

Let's Celebrate
Festivals across the Faiths
2023



The **Queensland Faith Communities Council** (QFCC) was launched on 23 May 2017 as a network of faith communities committed to advancing interfaith understanding and collaboration and to making a positive contribution within the broader community. (Website: www.qfcc.org.au Email: info@qfcc.org.au)

We do this by:

- (a) engaging in dialogue that enhances our understanding of shared values and develops respect for our diversity; and
- (b) publicly promoting interfaith relations by working together, through education, guidance and example, to support the positive outcomes of religious freedom, social justice, inclusivity and diversity.

All religious traditions have important days, which they celebrate each year. These often help to tell the story of the faith and teach the principles and ethics of that community. They are especially important for families as a way of both learning and coming together in celebration.

This booklet provides a brief introduction to the major festivals of the member organisations of QFCC. Because many faiths use a lunar calendar, the dates generally change each year. A number of holy days, especially in the Jewish, Islamic and Bahá'í faiths, begin at sunset on the evening before the date listed. The actual date may also be determined by the sighting of the Moon. Also, the date may vary according to the customs of a particular region or different methods used in calculation. QFCC encourages readers to contact local faith communities if they wish to know more.

We are extremely fortunate in Queensland to live in such a diverse society and the more we learn about each other the more we will build strong, respectful and inclusive communities.

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5 January

Birth of Guru Gobind Singh Ji (Sikhism)

Guru Gobind Singh Ji was the tenth guru of the Sikh community, thought to have been born on 22 December 1666. He became a Guru at the tender age of 9 and had a big impact on Sikhs with all the miraculous deeds he did during his lifetime. He stood up against the ruling Mughals and fought against injustice. His leadership inspired the courage in people to rise against the oppressive rule. He set up the Khalsa, a military force of saint-soldiers which he baptized and he introduced the Five Ks, the five articles of faith that Khalsa Sikhs wear at all times (Kesh: uncut hair, Kangha: a wooden comb, Kara: an iron or steel bracelet worn on the wrist, Kirpan: a sword or dagger, Kacchera: short breeches). They followed a strict moral code and spiritual discipline. He was both a military and spiritual leader and his teachings significantly form the core of the religion. It was he who declared the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Scripture, to be the permanent Sikh Guru.

7-9 January

Mahayana New Year (Buddhism)

The first full moon in January marks the beginning of the new year in the countries which conform to the Mahayana Buddhism beliefs. Nonetheless, the Buddhist New Year falls on a different day depending on ethnicity and country. For instance, Chinese, Koreans, and Vietnamese hold their celebrations in correspondence with the lunar calendar – either late January or early February. Whereas Tibetans customarily celebrate roughly one month later.

15 January

Buddha Enlightenment / Bodhi Day (Buddhism)

The enlightenment of the Buddha is among the most significant events in Buddhist history and is commemorated annually. According to early Buddhist scripture, the historical Buddha was an Indian prince named Siddhartha Gautama who was disturbed by the existence of sickness, old age, and death. He gave up his privileged life to search for peace and understanding. After six years, he sat under a fig tree (a variety known ever after as a 'bodhi tree') and vowed to remain in meditation until he had fulfilled his quest. During this meditation, he realized enlightenment and became the Buddha, or 'the one who is awake.' The word Bodhi in Sanskrit and Pali means 'awakening' but is often translated into English as 'enlightenment'.



Perhaps because of the austere nature of the Buddha's quest for enlightenment, Bodhi Day generally is observed quietly, without parades or fanfare. Meditation or chanting practices may be extended. More informal commemoration might involve bodhi tree decorations or simple tea and cookies.

The dates of celebration vary according to the particular Buddhist tradition and can be in December/January or April/May.

1-7 February World Interfaith Harmony Week

On 20 October 2010, World Interfaith Harmony Week was unanimously adopted by the United Nations and since then has been celebrated in the first week of February each year. The concept came from a proposal, only a month earlier, by H.M. King Abdullah II of Jordan, and is based on the pioneering work of The Common Word Initiative. Commencing in 2007, this encouraged Muslim and Christian leaders to engage in dialogue. The concept has been extended to people of all faiths and those of no faith. World Interfaith Harmony Week provides an opportunity to celebrate the dialogue being undertaken by all people of good will.

