

1 Palm Sunday (or Passion Sunday)

Materials for this team: red cloth, purple cloth, palm fronds

Instructions: Practice folding your palm crosses a few times before you show other classmates how to do it.

1. **Read this:** This feast day marks Jesus arrival in the city of Jerusalem. He came to Jerusalem for Passover, the feast of the Jews' delivery from slavery in Egypt long ago. Christian tradition also celebrates Jesus' royalty on this day as a descendant of King David.

According to Christian tradition, Jesus knew full well that coming to Jerusalem would mean his death, but that his death would eventually serve God's greater purpose of redemption and liberation. This focus on his suffering and death is the reason for the alternative name given this Sunday – "Passion Sunday" – with the "passion" of Christ from the Greek word that means "to suffer."

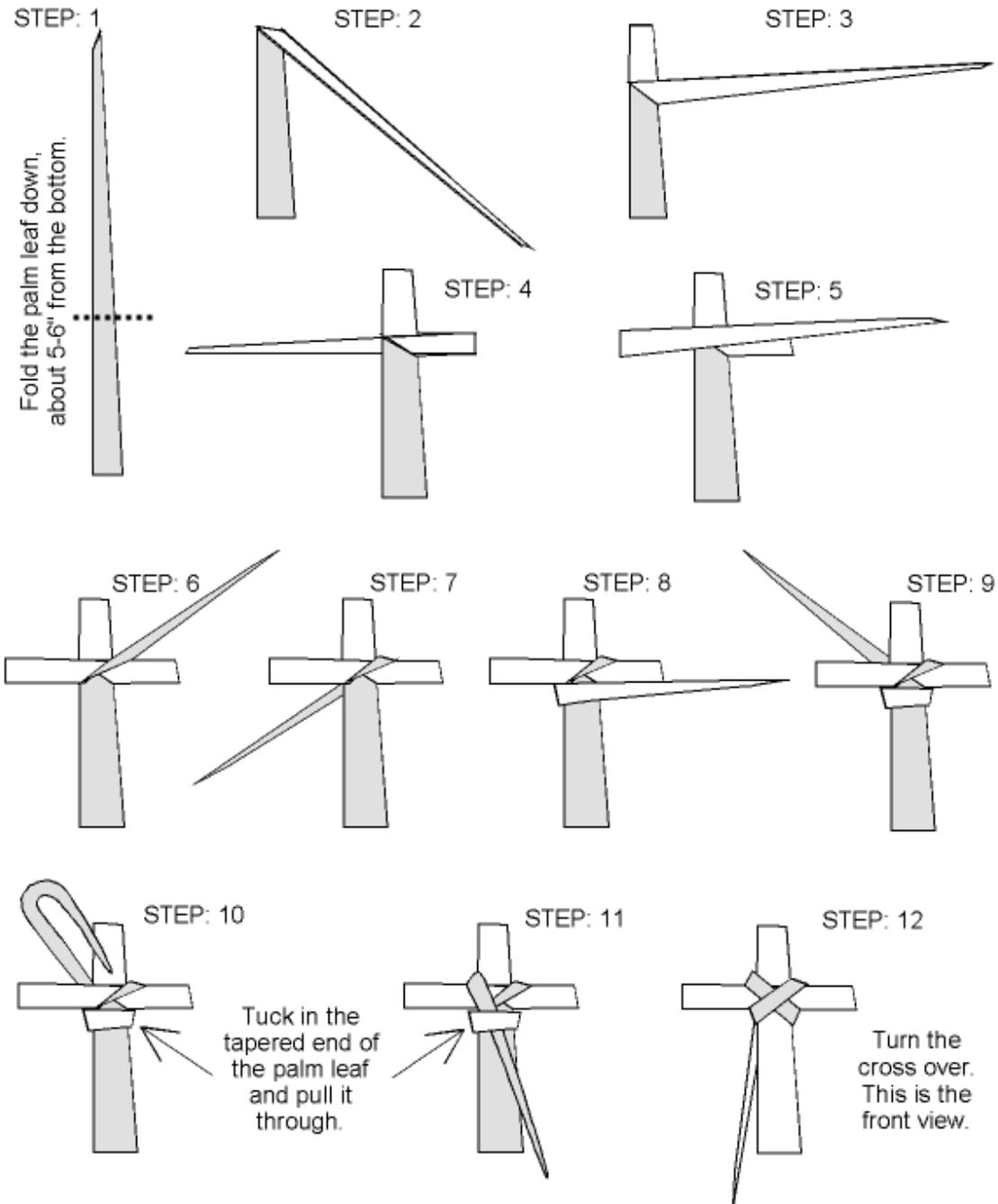
2. **Wave palms and read this:** More typically, this Sunday is called "Palm Sunday" because Jesus, who arrived on a modest little donkey, was hailed as royalty by the Jews of Jerusalem. The people threw palm branches – symbols of victory, triumph, and peace – and even their own cloaks on the road as a sort of "red carpet" welcome. The gathered multitude welcomed him with those familiar words: *"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!"* The Hebrew word "Hosanna" means "save us, we pray."

