



# **Easter**

## **TRADITIONS FACTS & SYMBOLS**

Bishop Cecil Reid

# Easter Traditions, Facts, and Symbols

By: Bishop Cecil Reid

Easter is a pivotal point in the apostolic ministry, for it embraces and proclaims the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the foundation of the Christian faith. The denial of this great fact has always come from the enemies of Christianity. This is but natural, as Christianity must stand or fall with the resurrection. That Christ "rose from the dead" has always been a cardinal article of faith in the Christian church.

The Easter celebration is the Super Bowl or World Series of Christianity! It was through the cross and the resurrection of Jesus that He; *"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it"* (Colossians 2:14-15). If anyone should have a parade, tailgate party, or block party during the Easter season it should be the Church of Jesus Christ!

For the early church, the Easter experience was the focal point of its mission and teaching ministry. Though it still is a very important part of our ministry, I feel that it has been replaced in many of our churches by Christmas as the key season of the Christian year.

Lent is often the object of many jokes, especially as it relates to giving up something. But Lent, is an important and serious time, a time of spiritual preparation for Good Friday and Easter. It is a time for each person to become prepared to understand, experience, and respond to the meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus.

I have been asked many questions about the observances of Easter. In this article, I wish to present some traditions that have been embraced over the years, and some symbols marking the festivity. Within this, I will highlight some apostolic facts, with one objective in mind – **that each of us will better understand, experience, and respond to the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

## **When is Easter?**

It is the first Sunday, after the first full moon, after the vernal equinox. *Vernal equinox* means the day in the spring when the days and nights are again of equal length. It is the first day of spring.

## **Was there a formula that decides when Easter comes?**

It was a complicated but interesting formula that decided when Easter would be fixed to our calendar. Here is the significance of that formula.

When we think of it in terms of light, it can have a beautiful, symbolic meaning. The ancients were much more aware of the effects of the moon and sun and light and darkness than they were of months and dates and calendars. The shortest day of the year is December 21<sup>st</sup>. Just

when it might look as if darkness is growing and will overtake all light, light returns and begins to push back the darkness. In Jesus' birth, a new form of light came into our world, and December 25<sup>th</sup> was chosen to celebrate that event. In the days following the vernal equinox on March 21<sup>st</sup>, there are more hours of light than there are of darkness. What better time is there to choose to celebrate Christ's victory over all the dark things this earth could offer, even death itself, than the Sunday after the first full moon (when night itself is at its brightest) after the vernal equinox!

Thus, the celebration of the resurrection of Christ may vary between March 22<sup>nd</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup>.

### **Did the early Christians just adopt an already established pagan spring fertility festival and incorporate it into their religion?**

The answer here is both yes and no. The very word *Easter* comes from the name of Eostre, who was a Teutonic goddess of spring. When everyone around was celebrating a pagan spring festival that heralded the renewal of life with the coming of a new spring, the early Christians added a spiritual dimension. The newness of life was more than blossoms, leaves, new lambs, and birds. It included the new life of the spirit that they had come to know through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It was as if to say, yes, the miracle of spring is worthy of our praise and adoration, but there's so much more. There's a whole new understanding of "new life" ... the spirit of Christ lives within us!

### **Where did Lent come from and what does it mean?**

The word itself comes from the Middle English word *Lente* and the Old English word *lengten*, meaning *spring*. Lent has been set aside as a time of preparation and remembering. The first Lent lasted forty hours as a reminder of the time Jesus' body lay in the tomb. But in the sixth century Gregory the Great set aside a forty-day period of fasting, penitence, and prayer.

### **Why are Sundays not included in the time set aside for Lent?**

Many people are confused by the forty days because Lent seems to begin more than forty days before Easter. The reason you see that Sundays are not counted is that all Sundays are feast days and never fast days.

To understand this, we must remind ourselves of the reason we worship on Sunday. The original day of worship in the Jewish-Christian heritage was the Sabbath-Saturday. This practice goes back to the account of the creation and the resting on the seventh day of the week. After the resurrection of Christ on *the first* day of the week, the early church decided to celebrate in worship the most important event in its Christian heritage. Each Sunday became a time to remember Christ's resurrection on the first day of the week, and, therefore, a happy day, celebration day, feast day, and "little Easter" day. So, Sunday takes precedence over the Lenten season, and Sundays are not counted in calculating the forty days of Lent.

