

# THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

The last few days of Jesus' life, death and resurrection and ascension

The Paschal mystery is one of the central concepts of Christian faith. It relates to the last few days of Jesus' life, his death and the events after his death. Christians believe that Jesus was resurrected and that he was then taken from earth to be with God in an event known as the Ascension. They believe that dying and rising from the dead was the work God the Father sent his Son to do on earth. They believe this is how Jesus offers salvation to all. The last few days of Jesus' life are remembered during Holy Week, the week running up to Easter Sunday. The suffering that Jesus went through at this time is traditionally called the Passion (from a Latin word meaning 'suffering').

## Start 1. The Last Supper

The Last Supper was the meal that Jesus had with his disciples on the evening before he was arrested. The events of the Last Supper are remembered on Maundy Thursday, which takes place on the Thursday of Holy Week. At the Last Supper, Jesus reassured his disciples that, after he had left the earth, the Holy Spirit would be sent to them to help keep his message and teaching alive. Jesus gave his disciples two symbols, in the form of bread and wine, to be used in remembrance of him. The bread represented Jesus's body, which was to be sacrificed on behalf of all human beings, and the wine his blood. Today, the symbols of bread and wine are an important part of Christian worship in a ceremony known as the Eucharist (or Mass, as Catholics call it).



## 2. Jesus' arrest in the garden of Gethsemane

The Gospels record that after the Last Supper Jesus went with his disciples to a garden called Gethsemane, where he prayed. This was a time of great sorrow and torment for him, because he knew that he would die. Christians refer to the hours Jesus spent at Gethsemane as the 'agony in the garden'. He was arrested there after one of his disciples Judas told the authorities where to find him.



## 3. Jesus is tried and found guilty

Jesus was tried by the Sanhedrin (the Jewish religious leaders and authorities). He was found guilty of blasphemy, the crime of either insulting God or pretending to be God. The punishment for blasphemy was death. Although the Sanhedrin found Jesus guilty some scholars today argue that it was the Romans who hurried Jesus to his death, because they wanted to nip in the bud any unrest.



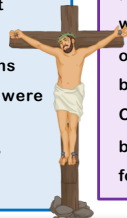
## 4. Pontius Pilate

Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor in charge of the city of Jerusalem, sentenced Jesus to be whipped and crucified. Roman soldiers then mocked and beat Jesus before leading him away to be crucified. As regards who was responsible, the Catholic Church teaches that it was the sins of all humankind that brought Jesus to the cross.



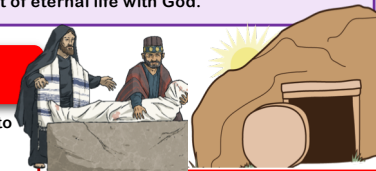
## 5. Good Friday Jesus is crucified

Christians commemorate Jesus' crucifixion and death on Good Friday, the Friday of Holy Week and treat it as a day of mourning for his death. However, Christians believe that Jesus' death ultimately had good consequences for humankind. Christians believe that Jesus' suffering and death were part of God's plan, which can only be understood within the context of Jesus' resurrection after his death.



## 6. The Resurrection and its significance for Christians

The Gospels record that after Jesus died on the cross, his body was buried, but he rose from the dead three days later. This event is known as the Resurrection. It is the central belief of Christianity and lies at the heart of the Christian faith. The reason for its importance is that Catholics believe Jesus's ability to overcome death proved he was the Son of God and had a divine nature. It confirms their belief in the Trinity and an omnipotent (all-powerful) God who holds ultimate power over the universe he created, because only the creator of life could resurrect life after death. Catholics also think the Resurrection demonstrates that Jesus is their Saviour. They believe he has the power to help anyone who believes in him to overcome death. By forgiving their sins Jesus can grant them the gift of eternal life with God.



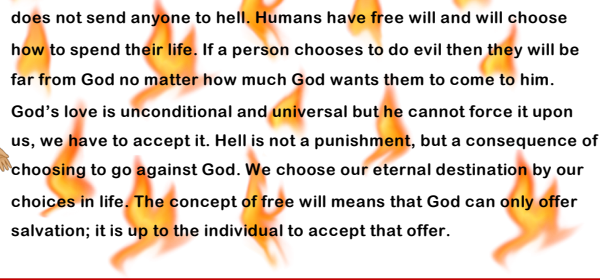
## 7. The Ascension and the promise of the Holy Spirit

The Gospels tell how Jesus was taken up into heaven 40 days after his resurrection, as witnessed by his disciples. This is known as the 'Ascension'. The significance of the Ascension for Christians is that is the end of Jesus' time on earth. Catholics believe this means his mission, or reason for being on the Earth, was successful. He had completed everything God the Father had intended him to do and could, therefore, return to heaven to prepare a place for his followers. Catholics also believe that Jesus' Ascension opened the way for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to energise and encourage Christians everywhere, as Jesus had promised at the Last Supper.



## 8. Hell and the consequence of a loving God

Some people might ask the question 'surely a loving God would want to save everyone. He would not want to condemn anyone to hell?' God does not send anyone to hell. Humans have free will and will choose how to spend their life. If a person chooses to do evil then they will be far from God no matter how much God wants them to come to him. God's love is unconditional and universal but he cannot force it upon us, we have to accept it. Hell is not a punishment, but a consequence of choosing to go against God. We choose our eternal destination by our choices in life. The concept of free will means that God can only offer salvation; it is up to the individual to accept that offer.



## Knowledge Check

1. What is the suffering Jesus went through in the last few days of his life traditionally known as?
2. When are the events of the Last Supper remembered?
3. The symbols of bread and wine are an important part of Christian worship. What is this ceremony known as?
4. Where was Jesus arrested?
5. What was Jesus found guilty of?
6. Who does the Catholic Church teach are responsible for Jesus' death?
7. What did Jesus' resurrection prove?
8. Jesus was taken up to heaven 40 days after his resurrection. What is this known as?

## Choose a Task

1. Create a detailed mind-map (try to make this visual)
2. Create a multiple-choice quiz (aim for at least 10 questions)
3. Create a poster/leaflet

### CHALLENGE!

Turn over the mat and try to complete your task without looking at the information. Then refer back to the task mat to see what you have missed/could have included.

## Exam Question

- a) Describe the Catholic teaching on the role of the Paschal Mystery in achieving salvation [5]
- b) Describe Catholic teaching on the role of the Paschal Mystery in achieving salvation [5]
- c) Explain the importance of belief in the Paschal Mystery [8]

## Summary

- Humans have rejected God by their sinfulness, but Jesus offers salvation and redemption.
- Christians believe that their relationship with God, and their salvation, depends on Jesus's life, death, resurrection and ascension.
- This is a freely given gift offered through God's grace and cannot be earned.
- God is all-loving and merciful but it is human free will but chooses to reject God which leads to hell.