

Faith Festivals in March 2018

Dates come from interfaith calendar <http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/> and RE online <http://www.reonline.org.uk/>. Information sources as per each item.

1st March is **St David's Day** for our **Christian** friends. Saint David, or Dewi Sant as he's called in the Welsh language, is the Patron saint of Wales. His influence is shown in the number of churches dedicated to him in Wales and the celebrations each Saint David's Day. There aren't many facts about St David; All we know is that he really existed, that he was at the heart of the Welsh church in the 6th century, that he came from an aristocratic family in West Wales, his mother was a saint, Saint Non, his teacher was also a saint, St Paulinus, he founded a large monastery in West Wales, he was one of the early saints who helped to spread Christianity among the pagan Celtic tribes of Western Britain, he became Archbishop of Wales, but remained in his community at Menevia (now called St David's), his shrine became a great place of pilgrimage; four visits to the shrine at St David's were considered the equivalent of two to Rome, and one to Jerusalem!

The most famous story about Saint David tells how he was preaching to a huge crowd and the ground is said to have risen up, so that he was standing on a hill and everyone had a better chance of hearing him. For more <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/uk/st-david-day>

1st March is **Purim** for our **Jewish** friends. The story of Purim is told in the Book of Esther. Purim commemorates Esther's courage in saving the Jewish people living in Persia 2000 years ago from extermination. Esther is a Jewish girl who becomes Queen to King Xerxes of Persia, and through her bravery, is able to thwart an attempt to slaughter all the Jews living in Persia at that time. Purim is celebrated on the 14th and 15th days of Adar, the twelfth month of the Jewish calendar. The 14th day of Adar is the day that Xerxes' Prime Minister, Haman, chose for the extermination of the Jews. The word Purim means lots and refers to the lottery that Haman used to choose the date for the massacre, (Esther 3:7). Adar usually falls in March, and is synonymous with joy because it has traditionally been a month of hope and good luck for the Jewish people.

The main commandment related to Purim is to hear the reading of the Book of Esther. The Book of Esther is known as the Megillah, which means scroll. In the synagogue, it is usually an entertaining and rowdy occasion as during the reading, everyone, often dressed up in costume, is expected to boo and clang noise-making instruments every time the name of the villain of the story, Haman, is heard and to cheer whenever the names of the heroes of the story, Queen Esther and her uncle Mordechai's names are uttered. Another mitzvah (commandment) is that Jewish people should eat, drink and be merry at Purim. It is customary to hold carnival-like celebrations on Purim, to perform plays and parodies. Last but not least, Jews are commanded to send gifts of money, food or drink, and make donations to charity. More at <http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday9.htm>

1st March Magha Puja. This is when our Buddhist friends celebrate Magha Puja. (AKA Fourfold Assembly or "Sangha Day") Considered one of the most important Buddhist celebrations, Magha Puja Day refers to the veneration of Buddha and his teachings that takes place on the full moon of the third lunar month (about the last week of February or early March). This holy day is observed to commemorate an important event that occurred early in the Buddha's teaching life: the day on which Lord Buddha recited the "Ovadha Patimokkha" (the Fundamental Teaching or rules and regulation of the monastic orders) to his disciples.

After the first Rains Retreat (Vassa) at the Deer Park at Sarnath, the Buddha went to Rajagaha city where 1250 Arahats, (Enlightened saints) who were the Buddha's disciples, without prior appointment, returned from their wanderings to pay respect to the Buddha. They assembled in the Veruvana Monastery with the two chief disciples of the Buddha, Ven. Sariputta and Ven. Moggallana

The assembly is called the Fourfold Assembly because it consisted of four factors: (1) 1,250 Buddhist monks from different places spontaneously came to pay homage to the Lord Buddha, without any appointment. (2) All of them were Arahants (enlightened monks) who had attained the Apinyas (Six Higher Knowledge). (3) All of them had been individually ordained by Lord Buddha himself (Ehi

Bhikkhu). (4)-It was the full moon day of Magha month (March).