3. **Put the red & purple cloth onto the central table and read this:** In Christian churches, palm fronds are given to youth and adults to wave during Palm Sunday worship. The colors of Palm Sunday are (1) purple signifying royalty and Jesus as a descendent of King David, and used for decorating the church and the altar; (2) red signifying the passion and suffering of Jesus, and worn by people blessing and carrying the palm fronds. Traditionally, the palm fronds from Palm Sunday are dried, then burned to ashes that are used at the following year's Ash Wednesday service to mark penitents' foreheads.

4. Youth and adults familiar with Palm Sunday may already know how to fold crosses out of the palm leaves. **Practice making the crosses (see diagram) and then teach your classmates to make them. If it seems like it will take too long to do in class, let them try at home.**

Palm Leaf Cross Directions

Supplies: One palm leaf strip about 24-26" in length, 1/2" in width, tapering to the end.



2 Maundy Thursday

Materials for this team: bowl of water, towel, bread, grape juice, Da Vinci's *Last Supper*

- 1. Read this:** Holy Monday through Holy Wednesday are days of prayer and preparation and sometimes fasting in the Christian church. In the story of Jesus' last week in Jerusalem, the mood changes from celebration to scandal and fear, as the religious and political authorities plot to have Jesus arrested and finally killed.
- 2. Pass around the picture of Da Vinci's *Last Supper* and read this:** Maundy Thursday is the celebration of Jesus' last meal with his disciples and marks the turn in this "passion" story toward Jesus' crucifixion. The word "passion" comes from the Greek word that means "to suffer" and refers to the suffering that Jesus will endure. Also, the word "maundy" comes from the same Latin root as in the word "mandate," meaning "to command." During this meal, Jesus predicts his arrest and death and **commands** his disciples to love one another even after he is gone.
- 3. Show the bowl of water and towel and read this:** In Biblical times, dusty and dirty conditions of the region and wearing of sandals necessitated foot-washing, a task often reserved for the lowliest of menial servants. Although the disciples would likely have been happy to wash Jesus' feet, they would not have even conceived of washing each other's feet! As a sign of loving care and humility, Jesus took on the role of a servant. Before everyone sat down to dinner, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, just as some women had washed his feet as preparation for his death. (He may have been preparing his disciples for their eventual martyrdom as well!) Many of his disciples objected to this, saying that Jesus should not demean himself in this manner, that it made them uncomfortable to have their esteemed teacher act in this way. But Jesus insisted that this was an example of his teachings, not of demeaning oneself but serving one another in humility and love. In many Christian congregations, the priests, ministers, and church leaders ritually wash the feet of their congregants during worship on this night.
- 4. Show the bread and grape juice and read this:** The meal, in a secret upper room of a house in Jerusalem, may have been part of a Passover meal, the feast of the Jews' delivery from slavery in Egypt. At the end of the meal, Jesus broke a loaf of bread and said, "*Take this and eat it. This is my body, given for you.*" Then he took a cup of wine and blessed it and said, "*This is my blood, shed for you and for the forgiveness of sins.*" He shared it with everyone at dinner and asked them to do this in remembrance of him. This is why Christian churches everywhere serve the ritual meal of bread and wine called Communion or Eucharist.
- 5. Read this:** Right after dinner, Jesus was betrayed by his disciple, Judas, and arrested. In some churches, right after this Communion is served on Thursday, the whole church is "undecorated" and left bare to mark this betrayal and movement closer to death and mourning. The bells of the church will not ring again until Easter.

3

Good Friday

Materials for this team: black cloth, Stations handout, crucifix, picture of draped cross

1. **Read this:** Good Friday is the holy day marking the crucifixion of Jesus. Calling this solemn day of Jesus' death "Good Friday" seems counterintuitive, but it likely originated from an antiquated meaning of "good" meaning "holy." In the Lutheran Church tradition, this day is like a Jewish Sabbath: all work is forbidden, and only until recently in Minnesota, banks and businesses would close. In the Catholic tradition, it is an absolute day of fasting.

2. **Ask this and invite responses:** Has anyone ever been inside the Cathedral of St. Paul? Have you seen the sculptures all around the edge of the sanctuary showing Jesus at different moments on his last day life?

Hand out copies of Stations of the Cross, and read this: These sacred works of art refer to the *Stations of the Cross*, 14 images arranged in order of Jesus' path on his final day of life. At noon, on Good Friday, Catholics walk around the inside of their church from station to station as a spiritual pilgrimage, revisiting the story of Jesus trial, torture, and execution at the hands of the Roman authorities.

