

Holy Week  
at  
Redeemer

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Greetings in Christ!

The religious ceremonies of Holy Week are central to our parish life and identity. We enthusiastically prepare and participate in the yearly “contemplation of those mighty acts, whereby God has given us life and immortality”.

However, we know these rites and ceremonies may seem surprisingly different, even confusing, to our newcomers, visitors and guests. Therefore, we have created this series of brief explanations about the liturgies (worship events) of Holy Week.

We hope you find them helpful. If you have questions about “what in the world is happening now?” - please feel free to ask the people next to you. We want you to be able to share Holy Week as fully as possible. Welcome!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John F. Fergusson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a small cross at the end.

The Rev. Canon John F. Fergusson  
Rector, The Church of the Redeemer

## *Introduction*

Most American Christians, including many Episcopalians, have come to expect the Church to commemorate the events of the last week of Jesus' life with a Palm Sunday worship experience, an Easter Sunrise Service and, perhaps, a Good Friday observance.

Thus, when confronted with a Palm Sunday procession and dramatic reading of Our Lord's Passion, highly symbolized evening liturgies on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and the principal Easter celebration occurring on Saturday night, it may seem as if we are doing something very new and different.

Actually, these Holy Week liturgies (worship events and ceremonies) are very ancient.

The Great Vigil of Easter (which takes place on the Saturday night before Easter Day) began in the first century of the Church's life.

The liturgies for Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday began in Jerusalem in the mid-300's AD. Under the guidance of Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem (c. 315-86 AD), these "worship experiences" were created for pilgrims visiting Jerusalem for Holy Week and to provide instruction for baptismal candidates. We have a record of them in a diary kept by Etheria, a nun, who made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 387AD. The Holy Week liturgies at Redeemer are substantially similar to her descriptions.

Thus, although our Holy Week events and ceremonies may seem new and unusual when compared to the experience of American Protestant Christianity, they are, in fact, the means through which the majority of Christians, throughout most of the Church's history, have commemorated and reappropriated the "mighty acts of God" in the last week of Our Lord's earthly life.

Let us turn our attention to the "what and why" of the liturgies for Holy Week.

## *Palm Sunday*

Actually, the correct title of this first day of Holy Week is not “Palm Sunday”, but rather “The Sunday of the Passion”.

The central experience of all worship at Redeemer is communion with Christ and reappropriation of the redemptive power of God in and through receiving the consecrated bread and wine.

However, every liturgy has a thematic core. On this day, that core is the dramatic reading of the account of Our Lord’s passion and death from one of the Gospels; thus the title “Sunday of the Passion”. We do this to “set the stage” and remind us of the events we will commemorate during the rest of Holy Week.

It is the ancient custom of the Church to begin important events and observances with a solemn procession from one location to another. On this day, we begin Holy Week with just such a procession. This procession recalls Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem to begin the “mighty acts of salvation”, often called his Exodus (recalling the salvation journey of the Old Testament).

During this procession, we frequently hear the word “hosanna” sung and said. “Hosanna is a Hebrew word which means “Save us, we beseech you”. The word comes from the Gospel account of Jesus’ entry of Jerusalem. It is a reminder that salvation comes to us from God through Christ, accomplished by the events of this last week of Christ’s life.

From the moment of our Baptism onward, we have all become participants in the saving activity of God, making a journey into fuller experience of the Kingdom of God. The Palm Procession, Passion Gospel and reception of the consecrated bread and wine connect our personal spiritual journey with the events through which “life and immortality” have been given.

## *Maundy Thursday*

The word “Maundy” in this day’s title comes from the Latin word “mandatum” which means “commandment”. It is taken from the Gospel according to John’s account of Jesus’ washing of the disciples feet at the Last Supper.

On this day we rejoice in Christ’s establishment of the Holy Eucharist (Holy Communion) as the “sure and certain” means for us to have communion with him and receive the redemptive power of his sacrifice into our lives.

Prior to receiving Holy Communion on Maundy Thursday, we participate in a ceremony of “foot-washing”. In John’s Gospel, we learn foot-washing was an act of love by Jesus to his disciples, as well as a reminder of the type of service Christians are called to exercise toward the World and one another. In many parts of the Early Church it was considered to be a sacrament (i.e. the power and love of God was conveyed through the action).

At Redeemer, the foot-washing consists of a small amount of water sprinkled upon your foot, immediately dried with a towel and followed by a kiss, the Christian sign of peace and love. It is a potent experience of the unconditional love God has for all. It is this “holilove” Christians are called to reveal and manifest as they minister.

After we receive Holy Communion, a large piece of the consecrated bread (marked with consecrated wine) is carried in procession to the Altar of Repose in the Education Building. An anthem is sung. The congregation then departs in silence.

Following the congregation’s departure, all decorations, altar furnishings and linens are removed from the sanctuary. This prepares the worship space for the solemn liturgy of Good Friday, and symbolizes the beginning degradations of Our Lord’s Passion.

