



Children's National®

Chaplaincy Services

Holy Days, Celebrations and Observances of April 2020

April 6 Mahavir Jayanti Jain Mahavir Jayanti is celebrated by followers of Jainism to honor the birth and life of Lord Mahavira, an important religious figure to Jains.

Lord Mahavira was born into a noble family in Bihar, India during the 4th century BCE. During his life, Lord Mahavira was known as Vardhamana. In many ways, Vardhamana is similar to Buddhism's Siddhartha Gautama.

Like Siddhartha, Vardhamana left his comfortable home to find truth in the world after being sheltered from the outside world. After mingling with people from various cultures and backgrounds, Vardhamana learned much about the world and the sources of suffering. Eventually, Varhamana decided to focus his efforts on fasting and meditation.

Through this process, Varhamana found enlightenment. He discovered that humans must eliminate greed and their connection to worldly possessions to end their limitless pursuit of desires. With his knowledge, Varhamana journeyed in India and other areas of Asia to spread Jainism. During this time, Varhamana's kingdom experienced a period of extreme prosperity.

Jains participate in many activities that allow them to bond with their family members and show respect for Lord Mahavira.

Procession: One of the most popular activities for Mahavir Jayanti is the procession an idol of Mahavira. This activity involves Jain monks carrying a statue of Mahavira throughout the streets on a chariot. During this parade, communities gather to recite special rhyming prayers, or bhajans, that honor Mahavira

Statue Washing: People often wash statues of Mahavira with water and fragrant oils. This symbolizes the purity of Mahavira. It also serves the practical purpose of cleaning the beautiful religious statues for regular worship during the year.

Visit Temples: During Mahavir Jayanti, people from across the world visit Jain temples in India. In addition to visiting active temples, people also go to ancient historical sites that are related to Mahavira and Jainism. Some of the most popular locations are Gomateshwara, Dilwara, Ranakpur, Sonagiri and Shikharji.

Donations: To demonstrate their humble lifestyle choices, many Jains donate money, food, and clothing to temples during Mahavir Jayanti. The monks often take what they need and donate the remaining items to less fortunate people.



April 7 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. 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. *Photo: JW.org*

April 7 or 8 Vesak/ the birthday of Buddha Buddhist Buddha's birthday, known as Vesak Day (or Wesak), is celebrated on various dates in the spring throughout the world, and each Buddhist culture has its own traditions for the day.

Buddhists celebrate the Buddha's three most important life stages on Vesak: Birth, Enlightenment and Death, which traditionally are said to all have happened on the same day of the calendar throughout his life. The birth story is important because the Buddha was born in Lumbini, Nepal, while his mother stood holding onto a tree. Once born he is said to have taken seven steps forward after which a lotus flower arose from each footstep. He then declared that this was his last rebirth and that he would become an enlightened individual.

In South Korea, followers light lotus lanterns that cover the temples in remembrance of these lotus footsteps. In Sri Lanka, where colorful lanterns are also used, elaborate electric light displays depict different stories from the Buddha's life. In Indonesia, Buddhists light and release lanterns into the air while visiting the Borobudur temple. In Taiwan, followers pour fragrant water over Buddha statues to symbolizing a fresh start in life. In Singapore, devotees set caged birds free on the Buddha's birthday.



April 9 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.

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.

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.

April 9 - 16 Passover Jewish Passover, Hebrew Pesah, or Pesach, in Judaism, holiday commemorating the Hebrews' liberation from slavery in Egypt and the "passing over" of the forces of destruction, or the sparing of the firstborn of the Israelites, when the Lord "smote the land of Egypt" on the eve of the Exodus. The festival thus marks the first and most momentous event in Jewish history.

Passover begins with the 15th and ends with the 21st (or, outside of Israel and among Reform Jews, the 22nd) day of the month of Nisan (March or April). On these seven (or eight) days, all leaven, whether in bread or other mixture, is prohibited, and only unleavened bread, called matzo, may be eaten. The matzo symbolizes both the Hebrews' suffering while in bondage and the haste with which they left Egypt in the course of the Exodus. Passover is also sometimes called the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

Passover is often celebrated with great pomp and ceremony, especially on the first night, when a special family meal called the seder is held. At the seder foods of symbolic significance commemorating the Hebrews' liberation are eaten, and prayers and traditional recitations are performed. Though the festival of Passover is meant to be one of great rejoicing, strict dietary laws must be observed, and special prohibitions restrict work at the beginning and end of the celebration.