## But why forty days?

There could be several reasons. The Israelites, after being freed from bondage in Egypt, wandered with Moses for forty years in the wilderness before coming to the Promised Land. Also, after his baptism, Jesus spent forty days alone in spiritual preparation for his ministry and the coming of that first Easter.

## Do all Christians believe in giving something up during Lent?

Some do, some don't. Those who follow this practice believe it will help them remember Jesus every time they deny themselves. The money that would have been spent on the item given up is set aside by some, for a special project of helping others. To the conscientious and dedicated Christian, denying oneself and following Jesus with your personal cross is a daily routine (Luke 9:23). Lent is only a reminder of our stewardship.

## AND SO IT BEGINS:

### PALM SUNDAY?



Palm Sunday marks Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. They, *"Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord"* (John 12:12-13). Ironically, the very people who shouted in praise would later condemn him by screaming words of execution. Palm Sunday allows Christians to reflect on reversing the unanimous commitment of the flesh to destroy the Prince of life (Matt. 27:25).

### **PALMS: What was the significance of the palms used on Palm Sunday?**

At the time of Jesus, palms were a sign of victory.

They were often given to the winners of contests of strength or skill. The fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy of Zechariah also signified Jesus as the Messiah. *"Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass"* (Zechariah 9:9).



## SPY WEDNESDAY?



Although an uncommon name for Holy Wednesday, it is the day Judas agrees to betray Jesus. *"Then one of the twelve the one called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver."* And from that time on he sought the opportunity to betray him. (Matthew 26:14-16)

## **How did Ash Wednesday get its name?**

During the early Hebrew worship burning of a sacrifice was in order. The resident's smoke and odors would reach God's dwelling place. The ashes were the remains of the offering. As a tradition, placing ashes on their body showed others that they were sorrowful and trying to renew relations with their god.



Lent has come down to us as a time to think about our relationship with God and be appropriately penitent. Some Roman Catholic churches still follow the custom of burning the palms from the previous Palm Sunday and with the ashes making a cross on the forehead of each worshiper. Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. Repentance is necessary for all believers in their walk of faith but need not be publicly displayed. It is a work of the heart (Psa.32:5; 1 John 1:9).

## MAUNDY THURSDAY



On Thursday of Holy Week, Jesus gathered his disciples to share a Passover meal. Passover was the celebration of God's bringing the Hebrew people out of bondage to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Moses had pleaded for their freedom. The Hebrews were told to slay a lamb and place its blood on the doorposts of their homes to avoid the plague that struck the Egyptians. Death "passed over". They were saved by the blood of the lamb. Jesus reinterpreted the meaning of the Passover feast for his disciples in terms of his own ministry. He became the Lamb of God. His body was to be

broken and his bloodshed. His emphasis changed from the physical salvation the Hebrews experienced in Egypt to a spiritual salvation.

Christians often connect Thursday or Holy Thursday to the Passover meal during which Jesus took bread and wine and offered it to his disciple. After giving thanks he said, *"This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me"* (Luke 22:14). He then took another cup, gave thanks, and said, *"Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the New Testament (a covenant), which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matthews 26:27-28). Jesus now gives a completely new significance to the feast of Passover.

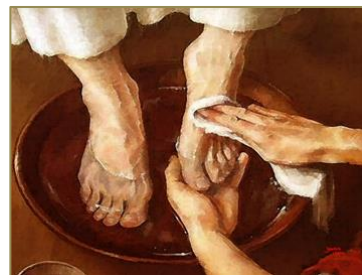
In part taking of the communion, we pause for a moment of reflection and prayer to accept the wafer and wine in remembrance of Jesus' sacrificial death and suffering. In keeping with tradition, the altars of some churches are stripped bare, and the bells are silenced until Holy Saturday.

During that night, two additional events occurred: Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, and Judas would leave to betray Christ. Without Judas present, Jesus said, *"A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another, as I have loved you."* (John 13:34). Maundy Thursday gives Christian a divine responsibility, for the word *"Maundy"* comes from the Latin *mandatum*, meaning commandment. We hear the same root word in the English word mandate.

Jesus now leaves the upper room with his disciples and waits *in the* garden of Gethsemane, praying and preparing. Roman soldiers would arrive and arrest him.

