

HOLY WEEK AND EASTER AT ST. PETER'S, SALISBURY

The liturgies for Holy Week and Easter are among the most significant and moving in the entire church year and St. Peter's conducts all the Proper Liturgies for Special Days found in the Book of Common Prayer. Parishioners and visitors are welcome to take part in all these liturgies to deepen your understanding and experience of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection.



Palm Sunday, March 29

Here we begin our service celebrating Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem with the Liturgy of the Palms. The congregation is invited to the back of the church for the reading of the gospel detailing Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Then the celebrant blesses the palm branches and hands a palm branch to every member of the congregation. The ministers and the congregation wave palm branches and process around the church, becoming part of the crowd that welcomed Jesus to the temple. We sing the hymn "All Glory, Laud and Honor" as we process.

At the conclusion of the hymn the celebrant prays the collect that transitions the service from the joy of Palm Sunday to the sorrow of Passion Sunday. We hear the lessons and then the Passion is acted out by ministers and lay people who read the gospel account of Jesus' condemnation, trial, crucifixion, and death, with members of the congregation taking the role of the crowd, shouting out during the trial to "Crucify him!" The service continues with the sermon, the Prayers of the People and then Holy Communion. The liturgical color is Passiontide Red; crosses, statues and icons are veiled for Holy Week.

The Palm Sunday service focuses on Jesus last days, his passion and death and the congregation takes the role of witness at these events.

The Triduum: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Great Vigil

One of the holiest times in the church year happens on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday with the three services of the Triduum: the services of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil. Liturgically they are all connected; one service leads to the next. In these services the congregation goes from witness to participant in the Paschal Mystery. It is recommended (but not required) that a person attend all three services to gain the full experience of these liturgies as the congregation enters intimately into Paschal Mystery.

Maundy Thursday, April 2 at 7pm

In this service we remember the Last Supper. The service begins routinely enough – a procession and an opening hymn, lessons, psalm, and the gospel which recounts Jesus' deeds at the Last Supper: the institution of Holy Communion and the washing of the disciples' feet.

Then things go in a different direction than the usual Eucharist: members of the congregation are invited to the foot washing – to have their feet washed as Christ at the Last Supper washed the feet of the disciples, and to wash someone else’s feet as Jesus commanded. With that, the congregation goes from witness to participant, invited into the Paschal Mystery, to share in Christ’s experience. The congregation then becomes Christ’s Body, Christ’s blood. We share in the foot washing and then we share in Holy Communion, being reminded that Jesus said: “This is my Body...this is my Blood. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

After Communion, the congregation is confronted with the fact that the reserved sacrament is taken out of the church to the Altar of Repose, and the congregation experiences the absence of Christ in the church. The altar is then stripped of all vessels, vestments and adornments and some chaos ensues. The final action is the closing of the triptych by the Rector, with the sound of both panels being closed echoing through the church. The congregation then leaves in silence, pondering the absence of Jesus who, in the narrative order of things, has been betrayed and removed from the people. The congregation is now positioned to return, on the following day, to the passion gospel they heard on Palm Sunday—this time, however, with a markedly different relationship to Jesus’ identity.

Good Friday, April 3 at 12noon

This service begins at noon – at the hour Our Lord was crucified and so our attendance at noon ties us to his hour of suffering at that time of day. It may require arrangements for time off work, or other appointments, but it is important to arrange to be present at this holy hour.



The altar remains stripped from the night before, the triptych closed, crosses veiled. The congregation enters in silence, and the collect identifies the congregation as the family of God “of whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed.” The congregation hears the lessons of Jesus as suffering servant and high priest and then hears the Passion of St. John in the context of Maundy Thursday wherein the people are now participants in the paschal mystery and share in Jesus’ high priesthood of sacrifice.

After lessons and sermon, the people take on the priestly role of Christ as they are invited to pray the Solemn Collects. The deacon bids the congregation to take on the mission of Christ as the mission of the church and to pray for the world’s redemption. The congregation now positions itself to stand in the place of Jesus: their mission is the world’s redemption.