2 February Lughnassagh (Pagan)

Lughnassagh (or Lammass) is the festival of the first harvest, the first fruits of high summer that will provide food for the coming seasons. Pagans give thanks for the bountiful harvest – honey, fruit, corn – as they realise that the days are growing shorter, winter will soon return and they must make ready.

25 February 1 March Ayyám-i-Há or Intercalary Days (Bahá'í)

The Intercalary Days (Ayyám-i-Há or 'Days of Há') are devoted to hospitality, charity, gift giving and spiritual preparation for the Bahá'í fasting month. They are celebrated during the four or five days before the last month of the Bahá'í year.



2-20 March **Bahá'í Month of Fasting**

The last month in the Bahá'í calendar, 'Alá' ('loftiness'), is dedicated to the Bahá'í Fast. During this time, Bahá'ís between 15 and 70 years of age do not eat or drink between sunrise and sunset and set aside time for prayer and meditation. Exemptions from the Fast occur for illness, pregnancy, nursing mothers, extended travel and arduous physical labour.

6 March **Sangha Day (Buddhism)**

Sangha Day is dedicated to the brotherhood of Buddhist monks and those who keep this doctrine and is celebrated on the full moon of the first lunar month. This may vary according to the particular tradition.

The Sangha is the third of the Three Jewels in Buddhism. The word in Pali and Sanskrit means 'association', 'assembly,' 'company' or 'community' and most commonly refers to the monastic community of ordained Buddhist monks or nuns. Due to the temptations and difficulties of life in the world, monastic life is considered to provide the safest and most suitable environment for advancing toward enlightenment and liberation.

In Buddhism, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha each are described as having certain characteristics. These characteristics are chanted either on a daily basis and/or on Uposatha days, depending on the school of Buddhism.

7 March **Purim (Judaism)**

This holiday commemorates the saving of the Jewish people from Haman, a Persian Empire official who was planning to kill all the Jews living in Persia. The story is recounted in the Megillah, the Scroll of Esther which is found in the Ketuvim meaning 'writings' in the Hebrew Scriptures. Purim remembers the actions of G-d through Esther and Mordechai in saving His people from death. The holiday is celebrated with a feast, the wearing of fancy dress costumes, the eating of hamantaschen (triangular pastries filled with fruit, cheese or poppyseeds) and the giving of gifts (food baskets) to friends and those in need.



8 March

Holi / Gaura Purima (Hinduism & ISKCON)

During celebrations of Gaura Purima, Hindu followers spend time fasting and chanting, followed by a feast at moonrise. The term means 'golden full moon' and signifies that Lord Chaitanya, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, was 'born' during a full moon, and the Lord blesses everyone with the soothing, moonlike rays of His sublime teachings. Lord Chaitanya advocated a universal religion, a scientific process for spiritual awakening and gave an opportunity for spiritual emancipation to all regardless of religion, caste, creed or colour. Lord Chaitanya inaugurated the Sankirtana movement – the congregational chanting of the Holy Name of Krishna in the form of the Hare Krishna Mantra.

8 March

Lailat al Miraj (Islam)

Subject to Moon Sighting

The Isra' and Mi'raj are the two parts of a night journey that, according to the teachings of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad took during a single night around the year 621. They signify both a physical and spiritual journey. The Quran contains an outline account while greater detail is found in the hadith, collections of the reports, teachings, deeds and sayings of Muhammad.

The festival is celebrated by telling the story of how the Prophet Muhammad was visited by two archangels while he was asleep. They purified his heart and filled him with knowledge and faith. He travelled from Mecca to Jerusalem on a strange winged creature called Buraq, meaning lightning or bright. In Jerusalem, he visited a mosque which came to be identified with the Al-Aqsa Mosque and represented the physical world. From Jerusalem, he ascended into heaven, where he met the earlier prophets, and eventually God. During his time in heaven Muhammad was told of the duty of Muslims to recite Salat (ritual prayer) five times a day.

