Easter, also called Pascha (Greek, Latin) or Resurrection Sunday, is a festival and holiday celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, described in the New Testament as having occurred on the third day of his burial after his crucifixion by the Romans at Calvary c. 30 AD. It is the culmination of the Passion of Jesus, preceded by Lent (or Great Lent), a forty-day period of fasting, prayer, and penance.

Most Christians refer to the week before Easter as "Holy Week"—it contains the days of the Easter Triduum, including Maundy Thursday, commemorating the Maundy and Last Supper, as well as Good Friday, commemorating the crucifixion and death of Jesus. In Western Christianity, Eastertide, or the Easter Season, begins on Easter Sunday and lasts seven weeks, ending with the coming of the fiftieth day, Pentecost Sunday. In Eastern Christianity, the season of Pascha begins on Pascha and ends with the coming of the fortieth day, the Feast of the Ascension.

Easter and the holidays that are related to it are moveable feasts which do not fall on a fixed date in the Gregorian or Julian calendars which follow only the cycle of the sun; rather, its date is determined on a lunisolar calendar similar to the Hebrew calendar. The First Council of Nicaea (325) established two rules, independence of the Jewish calendar and worldwide uniformity, which were the only rules for Easter explicitly laid down by the council. No details for the computation were specified; these were worked out in practice, a process that took centuries and generated a number of controversies. It has come to be the first Sunday after the ecclesiastical full moon that occurs on or soonest after 21 March, but calculations vary.

Easter is linked to the Jewish Passover by much of its symbolism, as well as by its position in the calendar. In most European languages the feast called Easter in English is termed by the words for passover in those languages and in the older English versions of the Bible the term Easter was the term used to translate passover. Easter customs vary across the Christian world, and include sunrise services, exclaiming the Paschal greeting, clipping the church, and decorating Easter eggs (symbols of the empty tomb). The Easter lily, a symbol of the resurrection, traditionally decorates the chancel area of churches on this day and for the rest of Eastertide. Additional customs that have become associated with Easter and are observed by both Christians and some non-Christians include egg hunting, the Easter Bunny, and Easter parades. There are also various traditional Easter foods that vary regionally.

Etymology

Main article: Names of Easter

The modern English term Easter, cognate with modern Dutch ooster and German Ostern, developed from an Old English word that usually appears in the form Ēastrun, -on, or -an; but also as Ēastru, -o; and Ēastre or Ēostre. The most widely accepted theory of the origin of the term is that it is derived from the name of an Old English goddess mentioned by the 7th to 8th-century English monk Bede, who wrote that Ēosturmōnaþ (Old English 'Month of Ēostre', translated in Bede's time as "Paschal month") was an English month, corresponding to April, which he says "was once called after a goddess of theirs named Ēostre, in whose honour feasts were celebrated in that month".

In Latin and Greek, the Christian celebration was, and still is, called Pascha (Greek: Πάσχα), a word derived from Aramaic פסחא (Paskha), cognate to Hebrew פֶּסַח (Pesach). The word originally denoted the Jewish festival known in English as Passover, commemorating the Jewish Exodus from slavery in Egypt. As early as the 50s of the 1st century, Paul, writing from Ephesus to the Christians in Corinth, applied the term to Christ, and it is unlikely that the Ephesian and Corinthian Christians were the first to hear Exodus 12 interpreted as speaking about the death of Jesus, not just about the Jewish Passover ritual. In most of the non-English speaking world, the feast is known by names derived from Greek and Latin Pascha. Pascha is also a name by which Jesus himself is remembered in the Orthodox Church, especially in connection with his resurrection and with the season of its celebration.

Theological significance

One of the earliest known depictions of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (Rabbula Gospel illuminated manuscript, 6th century)

The New Testament states that the resurrection of Jesus, which Easter celebrates, is a foundation of the Christian faith. The resurrection established Jesus as the powerful Son of God and is cited as proof that God will judge the world in righteousness. For those who trust in Jesus' death and resurrection, "death is swallowed up in victory." Any person who chooses to follow Jesus receives "a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead". Through faith in the working of God those who follow Jesus are spiritually resurrected with him so that they may walk in a new way of life and receive eternal salvation.

Easter is linked to Passover and the Exodus from Egypt recorded in the Old Testament through the Last Supper, sufferings, and crucifixion of Jesus that preceded the resurrection. According to the New Testament, Jesus gave the Passover meal a new meaning, as in the upper room during the Last Supper he prepared himself and his disciples for his death. He identified the matzah and cup of wine as his body soon to be sacrificed and his blood soon to be shed. Paul states, "Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed"; this refers to the Passover requirement to have no yeast in the house and to the allegory of Jesus as the Paschal lamb.