Magha Puja is a time for Buddhist to give thanks for the existence and work of the monks and nuns in the religious orders without whose prayers and guidance, sustaining a spiritual life and a spiritual community would be much more challenging. The spiritual aims of the day are: not to commit any kind of sins; to do only good and to purify one's mind. Celebrations vary, but can include chanting, meditation, the lighting of oil lamps, and the reaffirmation of people's commitment to Buddhist practice and traditions. Magha Puja is a traditional time for exchange of gifts; it has become a prominent festival among Western Buddhists even though it is less well known in the East. For more, see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/holydays/sangha.shtm>

2nd March is when our **Hindu** friends celebrate **Holi**. "Holi celebrates triumph over divisiveness and negativity," Sheetal Shah, senior director of the Hindu American Foundation in the National Geographic <http://news.nationalgeographic.co.uk/news/2013/04/pictures/130401-india-holi-krishna-vishnu-holiday-religion-culture/>.

"Celebrated on the day after the full moon in the month of Phalguna—which usually falls in early March—the major Hindu festival also marks the beginning of spring. During the evening of the full moon, bonfires are lit to ward off spirits and to celebrate the victory of good over evil. The following day, people pile into the streets for the beginning of the central Holi ritual—the throwing of bright, vibrant coloured powders and water at friends and strangers alike as they celebrate the arrival of spring, commemorate Krishna's pranks, and allow each other a momentary freedom -- a chance to drop their inhibitions and simply play and dance". For more <http://www.holifestival.org/holi-calendar.html> and for a glimpse of how it is celebrated in India see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaysqwFoVOE>

2nd/3rd March is **Hola Mahalla** (in the Lunar Calendar) for our **Sikh** friends. Hola Mahalla begins on the first day of the lunar month of Chet in the Nanakshahi calendar and follows the Hindu festival of colours, Holi. Guru Gobind Singh started this festival as a day for Sikhs to practise their military exercises and hold mock battles. Today, Sikhs celebrate by watching and partaking in martial arts parades, led by the Nishan sahibs (triangular flag on mast denoting the existence of a Gurdwara) of the Gurdwaras. These are followed by poetry readings and music. For more see http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Hola_Mahalla

11th March is **Mothering Sunday (Simnel Sunday) Christian**. This is more popularly known as Mother's Day. Traditionally, Christians visited their 'mother church' and took gifts to their mothers, which often included a simnel cake.

17th March is **St Patrick's Day** for our Christian friends. It is a national holiday in Ireland and commemorates one of its patron saints, St Patrick. In the United Kingdom, it is celebrated in Irish pubs and in cities, such as Nottingham and London where many people with an Irish background live. St Patrick is believed to have died on March 17 in or around the year 493. He grew up in mainland Britain, but spent time in Ireland as a young man and later as a missionary. According to popular legend, he is buried under Down Cathedral in Downpatrick, County Down, and banished all snakes from Ireland. However, it is thought that there have been no snakes in Ireland since the last ice age. The "snakes" that St Patrick banished from Ireland, may refer to pagan worshipers of snake gods. St Patrick's Day was originally a religious occasion to mark the life and work of St Patrick. In 1903 it became a public holiday in the whole of Ireland. Pubs were not allowed to open on March 17 until the 1970s. It is only recently that St Patrick's Day has become a secular holiday. For more <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/uk/st-patricks-day>

19th March is **St Joseph day**, (husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary) for our Christian friends. St. Joseph's Day is a Roman Catholic feast day commemorating the life of St. Joseph, the step-father of Jesus and husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary. "As befitting Saint Joseph's legacy of never speaking directly in the scriptures, leading years of unknown activities as Jesus' earthly father, and dying at date and place unknown, there are two different names for his feast and two different dates and one variable date. There is a tremendous lack of information about St. Joseph.

