THURSDAY

The annual Jewish festival of Passover was held on this Thursday, in what we now call Holy Week. Every year Jewish families gathered in the evening for a special meal; it’s purpose, to remember how their ancestors, who were living in Egypt, came to be released from slavery (Exodus 12).

Back then in Egypt, Moses (the Jewish leader) asked the Pharaoh to let the people leave the country to worship their God. He refused, in spite of many miraculous signs, such as the River Nile turning red like blood, plagues of frogs and gnats and other signs. Finally God sent the angel of death to every firstborn male in the land of Egypt - human and animal. On that night each Israelite family were instructed to roast lamb for supper. They had to kill the lamb and paint its blood on the door posts and lintel of their houses, to save all their first born male children and animals from death.

During the night that the angel of death visited Egypt no Egyptian family was spared, including the Pharaoh’s household. The angel ‘passed over’ all the houses where there was blood painted around the doors; every firstborn male inside was spared. No Egyptian family was spared, including the Pharaoh. Such was the grief in Egypt that the Pharaoh ordered the Israelites to leave.

Giving remembrance to this night, when the Israelite firstborn males were spared death, became known as the Passover. No self-respecting Jew would fail to celebrate the Passover each year with their family.

Now think forward from that first Passover approximately 1450 years to the time of Jesus.

At the start of Jesus’ ministry, John the Baptist (John 1:29) was calling the people back to their God and to be baptised as a sign of their new commitment as they anticipated their Messiah coming soon. When John, inspired by the Spirit, saw Jesus coming to be baptised he called out “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Jesus was on the road for three years. At one time his mother and brothers were so concerned about him they came to where he was and asked to see him. Jesus told them “those who did the will of my Father in heaven are my mother and brother (Matthew 12:47-50). It was with this ‘family’ of his disciples that Jesus would celebrate Passover.

Jesus instructed his disciples - Peter and John (Luke 22:7-8) to borrow a room - the “upper room” - and prepare it for a Passover meal together (Matthew 26:17-30). This was to be their last Passover and their last meal together with Jesus; it became known as “The Last Supper” (Luke 22:14-20).

When they had finished the meal Jesus took some bread and broke it, and took a cup of wine, inviting them all to share it among themselves saying that these would represent his body and his blood - a new covenant between God and his people. He said, “whenever you eat bread or drink wine do so in remembrance of me”. What he was telling them they would not understand until after the events of the next day.

Years later, the Apostle Paul explained to new followers of Jesus, that he was “Christ, our Passover lamb … sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 3:7).

Holy Communion now takes the place of Passover for Christians; by it we remember that it is the blood of Jesus that has saved us all from sin and death.

**Question for your reflection:**

People have different ideas about what Holy Communion signifies. If you already have an idea about Holy Communion does this account, of the Thursday evening of Holy Week, add to or change your understanding?

THURSDAY NIGHT

During the ‘Last Supper’ Jesus told the disciples that one of them would betray him. At the end Judas Iscariot left the room before the others. Unbeknown to them he had already struck a deal to betray Jesus to the leading priests for thirty pieces of silver.

When Jesus and the eleven had finished the meal they headed out of the city of Jerusalem towards the Mount of Olives. On the way Jesus told the disciples that they would all desert him. Peter, who was often the first to speak, said he’d never do that. It turned out that he wouldn’t even find the courage to own up to knowing Jesus and would deny him!

**Question for your reflection:**

Admitting that we have a relationship with Jesus can sometimes be hard when those we speak to have no interest or have strong feelings about ‘religion’.

What might you need to tell others that you know Jesus?

Towards the foot of the Mount of Olives is a garden called Gethsemane. It was there that Jesus asked his disciples to wait while he took Peter, James and John a little further on. Jesus shared his anguish about what was about to happen, with the three of them. He asked them to keep a lookout while he went on a little further on his own. Alone he poured out his heart in prayer to God his Father. He had always set his mind towards Jerusalem and the suffering he was about to endure. Twice Jesus went alone to pray and both times when he came back he found the three disciples had fallen asleep.

**Questions for your reflection:**

Have you ever experienced the pain of being alone, or fear being alone? Although Jesus knew the presence of his heavenly Father while he prayed, he really needed friends to be attentive to his distress.

Do think his disciples were just exhausted after the day, or might there have been other reasons why they fell asleep?

Can you ask God for the desire to ‘hang in there’ with someone’s pain or for passion to better understand the heart of God for his people?

It was soon after his time of prayer in that garden that a crowd of men armed with swords and clubs came to arrest Jesus, once they’d had the signal from Judas. The signal was Judas greeting Jesus with a kiss!

In the skirmish that followed, the high priest’s servant’s ear was cut off by one of Jesus’ men. Jesus took the ear, placed it back and healed the servant, saying “Why didn’t you arrest me in the Temple. Put away your swords. I only have to ask my Father and he would send thousands of angels to protect us.”

**Questions for your reflection:**

When you feel overwhelmed, what might hold you back from calling out to God for help? When a friend is overwhelmed how might you reach out to them?

Do you think his disciples were just exhausted after the day, or might there have been other reasons why they fell asleep?

Can you ask God for the desire to ‘hang in there with someone’s pain or the passion to better understand the heart of God for his people?

After Jesus was arrested, the disciples fled from the scene just as Jesus said they would. He was now in the hands of those who wanted him dead.