

COMENIUS PROJECT

FOOD FOR THE SOUL

EASTER, POPULAR SAINTS AND GASTRONOMY



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EASTER

History and Symbology

Easter is the most important Christian festival. At this time, Christians remember the last week of Jesus' life.

Easter was originally a pagan festival. It was co-opted by Christian missionaries. The ancient Saxons celebrated the return of spring with an uproarious festival commemorating their goddess of offspring and of springtime, *Eastre*, who some people worshipped long before Jesus was born. At that time, it was thought that the sun died in winter and was born again in spring when days would lengthen and the sun's power would return. When the second-century Christian missionaries encountered the tribes of the north with their pagan celebrations, they do what Christian missionaries have always done; they attempted to convert them to Christianity. They did so, however, in a clandestine manner.

It would have been dangerous for the very early Christian converts to celebrate their holy days with observances that did not coincide with celebrations that already existed. To save lives, the missionaries decided to spread their dogma slowly throughout the populations by allowing them to continue to celebrate pagan feasts, but to do so in a Christian manner.

As it happened, the pagan festival of *Eastre* occurred at the same time of year as the Christian observance of the Resurrection of Christ. It made sense, therefore, to alter the festival itself, to make it a Christian observance as pagans were slowly indoctrinated.

Easter Day is always on a Sunday, but the date varies from year to year unlike Christmas which is always on December 25. Many years ago Christians decided that Easter Day should be always on the Sunday following the first full moon after the first day of spring on March 21. This means that Easter can be as early as 22 March or as late as 25 April.

In fact not only is Easter a movable feast but it happens on different dates depending on where in the world you live. In western churches such as in the United Kingdom, Easter was celebrated on April 16, 2006 whereas in Eastern Orthodox churches the date was April 23. The reason for this is that in the west the date is calculated using the Gregorian calendar which is different to the Julian calendar which is used in the east.

The long build up to Easter is called Lent. The day before Lent begins is called Shrove Tuesday. 'Shrove' means being forgiven for wrong-doings. Another name for Shrove Tuesday is Pancake Day. Long ago this was a day for feasting and having a good time. People would go to church to confess the bad things they had done and would be 'shriven' or forgiven before the start of Lent. Since rich foods such as eggs were forbidden during Lent, one way of using them up would be to make pancakes.

Lent lasts for 40 days (not including Sundays). It is the time when Christians prepare for Easter by thinking of the things they have done wrong. It is a solemn time which reminds them of the time in Jesus' life when, after giving up his work as a carpenter, he began to teach people about God. Jesus prepared for this by spending 40 days without food alone in the desert.

Lent used to be a time for fasting or going without food as Jesus had done. Nowadays many people give up a favourite thing they enjoy like sweets and often give money to charity.

The colour purple is linked to Lent. In some churches the altar is covered with a purple cloth, the pulpit has a purple 'fall' and the vicar's garments are purple.

Purple is chosen for two reasons. One it is the colour associated with mourning and so it helps Christians think about the sadness of Jesus' death. The other reason is that purple is the colour linked to royalty and so it celebrates Christ's coming as a King.

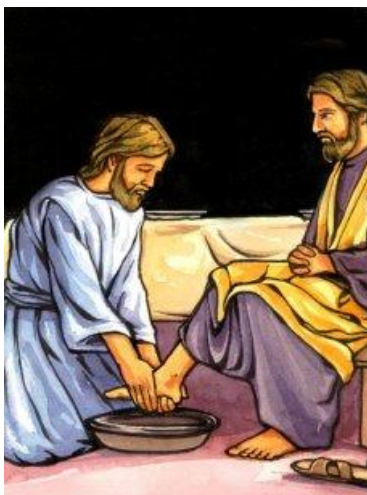
The first day of Lent is known as **Ash Wednesday**. Ashes are something that is left when something is burned. Christians use them as a symbol of being sorry for things they have done wrong and want to get rid of forever. In many Christian churches there are special services where the vicar or priest makes the shape of a cross with ash on the forehead of each person. The ashes come from last year's palm crosses which are burned and mixed with holy water.

The last week of Lent is known as Holy Week. It is when Christians remember the last week of Jesus' life and is the most important time in the Christian year. There are many church services and processions.

Palm Sunday marks the start of Holy Week. It reminds Christians of the journey Jesus made into Jerusalem on a donkey. Jesus was going there to celebrate the Jewish festival of Passover (Pesach). Jesus chose a donkey to show that he had come in peace. On that day many people welcomed Jesus by shouting, waving palm branches and throwing branches down in the path of the donkey. They hoped that Jesus was the Saviour who the Bible had promised.

