

Finding fun and faith at Easter

Ideas to connect the secular with the sacred

While Easter is central to the Christian calendar, its status among non-churchgoers is less clear. For many it is a welcome four-day weekend after the long winter months. For others it is a fantastic opportunity to eat your weight in chocolate, cake and biscuits. And for some, especially those with children, it is marked by various creative efforts – decorating eggs, creating an Easter tree (pictured), or making daffodils from egg boxes. What does seem to be universal is the collective sigh of relief that winter is over, delight that our gardens are sprouting patches of colour, and the evenings are brighter. While Jesus hardly features outside the church gates, the themes of spring, food, and time together certainly seem to be the main characteristic of most people's Easter stories.

Springtime

For most people the symbols of spring have usurped the cross. Chicks, daffodils, lambs and rabbits are ubiquitously dotted around on greetings cards and in shop windows. The Easter Bunny often has pride of place but has very little to do with the story of Christ. The bunny or hare is a symbol of a pagan god of springtime named Eostre (see *Further resources*), and was taken on by some German Lutherans in a fable about a rabbit judging small children and handing out gifts to those deemed worthy.

Of course these natural images do point us to a vital component of the Easter story – new life. There aren't many among us who don't marvel at the miracle of new life in some form, whether it be a flower, a chick or a baby. And this springtime burst of energy also inspires all sorts of creative endeavours. Easter bonnets, a tail end of an old church tradition of wearing new clothes at Easter, are paraded at school, pictures of bunnies and chicks are brought home, and cakes are baked and decorated. Springtime and its associated art fairs and craft days is a wonderful time to reflect that God not only created the world, but made us creative human beings, too.

The power of food

Food brings people together and can transform a meal table into a sacred place. In his final week on earth, Jesus took the time to sit and eat an unhurried meal with his friends. By sharing food with family, friends or strangers – whether it be roast lamb or an Easter egg – you can build something precious and long-lasting. Many of the pivotal moments of Holy Week can be introduced with a tasty morsel of food.

Spending time together

As with all holidays, time spent with family and friends is a wonderful thing. Children are off from school, many workplaces close down and people are actively encouraged by every supermarket around to sit and eat together. As a nation our

attention is drawn to each other and we should take full advantage of this focus on relationships. Why not take this opportunity to organise some special events or community activities that encourage families to have fun together, different generations to talk to each other, and neighbours to get to know each other better and discover or reconnect with the Easter story?

Reaching out to your local community



Easter trail

Fill eggs with symbols of the Easter story

- Pick a morning in the Easter holidays to hold your event and hand out some egg hunt flyers to local children beforehand. Make it free and open to all and prepare for people to just turn up and join in.
- Hide various symbols of the Easter story around the church or an area outside, e.g. a leaf for Palm Sunday, a fork (from fish and chip shops) for the Last Supper, a small cross made from twigs for Good Friday, a stone for the tomb, and a large seed, e.g. bean, for Jesus' resurrection.
- Wherever you do the hunt, place a bowl full of each item at various points around your trail. Make the starting point clear, give each child a plastic egg (one you can fill) and some directions and make sure they return for a final prize once they have collected all the items.
- In exchange for the items, each child could receive a chocolate egg and a book explaining the Easter story, e.g. *The Easter Story* by Juliet David.
- Alternatively, ask local shopkeepers to join you in creating a small Easter trail around your locality. Give participants a list of items to collect and the shops involved.

Gruesome Good Friday

Hammer nails into wood to create a cross

- If possible, do this outside to attract passers-by. Beforehand, on a large thick piece of wood, mark the outline of a cross in soft pencil. Provide hammers and nails and invite people to hammer in a nail along the outline to create the shape of a cross. When it is finished, wind red wool around the nails to complete a symbol of Jesus' sacrifice.

Egg paint bombs

Have fun making a messy piece of art



- This is definitely an outdoor activity and could be done at a community service on Good Friday, at a gathering following a walk of witness, or on Easter Saturday. It is especially popular with children up to 14 and will certainly draw passers-by in.
- A few weeks before the event, recruit some church members to collect as many empty eggshell halves as possible and rinse them out. On a large piece of lining paper or an old sheet, mark the outline of a cross with masking tape.
- On the day, pin the paper to a board or hang the sheet up with something firm behind it. Cover the ground in front with plastic sheeting or an old cloth. Have a range of ready mixed washable poster paint available, and let people choose a colour and then fill an egg shell half about a third full of paint. Invite them to throw the paint bomb at the cross. You can reuse the shells. Allow the paint to dry, then peel off the masking tape to unveil your community artwork!



Seasonal cooking

Make edible treats with a message

- Make hot cross buns (see *Further resources*) with an outreach group on Good Friday. The iconic symbol is made from a paste of flour and water.
- Decorate a simnel cake (see *Further resources*), explaining that its 11 marzipan balls represent the eleven faithful disciples (minus Judas).
- Ice biscuits with Easter messages or use excess chocolate and mini eggs to make a variation on an old favourite: Easter egg rocky road (see *Further resources*).
- If you're feeling braver in the kitchen, cook an Easter feast of roast lamb for friends and neighbours.

Food of suffering and celebration

Taste Easter food specialities from around the world

- Find out about traditional Easter foods from other countries (see *Further resources*) and make some for people to try at a local market stall or a community fun day, e.g. Greek tsourekhi is a brioche-like bread decorated with hard-boiled eggs dyed red to symbolize the blood of Christ; Mexican capirotada is a spiced bread pudding filled with raisins, cinnamon and cloves as symbols of Christ's suffering; and Orthodox kulich cakes are baked in tall tins, decorated with white icing and colourful sprinkles or flowers, and blessed after the Easter service.

Give-away gifts

Offer free gifts as symbols of encouragement and new life

- Encourage members of your congregation to sponsor some chocolate eggs or bunches of flowers. Give these away to passers-by or shopkeepers in your locality during Holy Week, perhaps with a Bible verse or invitation to a church service or event attached. Those who sponsored the eggs/flowers could be encouraged to pray for the people who will receive them.

Final thoughts

In this post-Christendom world, we have moved away from Christ as the centre of the Easter season. But by helping people to discover the root of many of their secular traditions, and sharing the Holy Week and Easter journey with them in memorable ways, perhaps we can reclaim Easter for Christ and help our communities to find new meaning in the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

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FURTHER RESOURCES

For information on Eostre, see: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eostre

Recipes for hot cross buns and Easter egg rocky road are from: www.bbcgoodfood.com

Recipe for a simnel cake is from: www.bbc.co.uk/food

Read more about Easter food specialities at:

www.telegraph.co.uk/food-and-drink/features/traditional-easter-foods-from-around-the-world