



Children's National®

# Chaplaincy Services

## Holy Days, Celebrations and Observances of May 2020

**May 7 Visakha Puja Day/Vesak Buddhist** Vesak is the holiest day of the year in Buddhism, one of the four largest religious families in the world. Buddhism is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (c. 563–483 B. C. E.), who came to be known as Buddha, or "The Enlightened One." The basic tenets of Buddhism can be summarized in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. The Four Noble Truths are 1) the truth and reality of suffering; 2) suffering is caused by desire; 3) the way to end suffering is to end desire; and 4) the Eightfold Path shows the way to end suffering. The Eightfold Path consists of 1) right view or right understanding; 2) right thoughts and aspirations; 3) right speech; 4) right conduct and action; 5) right way of life; 6) right effort; 7) right mindfulness; and 8) right contemplation.

Vesak celebrates the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death, or attainment of Nirvana. While these anniversaries are observed in all Buddhist countries, they are not always celebrated on the same day. Theravada Buddhists, who practice the oldest form of their religion and can be found primarily in Southeast Asia, observe all three anniversaries on the full moon of the sixth month. In Japan and other Mahayana Buddhist countries, these three events are celebrated on separate days: the Buddha's birth on April 8, his enlightenment on December 8 and his death on February 15.

Although the celebrations differ from country to country, activities generally center on Buddhist temples, where people gather to listen to sermons on the life of Buddha. In the evening, there are candlelight processions around the temples, while homes are decorated with paper lanterns and oil lamps. Because it's considered important to practice the virtues of kindness to all living things, it's traditional in some countries to free caged birds on this day, or to set up booths to dispense food to the poor.



**May 12 Lag B'omer Jewish** Lag BaOmer is the 33rd day of the Counting of the Omer, the seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot. It occurs on the 18th day of the month Iyar. This day has been accepted in modern Israeli tradition as a holiday established not by the Torah, but by the Sages. The origins of the holiday are unknown. Lag BaOmer is not mentioned in the Talmud, and only in the Middle Ages does it make its first appearance in the Scriptures.

The Omer has both agricultural and spiritual significance: it marks both the spring cycle of planting and harvest, and the Israelites' journey out of slavery in Egypt (Passover) and toward receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai (Shavuot).

An omer ("sheaf") is an ancient Hebrew measure of grain. Biblical law forbade any use of the new barley crop until after an omer was brought as an offering to the Temple in Jerusalem. The Book of Leviticus (23:15-16) also commanded: "And from the day on which you bring the offering... you shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete." This commandment led to the practice of the S'firat HaOmer, or the 49 days of the "Counting of the Omer," which begins on the second day of Passover and ends with the celebration of Shavuot on the 50th day.

Lag BaOmer commemorates a variety of historical events, including the end of a plague that killed many students of Rabbi Akiva (c. 50-135 C.E.), the yahrzeit of 2nd-century mystical scholar Shimon bar Yochai, and a Jewish military victory over Roman forces in 66 C.E. In remembrance of these events, some people celebrate with picnics and bonfires. Many couples in Israel choose to get married on Lag BaOmer, and many people also choose to wait until that day to get a haircut or beard trim.

Read more: [https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nli/english/digitallibrary/gallery/yearly\\_cycle/lag\\_baomer/pages/lag-baomer.aspx](https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nli/english/digitallibrary/gallery/yearly_cycle/lag_baomer/pages/lag-baomer.aspx)



**May 19 Laylat al Qadr Islam** Laylat al-Qadr is not a public holiday. Businesses have normal hours.

Laylat al Qadr marks the time when the Koran's first verses were revealed to the Islamic prophet Muhammed. It is also believed that this night marks their fate in the following year. Therefore, many Muslims pray in the night to God for mercy, forgiveness and salvation. This practice is also called Ehyaa.

This Night of Power is considered the most appropriate time of the entire year to pray for salvation and blessings. It is believed that a Muslim's past sins are forgiven if the person prays throughout this night. Many people assemble at mosques during the Isha' prayer, with many prayers being made until midnight.

Laylat al Qadr commemorates the night in 610 CE when Allah revealed the Koran (Islamic holy book) to the prophet Muhammad. The angel Gabriel first spoke to the prophet during that time, which marked the beginning of Muhammed's mission. These revelations continued throughout the remainder of his life, according to Islamic belief.



Children begin studying the Koran from an early age and they celebrate the moment when they have read all the chapters for the first time. Many adults try to memorize the Koran. The common belief that this day occurred on the 26th or 27th day of Ramadan has no Islamic base. It seems to have originated in Manichaeism where the death of Mani is celebrated on the 27th day of the fasting month. This day is also known as the Night of Power or the Night of Destiny.

There is a difference of opinion about the date for Laylat al-Qadr but, in general, it is agreed that it is most likely to be in the last 10 nights of Ramadan, with the odd nights being more likely. Of the odd nights, the night of the 27th (which is the night before the 27th of Ramadan, as the Islamic

day starts with nightfall) is most likely, according to many Muslim scholars.

