



**ASH WEDNESDAY TO EASTER
THE LENTEN JOURNEY 2026**


Holy Trinity
Cathedral
AUCKLAND

Ash Wednesday to Easter: The Lenten Journey

The joyful commemoration of the events of the first Easter morning formed the centre and climax of the Church's liturgical year from the earliest of times. The all-night vigil which preceded the Eucharist at dawn was originally a time of preparation, but soon became an integral part of the celebration of the resurrection of Christ and the redemption which he won for his people, so that it was seen as a most appropriate occasion to administer baptism, the sacrament of rebirth.

This preparation moved back to include first of all Holy Week (beginning on Palm Sunday), and then the whole of the Lenten Fast, recalling the forty days of our Lord's temptation in the wilderness. At the time of the Reformation (16th century) the ceremonies associated with particular days in this period (such as Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday) were largely excluded from the Book of Common Prayer. However, renewed interest in the ancient patterns of worship in the early church (and much of our knowledge comes from an intrepid woman (possibly a nun) Egeria, who travelled widely and kept extensive diaries of what she witnessed) has seen the restoration of a rich pattern of services which take us on a journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter. All are very much part of current worship in the Anglican Communion (as well as churches of other denominations).

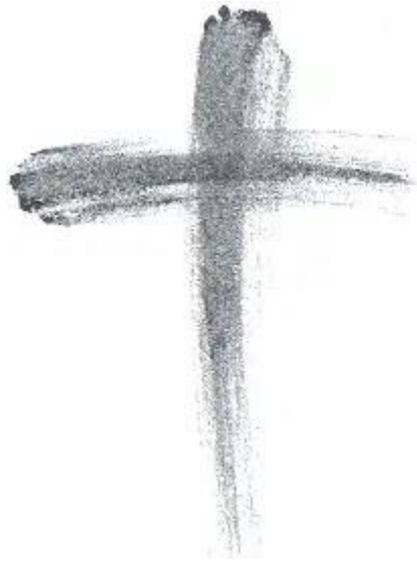
Cover picture: Christ entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday

One of a series of Christian art exhibitions at the University of Fu-Jen, Peking in 1938. Part of a series entitled "The Christ we Share" published by USPG, CMS and The Methodist Church UK.

Ash Wednesday

The Beginning

On this day, as the Church embarks on its Lenten Journey to the Easter Vigil, the theme is one of penitence. Ashes (made from last year's palm crosses) are blessed and used as a symbol of repentance. Those who wish are invited to come forward and be marked with a cross of ashes their foreheads. Many will want to continue in this spirit of repentance, simplicity, and extra prayer and worship.



Music during Lent

There is a long tradition of generally having more sombre music during this time. This is by no means boring and some of the most beautiful and meaningful music ever composed for use in worship is sung and played. Among these are the legendary setting of Psalm 51 by Allegri, known by its Latin title, *The Miserere*.

Works such as Stainer's *The Crucifixion* and Handel's *Messiah* continue to be popular both for musicians (singers and instrumentalists) as well as congregations and audiences.

It is usual not to sing or say the Gloria or Alleluyas during Lent - though there are always exceptions which can be made.

Palm Sunday



Palm Sunday marks the start of Holy Week – the final days of Jesus’s earthly life. Many church’s, including Holy Trinity Cathedral, make much of the start of this journey and invite people to join in procession as we remember the triumphal journey of Jesus into Jerusalem. Palm crosses, in New Zealand made either from palm fronds or flax leaves, are blessed and distributed to every person present.

One of the Passion narratives (that part of the Gospels which tells of Jesus’s betrayal, arrest, trial and crucifixion) is read as the Gospel of the day. While it can be sung, it is commonly done as a dramatic reading, involving different people reading the parts of different people such as Peter, Judas, Pontius Pilate, the crowd scenes of soldiers and onlookers. It can be both great fun and quite terrifying, particularly if people really get into the mood when shouting “Crucify him, crucify him!”

Maundy Thursday

There are two quite distinct services held on Maundy Thursday (the word comes from the Latin meaning 'to command').

The first is the Chrism Eucharist during which the Bishop and clergy gather to renew their ordination vows and bless the oils used for chrism (baptism and confirmation) and anointing of the sick and dying.

The second is an evening service during which the Last Supper that Jesus ate with his disciples is recalled. Two Gospel traditions are present in this service.

The first, drawing on Matthew, Mark and Luke, emphasises the Passover – that ancient remembrance of the angel of death 'passing over' the homes of the Israelites and the liberation from slavery in Egypt which followed. During the meal Jesus took bread and wine; after giving thanks to God he gave it to his disciples but, in a break with the ancient Jewish tradition, Jesus gave the bread and wine new meaning – his Body and Blood. This marks the beginning of our central act of worship – the Eucharist (thanksgiving), Holy Communion (coming together as God's people), or Mass (from the Latin words with which we still end our Eucharist: *Go to love and serve*). On this night the Gloria is once again sung.

