http://quantumnavigation.com)

## Holy Days With Fixed Date

**March 1 Purim Jewish (Begins at sundown on February 28)** Purim, or the Feast of Lots, is a joyous holiday that recounts the saving of the Jews from a threatened massacre during the Persian period (539-330 BCE). The story of Purim is recounted in the Book of Esther, whose eponymous heroine plays the leading role in saving her people. The holiday is traditionally celebrated with wild abandon and with the giving of gifts to friends and the poor.

While the origins of Purim appear clear from the Book of Esther, historians have looked in vain for any sort of extra-biblical corroboration of the events of the story. Be that as it may, it is a tale that purports to take place during a time when many Jews were living in Persia. A young Jewish woman, Esther, rises to be Queen of Persia under the tutelage of her guardian Mordecai. All, however, is not right. The Jews have enemies, and a certain Haman, the grand vizier, plots the Jews' destruction. Even though Esther has hidden her Jewish identity from all, Mordecai prevails on her to risk her life by revealing her true identity to the king. She does this and denounces the evil Haman's plot. At the end of the story, the Jews are able to turn the tables on their enemies, who are then punished in place of the intended victims. This story is one of the most beloved in the Jewish community, because of the hope that it gives a minority living in an oftentimes hostile majority culture.

In distinction to various other holidays, such as Pesach (Passover), Purim is the quintessential community holiday. Nonetheless, there are a number of activities that are centered in the home. One of the favorite activities in preparation for the holiday is the baking of hamantaschen, the triangular filled pastries that are the traditional food at Purim time. In addition, following the commandment to give gifts to friends and the poor, the preparation of so-called *mishloah manot baskets* is a fun activity to engage in, as is their distribution on the holiday. The centerpiece of Purim's home celebration is the seudah, a festive meal accompanied by alcoholic beverages.

Purim is a community holiday of joyful celebration. The centerpiece of the communal celebration is the reading of the Scroll of Esther, the Megillah, in the synagogue. This is a raucous affair, with whoops, hollers, and noise being made every time that Haman's name is mentioned, so no one can hear the name of this horrible evildoer. Another tradition is the Purim *shpiel*, the Purim play, during which fun is poked at community leaders and members. Purim has often been called the Jewish carnival, and dressing in costume and taking part in a Purim carnival heighten the levity of the day, on which one is encouraged to engage in activities that at other times of the year would be somewhat more restricted in scope.

The overriding theme of Purim is the saving of the Jews from a mortal threat. Even though God is not mentioned at all in the Book of Esther, from a Jewish perspective, God is the one who is pulling the strings of redemption behind the scenes. The holiday of Purim has become one of the best-loved holidays of the Jewish year. The reasons for this are easy to see. It is a joyous holiday on which everyone just lets go. Most significant, however, is the paradigmatic nature of the story of Purim. It is not difficult to see how a story in which a small and threatened Jewish community in exile is able to triumph over its foes would prove to be a powerful image for a Diaspora community faced over the centuries with threats from many different sources. The story of Purim, however, holds out the hope that no matter how bad the circumstances, things will turn out well in the end.



**March 2 Baha'i Nineteen Day Fast Begins Baha'i** Fasting has been a significant practice of religion throughout human history. Many of the Manifestations of God Themselves went through a period of meditation and fasting at some point in Their lives during which, in intense communion with God, They contemplated the mysteries of the universe and the nature of Their mission.

Fasting, said 'Abdu'l-Bahá "is the cause of awakening man. The heart becomes tender and the spirituality of man increases. This is produced by the fact that man's thoughts will be confined to the commemoration of God, and through this awakening and stimulation surely ideal advancements follow".<sup>1</sup>

However, it is important to note that fasting should not be viewed as a practice of asceticism, nor is it to be used as a means of penance: "[T]his material fast is an outer token of the spiritual fast; it is a symbol of self-restraint, the withholding of oneself from all appetites of the self, taking on the characteristics of the spirit, being carried away by the breathings of heaven and catching fire from the love of God."<sup>2</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh designated a nineteen-day period each year during which adult Bahá'ís fast from sunrise to sunset each day. This period coincides with the Bahá'í month of Alá—meaning Loftiness—from 2 to 20 March, which immediately precedes the Bahá'í new year. It is a time of prayer, meditation, and spiritual rejuvenation.

