

Easter is the most important festival of the year for most Christians and a holiday for many others. Read on to find out more about it.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. to mark
2. a triumph
3. a chick
4. pagan
5. fertility
6. holy
7. a procession
8. fasting

Definition

- a. the ability to produce new life (babies, plants, etc.)
- b. a baby bird
- c. to celebrate an important event
- d. belonging to a religion which existed before the main world religions
- e. a victory or success
- f. related to a religion or god
- g. eating no food for a period of time
- h. a group of people walking in a formal way as part of a ceremony

Easter

The meaning of Easter

Easter is a Christian festival which marks the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For many Christians, Easter is a celebration of the triumph of life over death, and a very important time of the year. Many non-Christians also have a holiday at this time, so it is a popular time to travel or spend with friends and family. We see lots of symbols of new life at Easter, especially eggs, chicks, flowers and rabbits. These symbols go back to ancient pagan traditions which celebrated fertility, rebirth and new growth after the long, winter months.

When it is celebrated

The dates of Easter change from year to year but it usually falls sometime between the end of March and the end of April. In Western Christianity, Easter Sunday is the first Sunday after the first full moon of spring, which starts on 21 March. The Eastern Orthodox churches, which use a different calendar, have a slightly different way of calculating Easter and usually celebrate Easter a little earlier or later.

Holy Week

The week before Easter is called Holy Week. The first day of Holy Week is Palm Sunday, which is the Sunday before Easter. Many Christians celebrate this as the day that Jesus entered Jerusalem and people threw down branches from palm trees on the road to welcome him. Four days later is Maundy Thursday, which marks the Last Supper, when Jesus ate bread and drank wine with his twelve disciples. The following day is Good Friday, which is significant for Christians as the day that Jesus was put to death on the cross. Many Christians believe that Jesus was killed and buried in a tomb on the Friday and that God raised him from the dead on the Sunday. So Easter Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus.

How Easter is celebrated

In many countries there are religious processions during Holy Week, and practising Christians attend special church services. On Palm Sunday, many churches bless palm branches and people put them on the ground during processions to mark the day that Jesus arrived in Jerusalem. The Last Supper on Maundy Thursday is celebrated in many Christian traditions in the form of the Communion, when believers share bread and wine. Good Friday is traditionally a day of fasting, reflection and sadness. A lot of church services start at midnight the night before Easter Sunday with the lighting of candles or, in Greece, fireworks. This represents the triumph of light over darkness. On Easter Sunday, churches are filled with flowers representing new life, and at home chocolate Easter eggs are given as presents.

Other Easter traditions

There are many different Easter traditions around the world. In some places, people eat lamb on Easter Sunday, but there are many other foods, such as hot cross buns – spiced, sweet bread buns made with raisins – that are traditional in the UK.

In some places in Eastern Europe, boys and girls throw water at each other, while in Corfu, Greece, there is a tradition of throwing pots and pans out of windows and from balconies, breaking them on the street. In the United States, a tradition of wearing new clothes at Easter has evolved into making Easter bonnets – fancy hats decorated with flowers, rabbits and other symbols of spring. For fans of crime fiction, Norway is the place to be at Easter, when it has become traditional to read crime novels and solve mysteries.

Eggs are a popular part of Easter celebrations. Traditionally, people paint chicken eggs and decorate them with bright colours to give as presents. Nowadays, chocolate eggs are more popular than the traditional kind, especially with children. They are often hidden around the house and garden so that children can find them in an Easter egg hunt.

Tasks

Task 1

Put the phrases in the correct group. There are two phrases in each group.

Communion	Fasting	Jesus entered Jerusalem
Light and flowers	The Last Supper	Jesus was raised from the dead
Palm branches	Jesus died	

Palm Sunday	Maundy Thursday
Good Friday	Easter Sunday

Task 2

Put the words in order to make sentences.

- Christian festival Easter the resurrection of is a which marks Jesus Christ.
- go ancient pagan to These symbols back traditions.
- as the day Many Christians that Jesus celebrate this entered Jerusalem.
- over the triumph represents This of light darkness.
- for fans of crime fiction the place Norway is to be at Easter.
- popular of Easter part Eggs are a celebrations.

Discussion

Do you celebrate Easter?

Answers

Preparation task

1. c
2. e
3. b
4. d
5. a
6. f
7. h
8. g

Task 1

1. Palm Sunday: Jesus entered Jerusalem, Palm branches
2. Maundy Thursday: The Last Supper, Communion
3. Good Friday: Jesus died, Fasting
4. Easter Sunday: Jesus was raised from the dead, Light and flowers

Task 2

1. Easter is a Christian festival which marks the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
2. These symbols go back to ancient pagan traditions.
3. Many Christians celebrate this as the day that Jesus entered Jerusalem.
4. This represents the triumph of light over darkness.
5. Norway is the place to be for fans of crime fiction at Easter.
6. Eggs are a popular part of Easter celebrations.