20-23 March

Mabon (Pagan)

Mabon, the autumnal equinox, is the time of the second harvest that must be preserved for Winter – crops need to be stored properly, produce turned into chutneys, pickles or jams or dried for later use. It is a time of thanksgiving. Day and night are again in balance but this time the darkness is increasing. Autumn cleaning is just as important as Spring cleaning – physically, mentally and spiritually. Whereas in Spring cleaning makes room for new growth, in Autumn it is for contemplation.



21 March **Naw Rúz / New Year** **(Bahá'í)**

The Bahá'í Faith has its own calendar, the Badí' Calendar, which is a solar calendar consisting of 19 months of 19 days each (361 days), with the addition of 4 or 5 'Intercalary Days' to adjust the calendar to the solar year. The Bahá'í New Year coincides with the spring equinox in the northern hemisphere. It can fall on 20 or 21 March, and the remaining Holy Days are adjusted accordingly. Naw-Rúz is an ancient Persian festival celebrating the 'new day'. For Bahá'ís it marks the end of the annual 19-Day Fast and is one of the nine holy days of the year when work is suspended and children are exempted from attending school.

28 March – 21 April **Ramadan begins (Islam)**

Subject to Moon Sighting

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is observed by Muslims worldwide as a time of fasting, prayer, reflection and community. Annual observance of Ramadan is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Fasting from sunrise to sunset is obligatory for all adult Muslims unless exempt because of age or illness. The spiritual rewards of fasting are believed to be multiplied during Ramadan, so Muslims refrain from tobacco, sexual relations and sinful behaviour as well as food and drink and devote themselves to prayer, recitation of the Quran and performance of charitable deeds as they strive for purity and heightened awareness of God.

6–13 April **Pesach / Passover (Judaism)**

Pesach or Passover commemorates the deliverance of the children of Israel from over two centuries of Egyptian bondage, and recalls their exodus from Egypt over 3500 years ago. It is a major Jewish Festival and a celebration of freedom as it crystallized the Jewish national identity and marked the birth of Jews as free people. The Passover story is retold each year at a special seder dinner in family homes and matza (unleavened bread/ flat wafer) and other unleavened and unfermented foods are eaten. In Israel the festival lasts for 7 days and the seder takes place on the first night. In the diaspora, it is eight days long with two nights of seder.



6-8 April

Theravada New Year (Buddhism)

This is a three day celebration surrounding a full moon. Theravada is a branch of Buddhism mostly practised in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar (Burma). The other two traditions are Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism.

Celebrations and traditions for Theravada New Year vary from region to region but many involve rituals using water and sand. Some communities have colourful processions or build sand sculptures on the banks of rivers. Each grain of sand represents a wrongdoing and when the sand is washed away, the bad karma caused by the wrongdoing is erased as well. There is always an underlying theme of a fresh start, a chance to wipe the slate clean and do better this year to do better in the next life.

7/14 April

Good Friday (Christianity)

Good Friday commemorates the death of Jesus by crucifixion and is called 'Good' because of Jesus' example of sacrificial love by giving his life for the healing of the world. Religious services often involve processions or the Way of the Cross which begins with Jesus' Last Supper with his friends on Thursday, through his arrest, trial and death on Friday. The atmosphere is sombre but with a consciousness that this is leading to Easter and resurrection.

9/16 April

Easter (Christianity)

Easter Sunday is the holiest celebration in the Christian calendar. It commemorates the day on which Jesus rose from the dead after his crucifixion on Good Friday. The life and teachings of Jesus, who Christians believe to be the Son of God, are the foundations of Christianity. His resurrection foreshadows the New Life open to all who follow his example of love. Religious services often include the lighting of a Paschal (Easter) candle to represent Christ the light of the world.

