

## Understanding Easter in America

<http://eflsuccess.com/easter/> (Michael Krigline)

See below for vocabulary and discussion questions.

Like Christmas, Easter (or Resurrection Day) has a secular and a sacred side. The secular side is for small children, who focus on eggs, baby animals, and Easter candy. The sacred side is for everyone who wants to honor Jesus, whose life was so influential that his birth split time between BC and AD.

### When and what is Resurrection Day (Easter)?

The spring-time date is determined by a lunar calendar, like many international festivals. Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after March 21. Historically, Easter has always been the celebration of Jesus' death and resurrection, an event linked to the Jewish lunar holiday "Passover."

The sacred holiday starts a week before Easter. On "Palm Sunday" Jesus entered Jerusalem with friends waving palm branches to welcome him. On Thursday, many meet to share Communion/Eucharist, remembering the "Last Supper" Jesus shared with his disciples. The next day is "Good Friday," remembering the day Jesus was crucified. Resurrection Sunday is celebrated as the day Jesus rose from the dead. The day of Jesus' death is called "good" because the Bible teaches that Jesus' painful death paid the penalty for our sin; and his resurrection opened the door of heaven for all who believe.

### Easter Symbols

Since Easter always comes in the spring, secular Easter traditions often focus on "new life." You'll see decorations with pastel-colored flowers, eggs and various baby animals, and children often get new springtime clothes. The lily is a popular Easter flower. Many churches decorate with dozens of these flowers every Easter. White dogwood-tree blossoms are also popular at Easter time. People say its shape reminds them of the cross, and the "marks" on the petals look like nail holes with blood stains.

Eggs are a symbol of "hope" (because there is "life" inside them, even though you can't see it). Centuries ago, Easter eggs were painted red to remind people of the "blood of the cross," but over the centuries they became more colorful (and now coloring eggs is an activity for children).

On Easter morning, children hunt for Easter eggs "left by the Easter bunny," and eat chocolate bunnies and marshmallow chicks. Many churches or communities welcome local kids to search for hundreds of plastic, candy-filled eggs.

Lambs are also a symbol of Easter, in part because on Passover a lamb was sacrificed. When ancient people sacrificed lambs they were really saying "sin is costly, so I shouldn't sin." The Bible says that "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness." Jesus was also called "the lamb of God," whose sacrifice paid for sin. That's another reason why sheep and lambs are popular Easter symbols (and Easter meals).

## The heart of Easter

But the heart of Easter is a Sunday celebration of what happened three days after Jesus died: the Bible says that God raised or “resurrected” him from the dead. That is why it is called “Resurrection Day.” Churches have a big celebration, with banners, special songs, dramas, flowers, and more. No other religious leader claims to have died and rose again. If this really happened, could anything else be as important? It would mean that the death we all fear has been conquered, and the one who arose could provide answers to what happens after death.

Well, I hope you’ve learned something about this important international holiday. And whether your Easter focuses on the historical, Christian holiday, or the secular “Easter bunny” side, just remember that Easter is a world-wide holiday to celebrate sacrifice, forgiveness, “new life” and hope. Happy Easter!

### Vocabulary

blossom: a flower on a tree or bush

Communion: (also called Eucharist/the Bread and Wine): a religious practice that helps all Christians worldwide remember the final meal Jesus shared with his followers, and how Jesus’ sacrifice saved them and unites them, regardless of their differences (Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me. This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, which is shed for the forgiveness of sins.”)

to conquer: to defeat an enemy (e.g., an army, fear, a difficult language); to succeed in doing something very difficult that no one did before (e.g., conquer a mountain)

to crucify: to put to death, specifically by nailing a man’s hands & feet to a wooden cross (a common way that Romans killed prisoners in the first century)

disciples: students who strongly believe in the teachings of a leader, philosopher, etc. (such as Confucius or Jesus)

to hunt: to look carefully for sth, esp. an animal

Passover: an important annual Jewish festival, remembering when their ancestors were saved from slavery in Egypt

pastel: a light color, such as the light pinks and blues of spring flowers

sacred: holy; of the utmost value according to religious teachings (the opposite of “secular”)

secular: not religious; not related to sacred practices/gods/faith/etc.

sin: human imperfection. According to the Bible, sin is every human act that falls short (“misses the mark”) of the perfection God intended for humans; all sin separates people from God, and the only way to “pay” for sin was through blood sacrifice

tomb: place where a dead body is put

### **Discussion:**

1. If there is a holiday in your country in early spring, tell your partner about it.
2. Other than spring flowers, baby animals and eggs, what other things symbolize “new life” or “hope” to you?
3. Candy is a popular part of Easter celebrations. What is your favorite kind of candy? (If you have tasted Easter candy, describe it to your partner.)

4. In your culture, what sorts of things are “sacrificed” (or perhaps, *were* sacrificed in previous times)? What is the purpose of these sacrifices? Is that different from what this article says about sacrifice? Explain.
5. Do you consider yourself to be a disciple of a certain teacher, philosophy, etc? If so, explain.
6. What is “sin,” according to the article? Are you a sinner? explain.
7. What is something you have hunted for? Tell your partner about it.
8. Christian believe that Jesus really did rise from the dead, and “pay” to create a path to heaven. Does this make you curios to know more about him? Why or why not?

Activity: If you have any questions about Easter, Passover, Communion, sin, heaven, or other things mentioned in the article, do some research and write a paper or paragraph about it in English.

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