



Children's National®

Chaplaincy Services

Holy Days, Celebrations and Observances of March 2020

Holy Days With No Fixed Date

Athabascan Stick Dance

The Athabascan Stickdance is part of Native American religious tradition. 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 name of the tribe is spelled many different ways (Athapascan, Athapaskan, Athabaskan, etc.), but "Athabascan" is now the preferred spelling.

The stickdance-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 (see GIFTS) 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. Surviving family members say that the opportunity to focus on their memories of the dead and to receive the support of the entire community is a valuable one, and that the stickdance does indeed make it easier for them to let go.



SYMBOLS AND CUSTOMS

Gifts: The sheer number of gifts that are distributed during the week of the stickdance is one of the primary reasons why it can take a family years to prepare for this event. Every single person who shows up receives a gift, and that means buying—or in most cases, making—hundreds of individual gifts. Merely gathering the furs, wood, and other materials needed to make the gifts can take the typical Athabascan family two or more years, which is why this event isn't held on an annual basis. It makes more sense to wait until several families are fully prepared and then hold a single stickdance for all of them.

Potlatch: The potlatch is perhaps the most important surviving religious practice among the Native people in Alaska and along the north Pacific coast in the aftermath of European arrival. This feast and gift-giving event is central to many important Athabascan ceremonies, including funeral rites. Hence it takes place not only on an annual basis but also throughout the year, at funerals and memorials. The first potlatch is held soon after death when the body of the deceased is burned, and then another potlatch is held during the stickdance or memorial service. Dishes served at the feast may include salmon, beaver, rabbit, and moose.

Ritual Songs: The ritual songs that are sung during a stickdance have been handed down from generation to generation by the Athabascan people. There were originally fourteen songs, but one has already been forgotten, and only the elder members of the tribe know all the words to the remaining thirteen. The stickdance is the only occasion at which these songs, known as *hi'o keleka*, may be chanted.

Spruce Pole: The pole from which the stickdance takes its name is a spruce tree from which all the branches have been stripped. Ribbons are wrapped around the rough wood, and furs and other gifts are often hung from the pole, making it resemble a Christmas tree. As the object around which the circular dance takes place, the spruce pole may be seen as a symbol for the dead and a focal point for the thoughts and memories of surviving friends and family members.

FURTHER READING

Hirschfelder, Arlene B., and Paulette Fairbanks Molin. "Stick Dance." Encyclopedia of Native American Religions. Updated ed. New York: Facts on File, 2000.

WEB SITE

"Athabascans of Interior Alaska," Alaska Native Knowledge Network, University of Alaska www.ankn.uaf.edu/curriculum/Athabascan/Athabascans/appendix_a.html. Photo: from the Fairbanks Daily News



Navajo Mountain Chant 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 (see FIRE). 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.

Photo: <https://jmparrishfineart.com/>



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.

Read more about the symbols and customs at: <https://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Navajo+Mountain+Chant>

Holy Days With Fixed Date

March 1 Feast of Saint David Christian St David is the patron saint of Wales and he is celebrated on the 1 March. To mark the day, Welsh people around the world wear one or both of Wales's national emblems – a daffodil and a leek. Special concerts and parades are also held in St David's honor.

St David – or Dewi Sant in Welsh – was born on the south-west coast of Wales, near to where the city of St Davids is today. We don't actually know the exact year when he was born, but it is believed to be some time in between 462 and 515 AD.

There are many stories about miracles happening around St David. One of the famous stories is from when he was speaking to a large crowd and someone in the crowd shouted: "We won't be able to see or hear him." Then, the ground David stood on is said to have risen up so that he was standing on a hill, making it easier for everyone to see him.

It is said that he lived for more than 100 years and died on Tuesday, 1 March 589.

A National St David's Day parade is held in the center of Cardiff every year, with lots of exciting performances by dragons and theatre groups. Many children wear traditional Welsh clothing and take part in dances.

Across the country, lots of towns and villages host their own parades and concerts, while many of the country's castles and heritage sites let people come to visit them for free.

There is also a famous concert held on the day at St David's Hall in Cardiff, with the BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales performing traditional songs. Photo: Pinterest



March 1 Cheesefare Orthodox Christian Cheesefare is the last week before the onset of Great Lent. During Cheesefare week, meat is already forbidden to Orthodox Christians, making it a "meat-fast week". During Lent, meat, fish, dairy products and eggs are forbidden. Furthermore, Lent also excludes parties, secular music, dancing and other distractions from the spiritual life. Thus, Cheesefare represents the last chance to partake of dairy products and those social activities that are not appropriate during the more prayerful, sober and introspective Lenten season.