Catholic tradition honours the feast of Saint Joseph as the husband of Mary on March 19 and the feast day of St. Joseph on May 1 as Joseph the worker. The March 19 date is of comparatively recent years (1621) and is formally named the Solemnity of Saint Joseph Spouse of The Blessed Virgin Mary, the traditional day in the Western Church. An optional date of May 1 for Joseph the Worker was set in 1955 but has not caught on in the Christian world. On the March 19 feast of St. Joseph, Catholics honour him with an age-old tradition called St. Joseph's table. History has it the tradition began on the Italian island of Sicily. There was a drought that ruined harvest and caused a famine. The Sicilians prayed to Saint Joseph, the Patron Saint of the Family and prayers were answered when the famine and the drought receded. In the finest Italian heritage, homage to St. Joseph comes in the form of food and celebration. Over the years many different types of foods have joined the traditional collage that today is known as St. Joseph's table – all done in the theme of bounty food for all". For more, see <http://www.st-joseph-medal.com/st-josephs-day.html> and <http://www.fisheaters.com/customslent5.html>

20th March is Naw-Ruz (News Year) for our Bahá'í friends. "Baha'is faithful celebrate the start of a new year with the arrival of spring. After sundown on March 20 – the eve of the vernal equinox (in the Northern Hemisphere) – Baha'is throughout the world will celebrate Naw-Ruz, the start of the Baha'i New Year. For Baha'is this is a religious holiday that marks the end of the Nineteen Day Fast. It is one of the nine Baha'i holy days on which work and school is to be suspended. The Baha'i Faith originated in Persia (present-day Iran), and the Baha'i calendar adopted the Persian new year holiday, Naw-Ruz, which has been celebrated for thousands of years at the vernal equinox (in the Northern Hemisphere). Baha'is practitioners observe Naw-Ruz through prayer, meditation, readings from Baha'i scripture and festive gatherings.)" <http://www.bahai.us/2011/03/02/the-annual-nineteen-day-fast-a-time-of-spiritual-purification/>. For more, <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-4-7-2.html>

21st March is Naw-Ruz or Norooz (Zoroastrian New Year in the Fasli calendar) for our Zoroastrian and our Persian friends. Naw-Ruz or Noruz (also known as **Jamshedi** or **Jamshidi Noruz**) is the seventh obligatory feast and it is dedicated to fire. It is one of the most important festivals for the Zoroastrians for it is believed that Zoroaster himself started this tradition. It is the first day of the Zoroastrian New Year. Many people believe that what they do on this day will affect and influence the rest of the year. Preparations for Noruz start with thorough cleaning of homes and businesses. Further, traditions include meeting and greeting friends and family and enjoying a special meal together.

"The Zoroastrian Parsis of India celebrate Noruz twice, firstly in common with their Iranian brethren on the vernal equinox as Jamshedi Navroz (also referred to as the Fasli New Year) and secondly on a day in July or August, depending upon whether they follow the Kadmi or the Shahenshahi calendar. This is because the practice of intercalation in the Zoroastrian calendar was lost on their arrival in India. The Kadmi New Year always precedes the Shahenshahi New Year by 30 days.

<http://www.crystalinks.com/noruz.html>

Noruz is so deeply embedded in Iranian culture that it is still celebrated as the Iranian New Year in Islamic Iran, although without the religious connotations. Many fires are lit and there is feasting and celebrations. In modern times fireworks have also become part of the festivities.

For more <http://festivals.iloveindia.com/jamshed-e-navroz/jamshed-navroz-date.html>

25th March is The Annunciation of the Lord/ Christian (Anglican). Lady Day celebrates the angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she is to bear a child, and Mary's response in the Magnificat. The day provides an opportunity to focus on the doctrine of the incarnation. Gabriel told Mary to name her son Jesus, meaning "Saviour". It is one of the twelve Great Feasts of the church year. Many Christians observe this event with the Feast of the Annunciation on 25 March, nine full months before Christmas, the birthday of Jesus. The feast of the Annunciation is usually is moved in the Catholic Church, Anglican and Lutheran liturgical calendars when this date would fall during Holy Week or Easter Week or on a Sunday. The Eastern Orthodox Church, Oriental Orthodoxy and Eastern Catholic Churches do not move the feast, having special combined liturgies for those years when the Annunciation coincides with another feast. For more: <https://www.cute-calendar.com/event/feast-of-annunciation/20433.html>

25th March is Lady Day Secular. This day commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus. Meditative services are held in church to mark the time that Jesus spent on the cross. In the western Liturgical year, Lady Day is the traditional name of the Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin in some English-speaking countries. It is the first of the four traditional English quarter days. The "Lady" was the Virgin Mary. The term derives from Middle English, when some nouns lost their genitive inflections. "Lady" would later gain an -s genitive ending, and therefore the name means "Lady's day." For more: www.cute-calendar.com

25th March Palm Sunday for our **Christian** friends. Palm Sunday is the first day of Holy Week, when Christians remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where later he would be arrested and crucified. Many churches commemorate the day by processions, with the congregation carrying symbolic palm leaves folded in the form of a cross, or branches of palm trees.