Palm Sunday is both a happy and sad day. Christians are happy because they are singing praises to Jesus but also sad because they know Jesus died less than a week after his arrival in Jerusalem.

In churches on Palm Sunday Christians are given small palm crosses made from palm leaves. Left over palm crosses are kept to be burnt so that their ashes can be used in a special service on the first day of Lent (Ash Wednesday) the following year. This ash is put on people's foreheads.



On the night before his death Jesus had a final meal with his friends. This meal was one of the festival meals for Passover. Before the meal Jesus did something which surprised his friends. He washed the feet of every person, a task which was normally done by a servant. By doing this he wanted to show his followers that they should love one another in humble ways.

Later in the meal which is known to Christians as 'The Last Supper', Jesus passed round bread and wine. He said the bread was his body broken for them and the wine was his blood shed for them. He was telling them that he was going to die and that when they share bread and wine they should remember him. Christians share bread and wine at their church services all year

round, but it is even more special on Maundy Thursday. Jesus also told his friends that they should love one another. It was later on this night that Judas betrayed Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

On **Good Friday** Christians remember the day that Jesus was killed on the cross. He was nailed to a wooden cross by Roman soldiers. This is the reason why the cross is an important sign for Christians today. There are crosses in churches and many Christians wear a cross on a chain. At Easter people eat bread which has a cross shape on the top. During this day, meat is not eaten as a sign of respect for the blood spilled by Christ.

Good Friday is a sad day and churches never have flowers or decorations on this day. The church is left dark and there is just a simple cross on the altar. It is known as Good Friday because Christians believe that Jesus gave up his life for the good of everyone.

Easter Sunday is a happy day for Christians because they believe that Jesus rose from the dead on this day. They believe that Jesus' resurrection or coming alive shows that death is not the end of everything. Many go to church to thank God for Jesus' life. Church bells are rung and churches are decorated with flowers such as white lilies which are associated with Easter. The colours in the church change to white or gold which are thought to be the best colours.

There are many customs associated with Easter Day which involve eggs. For this reason Easter Day used to be known as Egg Sunday. For the last two hundred years in Britain the custom of giving children chocolate eggs has been popular while in Europe and America parents hide chocolate eggs in the garden for children to find. In many countries children are given hard boiled eggs and it is also a custom for children to decorate these by painting or dyeing them in bright colours.

Eggs were always thought to be special even before Jesus was born. It is because they are associated with new life when the chick breaks from the egg. After Jesus had risen from the dead it was easy to think of eggs as a sign of new life. So eggs have always been part of celebrations at Easter.

Rabbits have been associated with springtime since ancient times. It is believed that a symbol of the Anglo-Saxon Goddess of Spring *Eostre* was the hare. It was *Eostre's* sacred animal since it was a symbol of fertility and the rebirth of nature following winter.

As rabbits are similar to hares and are very common everywhere, Christians changed the symbol to the Easter bunny. So the modern symbol of the Easter bunny comes from pagan times.

The custom of giving eggs at Easter celebrates new life. Christians remember that Jesus, after dying on the cross, rose from the dead. This miracle showed that life could win over death.

For Christians the egg is a symbol of Jesus' resurrection, as when they are cracked open they stand for the empty tomb. No-one actually knows when eggs were first used as symbols at festival times but it was long before Jesus' time. Eggs were always thought to be special

because although they do not seem alive, they have life within them especially at springtime when chicks hatch out.

Long ago people gave gifts of eggs carved from wood or precious stones. The first sweet eggs that were eaten were made in the last 100 years from sugar or marzipan. Since then chocolate eggs have become popular and these are given on Easter Sunday.

The **lamb** is another symbol of Christ. Its whiteness represents purity and its pacific attitude is a call for peace. It is common to eat roast lamb on Easter Sunday.

GASTRONOMY

PORTUGAL

Easter is the annual party celebrated by the Jews in memory of the exit from Egypt. The religion prescribes that, for a week from 14 to 21 of the month of Nissan (beginning of Spring) the followers should refrain from any fermented food (alcohol, cereals, dry vegetables, etc.); on Easter day, the meal includes roasted lamb immolated according to the Jewish uses.