A number of special prayers have been revealed specifically for the period of the fast. One, for example, begins with these words:

*"This is, O my God, the first of the days on which Thou hast bidden Thy loved ones to observe the Fast. I ask of Thee by Thy Self and by him who hath fasted out of love for Thee and for Thy good-pleasure—and not out of self and desire, nor out of fear of Thy wrath—and by Thy most excellent names and august attributes, to purify Thy servants from the love of aught except Thee and to draw them nigh unto the Dawning-Place of the lights of Thy countenance and the Seat of the throne of Thy oneness. Illumine their hearts, O my God, with the light of Thy knowledge and brighten their faces with the rays of the Daystar that shineth from the horizon of Thy Will."*



*Baha'i temple and gardens on the slope of Mt. Carmel.*

**March 3 Holi Hindu** Holi, a traditional Hindu festival which celebrates the beginning of spring as well as the triumph of good over evil, is almost here. It is best known around the world for the powder that revelers throw on each other, leaving festival-goers coated in color by the end of the day.

Every year the festival celebrations begin on the evening of the full moon that comes in 'Phalguná' (between the end of February and the middle of March), carrying on into the next day.

The first evening is known as Holika Dahan, or Chhoti Holi. Festival-goers traditionally gather around a bonfire to celebrate the victory of good over evil. They perform religious rituals, which include prayers that any evil inside of them is destroyed.

Holi's different celebrations come from various Hindu legends, although one is widely believed to be the most likely origin. In it, the celebration's name refers to Holika, the sister of the Hindu demon king Hiranyakashipu. The demon king was granted immortality with five powers:

He could be killed by neither animals nor humans

He could be killed neither indoors nor outdoors

He could be killed neither during the day nor at night

He could be killed on neither land, water nor air

He could be killed by neither projectile nor hand-held weapons

When his immortality turned him evil and he began to kill anyone who disobeyed him, his son, Prahlád, decided to kill him. When the king found out, he asked his sister Holika for help; in their plan she would wear a cloak which stopped her from being harmed by fire and take Prahlád into a bonfire with her.

However the cloak flew from Holika's shoulders while she was in the fire and covered Prahlád; he was protected but she burnt to death.  
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In the legend, the Lord Vishnu then appeared to kill Hiranyakashipu by sidestepping his five powers. He took the form of Narasimha, who was half-human and half-lion; he met him on a doorstep, which is neither indoors nor outdoors; he appeared at dusk, which is neither daylight nor dusk; he placed his father on his lap, which is neither land, water nor air; and he attacked him with his lion claws, which are neither projectile nor hand-held weapons.

While Hiranyakashipu and Holika came to represent evil, Vishnu and Prahlad came to represent good. The story shows the victory of good over evil, which is why it is tied to the festival.

The other most popular origin of the festival is the legend of Krishna. The Hindu deity, embarrassed by his dark blue skin, told his mother he was worried his love Radha would not accept him. She told him to color Radha's face whatever color he wanted; when he did, they became a couple.

The following day is called Holi, or Rangwali Holi. This is when the famous colorful powders are thrown, mixing with water from water guns and water balloons so that the powder sticks to people.

The colored powder - or *gulal* - thrown during the festival comes from the legend of Krishna. Today, anyone at Holi is fair game to be covered in the perfumed powder as a celebration of Krishna and Radha's love, regardless of age or social status. The powder also signifies the coming of spring and all the new colors it brings to nature.

Historically, the gulal was made of turmeric, paste and flower extracts, but today synthetic versions are largely used.

The four main powder colors are used to represent different things. Red reflects love and fertility, blue is the color of Krishna, yellow is the color of turmeric and green symbolizes spring and new beginnings.

