

EASTER WITH MEANING



The nomenclature Easter developed from the term *Ēastre*, the name of a Germanic goddess. The *Feast of Ēastre* was celebrated at the spring equinox. *Ēastre* is also a cognate of the Old High German *ōstarūn* (Easter in modern German is *Ostern*) and the Lithuanian *aušrà*, dawn. This connection leads us to the conclusion that Old English *Ēastre* has its ultimate origin in *east*, the indication being that it was the original reference to *dawn*. The corresponding Roman goddess was *Aurora* and the corresponding Greek goddess was *Ēos*. The Indo-European word root is **awes-**, meaning *to shine*.²

The institution of the *Eastran* festival that commemorates the resurrection of Christ appears in the English speaking culture in approximately the year 1103. This corresponds to the Jewish Passover, the festival celebrating the freedom of the Israelites from captivity and slavery in Egypt. The name Easter (Middle English *Esterne*, *Ester* was applied to both celebrations sometime before the year 1387. We find the use of the term *Ēastre* already before 899 in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of*

¹<http://t1.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcTIQvNOhvU67nkw6xrggaeEyAZuBvg53uDV2Kct5QHShiy7Zfuu>

² Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Francke Verlag, Tübingen and Basel: 2005, entry *awes-*, pp. 86-87.

England that was translated by Alfred the Great (849-899, king of Wessex from 871), or at least under his direction.

Easter, like many holidays is a synthesis of the Christian religion and pagan ritual. It is easily understood that Easter celebrates the renewal of life: flowers bloom, birds return from their winter retreats, animals come out from their winter hibernations, the leaves on trees begin to bud. Often these happenings were associated with fertility symbols: eggs, chickens, rabbits, and even flowers like daffodils. Furthermore, the spring equinox is the time of *sol invictus* when the sun shows its supremacy by conquering the darkness of the night because there are more daylight hours than there are hours of darkness. The symbolism of this act of nature is that just as the sun conquers the darkness of night, the Son of God conquers the darkness of death. Once Jesus Christ arose from the dead, human beings were born again through His fertility of dying for sinners.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ contains a most remarkable symbolism. The cross is the most enduring and the richest of symbols. As the emblem of the Christian faith, it is at one-and-the-same time the universal presentation of the cosmos created by God the Father and the Tree of Life. In the former two straight lines intersect to make the four directions of the cosmos visible. In the latter, the vertical axis of the cross symbolizes the ascensional aspect of life in heaven, and the horizontal axis symbolizes earthly life. Thus, we see the duality of spiritual life and earthly life and the union of both through Christ's crucifixion.

In Old Egypt the *ankh* cross with a loop at the top, symbolized immortality. It is the symbol of the Coptic Church.

The Romans used the cross as a brutal instrument for the execution of non-Roman citizens of the Empire who were foreign political revolutionaries, plain criminals, pirates, and disobedient slaves. After the crucifixion of Christ, the cross became a dominant Christian symbol because it was able to replace the older pagan rituals with a new meaning: redemption through the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Nowadays the Cross of Easter, regardless of its geometrical form, reminds us of the ultimate love that God through Jesus Christ shows humanity.



The Resurrection of Jesus by Bernhard Plockhorst³



The Good Shepherd by Bernhard Plockhorst⁴

³http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/97/Victory_over_the_Grave.jpg/225px-Victory_over_the_Grave.jpg.

Bernhard Plockhorst, (March 2, 1825 – May 18, 1907) was a German painter and graphic artist.

⁴http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a7/Bernhard_Plockhorst_-_Good_Shepherd.jpg/220px-Bernhard_Plockhorst_-_Good_Shepherd.jpg.



The Guardian Angel by Bernhard Plockhorst⁵

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16.

Have a meaningful Easter!

Frederick William Dame

Patriotic, Steadfast, and True

April 5, 2012.

⁵ http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/1/1e/Bernhard_Plockhorst_-_Schutzengel.jpg/220px-Bernhard_Plockhorst_-_Schutzengel.jpg.