25th – 31 March Holy week for our Christian friends. This is the most solemn week of the Christian year, in which Christians recall the events of the final week of the earthly life of Jesus.

29th March is Mahavira Jayanti (599 BCE) Jain. The birthday of the last Tirthankara, or great teacher and model of the Jainas. His birth and the events surrounding it are re-enacted. Monks or nuns read from the scriptures and teach about the rest of Mahavira's life. Lay people then return home to a celebratory feast. <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/2017-religious-festivals/march>

29th March Maundy Thursday for our **Christian** friends. Maundy Thursday commemorates Jesus Christ's institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper, which is described in the Christian Bible. The day is also known as Holy Thursday, Passion Thursday, Paschal Thursday or Sheer (or Shere) Thursday. It is the day before Good Friday and occurs during Holy Week. The Eucharist, also called Holy Communion (the liturgy and partaking of a piece of bread and sip of wine representing the body and blood of Jesus Christ) is observed in different ways and with different meaning in many Christian churches. Maundy Thursday in the United Kingdom features the monarch offering Maundy money, also known as Royal Maundy, to selected senior citizens – one man and one woman for each year of the monarch's age. The monarch presents each man and woman with a red and white purse during the service. The red purse traditionally contains an allowance for clothing and provisions and the white purse holds Maundy coins to match the monarch's age. Many Catholic and Anglican churches continue traditional Maundy Thursday rites that may include handing out special coins known as "Maundy money" to the aged and poor. Churches may also have the blessing of holy oil and feet washing as part of their Maundy Thursday service. Some churches have a tradition that involves priests washing the feet of 12 people to symbolize Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. For more <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/uk/maundy-thursday> for more on the Eucharist and Maundy Thursday in the United Kingdom See more: http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/ritesrituals/eucharist_1.shtml

30th March is Good (Holy) Friday for our **Christian** friends. Good Friday commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ following his time in the desert and his triumphal re-entrance into Jerusalem. This is a very important event in many Christian churches and is seen by some as the foundation of the Religion. Many churches hold special services on Good Friday to remind their congregations about Christ's suffering. Good Friday falls on the Friday before the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the vernal equinox. Many people in different countries observe this anniversary which involves fasting and praying. Many church services are held in the afternoon, usually around noon or midday to 3pm, to remember the hours when Jesus hung on the cross. Many churches also observe the day by re-enacting the procession of the cross as in the ritual of the Stations of the Cross, which depicts the final hours of Jesus' life. Processions are held in many countries such as India, Italy, Malta, the Philippines, and Spain. Specifically in the United Kingdom, the day is a bank holiday. People who regularly attend church will probably attend a special church service on Good Friday. Many Catholics do not eat meat on Good Friday. This means that, in some areas, it is common to eat fish on this day. It is traditional for all denominations to eat hot cross buns. There are a number of theories as to why the day marking the crucifixion of Jesus is known as

"Good" Friday The word 'Good' may be a different spelling or rendering of 'God' or it may have another, now lost, meaning of 'holy'. Another theory is that the tragedy of the crucifixion of Jesus brought great 'good' to his followers. Source: <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/uk/good-friday>

31st March – 7th April Passover/ Pesach for our Jewish friends. This major Jewish festival lasts eight days and commemorates the liberation of the Children of Israel and their Exodus from slavery in Egypt. The highlight is the Seder meal, held in each family's home at the beginning of the festival, when the story of their deliverance is recounted, as narrated in the Haggadah (the Telling, or the Story). Matzah, (unleavened bread) is eaten throughout the festival, as are other foods that contain no leaven (yeast). There is a major spring cleaning in the home shortly before the festival to ensure that no trace of leaven is left in the house during Pesach. Coconut pyramids and matza balls (which are put in soups) are foods that might be eaten at this time.

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