

THE CATHOLIC PARISH OF KING'S LYNN

Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation
London Road,
King's Lynn. PE30 5HQ

Church of the Holy Family
Field Lane, Gaywood,
King's Lynn. PE30 4AY

Scripture Reference

EASTER SUNDAY

Easter is the celebration of Christ's resurrection from the dead. It is celebrated on Sunday, and marks the end of Holy Week, the end of Lent, the last day of the Easter Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday), and is the beginning of the Easter season of the liturgical year. As we know from the Gospels, Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day following his crucifixion, which would be Sunday. His resurrection marks the triumph of good over evil, sin and death. It is the singular event which proves that those who trust in God and accept Christ will be raised from the dead.

Since Easter represents the fulfilment of God's promises to mankind, it is the most important holiday on the Christian calendar.

In the Gospels, the precise details of the Easter narrative vary slightly, but none of these variances are critical to the main story. In fact, it is argued that the variances are simply matters of style and not substance. Despite the variances, the key aspects of the Easter story all match. Above all, they agree that the tomb of Christ was indeed empty, which is the most essential fact.

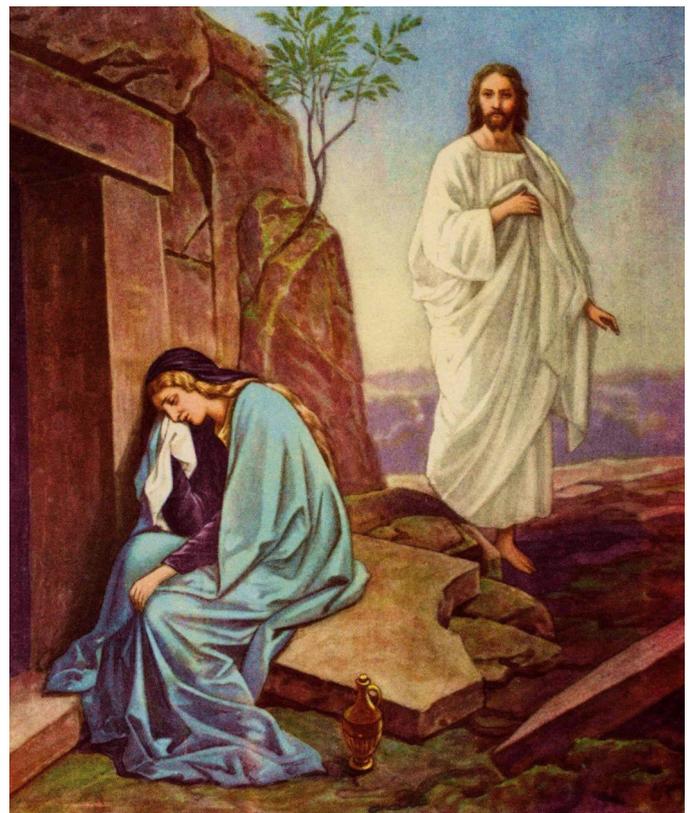
Based on direct evidence from the mid-second century, it is believed that Easter was regularly celebrated from the earliest days of the Church.

The Easter date is movable and always falls on a Sunday between March 22 and April 25. Easter in the Roman Catholic Church is always on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox.

Most Catholics attend Easter Vigil at midnight, although the services can be lengthy because many sacraments are performed, such as baptisms and Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, during the Mass. Services during the daytime on Easter are shorter and well attended.

Sunrise services are common, but are distinctly Protestant. Sunrise services are gathered before dawn and reflect the arrival of the women at Jesus' tomb early in the morning. The services take place outdoors, often in church yards, cemeteries, or in parks, and are timed so the sun will rise during the course of worship.

Traditional family activities vary by region. In the United States, children often hunt for Easter eggs, which are often brightly-dyed hard boiled eggs,



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though they can be plastic eggs filled with candy or small denominations of money. Candy is a traditional gift for Easter as children often break their Lenten fasts with sweets. Adults tend to share bouquets of flowers, greeting cards, and may gather for a family meal. Such celebrations are often secularised and focused on children and family rather than the religious aspect of the holy day.

Following Easter Sunday, the season of Easter begins and lasts for seven weeks, ending with Pentecost.

