

# History of Easter Traditions

## Did you know...

Easter originated as a Pagan tradition, celebrated by the Angles because in honor of their goddess of birth and springtime – Eostre (also known as Ostara or Ostre).

During the second century, when Christian missionaries were attempting to convert the population to Christianity, many Pagans who converted to Christianity still refused to give up their traditional religious celebrations. "Easter" began to be celebrated as a Christian holiday, in order to allow former Pagans to celebrate Easter without being blasphemous. It became a hybrid celebration of both the Pagan Eostre and the Christian observance of the Resurrection of Christ.

## Modern Easter traditions....

Most Easter traditions originated from the Pagan festival of Eostre. For example, the fertility goddess Eostre was associated with a sacred earth animal – the rabbit. The tradition of the Easter Bunny may have started in Germany where the goddess Eostre was known as Ostara. As one story goes, Ostara arrived late one Spring, and many animals had been frozen by the snow. She raised a small bird whose wings had been frozen, and she transformed him into a white rabbit so he could flourish and survive the winter. However, she allowed the bird the ability to lay eggs one day a year. And every year during the Eostre or Ostara Festival the women here would lay colorful eggs and give them out to the children.

Eggs have been longtime symbols of rebirth and fertility, even as far back as ancient Greece and Rome. During the Festival of Eostre it was customary to exchange colored eggs with one's neighbors. Colored and decorated eggs were given as a token of good fortune and wishes for a prosperous year. According to some, the tradition of Easter egg hunts began during the time of Christianity in Europe. Since egg giving was a Pagan tradition, some people were persecuted because of it, so people began hiding eggs instead of giving them as gifts, and soon it became a game for children to hunt for the hidden eggs.

## Key words are:

**Blasphemous** – A violation against God or other sacred things

**Hybrid** – A mix of two different things

**Fertility** – Ability to produce young

**Persecuted** – Harassed or harmed, especially due to one's race or beliefs

**Quarantine**

Why do you think it was important for the early Christians to hold on to their old celebrations and traditions despite persecution?

In what other ways can the egg be meaningful within the theme of Easter?



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