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# Questions about Holy Week

Holy Week is one of the most important seasons for Catholics. Why do we celebrate it? What does it consist of? Answers to some frequently asked questions about Holy Week.

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## Summary

1. What is Holy Week?
2. How do Catholics celebrate Holy Week?

3. Why are churches decorated in a particular way in Holy Week?

4. When did Catholics begin to celebrate Holy Week?

5. When is Holy Week celebrated?

6. When did Holy Week actually occur?

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## **1. What is Holy Week?**

Holy Week is the week when the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ is commemorated.

It begins with Christ's entry into Jerusalem and ends with his crucifixion.

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## **2. How do Catholics celebrate Holy Week?**

There are four important ceremonies during Holy Week.

a) Palm Sunday commemorates Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem. On this day, Catholics organize processions with olive branches and blessed palms.

b) Holy Thursday commemorates the betrayal of Judas and the Last Supper, where Jesus instituted the Eucharist. In the morning, the bishops gather with the priests of their dioceses and bless the holy oils. The washing of the feet takes place later in the day during the Mass of the Last Supper.

c) Good Friday is the most solemn day of the year for Catholics. It commemorates the agony and suffering of Jesus' arrest, trial and

death. There is no Mass on this day; Jesus has died.

d) In the evening on Holy Saturday, the main Christian celebration of the year takes place: the Easter Vigil. It commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus.

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### **3. Why are churches decorated in a particular way in Holy Week?**

On Good Friday and Holy Saturday, churches are decorated differently than the rest of the year; many are adorned with black or purple. In some countries, crucifixes are covered a week before Holy Week. On Good Friday and Holy Saturday, there is no Eucharist or holy water.

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#### **4. When did Catholics begin to celebrate Holy Week?**

Holy Week has been celebrated since the beginning of the Church. There are documents that attest to commemorations of Christ's Passion in Egypt, Palestine, and modern Turkey and Armenia as early as the 4th century. It is probable that these celebrations were carried out for some years before their documentation. The custom reached Europe in the 5th century.

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#### **5. When is Holy Week celebrated?**

Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday and ends at the Easter Vigil during the night of Holy Saturday to Easter Sunday. Each year it is celebrated on a different date, fixed on the Sunday following the first full moon of spring.

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## **6. When did Holy Week actually occur?**

It is calculated that the Resurrection of Jesus took place on Sunday, April 9. So Holy Thursday took place on April 6.

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