Following the Solemn Collects a wooden cross is brought into the church in full sight of the people. Anthems of adoration are said and sung, and then people are invited forward to venerate the wood of the cross. The cross is revered because death on the cross is the extent to which Jesus would go to live out his life of self-offering to the world. The cross is the ultimate

act and symbol of that life of self-offering, and in revering the cross, the people revere the pattern of life of the Crucified.

The service concludes with the Mass of the Pre-sanctified, when the reserved sacrament is brought by the ministers into the church from the Altar of Repose for distribution. No celebration of Eucharist occurs until Easter and the last of the Reserved Sacraments is consumed by the people. Good Friday concludes in silence with the tolling of the bell thirty-three times, signifying Christ's thirty-three 33 years on this earth. We are left silently contemplating his death.

Great Vigil of Easter 8pm on April 4

This service begins after sunset when the world is darkening, and the congregation gathers not in the church but outside at St. Peter's Courtyard. The New Fire is lit at 8pm and the celebrant begins by addressing the congregation: "Dear friends in Christ: On this most holy night, in which our Lord Jesus passed over from death to life, the Church invites her members, dispersed throughout the world, to gather in vigil and prayer. For this is the Passover of the Lord, in which, by hearing his Word and celebrating his Sacraments, we share in his victory over death."

The celebrant then blesses the New Fire of Easter. A new paschal candle is brought before the celebrant by the deacon, and the celebrant blesses the candle and then lights the candle from the New Fire.

The Deacon who holds the Paschal Candle leads the congregation out of the courtyard and through the double doors of the dark church, stopping three times and proclaiming: "The Light of Christ," to which the congregation responds, "Thanks be to God." People light their own candles from the Paschal Candle and enter the church after the Deacon, shedding more light into the tomb-like darkness of the church. Here we experience the Light of Christ overcoming the darkness; we are reminded that from the tomb Christ passed from death to life in resurrection.

Ministers and people take their places in pews in the nave, and the Paschal Candle is placed near the lectern, in the same place it is placed for funerals at St. Peter's. A cantor then chants the ancient Easter prayer: the "Exsultet," by calling for the whole of creation – the heavens, the earth, and the church—to rejoice in the "victory of our mighty King." The Exsultet prayer moves between the past and present, recalling the saving acts of God and God's salvation at this moment: "This is the night, when all who believe in Christ are delivered from the gloom of sin." The Exsultet concludes in asking God to accept the offering of the Paschal Candle: "May it shine continually to drive away all darkness." Indeed, St. Peter's Paschal Candle will be lit from now through the 50 days of the season of Easter, until the Day of Pentecost.

Next comes the scriptures, psalms and hymns and prayer of the vigil, reminding the people of God's saving power at work through history. Each lesson builds upon the other to make God's case for salvation.

The third part of the Easter Vigil is baptism. Baptism is very appropriately done on Easter Eve, as it has been done at Easter since the Early Church. The celebrant reminds the congregation: "Through the Paschal Mystery we are buried with Christ by baptism into his death and raised with him to newness of life." This year there are no baptisms, but the deacon carrying the Paschal Candle will lead the ministers and the people to the baptismal font, where the celebrant will bless the water with the Paschal Candle and then will lead the people in the renewal of their baptism vows.

After all are sprinkled with the waters of baptism, the waters of Easter, the ministers process to the altar and the celebrant and the people proclaim, "Alleluia. Christ is Risen. The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia." The lights of the church which had been dimmed are now bright as are the lights on the altar. The people sing the Gloria for the first time since Lent began and the resurrection celebration begins. Joyfully we hear the lessons of Christ's resurrection and then celebrate the first Eucharist of Easter with plenty of music and alleluias. The service concludes with a four-fold Easter blessing and an Eastertide dismissal.

Easter Sunday April 5 and the Season of Easter

Easter Sunday begins the 50-day season of Easter, or Eastertide, a feasting season that concludes on the Day of Pentecost. Easter Sunday liturgy is our familiar service of Holy Eucharist. The Easter liturgy is what is modeled for the other Sundays of the year, for each Sunday is a feast of the resurrection. On Easter Sunday we hear the good news of resurrection in the scriptures, and we experience some fantastic music and prayers. It is a principal feast of the church year, celebrating the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

-The Very Rev. David Michaud
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