One interpretation of the Gospel of John is that Jesus, as the Passover lamb, was crucified at roughly the same time as the Passover lambs were being slain in the temple, on the afternoon of Nisan 14. The scriptural instructions specify that the lamb is to be slain "between the two evenings", that is, at twilight. By the Roman period, however, the sacrifices were performed in the mid-afternoon. Josephus, Jewish War 6.10.1/423 ("They sacrifice from the ninth to the eleventh hour"). Philo, Special Laws 2.27/145 ("Many myriads of victims from noon till eventide are offered by the whole people").

This interpretation, however, is inconsistent with the chronology in the Synoptic Gospels. It assumes that text literally translated "the preparation of the passover" in John 19:14 refers to Nisan 14 (Preparation Day for the Passover) and not necessarily to Yom Shishi (Friday, Preparation Day for the Passover week Sabbath) and that the priests' desire to be ritually pure in order to "eat the passover" refers to eating the Passover lamb, not to the public offerings made during the days of Unleavened Bread.

Early Christianity

The Last Supper celebrated by Jesus and his disciples. The early Christians, too, would have celebrated this meal to commemorate Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection.

The first Christians, Jewish and Gentile, were certainly aware of the Hebrew calendar. Jewish Christians, the first to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, timed the observance in relation to Passover.

Direct evidence for a more fully formed Christian festival of Pascha (Easter) begins to appear in the mid-2nd century. Perhaps the earliest extant primary source referring to Easter is a mid-2nd-century Paschal homily attributed to Melito of Sardis, which characterizes the celebration as a well-established one. Evidence for another kind of annual Christian festival, the commemoration of martyrs, begins to appear at about the same time as evidence for the celebration of Easter.

While martyrs' days (usually the individual dates of martyrdom) were celebrated on fixed dates in the local solar calendar, the date of Easter was fixed by means of the local Jewish [citation needed] lunisolar calendar. This is consistent with the celebration of Easter having entered Christianity during its earliest, Jewish, period, but does not leave the question free of doubt.

The ecclesiastical historian Socrates Scholasticus attributes the observance of Easter by the church to the perpetuation of its custom, "just as many other customs have been established", stating that neither Jesus nor his Apostles enjoined the keeping of this or any other festival. Although he describes the details of the Easter celebration as deriving from local custom, he insists the feast itself is universally observed.

Date

A stained-glass window depicting the Passover Lamb, a concept integral to the foundation of Easter

Easter and the holidays that are related to it are moveable feasts, in that they do not fall on a fixed date in the Gregorian or Julian calendars (both of which follow the cycle of the sun and the seasons). Instead, the date for Easter is determined on a lunisolar calendar similar to the Hebrew calendar. The First Council of Nicaea (325) established two rules, independence of the Jewish calendar and worldwide uniformity, which were the only rules for Easter explicitly laid down by the Council. No details for the computation were specified; these were worked out in practice, a process that took centuries and generated a number of controversies. (See also Computus and Reform of the date of Easter.) In particular, the Council did not decree that Easter must fall on Sunday. This was already the practice almost everywhere.[incomplete short citation]

In Western Christianity, using the Gregorian calendar, Easter always falls on a Sunday between 22 March and 25 April inclusive, within about seven days after the astronomical full moon. The following day, Easter Monday, is a legal holiday in many countries with predominantly Christian traditions.

Eastern Christianity bases its calculations on the Julian Calendar. Because of the 13-day difference between the calendars between 1900 and 2099, 21 March corresponds, during the 21st century, to 3 April in the Gregorian Calendar. Easter therefore varies between 4 April and 8 May in the Gregorian calendar (the Julian calendar is no longer used as the civil calendar of the countries where Eastern Christian traditions predominate). Also, because the Julian "full moon" is always several days after the astronomical full moon, the eastern Easter is often later, relative to the visible moon's phases, than western Easter.

Among the Oriental Orthodox some churches have changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar and the date for Easter as for other fixed and moveable feasts is the same as in the Western church.

Computations

Main article: Computus

In 725, Bede succinctly wrote, "The Sunday following the full Moon which falls on or after the equinox will give the lawful Easter." However, this does not precisely reflect the ecclesiastical rules. The full moon referred to (called the Paschal full moon) is not an astronomical full moon, but the 14th day of a calendar lunar month. Another difference is that the astronomical equinox is a natural astronomical phenomenon, which can fall on 19, 20 or 21 March, while the ecclesiastical date is fixed by convention on 21 March.