**March 4 Meatfare Sunday Orthodox Christian** The Saturday of this week is the first Saturday of the Dead observed during the Great Lenten season. The proper name in the typikon for the Sunday of this week is The Sunday of the Last Judgment, indicating the theme of the Gospel of the day (Matthew 25:31-46). The popular name of "Meatfare Sunday" comes from the fact that this is the last day on which the laity are permitted to eat meat until Pascha (Byzantine Rite monks and nuns never eat meat). Read more at: <http://www.gometropolis.org/journey-to-pascha/the-last-judgment-meat-fare-sunday/>

**March 18 Hindu New Year** As per the lunar calendar, new year is celebrated in various parts of India during March/April. *Ugadi* is the New Year's Day for the Hindus of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana. *Gudi Padwa* is celebrated in Maharashtra, Goa and Konkan belt as new year. *Cheiraoba* in Manipur, Navreh in Kashmir and Cheti Chand is celebrated by Sindhi Hindus as new year. In Gujarat, *Bestu Varas* is celebrated around October/November time as new year.

To mark the festivities, people enjoy the day with family, friends and the community. They wear traditional attire, make regional festive meals, visit holy shrines, organize get-togethers or street processions, dance programs, decorate their homes and welcome the new year together, following the local customs. In a unique and diverse nation like India, festivals joys are shared with everyone and is one of the strong factors that binds people together.

**March 21 Nowruz Iran/Baha'i** Nowruz is the traditional Iranian festival of spring which starts at the exact moment of the vernal equinox, commencing the start of the spring. It is considered as the start of the New Year among Iranians. The name comes from Avestan meaning "new day/daylight". Noruz is celebrated March 20/21 each year, at the time the sun enters Aries and Spring begins.

Noruz has been celebrated for at least 3,000 years and is deeply rooted in the rituals and traditions of the Zoroastrian religion. Today the festival of Noruz is celebrated in Iran, Iraq, India, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

The Zoroastrian Parsis of India celebrate Noruz twice, firstly in common with their Iranian brethren on the vernal equinox as Jamshedi Navroz (also referred to as the Fasli New Year) and secondly on a day in July or August, depending upon whether they follow the Kadmi or the Shahenshahi calendar. This is because the practice of intercalation in the Zoroastrian calendar was lost on their arrival in India. The Kadmi New Year always precedes the Shahenshahi New Year by 30 days. In 2005, Noruz is celebrated on August 20 (Shahenshahi).

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The Baha'i Faith, a religion with its origin in Iran, celebrates this day (spelling it "Naw Ruz") as a religious holiday marking not only the new year according to the Baha'i calendar, but the end of their Nineteen Day Fast. Persian Baha'is still observe many Iranian customs associated with it, but Bahai's all over the world celebrate it as a festive day, according to local custom. American Baha'i communities, for example, may have a potluck dinner, along with prayers and readings from Baha'i scripture. While Naw Ruz, according to scripture, begins on the vernal equinox, Baha'is currently celebrate it on March 21, regardless of what day the equinox falls. Baha'is are required to suspend work and school in observance.

Although the Persian Calendar is very precise about the very moment of turn of the new year, Noruz itself is by definition the very first calendar day of the year, regardless of when the natural turn of the year happens. For instance, in some years, the actual natural moment of turn of the year could happen before the midnight of the first calendar day, but the calendar still starts at 00:00 hours for 24 hours, and those 24 hours constitute the Noruz. Iranians typically observe the exact moment of the turn of the year.

**March 21 Ostara Wicca/Pagan** Ostara is a Pagan festival celebrated on the spring equinox, which is between March 19 and March 22 in the Northern Hemisphere. On the spring and fall equinoxes, day and night are of equal lengths. Ostara celebrates the coming of spring, new growth and fertility.

The English monk and historian Bede (d. 735) recorded that the Anglo-Saxon goddess *Eostre* had a festival lasting several days, and that this name was adopted in England for the Christian holiday of Easter, which falls on the Sunday after the full moon following the spring equinox. *Eostre* has since evolved into "Easter" in English and "Ostern" in German. The word "Ostara" comes from the German mythologist Jacob Grimm (d. 1863), who said this was the Old High German name for the Easter festival. (All other languages use a variant of "Pascha," a Greek adoption of the Hebrew for Passover, for the Christian holiday.) The Germanic words *Eostre* and *Ostara* probably come from the same root as "East," the direction of the rising sun. They are not etymologically related to the word estrogen, which comes from the Greek *oistros*, meaning "frenzy."

