

**THE FIRST MAJOR**

*For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. (1 Corinthians 5:7, NIV)*

**Y**OU MAY NOT RECOGNIZE IT WITH ITS NEW NAME, but the first major of the year is being contested among the LPGA's finest at the same old Mission Hills Country Club in Rancho Mirage. It's now called the ANA Inspiration, but you can bet the winner will still take a leap into Poppie's Pond when it's all over.

Major championships in a sports-saturated culture get tangled up with major holidays in our time. Super Bowl Sunday, Daytona 500 Sunday, Masters Sunday—they come at us in a string this time of year, and you start to wonder if we've lost a major holiday in all the proceedings.

When we speak of Easter as we should, it should come with wonder exceeding all those other Sundays. It is, as "holi-days" go, most holy indeed, for it is a day honoring something uniquely belonging to God: the resurrection of his Son.

To get there with a fullness of understanding, of course, we must walk through today, Good Friday, when something not at all good *for* Jesus happened *to* Jesus that we might gain all the good that is *in* Jesus. And that goodness has everything to do with what we might well call "the first major of them all."

When the Hebrew people, those descendants of Abraham, had been exiled in Egypt until they could contain their cries no longer, God intervened. He sent the shepherd prophet Moses to the court of Pharaoh to demand the release of the people. Pharaoh would not give; the Hebrews slaves sustained his economy. So God sent plague upon plague. Surely, each time, Moses figured, *This one will do the trick*. No. Pharaoh stuck to his pride. And then came the Passover.

Here the firstborn of each household would die in the night, but not in the houses of the Jews, for they followed God's instruction to take the blood of a sacrificed lamb and spread it on their doorframes that the angel of death might "pass over" their homes and allow their children to live.

In the giving of the law to Moses, it was this event that led to the first holiday on the Jewish calendar: Passover, a commemoration of God's saving grace. It was not until the coming of the Messiah, however, that the Passover sacrifices were secured for all time. Jesus became our Passover lamb, whose blood turns aside the angel of death and purchases our eternal life. That, brothers and sisters, is worth celebrating!

**Opening questions** Why do we get excited about sports events but are generally reserved about religious holidays? How might we grow better at honoring God on special days?

**READING** Matthew 27:45-54; Hebrews 9:11-14 & 24-26

**The amazing death of Christ**

What do you make of the events of Jesus' last moments on the cross as Matthew described them?

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**The work of Christ's shed blood**

According to Hebrews 9, what did the blood of Christ shed in his death mean for those who rely in faith on his sacrifice?

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**The wonder and the work**

To those who believe, how is the drama at cross exceeded by the effects of his sacrifice? What response should we have to such grace?

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