The Feast

Easter is the principal feast of the ecclesiastical year. Leo I (Sermo xlvii in Exodum) calls it the greatest feast (festum festorum), and says that Christmas is celebrated only in preparation for Easter. It is the centre of the greater part of the ecclesiastical year. The order of Sundays from Septuagesima to the last Sunday after Pentecost, the feast of the Ascension, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, and all other movable feasts, from that of the Prayer of Jesus in the Garden (Tuesday after Septuagesima) to the feast of the Sacred Heart (Friday after the octave of Corpus Christi), depend upon the Easter date.

Commemorating the slaying of the true Lamb of God and the Resurrection of Christ, the corner-stone upon which faith is built, it is also the oldest feast of the Christian Church, as old as Christianity, the connecting link between the Old and New Testaments. That the Apostolic Fathers do not mention it and that we first hear of it principally through the controversy of the Quartodecimans are purely accidental. The connection between the Jewish Passover and the Christian feast of Easter is real and ideal. Real, since Christ died on the first Jewish Easter Day; ideal, like the relation between type and reality, because Christ's death and Resurrection had its figures and types in the Old Law, particularly in the paschal lamb, which was eaten towards evening of the 14th of Nisan.

In fact, the Jewish feast was taken over into the Christian Easter celebration; the liturgy (Exsultet) sings of the passing of Israel through the Red Sea, the paschal lamb, the column of fire, etc. Apart, however, from the Jewish feast, the Christians would have celebrated the anniversary of the death and the Resurrection of Christ. But for such a feast it was necessary to know the exact calendar date of Christ's death. To know this day was very simple for the Jews ; it was the day after the 14th of the first month, the 15th of Nisan of their calendar. But in other countries of the vast Roman Empire there were other systems of chronology.

The Romans from 45 B.C. had used the reformed

Julian calendar; there were also the Egyptian and the Syro-Macedonian calendar. The foundation of the Jewish calendar was the lunar year of 354 days, whilst the other systems depended on the solar year. In consequence the first days of the Jewish months and years did not coincide with any fixed days of the Roman solar year. Every fourth year of the Jewish system had an intercalary month. Since this month was inserted, not according to some scientific method or some definite rule, but arbitrarily, by command of the Sanhedrin, a distant Jewish date can never with certainty be transposed into the corresponding Julian or Gregorian date (Ideler, Chronologie, I, 570 sq.). The connection between the Jewish and the Christian Pasch explains the movable character of this feast.

Easter has no fixed date, like Christmas, because the 15th of Nisan of the Semitic calendar was shifting from date to date on the Julian calendar. Since Christ, the true Paschal Lamb, had been slain on the very day when the Jews, in celebration of their Passover, immolated the figurative lamb, the Jewish Christians in the Orient followed the Jewish method, and commemorated the death of Christ on the 15th of Nisan and His Resurrection on the 17th of Nisan, no matter on what day of the week they fell. For this observance they claimed the authority of St. John and St. Philip.

In the rest of the empire another consideration predominated. Every Sunday of the year was a commemoration of the Resurrection of Christ, which had occurred on a Sunday. Because the Sunday after 14 Nisan was the historical day of the Resurrection, at Rome this Sunday became the Christian feast of Easter. Easter was celebrated in Rome and Alexandria on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox, and the Roman Church claimed for this observance the authority of Sts. Peter and Paul. The spring equinox in Rome fell on 25 March; in Alexandria on 21 March. At Antioch Easter was kept on the Sunday after the Jewish Passover.

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EASTER SUNDAY

Easter is the greatest feast in the Christian calendar. On this Sunday, Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. For Catholics, Easter Sunday comes at the end of 40 days of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving known as Lent. Through spiritual struggle and self-denial, we have prepared ourselves to die spiritually with Christ on Good Friday, the day of His Crucifixion, so that we can rise again with Him in new life on Easter.

A DAY OF CELEBRATION

In Roman Catholic churches, the Alleluia is sung for the first time since the beginning of Lent. As St. John Chrysostom reminds us in his famous Easter Homily, our fast is over; now is the time for celebration.