For Wiccans and some other Pagans, Ostara is the day when the Goddess and God (variously identified as Mother Earth and the Green Man or the Young Maiden and Sun God) join in sacred marriage. The Goddess will conceive, and give birth in nine months. The increased growth and strength of nature in the spring is due to the rising power of the Goddess and God.

Pagans celebrate Ostara with various rituals celebrating fertility, nature and new growth. Egg races, egg hunts, egg eating and egg painting are common activities. A man and a woman might be chosen to act out the roles of Spring God and Goddess, playing out courtship and symbolically planting seeds.

Neopagans also celebrate by eating fresh spring foods like sprouts, dandelion greens, and nettles. Some undertake a fast during this period, to clear away the toxins of the winter. Many Wiccans plant an herb garden (for later use in spells) on Ostara. Home altars might feature spring flowers, seeds, jasmine or flowery incense, and the gemstone of jasper.



**March 25 Palm Sunday Christian** Palm Sunday commemorates Jesus Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, according to Christian belief. It marks the beginning of Holy Week and always falls on the Sunday before Easter Sunday. Other names for this day include Passion Sunday, Fig Sunday, Willow Sunday, Branch Sunday, or Blossom Sunday.

Many churches hold special Palm Sunday services that involve distributing palms to the congregation. Branches of olive, box elder, spruce or other trees are used in places where palms are not available. They are later hung up in houses for good luck, buried to preserve crops, or used to decorate graves. The custom of decorating graves with blessed palms still exists in some parts of Germany. Ashes from these palms are used for Ash Wednesday.

Processions take place in Spain, particularly in Seville, during Holy Week and start on Palm Sunday. These processions portray the Passion of Jesus Christ, which refers to Jesus' suffering prior to his trial and execution. Piazzas in front of many churches throughout Italy are filled with people, including vendors selling olive and palm branches. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is often reenacted with a procession in Rome on Palm Sunday. The priests and deacons wear red garments and blessed palms are distributed during the church service.

Many churches in Greece celebrate Palm Sunday in a solemn manner. They call it *kyriake*, *heorte ton baion*, *heorte baiophoros*, or Lazarus Sunday, because they have the feast of Lazarus' resurrection prior to Palm Sunday. Many Greek Orthodox churches celebrate Palm Sunday at a later date than the date that many western churches have for the day. This is because many Greek Orthodox churches still use the Julian calendar, which predates the Gregorian calendar used in many countries.

Palm Sunday is the start of Holy Week, which is the week before Easter, commemorating events in the last days of Jesus Christ's life. According to Christian belief, Jesus rode into Jerusalem where people gave him a hero's welcome during the Jewish Passover celebration. They heard about his miracles and regarded him as the leader who would deliver them from the Roman Empire's domination. They carried palm branches, which is a traditional symbol of victory, and spread them throughout the streets before him.

Many western churches have observed palm blessings and distributions to the congregation on Palm Sunday since the middle ages. Early references to Palm Sunday observations, including a procession and blessing of palms, go as far back as the fourth and eighth centuries. Many modern Christian churches, including the Catholic and eastern churches, as well as the Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches celebrate Palm Sunday as part of Holy Week.

The palm branch is traditionally a symbol of joy and victory. It is a sign of victory over the flesh and the world in Christianity. It is also associated in memory of Christian martyrs. Willow is commonly used instead of palm branches in some European countries. They are sometimes placed in the fields to ensure that there will be good crops.

**March 26 Ramnavami Hindu** Rama Navami celebrates the birth of Lord Rama, son of King Dasharatha of Ayodhya. Rama was an incarnation of Vishnu and the hero of the Ramayana, the Sanskrit epic of 24,000 stanzas.

A continuous recital of the book takes place for about a week prior to the celebration and on the day itself, the highlights of the story are read in the temple.

The house is thoroughly cleaned on Rama Navami and is also decorated. Offerings of fruit and flowers are placed on the family shrine and after an early bath, prayers are recited. The youngest female member of the household leads the *puja* (prayers) by applying a red *tilak* (mark) to all the other members of the family before everyone joins together in worship.

