

Varying accounts of the History of Easter

Easter is an ancient holiday that is celebrated in many countries. It has deep roots and traditions that go back well before Christianity.

The word Easter comes from Eostre pronounced "OHS-truh" or "EST-truh", the ancient Germanic goddess of spring. Eostre found a colorful bird that was too injured to be able to fly again, so she turned it into a rabbit. Amazingly, the rabbit kept the ability to lay eggs. To say thank you, the rabbit gave Eostre a basket of her colorful eggs as a gift. In kind, followers of Eostre honored spring with gifts of colorful bird eggs. This tradition spread throughout Europe and did not change until the mid 1800's when European manufacturers began to produce chocolate eggs. The chocolate was very popular and the custom evolved, so that today it is common to give baskets of chocolate Easter eggs. Europeans migrated to the United States, Australia, and other countries, brought the folk tale and tradition with them.

Easter is celebrated in many countries and in many ways. We would like to share a few.

In the United States of America, an Easter Party for children is hosted by the President. A highlight of this event is the egg rolling race.

In Eastern Europe, they use wax and dye to create detailed designs on hard-boiled eggs.

In the Netherlands and Germany, Easter fires are lit at sunset on Easter Sunday.

In Bermuda, kites are flown.

In Switzerland (the land of cuckoo clocks), the cuckoo brings the eggs.

In Westphalia (a region of Germany), a fox brings the eggs.

In the United Kingdom, egg knocking competitions are held. Competitors line up and knock eggs together. If an egg is cracked the competitor is out.

In Australia, people also give Chocolate Easter Bilbies. The bilby is an endangered native.

In France, children throw eggs in the air and catch them. If you drop your egg you're out.

And, in Egypt, Easter Monday is a public holiday that marks an ancient spring festival. Egyptians spend the day in parks and gardens.

The Story of Easter

Easter is a time of springtime festivals. In Christian countries Easter is celebrated as the religious holiday commemorating the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the son of God. But the celebrations of Easter have many customs and legends that are pagan in origin and have nothing to do with Christianity.

Scholars, accepting the derivation proposed by the 8th-century English scholar St. Bede, believe the name Easter is thought to come from the Scandinavian "*Ostra*" and the Teutonic "*Ostern*" or "*Eastre*," both Goddesses of mythology signifying spring and fertility whose festival was celebrated on the day of the vernal equinox.

Traditions associated with the festival survive in the Easter rabbit, a symbol of fertility, and in colored easter eggs, originally painted with bright colors to represent the sunlight of spring, and used in Easter-egg rolling contests or given as gifts.

The Christian celebration of Easter embodies a number of converging traditions with emphasis on the relation of Easter to the Jewish festival of Passover, or Pesach, from which is derived Pasch, another name used by Europeans for Easter. Passover is an important feast in the Jewish

calendar which is celebrated for 8 days and commemorates the flight and freedom of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

The early Christians, many of whom were of Jewish origin, were brought up in the Hebrew tradition and regarded Easter as a new feature of the Passover festival, a commemoration of the advent of the Messiah as foretold by the prophets.

Easter is observed by the churches of the West on the first Sunday following the full moon that occurs on or following the spring equinox (March 21). So Easter became a "movable" feast which can occur as early as March 22 or as late as April 25.

Christian churches in the East which were closer to the birthplace of the new religion and in which old traditions were strong, observe Easter according to the date of the Passover festival.

Easter is at the end of the Lenten season, which covers a forty-six-day period that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends with Easter. The Lenten season itself comprises forty days, as the six Sundays in Lent are not actually a part of Lent. Sundays are considered a commemoration of Easter Sunday and have always been excluded from the Lenten fast. The Lenten season is a period of penitence in preparation for the highest festival of the church year, Easter.

Holy Week, the last week of Lent, begins with the observance of Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday takes its name from Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem where the crowds laid palms at his feet. Holy Thursday commemorates the Last Supper, which was held the evening before the Crucifixion. Friday in Holy Week is the anniversary of the Crucifixion, the day that Christ was crucified and died on the cross.

Holy week and the Lenten season end with Easter Sunday, the day of resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It's pretty much common knowledge that Easter is a Christian celebration of Christ's rising, but this holiday also has pagan origins. Where did the colored eggs, cute little bunnies, baby chicks, leg of lamb dinners, and lilies

come from? They are all symbols of rebirth and the lamb was a traditional religious sacrifice.

Easter falls in the spring, the yearly time of renewal, when the earth renews itself after a long, cold winter. The word *Easter* comes to us from the Norsemen's *Eostur*, *Eastar*, *Ostara*, and *Ostar*, and the pagan goddess Eostre, all of which involve the season of the growing sun and new birth. The Easter Bunny arose originally as a symbol of fertility, due to the rapid reproduction habits of the hare and rabbit.

The ancient Egyptians, Persians, Phoenicians, and Hindus all believed the world began with an enormous egg, thus the egg as a symbol of new life has been around for eons. The particulars may vary, but most cultures around the world use the egg as a symbol of new life and rebirth. A notation in the household accounts of Edward I of England showed an expenditure of eighteen pence for 450 eggs to be gold-leafed and colored for Easter gifts. The first book to mention Easter eggs by name was written five hundred years ago. Yet, a North African tribe that had become Christian much earlier in time had a custom of coloring eggs at Easter. Long hard winters often meant little food, and a fresh egg for Easter was quite a prize. Later, Christians abstained from eating meat during the Lenten season prior to Easter. Easter was the first chance to enjoy eggs and meat after the long abstinence.

