



St John
the Evangelist, Balmain
Anglican Church
of Australia

Holy Week & The Easter Triduum

One of the things that becomes much more noticeable in recent times is how we, and that includes people in the church as well as those outside, have split the Easter story, so that not only does it become more comfortable in a spiritual sense but also, I suspect, in a physical and practical sense. Many people will only go to church on Easter Day itself, leaving out the rest of Holy Week. I've heard many people say that they don't want to go to church on Good Friday because it's all too sad and a bit gory.

But from the church's point of view the whole story has to be taken together: betrayal leads to crucifixion: crucifixion leads to death; death leads to resurrection. We cannot just pick and choose the bits we want.

It is for this reason that the final three days of Holy Week - known as Easter, or Paschal Triduum (a *triduum* is a three day period of prayer, usually in preparation for some festival) - are seen as being so important and why all Christians are encouraged to take a full part in the services on offer.

The Easter Triduum consists of the three days between sunset on Maundy Thursday and evening prayer on Easter Day. (Never forget that for the church a day begins on the previous evening and goes to the following evening).

The First Days.

The week begins with Palm Sunday – as we go with Christ into the Holy City, acclaimed by the crowds who will soon be baying for his death. The full story of the Passion is read – getting people ready for the week ahead.

At St John's this year, we will be adding a couple of extra services in the first three days. Monday and Tuesday will each have a Eucharist at 9.00am, and then at 5.00pm we will follow the Stations of the Cross – short prayers and meditations as we contemplate the 14 Stations that remind us of the final journey of Christ to his Death.

Maundy Thursday (5.00pm).

The service on Maundy Thursday, which is always a Eucharist, takes place in the evening. (It should be the only Eucharist of the day, apart from the Chrism Mass which is celebrated by the Bishop). The evening service is full of imagery and symbolism. In it we are taken to be with Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper, which in itself celebrated Passover. The readings reflect this, as we hear what God did to save Israel from slavery in Egypt; and how He is about to do it again for all of humanity. We are led to think about the Passover, but also the institution of the Eucharist, as Jesus takes bread and wine and declares them to be his body and blood. And, in the middle of the service, we are reminded of one other commandment of Jesus: that we are to serve each other. This is symbolised by the washing of feet; as Jesus washed the feet of his disciples so now the priest washes the feet of those he or she is called to serve. "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you." (The first word in this sentence Latin is *mandatum*, from which the word *Maundy* derives).

The service itself seems to have no end; there is no final blessing or dismissal. After communion the lights of the church are turned down, and while a psalm is read the ornaments of the church are removed and the altar is stripped. Probably the most moving part is when the Blessed Sacrament is removed from the aumbry and the light is turned off – the devastation of being without Christ, the darkness of the tomb.

The Blessed Sacrament itself is taken to a small garden, representing the Garden of Gethsemane. Around that garden a vigil begins – we wait a while, in prayer, waiting for the momentous events to begin. "Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter." This is our time to stand with Christ as he prepares for what is to come.

Good Friday (9.30am & 2.00pm).

Good Friday is a day of contrasts; a day of ambiguities. We face up to the devastation of what humanity can do to its creator; yet at the same time we celebrate death, because by death comes eternal life.

The services for Good Friday are designed to make us think about what was happening on that Cross, and the part that we play in it. In the morning, we have a basic liturgy, which includes readings about the passion; hymns; a litany; and most importantly the veneration of the Cross. The Cross - the symbol of all that we hate - becomes an object of veneration for what it gives.

In the afternoon, we have a period of meditation and readings, this year based on the Stations of the Cross. Again, it is time to think about ourselves, and how we react to the story that we're hearing. This service is designed to end at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the ninth hour when Jesus died. As we leave in silence we think about the great darkness, which seems to have fallen on the world.

Blessing of the Easter Garden – Saturday, 5.00pm.

Rather like the Crib at Christmas, the Easter Garden is there to remind us of that time that creation is joined once again to Creator. This is a short service, aimed at children, with a children's story – so bring any young people!

Easter Day (9.30am)

By tradition, there are no celebrations during the day on Holy Saturday – once again we feel the emptiness and the darkness of the world without Christ.

This ends at dawn on Easter Day when we hold the Service of Light and the first Eucharist of Easter. This is probably one of the most powerful and glorious services of the Church's year.

It begins in darkness, a darkness which begins to be dispelled by the lighting of the Easter Fire. From this fire the new Paschal Candle is lit, and that light spreads out to the candles of the people. We then process into the church following the Paschal Candle, which is placed on its stand at the front. We then sit to listen to the Exultet, one of the greatest and earliest of the Church's hymns to celebrate the Easter mysteries. We then once again hear in a few Bible readings God's plan of salvation, which culminates in the resurrection. As the lights come on, and the bells ring we can truly say that Christ is risen! This service also contains the renewal of Baptism vows; the Paschal candle is plunged into the water, showing the link between death, resurrection and baptism. We then celebrate the first Eucharist of Easter, sharing in the body and blood of the risen Christ.

These three days together tell the whole story. The liturgy, used by the church for nearly 2000 years, leads us through the story of the Passion; through death; and into resurrection. Why not try joining us this year for the whole story?

Confession

It is traditional for people who wish to take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation during this week. If you would like to, or just wish to talk about it, please see Fr Peter.