

WHAT IS EASTER: UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY AND SYMBOLS

What is Easter?

Easter is the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus from the tomb on the third day after his crucifixion. Easter is the fulfilled prophecy of the Messiah who would be persecuted, die for our sins, and rise on the third day. Remembering the resurrection of Jesus is a way to renew daily hope that we have victory over sin. According to the New Testament, Easter is three days after the death of Jesus on the cross.

Easter follows a period of fasting called Lent, in which many churches set aside time for repentance and remembrance. Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday** and ends on Good Friday, the day of Jesus' crucifixion. The 40 day period was established by Pope Gregory 1 using the 40-day pattern of Israel, Moses, Elijah and Jesus' time in the wilderness.

The week leading up to Easter is called The Holy Week, or "Passion Week", and includes Palm Sunday (the day Jesus entered Jerusalem and was celebrated), Maundy Thursday (the "Last Supper" where Jesus met with his disciples to observe Passover), and Good Friday (when Jesus would be crucified on the cross).

Easter is a very significant date within Christianity and is the foundation of the Christian faith. Jesus, the Son of God, fulfilled prophecy and through his death, has given the gift of eternal life in heaven to those who believe in his death and resurrection.

When did Easter start?

The earliest Christians celebrated the resurrection on the fourteenth of Nisan (our March-April), the date of the Jewish Passover. Jewish days were reckoned from evening to evening, so Jesus had celebrated His Last Supper the evening of the Passover and was crucified the day of the Passover. Early Christians celebrating the Passover worshiped Jesus as the Paschal Lamb and Redeemer.

Some of the Gentile Christians began celebrating Easter in the nearest Sunday to the Passover since Jesus actually arose on a Sunday. This especially became the case in the western part of the Roman Empire. In Rome itself, different congregations celebrated Easter on different days!

Many felt that the date should continue to be based on the timing of the Resurrection during Passover. Once Jewish leaders determined the date of Passover each year, Christian leaders could set the date for Easter by figuring three days after Passover. Following this schedule would have meant that Easter would be a different day of the week each year, only falling on a Sunday once in a while.

Others believed since the Lord rose on a Sunday and this day had been set aside as the Lord's Day, this was the only possible day to celebrate His resurrection. As Christianity drew away from Judaism, some were reluctant to base the Christian celebration on the Jewish calendar.

Constantine wanted Christianity to be totally separated from Judaism and did not want Easter to be celebrated on the Jewish Passover. The Council of Nicea accordingly required the feast of the resurrection to be celebrated on a Sunday and never on the Jewish Passover. Easter was to be the Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox. Since the date of the vernal equinox changed from year to year, calculating the proper date can be difficult. This is still the method used to determine Easter today, which is why some years we have Easter earlier than other years.

When is Easter this Year?

Easter falls on Sunday, April 4, 2021. Easter is celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon, the Paschal full moon, after the vernal equinox. Since the date of the vernal equinox changed from year to year, calculating the proper date can be difficult. This is still the method used to determine Easter today, which is why some years we have Easter earlier than other years.

What does Easter mean?

The origin of the word Easter isn't certain. The Venerable Bede, an eighth-century monk, and scholar, suggested that the word may have come from the Anglo-Saxon Eostre or Eastre – a Teutonic goddess of spring and fertility. Recent scholars haven't been able to find any reference to the goddess Bede mentioned and consider the theory discredited.

Another possibility is the Norse eostur, eastur, or ostara, which meant "the season of the growing sun" or "the season of new birth." The word east comes from the same roots. In this case, easter would be linked to the changing of the season.

A more recent and complex explanation comes from the Christian background of Easter rather than the pagan. The early Latin name for the week of Easter was hebdomada alba or "white week," while the Sunday after Easter day was called dominica in albis from the white robes of those who had been newly baptized. The word alba is Latin both for white and dawn. People speaking Old High German made a mistake in their translation and used a plural word for dawn, ostarun, instead of a plural for white. From ostarun we get the German Ostern and the English Easter.

Connection to Passover

The day before his crucifixion, Jesus observed Passover with his disciples. This event is known as the Last Supper. Passover is the time that Jews remembered their freedom and exodus from Egypt. During this Passover feast, Jesus told his disciples that the bread symbolizes his body that would be broken and the wine, his blood, which would be poured out for the forgiveness of sins. The Last Supper is remembered today in churches and religious services through the act of taking Communion and sharing bread and wine to remember the sacrifice of Jesus.