March 2 Clean Monday/Great Lent Orthodox Christian This is a Christian religious observance of the Eastern Orthodox Church and falls on the 7th Monday before Orthodox Easter. It is also called Pure Monday and is a day of fasting and spiritual purification and reflection, similar to Ash Wednesday of the Western Church. Clean Monday is the day Great Lent begins.

The first week of Great Lent is also called Pure Week. Great Lent lasts for 40 days and ends on Lazarus Saturday, the day before Orthodox Palm Sunday. The next week is Holy Week, and ends on Easter, the day of Christ's resurrection.

March 2 - 20 Nineteen-Day Fast Bahá'í Bahá'ís practice fasting as a discipline for the soul; they see abstaining from food as an outer symbol of a spiritual fast.

By this they mean the practice of self-restraint in order to distance oneself from all the appetites of the body and so concentrate on oneself as a spiritual being and get closer to God. Abstaining from food is not an end in itself but a symbol, and if it doesn't result in improvements in character and concern for others then it has not been undertaken in the right spirit.

Bahá'u'lláh designated a 19-day period of fasting each year immediately before the Bahá'í New Year. The fasting is seen as a period of spiritual preparation and regeneration for the new year ahead. In the Western calendar, this occurs between 2nd and 21st March (the Bahá'í month of Ala meaning 'loftiness').

Exemptions from fasting: the sick, elderly, and very young are exempt from fasting, as are pregnant or nursing mothers, travelers and those doing heavy physical work.

If a Holy Day occurs during the traditional period of fasting, then the fast is not obligatory on those days.

March 8 Orthodox Sunday Orthodox Christian The Sunday of Orthodoxy is the first Sunday of Great Lent. The dominant theme of this Sunday since 843 has been that of the victory of the icons. In that year the iconoclastic controversy, which had raged on and off since 726, was finally laid to rest, and icons and their veneration were restored on the first Sunday in Lent. Ever since, this Sunday has been commemorated as the "Triumph of Orthodoxy."

The Seventh Ecumenical Council dealt predominantly with the controversy regarding icons and their place in Orthodox worship. It was convened in Nicaea in 787 by Empress Irene at the request of Tarasios, Patriarch of Constantinople. The Council was attended by 367 bishops.

Almost a century before this, the iconoclastic controversy had once more shaken the foundations of both Church and State in the Byzantine empire. Excessive religious respect and the ascribed miracles to icons by some members of society, approached the point of worship (due only to God) and idolatry. This instigated excesses at the other extreme by which icons were completely taken out of the liturgical life of the Church by the Iconoclasts. The Iconophiles, on the other-hand, believed that icons served to preserve the doctrinal teachings of the Church; they considered icons to be man's dynamic way of expressing the divine through art and beauty.

The Council decided on a doctrine by which icons should be venerated but not worshiped. In answering the Empress' invitation to the Council, Pope Hadrian replied with a letter in which he also held the position of extending veneration to icons but not worship, the last befitting only God.

The decree of the Council for restoring icons to churches added an important clause which still stands at the foundation of the rationale for using and venerating icons in the Orthodox Church to this very day: "We define that the holy icons, whether in color, mosaic, or some other material, should be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on the sacred vessels and liturgical vestments, on the walls, furnishings, and in houses and along the roads, namely the icons of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ, that of our Lady the Theotokos, those of the venerable angels and those of all saintly people. Whenever these representations are contemplated, they will cause those who look at them to commemorate and love their prototype. We define also that they should be kissed and that they are an object of veneration and honor, but not of real worship, which is reserved for Him Who is the subject of our faith and is proper for the divine nature. The veneration accorded to an icon is in effect transmitted to the prototype; he who venerates the icon, venerates in it the reality for which it stands".

An Endemousa (Regional) Synod was called in Constantinople in 843. Under Empress Theodora. The veneration of icons was solemnly proclaimed at the Hagia Sophia Cathedral. The Empress, her son Michael III, Patriarch Methodios, and monks and clergy came in procession and restored the icons in their rightful place. The day was called "Triumph of Orthodoxy." Since that time, this event is commemorated yearly with a special service on the first Sunday of Lent, the "Sunday of Orthodoxy"



MARCH 9-10 PURIM JEWISH Purim marks the Jewish people's deliverance from a royal death decree around the fourth century BCE, as told in the Book of Esther. Many Jewish Americans celebrate Purim on the 14th day of the month of Adar in the Jewish calendar, which is in February or March in the Gregorian calendar. According to many sources, the celebrations begin at around sunset on the 13th day of Adar, while other sources mention that Purim is observed on the 15th day of Adar.

