

The Triduum

Triduum is a Latin word that refers to the three days from sundown Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday) to sundown Easter Day. Triduum is pronounced *tree do 'em*. Now you know a fancy word that you can use to impress your family and amaze your friends! Or not.

We can reconstruct the Triduum from Scripture as follows:

Friday: Preparation Day

The disciples arranged for the Passover meal, which took place after sundown on Thursday. We might call it Friday Eve, because by Jewish reckoning, the day begins with the previous sunset. That's why we call 24 December "Christmas Eve."

Jesus and the disciples ate the Passover in the upper room. They ate it early, which was not uncommon. In that era, most Passover Seders did not include lamb, because most Jews lived too far away from the Temple to obtain a lamb that was kosher for Passover. Therefore the disciples, who were from Galilee, would have been accustomed to a Passover Seder without lamb. Judas left during the meal. Jesus and the remaining disciples adjourned to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed and the disciples kept falling asleep. Judas arrived to betray Jesus, who spent the rest of the night being tried by the Sanhedrin and by Pilate. The following morning, which was still the same day by Jewish reckoning, the Crucifixion significantly took place just as the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple. Matthew 27:62, Mark 15:42, Luke 23:55-56, and John 19:31 all inform us that this took place on Preparation Day, which is the Jewish name for Friday. Mark and John explain that the next day was the Sabbath. Later the disciples realized that in giving them the bread and pronouncing it His body, Jesus Himself had been the Passover lamb at the Last Supper. Thus Jesus, our Passover lamb, was sacrificed for our sins on Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7), and His blood protects us from the angel of death. Jesus died on the cross and was buried before sunset. So Friday was first day that Jesus lay in the tomb.

Saturday: the Jewish Sabbath

Jesus rested in the tomb on the Sabbath. According to Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1-3, and Luke 23:56-24:3, the day before the Resurrection was a Sabbath. This is the second day that Jesus lay in the tomb.

Sunday: the First Day of the Week; the Festival of First Fruits

On the third day, Jesus rose from the grave. It was the first day of the week and the day after the Sabbath, according to Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1-3, Luke 23:56-24:3. In John 20:1 it says the Resurrection took place on the first day of the week. John does not explicitly say that the previous day was the Sabbath, but there is no room in his narrative for any intervening days. *The first day of the week* is the Jewish name for Sunday. Sunday is also the eighth day after the creation in Genesis, so Paul describes Jesus' Resurrection as the first fruits of the new creation in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.

- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all inform us that the Last Supper and the Crucifixion took place on Preparation Day.
- Mark and John inform us that the next day, the day after the Crucifixion, was the Sabbath.
- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John inform us that the Resurrection took place on the first day of the week.
- Matthew, Mark, and Luke inform us that the day before the Resurrection was the Sabbath, and John heavily implies it.

Ancient Christian writers confirm these conclusions. In *The Apostolic Constitutions*, Book V, Section III, it says that the Last Supper occurred on the fifth day of the week (Thursday), that Jesus was crucified on the next day (Friday), and rose on the first day (Sunday), and it explicitly states that this constitutes three days and three nights. *The Apostolic Constitutions* uses Roman-style midnight-to-midnight days, so this squares with the New Testament's use of sundown-to-sundown days. It also says that Jesus gave the apostles a commandment to pass on to us, to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays; the first to commemorate His betrayal, the second to commemorate His passion on the cross.

Now you might ask why didn't the gospel writers just come right out and say that it was Friday, Saturday, and Sunday? The answer is that they did, for the circumstances under which they wrote. In the Roman Empire of the first century, there was no general consensus about the names of the days of the week, the number of the current year, the names and lengths of the months, the date of the new year, or the time at which the day began. So even though it is not what we are used to, the gospels are really worded in such a way as to make the dates and times comprehensible to anyone in the Roman Empire who was familiar with the Jewish Scriptures.