



Moravian Women's Association - Home & Overseas Paper - April 2017

How Easter is celebrated around the world

Western Christianity

Easter is celebrated in many different ways among Western Christians. Traditionally, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and some Anglicans start to celebrate Easter on the Saturday night. This begins in total darkness with the blessing of the Easter fire, and the lighting of a large candle, (symbolic of the risen Christ). By the end of the service, the Church is fully lit. Traditionally there were then baptisms, or the congregation may renew its baptismal vows.

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. The first recorded sunrise service took place in 1732 among the Moravian Single Brethren at Herrnhut. Following an all-night vigil, they went before dawn to God's Acre to celebrate the Resurrection among the graves of the departed. This service was repeated the following year by the whole congregation, and is still observed today. Traditionally it may include a brass band.

In predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines, at dawn on Easter morning, large statues of Jesus and Mary are brought together to meet, imagining the first reunion of Jesus and his mother Mary after Jesus' Resurrection. In Polish culture, there is a joyous Easter morning Mass at daybreak when church bells ring and there are even explosions, to commemorate Christ rising from the dead. Another Polish Easter tradition is the blessing of Easter baskets by the parish priest on Holy Saturday.

Eastern Christianity

Easter is celebrated on a different date from the Western churches. In addition to fasting, charitable giving, and prayer during Lent, Orthodox Christians traditionally cut down on all entertainment and non-essential worldly activities, gradually eliminating them until Good Friday. On the Saturday evening a service starts an hour or two before midnight. Dramatically, all light in the church is extinguished, and all wait in darkness and silence for the stroke of midnight. Then, one new flame is lit, which spreads to candles held by the congregation. A procession re-enacts the journey of the women to the tomb of Jesus early in the morning. Then, in all traditions, the priest makes the sign of the cross in front of the closed doors of the church, (which represent the sealed tomb). Traditionally, hard-boiled eggs dyed bright red to symbolise the blood of Christ and the promise of eternal life, are cracked together to celebrate the opening of the tomb.

Other Christian groups

Some Protestant groups regard Easter festivals as wrong, based partly upon their interpretation of 2 Corinthians 6:14–16, and partly upon a more general belief that, if a religious practice is not actually written in the Christian Bible, then that practice 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.

Jehovah's Witnesses hold an annual service of the Last Supper and commemorate the crucifixion. They believe that verses such as Luke 22:19–20 and 1 Corinthians 11: 26 are a commandment to remember the death of Christ though not the resurrection. Quakers historically 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. Every day should be kept holy.

Cultural celebrations in Western society

Non religious celebrations are increasing in importance in Western society as Christian observance decreases. Something has to fill the void of the traditional spring public and school holidays, when families and friends often get together. There is now an emphasis on Easter's pre-Christian origins, and the consumer market has responded with aggressive marketing of eggs, hot cross buns, bunnies, bonnets and chicks, without religious associations. Many Christians are unhappy about this, but cultural celebrations which people of all religions or none can join in, have a great value in building an inclusive society. Would you really like an Easter which only Christians were able to celebrate, which excluded people of other religions or none?

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