

## Easter

### Overview

The past 6 weeks of Lent have been a period of prayer, penance and fasting. Holy Week has been a ritual full of symbolism and opens the church to the season of Easter.

### The dates for Easter

Early in Christianity, conflicts arose as to setting of the date for Easter. Since the early church started with Jewish converts, they insisted that it be celebrated on the precise date of the historical Passover which was the Jewish calendar date of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. It was finally resolved during the Council of 325. The decision was made to observe Easter on the Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox - the day when the hours of day and night are equal. Therefore, the date for Easter becomes one that varies each year.

The Easter season lasts for 50 days – ending with Pentecost Sunday. The timing comes from the Jewish tradition of a Feast of Weeks – which are 7 weeks of thanksgiving beginning with the Passover Feast. The colors for Easter are white while for Pentecost they are red symbolizing the intense fire of the Holy Spirit.

This season also includes the Feast of the Ascension – on the 40<sup>th</sup> day after Easter. After this the church goes on a 9 day Novena praying for the arrival of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost just like Peter and the others did while gathered in the Upper Room. Read Acts 2:1-13 for this account.

### The name for Easter

It is interesting to note that in almost every language except English – the name for the memorial celebration of the resurrection is some form of “Passover”. A possible explanation comes from of the Latin phrase “*albis*” which was later translated into the German word “*eostarun*” and the resulting incorrect pronouncement for Easter.

### The Easter Sunday Mass

The early church did not celebrate Easter on a Sunday – as they celebrated the night hours proceeding the dawn of Sunday - which became the Easter Vigil. This was natural since the culture

at that time recognized the day to end at sunset – not midnight as we do today.

### A new beginning

Easter has been celebrated as a new beginning in accordance with the resurrection of Jesus. For the agrarian communities at the time it was a time for planting of crops and a new creation of the foods resulting from those seeds.

Wearing new Easter clothes may be traced to this new beginning in which the newly baptized wore white robes



### Other practices

In the years, which followed, several popular practices arose which are as follows:

- The Easter Parade came about during the Middle-Ages when the people wore their new clothes and took a long walk after Easter Mass to show them off.
- The Easter Lamb was the symbol of the sacrificial lamb in Jesus as the Lamb of God.
- In ancient Egypt and Persia, friends exchanged decorated eggs at the spring equinox to celebrate the beginning of their new year.
- Easter bunnies never had a religious meaning but came from pre-Christian fertility rites.
- Easter lilies became popular since they bloom arrive Easter time and became a symbol of purity because of its delicacy and white color.

### Mystagogia

Easter does not end but begins a new season – Ordinary Time. In the early church, those who were baptized during the Easter Vigil gathered together for further instructions of the faith.