In applying the ecclesiastical rules, Christian churches use 21 March as the starting point in determining the date of Easter, from which they find the next full moon, etc. The Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches continue to use the Julian calendar. Their starting point in determining the date of Orthodox Easter is also 21 March but according to the Julian reckoning, which in the current century corresponds to 3 April in the Gregorian calendar.

In addition, the lunar tables of the Julian calendar are four days (sometimes five days) behind those of the Gregorian calendar. The 14th day of the lunar month according to the Gregorian system is figured as the ninth or tenth day according to the Julian. The result of this combination of solar and lunar discrepancies is divergence in the date of Easter in most years (see table).

Easter is determined on the basis of lunisolar cycles. The lunar year consists of 30-day and 29-day lunar months, generally alternating, with an embolismic month added periodically to bring the lunar cycle into line with the solar cycle. In each solar year (1 January to 31 December inclusive), the lunar month beginning with an ecclesiastical new moon falling in the 29-day period from 8 March to 5 April inclusive is designated as the paschal lunar month for that year.

Easter is the third Sunday in the paschal lunar month, or, in other words, the Sunday after the paschal lunar month's 14th day. The 14th of the paschal lunar month is designated by convention as the Paschal full moon, although the 14th of the lunar month may differ from the date of the astronomical full moon by up to two days. Since the ecclesiastical new moon falls on a date from 8 March to 5 April inclusive, the paschal full moon (the 14th of that lunar month) must fall on a date from 21 March to 18 April inclusive.

The Gregorian calculation of Easter was based on a method devised by the Calabrian doctor Aloysius Lilius (or Lilio) for adjusting the epacts of the moon, and has been adopted by almost all Western Christians and by Western countries which celebrate national holidays at Easter. For the British Empire and colonies, a determination of the date of Easter Sunday using Golden Numbers and Sunday letters was defined by the Calendar (New Style) Act 1750 with its Annexe. This was designed to match exactly the Gregorian calculation.

Controversies over the date

Main article: Easter controversy

A five-part Russian Orthodox icon depicting the Easter story.

Eastern Orthodox Christians use a different computation for the date of Easter than the Western churches.

The precise date of Easter has at times been a matter of contention. By the later 2nd century, it was widely accepted that the celebration of the holiday was a practice of the disciples and an undisputed tradition. The Quartodeciman controversy, the first of several Easter controversies, arose concerning the date on which the holiday should be celebrated.

The term "Quartodeciman" refers to the practice of celebrating Easter on Nisan 14 of the Hebrew calendar, "the LORD's passover" (Leviticus 23:5). According to the church historian Eusebius, the Quartodeciman Polycarp (bishop of Smyrna, by tradition a disciple of John the Apostle) debated the question with Anicetus (bishop of Rome). The Roman province of Asia was Quartodeciman, while the Roman and Alexandrian churches continued the fast until the Sunday following (the Sunday of Unleavened Bread), wishing to associate Easter with Sunday. Neither Polycarp nor Anicetus persuaded the other, but they did not consider the matter schismatic either, parting in peace and leaving the question unsettled.

Controversy arose when Victor, bishop of Rome a generation after Anicetus, attempted to excommunicate Polycrates of Ephesus and all other bishops of Asia for their Quartodecimanism. According to Eusebius, a number of synods were convened to deal with the controversy, which he regarded as all ruling in support of Easter on Sunday. Polycrates (circa 190), however, wrote to Victor defending the antiquity of Asian Quartodecimanism. Victor's attempted excommunication was apparently rescinded, and the two sides reconciled upon the intervention of bishop Irenaeus and others, who reminded Victor of the tolerant precedent of Anicetus.

Quartodecimanism seems to have lingered into the 4th century, when Socrates of Constantinople recorded that some Quartodecimans were deprived of their churches by John Chrysostom and that some were harassed by Nestorius.

It is not known how long the Nisan 14 practice continued. But both those who followed the Nisan 14 custom, and those who set Easter to the following Sunday had in common the custom of consulting their Jewish neighbors to learn when the month of Nisan would fall, and setting their festival accordingly. By the later 3rd century, however, some Christians began to express dissatisfaction with the custom of relying on the Jewish community to determine the date of Easter. The chief complaint was that the Jewish communities sometimes erred in setting Passover to fall before the Northern Hemisphere spring equinox. The Sardica paschal table confirms these complaints, for it indicates that the Jews of some eastern

Mediterranean city (possibly Antioch) fixed Nisan 14 on dates well before the spring equinox on multiple occasions.

Because of this dissatisfaction with reliance on the Jewish calendar, some Christians began to experiment with independent computations. Others, however, believed that the customary practice of consulting Jews should continue, even if the Jewish computations were in error.