## FOOT WASHING

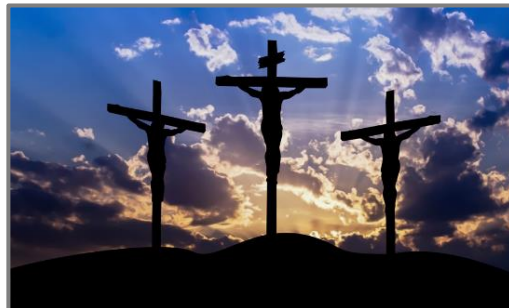
Maundy means a ceremony of washing the feet of the poor. Washing the guests' feet was always done by the humblest of the servants. As the disciples had debated who should be the greatest, Jesus poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciple's feet and wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Attempting to teach the principle of servant leadership, He said, *"For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done unto you"* (John 13:5-16).



## GOOD FRIDAY

Friday was a dark day of sacrifice, crucifixion, and death. Jesus' path fulfilled a prophecy when he was forced to carry his cross through the streets of Jerusalem and endure public mockery and beatings: *"So, it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead"* (Luke 24:46).

Good Friday reveals the cross veiled in black and parishioners visiting the Stations of the Cross to witness and reflect upon Christ's final hours.



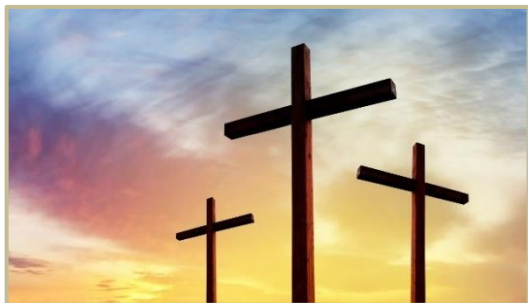
## How did Friday get the Label “Good Friday”?

From the perspective of what man did, it certainly was a "bad" Friday' but from the post-resurrection perspective of what God did, it can be called "good." Some people explain its origin as a word change from God's Friday to Good Friday. This same change occurs in the English "phrase God be with ye" to our modern "good-bye". In light of this, Good Friday was the day Jesus said, "It is finished!" or "good-bye" to the age-old ritual of animal sacrifice, and "hello" to the eternal redemption through His sinless blood.

Good Friday was the day God's judgment of man was unleashed upon himself! He became our substitute! The prophet Isaiah describes it: *"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: Surely, he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows smitten of God, and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions; bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes, we are healed."* The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: (Isaiah 53:3-12).

Good Friday was the one day God chose to save us from a bad eternity! – Hebrews 9:12, 26

## THE CROSS



The cross is among the most powerful and important religious symbols of Easter. That's because this type of cross most accurately depicts the cross upon which Jesus was crucified and where he died, before being placed in a tomb and being resurrected three days later.

Through the cross, Jesus gains victory over the power of sin and death (Romans 3:25-26). That is why the cross has become the major symbol of God's power to forgive sins and give new life to all people (1 Corinthians 1:18).

## THE CRUCIFIXION



Punishment by the cross was confined to slaves or to malefactors of the worst class. Exemption from it was the privilege of Roman citizenship.

**The Process:** Crucifixion was preceded by scourging with thorns, to which were sometimes added nails, pieces of bone, etc., to heighten the pain, often so intense as to cause death. In our Lord's case, however, this infliction seems to have been

neither the legal scourging after sentence nor examination by torture (Acts 22:24). But it was rather a scourging *before* the sentence to excite pity and procure immunity from further punishment (Luke 23:22; John 19:1).

The savage flogging of Jesus left his flesh in shreds. Imagine what it was like to have every sickness, infirmities, affliction, and sin of every person in the world placed upon one man at the same time. Isaiah 52:14 describes Jesus' appearance as being disfigured beyond recognition. The wounding, bruising, and chastisement by his stripes mutilated him as "He took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses" (Isaiah 53:5; Matthew 8:17).



Now hear Jesus' response as a committed servant from Isaiah 50:5-10, *"The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore, shall I not be confounded: therefore, have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? Let us stand together: who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? Lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up. Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God."* - What love, what faith, what commitment, and what endurance for us!

The criminal carried his own cross, or a part of it, in which case another person was compelled to share the burden (Luke 23:26). The place of execution was outside the city (1 Kings 21:13; Acts 7:58; Heb.13:12). Arriving there, the condemned was stripped of his clothes, which became the property of the soldiers (Matt. 27:35). He was drawn up and made fast with cords or nails to the cross that had been previously erected. Although sometimes he was first fastened to the cross and then raised. The limbs of the victim were generally three or four feet from the earth. Before the nailing or binding took place a medicated cup was given out of kindness to confuse the senses and deaden the pangs of the sufferer (Prov. 31:6). The medicated cup was usually of "wine mixed with myrrh," because myrrh was soporific. But the Lord refused it so that His senses might be clear (Matt. 27:34; Mark 15:23).

