

Easter Symbols



Easter Candles

Easter candles are lit in churches to celebrate the resurrection of Lord Jesus. Christians associate Jesus with the light from candles, hailing Him as "the eternal light" showing Christians the way from death to life. The candlelight ushers in a world of hope and prosperity by driving away the gloom of darkness. Candles are lit during many Easter celebrations, especially the vigil and midnight services before Easter Sunday. Many churches extinguish candles on their altars on Good Friday to show that Jesus' light has gone out. In Roman Catholic churches, the special paschal candle is lit on Easter Sunday next to the main altar. The candle symbolizes Jesus' return to life. The candle is often lit during the next 40 days, until it is put out on Ascension Day. The Paschal candle is a special candle for Easter. These paschal candles comprise of engravings of cross and the Greek letters alpha and omega that signify that the Lord is omnipresent. The beeswax, out of which the Easter candle is prepared, represents the purity of Jesus Christ, its wick signifies humanity and the flame is indicative of the Jesus' divine nature.



Easter Gifts

People exchange gifts to express love and affection for their near and dear ones. Be it a special occasion or a festival, we take recourse to gifts to convey our feelings. But this seemingly simple task requires one to exert due discretion. While zeroing in on a particular gift, we should keep in mind the particular occasion and the intended recipient. Easter being a festival of merriment and gaiety, people exchange gifts to convey their wishes and blessings. Since Easter is unique for the assorted symbolism of Easter bunny and Easter eggs, one can incorporate these icons as Easter gift ideas. Gift galleries have cashed in on this popular trend by coming out with chocolate Easter eggs and Easter bunny dolls. In the days leading up to Easter, gift shops are inundated with a multitude of gift items ranging from flower bouquets to Easter gift baskets.



Easter Cross

The cross, the all-pervading icon of Christianity, is an integral element of all Christian festivals including Easter. The crucifix is a cross with an image of Jesus' body hanging from it and symbolizes the sacrifice Jesus made for the humanity. An empty cross—one without the figure of Christ crucified—reminds Christians of Jesus' victory over death and the new life and hope this victory brings to believers. The Christian perception of the cross as a sign of redemption stems from the belief that Jesus' Crucifixion played a central role in redeeming humanity from its sins. When Jesus was crucified, the cross became a symbol of suffering. Then with the resurrection of Christ, the Christians saw it as a symbol of Jesus' victory over death. During the first 300 years after Christ's death, Christians feared persecution by the hostile Roman government and rarely displayed the cross in public. In the 300's, the Romans began to tolerate Christianity, and crosses were widely displayed. In A.D. 325, Constantine at the Council of Nicaea issued a decree that the Cross is the official symbol of Christianity. On Good Friday, the cross is covered with black, a color for mourning for the death of Jesus. Before the Easter Sunday, the draping in black is removed and the cross is rather decorated with flowers to honor the Jesus' return to life



Easter Bunny

The Easter bunny is one of the most adorable Easter symbols. During Easter children eagerly wait for this furry benefactor to bring them colored eggs and gift baskets filled with chocolates. The legend of Easter bunny has given birth to popular games such as Easter egg hunt. During Easter gift galleries are swamped with cute stuffed bunny toys and confectionary shops do brisk business by selling chocolate bunny rabbit cookies and cakes. The origin of the Easter bunny can be traced to ancient pagan celebrations which regarded rabbits as symbols of fertility because these animals give birth to multiple offspring at a time. Since rabbits were fertility icons, these became symbols of the rising fertility of the earth at the Vernal Equinox. Ancient tribes celebrated the beginning of spring at the vernal equinox by blessing seeds for growth and placing colored eggs on an altar. Easter bunny became a part of modern day Easter celebration in Germany, where tales were told of an "Easter hare" who laid eggs for children to find. German immigrants to America -- particularly Pennsylvania -- brought the tradition with them and spread it to a wider public. They also baked cakes for Easter in the shape of hares, and may have pioneered the practice of making chocolate bunnies and eggs.