First Council of Nicaea (325 AD)

Main article: First Council of Nicaea

This controversy between those who advocated independent computations, and those who wished to continue the custom of relying on the Jewish calendar, was formally resolved by the First Council of Nicaea in 325, which endorsed changing to an independent computation by the Christian community in order to celebrate in common. This effectively required the abandonment of the old custom of consulting the Jewish community in those places where it was still used. Epiphanius of Salamis wrote in the mid-4th century:

the emperor ... convened a council of 318 bishops ... in the city of Nicea ... They passed certain ecclesiastical canons at the council besides, and at the same time decreed in regard to the Passover that there must be one unanimous concord on the celebration of God's holy and supremely excellent day. For it was variously observed by people

That the older custom (called "protopaschite" by historians) did not at once die out, but persisted for a time, is indicated by the existence of canons and sermons against it.

Dionysius Exiguus, and others following him, maintained that the 318 Bishops assembled at the Nicene Council had specified a particular method of determining the date of Easter; subsequent scholarship has refuted this tradition. In any case, in the years following the council, the computational system that was worked out by the church of Alexandria came to be normative. It took a while for the Alexandrian rules to be adopted throughout Christian Europe, however. The 8-year cycle originally employed was replaced by (or by the time of) Augustalis's treatise on the measurement of Easter, after which Rome used his 84-year lunisolar calendar cycle until 457. It then switched to an adaptation by Victorius of the Alexandrian rules.

Because this Victorian cycle differed from the Alexandrian cycle in the dates of some of the Paschal Full Moons, and because it tried to respect the Roman custom of fixing Easter to the Sunday in the week of the 16th to the 22nd of the lunar month (rather than the 15th to the 21st as at Alexandria), by providing alternative "Latin" and "Greek" dates in some years, occasional differences in the date of Easter as fixed by Alexandrian rules continued. The Alexandrian rules were adopted in the West following the tables of Dionysius Exiguus in 525. From this time, therefore, all discrepancies between Alexandria and Rome as to the correct date for Easter cease, as both churches were using identical tables.

Early Christians in Britain and Ireland also used an 84-year cycle. From the 5th century onward this cycle set its equinox to 25 March and fixed Easter to the Sunday falling in the 14th to the 20th of the lunar month inclusive. This 84-year cycle was replaced by the Alexandrian method in the course of the 7th and 8th centuries. Churches in western continental Europe used a late Roman method until the late 8th century during the reign of Charlemagne, when they finally adopted the Alexandrian method. Since 1582, when the Catholic Church adopted the Gregorian calendar while the Eastern Orthodox and most Oriental Orthodox Churches retained the Julian calendar, the date on which Easter is celebrated has again differed.

The Greek island of Syros, whose population is divided almost equally between Catholics and Orthodox, is one of the few places where the two Churches share a common date for Easter, with the Catholics accepting the Orthodox date—a practice helping considerably in maintaining good relations between the two communities.

Reform of the date

See also: Reform of the date of Easter

The congregation lighting their candles from the new flame, just as the priest has retrieved it from the altar—note that the picture is flash-illuminated; all electric lighting is off, and only the oil lamps in front of the Iconostasis remain lit. (St. George Greek Orthodox Church, Adelaide).

In the 20th century, some individuals and institutions have propounded a fixed date for Easter, the most prominent proposal being the Sunday after the second Saturday in April. Despite having some support, proposals to reform the date have

not been implemented. An Orthodox congress of Eastern Orthodox bishops, which included representatives mostly from the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Serbian Patriarch, met in Constantinople in 1923, where the bishops agreed to the Revised Julian calendar.

The original form of this calendar would have determined Easter using precise astronomical calculations based on the meridian of Jerusalem. However, all the Eastern Orthodox countries that subsequently adopted the Revised Julian calendar adopted only that part of the revised calendar that applied to festivals falling on fixed dates in the Julian calendar. The revised Easter computation that had been part of the original 1923 agreement was never permanently implemented in any Orthodox diocese.

In the United Kingdom, the Easter Act 1928 set out legislation to allow the date of Easter to be fixed as the first Sunday after the second Saturday in April (or, in other words, the Sunday in the period from 9 to 15 April). However, the legislation has not been implemented, although it remains on the Statute book and could be implemented subject to approval by the various Christian churches.

At a summit in Aleppo, Syria, in 1997, the World Council of Churches (WCC) proposed a reform in the calculation of Easter which would have replaced the present divergent practices of calculating Easter with modern scientific knowledge taking into account actual astronomical instances of the spring equinox and full moon based on the meridian of Jerusalem, while also following the Council of Nicea position of Easter being on the Sunday following the full moon. The recommended World Council of Churches changes would have sidestepped the calendar issues and eliminated the difference in date between the Eastern and Western churches. The reform was proposed for implementation starting in 2001, but it was not ultimately adopted by any member body.