3. **Show the crucifix and read this:** Crucifixion was a method of capital punishment known principally from classical antiquity, in which the victim is tied or nailed to a large wooden beam and left to hang for several days until eventual death from exhaustion and asphyxiation. The Romans, in particular, crucified people for insurrection against the state, using it as a public demonstration of the state's power and deterrence against all of its would-be enemies.

4. **Take everything off the central table and drape the black cloth over it. Read this:** The word "*liturgy*" refers to public worship or the ritual life of a congregation. The *liturgical* color of Good Friday is black, with worship leaders and congregants traditionally wearing black. The altar or chancel is stripped bare of any ornamentation, and other items in the church – like crosses, baptismal fonts, pulpits and lecterns – are typically draped in black. **(Pass around picture of cross draped in black.)**

5. **Read this:** Several hundred years ago, there was no church service held at all until the Saturday night Easter vigil. In recent centuries, Jesus' crucifixion is marked with a 3:00pm Mass or worship service, marking the time of Jesus' death. In the past and sometimes today, tradition holds that no candles are lit, no musical instruments are played, and no hymns are sung by the congregation. In Orthodox churches, a crucifix is wrapped in cloth and symbolically buried. Sometimes, choirs will sing dirges of the last hours of Jesus' suffering. Typically, people conclude and leave worship in complete silence.

4 Holy Saturday

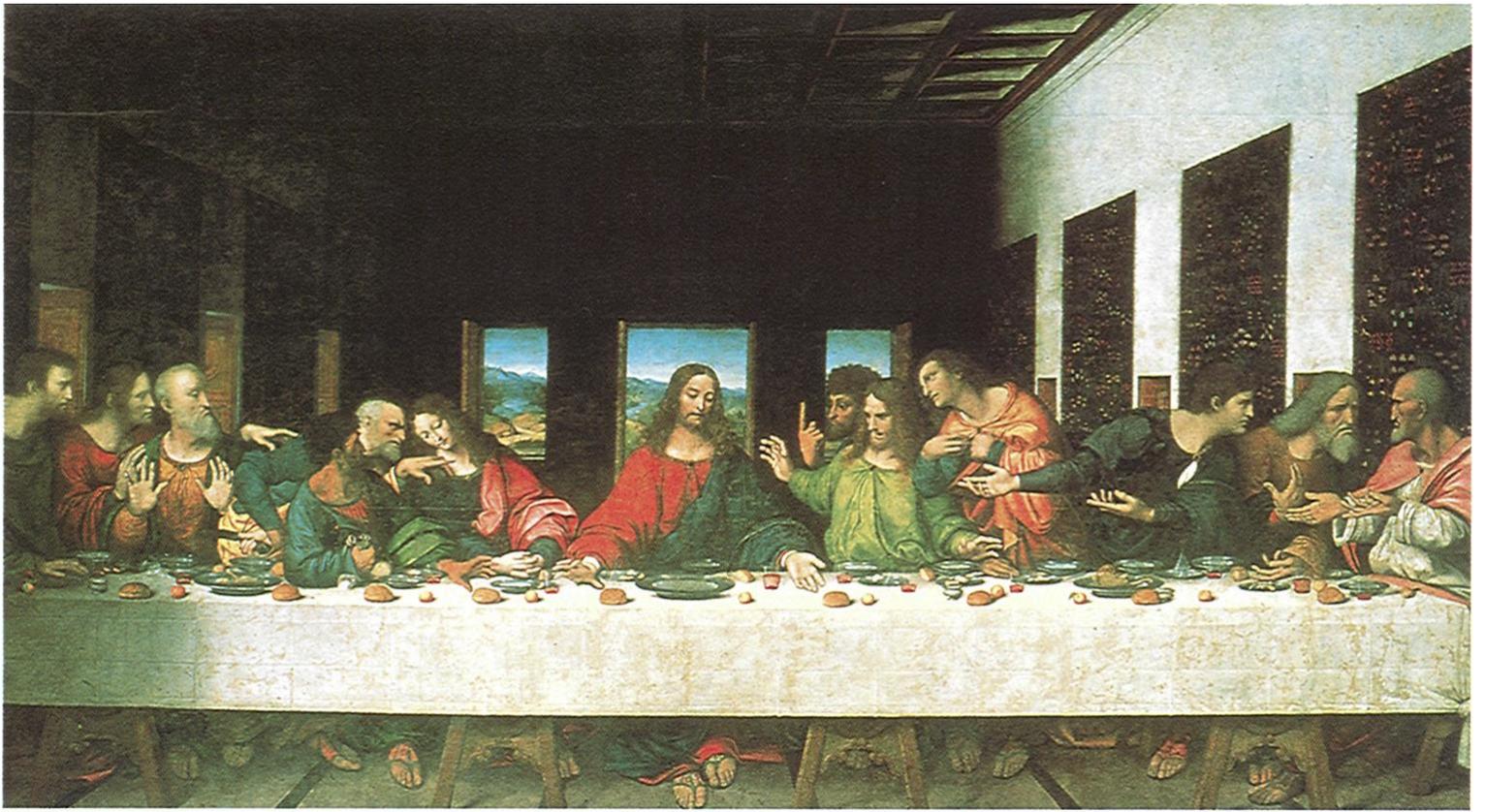
Materials for this team: candle, bells, Bible, red Easter eggs