From that moment until midnight, all are invited to spend a period (traditionally one hour) of prayer, meditation and reflection near the Altar of Repose, in the Education Building. (Reading and devotional materials are provided.) This “Gethsemane Vigil” recalls Our Lord’s prayerful struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane. At midnight, the account of Jesus’ arrest and removal is read. A prayer is said. The consecrated bread and wine are taken away.

## *Good Friday*

At this liturgy, the first thing to strike our senses is the unfamiliar barrenness of the worship space. There is nothing to distract our attention from the Cross and the saving events we commemorate. It is a time of great solemnity. However, the profundity of the liturgy should not be confused with mourning. We are not conducting a “funeral for Jesus”. Instead, with awe, we contemplate the deep redemptive love of God and its meaning for ourselves and the World.

The liturgy begins in the Nave (our main worship space) with prayer, biblical readings (including The Passion of Our Lord according to John) and a sermon.

Following the sermon, a 2nd Century form of the Prayers of the People called “The Solemn Collects” is prayed. Through them, we pray for the World, Creation and ourselves, for whose redemption Our Lord suffered and died.

Next, we participate in devotions which extol Christ’s victory on the Cross.

At the conclusion of these devotions. The figure of the Crucified Lord is taken down from the Cross, wrapped in a linen shroud and carried in solemn procession to the Chapel.

The figure of Our Lord is symbolically buried in the Chapel.

The liturgy concludes with a prayer.

We depart in Silence.

## *The Great Vigil of Easter*

From the 1st Century, the Church's primary celebration of the Resurrection has taken place in the middle of the night on Saturday. It was at this liturgy, during the first centuries of the Church's history, that the majority of people were baptized. It is the central festival and core of the Church Year.

The Great Vigil of Easter consists of four parts:

1. The Liturgy of Light
2. The Liturgy of Salvation History
3. Christian Initiation
4. Holy Communion

In Roman times, it was the custom to extinguish all fires and lamps when a member of the household had died. The kindling of a "new fire" indicated the period of mourning was ended.

Following that custom, the Great Vigil begins on the steps at the entrance to building. A new fire is kindled and blessed.

A large candle (called the Paschal Candle) is prepared and blessed. This Paschal Candle represents the resurrection life and light of the Risen Christ.

The Paschal Candle is lit from the new fire.

The Paschal Candle is carried by the Deacon in a procession into the Nave (worship space). We follow the Paschal Candle into the nave, responding to the sung words "The Light of Christ" by singing "*Thanks be to God*".

Once we are in the pews, the Paschal Candle is brought to the ends of the rear pews. Those at the back of the room light their candles and pass the light on to others in the pew. The light is then passed forward. Soon the room is ablaze with light, reminding us all of the new light and life given to us in Baptism.

The Paschal Candle is placed on its stand. An ancient hymn of praise (*the Exsultet*), extolling God's saving actions in the Passover, Exodus and Resurrection is sung by the Deacon.

*(Cont'd. on next page)*

## *The Great Vigil of Easter (Cont'd.)*

Following the hymn of praise, we are seated. Then a series of six readings, tracing Salvation History in the Hebrew Scriptures, are read. After each reading there is a period of silence. Then a psalm is sung.

Following the readings, the latest chapter in salvation history is written as we renew our Baptismal Covenant and commitment.

A very brief interlude follows. This interlude is concluded with a musical selection.

Following the musical selection, Holy Communion begins with the joyful announcement "Alleluia! Christ is Risen!" Recalling the wonder with which the first disciples heard this news and with our own joy over our redemption, we respond, "*The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia*"

What follows is the year's most glorious celebration of Holy Communion. Here at Redeemer, it includes majestic music, with instrumental accompaniment, art, flowers, incense and our best vestments.

The Paschal Candle occupies a place of honor beside the Altar, where it will burn throughout the fifty day Easter Season.

From that Altar, we receive the Risen Christ and the Resurrection Life he brings in the consecrated bread and wine of the Easter Eucharist (Communion).

Following this glorious liturgy we move to the Undercroft for a gala reception to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER  
2012  
HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

**PALM SUNDAY**

April 1 10:00 am *(only)* Procession and Liturgy  
*(The Procession begins in the Undercroft)*

**MAUNDY THURSDAY**

April 5 7:30 pm Liturgy  
9:00 pm-midnight Gethsemane Vigil *(Ed. Bldg.)*

**GOOD FRIDAY**

April 6 7:30 pm Good Friday Liturgy

**HOLY SATURDAY**

April 7 10:00 am Ministry of the Word *(Ed. Bldg.)*

**GREAT VIGIL OF EASTER**

April 7 9:00 pm Vigil, Baptism, Festival Eucharist  
*Followed by the Gala Agape.*  
*(Overflow parking is available across the street in the Bethany parking lot.)*

**EASTER DAY**

April 8 11:00 am *(only)* Festival Holy Eucharist