

The Real Meaning of Easter



The best way to understand the real meaning of Easter would be from Jesus. The real meaning is a three word answer ... **the new covenant**.

The New Covenant

Jesus had come in town for the Passover celebration and was getting ready to be betrayed by one of the disciples, publicly humiliated and mocked, beaten beyond recognition, and hung on a cross to die, when he made his special request for his followers to remember that He gave his body for us and poured out his blood as a sacrifice for us. The heart of Easter lies in his words, "the new covenant between God and his people."

In Luke 22 we get a picture of the night before his death:

When the time came, Jesus and the apostles sat down together at the table. Jesus said, "I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before my suffering begins. For I tell you now that I won't eat this meal again until its meaning is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God." Then he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. Then he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves. For I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come." He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me." After supper he took another cup of wine and said, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you. Luke 22:14-20

Passover and the New Covenant

Since the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden, people were destined to be separated from God because of their sin. God's Spirit rested on the Patriarchs of our faith, but was not poured out on the masses. The Holy of Holies was the innermost and most sacred part of the tabernacle and ordinary people of faith would never get to have access to this place where God's Presence could be found. We were hopeless in our sins and distanced from God.

People of faith offered up animal sacrifices according to the laws given to Moses to ask God to forgive their sins and have mercy on them. Bulls, goats, and lambs each had their significance. But the lamb had special meaning because it was lamb's blood the Israelites painted on their doorposts to avoid death on the night of Passover. (Exodus 12:11-13)

God gave Moses and Aaron specific instructions on how to honor God with annual Passover celebrations. Lamb is the pinnacle of the Passover meal. The lambs were to be spotless and even lived with the families for several days before they were sacrificed, adding to the understanding that the ultimate sacrifice was close to the hearts of those whose sins were atoned for. All of the many interesting details of celebrating Passover have significant meaning that point to the ultimate Passover lamb – Jesus Christ – a sinless God-man who lived among the people for a season.

What is the real meaning of Easter? In John 1:29, as he sees Jesus approaching, John the Baptist announces to the crowd around him, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

He knew that Jesus was the son of God, the long awaited Messiah, the one whom God's prophets had promised to save mankind from their sins and to give them a deep heartfelt relationship with God the Father. The new covenant would be an everlasting covenant. (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Jeremiah 32:39-42, Isaiah 55:3) Jesus, our sacrificial lamb, our Savior, our God, our Redeemer – he laid down his life as our sacrificial lamb to pay for our sins. When he rose from the dead three

days later, he gave victory over eternal separation from God (death) to all who put their faith and trust in him. That is the new covenant – everlasting life spent with God through faith in all that Jesus Christ has done and continues to do.

Bible Verses

All who believe in the Son of God know in their hearts that this testimony is true. Those who don't believe this are actually calling God a liar because they don't believe what God has testified about his Son. And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life. (1 John 5:10-12, NLT)

"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3b-4, KJV)

"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9, NLT)

Prayer

Father God, there is sometimes controversy about how, when, and what to call the remembrance of the greatest day in history – the day Jesus Christ, your beloved son, rose from the dead and brought the gift of your forgiveness and eternal life to all who would like to receive it – the new covenant. Please pour out your Holy Spirit on all who believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and put us on our knees before you with thankful hearts for your great love for us. You, oh God, have given us victory over sin and death, and the promise of never leaving us or forsaking us for eternity. Help us to be the body of Christ, the church, united in awe of how you saved our unworthy souls ... your body and your blood as a sacrifice for us. Help us to bring this message to all who will listen. Help us to love like you love. Thank you forever! Amen.

What the Jewish Passover and the Christian Easter have in common

Not Christmas, but Easter is the highest festival of Christianity. But how is the date of Easter actually calculated? Why do the Jewish Passover and Easter take place at around the same time? And why exactly then does Orthodox Christendom always leave a common date for Easter? A stroll through the intricate history of the Easter calendar.

As “Christmas Christianity” the Munich Protestant theologian and journalist Matthias Morgenroth has aptly described how in Germany and other western secular countries “the current shape of the Christian religion is revealed”. But that for Protestants in truth Good Friday and for Catholics Easter Sunday is the highest church holiday – this rumour persists to this day. It is true that the Easter cycle beginning with Maundy Thursday is the real high point in the Christian festive circle.

Whether Danish (Påske), Turkish (Paskalya), French (Pâques), Italian (Pasqua), Dutch (Pasen) or Finnish (Pääsiäinen) – most European languages still carry the memory of the Jewish Passover or Passover celebration within them. The [German “Easter”](#) we probably have to owe to missionary Iro-Scottish monks. As in the English “Easter”, the word contains either an old Germanic word for dawn (which could be related to Eos, the Greek goddess) or the name of an Anglo-Saxon goddess of light (“Ostara”).

Light symbolism, then, but nothing certain is known – just as

it is not certain why Maundy Thursday is called what it is called. That its “green” is supposed to come from the Grienen or Greinen der Büsser is not very plausible, since the day had already been a day of church joy since the 4th century, on which the previously excommunicated were admitted to Communion again after repentance and forgiveness.

Crucifixion on a holiday?

If the roots of Easter lie in the feast of Passover – why do Christians and Jews rarely celebrate at the same time? Rarely is it the case that – as was last seen in 2019 – the eve of Passover (the 14th Nisan or Erew Passover) coincides with Good Friday – just as the evangelist John describes it.

Pesach reminds of the Exodus from Egypt, the liberation of Israel from Egyptian slavery. After the biblical institution (Exodus 12, 1-27), the feast is celebrated in the Jewish spring month of Nisan, which in biblical times was considered the first month of the year. Today, the Jewish year begins in autumn with the Tishri (always 163 days after the first day of the Passover feast), because this is the month in which mankind was created, according to Jewish understanding: Almost parallel to Easter 2020, Jews celebrate the Passover in the year 5780 after the creation of the world. On April 8th (14th Nisan) the feast days begin with the “Erew Pessach”, the eve of the Pessach, and the traditional Seder meal, which is celebrated in the family.