An image or picture of baby Rama is placed in a covered cradle. At noon the covering is removed and *Prasad* (special sacred food) is offered to Rama, which may then be shared amongst the congregation.

There is an element of fasting. Some people don't eat certain foods, particularly things like onions, garlic, some spices and wheat products. The festival is a focal point for moral reflection and being especially charitable to others.

Celebrations at places associated with Sri Rama, like Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh and Ramesvaram in Tamil Nadu, attract thousands of devotees.



**March 28 Khordad Sal Zoroastrian** The birthday of Zoroaster. Khordad Sal is celebrated as the birthday of Zoroaster. This is known as the 'Greater Noruz' and happens six days after Noruz. The chosen date is symbolic since the actual date of the Prophet's birth cannot be identified accurately. This festival is considered one of the most important in the Zoroastrian calendar. Zoroastrians gather in Fire temples for prayers and then celebrate with feasting.

**March 29 Maundy Thursday Christian** Maundy Thursday, also known as Holy Thursday, is a Christian observance in the United States. It is the day before Good Friday and takes place during Holy Week. It commemorates Jesus Christ's last supper and the initiation of Holy Communion (the Eucharist), observed in many Christian churches.

Many Holy Thursday services, particularly in the Catholic churches, are held in the evenings and offer Communion (or Eucharist) to the congregation. Some priests or ministers wash parishioners' feet in memory of the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet. Holy oils are blessed to symbolize that the sacraments have their source in Jesus Christ, according to Christian belief. Hymns such as the *Pange Lingua*, *Gloria*, or *Ubi Caritas*, are usually sung in some church services during this time of the year.



Some churches offer a pot luck supper for congregation members after the Holy Thursday service. If donations are collected from the suppers, they usually go towards charitable causes. Holy Thursday serves as a time for some Christians to donate money to the poor. Some people also prepare a meal that includes roast lamb, bitter herbs and wine around this time of the year, symbolic of the Passover Seder.

Holy Thursday, or Maundy Thursday, commemorates the institution of the Eucharist, a Christian sacrament that involves consecrating (or making holy) bread and wine. The term "Maundy" derives from the Latin word for "commandment". The New Testament in the bible describes events that took place on Holy Thursday. These events include Jesus

washing his disciples' feet and the Last Supper before he was arrested. Many Maundy Thursday church traditions come from practices that took place in Europe for many centuries.

**March 30 Good Friday Christian** Good Friday occurs two days before Easter Sunday in the United States. It is the day when Christians commemorate Jesus Christ's crucifixion, which plays an important part in the Christian faith. It is not a federal holiday in the United States, although it is a state holiday in some states.

Some Christians may attend special church services or prayer vigils. Good Friday is a day of mourning and quiet prayer for many Christians. The candles are often extinguished and statues, paintings and crosses may be draped in black, purple or gray cloth. Some Catholics treat Good Friday as a day of fasting, while others observe a partial fast involving the exclusion of meat.

Some homes keep a quiet atmosphere, with little or no outside activities and limited television, radio, and computer use, in observing Good Friday. Others choose to play music such as J.S. Bach's St. Matthew's Passion. Some people bake hot cross buns, a traditional Good Friday sweet.

Good Friday is the day when Christians commemorate the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ. The Easter date depends on the ecclesiastical approximation of the March equinox.

This is an important event in Christianity, as it represents the sacrifices and suffering in Jesus' life. The crucifixion was the culmination of a number of events in Holy Week, including: the triumphal return of Jesus to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday; the washing of the disciples' feet by Jesus; and the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday. Some churches organize a prayer vigil on Good Friday for various causes, such as for cancer patients or for the American troops who have been sent to the middle-east.

The crucifix, or cross, which represents the way Jesus died, is an important symbol seen on Good Friday. Some crosses bear a figure of Christ. Other symbols of Good Friday include black cloth used to cover the cross, paintings and statues in churches and some homes to signify mourning.



**March 30 - April 7 (Begins at sundown on March 30)    *Passover*    *Jewish***    One of the Jewish religion's most sacred and widely observed holidays, Passover (Hebrew: *Pesach*) commemorates the story of the Israelites' departure from ancient Egypt, which appears in the Hebrew Bible's books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, among other texts. Jews observe the week-long festival with a number of important rituals, including traditional Passover meals known as seders, the removal of leavened products from their home, the substitution of matzo for bread and the retelling of the exodus tale.