The date is calculated by Western Christians as the first Sunday, after the first full moon, after the March equinox. Eastern Christians follow a different calendar and so Easter is generally more closely aligned with the Jewish Pesach or Passover. Symbolism is about new life, so eggs (real or chocolate) are often given as gifts.



14 April

Vaisakhi (Sikhism)

Vaisakhi is a festival to celebrate the birth of the Khalsa. Often it is misrepresented as a harvest festival or even the Sikh New Year. In April 1699 the 10th Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji tested the commitment of thousands of Sikhs. The first five to pass his test were initiated into a new order called the Khalsa. These five men came to be known as the Panj Pyare (five beloved).

Khalsa is the collective body of committed initiated Sikhs. Khalsa means both 'Pure' and 'King's Own'. The Khalsa represent the living form of the Guru – and therefore are God's representatives – on earth.

21 April – 2 May Festival of Ridván (Bahá'í)

This annual Bahá'í festival commemorates the 12 days when Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, publicly proclaimed His mission as God's messenger for this age in the garden of Ridván ('paradise') on the banks of the Tigris River, outside Baghdad. Elections for local, national and international Bahá'í institutions are generally held during the Festival of Ridván. The first, ninth and twelfth days are celebrated as holy days when work is suspended and children are exempted from attending school.

22 April

Eid-UI-Fitr (Islam)

Subject to Moon Sighting

Also called the Festival of the Breaking of the Fast, this religious holiday is celebrated by Muslims worldwide and marks the end of the month-long, dawn-to-sunset fasting of Ramadan. The date is based on the sighting of the new moon by religious authorities and therefore varies from place to place. Special prayers are said, generally at communal gatherings in open areas or large halls or mosques. Charitable donations, called Zakat, are given to the poor.

It is a time of family celebrations and feasting with special foods according to the local cultures. The traditional greeting to all at this time is Eid Mubarak.



30 April

Samhain (Pagan)

The Pagan year begins and ends with Samhain (pronounced sow-en or sow-een) which means 'Summer's end' and, in the southern hemisphere begins at sundown on 30 April. This is the time to honour ancestors and give thanks for the knowledge they have passed on, so that preparations can be made for Winter and the future seasons. It is a time for mourning the dead and acknowledging sorrows but also celebrating the illumination of the wisdom that has been handed down and the hope for the future that wisdom brings. Stories are shared about those who have passed to the Summerlands during the year, helping to keep them alive in people's memories.

4 May

Narasimha Jayanti (Hinduism)

Vaishakha Shukla Chaturdashi is celebrated as Narasimha Jayanti. Lord Narasimha was the 4th incarnation of Lord Vishnu. On Narasimha Jayanti day Lord Vishnu appeared in the form of Narasimha, a half lion and half man, to kill Demon Hiranyakashipu.

The rules and guidelines to observe Narasimha Jayanti fasting are similar to those of Ekadashi fasting. Devotees eat only single meal one day before. All type of grains and cereals are prohibited during Narasimha Jayanti. Parana, which means breaking the fast, is done next day at an appropriate time.

5 May

Buddha Birthday/ Vesak (Buddhism)

The Buddha's birthday festival commemorates the birth of Gautama Buddha, founder of Buddhism. In South and Southeast Asia it is celebrated as Vesak, which places greater emphasis on the enlightenment and death of Buddha.

According to the Buddhist scriptures, Gautama was born 563–480 BCE in modern-day Nepal and raised in India. The date varies from year to year but usually falls in April–May in the Western Gregorian calendar.

24 May

Declaration of the Báb (Bahá'í)

This Holy Day commemorates the day in 1844 when the Báb, the herald of the Bahá'í Faith, announced in Shiraz, Persia (now Iran), that He was the Herald of a new Messenger of God. It is one of the nine holy days of the year when work is suspended and children are exempted from attending school.



28 May / 4 June Pentecost (Christianity)

Pentecost is celebrated fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus at Easter and ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven. It commemorates the coming of the Holy Spirit on the first Christians which gave them the strength, wisdom and courage to proclaim Jesus' Good News.