April 10 Good Friday Christian Good Friday, the Friday before Easter, the day on which Christians annually observe the commemoration of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. From the early days of Christianity, Good Friday was observed as a day of sorrow, penance, and fasting, a characteristic that finds expression in the German word Karfreitag ("Sorrowful Friday").

The question of whether and when to observe Jesus' death and Resurrection triggered a major controversy in early Christianity. Until the 4th century, Jesus' Last Supper, his death, and his Resurrection were observed in one single commemoration on the evening before Easter. Since then, those three events have been observed separately—Easter, as the commemoration of Jesus' Resurrection, being considered the pivotal event.

The liturgical celebration of Good Friday has undergone various changes over the centuries. In the Roman Catholic Church the mass is not celebrated on Good Friday, though a liturgy is performed.

In the 17th century, following an earthquake in Peru, the Three Hour Service, a prayerful meditation on Jesus' "Seven Last Words on the Cross," was introduced to the Catholic liturgy by the Jesuits. It takes place between noon and 3 PM. The Three Hour Service has become common in North American churches, and a variety of liturgical services are held on Good Friday in other Protestant churches. With the revival of a liturgical emphasis in Protestantism in the second half of the 20th century, a distinct trend of adopting Catholic ritual (no use of the organ in the service, draping of the cross, barring of the altar, etc.) developed.



April 11 Holy Saturday/Great Vigil of Easter Christian Holy Saturday, also called Easter Vigil, Christian religious observance that ends the Lenten season, falling on the day before Easter Sunday. The observance commemorates the final day of Christ's death, which is traditionally associated with his triumphant descent into hell.

The early church celebrated the end of Lent with large baptismal ceremonies, but for many centuries no services were held on Holy Saturday in the Western churches, recalling the suspended state of Christ's followers in the period between his Crucifixion and Resurrection. Beginning in 1955, the Roman Catholic and some other churches restored the evening Easter Vigil. The Eastern Orthodox churches had never abandoned the ceremony. The vigil celebration may include lighting fires and candles to symbolize Christ's passing from death to life and tolling bells to signify the joyous end of Lent. Many churches also celebrate the baptism of catechumens (unbaptized converts) and the confirmation or chrismation and first communion of both catechumens and candidates (converts who were previously baptized in a different Christian faith tradition) during the Easter Vigil.

April 12 Easter Christian Easter, Latin Pascha, Greek Pascha, principal festival of the Christian church, which celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day after his Crucifixion. The earliest recorded observance of an Easter celebration comes from the 2nd century, though the commemoration of Jesus' Resurrection probably occurred earlier.

The English word Easter, which parallels the German word Ostern, is of uncertain origin. One view, expounded by the Venerable Bede in the 8th century, was that it derived from Eostre, or Eostræ, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring and fertility. This view presumes—as does the view associating the origin of Christmas on December 25 with pagan celebrations of the winter solstice—that Christians appropriated pagan names and holidays for their highest festivals. Given the determination with which Christians combated all forms of paganism (the belief in multiple deities), this appears a rather dubious presumption. There is now widespread consensus that the word derives from the Christian designation of Easter week as in albis, a Latin phrase that was understood as the plural of alba ("dawn") and became eostarum in Old High German, the precursor of the modern German and English term. The Latin and Greek Pascha ("Passover") provides the root for Pâques, the French word for Easter.

Fixing the date on which the Resurrection of Jesus was to be observed and celebrated triggered a major controversy in early Christianity in which an Eastern and a Western position can be distinguished. The dispute, known as the Paschal controversies, was not definitively resolved until the 8th century.

Eastern Orthodox churches use a slightly different calculation based on the Julian rather than the Gregorian calendar (which is 13 days ahead of the former), with the result that the Orthodox Easter celebration usually occurs later than that celebrated by Protestants and Roman Catholics. Moreover, the Orthodox tradition prohibits Easter from being celebrated before or at the same time as Passover.

In the 20th century several attempts were made to arrive at a fixed date for Easter, with the Sunday following the second Saturday in April specifically proposed. While this proposal and others had many supporters, none came to fruition. Renewed interest in a fixed date arose in the early 21st century, resulting from discussions involving the leaders of Eastern Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Coptic, Anglican, and Roman Catholic churches, but formal agreement on such a date remained elusive.