Purim is not a public holiday. Businesses have normal opening hours.

Many Jewish people, especially children, in the United States use this event as an opportunity to listen to the Megilla (or Megillah) [THE BOOK OF ESTHER] to relive the events that are told about the story of Esther, Mordecai and Haman. It is customary to twirl graggers (Purim noisemakers) and stamp one's feet when Haman's name is mentioned.

Many Jewish people give to the needy around this time of the year. Food baskets or food gifts are also given away. It is a time for people to celebrate and be merry. So some Jewish schools hold celebrations to remember the past and their heritage. Other groups or organizations hold Purim carnivals filled with activities, costumes, food and games. Special prayers, particularly the Al HaNissim prayer are also included in evening, morning and afternoon prayers.



Purim is not a public holiday in the United States. It is a relatively minor festival and some activities that are not allowed on many Jewish holidays may be permitted on Purim.

MARCH 9-10 HOLI HINDU Holi is celebrated over two days in many areas, while other areas may celebrate it for longer periods. The festival loosens the normal social restrictions by bringing people together not based on sex, status, and/or age. A public bonfire is usually held between 10pm and midnight to commemorate the burning of Holika on the first evening of Holi. Many sing and dance in the street while others shout, curse and cause general mayhem during the bonfire event.

Millions of Hindus around the world celebrate Holi with a community festival. Many visit each other's homes to distribute sweets and greet each other. Men, women, adult and children all take part in dances and other cultural programs during Holi. People dress in pure white and gather together in a common place to color each other with gulal, which are colored powders and other forms of dyes. A popular activity is the throwing of water balloons at one another, sometimes called lila.

Holi is accompanied by many legends but there are two stories that serve as the origin of Holi traditions. The story of Krishna and Radha is said to be the basis for the ritual of throwing and applying colored water and powder. According to legend, the young Krishna complained to his mother, Yashoda that Radha was so fair and he was so dark. Yashoda advised him to apply color to Radha's face and see how her complexion would change. Thus, Holi has now become a festival of colors not only to celebrate the coming of spring but also to disregard social norms and to focus on enjoying the festivities.

Another legend behind Holi is that an evil king tried to kill his son, Prahalada, a devoted follower of the god Vishnu. The king, Hiranyakashipu, challenged Prahalada to sit on a pyre and asked (though some believed she was forced) his sister, Holika, who the king believed was immune to fire, to sit with his son in the fire. When the fire started, everyone watched as Holika burned to death, but Prahalada survived without any injuries due to his devotion to Vishnu. According to some accounts, Holika begged Prahalada for forgiveness before her death, so he promised that the burning of Holika would be remembered every year at Holi.



MARCH 10-12 HOLA MOHALLA SIKH Hola Mahalla begins on the first day of the lunar month of Chet in the Nanakshahi calendar and follows the Hindu festival of colors, Holi.

Guru Gobind Singh started this festival as a day for Sikhs to practice their military exercises and hold mock battles.

Today, Sikhs celebrate by watching and partaking in martial arts parades, led by the nishan sahibs of the Gurdwaras. These are followed by poetry readings and music.

March 17 Saint Patrick's Day Christian Saint Patrick's Day, feast day (March 17) of St. Patrick, patron saint of Ireland. Born in Roman Britain in the late 4th century, he was kidnapped at the age of 16 and taken to Ireland as a slave. He escaped but returned about 432 to convert the Irish to Christianity. By the time of his death on March 17, 461, he had established monasteries, churches, and schools. Many legends grew up around him—for example, that he drove the snakes out of Ireland and used the shamrock to explain the Trinity. Ireland came to celebrate his day with religious services and feasts.

March 19 Saint Joseph's Day Christian St. Joseph's Day, also known as the Feast of Saint Joseph, is the feast day for St. Joseph—which falls on March 19th each year. Saint Joseph is believed by Christians to have been the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the step-father of Jesus Christ. In Poland and Canada, it is a Patronal Feast Day and is Father's Day in some Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain. In Switzerland, it is a public holiday.

On some Western calendars, St. Joseph's Day was clearly marked on March 19th by the 10th century. By the late 15th century, the custom was adopted by Rome. In 1570, Pope St. Pius V extended its use to the entire Roman Rite. From the late 19th century through the middle of the 20th century, a feast day had been established to honor St. Joseph as the spouse of the Virgin Mary.

March 19-20 NawRuz Bahá'i/Zoroastrian Naw-Rúz (literally new day) is the Bahá'í new year festival and falls at the spring equinox, although it has been fixed at 21st March for countries outside the Middle East. Naw-Rúz symbolizes the new life of spring.