The scriptural text, The Acts of the Apostles, relates the story of the apostle Peter preaching to a large crowd in Jerusalem for the Jewish Festival of Shavuot. As a result, some three thousand were baptised. Hence Pentecost is often referred to as the 'Birthday of the Church'.

29 May Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh (Bahá'í)

Bahá'ís observe the anniversary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, in 1892 outside Akko (also known as Akka or Acre), in what is now northern Israel. It is one of the nine holy days of the year when work is suspended and children are exempted from attending school.

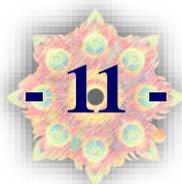
20-23 June Yule (Pagan)

Yule, the Winter solstice, is celebrated between 20 and 23 June depending on the precise position of the Sun on the longest night. After this, days begin to lengthen with the promise of life to come, symbolising the rebirth of the Sun, who is the Son of the Goddess. This is a time of deep reflection and planning for the turning of the seasons, of sheltering around the family hearth and sharing stories.

29 June Eid al-Adha (Islam)

Subject to Moon Sighting

This celebration is called the 'Festival of the Sacrifice'. It remembers Ibrahim's (Abraham's) willingness to sacrifice his son, thereby obeying God's command. However, it also remembers that God provided a lamb for the sacrifice instead of his son, who according to tradition was Ishmael. The feast usually occurs at the end of the Hajj, the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca. During this time, Muslims may sacrifice an animal that meets certain regulations and then the meat is shared among the poor and needy, family and friends.



10 July

Martyrdom of the Báb (Bahá'í)

This Holy Day commemorates the anniversary of the execution of the Báb (Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad), the herald of the Bahá'í Faith, by a firing squad in 1850 in Tabriz, Persia (now Iran). It is one of the nine holy days of the year when work is suspended and children are exempted from attending school.

19 July

Ras as-Sana (Islam)

Subject to Moon Sighting

This is Islamic New Year, the day on which everything begins again and the new dates for all religious duties and festivals are calculated. The calculation of the Islamic calendar started in 622CE, the year of the Hijra when Muhammed migrated from Mecca to Medina. The word Ras as-Sana literally means 'Head of the Year'. This is a time for quiet reflection on the passing of time and one's mortality.

24 July Pioneer Day (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

Members of the Church celebrate the entry of Brigham Young and the first group of pioneer members into the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, after a long journey westbound to escape religious persecution.

28 July

Day of Ashura (Islam)

Subject to Moon Sighting

Ashura is the tenth day of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic calendar. It marks the day that Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, was martyred in the Battle of Karbala, in 690 CE. Ashura is a major holy day and occasion for pilgrimage in Shia Islam, as well as a recommended but non-obligatory day of fasting in Sunni Islam. It has become a national holiday in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, Pakistan and India and many ethnic and religious communities participate in it.

For Sunni Muslims, Ashura also marks the day that Moses and the Israelites were saved from Pharaoh by God creating a path in the Sea or Noah leaving the Ark. In Turkey, it is celebrated by making Ashure or Noah's Pudding, a dessert made of grains, fruit, dried fruit and nuts. The focus is on Noah and his family leaving the Ark and using whatever foods were left at the end of the 40 day flood. Noah's



pudding is shared with neighbours, friends and colleagues, whatever their beliefs, as an offering of love and peace.

2 August Imbolic (Pagan)

It is now obvious that light is growing and the days are lengthening. This is the time when the land is prepared for new crops so that the Earth can bring forth new life. It is the time of lambing and the first early green shoots as the plants, dormant during winter, are reborn. It is also the time when hens start laying again. It is the festival of the Goddess Brigid who is Goddess of healing, smithcraft, poetry, childbirth and creativity of all kinds. She is also goddess of the hearth fire and protector of the home.

20 August The Blessed Appearance Day (International Society for Krishna Consciousness)

The Blessed Appearance Day of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada, Founder and Spiritual Leader of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON).

ISKCON devotees around the world observe this day with a blissful festival of readings and memories sharing the inspiration Srila Prabhupada has provided in their lives. A feast is cooked and served at the end of the program.