April 12 Yaqui Easter Festival Yaqui

The Yaqui Easter Ceremony combines Christian beliefs with the traditions of the Yaqui Indians. Preparations for Ester begin before Ash Wednesday with the decoration of churches, the creation of ceremonial masks, and the setting up of crosses for the reenactment of the Passion of Christ. Public ceremonies and tribal dances, including the deer dance , take place throughout the forty days of Lent, but it is during Easter week that the celebration reaches a climax. On Holy Thursday the cha payekas , the soldiers who have been searching for Jesus throughout Lent, capture an effigy of Christ and seize control of the church. As part of the fariseos (Pharisees) or enemies of Christ, they carry out a symbolic crucifixion on Good Friday, but the Resurrection takes place that night and they don't realize at first that they have lost possession of the body. On Holy Saturday there is a final confrontation between the Fariseos and Chapayekas on one side and, on the other, several groups who are defending the church and have armed themselves with flowers . The Fariseos and Chapayekas advance toward the church three times, but they are turned back by the Matachin Dancers, the Deer Dancers, the pascolas , and an avalanche of real and crepe paper flowers. Eventually the Fariseos are defeated, which they admit by throwing their ceremonial masks and the straw effigy of Judas into a huge fire. The Pascolas, along with the Deer Dancers and Matachin Dancers, perform at the celebration that follows, and when the news of Jesus' resurrection reaches them early on Sunday morning, they join the rest of the Yaqui in a final procession of joy that ends with a sermon in which the various parts of the Easter Ceremony are explained. You can read more details here:

<https://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Yaqui+Easter+Ceremony>

April 13 Vaisakhi Sikh Vaisakhi, also spelled Baisakhi, is one of the most important dates in the Sikh calendar. It is the Sikh New Year festival and is celebrated on April 13 or 14. It also commemorates 1699, the year Sikhism was born as a collective faith.

Vaisakhi is a long established harvest festival in the Punjab. It had been celebrated long before it gained an added dimension for Sikhs.

In 1699 the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh, chose Vaisakhi as the occasion to transform the Sikhs into a family of soldier saints, known as the Khalsa Panth.

Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa in front of thousands at Anandpur Sahib. During the Vaisakhi festival Guru Gobind Singh came out of a tent carrying a sword. He challenged any Sikh who was prepared to give his life to come into the tent. The Guru returned alone with his sword covered in blood. He then requested another volunteer and repeated the same action four times until five men disappeared into the tent. The crowd was very concerned until they saw five men return wearing turbans with the Guru.

These five men became known as the Panj Piare, or 'Beloved Five'. The men were then baptized into the Khalsa by the Guru. He sprinkled them with Amrit ('immortalizing nectar': the Sikh term for holy water) and said prayers. This is the basis of the Sikh baptism ceremony.

Gudwaras are decorated and visited. Parades, dancing and singing happen throughout the day. Many Sikhs choose to be baptized into the Khalsa brotherhood on this day.

The festival is marked with nagar kirtan processions through the streets (nagar means "town") which form an important part of Sikh culture and religious celebrations.

Kirtan is a term meaning the singing of hymns from the Guru Grath Sahib, the Sikh holy book. Celebrations always include music, singing and chanting scriptures and hymns.

The processions are led by traditionally dressed Panj Piaras.

The Guru Granth Sahib will be carried in the procession in a place of honor.



April 19 Feast of Divine Mercy Catholic Christian Divine Mercy Sunday, a feast instituted by Pope Saint John Paul II, is celebrated every year on the Octave of Easter.

The Octave of Easter is the eighth day of Easter, or, in other words, the Sunday after Easter Sunday. Since the date of Easter changes every year, the date of Divine Mercy Sunday does as well.

Pope John Paul II extended the feast of Divine Mercy Sunday to the entire church when he canonized St. Maria Faustina Kowalska on April 30, 2000 (Divine Mercy Sunday that year), The Holy Father chose the Octave of Easter as the date for Divine Mercy Sunday because that is the day after the Divine Mercy Novena ends.

Divine Mercy Sunday marks the end of the Divine Mercy Novena, which begins on Good Friday every year. Christ Himself revealed the Divine Mercy Novena to Saint Faustina on Good Friday 1937 and dictated to her the prayers that make up the novena. The Divine Mercy Novena is often combined with the Divine Mercy Chaplet, which is also commonly prayed on Divine Mercy Sunday. Many people also pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet throughout the year, especially at 3 pm, the time when Christ died on the Cross.