The nailing was the most painful mode in the first instance, but another was more so at the end, for the sufferer was left to die of sheer exhaustion. However, when simply bound with thongs, it might take days to accomplish the process. Instances are on record of persons surviving for nine days.



Owing to the lingering character of this death our Lord was watched, according to custom, by a party of four soldiers (John 19:23), with their centurion (Matt. 27:54), to prevent His being taken down and resuscitated.

Fracture of the legs was resorted to by the Jews to hasten death (John 19:31). This was done to the two thieves crucified with Jesus but not to Him, for the soldiers found that He was dead already (19:32-34). The unusual rapidity of the Lord's death was due to the depth of His previous agonies or it may simply be sufficiently accounted for by peculiarities of his constitution.

Pilate expressly satisfied himself as to the actual death by questioning the centurion (Mark 15:44). In most cases, the body was allowed to rot on the cross by the action of the sun and rain or to be devoured by birds and beasts. Interment was generally forbidden but in consequence of Deut. 21:22-23 an exception was made in favor of the Jews (Matt. 27:58).

## **CROWN OF THORNS**



The Roman soldiers made a crown out of some thorny plant and crowned our Lord in mockery (Matt. 27:29). The object was not to cause suffering but to excite ridicule; so that while we cannot altogether disassociate the idea of something painful from this crown of thorns, we must not conceive of it as covered with prickles, which were intentionally thrust into the flesh. It is impossible to determine what *species* of thorn it was.

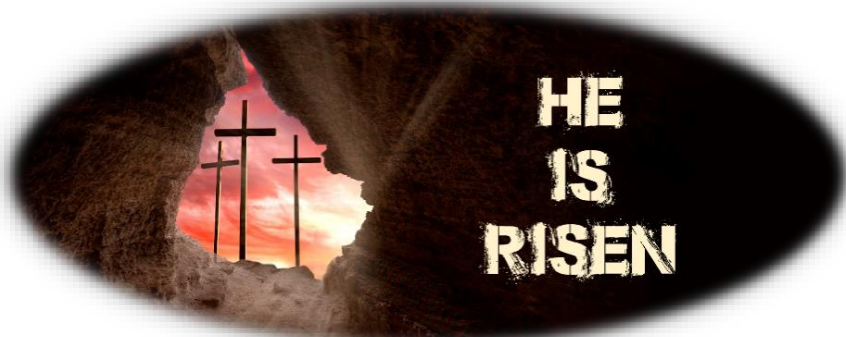
## **HOLY SATURDAY**

Holy Saturday or Holy Sabbath was a day of resting and waiting for the fulfillment of Jesus' promise, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise" (Mark 9:32-32).

Traditionally, it is a day that acknowledges a 40-hour vigil that his followers held outside of the tomb, awaiting His resurrection. "So, Joseph *bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of the rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary saw where he was laid*" (Mark 15:46-47).



## **EASTER SUNDAY**

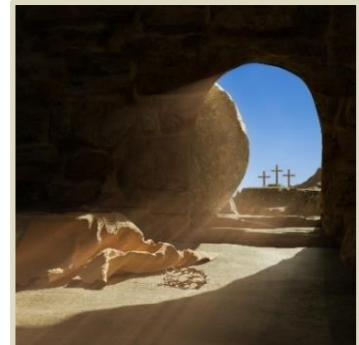


Easter Sunday is a day of celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Symbolizing the promise of eternal life for all who believe in His victory over death, commemorating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8: "...Then, he appeared to James, then to all of his apostles, and last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time [Paul]."