Some European children go from house to house begging for Easter eggs, much like Halloween trick-or-treaters. Called pace-egging, it comes from the old word for Easter, *Pasch*. Many old cultures also attributed the egg with great healing powers. It is interesting to note that eggs play almost no part in the Easter celebrations of Mexico, South America, and Native American Indian cultures. Egg-rolling contests are a symbolic re-enactment of the rolling away of the stone from Christ's tomb. The decoration of small leaf-barren branches as Easter egg trees has become a popular custom in the United States since the 1990s.

Regarding its Christian heritage: in 325 A.D. it was decreed by the council of Nice that “after that date, Easter was to fall upon the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the vernal equinox; and if said full moon fell on a Sunday, then Easter should be the Sunday after.”

What is the history of Easter?

According to Christians around the world, Easter is a day set aside to commemorate Jesus' resurrection from the dead. But the history of Easter is more complicated than that. The name of the holiday is derived from the name of an ancient, pagan goddess, Eastre, sometimes spelled Eostre. Eastre was the goddess of spring and worshipped by the Teutonic tribes that the early Christians ministered to.

At this point, the history of Easter becomes a little complicated. The early missionaries, seeking to convert the people of the Teutonic tribes, adopted the celebration of Eastre's festival as their own. Since the festival fell around the same time as the Christian's memorial of Jesus' resurrection, the missionaries simply substituted one holiday for another. This allowed the new converts to continue their tradition, but its meaning and purpose had changed.

The history of Easter continued to be complex as the actual date of the celebration was never fully established. Some linked the memorial to the ancient Hebrew calendar's celebration of Passover. Others linked the date to the spring equinox. Finally, in 325 A.D. Emperor Constantine met with other church leaders and together they decreed that Easter would fall on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox. However, the controversy over the holiday's date continues with some the Eastern Orthodox Churches still celebrating it at the end of Passover week

The history of Easter wouldn't be complete without mention of the Easter Bunny and Easter Eggs. Both of these common symbols of Easter are derived from ancient, pagan traditions. Eastre's pagan symbol was the rabbit or hare. The giving and receiving of eggs was also a common tradition in the Teutonic tribes, eggs symbolizing rebirth and renewal.

With or without the Easter Bunny, Easter today, means victory over death for millions of Christians around the world. For it was on this day in the history of Easter, that Jesus conquered death and rose again, bringing light, love, and life to the world forever.

Origin of Easter - A Christian Commemoration

The origin of Easter, a holiday associated with the observance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is actually based on an ancient pagan celebration. Christians recognize this day as commemorating the culminating event of their faith, but like so many other "Christian" holidays, Easter has become commercialized and mixed with non-Christian traditions like the Easter Bunny, Easter parades and hunting for Easter eggs. How did this happen?

Origin of Easter - Its Pagan Roots

The origin of Easter dates back to ancient times, not long after the global flood recorded in Genesis 6-9 of the Bible. Nimrod, a grandson of Noah, had turned from following his grandfather's God and had become a tyrannical ruler. According to the biblical record, as king, Nimrod created Babel, Ninevah, Asshur, Calla and other cities, all known for lifestyles that promoted unspeakable evil and perversion. When Nimrod died, his wife, Queen Semiramis, deified him as the Sun-god, or Life Giver. Later he would become known as Baal, and those who followed the religion Semiramis created in his name would be called Baal worshippers. They became associated with idolatry, demon worship, human sacrifice and other practices regarded as evil.

The origin of Easter involves the birth of Semiramis' illegitimate son, Tammuz. Somehow, Semiramis convinced the people that Tammuz was actually Nimrod reborn. Since people had been looking for the promised savior since the beginning of mankind (see Genesis 3:15), they were persuaded by Semiramis to believe that Tammuz was that savior, even that he had been supernaturally conceived. Before long, in addition to worshipping Tammuz (or Nimrod reborn), the people also worshipped

Semiramis herself as the goddess of fertility. In other cultures, she has been called Ishtar, Ashtur and yes, Easter.

The origin of Easter goes back to the springtime ritual instituted by Semiramis following the death of Tammuz, who, according to tradition, was killed by a wild boar. Legend has it that through the power of his mother's tears, Tammuz was "resurrected" in the form of the new vegetation that appeared on the earth.

According to the Bible, it was in the city of Babel that the people created a tower in order to defy God. Up until that time, all the people on the earth spoke one language. The building of the tower led God, as recorded in Genesis 11:7, to confuse their tongues to keep them from being further unified in their false beliefs. As the people moved into other lands, many of them took their pagan practices with them.

Contemporary traditions such as the Easter Bunny and the Easter egg can also be traced back to the practices established by Semiramis. Because of their prolific nature, rabbits have long been associated with fertility and its goddess, Ishtar. Ancient Babylonians believed in a fable about an egg that fell into the Euphrates River from heaven and from which Queen Astarte (another name for Ishtar or Semiramis) was "hatched."

Origin of Easter - Resurrection Day for Christians

For Christians, the origin of Easter is simply the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ about 2,000 years ago. According to the Gospel accounts, Jesus Christ, the true Messiah promised in the Old Testament, was crucified and resurrected at the time of the Jewish Passover. Since that awesome event took place, those who believe Christ is their Messiah have honored that day and often celebrated it with the traditional Passover. As the Gospel of Christ spread throughout non-jewish nations, among people who did not have a history of celebrating the Passover, the pagan rites of Easter gradually became assimilated into what the Christian church called "Resurrection Day." Compromising the commandments of God with the comfort of the world is as old as the nation of Israel itself. Actually, American history teaches us that Easter was dismissed as a pagan holiday

by the nation's founding Puritans and did not begin to be widely observed until just after the Civil War. Those interested in a Christian view of American history and the gradual compromise of America's Biblical foundations may wish to read books such as *The Light and the Glory* by Peter Marshall and David Manuel.