April 24 - May 24 Ramadan Islam Ramadan, in Islam, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar and the holy month of fasting. It begins and ends with the appearance of the new moon.

Islamic tradition states that it was during Ramadan, on the "Night of Power" (Laylat al-Qadr) - commemorated on one of the last 10 nights of Ramadan, usually the 27th night- that God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad the Qur'ān, Islam's holy book, "as a guidance for the people." For Muslims Ramadan is a period of introspection, communal prayer (salāt) in the mosque, and reading of the Qur'ān. God forgives the past sins of those who observe the holy month with fasting, prayer, and faithful intention.

Ramadan, however, is less a period of atonement than it is a time for Muslims to practice self-restraint, in keeping with sawm (Arabic: "to refrain"), one of the pillars of Islam (the five basic tenets of the Muslim religion). Although sawm is most commonly understood as the obligation to fast during Ramadan, it is more broadly interpreted as the obligation to refrain between dawn and dusk from food, drink, sexual activity, and all forms of immoral behavior, including impure or unkind thoughts. Thus, false words or bad deeds or intentions are as destructive of a fast as is eating or drinking.

Muslims gather in their homes or mosques to break their fast with a meal called iftār that is often shared with friends and extended family. The iftār usually begins with dates, as was the custom of Muhammad, or apricots and water or sweetened milk. There are additional prayers offered at night called the tawarīh prayers, preferably performed in congregation at the mosque. During these prayers, the entire Qur'ān may be recited over the course of the month of Ramadan. To accommodate such acts of worship in the evening, work hours are adjusted during the day and sometimes reduced in some Muslim-majority countries. The Qur'ān indicates that eating and drinking are permissible only until the "white thread of light becomes distinguishable from the dark thread of night at dawn." Thus, Muslims in some communities sound drums or ring bells in the predawn hours to remind others that it is time for the meal before dawn, called the suhūr.

Sawm can be invalidated by eating or drinking at the wrong time, but the lost day can be made up with an extra day of fasting. For anyone who becomes ill during the month or for whom travel is required, extra fasting days may be substituted after Ramadan ends. Volunteering, performing righteous works, or feeding the poor can be substituted for fasting if necessary. Able-bodied adults and older children fast during the daylight hours from dawn to dusk. Pregnant or nursing women, children, the old, the weak, travelers on long journeys, and the mentally ill are all exempt from the requirement of fasting.



The end of the Ramadan fast is celebrated as Eid al-Fitr, the "Feast of Fast-Breaking," which is one of the two major religious holidays of the Muslim calendar (the other, Eid al-Adha, marks the end of the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca that all Muslims are expected to perform at least once in their lives if they are financially and physically able). In some communities Eid al-Fitr is quite elaborate: children wear new clothes, women dress in white, special pastries are baked, gifts are exchanged, the graves of relatives are visited, and people gather for family meals and to pray in mosques.

April 30 Beltaine Wicca/Pagan The Celtic Festival of Beltane (Beltain, Beltainne, Beltaine, Bealtaine, Beltany) which marks the beginning of summer in the ancient Celtic calendar is a Cross Quarter Day, half way between the Spring Equinox and the Summer Solstice. While the Beltane Festival is now associated with May 1st, the actual astronomical date is a number of days later. The festival was marked with the lighting of bonfires and the movement of animals to summer pastures.

In Irish mythology, the beginning of the summer season started with the Fire Festival at Beltane. Great bonfires would mark a time of purification and transition, heralding in the season in the hope of a good harvest later in the year, and were accompanied with rituals to protect the people from any harm by otherworldly spirits.

At the Beltany (Beltony) Stone Circle in the North West of Ireland, the sunrise at Beltane is aligned with the only decorated stone in the circle. The Beltany Stone Circle gets its name from Beltane which is associated with the lighting of hilltop fires in a rekindling of the sun. *Photo: newgrange.com*



Resources: publicholidays.in, huffpost.com, readthespirit.com, timeanddate.com, britannica.com, encyclopedia2.com, bbc.co.uk, learnreligions.com. All photos are from Shutterstock unless otherwise identified.

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Here is an example of a recent Grace Note.

*If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy—don't hesitate.
Give in to it.
Mary Oliver*



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

Jummah Prayer is held Friday at 12:15 p.m. in the Main Chapel, third floor Main, room 3201.