**1. Origins of Easter**

Like most Christian festivals, Easter has its origins in pre-Christian times. Our ancestors believed that the sun died in winter and was born anew in spring. The arrival of spring was celebrated all over the world long before the religious meaning became associated with Easter. Today, Easter celebrates the rebirth of Christ.

Different Gods were thanked for bringing the Earth back to life. The word Easter is thought to have derived from the goddess Easter, an Anglo-Saxon Goddess.

Even though Easter is associated with Spring here in England, it is not so in countries in the southern hemisphere. In these countries Easter falls near the end of autumn. However, through out the world Easter is felt to be a time of new life and new beginnings because of Jesus' rebirth.

Easter starts with Good Friday.

**2. Good Friday (Holy Friday)**

Good Friday is the Friday before Easter Sunday. On this day, Christians remember the day when Jesus was crucified on a cross. The name may be derived from 'God's Friday' in the same way that good-bye is derived from 'God be with ye'.

Jesus was arrested and was tried, in a mock trial. He was handed over to the Roman soldiers to be beaten and flogged with whips. A crown of long, sharp thorns was thrust upon his head.

Jesus was forced to carry his own cross outside the city to Skull Hill. He was so weak after the beating that a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, was pulled from the crowd and forced to carry Jesus' cross the rest of the way.

Jesus was nailed to the cross. Two other criminals were crucified with him, their crosses were on either side of him. A sign above Jesus read «The King of the Jews». This took place at approximately 9am Friday morning.

It is traditional to eat warm 'hot cross buns' on Good Friday. Hot Cross Buns with their combination of spicy, sweet and fruity flavors have long been an Easter tradition. The pastry cross on top of the buns symbolizes and reminds Christians of the cross that Jesus was killed on.

The buns were traditionally eaten at breakfast time. They were once sold by street vendors who sang a little song about them.

Good Friday Superstitions / beliefs:

Many fishermen will not set out for catch on Good Friday. Bread or cakes baked on this day would not go mouldy.

The planting of crops is not advised on this day, as an old belief says that no iron should enter the ground (i.e. spade, fork etc.).

Hot cross buns baked on Good Friday were supposed to have magical powers. It is said that you could keep a hot cross bun which had been made on Good Friday for at least a year and it wouldn't go mouldy.

Hardened old hot cross buns were supposed to protect the house from fire

Sailors took them to sea with them to prevent shipwreck.

A bun baked on Good Friday and left to get hard could be grated up and put in some warm milk and this was supposed to stop an upset tummy.

**3. Easter Saturday** **(Holy Saturday)**

Easter Saturday is also known as Holy Saturday, Easter Even and the Great Sabbath. The term «Easter Even» was used by the 1549 Prayer Book. The 1979 BCP uses the title «Holy Saturday» for the Saturday before Easter (p. 283).

It is the Saturday before Easter, the last day of Lent and is the day when Christ's body lay in His Tomb. In the early church Holy Saturday was a day of fasting and preparation for the Easter Vigil.

Easter Vigil, dating back to at least the Roman times, takes place on Holy Saturday. It is celebrated by the use of a wax candle which is inscribed with a cross. The letters alpha and omega are inscribed at the top and bottom and the four numbers representing the current year are inscribed above and below the cross arms. Five grains representing the wounds of Christ are sometimes pushed into the soft wax.

Holy Saturday is also often incorrectly called *Easter Saturday*, a term that correctly refers to the following Saturday after Easter.

**4. Easter Sunday**

Easter Day is the high point of the festival.A day of parties, gift-giving and above all a celebration that Jesus rose from the dead and lives forever. The traditional Easter gift is a chocolate egg.

Christians gather together on Easter Sunday for a Sunrise Service. This service takes place on a hill side so everyone can see the sun rise.

On Easter Sunday, the Church is recollected in contemplation of the risen Christ. Thus she relives the primordial experience that lies at the basis of her existence. She feels imbued with the same wonder as Mary Magdalen and the other women who went to Christ's tomb on Easter morning and found it empty. That tomb became the womb of life. Whoever had condemned Jesus, deceived himself that he had buried his cause under an ice-cold tombstone. The disciples themselves gave into the feeling of irreparable failure. We understand their surprise, then, and even their distrust in the news of the empty tomb. But the Risen One did not delay in making himself seen and they yielded to reality. They saw and believed! Two thousand years later, we still sense the unspeakable emotion that overcame them when they heard the Master's greeting: «Peace be with you.'»

For Christians, Easter eggs symbolize new life. They believe that, through his resurrection, Jesus defeated death and sin and offers people the promise of eternal life if they follow his teachings.