6 September Krishna Janmastami (Hinduism / ISKCON)

One of the most important Hindu festivals, Janmashtami (Krishna Jayanti) is the Divine Appearance day of Bhagavan Lord Shree Krishna, the original Supreme Personality of Godhead who gave the vital message of the Bhagavad-gita – ‘Song of God’ – the guiding principles for every Hindu.

Around the world, there will be ceremonies and prayers at temples dedicated to Lord Krishna. A large festival is held with fasting and prayer up to midnight, the time at which it was said that Krishna was born.

Krishna was born in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. In this region, a common tradition is the performance of Krishna Lila, a folk drama consisting of scenes from Krishna's life.

Many customs have developed in the different parts of India, all based on stories from Krishna's life. For instance, it is said that as a boy, Krishna loved butter and milk so much that they had to be kept out of his reach. This story is reflected in many climbing games for children.

It is a public holiday in India but the date may vary according to the region.

16-18 September Rosh Hashanah (Judaism)

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and Yom Kippur (below) the Day of Atonement, are purely religious holidays. They are High Holy Days and they are both called 'holy convocations'. They emphasize spirituality, morality and holiness and celebrate G-d's role as King of the Universe and judge of all our actions. Rosh Hashanah lasts ten days with Yom Kippur as the last day. They are known as The Ten Days of Penitence and it is a religious duty to hear the shofar (ram's horn) blown in the synagogue. Foods at this time are sweet (for a sweet New Year), such as apples dipped in honey, and are round to symbolise the cyclical and eternal nature of life.

20-22 September Ostara (Pagan)

Spring equinox, or Ostara, is celebrated when day and night are in balance, light and darkness equal but light is growing stronger. There is increased energy for the work ahead – seeds are sown and the fertile Earth is celebrated. Physically, mentally and spiritually it is a time for 'spring cleaning', for weeding out what is no longer useful, what is holding you back from accomplishing your plans and nurturing what is needed to help you grow in all aspects of life.

25 September Yom Kippur (Judaism)

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is the holiest day of the year in Judaism. According to tradition, G-d inscribes each person's fate for the coming year into the Book of Life and waits until Yom Kippur to 'seal' the verdict. Five prayer services that include private and public confessions of sins are held on this day. People refrain from work, attend synagogue and fast from the evening before until the evening of Yom Kippur. No food or drink is taken for 25 hours. It is customary to wear white as a symbol of purity.

26-27 September Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (Islam)

Subject to Moon Sighting

Also known as Maulid Nabi, the date of this holiday is based in the Islamic lunar calendar. Maulid Nabi falls on the 12th day of the third Islamic month of Rabi' al-awwal.

30 September - 6 October Sukkot (Judaism)

Sukkot is a seven-day holiday and the primary symbol of sukkot is the sukka – a temporary structure that represents the hastily constructed quarters of the Jews as they wandered in the desert. It is a time to remember when G-d protected them and dwelt amongst them in the Tent of Meeting. It is a time of praise, singing and dancing for joy for all the wonders that G-d has done. In modern times, only the very religious will live in their sukka for seven days. Most Jewish people symbolically build a small structure and eat a meal in it.

20-24 October Durga Puja (Hinduism)

The ceremonies of Durga Puja are centred on the worship of the Hindu goddess Durga who is iconically depicted as a 10-armed mother-goddess with her four children standing nearby. Durga Puja is also a time of family reunions and appreciation of the cultural heritage of the Bengali people.

The dates chosen for Durga Puja are based on the time when Prince Rama is thought to have invoked the aid of the goddess Durga, who then (legend has it) came to battle and ultimately defeated the demon-buffalo king Ravana and his evil henchmen.

The first Durga Puja in recorded history took place in Bengal around the turn of the 16th Century A.D. Annual celebrations continued and later spread to Delhi in 1911 when many Bengalis moved there to work in the then-new capital of British India. The holiday was also transported to Mumbai (Bombay) and other cities to which Bengalis immigrated. Finally, Bengalis who live in other nations also often observe the feast. The biggest and most significant Durga Puja festival, however, still takes place in West Bengal in the municipality of Kolkata.

