

Faith Festivals April 2020

2nd April RAMA NAVAMI Hindu is for our Hindu friends. Ram Navami is the celebration of the birthday of Rama, a divine figure in Hinduism. On this festival people perform Kalyanotsavam (marriage celebration) with small images of Rama and Sita in their houses, and at the end of the day the deity is taken to a procession on the streets.

5th April (Sunday) to 11th April (Saturday) Holy week is 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.

5th April Palm Sunday Christian

Palm Sunday is the final Sunday of Lent and 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. Five days before the Passover, Jesus came from Bethany to Jerusalem. Having sent two of His disciples to bring him a colt of a donkey, he sat upon it and entered the city. The gospels record his arrival, riding into the city on a donkey, while the crowds spread their cloaks and palm branches on the street and shouted 'Hosanna to the Son of David' and 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' to honour him as their long-awaited Messiah and King. During Palm Sunday services, palms are distributed to parishioners who carry them in a ritual procession into church. The palms are blessed and many people fashion them into small crosses or other items of personal devotion. These may be returned to the church, or kept for the year. Because the palms have been blessed, they may not be discarded as trash. In many cases they are collected at the church and incinerated to create the ashes that will be used in the following year's Ash Wednesday observance. In Orthodox churches Palm Sunday is celebrated with the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, which is preceded by the Matins service. A Great Vespers is conducted on the preceding Saturday evening, according to the order prescribed in the Triodion. On this Sunday a basket containing the woven palm crosses is placed on a table in front of the icon of the Lord. The palms are then distributed to the faithful, as a blessing upon those who hold the palms in their hands. In the simplest of terms, Palm Sunday is an occasion for reflecting on the final week of Jesus' life. It is a time for Christians to prepare their hearts for the agony of His Passion and the joy of His Resurrection.

6th April is **Mahavira Jayanti (599 BCE) Jain**. This day is 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

8th April is **HANAMATSURI Buddhist (Japanese)** for our Buddhist friends. Mahayana flower festival to celebrate the Buddha Shakyamuni's birthday. Shrines are erected and an image of the infant Buddha is bathed. Theravadins celebrate Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing away later in the year, at the full moon in May.

8th April Hanuman Jayanti is for our **Hindu** friends. This Hindu festival recalls the birth of Lord Rama's supreme devotee, the monkey-headed Hanuman, whose feats figure in the Ramayana epic. Hanuman's birth is celebrated at sunrise on the full-moon day of the lunar month of Chaitra.

8th April – 16th 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.

9th April (Thursday) MAUNDY THURSDAY Christian (Western Churches)

Christians remember the Last Supper when Jesus blessed bread and wine and commanded his disciples to remember him whenever they did this. The name 'maundy' comes from a Latin term 'mandatum' ('commandment'), signifying Jesus' new commandment to his disciples, as recorded in John 15:17.

10th April 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. 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.

11th April is **HOLY SATURDAY (Easter Eve) Christian**. This is the last day of Lent. Special services involving the lighting of the Paschal Candle and the renewal of baptismal vows take place in the evening in preparation for Easter.

12th April (Sunday) is **Easter Day** for all our **Christian** friends. The culmination of the Holy week Easter commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is **the most important Christian festival**, and the one celebrated with the greatest joy. The date of Easter changes each year, and several other Christian festivals fix their dates by reference to Easter. Churches are filled with flowers, and there are special hymns and songs. The Easter story is at the heart of Christianity. On Good Friday, Jesus Christ was executed by crucifixion. His body was taken down from the cross, and buried in a cave. The tomb was guarded and an enormous stone was put over the entrance, so that no-one could steal the body. On the following Sunday, some women visited the grave and found that the stone had been moved, and that the tomb was empty. Jesus himself was seen that day, and for days afterwards by many people. His followers realised that God had raised Jesus from the dead. **The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the centrepiece of the Christian faith.** The Apostle Paul even goes so far to say that if Jesus Christ has not been resurrected then the Christian faith is worthless and futile (1 Cor. 15:14-17). Therefore, without Easter there is no Christianity. Easter is the oldest Christian holiday and the most important day of the church year. All the Christian movable feasts and the entire liturgical year of worship are arranged around Easter. Easter is preceded by the season of Lent, a 40-day period of fasting and repentance culminating in Holy Week, and followed by a 50-day Easter Season that stretches from Easter to Pentecost.