In January 2016, Christian churches again considered the idea of a fixed and unified date of Easter, probably either the second or third Sunday in April.

Table of the dates of Easter

The WCC presented comparative data of the relationships:

More information: Year, Full Moon ...

Notes: 1. Astronomical Easter is the first Sunday after the Astronomical full moon. In the Eastern reckoning, that full moon is derived from the Metonic cycle while in the West it is referred to the meridian of Jerusalem.

2. Passover commences at sunset preceding the date indicated (as does Easter in many traditions).

Position in the church year

Further information: Liturgical year

Western Christianity

In Western Christianity, Easter is preceded by Lent, a period of fasting and penitence in preparation for Easter, which begins on Ash Wednesday and lasts forty days (not counting Sundays). The week before Easter, known as Holy Week, is very special in the Christian tradition. The Sunday before Easter is Palm Sunday, with the Wednesday before Easter being known as Spy Wednesday. The last three days before Easter are Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday (sometimes referred to as Silent Saturday).

Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday respectively commemorate Jesus' entry in Jerusalem, the Last Supper and the Crucifixion. Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday are sometimes referred to as the Easter Triduum (Latin for "Three Days"). Many churches begin celebrating Easter late in the evening of Holy Saturday at a service called the Easter Vigil.

The week beginning with Easter Sunday is called Easter Week or the Octave of Easter, and each day is prefaced with "Easter", e.g. Easter Monday (a public holiday in many countries), Easter Tuesday (a much less widespread public holiday), etc. Easter Saturday is therefore the Saturday after Easter Sunday. The day before Easter is properly called Holy Saturday. Eastertide, or Paschaltide, the season of Easter, begins on Easter Sunday and lasts until the day of Pentecost, seven weeks later.

Eastern Christianity

In Eastern Christianity, the spiritual preparation for Easter begins with Great Lent, which starts on Clean Monday and lasts for 40 continuous days (including Sundays). The last week of Great Lent (following the fifth Sunday of Great Lent) is called Palm Week, and ends with Lazarus Saturday. The Vespers which begins Lazarus Saturday officially brings Great Lent to a close, although the fast continues through the following week. After Lazarus Saturday comes Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and finally Easter itself, and the fast is broken immediately after the Paschal Divine Liturgy.

The Paschal Vigil begins with the Midnight Office, which is the last service of the Lenten Triodion and is timed so that it ends a little before midnight on Holy Saturday night. At the stroke of midnight the Paschal celebration itself begins, consisting of Paschal Matins, Paschal Hours, and Paschal Divine Liturgy. Placing the Paschal Divine Liturgy at midnight guarantees that no Divine Liturgy will come earlier in the morning, ensuring its place as the pre-eminent "Feast of Feasts" in the liturgical year.

The liturgical season from Easter to the Sunday of All Saints (the Sunday after Pentecost) is known as the Pentecostarion (the "fifty days"). The week which begins on Easter Sunday is called Bright Week, during which there is no fasting, even on Wednesday and Friday. The Afterfeast of Easter lasts 39 days, with its Apodosis (leave-taking) on the day before Ascension. Pentecost Sunday is the fiftieth day from Easter (counted inclusively).

Religious observance

Depiction of The Resurrection of Jesus Christ, by Piero della Francesca.

Western Christianity

The Easter festival is kept in many different ways among Western Christians. The traditional, liturgical observation of Easter, as practised among Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and some Anglicans begins on the night of Holy Saturday with the Easter Vigil. This, the most important liturgy of the year, begins in total darkness with the blessing of the Easter fire, the lighting of the large Paschal candle (symbolic of the Risen Christ) and the chanting of the Exultet or Easter Proclamation attributed to Saint Ambrose of Milan.

Epistle reading, I Corinthians 5:7–8 (in Latin), for the Solemn Mass of Easter Day

After this service of light, a number of readings from the Old Testament are read. These tell the stories of creation, the sacrifice of Isaac, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the foretold coming of the Messiah. This part of the service climaxes with the singing of the Gloria and the Alleluia and the proclamation of the Gospel of the resurrection. At this time, the lights are brought up and the church bells are rung, according to local custom. A sermon may be preached after the gospel.

The focus then moves from the lectern to the font. Anciently, Easter was considered the ideal time for converts to receive baptism, and this practice continues within Roman Catholicism and the Anglican Communion. Whether there are baptisms at this point or not, it is traditional for the congregation to renew the vows of their baptismal faith. This act is often sealed by the sprinkling of the congregation with holy water from the font. The Catholic sacrament of Confirmation is also celebrated at the Vigil.