According to the Hebrew Bible, Jewish settlement in ancient Egypt first occurs when Joseph, a son of the patriarch Jacob and founder of one of the 12 tribes of Israel, moves his family there during a severe famine in their homeland of Canaan. For many years the Israelites live in harmony in the province of Goshen, but as their population grows the Egyptians begin to see them as a threat. After the death of Joseph and his brothers, the story goes, a particularly hostile pharaoh orders their enslavement and the systematic drowning of their firstborn sons in the Nile. One of these doomed infants is rescued by the pharaoh's daughter, given the name Moses (meaning "one who is pulled out") and adopted into the Egyptian royal family.

When he reaches adulthood, Moses becomes aware of his true identity and the Egyptians' brutal treatment of his fellow Hebrews. He kills an Egyptian slave master and escapes to the Sinai Peninsula, where he lives as a humble shepherd for 40 years. One day, however, Moses receives a command from God to return to Egypt and free his kin from bondage. Along with his brother Aaron, Moses approaches the reigning pharaoh (who is unnamed in the biblical version of the story) several times, explaining that the Hebrew God has requested a three-day leave for his people so that they may celebrate a feast in the wilderness. When the pharaoh refuses, God unleashes 10 devastating plagues on the Egyptians, culminating in the slaying of every firstborn son by an avenging angel. The Israelites mark the doorframes of their homes with lamb's blood so that the angel will recognize and "pass over" each Jewish household.

Terrified of further punishment, the Egyptians convince their ruler to release the Israelites, and Moses quickly leads them out of Egypt. The pharaoh changes his mind, however, and sends his soldiers to retrieve the former slaves. As the Egyptian army approaches the fleeing Jews at the edge of the Red Sea, a miracle occurs: God causes the sea to part, allowing Moses and his followers to cross safely, then closes the passage and drowns the Egyptians. According to the Hebrew Bible, the Jews—now numbering in the hundreds of thousands—then trek through the Sinai desert for 40 tumultuous years before finally reaching their ancestral home in Canaan, later known as the Land of Israel.

One of the most important Passover rituals for observant Jews is removing all leavened food products (known as chametz) from their home before the holiday begins and abstaining from them throughout its duration. Instead of bread, religious Jews eat a type of flatbread called matzo; according to tradition, this is because the Hebrews fled Egypt in such haste that there was no time for their bread to rise, or perhaps because matzo was lighter and easier to carry through the desert than regular bread.

On the first two nights of Passover, families and friends gather for a religious feast known as a seder. During the meal, the story of the exodus from Egypt is read aloud from a special text called the Haggadah (Hebrew for "telling"), and rituals corresponding to various aspects of the narrative are performed. For example, vegetables are dipped into salt water representing the tears Jews shed during their time as slaves, and bitter herbs (usually horseradish) symbolizing the unpleasant years of their bondage are eaten. A seder plate at the center of the table contains Passover foods with particular significance to the exodus story, including matzo, bitter herbs, a lamb shankbone and a mixture of fruit, nuts and wine known as charoset, which represents the mortar Jews used while bonding bricks as slaves in Egypt. Other typical menu items include matzo kugel (a pudding made from matzo and apples), poached fish patties called gefilte fish and chicken soup with matzo balls.

Children play an important role in the seder and are expected to take part in many of its customs. At one point during the meal, the youngest child present recites the four questions, which ask what distinguishes this special night from all other nights. In many households, young people also enjoy participating in the traditional hunt for the afikomen, a piece of matzo that is hidden early in the evening. The finder is rewarded with a prize or money.



**March 31 Hanuman Jayanti Hindu** Hanuman Jayanti is celebrated to commemorate the birth of Hanuman Ji, the monkey God. He is the symbol of strength and energy. Hanuman is worshiped for his unyielding devotion to Rama and is remembered for his selfless dedication to the God. Hanuman is considered the living embodiment of the Karma Yogi (one whose meditation and devotion are demonstrated through hard work or service).