9th-10th April -THE NIGHT OF FORGIVENESS / LAILAT-UL-BARA'AH (14th Sha'ban)

On the fourteenth of Sha'ban, the eighth month of the Muslim calendar and two weeks before Ramadan commences, Muslims seek forgiveness for their sins. Many Muslims believe that it is on this night that a person's destiny is fixed by Allah for the coming year, and the night is often spent in prayer, asking for forgiveness and God's guidance. Some Muslims fast during the daytime in preparation for the night. In certain parts of the world Muslims visit the graves of relatives, and the giving of charity is also traditional. In a number of places the night is marked with firework displays.

Lailat-ul-Bara'ah falls on the day that is celebrated by the Ithna Asheri Shi'a community as being the birthday of the 12th Imam (Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Mahdi), and they therefore observe the night in prayer and worship, and then celebrate the birthday during the daytime.

13th April VAISAKHI/BAISAKHI – The Sikh New Year Festival S14th April is Vaisakhi

/Baisakhi for our **Sikh** friends. Vaisakhi, the Sikh New Year, is the holiest day of the calendar for over 20m Sikhs worldwide it is of particular importance for the Sikh community and farmers of Punjab and Haryana. On this day in 1699, Sikhism was born as a collective faith. Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the 10th Master of the Sikhs, initiated the Sikhs as the Khalsa or the pure and sincere. He bound the Sikhs to a strict code of conduct and, with uncut hair, beard and turban, gave the Sikhs a distinct identity. The celebration of Vaisakhi takes the form of continuous reading of the Sikh Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib Ji, over a period of three days. That is followed by the recitation of sacred hymns. The service ends with a final prayer for the good and well-being of the whole of humanity, and the serving of sacramental food

19th April (Sunday) PASCHA/EASTER Christian (Orthodox) is Easter Day, the most important festival of the Christian year, is when Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. A vigil is kept during the preceding night and the resurrection is greeted with the lighting of candles and the glad affirmation, 'Christ is risen'.

20th April - 1 May RIDVAN Baha'I is Ridvan for our Baha'I friends. This is the most important Baha'i festival. In these 12 days, in the garden outside Baghdad after which the festival is named, Baha'u'llah declared himself the Promised One, prophesied by the Bab. The first, ninth and twelfth days are especially significant and are holy days, when no work is done. It is during this period that Bahai's elect all their governing bodies/

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23rd April is St George's Day, "St George's Day in England remembers St George, England's patron saint. The anniversary of his death, which is on April 23, is seen as England's national day. According to legend, he was a soldier in the Roman army who killed a dragon and saved a princess. Many people in England don't observe nor know when the national day is at all. However, in recent years, celebrating St George's Day seems to gradually be regaining popularity in England. From the 15th century, St George's Day used to be a national holiday

in England, and was celebrated as widely as Christmas. But the celebrations waned by the end of the 18th century after England had united with Scotland on May 1, 1707. Compared to national day festivities in other countries worldwide, England's national day is not widely celebrated. One exception is in the city of Salisbury, where there's an annual St George's Day pageant, which historians believe dates back to the 13th century. Flags with the image of St George's cross are flown on some buildings, and a few people wear a red rose on their lapel

24th April - Ramadan

During the month of Ramadan Muslims fast from dawn to sunset. Fasting (sawm) is the fourth of the five pillars of Islam, requiring self-discipline and giving everyone some experience of deprivation. Those who are not able to fast are expected to give charity to compensate for the 'lost' days. While children may be encouraged to fast, the full fast is not compulsory until puberty is reached, often by the age of 12, but many young people still attempt to keep some, or even all of it.