Easter Lily

Among the multitude of spring flowers, the Easter white lily is the traditional Easter flower and is considered the symbol of the resurrection of Christ. The large, pure white blooms of the Easter Lilies are symptomatic of the pure new life that comes through the Resurrection of Jesus. Today, on Easter morning, churches are bedecked with white lilies in remembrance of the loved ones, who passed away. The white Easter lily also symbolizes purity. Artists for centuries have portrayed the angel Gabriel coming to the Virgin Mary with a spray of lilies in his hand, to announce that she is to be the mother of the Christ child. Roman mythology associates the white lily with Juno, the queen of gods. It is said that when queen Juno was feeding her baby son Hercules, a portion of the milk fell on to the earth, leading to the blooming of gorgeous white lilies.

The lovely white Madonna lily was used for years as the Easter lily. It often failed to bloom in time for Easter, however, and so Bermuda lilies were substituted. They have six-part flowers (three petals and three sepals colored alike) and usually six stamens.

Bermuda lilies are called so because they were first found in Bermuda by Ms Thomas P Sargent in the 1880s. Since these lilies bloom naturally in springtime, she brought its bulbs in back home in Philadelphia. There, a nursery man, called William Harris, made it popular among other florists.



Hot Cross Buns

Hot cross buns stand out from other Easter delicacies for their religious flavor. A prominent Easter icon, hot cross bun is called so because of the icing cross on the top of the bun, which reminds people of the crucifixion of Jesus. Hot cross buns were first baked in England to be served as the traditional Good Friday breakfast. Nowadays, they are served throughout the Easter season. Like so many other Easter symbols, hot cross buns also owe their origin to ancient pagan traditions. They are not a truly Christian tradition, even though there is a Cross on the bun. Hot cross buns are regarded by many as the outgrowth of the ancient pagan sacramental cakes eaten by Anglo-Saxons in honor of their goddess "Eastore." Besides being culinary delights, hot cross buns are believed to be protecting people from evil spirits and having a magical power of curing. Which is why, in ancient times, people used to hang these buns on the kitchen ceilings. The popularity of hot cross buns has given birth to a popular song of the same name. Street vendors used to sing a song when they went around selling their hot cross buns. This song, "Hot Cross Buns", is now a favorite nursery rhyme for children.



Easter Lamb

Apart from being a traditional delicacy in the Easter dinner, the Easter lamb is also a part of religious symbolism. A prominent Easter symbol in central and eastern European countries, the Easter lamb represents Jesus and relates His death to that of the lamb sacrificed on the first Passover. Christians traditionally refer to Jesus as "the Lamb of God." The Easter lamb, draped with the flag of victory, may be seen in pictures and images in the homes of every central and eastern European family. Along with smoked ham, lamb has been an integral part of the Easter feast. In many homes, a lamb-shaped cake decorates the table. Roast lamb has been the main feature of the Pope's Easter dinner for many centuries. After the tenth century, in place of the whole lamb, smaller pieces of meat were used. In some Benedictine monasteries, however, even today whole lambs are still blessed with the ancient prayers. The ancient tradition of the Pasch lamb inspired among the Christians the use of lamb meat as a popular food at Easter time. Nowadays, however, little figures of a lamb made of butter, pastry, or sugar have been substituted for the meat, forming Easter table centerpieces.



Easter Eggs

Perhaps the most venerable symbol of Easter, Easter eggs have long been acknowledged as a symbol of continuing life and fertility since pre-Christian spring celebrations. Given as springtime gifts by the ancient Greeks, Persians, and Chinese at their spring festivals, the egg also appears in pagan mythology, where the Heaven and Earth were thought to have been formed from two halves of an egg. Eggs become a prominent Easter icon as they were perceived to be the symbol of Jesus' Resurrection. Even as early as the Middle Ages, eggs were colored to be given as gifts at Easter. Forbidden during the solemn fast of Lent, eggs were reintroduced on Easter Sunday, both as part of the feasting and as gifts for family, friends, and servants. Besides their religious connotations, Easter eggs have given rise to many exotic traditions and practices. The coloring of eggs is an established art, and eggs are often dyed, painted, and otherwise decorated. Various Easter games have imbibed the use of eggs: parents would hide eggs for children to find, and children would roll eggs down hills. These practices live on in Easter egg hunts and egg rolls. The most elaborate Easter egg traditions appear to have emerged in Eastern Europe. In Poland and Ukraine, eggs were often painted silver and gold. Pysanky eggs were created by carefully applying wax in patterns to an egg. The egg was then dyed, wax would be reapplied in spots to preserve that color, and the egg was boiled again in other shades. The result was a multi-color striped or patterned egg.