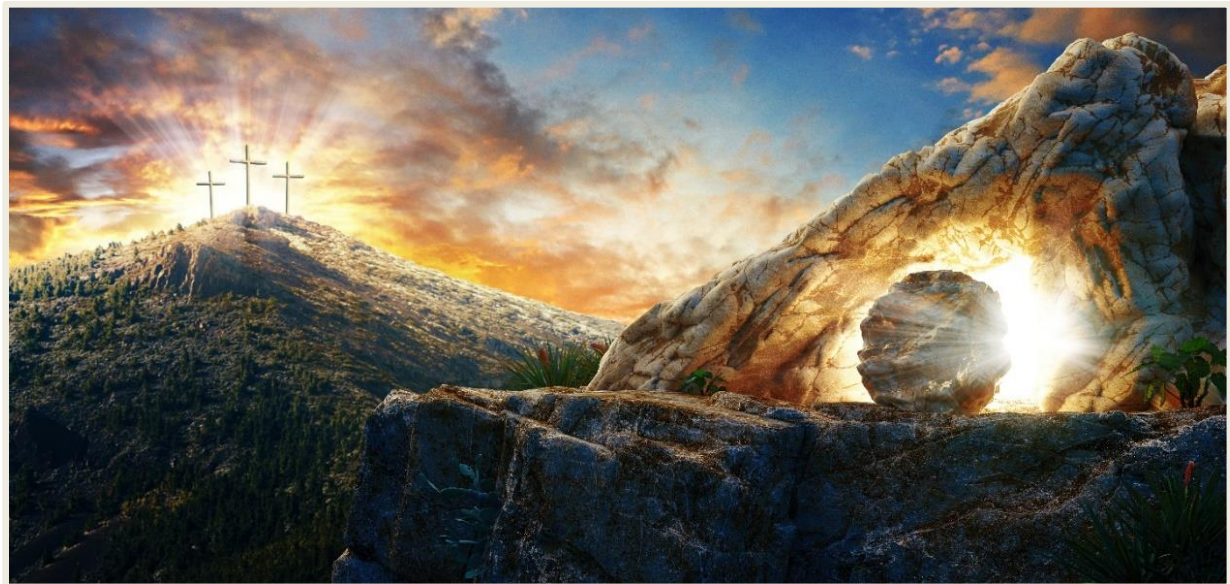
The proclamation of the resurrection lies at the basis of apostolic teaching (Acts 1:22; 4:2, 3; 17:18; 23:6; 1 Cor. 15:14). It ranks first among the miracles that bear witness to Christ's divine character (Rom. 1:4). It is the divine seal of approval upon Christ's atoning work and thus in close connection with the justification of sinners (4:25; 5:10; 8:34). It is connected with our spiritual renewal, as the new life of believers comes from the risen Christ (Col. 3:1-3). It is the pledge of the resurrection and glorification of the true followers of Christ (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:20-21; Phil. 3:21; 1 Thess. 4:14).

## THE EMPTY TOMB

The empty tomb is also a significant religious symbol for Easter. The fact that the tomb is empty symbolizes the mystery of the resurrection. It demonstrates the role of God in performing a deed that no man could make happen. It points to the hope and promise of new life and rebirth for those who walk with the Lord. It also extends that this is the foundation for our resurrection (Romans 6:5-6).



## SUNRISE SERVICES



The familiar sunrise service is a relatively new addition to Easter. A group of young Moravian men in Hernhut, Saxony held the first recorded sunrise service in 1732. They went to their cemetery called God's Acre at sunrise to worship in memory of the women who went to the tomb early on the first Easter morning and discovered it empty. Moravian immigrants brought the custom to America, with the first service in the United States held in 1743.

# SYMBOLS & TRADITIONS AT EASTER

## MARDI GRAS:

Is it true that Mardi Gras is connected to the celebration of Easter?

Yes. Mardi Gras, when translated from the French, means *Fat Tuesday*. It seems that not every Christian was excited about entering the Lenten season of fasting and self-reflection that begins with Ash Wednesday. So, on the Tuesday prior to Ash Wednesday, a "last fling" was planned. Practically speaking, this was a good opportunity to use up the last of the meat products that would not be allowed during the fast period.



## THE PASCHAL CANDLE:



A Paschal candle is another important symbol of Easter. It's a special candle used during all the celebrations connected with Easter. Its symbolism refers directly to light dispersing darkness and the resurrection of Christ (John 1:4-5).

The Paschal Candle is lit from a new fire during Easter Vigil, which takes place at church the evening before Easter Sunday. It's a beeswax candle that is marked with the year, a cross symbol, and the Greek letters Alpha and Omega, which represent the beginning and the end. The Paschal candle is then used to light smaller candles held by the members of the congregation to represent spreading the light of Jesus to those in attendance and beyond (Matt. 5:14-16).