20 October

Installation of Gurgaddi Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (Sikhism)

The Sikh faith was founded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji. A Guru is a divine teacher who spiritually enlightens one. The Sikh faith has 10 Gurus who came to the earth in human form and the 11th Guru is the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji – the Sikh Holy Scriptures.

In 1708, Guru Gobind Singh Ji the 10th Guru affirmed the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (SGGS Ji) as His successor and commanded all Sikhs to accept Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji as their perpetual Guru. Thus began the reign of the Shabad (writings in the SGGS Ji) as the spiritual light and guide to the Sikhs. This day is celebrated by Sikhs as one of the main events of the Sikh faith.

The Holy text starts with Ek OangKaar – Ek as in number One and OangKaar meaning God, highlighting that there is One God who created and nurtures all His creation.

26, 27 October

Twin Holy Birthdays (Bahá'í)

The Birth of the Báb (20 October 1819) and the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh (12 November 1817) occurred on consecutive dates according to the Islamic lunar calendar (1 and 2 Muharram, respectively). These Holy Days are celebrated on the first and second days of the eighth lunar month after Naw-Rúz, and may fall as early as October 20–21 and as late as November 11–12. They are two of the nine holy days of the year when work is suspended and children are exempted from attending school.

31 October

Beltaine (Pagan)

Beltaine celebrations begin at sundown on 31 October. This is the time which celebrates the flourishing of Nature – plants, animals and humans feel the growing energy and life force of the land. This is the time when thoughts and actions turn to joy and revelling in all the pleasures that are the Gods' and Goddess' gifts to their children. It is a celebration of the Sacred Marriage of the Goddess, as the land, with the young God as the life force.

31 October Reformation Day (Christianity)

Reformation Day is a Protestant Christian religious holiday. It commemorates the day in 1517 when the German monk and theologian, Martin Luther, nailed his 95 theses (reform proposals) on the door of Wittenburg Castle Church. Luther condemned the excesses and corruption of the Roman Catholic Church at that time, especially the papal practice – called ‘indulgences’ – for the forgiveness of sin. Many Lutheran and some reformed Churches hold special church services. The Catholic Church officially recognises Reformation Day and, in a spirit of ecumenical relations, approves official representatives to attend various commemoration events.

4 November Anglican Roman Catholic Reconciliation Day (Christianity)

In 2002, the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches in Australia agreed to set aside 4th November as a day of prayer for reconciliation and greater understanding between the two communities. The Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches recognise that they are bonded together by a common faith in Christ and by Baptism and relationships between the two Churches have improved in many ways that we now take for granted. However, relationships need constant care to grow and deepen. Also new issues arise from time to time that can strain the relationship, so there is a need to keep praying for each other. As 4 November is so close to All Saints Day, we take courage from the witness of many holy women and men who have lived in both communities.

12 November Deepawali /Diwali (Hinduism)

Deepawali or Diwali is a festival of lights that is celebrated annually across India. It is one of the most popular festivals in the Hindu calendar and an important public holiday. Diwali is celebrated to honour Rama-chandra, the seventh avatar (incarnation) of the god Vishnu. The word ‘Deepwali’ means a row or cluster of lights or clay lamps. Many people decorate their homes with tiny electric lights or small clay lamps.

The festival celebrates the victory of righteousness and the lifting of spiritual darkness. The goddess Lakshmi, who symbolises wealth, happiness and prosperity, is also worshipped at this time. In northern India, they celebrate the story of King

Rama's return to Ayodhya after he defeated Ravana and in southern India it is the day that the Lord Krishna defeated the demon Narakasura. It is customary for Hindus, Jains and Sikhs to send greeting cards during this season, sometimes accompanied by confectionery.

12 November Bandhi Chhor Divas (Sikhism)

Bandi Chhor Divas is an important celebration in the Sikh community. It literally translates to 'prisoner release day'. Sikhs commemorate this day as the day of liberation for their Sixth Guru Hargobind Sahib, along with 52 Hindu political prisoners detained during the reign of Mughal Emperor Jahangir.

