



THE PASCHAL TRIDUUM

The three great and
holy days

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Three Days, One Liturgy
- 2 Maundy Thursday
- 3 Good Friday
- 4 The Great Vigil of Easter
- 5 Learning More

Photo Credits

Photos by Maria Orlova, mas_hha,
Jonathan Borba, Emily,
and Alexander Suhorucov from Pexels;
Ashim D'Silva from Unsplash.

THREE DAYS, ONE LITURGY

An introduction to the Paschal Triduum

What's in a name?

In nearly every Western language except English, Easter is known by its Greek name: Pascha. Triduum is a Latin word meaning "three days". Paschal Triduum literally means "three days of Easter". In practice, this is a short, three day season in the church year, which makes the bridge between Lent/Passiontide and Easter: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter.

What's it about?

If Lent is a season of reflection, growth, and preparation, then the Triduum is what we prepare ourselves for. This is the moment when those seeds, planted and watered, burst from the ground with new life. This is the heart of the Church's year and the liturgy that all other liturgies take their cues from.

One liturgy over three days

There are many analogies used to describe the Triduum: A play in three acts; a symphony in three movements; a journey with three stops. However we think of it, the Triduum begins with the Maundy Thursday liturgy and continues until the end of the first celebrations of Easter Day.

Maundy Thursday's liturgy has an opening but no closing; Good Friday has neither opening nor closing; the Great Vigil and first Eucharist of Easter has no opening, but does conclude with a dismissal. We may go home and rest in between ceremonies, but the liturgy stays open and continues on. Like a flowing river into which we dip for a time and step back out of, but that keeps running whether we are there or not.

The Church—the Body of Christ—is at prayer and worship constantly over these great and holy days

MAUNDY THURSDAY

1 WASHING OF FEET

Maundy Thursday holds three major events. The first remembers Jesus's washing of the feet of the disciples, much to their concern. Jesus leads by serving, demonstrating that God is willing to meet us in our most awkward, rude, humble, dirty, seemingly unworthy of places. Even to kneel down and wash the dirt and dust from our feet.

Jesus also commands the disciples who receive this blessing to share it with others: "For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." So, on this day, we honour this command and wash the feet of one another.

2 COMMEMORATING THE LAST SUPPER

Maundy Thursday also remembers the last meal Jesus shared with his friends and disciples before his crucifixion. It is from this event in the Gospels that we receive the words that we repeat, in some form, at every Eucharist:

Jesus took bread and gave thanks saying "Take, and eat: this is my body which is broken for you." In the same way he took the cup, saying, "This is my blood which is shed for you. When you do this, you do it in memory of me."

3 STRIPPING THE CHURCH AND GETHSEMANE

The final acts of this day's ceremony are to remove from the church all of the symbols of light and glory. Candles are snuffed and removed, brass and gold are taken away, banners rolled up, and lights put out. In some communities the reserved eucharistic bread and wine are taken out of the church and stored elsewhere. Often Psalm 22 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is sung while the stripping of the church takes place. This emotional act represents Jesus's departure to the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before the crucifixion and his solitude as the disciples who promise to stay with him fall asleep.



GOOD FRIDAY

Almost all Christians agree that Good Friday is a central day in our faith and should be observed by everyone who is able. How it ought to be observed is where this opinion branches into almost as many paths as there are Christians.

For Anglicans—and most other churches rooted in the Western catholic tradition—Good Friday is not a day for Passion Plays reenacting the crucifixion nor is it a funeral for Jesus. It is a day of solemn reflection where we gather to hear the Passion proclaimed, to pray, to give thanks, and to stand in Holy awe of what God has done for us on the Cross.

This day includes a reading of the Passion according to St John. Following this are solemn intercessions used only on this day, where we pray for the whole world. The Church remembers that Jesus's death on the Cross is not a condemnation of the world nor a punishment. It is God's outpouring of love, grace, and mercy—water and blood, baptism and eucharist—into the world that we might be saved from sin and death and join the eternal life of Jesus Christ.

We also acknowledge that our salvation is sure and certain but that we are works in progress. We all fall into sin and must always return to the love of God to be forgiven and restored. No matter how thoroughly our feet are washed, we will dirty them again. When we do, our God is ready to kneel and wash them with loving hands and the water of life.

In many communities this liturgy includes a large, wooden cross or crucifix placed before the congregation as a focus for prayer and reflection. It is also common for people to venerate the cross by approaching it and touching, embracing, or kissing it, remembering the anthem: This is the wood of the cross, on which hung the Saviour of the world. Come let us worship.

This day ends in silence and expectation, waiting for the Great Vigil of Easter.



