

# EASTER

## REMEMBERING THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST OR A PAGAN SPRING FESTIVAL?

### The death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ

#### Timeline:

- Jesus takes Passover meal (Last Supper) with his disciples in Jerusalem. (Matthew 26:17)  
*Passover is the most important feast of the Jewish calendar, celebrated at the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox (typically occurs on March 20, 21 or 22). Passover would have fallen on a Thursday, in the years 30 and 33 AD.*
- Jesus betrayed and taken away (Matthew 26:45)
- Brought before Pilate (Matthew 27)
- Jesus crucified (Matthew 27:35)
- Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 28)
- Jesus appears to disciples and others. (John 20-21)

### Origin of Easter <sup>1</sup>

Modern-day Easter is derived from two ancient traditions: one Judeo-Christian and the other Pagan. Both Christians and Pagans have celebrated death and resurrection themes following the Spring Equinox for millennia. Most religious historians believe that many elements of the Christian observance of Easter were derived from earlier Pagan celebrations. The equinox occurs each year on March 20, 21 or 22. Both Neopagans and Christians continue to celebration religious rituals in the present day. Wiccans and other Neopagans usually hold their celebrations on the day or eve of the equinox. Western Christians wait until the Sunday on or after the next full moon. The Eastern Orthodox churches follow the Julian Calendar. Their celebration is generally many weeks after that of the Western churches.

#### Where did the name Easter come from?

The name "**Easter**" originated with the names of an ancient Goddess and God. The Venerable Bede, (672-735 AD) a Christian scholar, first asserted in his book *De Ratione Temporum* that **Easter** was named after **Eostre** (a.k.a. **Eastre**). She was the Great Mother Goddess of the Saxon people in Northern Europe. Similar "*Teutonic dawn goddess of fertility*[were known variously as *Ostare, Ostara, Ostern, Eostra, Eostre, Eostur, Eastra, Eastur, Austron and Ausos.*" Her name was derived from the ancient word for spring: "**eastre**." Similar Goddesses were known by other names in ancient cultures around the Mediterranean, and were celebrated in the springtime. Some were: **Aphrodite** from Cyprus; **Astarte** from Phoenicia; **Demeter**, from Mycenae; **Hathor** from Egypt; **Ishtar** from Assyria; **Kali** from India **Ostara**, a Norse goddess of fertility.

An alternate explanation has been suggested. The name given by the Frankish church to Jesus' resurrection festival included the Latin word "*alba*" which means "*white*." (This was a reference to the white robes that were worn during the festival.) "*Alba*" also has a second meaning: "*sunrise*." When the name of the festival was translated into German, the "*sunrise*" meaning was selected in error. This became "*ostern*" in German. Ostern has been proposed as the origin of the word "*Easter*".<sup>2</sup>

#### What's the deal with the rabbits and eggs and other Easter stuff?

**Easter Rabbit and Eggs:** The symbols of the Norse Goddess **Ostara** were the hare and the egg. Both represented fertility. From these, we have inherited the customs and symbols of the Easter egg and Easter rabbit. Dyed eggs also formed part of the rituals of the Babylonian mystery religions. Eggs "*were sacred to many ancient civilizations and formed an integral part of religious ceremonies in Egypt and the Orient. Dyed eggs were hung in Egyptian temples, and the egg was regarded as the emblem of regenerative life proceeding from the mouth of the great Egyptian god.*"<sup>2</sup>

**Hot Cross Buns:** At the feast of **Eostre**, the Saxon fertility Goddess, an ox was sacrificed. The ox's horns became a symbol for the feast. They were carved into the ritual bread. Thus originated "hot cross buns". The word "buns" is derived from the Saxon word "boun" which means "sacred ox." Later, the symbol of a symmetrical cross was used to decorate the buns; the cross represented the moon, the heavenly body associated with the Goddess, and its 4 quarters.

**Easter Sunrise Service:** This custom can be traced back to the ancient Pagan custom of welcoming the sun God at the vernal equinox - when daytime is about to exceed the length of the nighttime. It was a time to "*celebrate the return of life and reproduction to animal and plant life as well.*"<sup>3</sup> Worship of the Sun God at sunrise may be the religious ritual condemned by Jehovah as recorded in: Ezekiel 8:16-18.

**Easter Candles:** These are sometimes lit in churches on the eve of Easter Sunday. Some commentators believe that these can be directly linked to the Pagan customs of lighting bonfires at this time of year to welcome the rebirth/resurrection of the sun god.<sup>4</sup>

#### Discussion Questions

Is the concept of rebirth/renewal the same as resurrection?

What's the difference between resurrection and reincarnation?

Did Jesus tell us to celebrate His resurrection?

How many day(s) out of the year should we celebrate Jesus' resurrection?

**The Resurrection of  
Jesus Christ:  
Fact or Fiction?  
Does Christianity make sense  
without the resurrection?**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.religioustolerance.org>

<sup>2</sup> Anon, "*Easter: The Pagan Origins of Common Easter Traditions,*"

<sup>3</sup> Arnold Gordon, untitled essay at: <http://thezephyr.com/bible/bibleah.htm>

<sup>4</sup> A. J. Dager, "*Facts and Fallacies of the Resurrection,*" Page 5. Cited in: R.K. Tardo, "*Rabbits, Eggs and Other Easter Errors,*"