



Why is Easter a month before Passover this year?

That's a really good question, because it was during the Passover that Jesus was crucified. (And, typically Easter does come after Passover - usually within a week. But this year Easter is on March 31, and Passover isn't celebrated until April 22.)

Just a bit of background: God told the Israelites to celebrate the Passover beginning on the evening of the 14th day of the first month of their year. Each month for the Israelites began with a New Moon. That meant the evening of the 14th would always be a Full Moon, so Passover always starts with a full moon.

Since the Passover date is set by a full moon, that means it falls on a different day of the week each year. Whereas Christians have always celebrated Jesus' resurrection on a day of the week, Sunday, rather than on a specific date of a month.

Initially, every Sunday was designed to be a mini celebration of Jesus rising from the grave. (And that's still the reason we gather for worship every Sunday.) Eventually, Christians got the idea to celebrate Jesus' resurrection also on a yearly basis. But there was some disagreement as to which specific Sunday to do it.

Way back in 325 AD a church-wide council held at Nicaea decided on a specific formula for determining the date Easter would be celebrated throughout Christendom. It was set to always occur the first Sunday after a full moon (just like the day Jesus rose was the first Sunday after a full moon.). The Easter date was set as the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox.

That means if the first full moon of Spring is the day after Spring begins, we have a very early Easter. If the first full moon of Spring falls four weeks after the day Spring begins we have a really late Easter.

Passover usually occurs sometime within the week prior to Easter due to both festivals keying off the full moon after the Spring Equinox - Passover starting with the full moon and Easter after the full moon. But this year the Passover occurs over 3 weeks after Easter. That's because folks who use a lunar calendar (where every month has 29+ days - same as the cycle of the moon) need to have leap month every so often in order to catch up. Whereas those who use a solar calendar only need a leap day every four years. 2024 is one of those years with an extra month, hence Passover occurs after Easter this year.

It can be a bit confusing, but the basic reason is that the Hebrew calendar is a lunar calendar based on the moon's revolution around the earth, and the calendar we follow (known as the Gregorian Calendar) is a solar calendar based on the earth's revolution around the sun.

But maybe the most important thing to remember isn't the date of Passover or the date of Easter. It's the fact that Jesus is the Passover Lamb who was sacrificed to save us from our sin, and rose back to life on Easter Sunday proving that God the Father did indeed accept Jesus' sacrifice as full payment for those sins! Please join us to celebrate both events!

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net