Eggs have been a symbol of continuing life and resurrection since pre-Christian spring celebrations. Eggs had a religious significance in many ancient civilizations; Egyptians buried eggs in their tombs, as did the Greeks; A Roman proverb states, «All life comes from an egg». It’s probably no surprise that Christianity should also adopt the egg to symbolize the resurrection of Christ.

**5. Easter Presents**

Chocolate eggs are given to children. The eggs are either hollow or have a filling, and are usually covered with brightly coloured silver paper.

Small chocolate eggs are hidden for the children to find on the traditional **Easter Egg Hunt.**

Around 80 million chocolate eggs are eaten each year in Britain.

All kinds of fun are had with the hard-boiled decorated pace eggs.

Decorating and colouring eggs for Easter was a common custom in England in the middle ages. Eggs were brightly coloured to mimic the new, fresh colours of spring. The practice of decorating eggs was made even more famous by King Edward I of England who ordered 450 eggs to be gold-leafed and coloured for Easter gifts in 1290.

Egg rolling is the most popular and is an Easter Monday sport.Hard-boiled eggs are rolled down a hill. Customs differ from place to place. The winner's egg may be the one that rolls the farthest, survives the most rolls, or is rolled between two pegs.

Another activity that happens is the playing of a game with the eggs known as «jarping», which is rather like conkers. Each person holds a pace egg firmly in his hand and knocks it against his opponent's to see which is the strongest and which egg can score the most victims.

Easter cards arrived in Victorian England, when a stationer added a greeting to a drawing of a rabbit. The cards proved popular.

# *By Mary Brandolino*

I was just a little thing

When they brought me from the store

And they put me on the floor

In my cage.

They would take me out to play

Love and pet me all the time

Then at day's end I would climb

In my cage.

But as days and weeks went by

I saw less of them it seemed

Of their loving touch I dreamed

In my cage.

In the night outside their house

I felt sad and so neglected

Often scared and unprotected

In my cage.

In the dry or rainy weather

Sometimes hotter sometimes colder

I just sat there growing older

In my cage.

The cat and dog raced by me

Playing with each other only

While I sat there feeling lonely

In my cage.

Upon the fresh green grass

Children skipped and laughed all day

I could only watch them play

From my cage.

They used to take me out

And let me scamper in the sun

I no longer get to run

In my cage.

Once a cute and cuddly bunny

Like a little ball of cotton

Now I'm grown up and forgotten

In my cage.

I don't know what went wrong

At the home I did inhabit

I just grew to be a rabbit

In my cage.

But they've brought me to the pound

I was once loved and enjoyed

Now I wait to be destroyed

In my cage.

**6. Easter Traditions**

The climax of Lent is Holy Week, the seven days before Easter. It begins on Palm Sunday, commemorating Christ's triumphal ride into Jerusalem, where the populace greeted Him with palm branches. Passion plays are sometimes held to re-enact the suffering and death of the Lord.

To Christian believers, probably the most sombre day of the year is Good Friday, when Tre Ore services (Latin for «three hours») are held to symbolise the three hours Jesus hung on the Cross.

The idea of Easter eggs goes back to the time of ancient Persia and Egypt and was also a part of the culture of the Germanic tribes of Europe. The latter believed that eggs were laid by Easter’s pet hare. The egg was easily taken over by Christian culture to symbolize new life. Just as a chick breaks out of its shell, so too, Jesus emerged from His tomb.

Easter eggs are coloured or otherwise decorated in a wide variety of techniques, including dyeing, painting and etching. The most ornate multicoloured eggs come from Poland's Ukrainian borderlands in the south-east, where designs are applied with molten wax. The egg is dipped in dye, then dried, again decorated with molten wax and immersed in yet another colour bath. This process may be repeated a number of times to create gaily patterned Easter eggs of four or more different colours.

The easiest Easter eggs to make are the solid colour variety. This is the favourite of small children on both sides of the Atlantic, since it suffices to dip a hard-boiled egg into a colour solution for several minutes. Some decorate their eggs with various decals. Those stick-ons that show smurfs, Ninja turtles or Disney characters are more kitchy and commercial than festive, as far as this writer is concerned!

If you were to ask people what a rabbit has to do with Easter, probably few would know the answer, regardless of whether you did the asking in the streets of New York or Warsaw. American youngsters would probably say that the Easter Bunny brings presents the way Santa Claus does at Christmas, but the origin of the custom would be known to almost none of them. That is because the hare has no connection whatsoever with the Christian Feast of Resurrection. The Osterhase (German for the mythical egg-laying hare belonging to the goddess Eostre) was simply adopted by some l9th-century stationer, giving rise to the millions of rabbit-covered Easter cards we see today. In cashing in on this craze, the chocolate factories were not far behind.

