



## **I know that the eggs are a symbol of the new life offered by the Resurrection of Jesus, but where does the bunny fit in - and why does he deliver the eggs?**

A great question. Easter in America is very similar to Christmas in America. The time of our celebration of the birth of Christ coincides with ancient celebrations of the Winter Solstice which marks the beginning of longer and stronger sunshine. The time of our celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus also coincides with the ancient celebrations of the coming of Spring and the new life that it brings. Thus there are a lot of ancient pagan (nature-worship) rituals that get mixed with Christian aspects of both holidays. For example, scholars believe the name Easter is derived from Oestar, a goddess of Spring and renewal.

While the egg certainly is a fitting symbol of the Resurrection, the bunny aspect of Easter celebrations seems to have no real Christian connection. Here is what my research on both eggs and bunnies turned up:

### **The Easter Bunny**

The Easter bunny has its origin in pre-Christian fertility lore. The Hare and the Rabbit were the most fertile animals known and they served as symbols of the new life during the Spring season. The rabbit or hare was the symbol of fertility, new life and of the moon in ancient Egypt. It may have become an Easter symbol because the date for Easter is determined by the moon.

The bunny as an Easter symbol seems to have its origins in Germany, where it was first mentioned in German writings in the 1500s. The Easter bunny was introduced to American folklore by the German settlers who arrived in the Pennsylvania Dutch country during the 1700s. The arrival of the "Oschter Haws" was considered "childhood's greatest pleasure" next to a visit from Christ\_Kindel on Christmas Eve. The children believed that if they were good the "Oschter Haws" would lay a nest of colored eggs. The children would build their nest in a secluded place in the home, the barn or the garden. Boys would use their caps and girls their bonnets to make the nests. The use of elaborate Easter baskets would come later as the tradition of the Easter bunny spread through out the country.

### **Easter Eggs:**

The simple egg is perhaps the oldest and most universal symbol of rebirth and new life. The custom of offering Easter eggs, either chocolate or hard boiled and colored, dates back well beyond the early years of Christianity to the most ancient pagan traditions.

Egyptians and Persians used to dye eggs in spring colors and give them to friends as a symbol of renewed life long before Christ was born. The myths of several Eastern and middle Eastern cultures maintain that the earth itself was hatched from a giant egg.

Long before the egg became a symbol of the new life offered by the Resurrection, it was honored during many rite-of-Spring festivals. The Romans, Gauls, Chinese, Egyptians and Persians all cherished the egg as a symbol of the universe. In Pagan times the egg represented the rebirth of the earth. The long, hard winter was over; the earth burst forth and was reborn just as the egg miraculously burst forth with life. The egg, therefore, was believed to have special powers. It was buried under the foundations of buildings to ward off evil; pregnant young Roman women carried an egg on their persons to foretell the

sex of their unborn children; French brides stepped upon an egg before crossing the threshold of their new homes.

With the advent of Christianity the symbolism of the egg changed to represent, not nature's rebirth, but the rebirth of man. Christians embraced the egg symbol and likened it to the tomb from which Christ rose.

### **So What Does All This Mean for Us ?**

Quite simply it means that, just like at Christmas, we need to make sure our Easter celebrations emphasize the reason for our celebrating: Jesus Christ and his resurrection from the dead. It's great to celebrate the coming of Spring, but Spring lasts only a short time. The new life Jesus' Resurrection brings to believers lasts an eternal-lifetime! Easter provides us the opportunity to share the message with people who think it's just about bunnies and eggs.

Thanks for asking,  
Pastor David

**Send your questions to [pastor@livingwordlutheran.net](mailto:pastor@livingwordlutheran.net)**