

### **Why do we Celebrate Easter?**

Easter is an ancient holiday that is celebrated in many countries. For Christians, it is the commemoration of the death and rebirth of Jesus Christ. However, Easter has deep roots and traditions that go back well before Christianity (which is 2000 years old).

The word Easter comes from Eostre, the ancient Germanic goddess of spring (popular from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC). Eostre found a colorful bird that was too injured to be able to fly again, so she turned it into a rabbit. Amazingly, the rabbit kept the ability to lay eggs. To say thank you, the rabbit gave Eostre a basket of her colorful eggs as a gift. In time, followers of Eostre honored spring with gifts of colorful bird eggs. This tradition spread throughout Europe and did not change until the mid 1800's when European manufacturers began to produce chocolate eggs. The chocolate was very popular and the custom evolved, so that today it is common to give baskets of chocolate Easter eggs. Migrants to the United States, Australia and other countries brought the folk tale and tradition with them.

If you look even further back than the legend of Eostre, you can find plenty evidence of ancient cultures decorating and giving eggs in spring. For more than 3000 years, the Chinese have been painting eggs red for spring festivals, the Zoroastrians (Middle East - 2500 years ago) offered colored eggs on their 'New Year's Eve' which is at the start of spring, and the Druids (Western Europe - 4000 years ago) used them in ceremonies held on the spring equinox (same day and night are of equal length). Incredibly, a large mass of 50,000 year old ostrich egg shells found at Oudjaja in South Africa had detailed patterned scratched onto them.

### **Answer the following questions in full sentences.**

1. How old is Christianity?
2. What does the word Easter come from?
3. Why did Eostre turn the bird into a rabbit?
4. What did the rabbit give to the Germanic goddess of spring?
5. What did Europeans begin to produce chocolate eggs?
6. Who brought the tradition of the Easter Bunny to the U.S.A?
7. How long have the Chinese been painting eggs red to celebrate spring?
8. What did the Zoroastrians give colored eggs?
9. At what time of year did the Druids hold their spring ceremonies?
10. How old were the decorated eggs found in South Africa?
11. What does your family do every Easter?
12. Decorate the eggs below.

