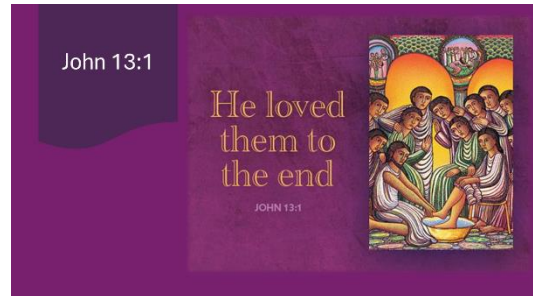


The Readings on This Day

***[Click on the links for the Bible Verse\(s\)](#)

Maundy Thursday

Many Christian theologians have taught that the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ must be held together to be adequately understood. Thus it was that since at least the fourth century, the Christianized Passover festival that English speakers call Easter took three days, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the first eucharist of Easter. The framers of the three-year lectionary judged that, with the church of the future resembling that of the fourth more than that of the nineteenth, a full restoration of the classic Three Days was appropriate. The liturgy of the Three Days begins on Maundy Thursday with an act of confession and absolution that concludes the season of Lent and prepares everyone for the baptismal renewals of Easter. Many churches are reviving the practice of the footwashing, reiterating Jesus' sign of communal love. *Mandatum*, the "command" to love, is the source of the term *Maundy*. The eucharist recalls Jesus' last meal with his disciples before his death. The lectionary's readings include both Paul's directions for the church's keeping of this meal and John's sign-and-discourse about the meaning of the meal. The service concludes with a stripping of the worship space of all adornment in preparation for Good Friday.



[Exodus 12:1-4 \[5-10\] 11-14](#)

Most second-century Christians continued to keep the Jewish Passover. Over the decades, the celebration moved from the date of Pesach to the following Sunday, because the primary focus had morphed from a memorial of God's liberation of the ancient Israelites into Christian praise for Jesus' resurrection, which is always celebrated on a Sunday. At the seder meal of Passover still today, Jews tell the story of Exodus 12. Christians remember the old Passover as a parallel to the new Passover. Over the Three Days we keep the Christian Passover: Jesus is the lamb whose blood saves the people from death.

[The Psalm for the Day](#)

We respond to the story of the Passover meal with our thanksgiving song. In the words of [Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19](#), we join the ancient Israelites by lifting the cup of salvation, our sacrifice of thanksgiving, for we too have been freed from our bonds. In anticipation of the footwashing, we call ourselves God's servants.

During the stripping of the altar, [Psalm 88](#) is appointed. We sing the wrenching lament as if we are with Christ, or with all who suffer, or are ourselves approaching death. The closing sentence, "Darkness is my only companion," readies us for Good Friday. Alternatively, [Psalm 22](#) may be chanted, but it more likely takes its place during the Good Friday liturgy.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Appropriately on Maundy Thursday the second reading is Paul's narration of Jesus' last supper with his disciples before his death. During the Three Days, our eucharist heeds Paul's advice: we share food equally, as does one loving body, and we see the meaning of the meal in the death of Christ.

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

The liturgy of the Three Days features the Gospel of John, the last-written canonical gospel, described since the second century as, like an eagle, the gospel that flies highest and sees farthest about the meaning of Jesus' life and death. In John, the meal signifies the body of Christ by connecting Christ with the literal bodies of the believing community by means of the servant's task of foot-washing. After the foot-washing, Jesus spoke about his coming death as the glorification of God.