The Easter Vigil concludes with the celebration of the Eucharist (known in some traditions as Holy Communion). Certain variations in the Easter Vigil exist: Some churches read the Old Testament lessons before the procession of the Paschal candle, and then read the gospel immediately after the Exsultet.

Sunrise service in Rockland, Maine, United States

Some churches prefer to keep this vigil very early on the Sunday morning instead of the Saturday night to reflect the gospel account of the women coming to the tomb at dawn on the first day of the week. These services are known as the Sunrise service and often occur in outdoor setting such as the church cemetery, yard, or a nearby park.

The first recorded "Sunrise Service" took place in 1732 among the Single Brethren in the Moravian congregation at Herrnhut, Saxony, in what is now Germany. Following an all-night vigil they went before dawn to the town graveyard, God's Acre, on the hill above the town, to celebrate the Resurrection among the graves of the departed. This service was repeated the following year by the whole congregation and subsequently spread with the Moravian Missionaries around the world, including Old Salem in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Additional celebrations are usually offered on Easter Sunday itself. Typically these services follow the usual order of Sunday services in a congregation, but also typically incorporate more highly festive elements. The music of the service, in particular, often displays a highly festive tone; the incorporation of brass instruments (trumpets, etc.) to supplement a congregation's usual instrumentation is common. Often a congregation's worship space is decorated with special banners and flowers (such as Easter lilies).

Celtic cross draped for Easter at Bon Air Presbyterian Church, Virginia

In predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines, the morning of Easter (known in the national language as "Pasko ng Muling Pagkabuhay" or the Pasch of the Resurrection) is marked with joyous celebration, the first being the dawn "Salubong", wherein large statues of Jesus and Mary are brought together to meet, imagining the first reunion of Jesus and his mother Mary after Jesus' Resurrection. This is followed by the joyous Easter Mass.

In Polish culture, the Rezurekcja (Resurrection Procession) is the joyous Easter morning Mass at daybreak when church bells ring out and explosions resound to commemorate Christ rising from the dead. Before the Mass begins at dawn, a festive procession with the Blessed Sacrament carried beneath a canopy encircles the church. As church bells ring out, handbells are vigorously shaken by altar boys, the air is filled with incense and the faithful raise their voices heavenward in a triumphant rendering of age-old Easter hymns. After the Blessed Sacrament is carried around the church and Adoration is complete, the Easter Mass begins. Another Polish Easter tradition is Święconka, the blessing of Easter baskets by the parish priest on Holy Saturday. This custom is celebrated not only in Poland, but also in the United States by Polish-Americans.

Eastern Christianity

Icon of the Resurrection by an unknown 17th-century Bulgarian artist

Easter is the fundamental and most important festival of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches:

This is the Expected and Holy Day,

the One among the Sabbaths,

the Sovereign and Lady of days,

Feast of feasts, Celebration of celebrations,

on which we praise Christ for all eternity!

Boris Kustodiev's Pascha Greetings (1912) shows traditional Russian khristosovanie (exchanging a triple kiss), with such foods as red eggs, kulich and paskha in the background.

Every other religious festival in their calendar, including Christmas, is secondary in importance to the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is reflected in rich Paschal customs in the cultures of countries that have traditionally had an Orthodox Christian majority. Eastern Catholics have similar emphasis in their calendars, and many of their liturgical customs are very similar.

This is not to say that Christmas and other elements of the Christian liturgical calendar are ignored. Instead, these events are all seen as necessary but preliminary to, and illuminated by, the full climax of the Resurrection, in which all that has come before reaches fulfillment and fruition. They shine only in the light of the Resurrection. Easter is the primary act that fulfills the purpose of Christ's ministry on earth—to defeat death by dying and to purify and exalt humanity by voluntarily assuming and overcoming human frailty. This is succinctly summarized by the Paschal troparion, sung repeatedly for forty days, through the Apodosis of Easter, which is the day before Ascension:

Χριστὸς ἀνέστη ἐκ νεκρῶν,

θανάτῳ θάνατον πατήσας,

καὶ τοῖς ἐν τοῖς μνήμασι

ζωὴν χαρισάμενος.

Christ is risen from the dead,

Trampling down death by death,

And upon those in the tombs

Bestowing life!

Preparation for Easter begins with the season of Great Lent. In addition to fasting, almsgiving, and prayer, Orthodox Christians cut down on all entertainment and non-essential worldly activities, gradually eliminating them until Great and Holy Friday, the most austere day of the year. On the evening of Great and Holy Saturday, the Midnight Office commences an hour or two before midnight (see paschal vigil).

Religious Procession in Kursk Province, a controversial painting by Ilya Repin (1880–83), depicting a Bright Week outdoor procession.

