

Jesus is Risen!

Symbols and Traditions of Easter

Easter Eggs

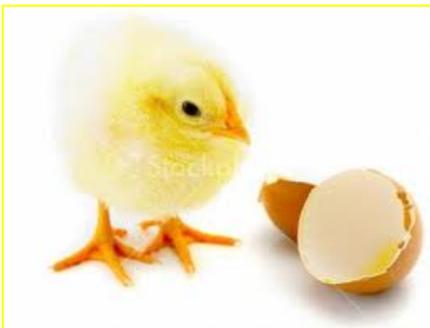
From the beginning of time, eggs have been an essential source of nutrition and a hopeful sign. If you have eggs, you have a meal. If you have eggs, you might get more chickens, ducks, geese, or turkeys and keep your family fed. Because of this importance, the egg is one of the oldest symbols for springtime in the world.

Hindus and many ancient cultures, such as those in Egypt and Persia, believed that the world began with a single egg. In one legend, when the egg broke, half of the shell became the earth, the other half became the sky and the yolk became the sun. In China, Greece, and Rome, eggs were often given as gifts during springtime.

As the story of Jesus' resurrection spread throughout the world, many people began to associate the egg with Jesus rising from the dead. As a chick breaks through the shell, Jesus broke through the stone tomb and rose! The egg shell was seen as a symbol of the tomb with new life bursting inside.



For Christians, the giving of eggs at Easter took on this new, deeper meaning. The practice even became very elaborate as women and girls would spend hours creating intricate designs on Easter eggs in Russia and Poland.



Kings and Queens began exchanging “eggs” made from gold and bedecked with jewels. The settlers in early America colored eggs using dyes made from berries, leaves and tree bark.¹

¹ For additional information about the symbols of Easter, see: *An Easter Celebration – Traditions and Customs from Around the World* by Pamela Kennedy (Nashville, Tennessee: Ideal’s Children’s Books, 1990.)

Bonfires / Candles

The ancient Celts lived throughout Western Europe from 2000 B.C. to 100 B.C. Their religion, called Druidism, focused on the tension between good and evil spirits. The seasons were caused by this struggle. In the winter, they believed that the evil spirits captured the sun god. Each year at springtime, the Celts would light huge bonfires, hoping to frighten the spirits into releasing the sun.



This tradition of spring bonfires was common at the time that Christianity and the stories of Jesus' resurrection spread throughout Europe. *Christians recognized the light of the bonfire and the light of a candle as a symbol of Christ, who is light for the world.* The Easter Vigil, which is the highest celebration in the Catholic Church, begins with the blessing of the new fire. From this fire, we light the Paschal Candle which is then used on the altar for the rest of the year. The word "Paschal" is similar to the word used to describe Easter in much of the world. It comes from the word that meant "Passover" since Jesus' death and resurrection took place within the celebration of Passover for the Jewish people. In the early centuries of Christianity, people who put out all of the fires in their home on the night before Easter and would bring home their "new fire" from the Easter Candle and light the fire in their home with the Light of Christ.



Easter Bunny

The history of the Easter Bunny goes back thousands of years. Early Egyptians who saw rabbits scurrying throughout the springtime believed that the rabbits were responsible for the new life that overflowed at this time of year. Other cultures also associated rabbits with new life because they multiply so quickly and have so many baby rabbits in the spring.

Early Christians were aware of these connections and they saw the rabbit as a symbol for the new life we experience in Christ's resurrection.

“An old German story tells of a poor woman who loved children and enjoyed giving them Easter treats. One year, she hid brightly colored eggs in her garden, and while the children searched for them, they saw a hare hopping past. They thought the hare had left the eggs!”²



After this story became popular, German children began to make nests of leaves and branches in their garden for the “Easter Hare.” Other children would create a “nest” from clothes or a hat and hope for presents in their home. This custom came to the United States with German families, but was adapted because of the prevalence of rabbits rather than hares. Thus, the story of the Easter Rabbit, who later became known as the Easter Bunny, became a tradition for families.

² *An Easter Celebration – Traditions and Customs from Around the World* by Pamela Kennedy (Nashville, Tennessee: Ideal's Children's Books, 1990), p. 14.

Lambs



In the Old Testament, even before the story of the Exodus from Egypt and the Passover, we hear many stories of lambs being offered as a sacrifice or thanksgiving to God. Since that first Passover, when God protected the Hebrew families as they were trying to become free from their slave masters, many Jewish families serve lamb as an important part of the Passover feast.

This would have been the tradition for Jesus and his family and for his disciples. ***During the Passover, Jesus gave his life freely as an offering out of love for us to free us from sin, which is why Jesus is called the Lamb of God.***

The lamb became a frequent symbol for Jesus and was used in the Catacombs when early Christians had to hide their faith for fear of their life. In the Middle Ages, banners and flags with pictures of lambs were prominent in Easter celebrations. In many countries, families made cakes, candies and pastries in the shape of a lamb. Here in the United States, a lamb cake is often the center piece of an Easter feast.



Sharing Faith at Home for Easter

Meal Blessing for Easter

Reader: “Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is so good, and by raising Jesus from death, he has given us new life and a hope that lives on.” 1 Peter 1:3

Prayer Leader: Glorious God, the darkness of Lent is over, and the light of Easter shines on us. We praise you because you have shown us your power in the resurrection.

We rejoice in you because you have refreshed us in the waters of baptism. We glorify you because you have given us hope for eternal life. WE love you because you have loved us.

Blessing over the Food: Loving God, bless those who gather around this table. Help us to spread the light of your son, Jesus, to those are hungry today. Amen.³

Faith Sharing for the First Week of Easter

Choose one night in the first week after the celebration of Easter to have a family conversation and prayer.

Introduce the Scripture: This story in this reading happens after Jesus rose from the dead. Listen to the story and choose a word or phrase that seems important to you.

Read: Matthew 28:1-10 and 16-20.

- *What was the word or phrase that struck you from this reading?*
- *What is a feeling you have listening to this reading?*
- *In this story, Jesus promises to be with us always, until the end of time. What are some ways that you experience His presence?*

(Consider these ideas if needed: in the beauty of creation, in the Bible, in Eucharist that we share during Mass at Church, in prayer, in our family, in my friendships, or when I am doing something for someone else.)

After sharing, **close with this prayer:**

Jesus, thank you for loving us and for always being with us. As we continue to celebrate your rising at Easter, help us to always be looking for you. Strengthen us to take the time to pray and to learn more about you. Guide us in ways we can share your love. We ask this in Your Name. Amen.

³ Created for *Celebrate Family, Volume 1*, edited by Susan Stark. (Gig Harbor, Washington: Center for Ministry Development, 1996), Section Five, p. 12.