- 1. Read this:** Protestants do not tend to observe Holy Saturday, as they view most of the elements of this feast as not being part of the Biblical story. For the early Christian church, however, this was one of the MOST important days of the year. Baptisms were only held on this day and people spent two years in preparatory classes getting ready for baptism. Today, the most important part of Holy Saturday is the Easter Vigil, observed from sunset until midnight on the Saturday before Easter Sunday. (St. Francis Cabrini Catholic Church on Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, holds a very popular Easter Vigil service, attended by progressive religious people of all faiths in the Twin Cities.)
- 2. Someone else read this:** Here is what the Easter Vigil looks like in many Orthodox and Episcopal churches:
 - **Turn off the lights and read this:** All the lights in the church are extinguished except for the “unsleeping flame” on the Holy Table (altar), and everyone waits in silence and darkness.
 - **Hold up a candle and read this:** Someone brings in the Paschal (Easter) Candle, a huge decorated candle that will burn through the next forty days as a symbol of Jesus’ triumph over death. Everyone at church lights a small candle from this Paschal Candle.
 - **Hold up the Bible and read this:** Next, seven readings from the Hebrew Bible are read. They start with Creation and go through Jewish history to the prophecies of a Messiah that Christians say are fulfilled by Jesus.
 - **Ring bells and read this:** At midnight, everyone sings *Alleluia*, a word that was not said or sung all through the Lenten season. In some churches, all this singing and bell-ringing happens as people parade around the outside of the church three times.
 - **Pass out red Easter eggs and read this:** In Eastern Europe, people break the Lenten fast with red eggs as a sign of life.

5 Easter Sunday

Materials for this team: Easter lily, Easter basket, Eostre handout

- 1. Read this:** Easter Sunday holds the position as the most important religious holiday in American Christianity, even more important than Christmas in its religious meaning and function. The Christian tradition holds that on the third day after his death, Jesus rose from the dead. His resurrection is seen as a triumph over sin and death, benefiting everyone (according to Universalist tradition) or just a few (according to most other Christian denominations). People greet each other on Easter morning with “*Christ is risen!*” to which the response is, “*He is risen, indeed!*” Some Christian communities, including Jehovah’s Witnesses and Quakers, do not always observe Easter Sunday, given their own understanding of the resurrection story and how Easter borrows from many pagan traditions.
- 2. Another person reads this:** Worship on Easter often happens at sunrise and the service is festive, often including brass instrumental music from trumpets to percussion instruments like timpani, etc. Hymns and art related to Easter speak of the empty tomb and the stone that sealed the tomb’s entrance being rolled away. People traditionally wear new clothes to church on Easter Sunday, and in the past, women wore new bonnets decorated with spring flowers and feathers.
- 3. Show the Easter lily and read this:** The liturgical color of Easter in churches is white. Everything is white – including Easter lilies, which are native to Bermuda. Their white color and trumpet shape became a symbol of the resurrection in the 1880s, when a man working in a plant nursery managed to force them to bloom in spring.
- 4. Hold up an Easter Basket, pass around picture of Eostre, and read this:** Throughout North America, the Easter holiday has been partially secularized, so that some families participate only in the festivities of decorating Easter eggs on Saturday evening, hiding them, and hunting for them on Sunday morning. In North America, parents tell their children that eggs and other treats have been delivered and hidden by the Easter Bunny in an Easter basket, which children find waiting for them when they wake up. The Easter Bunny is not a modern invention, as the symbol originated with the pagan festival of the goddess *Eastre/ Eostre/ Ostara* – the goddess of dawn, Spring Equinox, and fertility. She was worshipped by the Anglo-Saxons through her earthly symbol, the rabbit. Many families in America will attend church in the morning and then participate in a feast or party in the afternoon.



... and the wheel of the year turns to Ostara/Spring, Vernal Equinox
circa 21st March



Eostre, Maiden of Spring is flushed with youth and vitality. She spreads her seeds
of promise. The earth awakens and the wheel turns...
Blessed Be