THE FULFILMENT OF OUR FAITH

Easter is a day of celebration because it represents the fulfilment of our faith as Christians. Saint Paul wrote that, unless Christ rose from the dead, our faith is in vain (1 Corinthians 15:17). Through his death, Christ saved mankind from bondage to sin, and He destroyed the hold that death has on all of us; but it is His Resurrection that gives us the promise of new life, both in this world and the next.

THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

That new life began on Easter Sunday. In the Our Father, we pray that "Thy Kingdom come, on earth as it is in Heaven." And Christ told His disciples that some of them would not die until they saw the Kingdom of God "coming in power" (Mark 9:1). The early Christian Fathers saw Easter as the fulfilment of that promise. With the resurrection of Christ, God's Kingdom is established on earth, in the form of the Church.

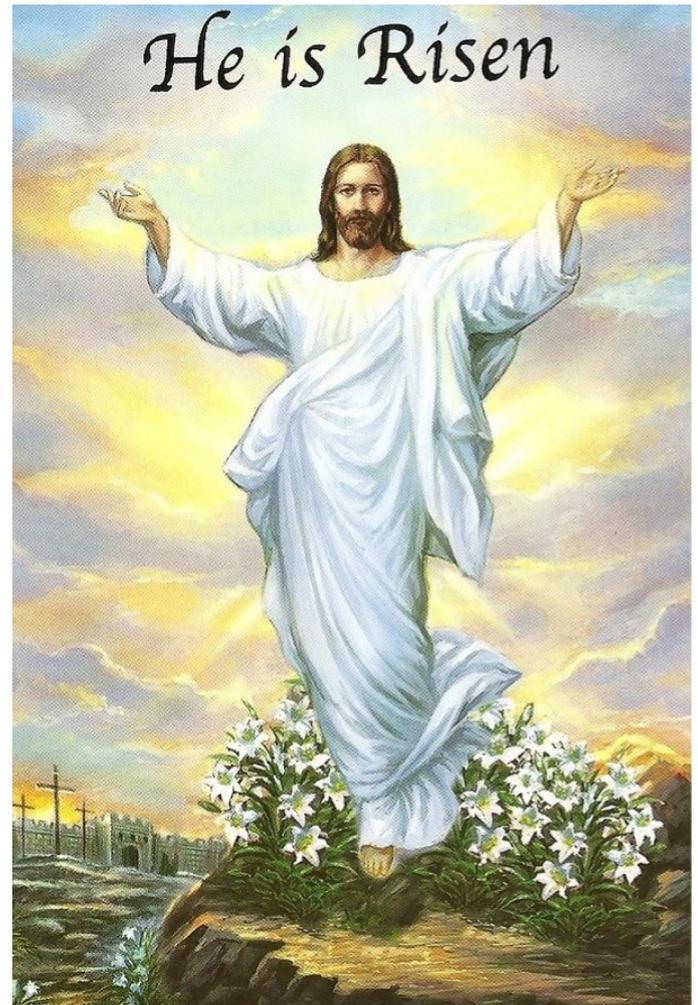
NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

That is why people who are converting to Catholicism traditionally are baptized at the Easter Vigil service, which takes place on Holy Saturday (the day before Easter), starting sometime after sunset. They have usually undergone a long process of study and preparation known as the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (R.C.I.A.). Their baptism parallels Christ's own Death and Resurrection, as they die to sin and rise to new life in the Kingdom of God.

- The Sacrament of Baptism

COMMUNION: OUR EASTER DUTY

Because of the central importance of Easter to the Christian faith, the Catholic Church requires that all Catholics who have made their First Communion receive the Holy Eucharist sometime during



the Easter season, which lasts through Pentecost, 50 days after Easter. (The Church also urges us to take part in the Sacrament of Confession before receiving this Easter communion.) This reception of the Eucharist is a visible sign of our faith and our participation in the Kingdom of God. Of course, we should receive Communion as frequently as possible; this "Easter Duty" is simply the minimum requirement set by the Church.

- The Easter Duty
- The Sacrament of Communion
- The Sacrament of Confession

CHRIST IS RISEN !

Easter isn't a spiritual event that happened just once, long ago; we don't say "Christ has risen" but "Christ is risen," because He rose, body and soul, and is still alive and with us today. That is the true meaning of Easter.

Christ is risen ! Indeed He is risen !