



Mariposa READ

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Easter History and Traditions

Thursday, April 14, 2022 at 7:30 PM
Sunday, April 17, 2022 at 2:30 PM

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Easter Traditions and History

Easter is a principal festival of the Christian church, which celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day after his Crucifixion. It has also come to be known as a day to celebrate the coming of spring with colored eggs and a basket of goodies hidden by the Easter Bunny.

There is disagreement about from where the English word “Easter” comes. Some believe that it was derived from the early English word for April. Some claim that Pope Gregory the Great had ordered his missionaries to use old religious sites and festivals in order to absorb them into Christian rituals wherever possible. They speculate that the Resurrection of Christ was merged with the Pagan feast of Eostre. This feast was held on the Vernal equinox, around March 21. Eostre is the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring and fertility. Another theory is that it comes from the Old High German word “eostarum” which is the plural word for “dawn”. The translated words for Easter in the Latin languages come from the word “Passover”.

The holiday of Easter is a moveable feast, which means that it does not fall on a fixed date on the calendars that we use. It is determined on a lunisolar

calendar, similar to the Hebrew calendar. Each year the date upon which Easter falls is computed. The only consistency is that it takes place on a Sunday, almost everywhere.

There is a major controversy between Eastern and Western Christians as to the actual date of Jesus' Resurrection. In Asia Minor, Christians observed the day of the Crucifixion on the same day that Jews celebrated the Passover offering. This is called Nisan and is on the 14th day of the first full moon of spring. The Resurrection is observed two days later, regardless of the day of the week. In the West, the Resurrection of Jesus is celebrated on the first day of the week, Sunday. Consequently, Easter was always celebrated on the first Sunday after Nisan. There was later a decree that Easter should be observed on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox, which is March 21. So, for now, we celebrate Easter on a Sunday between March 22 and April 35 each year. There are many world church leaders who continue to debate which day should hold this celebration. There is a proposal for it to always be the Sunday following the second Saturday in April, but after over 100 years of discussions, they have yet to come to an agreement.

All Christians have their own special traditions for Easter. In North America it is traditional to have an Easter sunrise service. It is said that is because Mary Magdalene went to the tomb of Jesus as dawn was breaking. This would support why some believe that the word Easter comes from the German word for "dawns". Many traditions include Lent, a forty-day period of fasting and penitence before Easter. The week before Easter is known as "Holy Week", with different celebrations throughout the week that coincide with the descriptions of Jesus' happenings the week before his Crucifixion, according to the Bible. Many churches begin their celebration on Saturday night with an Easter Vigil with candles and other symbols of light. In some countries, these services continue through Easter Monday, which many begin in cemeteries.

Many Puritans saw the traditional feasts of the established Anglican Church as an abomination because they do not celebrate any festivities that are not specifically written about in the Bible. Some see it as unnecessary, and some deem it sinful. Quakers believe that "every day is the Lord's day" and to make one day more special than another may lead folks to do un-Christian acts on other days. Some believe that there are Bible verses that command to remember Jesus' death, not the Resurrection. Many groups reject the celebration of Easter because they see it as originating in a pagan spring festival. While Easter is celebrated in most countries of the world, the traditions of how it is celebrated vary greatly.

Many of the traditions for Easter have little to do with the Christian celebration of the Resurrection but derive from folk customs. The custom of the Easter lamb comes from the lambs role as a sacrificial animal in ancient Israel. The large meal we share at Easter is because Lent is ended on Easter with large meals and sweets. A hot cross bun is a spiced sweet bun made with fruit and a cross on top. The buns' ingredients carry significance to those celebrating Lent and there is much lore surrounding hot cross buns. Many cultures consider springtime or Easter a time of new beginnings and redemption and it is tradition to start with a new set of clothing, to include a new hat or bonnet. That tradition grew into women decorating an old hat or getting a brand new one to wear to Easter services. Often times there would be a parade after the service to show off these elaborately decorated hats. While the tradition of an Easter bonnet has fallen away and now little girls may just wear a white, brimmed hat, many cities in the United States still hold Easter parades.

What about the Easter egg? In ancient times the church prohibited the eating of eggs during Holy Week, but the chickens continued to lay them. Those eggs began to be called "Holy Week eggs" and some started to decorate them to celebrate. They also needed to be eaten quickly so that they didn't spoil. Hard boiling the was another way to preserve the surplus of eggs. The egg, itself, symbolizes new life emerging from its shell. As many see the Resurrection of Jesus as "new life", it became another way to use eggs as part of the celebration. There are other legendary stories about Mary Magdalene and eggs, that suggest more reason they became part of this celebration. Many cultures paint their eggs red to symbolize the blood that Jesus shed on the cross. Other cultures boil them wrapped in onion skins so that they look like mottled gold. In many Slavic countries they use pisanka, which is a batik-like decorating process that produces intricate and brilliantly colored eggs. The Scandinavian tradition is to wrap eggs in flowers or leaves to leave a pattern. A Latin American tradition uses emptied and dried chicken eggs called "cascarones". The eggs are stuffed with confetti and sealed with a piece of tissue paper. The eggs are hidden and when found, adults and children break them over each other's heads. Drawing on eggs with a crayon before dying comes from an ancient tradition of writing names or dates on eggs with a candle before staining them. Modern customs substitute decorated chocolate or plastic eggs filled with candies. An egg-hunt is where these eggs are hidden for children to find.

The rabbit or hare have long traditionally stood for fertility. The Easter Bunny originated in Germany where an egg-laying hare named "Osterhase" would lay colorful eggs as gifts to well-behaved children. Before they went to sleep, the

children would create nests or put out baskets for the hare to fill. Interestingly, some countries celebrate using foxes, chickens, cranes, or storks. In Australia, the rabbit is considered a non-native pest that has over-reproduced and consumed too many native plants. They have recently opted to name the Easter Bilby as the alternative animal for this celebration. In the United States, the Easter Bunny appears to be an Arctic hare, with very tall ears and a white coat. Occasionally you will see the Easter Bunny with clothing such as vests and bow ties.

The traditions that people use to celebrate the Easter season also include egg roll races, egg roll competitions, egg dances, egg tapping or hitting eggs against each other to see which breaks first, egg bowling games, and pace-egger plays and processions. In Finland they have Easter witches and children go door to door and get treats, much like how Halloween is celebrated in the United States. In Greece, they hold their red eggs and crack them together while they give each other Easter greetings. Whatever your reasons, customs, and family traditions, we here at Mariposa READ hope that your Easter is full of joy and fun. Happy Easter.