

Holy Week

This year, Easter Day falls on 11th April. The week leading up to it, which begins with Palm Sunday on 4th April, is very special in the church year, and is known as Holy Week.



Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday, the day when the Church remembers the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The gospels tell us that He had gone up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and that when He entered the city, the

crowds gave him a rapturous welcome, throwing palm fronds into his path. On this day churches worldwide will distribute little crosses made from palm fronds in memory of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem.



The next highlight of Holy Week falls on Maundy Thursday. Maundy Thursday focuses on one of the final acts concerning Jesus to be related in John's Gospel – the washing of the disciples'

feet by Jesus. The ceremony of the 'washing of the feet' of members of the congregation came to be an important part of the liturgy (regular worship) of the medieval church, symbolising the humility of the clergy, in obedience to the example of Christ.

'Maundy' is an unusual word, and relates to this medieval practice of foot-washing. In the Middle Ages, church services were held in Latin. The opening words of a typical service on this day are based on the words of Jesus recorded in John 13: 'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.' In Latin, the opening

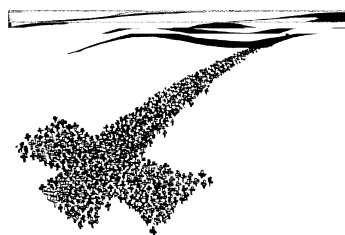
phrase of this sentence is 'mandatum novum do vobis' The word 'mundy' is thus a corruption of the Latin 'mandatum' (or command).

In England, in by-gone years, as an affirmation of humility, the monarch would wash the feet of a small number of his or her subjects. This has now been replaced by the ceremony of the 'Maundy money', in which the Queen distributes specially minted coins to the elderly at cathedrals throughout England.



Good Friday is the day on which Jesus died on the cross. It is the most solemn day in the Christian year, and is widely marked by the removal of all decorations from

churches. In Lutheran churches, the day was marked by the reading of the passion narrative in a gospel, a practice that lies behind the 'passions' composed by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750). Both the St Matthew Passion and the St John Passion have their origins in this observance of Good Friday.



The custom of observing a period of three hours' devotion from midday to 3 pm on Good Friday goes back

to the 18th century. The 'Three Hours of the Cross' often take the form of an extended meditation on the 'Seven Last Words from the Cross', with periods of silence, prayer, or hymn-singing.

Lent ends with Holy Saturday. The Eastern Orthodox churches hold the 'Paschal Vigil' – a late evening service which leads directly into the following Easter Day.