This party is also celebrated by the Christian religion that on that day celebrates Jesus Christ's Resurrection. Easter day on the first Sunday after the first moon that follows to the equinox of the spring, relapses between 22 of March and April 22. It is the time of the full renewal of Nature and as Easter it happens naturally to the abstinence of the Lent, numerous culinary traditions mark that party.

On the whole side, hard eggs, natural or coloured are typical. The habit of offering coloured eggs or decorations starts in Portugal, in the 15th century. The Easter omelette done with eggs «Requests» or put on Holy Friday is garnished with bacon or similar to well mark the end of this period.

Traditionally, on Easter Sunday, we have a meat plate: generally kid goat or lamb, but a lot of times also Pork (roasted pork or ham). In some areas they include in Easter menu a stuffed pie of several meats and eggs. The bread that was eaten on Easter Sunday was whiter than the bread homemade.



Roast kid goat (*cabrito assado*)



Codfish (*bacalhoadada*)



Lamb (*cordeiro*)

The desserts of Easter time show an entire variety of special sweets; the form of baskets with painted eggs of several colours, crowns with eggs, brioches and pies but above all the chocolate eggs and the almonds are the most representative.

Easter in Portugal is celebrated with sweet bread called “Folar da Páscoa”. The bread is usually served at breakfast on Easter morning but more often as a dessert after Easter dinner.



The story behind the *FOLAR*

Mariana, a young village girl, wished to marry. She prayed so much to Saint Catherine that two suiters appeared: a poor farmer and a rich nobleman. Both were handsome and young. The girl was indecisive and therefore prayed for help again to Saint Catherine. Both the suiters pressured her and the young farmer established a final date: Palm Sunday. On this day, both the men got into a fight and Mariana finally chose the farmer named Amaro. Nevertheless, Mariana was uneasy because rumours were that the nobleman intended to kill Amaro. Again, she prayed to Saint Catherine for help, who smiled at her, which made Mariana feel better and therefore offered the Saint some flowers. When she arrived home, Mariana found a bread with eggs on it and the flowers she had offered to the Saint. Mariana went to Amaro's house to tell him what happened but he too had received the same gifts. Both thought that it had been the nobleman who had offered the gifts and went to his home to thank him. But he too had received the same. *Folar* is, thus, a tradition which celebrates reconciliation and friendship. That is why on Palm Sunday godsons offer to their godparents flowers and receive on Easter Sunday a *Folar*.

Popular Saints

They take place between June 13 (*Santo António* – Saint Anthony) and June 29 (*São Pedro* – Saint Peter).

They consist of street parties with a lot of dancing, eating and drinking, more precisely *St. António* in the city of Lisbon, *S. João* (Saint John) in the city of *Porto* and *S. Pedro* in Sintra.

A bonfire is the highest point in every evening of the celebrations: a fire is made on the ground and some brave people, especially men, try to jump over it.

In St. Anthony's night, the most celebrated - 12th to 13th June - and after the bonfire is lit the girls sing and dance around it and they slightly burn a globe artichoke they have chosen, and picked up in the fields.

After they have burnt it, they keep it at their window box getting the night air, so that the next morning they can see if it flourishes again, it means that their beloved really loves them; if the globe artichoke flower keeps burnt and fades, the beloved boy does not love the girl.

The typical dishes in these festivals are:

- *Caldo Verde* (green cabbage broth)

Portuguese national plate, consisting of a soup prepared with olive oil, potatoes and green cabbage finely cut with garnished of slices with garlic, and accompanied with corn bread, olives and red wine. The Portuguese-cabbage, green-dark and very scented, has to be cut in very fine ribbons.



- *Sardinhas assadas* (Grilled Sardines)

Ingredients:	
sardines	Oil and vinegar
onion	Salt
peppers	

Preparation:

The sardines are prepared in the simplest way: salted and roasted on the coal, accompanied by boiled potato and mixed salads (tomato, sweet pepper and lettuce).

For accompaniment it can serve with potatoes cooked with skin and corn bread.

These are a great tradition of the city of Lisbon and of the country. They were already eaten in the XV Century and today they are still traditionally grilled outdoors, due to the strong aroma that they free when roasting.



- *Febras assadas* (grilled Pork)

This meal usually substitutes the sardines when the option is meat instead of fish.

Just as the sardines they are cooked in the same way: salted and grilled in the coal, accompanied by the same mixed salads.

Note:

It is normal to accompany all these meals with Sangria that is composed by: red wine, gaseous lemonade and fruit of the season (apple, orange, pear, peach and etc.) and sugar.