Unlike our solar calendar, in which the months are only a vague reminder of the lunar cycles, the Jewish calendar as a “lunisolar calendar” (or “bound lunar calendar”) follows the lunar months very precisely. At the same time, it also follows the seasons, i.e. the solar year.

Because twelve lunar months correspond on average to only 354.37 days, but a solar year lasts 365.24 days on average, the Jewish calendar must regularly insert leap months so that

the seasons and the months assigned to them do not fall apart. For when spring begins depends on the sun, which on a day between March 19 and 21 shines for as long as it is night. This equinox marks the beginning of spring.

This also makes it clear that the [spring full moon](#) – and thus Passover – can fall on any day of the week. At the Council of Nicaea in the year 325, however, Christianity decided on a dispute about the date of Easter that has been going on since the time of the Original Christians, and determined that Easter is to be celebrated on a Sunday.

Graphic overview of the date of Easter in John and the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, Luke).

Crucifixion on a major Jewish holiday? The evangelists present the date of Jesus' crucifixion in different ways. However, the gospels agree on the weekdays of Easter: crucifixion on the day before the Sabbath ("Friday"), burial rest on the Sabbath, resurrection on the following day ("Sunday"). How the evangelist John dates the Easter event is considered historically more likely. The 14th Nisan (or Erew Pessach) and Good Friday fell on a common date last in the year 2019.

The tradition of the Gospel writings about the exact date of Jesus' death is contradictory. The synoptists – the evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke – understand the Lord's Supper as a ritual banquet on the eve of Pesach – that is, on the 14th of Nisan. The crucifixion would accordingly have taken place on the afternoon of the main Jewish holiday of Passover (15 Nisan) – which is regarded as rather improbable.

More plausible are the statements of John, who drops the Passover feast in the year of Jesus' death on a Sabbath. Thus the last meal of Jesus with his disciples would not have been a Pessach-Sedermahl, but an execution could have taken place the day before the feast. Modern historians therefore favor the statements of John.

Passover: From Computus to Computer

Actually, since Nicaea, it seems quite simple to determine the date of Easter: It is simply the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox. However, if you want to calculate the date of Easter in advance, there are highly complex difficulties – at least without a computer. Before mathematics became a free science, in the Middle Ages it worked almost exclusively on the “Computus paschalis”, the calculation of the date of Easter. It was only in 1800 that the mathematical genius Carl Friedrich Gauss (1777-1855) succeeded in packing the problem into a complex but clear set of algebraic formulae.

Strictly speaking, these are two different sets of formulas that Gauss had to develop. For as if the matter was not already difficult enough, since the calendar reform of Pope Gregory there have been two different Easter dates in Christendom, because the Orthodox churches (except in Finland) used the Julian calendar to calculate the date of Easter. The Orthodox churches refer to the Jewish Passover in their determination of dates – but in a negative way, as the Council of Nicaea wanted it: Easter must always take place after the Jewish Passover.

Like the Latin churches of the West, to celebrate Easter exactly when the Jews also celebrate Passover (as was the case this year) – this is therefore out of the question in the Orthodox churches. In extreme cases, therefore, it may even be that the Orthodox celebrate five weeks later than the churches of the West. Joint Easter dates like in 2017 are possible, but the exception.

A new Council that would help to establish a common date for Easter for all of Christendom is not in sight. In 2020 the Orthodox will celebrate in the week after us – when the Jewish Passover period is already over.



Why does the Queen hand out money on Maundy Thursday?



[The Queen](#) has attended a special service at Leicester Cathedral in celebration of Maundy Thursday. Her Majesty, accompanied by **Prince Philip**, observed the historical tradition of handing out Maundy Money to a group of 91 men and 91 women for the local community. But what is the tradition of Maundy Thursday, and why do people receive special coins? Maundy Thursday always takes place on the Thursday before Easter Sunday – the day on which Christians celebrate Jesus’ Last Supper. The Queen marks it by giving out special silver coins, known as ‘Maundy Money’ to local pensioners.

The number of recipients reflects the monarch’s age, and she travels to a different cathedral or abbey nearly every year to distribute the coins. The people who are chosen to receive the money have been recommended by clergy or ministers in recognition for the services to the church or local community. Each recipient receives two purses – one red, and one white. This year, the red purse contained a £5 coin, commemorating the Centenary of the House of Windsor, and a 50p coin

commemorating Sir Isaac Newton. The white purse held uniquely minted money in one, two, three and four penny pieces, which equals 91 pence. While the money is legal tender, recipients usually prefer to hold on to the coins as a souvenir.

According to the [Royal Mint](#), the custom of members of the royal family taking part in Maundy services dates back as early as the 13th century, when they gave out gifts and money, and even took part in foot-washing ceremonies to symbolise Jesus' display of humility when he washed the feet of his disciples.

"Henry IV began the practice of relating the number of recipients of gifts to the sovereign's age, and as it became the custom of the sovereign to perform the ceremony, the event became known as the Royal Maundy," the website explains. "In the eighteenth century the act of washing the feet of the poor was discontinued and in the nineteenth century money allowances were substituted for the various gifts of food and clothing."

"Maundy Money as such started in the reign of Charles II with an undated issue of hammered coins in 1662. The coins were a four penny, three penny, two penny and one penny piece but it was not until 1670 that a dated set of all four coins appeared. Prior to this, ordinary coinage was used for Maundy gifts, silver pennies alone being used by the Tudors and Stuarts for the ceremony."





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