

Timing the Passion and Holy Week
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As we begin Holy Week, many questions arise about the timing of events. Many of us try to make a direct connection between a particular church service and one event in the narrative. This is not very easy given that readings overlap and the Gospels themselves are not as precise as we would like. For example, the Gospel readings of Holy Thursday morning (the Vespertine liturgy), the Orthros of Holy Friday (Holy Thursday evening), the Vespers of Holy Friday (the *Apokathelosis*) overlap considerably.

The core of the four Gospels is the story of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. In fact, these elements comprise the longest sections of the Gospels. However, the Gospels only provide clues to understanding the timing of the events of this week. Ancient Christians, especially with close ties to the Jewish community, would have more easily understood the references.

The table below outlines only the order of events reported in the four Gospels and places similar events next to one another so that you may see where the stories converge. You will also notice that there are some differences.

Mark	Matthew	Luke	John
Ch. 11. Jesus enters Jerusalem, leaves and returns the next day. Cleanses the Temple.	Ch. 21. Entry to Jerusalem. Cleanses the Temple. Leaves for Bethany.	Ch. 19:28. Entry into Jerusalem. Cleanses Temple.	Ch. 12. Six days before the Passover, Jesus is at Bethany to see Lazarus, who Jesus had raised some time earlier. The next day, Jesus enters Jerusalem.
Ch. 14. Two days before the Passover – the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Jesus is in Bethany, anointed First day of Unleavened Bread, the day when the Passover lambs	Ch. 26. Two days before the Passover. Jesus is in Bethany, anointing. First day of Unleavened Bread. Last Supper. Institution of the Eucharist. (Take,	Ch. 22. Feast of Unleavened Bread draws near, day on which Passover lambs are sacrificed. Prepare for Passover. Last Supper. Institution of the Eucharist. (Take, eat, this is my	Ch. 13. Before the Passover, Jesus washes the disciples feet at the Last Supper.

were sacrificed. Jesus eats the Last Supper. Institution of the Eucharist. (Take, eat, this is my body...).	eat, this is my body...).	body...).	
Gethsemane. Arrest Trial before Caiaphas.	Gethsemane Arrest Trial before Caiaphas.	Gethsemane. Arrest. When day comes, Trial before Caiaphas.	Ch. 18. Gethsemane. Arrest. Trial before Caiaphas.
Ch. 15. In the morning, Jesus before Pilate. Scourged, mocked, crucified. Evening comes – because it was the day of Preparation – (Friday), Jesus’ body is removed from cross and buried.	Ch. 27. In the morning, Jesus before Pilate. Scourged, crucified. Evening comes. Jesus is buried. Next day is Sabbath.	Ch. 23. Jesus before Pilate. Pilate sends Jesus to Herod. Herod returns Jesus to Pilate, mockingly dressed in “gorgeous apparel.” Crucifixion. Burial. Ch. 23:56. On the Sabbath, they rested.	Led to Pilate (but the Jews will not enter the place, because they want to celebrate the Passover). Ch. 19. Pilate has Jesus scourged. Jesus is mocked. Crucifixion. Because it is the day of Preparation (Friday), Jesus’ body is removed and buried.
When the Sabbath was past, the first day of the week, the tomb is empty.	Ch. 28. First day of the Week, the tomb is empty.	Ch. 24. First day of the week, the tomb is empty.	Ch. 20. First day of the week, the tomb is empty.

Some things to notice:

In the Gospel of John, Jesus does not cleanse the Temple after the entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday). In John, Jesus cleanses the Temple at the beginning of His ministry (John 2:13-25).

From the time Jesus enters Jerusalem to the time of the Last Supper, in all four Gospels, Jesus is active teaching.

The date of the Jewish Passover fluctuated from year to year, then as it does now. Judaism relies on a lunar calendar. Passover is a spring holiday, so it must take place

after the vernal equinox. The 14th of Nisan begins of the night of a full moon after the vernal equinox. According to Jewish Law, the Passover lambs were slaughtered on 14 Nisan at the Temple and the lamb was eaten the next day, with no leavened bread.

One of the great dilemmas of Christianity is discerning whether or not the Last Supper was a Passover meal. Evidence points in both directions. Since no work of any kind could be done *during* the Passover, Jesus' trial could not have taken place during the Festival, thus the meal (and the trials) must have been before Passover began (John). Two of the Gospels point to the meal occurring on the same day as when the Passover lambs were slaughtered, not the next day when they would be eaten (thus the meal is not the Passover meal). Details about the meal itself point that it was a Passover meal, for example, the disciples reclined at couches, the meal was eaten in Jerusalem, and the meal took place at night. However, after two millennia there is still no conclusion to this discussion because the evidence is not conclusive one way or the other.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, at the Last Supper Jesus institutes the Eucharist (we read that he says, "Take eat, this is my body," etc.) He does not wash the feet of the disciples. In John, Jesus washes the feet of the disciples, but does not institute the Eucharist as we understand it.

The order of events from the arrest to the crucifixion is the same, although Luke adds the detail of Jesus being taken to Herod.

Given the Jewish reckoning of a day, from sunset to sunset (not our way of reckoning, from midnight to midnight), we can see that Jesus has died during the day on the Day of Preparation (Friday) and is buried at the close of the day, the eve of the Sabbath. On the Sabbath itself, Jesus is in the tomb. The resurrection is on the third day, the first day of the week, Sunday in the morning.

All four Gospels clearly agree upon is that the Empty Tomb is discovered on the first day of the week, Sunday, the day after the Sabbath.