Hanuman said "I am a humble messenger of Sri Rama. I have come here to serve Rama, to do His work. By the command of Lord Rama, I have come here. I am fearless by the Grace of Lord Rama. I am not afraid of death. I welcome it if it comes while serving Lord Rama." In return for his unconditional love, Lord Rama granted him everlasting life. He promised that he would be worshiped alongside Rama and that his idol would be placed next to his. This is a very popular festival. It can be celebrated individually or in the temple.

On this day, the sacred text, *Hanuman Chalisa*, is recited - a set of prayers glorifying Hanuman, describing his past times. Depending on the devotee, the text is either recited non-stop for 24 hours or sometimes it's performed a set number of times. Special *Pujas* are performed and offerings are made to Lord Hanuman. Some people have different rituals, such as sacred fire ceremonies.

In India particularly, colorful processions fill the streets. People dance, carry idols of Lord Hanuman and some people wear masks and tails to imitate the monkey God. Every celebration is always accompanied by a period of fasting and then a big vegetarian feast.

**March 31 Lord's Evening Meal Jehovah's Witness** As Passover begins for Jews around the globe, Jehovah's Witnesses commemorate an event believed to have occurred on the first night of Passover in approximately 33 CE—the Last Supper, known as the Lord's Evening Meal to Witnesses.

According to this Christian tradition: Jesus celebrated Passover together with his closest followers in the upper room of the home owned by John and his mother in Jerusalem. Hours before his crucifixion, Jesus instituted a special meal that would become memorialized in the Christian Church. After saying a special blessing over the unleavened bread and wine, and passing them around the table, Jesus announced: "Keep doing this in remembrance of me."

Jehovah's Witnesses hold the bread and the wine of the Last Supper as symbolic of Christ's body. (Learn more from JW.org.) The wine, the representation of Jesus' blood, made valid a new covenant and ushered in a new practice for all future Christians. Jesus explained that his blood would be poured out for the forgiveness of sins.

Jehovah's Witnesses point to accounts in Genesis, Jeremiah, Peter and Revelation that describe 144,000 faithful Christians who will go to heaven and serve as kings and priests for all mankind. (Read more from the Watchtower Online Library.) Each year, only a few thousand persons worldwide partake in the annual Memorial meal; all other Jehovah's Witnesses attend the event but do not partake. Since Passover is only Commemorated once per year, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the anniversary of the Last Supper and Jesus' death should, too, be marked only once per year.

**March 31 Magha Puja Buddhist** This festival is also known as Fourfold Assembly or Magha Puja Day. Sangha Day is the second most important Buddhist festival. It is a celebration in honor of the Sangha, or the Buddhist community. For some Buddhists Sangha refers only to monks and nuns. It is a chance for people to reaffirm their commitment to Buddhist practices and traditions.

Sangha Day commemorates the spontaneous gathering of 1,250 enlightened monks (arahants) to hear the Buddha preach at Veluvana Vihara. At this gathering, the Buddha gave his first sermon, or recitation of the Patimokkha (the rules and regulations of the monastic order).

*Sangha* is the term used for the Buddhist spiritual community. On Sangha Day Buddhists celebrate both the ideal of creating a spiritual community, and also the actual spiritual community which they are trying to create. The Sangha is precious in Buddhism as without those in the community to look up to or share aspirations with, the spiritual life would be very challenging.

Sangha Day is a traditional time for exchange of gifts; it has become a prominent festival among Western Buddhists even though it is less well known in the East. Celebrations vary, but can include chanting, meditation, the lighting of oil lamps, and the reaffirmation of people's commitment to Buddhist practice.

Sources: encyclopedia2.com, myjewishlearning.com, bahai.org, telegraph.co.uk, wikipedia, ndtv.com, crystalings.com, religionfacts.com, readthespirit.com, timeanddate.com, bbc.co.uk, history.com. All pictures are from the subscription service Shutterstock unless otherwise noted.

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Catholic Mass is held Thursday at noon and Saturday at 4 pm in the Main Chapel, third floor Main, room 3201

Jumma Prayer is held Friday at 12:15 pm in the Main Chapel, third floor Main, room 3201