At its completion all light in the church building is extinguished, and all wait in darkness and silence for the stroke of midnight. Then, a new flame is struck in the altar, or the priest lights his candle from the perpetual lamp kept burning there, and he then lights candles held by deacons or other assistants, who then go to light candles held by the congregation (this practice has its origin in the reception of the Holy Fire at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem). Then the priest and congregation go in a procession around the temple, holding lit candles, chanting:

By Thy Resurrection O Christ our savior, the angels in Heaven sing, enable us who are on Earth, to glorify thee in purity of heart.

This procession reenacts the journey of the Myrrhbearers to the Tomb of Jesus "very early in the morning". After circling around the temple once or three times, the procession halts in front of the closed doors. In the Greek practice the priest reads a selection from the Gospel Book. Then, in all traditions, the priest makes the sign of the cross with the censer in front of the closed doors (which represent the sealed tomb).

Traditional Paschal Outdoor Procession during Bright Week by Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church.

He and the people chant the Paschal Troparion, and all of the bells and semantra are sounded. Then all re-enter the temple and paschal matins begins immediately, followed by the paschal hours and then the paschal divine liturgy. The Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom is read at matins.

After the dismissal of the liturgy, the priest may bless paschal eggs and baskets brought by the faithful containing those foods which have been forbidden during the Great Fast. Immediately after the Liturgy it is customary for the congregation to share a meal, essentially an agápē dinner (albeit at 2:00 am or later).

In Greece the traditional meal is mageiritsa, a hearty stew of chopped lamb liver and wild greens seasoned with egg-and-lemon sauce. Traditionally, easter eggs, hard-boiled eggs dyed bright red to symbolize the spilt Blood of Christ and the promise of eternal life, are cracked together to celebrate the opening of the Tomb of Christ.

The next morning, Easter Sunday proper, there is no Divine Liturgy, since the liturgy for that day has already been celebrated. Instead, in the afternoon "Agápē Vespers" is sung. In this service, it has become customary during the last few centuries for the priest and members of the congregation to read a portion of the Gospel of John in as many languages as they can manage, to show the universality of the Resurrection.[citation needed]

For the remainder of the week, known as "Bright Week", fasting (other than before holy communion is suppressed, and the customary Paschal greeting is: "Christ is risen!", to which the response is: "Truly he is risen!" This may also be done in many different languages. The services during Bright Week are nearly identical to those on Easter itself, except that they do not take place at midnight, but at their normal times during the day. The outdoor procession during Bright Week takes place either after paschal matins or the paschal divine liturgy.

Non-observing Christian groups

Nonconformist Protestant Christians prefer to use a simple Christian cross, rather than a crucifix, to emphasize the Resurrection.

Along with the celebration of Christmas and Advent, many Lenten and Easter traditions were altered or even abandoned altogether by various offshoots of the Protestant Reformation, as they were deemed "pagan" or "Popish" (and therefore tainted) by many of the Reformation's Puritan movements. However, some of the major Reformation Churches and movements (Lutheran, Methodist and Anglican for

example), chose to retain a large proportion of the observances of the established Church Year along with many of its associated traditions. In Lutheran Churches, for example, not only were the days of Holy Week observed, but also Christmas, Easter and Pentecost were observed with three-day festivals (the day itself and the two following).

Other Protestant groups took a different attitude, with most Anabaptists, Quakers, Congregationalists and Presbyterian Puritans regarding such festivals as an abomination. The Puritan rejection of Easter traditions was (and is) based partly upon their interpretation of 2 Corinthians 6:14–16 and partly upon a more general belief that, if a religious practice or celebration is not actually written in the Christian Bible, then that practice/celebration must be a later development and cannot be considered an authentic part of Christian practice or belief—so at best simply unnecessary, at worst actually sinful.

Groups such as the Restored Church of God reject the celebration of Easter, seeing it as originating in a pagan spring festival taken over by the "Roman" Catholic Church.

Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a similar view, observing a yearly commemorative service of the Last Supper and the subsequent execution of Christ on the evening of Nisan 14 (as they calculate the dates derived from the lunar Hebrew Calendar). It is commonly referred to by many Witnesses as simply "The Memorial". Jehovah's Witnesses believe that such verses as Luke 22:19–20 and 1 Corinthians 11:26 constitute a commandment to remember the death of Christ though not the resurrection, and they do so on a yearly basis just as Passover is celebrated annually by the Jews.

Members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), as part of their historic testimony against times and seasons, do not celebrate or observe Easter or any other Christian holidays, believing instead that "every day is the Lord's day", and that elevation of one day above others suggests that it is acceptable to do un-Christian acts on other days. During the 17th and 18th centuries, Quakers were persecuted for this non-observance of Holy Days.