**May 21 Ascension Day Christian** Ascension, in Christian belief, the ascent of Jesus Christ into heaven on the 40th day after his Resurrection (Easter being reckoned as the first day). The Feast of the Ascension ranks with Christmas, Easter and Pentecost in the universality of its observance among Christians. The feast has been celebrated 40 days after Easter in both Eastern and Western Christianity since the 4th century. Prior to that time, the Ascension was commemorated as a part of the celebration of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The meaning of the Ascension for Christians is derived from their belief in the glorification and exaltation of Jesus following his death and Resurrection, as well as from the theme of his return to God the Father. Thus, the Gospel According to John uses both the sayings of Jesus and his post-Resurrection appearances to indicate a new relationship between Jesus and his Father and between him and his followers, rather than a simple physical relocation from earth to heaven.

According to the first chapter of The Acts of the Apostles, after appearing to the Apostles on various occasions during a period of 40 days, Jesus was taken up in their presence and was then hidden from them by a cloud, a frequent biblical image signifying the presence of God.

A distinctive feature of the feast's liturgy in the Western churches is the extinguishing of the Paschal candle, first lit on Easter, after the Gospel has been read, as a symbol of Christ's leaving the earth. Despite the idea of separation indicated in this act, which might be expected to set a note of sadness, the whole liturgy of Ascensioentide, through the 10 days to Pentecost, is marked by joy in the final triumph of the risen Lord. One of the central themes of the feast is the kingship of Christ, and the theological implication is that the Ascension was the final redemptive act conferring participation in the divine life on all who are members of Christ. In other words, Christ "was lifted up into heaven so that he might make us partakers of his Godhead."

In the European Middle Ages the people's delight in the visual and dramatic found an outlet in various ritual practices that came to be associated with the feast. Popular customs included a procession in imitation of Christ's journey with his Apostles to the Mount of Olives, as well as the raising of a crucifix or a statue of the risen Christ through an opening in the church roof.

**May 23 Declaration of the Báb Baha'i** The Báb was the forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh. His mission was to prepare the world for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh and he declared it in the evening of May 22, 1844.

The Báb was later imprisoned and executed for his beliefs and activities. This is commemorated on the day of the Martyrdom of the Báb.

**May 23 Eid al-Fitr Islam Eid al-Fitr** First of two canonical festivals of Islam. Eid al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting, and is celebrated during the first three days of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar (though the Muslim use of a lunar calendar means that it may fall in any season of the year). As in Islam's other holy festival, Eid al-Adha, it is distinguished by the performance of communal prayer (salāt) at daybreak on its first day. Eid al-Fitr is a time of official receptions and private visits, when friends greet one another, presents are given, new clothes are worn, and the graves of relatives are visited.

**May 28 Ascension of Baha'u'llah Baha'i** This important holy day commemorates the anniversary of the death of the founder of the Bahá'í faith, Bahá'u'lláh, and his teachings.

Bahá'u'lláh died peacefully on the morning of May 29, 1892. He now lies buried in Bahji, in a shrine surrounded by a stunning garden, which is designed to symbolize the order of the world in the future.

Pilgrims to the Bahá'í shrines in Israel visit the tomb to pray there. This solemn anniversary is a day of rest, and is often observed by reading or chanting from the scriptures.

**May 28 Shavuot Jewish** Shavuot is one of the Jewish harvest festivals, also known as the festival or feast of 'Weeks'. (The other two Jewish agricultural festivals are Passover and Sukkot.) There is no set date for the two-day festival, but it takes place seven weeks (50 days) after the first day of the spring festival of Passover.

This time of year marks the start of the wheat harvest and the end of the barley harvest.

Shavuot also marks the time that the Jews were given the Torah on Mount Sinai. It is considered a highly important historical event.

Prayers are said on Shavuot (especially at dawn) to thank God for the five books of Moses (collectively known as the Torah) and for his law. Some people also spend the first night of Shavuot studying the Torah. Synagogues are decorated with flowers and plants on this joyous occasion to remember the flowers of Mount Sinai.

Dairy products are eaten during Shavuot. There are many interpretations about why this custom is observed. It is believed that once the rules about the preparation of meat were revealed in the Torah, the people of Sinai were reluctant to eat meat until they fully understood the rules.



**May 29 Ascension of Jesus Orthodox Christian (see above)**

**May 31 Pentecost Christian** Pentecost, also called Whitsunday, (Pentecost from Greek pentecostē, "50th day"), major festival in the Christian church, celebrated on the Sunday that falls on the 50th day of Easter. It commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and other disciples following the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ (Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2), and it marks the beginning of the Christian church's mission to the world.

The Jewish feast of Pentecost (Shavuot) was primarily a thanksgiving for the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, but it was later associated with a remembrance of the Law given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. The church's transformation of the Jewish feast to a Christian festival was thus related to the belief that the gift of the Holy Spirit to the followers of Jesus was the firstfruits of a new dispensation that fulfilled and succeeded the old dispensation of the Law.

When the festival was first celebrated in the Christian church is not known, but it was mentioned in a work from the Eastern church, the *Epistola Apostolorum*, in the 2nd century. In the 3rd century it was mentioned by Origen, theologian and head of the catechetical school in Alexandria, and by Tertullian, Christian priest and writer of Carthage.

In the early church, Christians often referred to the entire 50-day period beginning with Easter as Pentecost. Baptism was administered both at the beginning (Easter) and end (the day of Pentecost) of the Paschal season. Eventually, Pentecost became a more popular time for baptism than Easter in northern Europe, and in England the feast was commonly called White Sunday (Whitsunday) for the special white garments worn by the newly baptized.

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Sources for this newsletter: encyclopedia2.com, nli.org.il, reform judaism.org, britannica.com, bbc.co.uk.  
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