

Is it true that Easter is a pagan festival stolen by Christians?

Possibly. One ancient writer says that when the Anglo-Saxons became Christians, they kept their spring equinox festival and turned it into a Christian celebration. But other experts think it's more likely that 'Easter' comes from an old Germanic word meaning 'dawn'—as in, the dawn of new life. Those who say it's just a pagan festival changed by Christians should remember that, if it is, it was ex-pagans who made the change because *they* had changed. And what had changed them was the story of the first Easter.



Does Easter mean Christianity is a death cult? After all, the symbol of Easter is a cross—an execution implement.

That's about half true. Death matters, if only because none of us can avoid it. We say someone has 'passed away' because we're uncomfortable with the word 'death'. But we need to get real. Today you are 24 hours closer to your death than you were yesterday. And Christianity is more than a death cult—you could call it a 'Surviving Death Cult'. Interested in surviving death? And surviving it well? Read on.



Why does the date of Easter change every year?

The historical records say that Jesus died at the time of the Jewish festival of Passover. Passover falls on the 15th day of the month of Nissan in the ancient Jewish calendar, which is based on lunar months. That means the date of Easter is computed each year through a calculation known as *computus* (Latin for 'computation'). Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after 21 March (a fixed approximation of the March equinox). Sound complicated? It just means that 2,000 years ago the Jewish authorities used a calendar based on the solar year plus the phases of the moon. And each Easter, so do we!

Why is it called 'Good Friday'? If Jesus was executed and took hours to die painfully, how can that be good?

Imagine a soldier who succeeds in rescuing captives from terrorists, but dies himself during the rescue. Would you call that a good death? Jesus was God's rescue mission to Planet Earth. Jesus died rescuing us from death, judgement and punishment. Would you call that a good death? Because he died, you can survive death well. He died your death, suffered your punishment and purchased your forgiveness. The Bible says that Jesus "suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18). But unlike the soldier who rescued the captives, Jesus came back from the dead. Jesus has survived death and opened the (one and only) door to eternal life. That door is labelled 'Forgiveness'—and that door is actually a person: Jesus Christ himself. That makes it a very Good Friday!



What about Easter hat parades? Why do kids make funny hats at Easter?

This hat business seems to be an old European tradition. In the northern hemisphere, Easter generally marks the move into spring, and that usually means swapping winter clothes for lighter, fresher outfits. In the past women often wore hats to church, and Easter gave them the opportunity to wear the first non-winter hat of the year. This tied in perfectly with the celebration of new life that Easter represents. Surviving death—and surviving it well—is worth celebrating. And you can celebrate any way you want—with or without a fancy hat!

Why do we celebrate Easter with eggs?

Eggs are where new life comes from. It's like that old question: which came first, the chicken or the egg? Chickens come out of eggs, and grow up to lay more eggs, which in turn become more chickens. It's a steady flow of new life. And that makes eggs a suitable symbol of the new spiritual life—eternal life—that comes from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.



All this stuff about Jesus and the first Easter is just a myth, isn't it? Like Robin Hood?

We really can know the key facts of history. Just ask the history department in any university. Archaeologists and historians know how to dig up the facts. And they've done it. They have identified the Christian documents about Jesus as being early and reliable. They have found references to Jesus in the works of non-Christian ancient writers (such as Josephus, Tacitus and Suetonius). And those early Christian documents (found in the New Testament part of the Bible) fit perfectly with other, secular records of life in the first century. One of those early biographers of Jesus promised that he had written his report only after having "carefully investigated everything from the beginning" (Luke 1:3). The real experts who study this stuff are as confident of the existence of Jesus as they are of the existence of Julius Caesar. You can't escape it: Easter is history!



Dead people stay dead. Is there evidence I can see with my own eyes that Jesus came back from the dead?

Yes, there is. Look at the churches you can see in towns, cities and suburbs around the world. They shouldn't be there. That is evidence you can see—because the survival of Christianity is humanly inexplicable. When Jesus was alive, there were others who claimed to be some sort of messiah—but where are their churches? Other ancient religions, such as Mithraism or the worship of Diana, have died out. Where are their temples today? They don't exist! When Muhammad died, he had conquered most of the Arabian Peninsula and had tens of thousands of followers. When Jesus died, he had only a few hundred followers—and none of them were important or powerful. Some faiths survive because they belong to a whole nation of people. Both Hinduism and Buddhism belong to the Indian people. Both Confucianism and Taoism belong to the Chinese people. But there was no nation behind Jesus. Given all this, how come there are Christian churches all over the world today? When Jesus died, his handful of followers were dispirited, defeated, depressed and ready to give up. Jesus should be lost to history, forgotten. Instead, he is worshiped by 2.4 billion people around the world (in every culture on every continent). Logically, there should be no worshippers and no churches. Jesus should be known only to historians who study the dusty corners of ancient history. But you've heard his name and seen his churches. Without something as powerful, as stunning, as mind-blowing as Jesus coming back from the dead, it's impossible to explain the evidence you can see with your own eyes.





Where did the Easter bunny come from?

This is a bit like the eggs—the Easter bunny is all about new life. Rabbits symbolize life because rabbits breed like ... well ... like rabbits. Put a pair of breeding rabbits in a field, and before very long you'll have a field full of rabbits. New life bursting out all over the place. And it's new life—eternal life—that Jesus offers us and that Easter reminds us of each year.



Even if something surprising (and weird) happened at the first Easter, that was 2,000 years ago. Why should I care?

Because you will die. But there is a way of escape. I deserve to be punished for my failings and failures—and especially for ignoring God. But if Jesus died in my place, as my substitute, my physical death is not the last chapter. Jesus said he came “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). When God brought Jesus back from the dead, it was as if he was waving his arms and flashing a neon sign that said: “Pay attention! This is the important bit! This is my Son! Your King! Here is my escape-from-death plan for you!”



As a result, if I turn from my way to God's way, my physical death is just turning the page to a new chapter. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die” (John 11:25). At my death God can say “Welcome home!” not “You don't belong here!” Right now, as you flick over this tract, Jesus is alive. So when we turn the last page of our earthly life, Jesus will be there to welcome us into the next chapter. The message of Easter is: God loves you. Because what we see in Jesus is God's love: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

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