branches on the dusty road to pave the way before him. Passion Sunday processions are customary in many Christian traditions, they are often woven into the shape of the cross. Inevitably, this palm procession lends a touch of informal celebration to the day, in sharp contrast to the Eucharist itself where the mood is determined by reading or chanting the complete passion narrative according to Mark, Matthew or Luke.

Triduum
Lent and Holy Week climax in the Triduum, three days celebrated as one continuous day, and counted from sunset to sunset. Late on Holy Thursday, known as Maundy Thursday, these Great Three Days begin. The word “maundy” is derived from the Latin mandatum, meaning commandment. On this day Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you”. From ancient times there has been an Evening Eucharist of the Lord’s Supper, celebrating that on this night, the night of his betrayal, Jesus ate the last supper with his friends. In the context of this meal at Passover, he washes his disciples’ feet and asks them to “remember” him in bread and wine, thus instituting the sacrament of the Eucharist. Triduum continues with Good or Great Friday, the day of Jesus’ crucifixion. He is executed by nailing to a cross and left slowly to asphyxiate in the sun, dying a martyr’s death for love of God and love of humankind. Christians claim that the cross is the clearest picture of God the world has ever seen. The resurrection, celebrated “on the third day”, Easter Day, is not a happy ending after Good Friday. Friday is the date of Christ’s victory, not Easter Day. Easter, in Christian understanding, is God setting the divine seal on all that Jesus was, on all that Jesus did, and on all that Jesus said. Easter is God “indicating” the cross, shining light on the cross. Calvary is the place of enlightenment, the place where love triumphs over all love’s enemies. Easter’s new fire celebrates this truth.

Easter-Pentecost
Easter celebrations commonly continue through fifty days from Easter Day until the Day of Pentecost - “forty days of preparation for fifty days of celebration”. Between Easter and Pentecost, throughout the year, and through all the years, Christians proclaim “Christ is Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!”

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With appreciation to
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Easter, the principal festival of Christianity, is a Lunar event. Since the Council of Nicea in 325 CE, Easter has been celebrated in the west on the Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. This means the date of Easter varies considerably from year to year, although it always falls somewhere between 21st March and 25th April. Because the churches of west and east use different calendars, Easter in the west (Gregorian Calendar) and Easter in the east (Julian Calendar) occasionally coincide, but mostly differ by days or even weeks. Lent, Holy Week and Easter, this annual time of “waiting for the risen Christ”, may involve elaborate ritual or absolute simplicity, customs differing dramatically from church to church.

Lent
For most Christians, Easter is preceded by a preparatory season known as Lent, usually forty days of restraint, fasting, almsgiving and similar spiritual disciplines stretching from Ash Wednesday to Holy Thursday. Ash Wednesday takes its name from the ancient custom of using ashes (made from burning last year’s palm crosses) to trace the baptismal sign of the cross on the foreheads of believers: “Remember, you are dust and to dust you will return. Repent and believe the gospel”. The reference is to the first book of the Hebrew bible, where God creates humankind from the dust of the earth and breathes life into us. We live by every word from the mouth of God, and by the gospel of grace. Mardi Gras (French for “Fat Tuesday”) falls the day before Ash Wednesday, a last day of festival and celebration before the great annual fast begins. This day is also popularly called “Shrove Tuesday”, from the custom of being “shrive” or forgiven ones sins prior to the beginning of Lent. Pancakes are associated with Shrove Tuesday because household eggs must be consumed before Lent. Eggs, being essential ingredients in rich foods such as cakes and desserts, are traditionally forbidden in Lent. Being an obvious symbol of new life breaking from a cave, eggs are also symbolically inappropriate in a Lent diet. Decorated eggs are still exchanged as Easter gifts in many cultures, and are as popular as chocolate Easter eggs. It is important to note that Lent is not a time of doom and gloom when Christians are encouraged to feel guilty, attempting to make themselves acceptable to God by means of good works. Christians believe we are already accepted by God long before we even begin to think or act. Knowing oneself loved in this way makes disciples long to return God’s love fully. It is this particular dynamic which makes Lent a special time of self-examination and spiritual spring-cleaning. Such scrutiny may well lead to confession of sin, formally and sacramentally in some traditions, in strict privacy for others. Confession and forgiveness is an experience flowering naturally in more integrated, mature and useful lives. Fasting, particularly from flesh meats on Fridays in Lent, is good both for body and spirit, a physical reminder that we human beings hunger for meaning more than life itself.

Sundays in Lent
Sundays are not part of Lent, so are omitted in counting out the forty days. Sunday is always a weekly festival of the resurrection, the first day of the week, a little Easter, the Lord's Day. The gospels attest that God raised Jesus from the dead “on the first day of the week”, the day after the Sabbath rest. For these reasons, Lent Sundays are known as Sundays in Lent, rather than Sundays of Lent. The first duty of Christians on the Lord’s Day is to gather for worship, celebrating the resurrection. This usually involves reading and studying the scriptures together and breaking the bread of the Eucharist.

Holy Week
The final Sunday in Lent is known as Passion Sunday - from the Latin passio, to suffer. The four gospels are not biographies of Jesus of Nazareth, and offer nothing resembling a full account of his life and teaching. Only the final week is dealt with in any detail, leading New Testament scholars to suggest that the gospels are really “passion narratives, with extended introductions”! This fact is reflected liturgically in Christian worship. From at least the fourth century, Christian pilgrims returning from the Holy Land have wanted to recreate on their home soil the “sacred geography” of Jerusalem. Beginning on this day, Holy Week or Great Week unfolds with great drama. It begins with Jesus entering Jerusalem riding on a donkey, when the crowds welcome him royally, spreading their cloaks and palm