## FISH, GREEK LETTERS: ΙΧΘΥΣ

The Greek word for fish is "ichthys." Letters of the first symbol for Christians represent the phrase of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior. Greeks, Romans, and many other pagans used the fish symbol before Christians. Hence the fish, unlike say the cross, attracted little suspicion, making it a perfect secret symbol for persecuted believers. When threatened by Romans in the first centuries after Christ, Christians used the fish to mark meeting places and tombs or to distinguish friends from foes.



## **DOGWOOD TREES:**

Dogwood trees are an important symbol of Easter not just because it blooms on or very close to Easter. Dogwood flowers are most often used as symbols of rebirth. The legend of the Dogwood is that it was the tree used to fashion the cross of Jesus' crucifixion. According to the legend, the dogwood felt great sorrow for the role it played in the death of Jesus Christ. While on the cross, Jesus sensed the tree's anguish, and he decided to transform it so that it could never again be used in a crucifixion. From that point on, the dogwood was no longer a tall, stately forest tree. Rather, it became a small and shrub-like tree with thin and twisted limbs.



The Dogwood flowers are closely connected to Christianity, as the end of the leaves resembles the wound of a nail. Although the dogwood flower is small and delicate looking, it's actually quite tough, very durable, and can withstand various challenges in life. The Dogwood flower has the meaning of, Rebirth, Durability, Purity, Affection, and Strength.

## **THE LAMB:**



The lamb symbolizes Jesus himself. As the son of God, Jesus was sent to Earth to provide for the forgiveness of the sins of all mankind. He is, in essence, the embodiment of a true sacrificial Paschal lamb in human form.

Jesus is often referred to in the Bible as the "Lamb of God" (Revelation 5:6-14). John the Baptist described Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus as the Lamb of God is rooted in the early Passover celebrations. In the story of

Exodus, the people of Egypt suffered a series of terrible plagues, including the death of all firstborn sons. Members of the Jewish community were required to paint their doorposts with sacrificed lamb's blood so that God would "pass over" their homes. Jews who converted to Christianity continued the tradition of eating lamb at Easter. Lamb is a traditional Easter food.

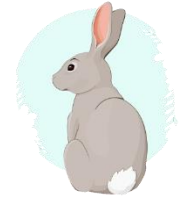
## **BABY CHICKS:**



Because baby chicks are born by hatching from an egg, they symbolize new life and fertility, which is strongly associated both with Easter and the spring season overall. Other baby animals are also sometimes considered to be Easter symbols.

## **EASTER RABBIT: How did a rabbit ever get mixed up in all this?**

No one seems to know exactly where or how the "bunny" entered the scene. It seems to have been a spring symbol in several cultures. The rabbit has certainly been the brunt of many jokes because of its association with an abundance of new life. From that perspective, the egg and the rabbit seem to have a lot in common even if nature didn't put them together.



## **PELICAN:**



In the early Renaissance period, it was believed that whenever food grew scarce, mother pelicans would intentionally stab themselves on the breast with their beaks and then use the blood to feed their chicks. The pelicans became a symbol of Christ sacrificing himself for man, and Christ's blood in Communion (Titus 2:14; Luke 22:20).

Because of this sacrificial charitable gesture, the Pelican was frequently represented in Christian art. Decorative plates of brass, featuring the image of a breast-piercing pelican, were proudly displayed in many homes. It also appears in a 1575 portrait of Queen Elizabeth I.

## **EASTER EGGS: What is the origin of the Easter Egg?**



Ancient civilizations thought of the egg as holding the secret of new life. In India and Egypt, the world was said to have begun by the splitting of a huge egg, one half becoming the heavens, and the other half becoming the earth. The early Christians converted the pagan custom into a Christian one. Eggs still symbolize the secret of new life – the spiritual new life as found in the life of Christ.

## **EASTER BASKETS:**

Easter baskets are symbolic nests, which of course link directly to the spring theme of fertility and new life. The fact that Easter baskets are often used to carry eggs further represents this symbolic link.



## **HAM: Is it a tradition to eat ham on Easter Sunday?**

For some families, it seems to be, but others have never heard of the tradition. Here again, it can be a dramatic breaking of the Lenten fast. And it can also be an unspoken declaration that by Christ's revelation and fulfillment of the law, Christians are no longer bound by Jewish dietary regulations forbidding pork. Lamb is also a favorite dish and can be understood as an important symbol in relation to the life of Christ as the Lamb of God, as the good shepherd, and as a fulfillment of the Old Testament Passover or Paschal lamb.

