

Easter Traditions¹

Hot Cross Buns

At the feast of Eostre, the Saxon fertility Goddess, an ox was sacrificed. The ox's horns became a symbol for the feast. They were carved into the ritual bread. Thus originated "hot cross buns". The word "buns" is derived from the Saxon word "boun" which means "sacred ox."

Later, the symbol of a symmetrical cross was used to decorate the buns; the cross arms represent the moon, the heavenly body associated with the Goddess, and its four quarters.

Easter Rabbit and Eggs

The symbols of the Norse Goddess Ostara were the hare and the egg. Both represented fertility. From these, we have inherited the customs and symbols of the Easter egg and Easter rabbit. Dyed eggs also formed part of the rituals of the Babylonian mystery religions. Eggs "were sacred to many ancient civilizations and formed an integral part of religious ceremonies in Egypt and the Orient. Dyed eggs were hung in Egyptian temples, and the egg was regarded as the emblem of regenerative life proceeding from the mouth of the great Egyptian god."

Easter Lilies

"The so-called 'Easter lily' has long been revered by pagans of various lands as a holy symbol associated with the reproductive organs. It was considered a phallic symbol!"

Sunrise Services

This custom can be traced back to the ancient Pagan custom of welcoming the sun God at the vernal equinox - when daytime is about to exceed the length of the nighttime. It was a time to "celebrate the return of life and reproduction to animal and plant life as well." (4) Worship of the sun God at sunrise may be the religious ritual condemned by God as recorded in:

Ezekiel 8:16-18: "...behold, at the door of the temple of Jehovah, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of Jehovah, and their faces toward the east; and they were worshipping the sun toward the east. Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen (this), O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have turned again to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in wrath; mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity; and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them." (ASV)

Easter Candles

Easter Candles: These are sometimes lit in churches on the eve of Easter Sunday. Some commentators believe that these can be directly linked to the Pagan customs of lighting bonfires at this time of year to welcome the rebirth/resurrection of the sun God.

Origins

Judeo-Christian History of Easter:

The Christian celebration of Easter is linked to the Jewish celebration of the Passover. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were observed by the ancient Israelites early in each new year.

The Jewish people followed the Persian/Babylonian calendar and started each year with the Spring Equinox circa March 21.

"Equinox" means "equal night;" on that date of the year, the night and day are approximately equal.

The name "Passover" was derived from the actions of the angel of death as described in the book of Exodus. The angel "passed over" the homes of the Jews which were marked with the blood obtained from a ritual animal sacrifice. The same angel exterminated the first born son of every family whose doorway was not so marked.

Passover was the most important feast of the Jewish calendar, celebrated at the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox. (The Equinox typically occurs on March 20, 21 or 22 according to our present calendar.)

All four Gospels of the Christian Scriptures (New Testament) relate that Jesus Christ was executed and buried just before the beginning of Passover on Friday evening. Various years have been suggested - usually 30 to 32 CE.

The Christian Liturgical Calendar:

Until the 4th century CE, Easter and Pentecost were the only two Christian holy days were observed. Easter Sunday was the main day of celebration, formally recognized by the Council of Nicene in 325 CE. Pentecost Sunday was also observed as a less important holy day, 7 weeks/49 days later. Other occasions related to Jesus' execution were gradually added to the church calendar:

Lent: This was a period of spiritual preparation for Easter which typically involves fasting, penance and prayer. It was originally established by various Christian groups as an interval ranging from a few days to several weeks. It was eventually fixed in the 8th century CE at 40 days. (The number 40 is one of many magical numbers with religious significance in the Bible; others were 3, 7, 12, and 70). 40 days recalls the interval that Jesus, Moses and Elias spent in the desert. Among Roman Catholics, Lent lasts for six and a half weeks before Easter, excluding Sundays. Among the Eastern Orthodox churches, it is a full eight weeks, because Saturdays and Sundays are not included.

Ash Wednesday: This is held on the first day of Lent, a Wednesday. "Wednesday" is derived from the Anglo-Saxon "Wodnes Daeg"; Woden was the Saxon God of war and victory.

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Holy Week: the week before Easter Sunday:

Palm Sunday: This is held on the Sunday before Easter Sunday. It recalls Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem one week before his execution.

Holy Monday commemorates Jesus' cleansing of the temple.

Holy Tuesday recalls Jesus' description to his disciples on the Mount of Olives of the destruction of Jerusalem

Holy Wednesday (once called Spy Wednesday) recalls Judas' decision to betray Jesus in exchange for 30 pieces of silver.

Maundy Thursday commemorates the Last Supper, Jesus' agony in the garden and his arrest. "Maundy" is derived from the Latin "mandatum" (commandment of God in John 13:34-35). For centuries, people in authority have washed the feet of their followers on this day.

Good Friday recalls Jesus' death on the cross. The origin of the word "good" has been lost. Some claim that it is a corruption of "God" and that the early Christian called this day "God's Friday." Others claim that "good" refers to the blessings of mankind that Christians believe arose as a result of Jesus' execution.

Holy Saturday (a.k.a. Easter Eve) is the final day of Holy Week and of Lent.

Easter Sunday commemorates Jesus' resurrection. In the early church, converts were baptized into church membership on this day after a lengthy period of instruction. This tradition continues today in some churches.

Feast of the Ascension (a.k.a. Ascension Day) is a celebration of Jesus' ascension up to heaven. This is described in:

the gospel of John as happening immediately after Jesus' resurrection

the gospel of Luke at an undefined number of days after the resurrection

the book of Acts at 40 days after the resurrection.

The church has accepted the account in Acts; the feast is celebrated on a Thursday, 39 days after Easter Sunday. Although tradition states that it was first celebrated in 68 CE, it did not become formally recognized by the church until the late 3rd century.

Pentecost (a.k.a. Whit Sunday) is now celebrated 7 weeks/49 days after Easter Sunday. It recalls the visitation of the Holy Spirit to 120 Christians, both apostles and followers. They spoke in tongues (in foreign languages that they had not previously known) to the assembled crowd. 3,000 were baptized. The day was originally a Jewish festival which was called "Pentecost," because it was observed 50 days after Passover. (The Greek word for 50th day is "pentecoste.") This is usually regarded as the date of the birth of the Christian church. The feast was mentioned in a 2nd century book, and was formally recognized in the 3rd century CE.