

EASTER
WHAT'S THE DEAL?
(Sunday April 3, 2005)

Last Sunday (March 27, 2005) was Easter.

The Easter schedule is as follows:

4-15-01
3-31-02
4-20-03
4-11-04
3-27-05
4-16-06

Confusing isn't it? Of course these dates are the dates that Easter is observed by the Western Christian Church. To add to the confusion the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church observes Easter on the following dates:

4-15-01
5-05-02
4-27-03
4-11-04
5-01-05
4-23-06

If you are not completely confused yet, you may observe that at times (example: 2001 and 2004) the Western and Orthodox churches observe Easter on the same dates (and have/will at other dates).

If this has not given you a headache, we might add that from scripture we know that Christ was crucified at the Passover and the Passover dates are:

4-08-01
3-28-02
4-17-03
4-06-04
4-24-05
4-13-06

You might take note that the Passover dates do not correspond with either the Western or Orthodox dates for Easter. Now to mix it up just a bit – what about the Easter Bunny and Easter Eggs?

“Easter” is the day that Christians observe the resurrection of Jesus Christ. However our present day observance of Easter is the result of the blending of Christian beliefs with pagan practices and traditions. Around the second century A.D. when the Christian church was attempting to convert the pagan nations to the north to Christianity,

they tried to blend Christian beliefs with the native observances. Christmas is one example of this practice and Easter is another. As the resurrection of Jesus was just after the Passover (He was crucified on the Passover), this occurred in the spring. Most all of the pagan nations had some type of spring festival or celebration that incorporated the concept of life. From Babylonia and Assyria came the goddess Ishtar – the goddess of love and fertility that presided over the spring festival. The Phoenician counterpart was the goddess Astarte who was the sister and consort of Baal. The Anglo-Saxon version was the goddess Ostara. It is from the names of these goddesses: Ishtar, Astarte and Ostara that the original Old English word “Eastre” was derived and would become the current word “Easter” that we now use to refer to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As these pagan celebrations were at different times in different communities and often at different dates from year to year corresponding to a time when the harsh winter ended, so the early “Easter” dates often varied greatly from one area to another and from one year to another.

Under Constantine, much of the early persecution of the Christian Church ended and there was felt a need to standardize these practices. In 325 A.D. the Council of Nicaea determined that Easter would be observed “The first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the vernal equinox”. (Vernal equinox – sun over equator, day & night equal length – vernal equinox for northern hemisphere and autumnal equinox for the southern hemisphere)

Because of this, the date of Easter varies from year to year as a result of it being correlated with spring and the pagan festivals rather than the Passover. This is the formula that both the Orthodox and Western churches use to calculate Easter. So why do they have different dates?

The Orthodox church uses the older Julian calendar and the Western uses the modern Gregorian calendar. The Orthodox church uses astronomical equinox while the Western uses the fixed equinox. The Orthodox church uses paschal full moons for their calculations while the Western church uses ecclesiastical full moons for its Easter calculations.

Orthodox: Julian Calendar – less accurate
 Astronomical equinox – true, more accurate
 Paschal full moon – true, more accurate

Western: Gregorian Calendar – more accurate
 Fixed Equinox – calculated (March 21), less accurate
 Ecclesiastical Full Moon – calculated, less accurate

Must remember neither is associating Easter with the date of the resurrection!

So what is the significance of the full moon, the bunny and eggs? Well, as you might suspect they were all various pagan practices incorporated into Easter. Even today,

rabbits are associated with the idea of being able to reproduce rapidly. In ancient customs they were the symbol of fertility and the animal representations of the goddesses of fertility. Egyptian mythology associated rabbits, which came out to feed at night with the full moon. This association probably was because they were more readily observed in the light of a full moon. In both Egypt and Persia, eggs symbolized birth and fertility and colored eggs were exchanged during their spring festivals.

These myths seemed to combine in the myth of the Anglo-Saxon goddess Ostara, who while amusing some children, turned her pet bird into a rabbit that proceeded to lay brightly colored eggs which she gave to the children.

In ancient Europe, eggs of various colors were taken from the nests of different birds and used to make talismans. The search through the woods for eggs gradually evolved into the Easter egg hunt, while painted eggs eventually replaced wild birds' eggs and Easter baskets were used to resemble bird's nests.

There seems to be little to support the idea that the early settlers of this nation observed Easter in a particular fashion. It was not until after the civil war and a large number of German immigrants into this nation that the current "Easter Traditions" began.

CONCLUSION: The name "Easter", the date, the full moon, the Easter Bunny and the Easter Eggs are all pagan traditions that have nothing to do with the resurrection of our Lord and Savior.