**The Easter mystery**

[**Atle Hetland**](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/atle-hetland)

April 06, 2023

Last Sunday was Palm Sunday in the Catholic and Protestant Christian Church, following the Gregorian calendar, a week before it is marked in the Eastern Orthodox Church following the Julian calendar. Since most Pakistanis are Muslims, not Christians, I shall in this article explain a bit about the most important Christian feast now during the Easter Week, called the Holy Week, or the Silent Week, from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. Easter falls at the same time as Passover in the Jewish tradition, Pesach in Hebrew. It is called ‘påske’ in my mother tongue, Norwegian, and the other Scandinavian languages.

I shall summarize the Easter events, the Easter Mystery, not to preach, but inform; after all it is the most important feast of the Christian faith and therefore also something everyone should know about, irrespective of faith. In this article, I shall say something about our overall knowledge of own and other religions, and how we understand religious dogmas and doctrines. We become a bit wiser knowing a bit more, remembering, too, that the Easter Mystery has no proof or evidence because religion is not like the natural sciences. The Easter Mystery is not the only mystery in the Bible, and the other holy books, but it is profound to the Christian faith.

[Four rescue workers die due to collapse of factory building](https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Apr-2023/four-rescue-workers-die-due-to-collapse-of-factory-building)

I am sure that Muslims, Christians, and followers of other religions are interested in studying and reflecting on the Easter events. Christianity is the world’s largest religion, counting over two and a half billion members, followed by Islam with close to two billion. There are several other large religions, and even in our modern, scientific world, as we say, religion is still important to people, not always with the official interpretations of all details and traditions. We should also remember the similarities between the three Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, built on each other’s holy books, with Islam being the last.

The month of fast, called Lent, ends on Easter Sunday, but the actual fast ends a few days earlier on Maundy Thursday evening, forty days since it started. Friday, called Good Friday or Long Friday, is marked in commemoration of the crucifixion of Jesus/Isa, according to the Christian Bible, and Easter Sunday is the day of Resurrection. The Passion of Easter lasts for one week, beginning with happiness and cheering when Jesus/Isa, the new preacher with a great following, especially among poor people rides into Jerusalem on a poor man’s donkey, not a powerful man’s stately horse, yet, many people see him as the King of the Jews, although he had said his kingdom was not from this world.

[Committee formed to probe 'undercounting' in big cities during census 2023](https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Apr-2023/committee-formed-to-probe-undercounting-in-big-cities-during-census-2023)

The Easter events include the Last Supper held on the traditional Jewish Passover evening of Maundy Thursday. The twelve apostles or disciples were present, including Judas, who betrayed Jesus/Isa to the Roman soldiers. The country of the Jews and Palestinians was occupied by the Romans at that time. Jesus/Isa was arrested as he was pointed out by the disciple Judas, who had been paid money for it, but when he realized what he had done, he committed suicide. Also the disciple Peter denied knowing Jesus/Isa, but later, he became the founder of the Christian Church.

The main drama of the Easter Mystery includes the Trial and Torture of Jesus/Isa overseen by the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, who however could not find him guilty, but handed him over to the mob to do with him what they wanted. The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus/Isa happened on the evening of Friday, followed by his Descent to the Realm of the Dead for three days. Then the miracle of his Resurrection happened, according to the Bible. It was first experienced and announced by a few women, who found the tomb of Jesus/Isa empty on Sunday morning. The three women were Mary Magdalene, Mary of Clopas, and Mary Salome, and they had come to anoint and prepare his body. The tomb being empty, although guarded by soldiers, came to be interpreted as a miracle and that Jesus/Isa rose from the dead. Later, some of his disciples said they had seen him during the forty days before he was taken up to heaven in front of a huge crowd of people on Ascension Day. That day is marked both in Christianity and Islam. Also, the belief in the Second Coming of Jesus/Isa is included in both religions.

[British envoy offers 'all possible help' to overcome economic crisis](https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Apr-2023/british-envoy-offers-all-possible-help-to-overcome-economic-crisis)

Muslims do not believe that Jesus/Isa died on the cross, but rather that it was someone else who died; some believe that the body was stolen, or even that the man on the cross had not died. Hence, the Resurrection is not part of the faith of Muslims. Furthermore, Christians say that Jesus/Isa was the Son of God, but Jesus/Isa never said that about himself. The term may that time have been used about particularly good and holy men and prophets.

In the Christian faith, the key, symbolic aspect of the death and resurrection of Jesus/Isa is that he died for the sins of all human beings, making it possible for all human beings to pray for forgiveness for any kind of sin. Thus, rather than being condemned, every human being has the opportunity to be granted forgiveness and eternal life, based on faith and deeds.

The modern way of looking at the meaning of Easter, the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus/Isa, also among Christian believers, would be to see it in a symbolic way, emphasizing the message of Jesus/Isa. It is the message of Jesus/Isa that we must understand the term ‘live forever’, not necessarily that the person shall live forever. His preaching was different from that of the Jewish faith in the Bible’s Old Testament, which is mainly about a God that we must fear and his commandments must follow in faith and deeds. But Jesus/Isa preached about the God of Mercy, which is the essence of the Bible’s New Testament, and it is the New Covenant between God and the world.

[Pakistan reports 28 coronavirus cases in 24 hours](https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Apr-2023/pakistan-reports-28-coronavirus-cases-in-24-hours)

It is this message that shall live forever; what one believes literally about the events of the Easter Mystery is secondary. As we all know, that is also the case for many other events and parables in the Bible, and also in other holy books; if we only believe concretely in the actual stories, we may not quite believe as we have not considered the deeper meanings of the message.

Now then, since Pakistan is a Muslim country, with Christian and other religious minorities, the knowledge is vast about Islam but scant about other religions. But the knowledge about other religions is a bit better in Pakistan than in my home country Norway, a Christian country, now with several hundred thousand Muslims and believers in other religions, mainly made up of immigrants and refugees who have come in the last fifty or sixty years. Christian faithful, and cultural Christians, have fairly good knowledge of Christianity since Bible history was a subject in the country’s schools and Christianity was the state religion till 2012; it is still a school subject but now widened to include other religions and non-religious thinking. In Norway, the knowledge about foreign religions, including the main one, Islam, is limited, often even including misunderstandings, focusing on issues highlighted in the media. In the West and beyond, the actual knowledge about Christianity and other religions is also diminishing. I believe we all have a duty to learn about our own and other religions. It enriches our lives and thinking. In addition, comes faith and religious belief in one’s own religion.