

**What Does Easter Mean to You?**  
**Sermon preached on April 4, 2021**  
**EASTER SUNDAY**

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING: John 20:11-18

*Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.*

*They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'*

*She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.'*

*When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.*

*Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?'*

*Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'*

*Jesus said to her, 'Mary!'*

*She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher).*

*Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'*

*Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord!'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.*

Holy Wisdom, Holy Word! Thanks be to God!

**CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!** Isn't Easter just the happiest of all the holidays? No pressure to do a lot of shopping for presents. We get to eat chocolate bunnies and peeps. (3 Billion US dollars will be spent on Easter candy this year.) And we have an excuse to get a new

Easter outfit to wear to church. Sadly, that is the extent of what Easter means to the many people in the Western world.

**WHAT HAPPENED?** How did it go from a miracle morning to an Easter bunny egg hunting day? IT is always good to know where our holiday traditions come from and why we do what we do.. Many of the details can be found on [history.com](http://history.com) (which is the website for the History channel on TV). You might be surprised to learn that the symbols of the easter bunny and easter eggs pre-date the Christian Easter holiday. Bunnies and eggs symbolize Spring, Fertility and new birth. One origin of the word Easter means "Goddess of Spring". Another Latin origin of the word means "new dawn".

*"Since pre-historic times, people have celebrated the equinoxes and the solstices as sacred times." According to University of Sydney Professor Carole Cusack, "The spring equinox is a day where the amount of dark and the amount of daylight is exactly identical, so you can tell that you're emerging from winter because the daylight and the dark have come back into balance. Agrarian people (which includes most of our ancestors) mapped their lives according to the patterns of nature." So the Goddess of Spring was celebrated with other symbols from nature to promote good tidings for their planting and harvesting.*

That reminds me, I was going to tell you a joke about an Easter egg. But then I decided it's not all it's cracked up to be. Here's one for your Easter dinner, — What do you call a line of rabbits jumping backwards? A receding hare line! Just one more, What do you call a rabbit with fleas? Bugs Bunny!

As all of us know, the Easter season became associated with the resurrection of Jesus Christ when the early church was formed. Professor Cusack, who studies the merger between pagan and Christian traditions, said: *"In the first couple of centuries after Jesus's life, feast days in the new Christian church were attached to the same old pagan spring festivals," "Spring festivals with the theme of new life and a celebration of the end of the cold of winter became connected explicitly to Jesus having conquered death by being resurrected after the crucifixion."*

In nature, we see so many signs of resurrection in the Springtime. The egg is still used to symbolize new birth and the caterpillar transforming into a butterfly is often used as a visual example of resurrection. But the idea of an Easter bunny didn't develop until 1722. The first association of the rabbit with Easter, was a mention of the "Easter hare" in a book by German professor of medicine Georg Franck published in 1722.

An interesting side note is that the first edible Easter bunny was not chocolate. It was a sugared pastry made in Germany in the 19th century. That seems weird, doesn't it?

So what does all of this have to do with our Easter celebration today?

**What makes the Easter season meaningful is the meaning YOU put into it.** The Easter season is also called Eastertide. It lasts 50 days from today until the day of Pentecost when the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples. You have a choice. You can make Easter just a Spring festival, or a candy celebration. Or — you can use this day and this Eastertide season as a time to focus on your faith.

Ask yourself, what do I really believe about Jesus and how does my faith in him affect my daily life? Does the resurrection of Jesus from the dead give me hope that God will be with me when I die? Does that reassurance of God not abandoning us in life or in death help me cope when my friends and family also die? Does the life of Jesus and the way he loved and healed people inspire me to love myself better and to help others? How does the fact that Jesus protested the oppression of the poor and the vulnerable inspire me to advocate for them, too?

**There is a kind of peace that comes from faith in Jesus during the Easter season.** The kind of peace that Eastertide can give does not put you in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. It is the kind of peace where you can be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart trusting that all will be well no matter what happens. Jesus wants to have a personal relationship with you like the one he had with Mary Magdalene. She knew Jesus so well that even though she didn't recognize him physically after he had risen, she knew his voice when he said her name.

**GOD KNOWS YOU BY NAME.** God created you and you are a beloved child of God. Like most parents God craves a close relationship with each of one of you. God loves so deeply, he would sacrifice his life for you. There is no greater love than the love God has for you. Your cosmic destiny is with God, whether you are aware of her presence or not. Life is much more peaceful when you seek a relationship with God rather than ignore God's presence in the world. Science has proven that your health is better when you practice your faith in God. And your soul is less restless when you understand that your purpose in life is to make the world a better place on behalf of God.

**Here at the Church of the Roses we can help you get involved with making the world a better place.** We hosted the Dogwood Rescue fundraiser yesterday in our parking lot. That is one way you can make the world a better place. Rescue an animal or support people who do. We reach out with nurturing love to all in our community and beyond in various ways. There is nothing wrong with celebrating Easter with eggs and bunnies and new clothes and special

food. But we would not be here together today if Jesus Christ had not died on the cross and left the tomb empty on Easter morning 1988 years ago.

Just ponder that fact for a moment: Christianity spread all the way from Jerusalem to Santa Rosa and all around the world. It all started with a little baby's birth in a manger in Bethlehem. And still a large portion of the world celebrates Easter 1988 years later. We celebrate because Easter hope means so much to us. That in itself is a miracle!

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!