Naw-Rúz is the first day of the month of Baha which is the first month in the Bahá'í calendar.

The festival is usually observed with meetings for prayer and celebration. The celebration is often combined with a feast as the sunset before Naw-Rúz signals the end of a 19-day fast. Festivities can also include music and dancing.

Time is spent visiting friends and relatives and exchanging gifts. Naw-Rúz is one of the nine Bahá'í holy days on which work is suspended.

Naw-Rúz is an old Iranian celebration and also marks the start of the Zoroastrian new year.

March 20-21 Ostara/Spring Equinox Pagan/Wicca This marks the Spring Equinox. This is the Pagan "Easter" - or rather, this is the day that Christians borrowed to be their Easter. It is traditionally the day of equilibrium, neither harsh winter or the merciless summer, and is a time of childish wonder. Painted eggs, baskets of flowers and the like are generally used to decorate the house. It is common to use this time to free yourself from things which hinder progress. As a day of equilibrium, it is a good time to perform self banishings and also perform workings to gain things we have lost, or to gain qualities we wish to have.



The second of the 3 spring festivals, this Sabbat occurs in mid march when day and night are of equal length. This festival is also of fertility where seeds are blessed for planting soon after. Traditional colors for this holiday are light green, lemon yellow and pale pink.

March 25 Annunciation of Mary Christian (Catholic) The Annunciation is a day of celebration for Christians throughout the world. Many religions including the Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, the Greek Orthodox religion, and others hold the Annunciation as a very important day of religious life. This day reminds all Christians of the time when the Virgin Mary was asked by the Lord to bring into the world a Savior who would be named Jesus.

The current celebration date of the Annunciation occurs on March 25th which is nine months before the birth of Jesus on December 25th. In some religions, if March 25th falls during the Holy Week, the date will be moved to a date, not within Holy Week. In other religions, if March 25th falls during Holy Week, it will remain on that day and dual celebrations occur.

In celebrating the Annunciation, the color white is used during church services. The color white is used for this celebration as it relates to purity, respect, virtue, and holiness.

In the Catholic religion, the parishioners say a prayer to St. Mary for intercession with her son, Jesus. The prayer to St. Mary begins with the acknowledgment of Mary's grace when the angel Gabriel, sent by God to Mary, stated: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (St. Luke 1:28). The Hail Mary prayer continues by honoring Jesus with the words "and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus". The prayer ends with a plea from parishioners to St. Mary in asking for forgiveness of sins.

March 28 Khordad Sal Zoroastrian 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.

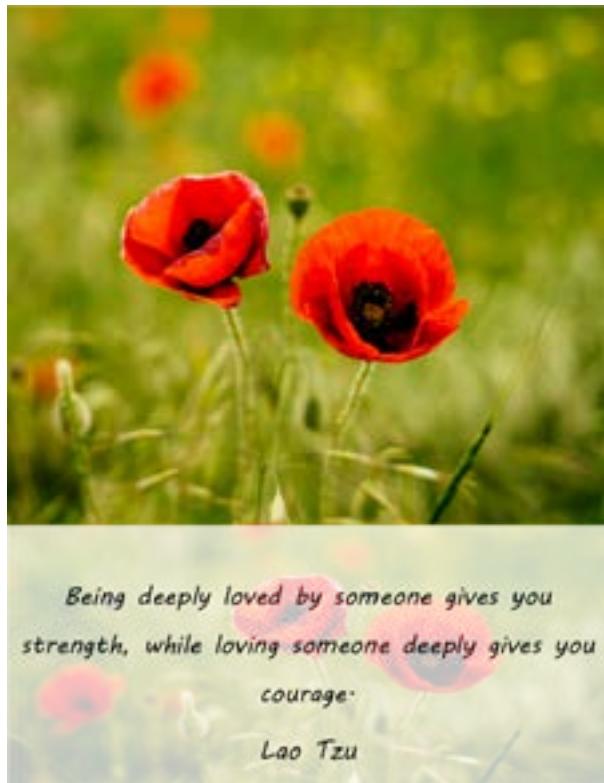
This festival is considered one of the most important in the Zoroastrian calendar. Zoroastrians gather in Fire temples for prayers and then celebrate with feasting.



Sources for this newsletter: encyclopedia2.com, bbc.co.uk, orthowiki.com, almanac.com, geoarch.org, timeanddate.com, britannica.com, holidayscalendar.com, thewhitegoddess.co.uk. All pictures are from the subscription service, Shutterstock, unless otherwise identified.

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Kathleen Ennis-Durstine at kennisdu@childrensnational.org and ask to be included.
Below is an example of a Grace Note*

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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