

Faith Festivals March 2019

1st March (Monday) 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>

4th March (Monday) is MahaShivaratri/Shiva Ratri for our Hindu friends. Maha Shivaratri or Shivratri, the night of the worship of Lord Shiva, is a major festival which occurs on the 14th night of the new moon during the dark half of the month of Phalguna. It falls on a moonless February night, when Hindus offer special prayer to the Lord Shiva. Shivaratri (Sanskrit 'ratri' = night) is the night when he is said to have performed the Tandava Nritya or the dance of primordial creation, preservation and destruction. The festival is observed for one day and one night only. People often fast on the night of Shivratri and sing hymns and praises in the name of Lord Shiva. Hindu temples across the country are decorated with lights and colourful decorations and people can be seen offering night long prayers to Shiva Lingam. Wood apple leaves, cold water and milk are offered to the Shiva Lingam on this day as they are believed to be Lord Shiva's favourite. Shivratri is considered especially auspicious for women. Married women pray for the well-being of their husbands and sons, while unmarried women pray for an ideal husband like Shiva, who is the spouse of Kali, Parvati and Durga. But generally it is believed that anyone who utters the name of Shiva during Shivratri with pure devotion is freed from all sins. He or she reaches the abode of Shiva and is liberated from the cycle of birth and death. For more see <http://www.calendarlabs.com/holidays/india/maha-shivratri.php> and <http://hinduism.about.com/od/festivalsholidays/p/mahashivratri.htm>

5th March (Tuesday) Shrove Tuesday Christian (Western Churches). 'Shrove' relates to absolution from sin. In Britain it is called 'Pancake Day', as pancakes use up all the rich foods before Lent. Elsewhere it is known as Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday), and is a time for carnivals and fairs.

6th March ASH (Wednesday) Christian (Western Churches). This first day of Lent recalls the temptations Jesus faced for forty days in the wilderness. In Catholic and some Anglican churches, worshipper's foreheads are marked with a cross of ash made from burning the palm crosses of the previous year – hence 'Ash Wednesday'

6th March (Wednesday) – 20 April (Friday) LENT Christian (Western Churches) A period of forty days fasting and self-discipline that leads up to Easter. Traditionally Christians give up

something during this time to mark the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness. Many Christians feel it is a time for study groups, prayer and Bible reading. Source: <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/religious-festivals>

11th March (Monday) FIRST DAY OF LENT / THE GREAT FAST Christian (Orthodox) This is the beginning of the Lenten Fast, which involves abstinence from meat, fish and dairy products until Easter. Source: <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/religious-festivals>

17th March (Sunday) 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 (Tuesday) is St Joseph's 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>

21st March (Thursday) 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'í 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 (Thursday) 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>

21st March (Thursday) 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>

21st March and 22nd March (Thursday and Friday) 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

21st March (Thursday) 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. 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>

25th March (Monday) 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 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>

31st March (Sunday) 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."