

## **Religious Holidays and Activities**

This is a brief rundown of some of the religious events, practices, and beliefs honored at Centre College.

### **Get Centred**

This is a weekly half-hour service of contemplative Christian worship in the candlelit sanctuary of the Presbyterian Church near campus every Sunday night from 9:30 to 10 p.m.

### **Advent Festival of Lessons and Carols**

In many Christian traditions, Advent is a four-week period of expectant waiting for the coming of Christ, which western Christians celebrate on Christmas, December 25. During the four Sundays of Advent, readings from the prophets in the Hebrew Bible focus on the ancient hope for a Messiah. Many churches observe the season with an Advent Wreath with four candles that symbolize the light for which the world waits, highlighting themes like hope, faith, joy and love. Finally, on Christmas Eve, the Christ Candle is lit symbolizing the coming of light into the world.

Centre's celebration of Advent is a "Festival of Lessons and Carols." The hour-long service of readings and songs take place in the sanctuary of the Presbyterian Church near campus.

### **Ash Wednesday Mass**

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the Christian season of Lent. The Lenten season is a 40-day period (Quadragesima) of fasting, penance and reflection in preparation for Holy Week and Easter. On Ash Wednesday, many Christian traditions hold services that focus on repentance. Ashes are imposed on the foreheads of worshippers in the form of a cross. Imposing the ashes, the minister or priest says, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." The solemn ritual is a reminder of human mortality and dependence upon God. It calls worshippers to renew their commitment to Christ.

During Lent, many Christians practice fasting or partial fasting in preparation for Holy Week, just as Moses, Elijah and Jesus were said to have fasted for 40 days in the wilderness. The season is a time to practice self-denial, to lay aside vices, and to dedicate oneself to acts of charity. Roman Catholic tradition includes abstaining from meat on Fridays during Lent as well as a strict fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

### **Holy Week**

Holy Week in Christianity is the conclusion of the season of Lent and the final week before Easter. For Christians, this week is the most sacred time of the church year. The week includes the holidays of Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. It is a time of fasting, prayer and remembrance of the events leading to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Gospel passages read during the week recall events at the end of Jesus' life and ministry.

### **Palm Sunday**

Catholic and Protestant communities celebrate Palm Sunday, which marks the beginning of Holy Week. (Orthodox Christians observe Palm Sunday and Easter according to a different calendric cycle). Palm Sunday worship services recall the gospel story of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem where he was acclaimed by crowds who placed palm branches on the ground before him as he rode a colt, an action interpreted as fulfilling prophecies related to the Davidic Messiah. The entrance into Jerusalem begins his journey to the cross. Palm Sunday services often include a blessing of palm leaves, a reading of the story of the Passion of Jesus (recalling his suffering and death), and processions in and out of the church with palm branches. Palm Sunday is a reminder for Christians to welcome Jesus into their lives and a time of recommitment to following him, no matter what the cost.

### **Maundy Thursday**

Maundy Thursday commemorates the "Last Supper" at which Jesus celebrated the Passover with his twelve disciples and instituted the Eucharist that would commemorate his broken body and shed blood. Churches observe Maundy Thursday with celebration of the Eucharist. In some traditions, priests, ministers or deacons wash the feet of members of the community to recall the story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples (John 13). This is a visible sign of the command to love one another and to serve others with selfless humility. After Maundy Thursday services, the altars of the church are stripped of cloths, candlesticks, and texts. Crosses or other religious symbols are removed or veiled in red, black, or violet.

### **Good Friday**

Good Friday is the solemn day on which Christians recall the death of Jesus and its promise of hope and new life. In many traditions Good Friday is a day of fasting and penance. Some traditions emphasize veneration of the cross and meditations on suffering. Many churches set up a wooden cross and people spend time on their knees meditating before it, often at midday. Other people pray or walk the "Stations of the Cross" as a devotion that recalls the journey of Jesus on the Via Dolorosa (Way of Sorrows) in Jerusalem to Calvary where he was crucified. Christians meditate on the suffering of Jesus and the suffering of others.

### **Holy Saturday and Easter**

Holy Saturday is a day of waiting, prayer and fasting. Symbolically, Christians wait at the tomb in which Jesus was buried, meditating on his Passion and Death and anticipating resurrection. Mass is not celebrated on Holy Saturday. Candles remain extinguished and altars remain bare. In Roman Catholic tradition, the lamp or candle denoting the Presence of Christ is put out, and remaining Eucharistic Hosts consecrated on Maundy Thursday are kept elsewhere. The traditional celebration of Easter then begins after sundown on Saturday, which is Easter Sunday, liturgically. The Easter Triduum signifies that in the darkness of Friday's suffering and Saturday's waiting, the church anticipates the coming of Sunday's light.

## **Holi**

In Hinduism, Holi marks the end of winter and celebrates the abundant colors of spring. In addition, it recalls key events in popular Hindu mythology. The principal narrative behind Holi is the Vaishnavite story of Hiranyakashipu, a demon king whose penance had made him almost invulnerable to death. This immunity led to excessive pride and the demand that people worship him rather than the gods. Hiranyakashipu's own son, Prahlada, refused to cease his devotions to Vishnu so his father tried to kill him, but every method failed. Finally, Hiranyakashipu enlisted the help of his demon sister Holika, who was immune to death by fire. She carried Prahlada into the flames, but he prayed to Vishnu and survived, while Holika turned to ashes. This triumph of piety and goodness over pride and evil is celebrated during Holi. Although most Hindus celebrate the Festival for two days, Holi lasts for up to a week in some regions.