Some Christian groups feel that Easter is something to be regarded with great joy: not marking the day itself, but remembering and rejoicing in the event it

commemorates—the miracle of Christ's resurrection. In this spirit, these Christians teach that each day and all Sabbaths should be kept holy, in Christ's teachings. Hebrew-Christian, Sacred Name, and Armstrong movement churches (such as the Living Church of God) usually reject Easter in favor of Nisan 14 observance and celebration of the Christian Passover. This is especially true of Christian groups that celebrate the New Moons or annual High Sabbaths in addition to seventh-day Sabbath. They support this textually with reference to the letter to the Colossians: "Let no one ... pass judgment on you in matters of food and drink or with regard to a festival or new moon or sabbath. These are shadows of things to come; the reality belongs to Christ." (Col. 2:16–17, NAB)

Easter celebrations around the world

Main article: Easter customs

An Easter postcard depicting the Easter Bunny

In countries where Christianity is a state religion, or where the country has large Christian population, Easter is often a public holiday. As Easter is always a Sunday, many countries in the world also have Easter Monday as a public holiday. Some retail stores, shopping malls, and restaurants are closed on Easter Sunday. Good Friday, which occurs two days before Easter Sunday, is also a public holiday in many countries, as well as in 12 U.S. states. Even in states where Good Friday is not a holiday, many financial institutions, stock markets, and public schools are closed. Few banks that are normally open on regular Sundays are closed on Easter.

In the Nordic countries Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday are public holidays, and Good Friday and Easter Monday are bank holidays. In Denmark, Iceland and Norway Maundy Thursday is also a public holiday. It is a holiday for most workers except some shopping malls which keep open for a half-day. Many businesses give their employees almost a week off, called Easter break. Schools are closed between Palm Sunday and Easter Monday. According to a 2014 poll, 6 of 10 Norwegians travel during Easter, often to a countryside cottage; 3 of 10 said their typical Easter included skiing.

In the Netherlands both Easter Sunday and Easter Monday are national holidays. Like first and second Christmas Day, they are both considered Sundays, which results in a first and a second Easter Sunday, after which the week continues to a

Tuesday. Even though Good Friday is an official national holiday, it is not a mandatory day off for commercial companies.

In Commonwealth nations Easter Day is rarely a public holiday, as is the case for celebrations which fall on a Sunday. In the United Kingdom both Good Friday and Easter Monday are bank holidays. However, in Canada Easter Sunday is a public holiday, along with Easter Monday. In the Canadian province of Quebec, either Good Friday or Easter Monday are statutory holidays (although most companies give both). In some countries Good Friday is a public holiday as well.

In Australia, because of its location in the southern hemisphere, Easter takes place in autumn. Hence, Australian Easter is associated with harvest time, rather than with the coming of spring as in the northern hemisphere. The religious aspect of Easter remains the same. Good Friday and Easter Monday are public holidays across all states and territories. "Easter Saturday" (the Saturday before Easter Sunday) is a public holiday in every state except Tasmania and Western Australia, while Easter Sunday itself is a public holiday only in New South Wales. Easter Tuesday is additionally a conditional public holiday in Tasmania, varying between award, and was also a public holiday in Victoria until 1994.

In the United States, because Easter falls on a Sunday, which is already a non-working day for federal and state employees, it has not been designated as a federal or state holiday. Easter parades are held in many American cities, involving festive strolling processions, with the New York City parade being the best known.

Easter eggs are a popular cultural symbol of Easter.

Easter eggs

Main article: Easter egg

The egg is an ancient symbol of new life and rebirth. In Christianity it became associated with Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. The custom of the Easter egg originated in the early Christian community of Mesopotamia, who stained eggs red in memory of the blood of Christ, shed at his crucifixion. As such, for Christians, the Easter egg is a symbol of the empty tomb. The oldest tradition is to use dyed chicken eggs, but a modern custom is to substitute decorated chocolate, or plastic eggs filled with candy such as jellybeans.

The Easter Bunny is a popular legendary anthropomorphic Easter gift-giving character analogous to Santa Claus in American culture. Many Americans follow the tradition of coloring hard-boiled eggs and giving baskets of candy. On Easter Monday, the President of the United States holds an annual Easter egg roll on the White House lawn for young children. Since the rabbit is a pest in Australia, the Easter Bilby is available as an alternative. Easter eggs are a widely popular symbol of new life in Poland and other Slavic countries' folk traditions. A batik-like decorating process known as pisanka produces intricate, brilliantly-colored eggs.

The celebrated House of Fabergé workshops created exquisite jewelled Easter eggs for the Russian Imperial family from 1885 to 1916.