

GENERATIONS OF FAITH



The Road to the Cross Exploring the Death of Jesus in the Four Gospels

Unlike the infancy narratives, which only Matthew and Luke include in their Gospels, you'll find accounts of Jesus' death reported extensively by all four Evangelists. What's more, all four accounts share five scenes in common: Jesus is arrested in a garden at night; he is questioned by some Jewish leaders; he is questioned and ultimately ordered to be crucified by the Roman Prefect Pilate; he is executed; and he is buried in a nearby stone tomb. At the same time, the scenes contain distinctive elements and nuances reflective of the Christological emphases at the heart of each Evangelist's portrait of Jesus. Kenneth Overberg explains: "As with the infancy accounts, we tend to combine the different passion narratives in our hearts and minds. Still, there are significant differences in the four portraits. For example, Mark describes Jesus as abandoned by his disciples, rejected by the crowd, and seemingly forsaken by his God. But John describes Jesus as being in control, freely laying down his life, and dying in a sovereign and life-giving manner. In his portrait of the passion, Luke continues to emphasize the same characteristics and experiences of Jesus found throughout the gospel: compassion and healing, forgiveness and profound trust. Thus even the passion accounts, while rooted in a historical fact (the crucifixion), are stories of faith in which theology, not biography, determines how events are narrated." All four Passion narratives begin when Jesus is arrested shortly after sharing a last meal with his beloved friends and followers. But for all four

Evangelists, Jesus' road to the cross stretches much farther back than the last days of his earthly life. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus' very first public act (when he reads from the scroll of Isaiah at the Nazareth synagogue) results in his violent and forcible removal from his own hometown. By chapter two of Mark's Gospel, Jesus has already been accused of blasphemy by some powerful people; by chapter three others are actually strategizing how to get him killed. Midway through John's Gospel, a formally convened council of leaders is debating Jesus' fate, and Caiaphas is portrayed as advising that it is better for one man to die rather than to risk the Roman destruction of the temple and the nation. Even the infancy narratives cannot escape the shadow of the cross: Recall for example that in Matthew's Gospel the Magi bring the infant Jesus *burial* gifts fit for a king. As Thomas Zanig astutely notes, it's almost "as if everything in the Gospels is intended to prepare the reader for Jesus' execution." Why? What's going on here? Clearly the death and resurrection of Jesus are at the very heart of the Christian story. After all, it's the cross rather than the crèche that is the central symbol of Christian faith. But there's more to it. As Elizabeth Johnson puts it, "Jesus' death was not an accident. Rather, it was the price he paid for his ministry." Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God. He did so with words and deeds that brought healing and hope to many, but which also threatened others enough to actively seek his death. Jesus lived the dream at the heart of his life. And it cost him his life.

Pray It Forward The Stations of the Cross

The path that Jesus followed - from the courtroom of Pontius Pilate to the place where he died - is in Jerusalem. There this path is known as the "Via Dolorosa," or the Sorrowful Way. Certain spots where Jesus stopped along this route are marked, and these are called Stations. Over the centuries, many people traveled to Jerusalem to retrace and recall Jesus' steps to Calvary, especially during Lent. But Jerusalem was too far for most people. So, in the Middle Ages, they began making this "journey" in Churches, using painted or carved images of the fourteen stops that Jesus made. (At St. Matthew's Church, the Stations are mounted on the back wall.) Thanks to the wonders of modern technology, you can now make this prayerful pilgrimage online:

Listen to an audio version of the Stations of the Cross online at:
<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Stations.mp3>

View an online presentation of the Stations of the Cross for children at:
<https://media.loyolapress.com/assets/lent/stations-eng/stations-eng.html>

"Christian prayer loves to follow the way of the cross in the Savior's steps. The stations from the Praetorium to Golgotha and the tomb trace the way of Jesus, who by his holy Cross has redeemed the world."
—Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2669

Seasons of Faith: The Easter Triduum

"Beginning with the Easter Triduum as its source of light, the new age of the Resurrection fills the whole liturgical year with its brilliance. Gradually, on either side of this source, the year is transfigured by the liturgy. It really is a 'year of the Lord's favor.' The economy of salvation is at work within the framework of time, but since its fulfillment in the Passover of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the culmination of history is anticipated 'as a foretaste,' and the kingdom of God enters into our time."—Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1168

The Easter *Triduum* includes three holy days that celebrate the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. These holy days invite and encourage us to accompany Jesus on his journey to the cross and into new life. As the Scripture readings for these Holy Days attest, the Gospel of John's passion narrative serves as the focus for

the *Triduum*. On Holy Thursday we hear John's account of Jesus' Last Supper as we recreate Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet in an act of servant leadership and love (John 13:1-5.) On Good Friday, we hear John's account of Jesus' Passion as we venerate the cross (John 18-19.) The climax of the *Triduum* is the Easter Vigil. At the start of Mass, a beautiful ceremony of light is accompanied by a series of Scripture readings that recount key events in salvation history. The culminating reading comes once again from John's Gospel: John's account of Jesus' resurrection (John 20:1-9.) Did you know? Although the Easter *Triduum* is celebrated over three days, it is actually one celebration, from the opening song on Holy Thursday to the closing song at Easter Vigil. (Adapted in part from "Easter Triduum," in *The Catholic Family Connections Bible*)