While Diwali is celebrated by Hindus at the same time, the only connection between the two holidays is that, when Guru Hargobind was released and travelled back home to Amritsar, he arrived during the celebration of Diwali.

24 November Martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur (Sikhism)

Guru Tegh Bahadur was the ninth Guru, spiritual guide and father figure for the Sikh community. This was a particularly difficult period for all Indic communities – the people of dharma – under the persecution of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. It was a unique situation that a venerated Spiritual Prophet of the Sikh faith made the ultimate sacrifice to defend the sacred rights of Kashmiri Hindu Brahmins who were being forced to convert to Islam. The Guru was tortured and publically beheaded on 11 November 1675 in Chandani Chowk (square) in Old Delhi in front of a large crowd.

Guru Teg Bahadur's martyrdom was a major turning point in the transformation of the Sikh Nation and illustrates the commitment of the Sikh faith to equality, justice, human dignity and sacred rights for all faiths.

27 November Birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji (Sikhism)

Guru Nanak was born in 1469 into a Hindu family in the Indian region of Punjab, now Pakistan. Sikhism is based on his teachings and those of the nine Sikh Gurus who followed him. Every year Sikhs celebrate his birth with a festival titled Guru Nanak Gurpurab, taken from the Punjabi words for 'teacher' and 'festival'. The Sikh holy book, Guru Granth Sahib, is kept in the place of worship called the Gurdwara and provides the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Sikhs believe in one God

who guides and protects them and the central conviction that everyone is equal before God. Living a good life, being honest, working hard and being generous to the less fortunate and serving others are key teachings.

3 December First Sunday of Advent (Christianity)

In Western Christianity, the First Sunday of Advent is the start of the Christian year and begins a season of four Sundays, culminating in the celebration of Christmas.

The word 'advent' means 'coming' and the main theme of the Season is preparing for the coming of Jesus the Christ: preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus and preparing for the coming of Christ in our lives. The First Sunday of Advent is marked in some churches by the lighting of the first of five candles, held together by a wreath of greenery. The final candle is lit on Christmas Day representing Christ as the light of the world.

8-15 December Chanukah (Judaism)

Chanukah commemorates the historic victory of the Maccabees following a three-year long uprising against the ruling Assyrian-Greek regime who conspired to impose restrictions against Jewish practices and values. The struggle culminated with the recapture of the Temple of Jerusalem in 165 BCE and the restoration of its traditional Jewish service. Chanukah means 'dedication' and refers to the rededication of the temple to the service of G-d after it had been defiled with Hellenic images and practices. A Chanukiah (8 branch candle holder with a 9th servant candle) is lit each night resulting in all eight candles shining on the eighth night. Children are given gifts each night and oil-fried foods like doughnuts and potato latkes (potato cakes) are eaten.

20-23 December Litha (Pagan)

This is the Summer Solstice. It is a time of light and the longest day celebrates the power of the Sun. It is a haven between the toil of planting and the toil of harvesting; a time of games, feasting and thanksgiving. It is also a turning point of the year, as from now light begins to ebb as darkness grows, reminding us that nothing is certain and change is the basis of life.

25 December / 7 January Christmas (Christianity)

Christmas Day is the birthday of Jesus, believed by Christians to be the promised Messiah (Hebrew) or the Christ (Greek) and Son of God, sent to proclaim the Good News of salvation for humanity. His mother was Mary and he was born in Bethlehem, the hometown of his ancestor King David. The actual date is unknown but 25 December was set by Pope Julius in the 4th Century CE. Pope Gregory XIII restructured the calendar in 1582 CE, but this was not adopted by the Eastern Christian Churches who now celebrate Christmas on 7 January.

As well as a religious celebration, the focus is very much on family gatherings and gift giving. People with a European heritage often have a large decorated tree in their homes and also a manger or crib, as a reminder of the stable where Jesus was born.