Jesus was arrested after the Passover meal while he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was then taken before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, for trial.

The Easter Lamb

Of all Easter symbols, the lamb is probably the most strongly Christian. Other than the fact that lambs are young animals born in springtime, it has no strong ties to pagan traditions.

The lamb comes from the Jewish Passover, where each family killed a lamb as a sacrifice. When Christ became the Passover Lamb for everyone, the lamb became a symbol for His sacrifice.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Sunrise Services

The familiar sunrise service is a relatively new addition to Easter. A group of young Moravian men in Hernhut, Saxony held the first recorded sunrise service in 1732. They went to their cemetery called God's Acre at sunrise to worship in memory of the women who went to the tomb early on the first Easter morning and discovered it empty. Moravian immigrants brought the custom to America, with the first service in the United States held in 1743.

EASTER PRAYERS: CELEBRATE RESURRECTION DAY VICTORY

Our Savior has risen! This Easter day, the resurrection of Jesus reminds us that God makes all things new. He has given us the same resurrection power to live free from sin and death and to have a life fully ALIVE! While it's easy to forget the real reason for this holiday, let's take a moment to put aside the easter bunny, egg hunts, and baskets filled with goodies and remember the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus and his resurrection from the grave.

We hope that the below **Easter prayers** will bring you renewed hope and faith this Resurrection Day. Take time to meet with God today and speak these prayers of thanks to Him for the victory of Jesus and the victory we have over sin.

You can read more about the meaning, origin and history of Easter, the celebration and remembrance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day after his crucifixion, at our article [What is Easter?](#)

Resurrection Prayer

Dear God,
Thank you that you make all things new. Thank you for the victory and power in your Name. Thank you that you hold the keys over death, that by your might, Jesus was raised from the grave, paving the way for us to have new life with you. Thank you that you had plan, that you made a way.

We confess our need for you...fresh...new...again. We ask that you renew our hearts, minds, and lives, for the days ahead. We pray for your refreshing over us.

Keep your words of truth planted firm within us, help us to keep focused on what is pure and right, give us the power to be obedient to your word. And when the enemy reminds us where we have been, hissing his lies and attacks our way, we trust that your voice speaks louder and stronger, reminding us we are safe with you and that your purposes and plans will not fail. We ask that you will be our defense and rear guard, keeping our way clear, removing the obstacles, and covering the pitfalls. Lord, lead us on your level ground.

Shine your light in us, through us, over us. May we make a difference in this world, for your glory and purposes. Set you way before us. May all your plans succeed. We may reflect your peace and hope to a world that so desperately needs your presence and healing.

Thanks be to you God, for your indescribable gift! To you be glory and honor, on this Resurrection Day, and forever.

Easter Sunday Prayer

Lord God,
You loved this world so much that you gave your one and only Son, that we might be called your children too. Lord, help us to live in the gladness and grace of Easter Sunday, everyday. Let us have hearts of thankfulness for your sacrifice. Let us have eyes that look upon your grace and rejoice in our salvation. Help us to walk in that mighty grace and tell your good news to the world. All for your glory do we pray, Lord, Amen.

Faith this Easter

Dear Lord, draw my thoughts upward toward You every minute of every day, but especially this Easter. Help me resist the temptation to focus on the painful things of this earthly life and learn to control my thoughts so they don't sink my faith or joy in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Depths of Love

Lord, You are so amazing! How can I ever thank You enough for coming into this world to give Your life for me? I'm sorry for the times I get so busy that I fail to remember the incredible love You willfully demonstrated to me by going to the Cross. You didn't have to do it, but You did it for me. I thank You from the depths of my heart for loving me so completely! I pray this in Jesus' name!