## CROSS BUNS:

### Why do local bakeries sell hot cross buns during Lent?

The spicy, fruit-filled buns became popular as a breakfast treat during a time when meat and eggs were not allowed. The marking of the cross is an additional reminder of the season. Many families bake hot cross buns together as part of their Easter tradition.



## PRETZELS?



Would it surprise you to know that even *pretzels* were developed in Germany to be eaten on fast days? They were made of only flour, salt, and water and were shaped in the form of arms folded in prayer.

Prayer was the resort of Jesus, especially in the garden of Gethsemane. There he wrestled in prayer to conform to the will of his father to taste death for every man. In so doing, he *embraced* you and I in that prayer of commitment (Luke 22:42) *“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”* (Hebrews 2:9).

## EASTER CANDY:

In America, Easter is the second best-selling candy holiday after Halloween. Among the most popular sweet treats associated with this day are chocolate eggs, which date back to early 19th century Europe. Eggs have long been associated with Easter as a symbol of new life and Jesus’ resurrection. Another egg-shaped candy, the jellybean, became associated with Easter in the 1930s (although the jellybean’s origins reportedly date all the way back to a Biblical-era concoction called a Turkish Delight). According to the National Confectioners Association, over 16 billion jellybeans are made in the U.S. each year for Easter.



## NEW CLOTHES:

### Where did we get the idea to wear new clothes at Eastertime?

As the church grew and developed traditions and customs, Lent became a time to train new members in the faith and baptize them. New white linen clothes were worn for the occasion to symbolize the cleansing and a new life of faith. In the early centuries, newly baptized Christians put on new white linen garments. Thus, it became traditional to wear new clothing at Easter to symbolize the new life Jesus had given His believers 'through the Resurrection.

## SPRING HOUSE CLEANING?

Even spring house cleaning can be traced to the cleansing of the household of all traces of meat and meat by-products in accord with the ancient, strict rules of the fast. There were also overtones of making ready for the newness of life in the spring. So, the house and all the cooking utensils were cleaned and prepared for a new season as a part of the renewal and readiness to start afresh at Eastertime.



## PARADES:

### How the Easter Parade Got Started



The parade along Fifth Avenue became an institution in the 19th Century. It would be hard to guess, looking at some of the fineries in an Easter parade that it all grew out of an early Christian custom of wearing new white linen garments in celebration of the Resurrection.

There is no more famous Easter parade than that on New York's Fifth Avenue. Such parades are usually considered just a pleasant custom associated with the Holy Day. Indeed, they are. But their origins

were entirely religious, rooted in a solemn Christian tradition.

In many parts of medieval Europe, men and women paraded in their Easter finery through the town and out into the open country. They kept it religious, singing hymns and stopping at intervals to pray.

Gradually the "Easter Walk," as it was called, dropped the hymns and prayers. It became the "Easter parade," carrying on the tradition of new clothes, but otherwise unconnected with the Easter observance except for the day on which it was held.

### New York City Easter Parade



Easter in New York has become synonymous with a pageant of people marching down Fifth Avenue, many wearing large over-the-top hats, reveling in the sunshine. The tradition of the Easter parade began after the Civil War as a "fashion promenade" rooted in the custom of a Sunday walk following religious service. Wealthy New Yorkers would emerge from their respective houses of worship along Fifth Avenue to stroll down the street, dine at hotels nearby, or pay social calls. Some members of the congregation

at St. Thomas Episcopal Church, located at 5th Avenue and 53rd Street, carried flowers used in the Easter service to St. Luke's Hospital located at 54th St.

The Sunday stroll was particularly popular on Easter Sunday as it marked a time to show off the latest trends in fashion. Dressmakers and milliners would line the streets producing sketches of the ensembles later copied by department stores within weeks of the holiday. Hats decorated with faux flowers, tall ostrich feathers, and taxidermy birds were at the height of fashion. We have shucked the voluminous dome-shaped skirts, but the excessive hats have always remained in style.

## SYMBOLS OF THE RESURRECTION

In a day that seeks immediate practicality, and the real thing, signs and symbols still play an important part in our thinking. Trademarks, traffic signs, type styles, logos, etc. all bring to mind an immediate identification and evoke feelings about the substance the symbol represents.

So, it is with Easter. Even the name is a symbol - coming from the old Saxon word for the personification of the East, the morning, and spring: Ostara, Oster, or Ēostre. As such, the word is the symbol evoking feelings of joy, lightheartedness, and hope. The use of symbols is hardly new in Christianity.