## **Diwali**

The five-day festival of Diwali, or "The Festival of Lights," is one of the most important festivals of the year for Hindus. It is also celebrated by Jains and Sikhs. Observed by over a billion people around the world, Diwali is an official holiday in India and ten other countries. The celebration highlights many of the great stories of Hindu tradition, principally the victorious return of Prince Rama and his wife Sita from exile and triumph over their adversaries. Traditional celebrations in Hindu homes include the lighting of oil-filled lamps or candles that welcome Rama and Sita and celebrate the triumph of good over evil. Depending on region and tradition, the holiday also symbolizes stories that celebrate the harvest and welcome prosperity.

## **Eid al-Adha**

The Feast of Sacrifice, one of the two most important holidays in Islam. The Eid is especially significant because it marks the end of the annual Hajj or Pilgrimage to Mecca, celebrated in the final month of the (lunar) Islamic calendar. The annual Hajj is the fifth "pillar of Islam" and is an obligation for all Muslims at least once in their lifetime if they are able. Eid al-Adha is the climax of the Hajj at sundown on the 12th day of the 12th month.

The holy day commemorates the willingness of Ibrahim (Abraham) to sacrifice his firstborn son Ishmael in faithful obedience to God's command. In the version of the story found in Sura 37 of the Qur'an, God then mercifully provides a ram as an alternative and Ibrahim sacrifices the ram instead of his son. Because of this, it is customary on this holiday to sacrifice a goat, sheep or cow and to give a portion of the meat for sustenance of the poor.

Most Muslims, even if not on pilgrimage, celebrate this holiday over three days and two nights, offering special prayers at mosques. Eid al-Adha is a joyous and celebratory holiday that includes wearing new clothes, exchanging gifts, taking time off from school or work, and gathering with family for feasts of thanksgiving.

## **Hanukkah**

Hanukkah, or the Festival of Lights, is an eight day festival in Judaism commemorating the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in 164 BCE. Hanukkah celebrates religious freedom and deliverance from oppression.

The story of Hanukkah comes from the books of First and Second Maccabees, which were non-canonical additions to the Tanakh, or Hebrew Bible.

Hanukkah customs include eating latkes (potato pancakes), sufganiyot (donuts), or other foods baked in oil; playing games of chance with a spinning top called a dreidel; and giving gelt (monetary or chocolate coins) and other gifts.

## **High Holy Days**

Jewish members of our community enter the High Holy Days or “Days of Awe,” the most solemn days of the Jewish calendar beginning with Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and conclude ten days later with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Yom Kippur is a day of fasting, gathering at synagogue or temple, and prayers that continue throughout the day. At the end of Yom Kippur, the shofar is blown to indicate that the High Holy Days are concluded and forgiveness is granted.

[For our Jewish students who make a request to the Associate Dean related to religious observance, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are considered an excused absence].

## **Mormon Pioneer Day**

In the Mormon community, July 24 is Pioneer Day. This remembrance recognizes the entry of Brigham Young and other pioneers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) into the Salt Lake Valley for the first time on July 24, 1847. It was a turbulent time for the community, following the assassination of Joseph Smith and the subsequent expulsion of Mormons from Nauvoo, Illinois. Prompted by religious persecution, the demanding trek across the Great Plains, through the Wasatch Range, and into the arid Salt Lake Valley is a defining narrative of Mormon identity.

## **Passover**

Passover (Pesach), or the Feast of Unleavened Bread, celebrates the liberation of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The biblical story recounts God’s deliverance of the Israelites after ten plagues were inflicted upon the Egyptians. Only after the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn children of Egypt, did Pharaoh release his slaves. According to the story, Israelites marked their doorposts with the blood of a lamb and God guarded those homes so that death would pass over them. Then they fled in such a hurry that there was not enough time for dough to rise. Hence, Jews ceremonially remove all leaven (chametz), including crumbs which must be swept from the house, and do not eat leavened bread during Passover. Matzah (unleavened flatbread) is one of the symbols of the holiday, also reminding Jews of what it was like to be slaves who ate the bread of poverty.

Passover is a time of remembering. The history of suffering and deliverance it recalls also inspires the hope that slaves can be liberated, that justice is possible, and that freedom is to be cherished. As such, Passover motivates action that seeks deliverance for all who are enslaved and afflicted by “pharaohs” of every age. Passover is a reminder that the future can be better.

### **Poverty and Homelessness Week**

Poverty and Homelessness Week combines education and advocacy with a focus on food insecurity in a time of pandemic.

**Local** Food Insecurity. A discussion on the local issues in Danville, Boyle County and Central Kentucky, especially after the closing of Grace Café (Nov. 9, 2020).

Zoom Convocation: **National** Food Insecurity in the United States. Our discussion looks at the increase in food insecurity and increased demand on food pantries during the pandemic and what this reveals about the U.S. economic system and how precarious it is for working people. Featured speaker Christina Martinez, of Feeding America, the nation's largest food distribution agency (Nov. 10, 2020).

**Global** Food Insecurity: A discussion of world hunger in a time of pandemic (Nov. 11, 2020).

### **The Labyrinth: Prayer in Motion**

Centre College and the Presbyterian Church share a labyrinth at the corner of Walnut and College Streets in the park adjacent to the Presbyterian Church.

A labyrinth is a large circle with a single path that winds back and forth moving alternately toward and away from the center, covering every quadrant, leading ultimately to a central prayer circle. The labyrinth is a metaphor for our spiritual journey. To walk the labyrinth is to make a pilgrimage and to be present to and with God, ourselves, and others. It allows us to bring our whole being into the experience, worshipping with our bodies as well as our hearts and minds.

Our labyrinth is modeled after one set into the floor of Chartres Cathedral in France (built between 1194 and 1220 CE). It offered a safe alternative to the practice of pilgrimage to the Holy Land to those for whom such travel was dangerous or impossible. Today, the spiritual practice of walking the labyrinth is being revived all over the world.

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