

# THE EASTER STORY

## Important Facts All Christians Need to Know

The story of Easter is the story of an empty tomb. No one knows with complete certainty where the tomb of Jesus was located, but this shouldn't be surprising. After the resurrection, the location of the tomb didn't matter anymore since Jesus was no longer in it.

### What is the Easter Story?

On Easter, or Resurrection Sunday, we celebrate what is arguably the most important event in all of human history: Jesus rising from the dead. All of Christianity and all eternity hinges on the truth of the resurrection. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then our faith is lacking in meaning and is just another interesting philosophy. But if the resurrection is true, then it is the clearest proof that Jesus is exactly who he claimed to be – the Son of God and the Savior of the world. All of the evidence points to the truth of the resurrection, and the result is changed lives. Let's dive into both the big and seemingly smaller events of the story of Easter, and understand how each is significant to the entire redemption story.

### Why is the timeline of Easter important?

*“Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?” [Matthew 26:53-54](#)*

Throughout Scripture, events happen in a certain order for a certain reason, and God often works not only through *what* happens, but through *how and when* things happen. The order of events, in this case of the Easter story, shows a fulfillment of prophecies and reveals why Jesus is called the ‘Lamb of God.’

Immediately before the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus sat at the Passover meal with his disciples and explained how the meal represented not only the past, but also what was about to happen in the following days. Jesus had to make the ultimate sacrifice at the time of Passover. He also had to be taken down from the cross before sunset, because this was the beginning of the Sabbath. Each event fit inside a larger picture of what God had been doing through his people for centuries and set the stage for what he had planned for the next few thousand years.

# What did the Last Supper really mean and what does it have to do with Easter?

*"Do this in remembrance of me."* [Luke 22:19](#)

Christians everywhere celebrate what we call 'communion' or the 'Lord's Supper' because of what happened the night before the crucifixion. Jesus and his disciples were celebrating the Passover together, and a small part of this observance involves drinking a cup and the breaking and eating of unleavened bread. The entire observation of Passover is a remembrance of how God delivered the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt, and each element is a symbol of that. As they celebrated this meal, Jesus reaffirmed the original meaning of deliverance from physical slavery while adding to it the meaning of freedom from spiritual slavery. His broken body is represented in the bread, and his blood in the cup. In him and through his sacrifice, the symbolism has now been fulfilled.

## What happened in the garden of Gethsemane?

*"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."* [Luke 22:42](#)

The garden of Gethsemane is a grove of olive trees that is still there today. Some of the trees are over 2,000 years old and would have been young trees at the time Jesus was there on the night he was arrested. Located in Jerusalem, the Temple Mount is just a short walk away across the Kidron Valley. As Jesus prayed in the garden, he could see the temple, and could likely hear the hustle and bustle of people gathering for the Passover.

It is here that he prayed the most agonizing prayer ever to be lifted up. After the Last Supper with his disciples, he took them out to pray in the garden where he predicted Peter's denial and prayed for God's will to be done in him.

## Why was Jesus put on trial?

*“And they began to accuse him, saying, ‘We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.’” [Luke 23:2](#)*

Jesus went through several trials, and all of them were legally out-of-line, even by ancient standards. His first trial was before the Sanhedrin, the leading council of Israel, where he was charged with blasphemy for claiming to be God. The meeting of the council was called at night, and all the witnesses brought against Jesus were poor witnesses at best.

The council had no authority to sentence him to death, so they brought him to Pilate, the Roman governor who held that power. Pilate found no cause for getting involved in what he saw as a local religious dispute, so when he found out that Jesus was from Galilee, he sent him off to Herod, the leader of Galilee, who was also in Jerusalem for the Passover. Before Herod, Jesus was mocked and beaten and then sent back to Pilate. Pilate finally allowed his crucifixion in order to “satisfy the crowd” ([Mark 15:15](#)).

There was no legal reason for Jesus to be crucified. He had not blasphemed or opposed paying taxes. Yet, it was God’s will that Jesus die on our behalf to take away our sin. There was no stopping the plan of God, no matter how painful. Out of this pain and even in this dark hour, a path was being laid for the resurrection and the glorious hope of eternal life and triumph over the grave.

## Why was Jesus crucified?

The crucifixion of Jesus is one of the most horrifying, yet most startlingly beautiful things that has ever happened. Crucifixion was not unique to Jesus but was a common Roman practice. Criminals, outlaws, and others were regularly crucified in the Roman world. Perhaps the most striking thing about the method of his death was that it was so strikingly common. Crucifixion was not an unusual sight for the people of Israel under Roman occupation. What was unusual is that this man had committed no crime worthy of crucifixion.

In fact, he had committed no crime at all.

The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, was a soldier and a politician known to be cruel in his methods and by no means a softhearted man. Yet even he expressed regret for allowing the crucifixion of Christ to proceed.

## Where was Jesus crucified?

*“They came to a place called Golgotha (which means ‘the place of the skull’).” [Matthew 27:33](#)*

Jesus was crucified on a hill known as ‘The Skull’ outside of Jerusalem. Some Bible versions translate this as *Calvary* (Latin) or *Golgotha* (Aramaic). It seems to have been a common place for these types of executions. It could have been so named because the hill looked like a large skull, or because of the many executions that regularly occurred there.

## How did Jesus die?

*“Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.” [Luke 23:46](#)*

To say the death of Christ was excruciating is no stretch, as the word *excruciating* itself is derived from the word *crucifixion*. It literally means ‘the pain of a crucifixion.’

Suffering from blood loss, extreme pain, and muscle spasms from being nailed to a cross, the victim eventually lost the strength and ability to continue taking air and died from suffocation. The moment Jesus died, it would seem that all was lost and his vision of God’s kingdom had died with him.

But the story was not yet over.

## What happened when he died?

When Jesus died, the hope of his followers was also on the verge of death. The one who they followed and believed in had died the death of a common thief. Yet there were many other things that occurred which the Bible tells us of:

*“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, ‘Surely he was the Son of God!’” [Matthew 27:51-54](#)*

## Where was Jesus buried?

*“At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid.” [John 19:41](#)*

After the crucifixion, a man named Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus to be placed in his tomb. Joseph was a wealthy man, a member of the council, and a follower of Jesus. After they had hastily prepared his body for burial, a large stone was rolled in front of the entrance, and Roman guards were placed in front of it.

Jesus had gained quite an energetic following, and there was concern that someone may attempt to steal the body, claiming that Jesus had returned from the dead. These guards would fulfill their duty to ensure that the stone stayed in place and that no one would move it.

They never anticipated it being moved from the inside.

## How did the resurrection happen?

*“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!”* [Luke 24:5-6](#)

The moment that death was defeated is the moment that Jesus arose from the dead and walked out of that borrowed grave! We don't understand *how* this happened; only that through the power of God, *it did happen!* The first people to see the empty tomb and to see him resurrected were women who had followed him: *“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus”* ([Luke 24:1-3](#)).

## How can you be saved?

*“In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”* [1 Peter 1:3](#)

The death and resurrection of Jesus means that there is hope in this hopeless world; that there truly is a God; and that not only does he understand us, but he became one of us. He took our sins upon himself and is alive today. [Romans 10:9](#) says that *“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

It is that simple. If we truly believe he is who he says he is and that he rose from the dead as he said he would, it will forever change the way we think and live.

This is the time of year that life begins to bloom around us. Spring replaces winter, and as the air begins to warm there is a sense of rejuvenation and refreshing—a feeling that the old is being made new all over again. It is fitting that we celebrate the resurrection at this time of year, and also fitting that we embrace the new life offered to us through our living Savior.