THE GREAT VIGIL OF EASTER

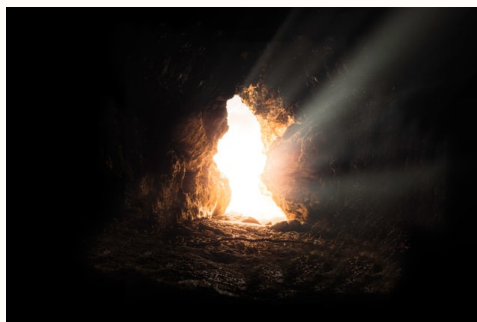
In the Christian calendar, most days are measured from midnight to midnight. However, important days begin at sundown the day before their calendar date. When a day's first liturgies happen the night before, they are called vigils. This is where the beloved tradition of Christmas Eve liturgies is rooted.

Like Christmas, Easter also has a vigil. In the case of Easter, it is called the Great Vigil because this liturgy is the model from which all others take their shape. The candle from which all other candles are lit. The stem from which all other shoots grow.

The vigil begins in darkness. We approach the church like the women approaching the tomb, remembering the events of Good Friday. We light a fire, that we might see our way, sharing the light of Christ with one another.

On entering the church and realizing the tomb is empty, an ancient hymn called The Exsultet is sung. This hymn calls on every power in earth and heaven to sing and rejoice in the power of Christ who broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave.

After this triumphant resurrection hymn, light is restored to the church and a cycle of readings from the Hebrew Bible, psalms, and prayers recalling the history of our salvation is shared. We remember the events and prophecy that brought us here.

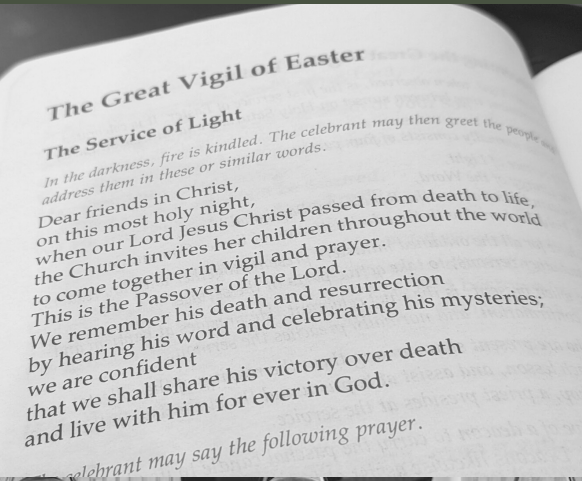


A song of praise is then sung, bells are rung, a resurrection Gospel is proclaimed and those who have been preparing through Lent for baptism are led to the font to receive the sacrament of new life. When the baptisms are complete, the congregation dances with the newly baptized and reconciled from the font to the altar, singing the Easter Troparion (hymn), remembering again Christ's victory over death.

At this point the church has been restored, the Resurrection has been proclaimed, history has been honored, new Christians have been baptized, alleluias are sung, God is being praised, and there is only one thing left to do: Bring forth all of the gifts of God's creation and celebrate the first Holy Eucharist of Easter together.

In many communities, when the liturgy has concluded celebrations and parties begin that continue long into the wee hours of the morning, sharing the joy of Easter with siblings, friends, and neighbours.

LEARNING MORE



DOING IT!

Participating in the Paschal Triduum

The best way to learn more about the traditions, history, and power of these three great and holy days is to participate in them. The intimacy of foot-washing; the heartbreak of Gethsemane; the awe of Good Friday; the ancient mystery of the Exsultet; the victory of the Easter Troparion; the glory of the first Eucharist of Easter are all present with abundant blessing in these liturgies that we share with our ancestors in the faith.



TALK ABOUT IT!

Sharing experiences and traditions

Talk with friends, godparents and elders in the faith, leaders in the church, and clergy about your questions and experiences during these days. Share your insights, your surprises, even your concerns. We all meet God in different ways in our worship and by sharing those experiences, we can all move deeper into the Paschal mystery.



READ ABOUT IT!

Articles, books, and so much more

Countless books, articles, sermons, pamphlets, tracts, and every other means of sharing thinking in writing have been composed about these three great days over the generations. If you would like recommendations for reading about the Triduum as a whole, any of the three days themselves, or any other aspect of Christian life and tradition, please contact the Rev. Andrew Rampton. He would be delighted to hear from you!

THE PASCHAL
TRIDUUM

CONTACT US

Holy Trinity Church
256 Smith Street
Winnipeg, MB R3C 1K1
204-942-7465

holytrinitywpg.com