Sacrifice Thanksgiving

To my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:

I offer a prayer of sincere thanksgiving for Your blood sacrifice. Thank You for being obedient to Your Father and going to the cross for me. May I never forget that You gave Your life for me, so that one day I might live with You in eternity. Because Your blood has redeemed us, we are now new creations in Christ ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)), and by His blood we are freed from sin to serve the living God, to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever. In Jesus' Name, Amen

Love and Mercy

Lord, how can we ever thank You enough? You endured more pain, more shame, more sorrow, more grief than we can possibly fathom. Help us remember why You gave Your life. Because of love. Because of mercy. Because we desperately need them both. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Thank You for Jesus

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus to save me from my sins. Thank you that you loved me enough to send a perfect sacrifice, so that we could live together eternally. I confess that I am a sinner and need forgiveness. I ask you to come into my heart, and I commit to following Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Hope Through the Cross

Father, We praise You for sending Your Son to abide with us and be with us. Life can feel lonely, but the fact is...we are never alone. That is a truth we can cling to during the ugliest breakdowns. Thank You for giving us the grace to release our failed efforts and bottled up emotions to You, free of judgment and full of healing love.

Forgive us for walking through life without the joy that Jesus died to fill our hearts with. Help us to find You in the hard moments of life, and remember the comfort and truth of Your promises during seasons of suffering.

Jesus, You never leave us, and always guide us. Who we are becoming is no secret to You, You who formed us in our mother's womb. You came down to earth to save us, love us, and show us how to live. May we chase after You all of our days, and experience the rich and irreplaceable Peace that allows us to overcome...to walk victorious...and to hold onto hope.

Share the Real Meaning of Easter

Dear Lord, help me to tell of Your wondrous power and mighty acts to those generations that come after me. May I not let the season pass by without pondering the real meaning of Easter.

For a Heart Like Jesus

Dear Jesus, I plead for You to give me Your grief over the people who have missed You and rejected You. This Easter, remind me just how much I need You. Help me see Your grace. Grant me that divine combination of sorrow and tenderness that points people to the cross and to new Life. Dear God, give me Your heart for my world, to see the desperate need for salvation we all have. In Jesus' Name, Amen

A Prayer to Receive the Cross

Almighty Father, thank You for the gift of Your forgiveness, for binding up my brokenness. Forgive me for the ways I try to "help" You save and fix me. Help me to simply receive what You have done for me on the Cross. "Simply" receiving sometimes isn't so simple. Give me the strength to be still and receive Your mercy and grace in this moment. Through the Savior who saves completely. Amen.

Our Debt is Paid on Easter

Lord Jesus, how can I ever repay You for what You've done? Thank You for paying the debt for my life. Thank You for erasing my sin and calling me Your own. I am no longer a slave to sin or in debt to a holy God. I am a child of God. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

The Good News

Dear God, thank You for the resurrection of Your Son, Jesus. We want to celebrate Him every day of our lives. In a world that grows increasingly dark, help us hold up His light. Give us the courage to speak as boldly as Mary Magdalene did, and never be ashamed of proclaiming Your Good News. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Easter Hope in Troubled Times

These times are frightening, Lord. Headlines daily deliver troubling news. If we dwell there, Father, we will lose all hope. Thank You for Your protection and the promises we have in Your word. Nothing can separate us from Your love and the victory achieved by Christ at the cross. He is our hope and ever present help in trouble. Thank You, Father. We have no need to fear. You will never leave nor forsake Your own!

Easter Prayer

- "Do not be afraid," - God, I hand over to You those things that make me so afraid. Resurrect the parts of my faith squelched by fear.
- "I know that you are looking for Jesus," - God, when my soul is searching, help me know the answer to every longing can be found in You.
- "He has risen," - God, the fact that Jesus is risen should lift my head, my heart and my attitude. Help me to live today as if I really believe this with every part of my life.
- "just as he said," - Jesus, You keep Your promises. Help me live as though I believe that with every part of me. Help me trust You more, obey You more and resemble You more.
- "Come and see," - Jesus, You had the angels invite the women in to see for themselves that You had risen. You invite me into these personal revelations every day. Forgive me for sometimes rushing about and forgetting to come and see for myself ... You, Your Word, Your insights.
- "Then go quickly and tell his disciples," - Jesus, I don't want to be a secret keeper with my faith. I want to be a bold and gracious truth proclaimer. For You. With You. Because of You. Me, the unwanted girl whom You loved, redeemed and wanted.

Good Friday Prayer

Lord God, Jesus cried out to you on the cross, "Why have you forsaken me?" You seemed so far from his cry and from his distress. Those who stood at the foot of the cross wondered where you were, as they saw Jesus mocked and shamed and killed. Where were you then?