The second Gospel tradition comes from St John and records the foot-washing incident in John 13, and the giving of a new commandment – love one another as I (Jesus) have loved you. Hence the name Maundy (Latin for command).



In another twist this service ends in some chaos with the stripping of the altar and removal of all decoration in the church/cathedral and an invitation to people to watch and pray. This, of course, reflects the scattering of the disciples after Jesus's arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, as well as the request of Jesus to his friends to stay awake with him in prayer.

Good Friday

On this most solemn day of the Christian calendar we gather to be with Christ as he suffers and dies. Here in the Cathedral the day begins with a service aimed particularly at families and children. Later, at 3.00pm, we are introducing a somewhat different format from previous years.

A Service of Shadows is based on the ancient service of Tenebrae and dates back to the very early days of the Church. We listen to a description of the “shadows” which descended on our Lord during his last hours of life on earth. Each Bible reading is followed by an intentionally challenging meditation, before the Choir takes up the most ancient of hymns, *Kyrie Eleison* – ‘Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy’. These are sung mainly in Greek, the original language of the Church. We pray and watch in silence.

As the final ‘shadow’ falls we move into the second phase of this service – the Veneration of the Cross. Members of the congregation are invited to move forward and stand or kneel before the cross as a simple act of thanksgiving and veneration. A nail or sprig of rosemary may be placed on or near the cross.

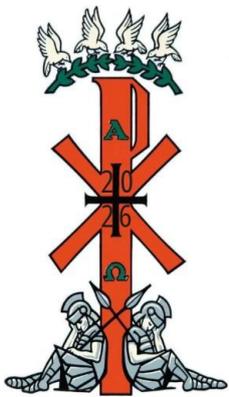
After the concluding prayer, the bell will be tolled 33 times, one for each year of Our Lord's life. The remaining candle is extinguished and choir and clergy, followed by the congregation, leave in silence. Sombre and saddened, but knowing that this is not the end of the story.



The Easter Vigil

In the Easter Vigil, which from early times has been the centre of the liturgical year, the Church celebrates the resurrection of Christ and the redemption which he won. Christians share the fruits of this redemption in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.

It is called Vigil because long ago the Church kept an all-night watch, reading and meditating on the Scriptures and praying till dawn when Christ's resurrection was acclaimed.



The Easter (or Paschal) Candle is an important symbol in this service, and throughout Eastertide (which stretches all the way to Pentecost) is a constant reminder of the risen Christ, the Light of the world.

There are often baptisms and confirmations at Easter services along with the opportunity for members of the congregation to renew their baptismal promises. The service moves from the focus on the Paschal Candle and Baptism to the joyful celebration of the Eucharist.

This year the music setting at 10.00am on Easter Day will be Mozart's Coronation Mass, complete with live orchestra. The great Easter hymns, replete with Alleluyas, are sung as we explode with joy and thankfulness at God's loving Grace shown to us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And so our Lenten Journey, which began on Ash Wednesday, is over for this year. But, of course, our Christian Journey continues as, day by day, we strive to walk in the Light of Christ, in a very real sense being Christ in the world.

Note: The three special days at the end of Holy Week – Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Day (which, following the Jewish calendar, begins on Holy Saturday evening) – are sometimes referred to as the Triduum – the Three Days.

***Acknowledgement:** In preparing these brief notes on the Lenten Journey I have drawn heavily, at times quoting verbatim, on the introductions to these services contained in "An Anglican Prayer Book, 1989, Church of the Province of South Africa). Frank Nelson*

HOLY WEEK SERVICES 2026

PALM SUNDAY Sunday 29 March

- 8.00am Eucharist in Bishop Selwyn Chapel
- 9.00 am Holy Communion (BCP) in St Stephen's Chapel
- 10.00am Festal Choral Eucharist
Procession and Blessing of the palm crosses
- 5.00pm 'The Crucifixion', John Stainer

Holy Wednesday 1 April

- 6.00 pm Choral Evensong

MAUNDY THURSDAY 2 April

- 10.00am Chrism Eucharist
- 7.30 pm Festal Eucharist
Last Supper, Washing of the feet, Stripping of the Altar

GOOD FRIDAY 3 April

- 10.00 am Family Service
- 3.00 pm A Service of Shadows

HOLY SATURDAY 4 April

- 8.00 pm The Great Easter Vigil Festal Eucharist

EASTER DAY 5 April

- 8.00am Eucharist with Hymns in St Mary's-in-Holy Trinity
- 9.00 am Holy Communion (BCP) in St Stephen's Chapel
- 10.00am Choral Eucharist and renewal of Baptismal Vows
Mozart's Coronation Mass with Orchestra
- 5.00pm Choral Evensong