Catholicism 101: A Brief History of Easter

"Easter is not simply one feast among others, but the 'Feast of Feasts,' the 'Solemnity of solemnities,' just as the Eucharist is the 'Sacrament of sacraments.'" –Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1169

The earliest recorded celebration of Easter dates back to the second century, although Christians were most likely commemorating Jesus' resurrection far earlier on than that. At the Council of Nicea in 325, a decree was issued that the "Christian Passover" should be celebrated on the first Sunday following the first moon after the spring equinox. (In short: somewhere between March 22 and April 25.) Easter Vigil was fairly well established by the fourth century, with the use of the Paschal candle first recorded in 384. (By the way: the word "Paschal" has its origins in the Greek and Latin words for Passover.) The custom of Easter baptism also dates back to the fourth century, when Christian communities celebrated the sacrament of baptism only once a year at Easter time. The word "Easter" comes from the Old High German word *esotarum* – which may have its origins in a Latin phrase.

Like Christmas, Easter is actually an entire season in the Church's liturgical calendar: "The redemptive work of Christ celebrated on Easter Sunday becomes the pattern for all Sunday liturgies and in fact, for all feasts throughout the liturgical year. It is so significant an event that the Church celebrates Easter Time for fifty days. To absorb its powerful impact on the human family, the Church celebrates a week of weeks (seven times seven) plus one extra day. It symbolizes the fullness of time. The long duration ritualizes Easter as the perfect event restoring all of creation and pointing it toward eternity." *-Companion to the Calendar: A Guide to the Saints, Seasons, and Holidays of the Year*

We Recommend: Resources for Your Journey toward Easter

The Death of Jesus: Four Gospel Accounts, written and narrated by **Philip Cunningham**

www.bc.edu/deathofjesus

Brought to you free of charge by Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry, this self-paced, online mini-course will guide you through the passion narratives in the Gospels. By the end of the course, participants will have explored:

- the four different Gospel Passion Narratives by examining five scenes that are common to each of the narratives;
- the unique characteristics of each account;
- the limits of our historical knowledge about Jesus's death;
- the spiritual message about the death of Jesus that each Evangelist sought to convey.

Make Room: A Child's Guide to Lent and Easter, written by **Laura Alary**, illustrated by **Ann Boyajian**

Here's what the back cover reads: "This unique book teaches children to experience Lent with all their senses, and to see it as a special time for creating a welcoming space for God. Simple activities like cleaning a room, making bread and soup, and inviting a neighbor to supper become acts of justice and kindness, part of a life of following Christ." Here's what we want to add: this may be the best Lent resource we've seen in a long time ... FOR ALL AGES. Equal parts prayerful meditation, educational resource and practical guide, this beautifully written and illustrated book is an excellent companion on your Lenten journey.

The Berenstain Bears and the Easter Story, written by **Jan and Mike Berenstain**

Part of the *Living Lights* series, this delightful book teaches children that there is far more to Easter than candy. An age-appropriate retelling of the Easter story that connects beautifully Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Bonus features include: discussion questions, suggested activities and even stickers!

The Story of Easter, written by **Patricia Pingry**, illustrated by **Rebecca Thornburgh**

Finally! A board book that presents the story of Easter to very young children in simple words and pictures. We agree wholeheartedly with the publisher: "Parents can use this book to introduce little ones in a gentle and age-appropriate way to Jesus and the meaning behind the Easter Holiday."

Living the Lectionary

March 4, 2018

3rd Sunday of Lent

Gospel: John 2:13-25

Adults: When has the message of the Cross not made any sense to me? When has it?

Kids: Which Gospel story fills me with hope? Why?

March 11, 2018

4th Sunday of Lent

Gospel: John 3:14-21

Adults: Do I see the world as good or evil, and how does my view impact my life?

Kids: What are some of the ways that God shows his love for me? How can I show God my love?

March 18, 2018

5th Sunday of Lent

Gospel: John 12:20-33

Adults: In what ways have I sacrificed my own desires to be of help to others?

Kids: How have I given something up to help my family, a classmate, or a friend?

March 25, 2018

Palm Sunday

Gospel: Mark 14:1-15:47

Adults: When have I found it hard to accept God's will? What helped me to accept God's will?

Kids: When is it hard to obey? Why?

From RCL Benzinger
<http://rclbiblectionary.com>