Lord God, we, too, ask where you are, when there is trouble and suffering and death, and we cry out to you for help. Be near to us, and save us so that we may praise you for your deliverance.

Lord God, we wait, on Friday, for the resurrection of Sunday and sometimes our lives seem a succession of Fridays and we cannot see what is "Good." Teach us to call your name as Jesus did. Make us to trust in you like little children. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Celebrate Victory Every Day

Father, Thank You for the miracle of life – abundant life here, and eternal life with You in Heaven. Help me celebrate that life every day as I seek You and follow Your plan for my life. Today, I say with the Apostle Paul, “Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?”

Pour Spirit Afresh

Almighty God, I praise You for Your power, presence, and purpose in my life. I confess my unbelief and unwillingness to press on when hope seems dead. O Lord, please pour Your Spirit afresh on me. May Your resurrecting power shine forth in my life and the lives of my loved ones. In Jesus Christ’s Name, I pray, Amen.

Gratefulness for Victory Over Death

Lord Jesus Christ, I rejoice and rejoice continually in Your glorious and triumphant victory over death. For Your victory is my victory. Help me to live by it, in it, and for it. I am grateful to my depths - grateful forever. Amen.

Power of Resurrection

Lord, death could not hold You. And because of You, the resurrection, we, too, can live. Thank You that the grave is only a journey into the presence of God. You have removed the sting of death and empowered this thing called life. Now I will live in Your presence forever. Amen.

Forgiveness and Freedom

Dear Lord, may I realize afresh today what Your death and resurrection mean for me. Forgiveness ... Freedom ... and the ability to walk with You through this fallen world into eternity. May I always find my satisfaction in You and Your willingness to offer Yourself to me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

A Jelly Bean Prayer for Kids

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you so much for creating me and everything in this universe (green jellybean). I admit that I have sinned (black jellybean) and have fallen short of your glory. But I want to thank you for going through with God’s plan, even when it was scary for you (purple jellybean). Thank you for dying for my sins and the cross (red jellybean) and shedding your blood for me so that I could become pure as snow (white jellybean). I know that you will do everything you said you will do and that one day I will be in heaven with you (orange and yellow jellybean). For now, I wait in hope and excitement for when I will see you face to face (pink jellybean). Amen.

EASTER BLESSINGS TO CELEBRATE THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

The Easter season is upon us, and there are signs of the Lord's handiwork and blessings everywhere. I love the season of spring with the warmer temperatures, green grass, bright flowers, birds chirping, and various squirrels and rabbits running around in the backyard. With spring comes Easter and the celebration of our Lord's resurrection.

In the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, let's take a moment and really reflect on what the blessing of His resurrection and what it means for us. We will not be condemned to hell for our sins but taken to live with Him in heaven. We will have no more pain or sorrow, and we will be able to see our beautiful Savior face-to-face as well as be reunited with our loved ones who have gone before us. What a fantastic day that will be. In honor of the Easter season, here is a list of Easter blessings and quotes to help keep your heart focused.

Easter Blessings:

1. "Do not abandon yourselves to despair. We are the Easter people and hallelujah is our song." - Pope John Paul II
2. "All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again because God raised Christ Jesus from the dead. - 1 Peter 1:3
3. "So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trusty anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain to God's inner sanctuary." - Hebrews 6:18-19
4. "If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved." - Romans 10:9-10
6. "For this is how God loved the world; that he gave his one and only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him." - John 3:16-17
7. "For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live many new lives." - Romans 6:4
9. "Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was." - Romans 6:5
10. "And God will raise us from the dead by his power, just as he raised our Lord from the dead." - 1 Corinthians 6:14
11. "I passed onto you what is most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve." - 1 Corinthians 15:3-5
12. "But he was pierced for our rebellion and crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed." - Isaiah 53:5
13. "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last." - Job 19:25
14. "But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life." - John 4:14
15. "My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." - Galatians 2:20

16. "Because of the empty tomb, we have peace. Because of His resurrection, we can have peace during even the most troubling of times because we know He is in control of all that happens in the world."

17. "Jesus Christ did not come into this world to make bad people good. He came into this world to make dead people live."

18. "Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in the books alone, but in every leaf in springtime."

19. "But the angel said, 'Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body.'" - Mark 16:6

20. "Jesus told her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?'" - John 11:25-26

This was compiled from a couple locations of the internet by Deacon Jim Multeri