The Easter Lamb, shown with a banner of Resurrection, is the Christian adaptation of the sacrificial Paschal Lamb of the Jews. To Christians, the fleecy quadruped was the Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God, in other words the Redeemer who shed His blood to cleanse mankind of sin. For whatever reason, the chocolate industry is more partial to the Easter Rabbit than the Easter Lamb. In Polish tradition however, it is customary to place a lamb made of sugar, butter or even plastic in the Easter basket that is taken to church to be blessed.

**7. Symbols of Easter**

As Christianity spread, more familiar traditions, symbols and celebrations of spring were associated with Easter – Christ coming back to life after death. One of the oldest spring symbols in the world is the egg.

The oval shape of the egg was the same shape for a raindrop and a seed. These two were important life-giving elements. The egg itself promises new life as in spring, birds, and many other animals are hatched from eggs. In fact, the Persians, Hindus and Egyptians believed that the world began with a single egg. In ancient China, Rome and Greece, eggs were given as springtime gifts.

In Poland and Russia, hours are spent on drawing intricate designs on Easter eggs. In England, members of the royal families gave each other gold-covered eggs as Easter gifts in the middle ages.

The most famous Easter egg decorator was Peter Carl Faberge. He designed eggs from gold, silver and other precious gems for kings of Europe and czars of Russia. These eggs are priceless now and can only be found in museums and private collections. In early America, children decorated their eggs by using dyes made from natural materials like fruit and leave coloring.

The Celts, a prehistoric race or people, practiced a religion called Druidism. They believed in good and evil spirits. It was believed that evil spirits captured the sun god and that was why there was winter.

Every beginning of Spring, they would lit up huge bonfires to frighten away the evil spirits into releasing the sun. The lighting of bonfires are still a part of Easter celebrations in some countries today such as in Germany and Belgium. Today, bonfires represent the light coming to the world through Christ. The candle is also used as a symbol of the light of Christ.

In ancient Rome, people thought a goddess Flora made the flowers bloom. They celebrated the Festival of Floralia by having big parades and carried garlands of blossoms thought the streets to honor her every Spring. The statues of Flora were decorated with flowers.

In ancient Greek, people believed that the goddess Demeter's daughter was kidnapped while picking the flower narcissus. She was allowed to visit her mother only during spring and summer. The Greeks believed that this made Demeter really happy and made the flowers bloom. They thought that winter is caused by her sadness when her daughter went away again. This flower thus hold a special meaning to the Greeks. The narcissus is also a favorite Easter flower in many parts of the world because of its bright and fragrant blossoms. The Easter lily is a new but popular Easter flower. The Easter lily was brought into the United States in 1882 from Bermuda. They serve as a reminder of the purity of Christ.

The cross was also a well-known symbol before the time of Christ. It was used a special mark on clothes and buildings. However, when Jesus was crucified, the cross became a symbol of suffering. Then with the resurrection of Christ, the Christians saw it as a symbol of Jesus' victory over death. In A.D. 325, Constantine at the Council of Nicaea issued a decree that the Cross is the official symbol of Christianity.

It was a Roman custom to welcome royalty by waving palm branches. When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday, people welcomed him with palm branches carpeting the streets and waving them. Today, on Palm Sunday, Christians would carry palm branches in parades, make them into crosses and garlands to decorate the Church.

European legend says that the hare never closed its eyes and watch the other animals throughout the night. It became a symbol of the moon. The hare is connected with Easter because the celebration date depends upon the full moon.

In Egypt, people used to believe that the rabbit was responsible for the new life in spring. Later, early Christians saw it as a symbol for the resurrection of Christ.

According to an old German story, a poor woman hid some brightly colored eggs in her garden as Easter treats for children. While the children were searching, a hare hopped past. The children thought that the hare had left the eggs. So every Easter, German children would make nests of leaves and branches in their gardens for the hare. This custom was brought to the United States when the Germans came. The hare became a rabbit because there were more rabbits in the United States. Today, it is called the Easter bunny.

In England, the goddess of spring, Eastre had an earthly symbol which was the rabbit. She was worship by the Anglo-Saxons through her earthly symbol.

The Easter bunny also has to do with its pre-Christian origin. The hare were very fertile animals and gave birth to many offsprings in spring. Therefore, the bunny served as a symbol of new life during the Spring season.

The lamb was often sacrificed as offerings to God by the Hebrews long before the first Passover. When Jesus died, he gave himself as an offering to God for the sins of the world. Early Christians then saw the lamb as a symbol of Jesus and used it for Easter celebration. Many people serve lamb as part of the Easter feast.

Other food served on Easter are Pretzels, a Lenten food. The twisted shaped symbolizes arms crossed in prayer.

In Great Britain people have always enjoyed the traditional Good Friday breakfast of hot cross buns. They are also served throughout Easter. Each bun has an icing cross on top to remind people of Christ. Street vendors used to used to sing a song when they went around selling their hot cross buns. This song is now a favorite nursery rhyme for children.