Consider the significance of these Old Testament symbols: the Sabbath, the rainbow, circumcision, Jacob's ladder, the many sacrifices, the priestly vestments, the Passover, the tabernacle and temple appointments, memorial rock piles, the names of Isaiah's sons, Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's use of "visual aids," and others. Jesus also used symbols-particularly in his parables: the vine, the mustard seed, the lamp, the hen, and so forth.

A symbol, of course, is not an end in itself, but a guide to deeper meaning. To that end, we are including a few symbols of Easter with a brief explanation of each.

### BUTTERFLY



The butterfly has long been a symbol of the resurrection for obvious reasons. As the caterpillar encases itself willingly in its chrysalis (cocoon) and later emerges into a more beautiful body, so Christ willingly encased himself in the tomb and emerged into his glorified body.

Significantly, the flight of the butterfly represents not only the divine capabilities of the risen Christ but also the highest hopes of humanity for the joy and excitement of soaring freedom under the love of God. As such, both the butterfly and the resurrected Christ call men to faith and to their own life, death, and resurrection.

## POMEGRANATE

In Greek and Latin mythology, the pomegranate was the sign of Proserpine/Proserpina, the goddess of spring and new life. Christians have used the plant, filled with seeds and ready to burst open, to symbolize Christ, ready to burst open the tomb and to give life to his believers.



Because of the countless seeds unified in the one fruit, the pomegranate has also come to symbolize the unity of Christians ready to break forth into a new life with God, now and in eternity. The symbol further suggests the fertility of the Word, which will bring forth fruit, and the richness of divine grace.

## LILY



Although the lily abundantly decorates altars and homes on Easter, it didn't always. Adapted from pre-Christian symbolism, the lily was a symbol of purity, an attribute of the virgin saints, particularly the Virgin Mary. In Renaissance art, the lily is often shown at the annunciation-either in the hand of the archangel Gabriel, in Mary's hand, or in a vase beside her.

Perhaps because the lily blooms at Easter, perhaps because of its trumpet shape, perhaps because of the fleur-de-lis' association with royalty, the lily today symbolizes the heralding of a new life for believers in the resurrected King. Although its bulb is buried in the ground, new life springs forth at Easter.

## PEACOCK

An ancient legend has it that the peacock sheds its feathers only to grow others more brilliant than those it has lost. Another legend says that the flesh of the peacock does not decay.

It is easy to see why this bird became an early symbol of the resurrection. As the peacock's flesh does not decay, so the flesh of Christ did not see corruption in the grave. Rather, he returned in a glorified body, more brilliant than the one he shed on the cross.



## PHOENIX



The phoenix, alleged in Egyptian mythology, is a beautiful bird that lives in the Arabian Desert for five hundred years. Then, having fulfilled its life, it bursts into flames and is destroyed-only to rise again from its own ashes.

Unlike caterpillars, which are transformed, the phoenix is totally destroyed yet is resurrected. In addition to symbolizing the resurrection event, the mythological "fact" that there is only one such bird fits well with our need for only one resurrected Savior. Clement, one of the first Christian writers after the apostles (c. A.D. 100), was the first to connect the phoenix with the resurrection of Jesus.

## HOLY COMMUNION TABLE



The Lord's Supper is the meal established by our Lord (1Corinthians 11:20) and called "Supper" because it was instituted at suppertime. Other given titles are "the table of the Lord", and "the cup of the Lord." (10:21). Other terms were introduced in the church, such as **Communion** (Gk. *koinonia*, "participation," a festival in "common," (1Cor.10:16), and **Eucharist** ("a giving of thanks") because of the hymns and psalms that accompanied it.

The frequency of this Passover meal is debated. Our Lord Jesus commanded, "*Do this, as often as you drink it.*" (1Corinthians 11:25) suggests a frequent observance. It appears that the celebration of the Lord's supper by the first disciples occurred daily in private homes (Acts 2:46), in connection with the agape, or love feast, to indicate that its purpose was the expression of brotherly love and to keep in focus our Lord's victory over sin, death, hell, and the grave.

The communion service is a divine appointment, a medium through which the Christian receives spiritual energy and is made radiant for service. Here the believer has contact with God, remembers the death and suffering of his Savior, examines himself, asked for wholeness of body, soul, and spirit, and renews his covenant relationship.

**The Communion Service is a strong public testimony that our Lord's victory was, and still is a reality and that the penalty for sin has been fully paid!..... Amen**

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