



The Biblical Significance of Easter Signs and Symbols

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Introduction

- The following presentation explains the Biblical significance behind the signs, symbols, and customs associated with Easter, the oldest and most important feast in the church year. The church throughout history has used these signs and symbols to focus on the central part of our faith, the basis of our life in Christ.
- Beginning in the Old Testament (OT), we see God progressively revealing his plan of redemption, in and through history, of his creation, and especially of the crown of his creation, the fallen and now sinful humans who bear his image. God reveals that he will accomplish this redemption through the Messiah he will send, who in the New Testament (NT) is called the Christ.

Introduction

- Both the OT Hebrew word, Messiah, and the NT Greek word, Christ, mean “Anointed One.” The Hebrew verb, *masah*, and Greek verb, *chrío*, mean to anoint, which in the OT most commonly involved applying oil upon someone, typically a king, prophet, or priest. Doing so signified setting apart (sanctifying, making holy to God) and empowering the anointed one for God’s service by the Holy Spirit coming upon that person.
- God’s progressive revelation of his plan of redemption (redeeming through payment of a ransom) is well described by NT professor, Everett F. Harrison, who wrote that “No Word in the Christian vocabulary deserves to be held more precious than Redeemer,...for it reminds the child of God that his salvation has been purchased at a great and personal cost, for the Lord has given himself for our sins in order to deliver us from them.”

Introduction

- For just a small representative number of Biblical passages that show the OT-NT links to God's plan of salvation in the Christ, see e.g., Genesis 1:26-28; 3:15; Psalm 2:2; Isaiah 53; 61:1 (cf. Luke 4:18-20); Daniel 9:25-26; Matthew 1:1,17,18; John 4:25-26; Acts 4:25-28.
- The description in this program follows the order of the events as they occurred in the Bible. Bible texts are from the NIV unless otherwise indicated.
- Some current customs associated with Easter that are not directly related to events in the Bible, but that point to Biblical and theological principles and implications, will also be explained in their chronological context.
- For further information on the slides in this program, an accompanying commentary is available on both of my Websites:
 - www.fromacorntoak12.com and www.edwardseely.com or
 - <https://seelyedward.academia.edu/>

Introduction

Symbols tell the Easter Story

SYMBOL = "A visible sign of something invisible", says the dictionary.

Look around you. How many symbols can *you* see?

High up on the eighteenth floor of the Interchurch Center in New York City, we can see: a flag, a traffic signal, a church steeple, and the Statue of Liberty — all everyday symbols.

Below, we have some well-known Christian symbols. You may add others you know.

Soon you will be studying the language of symbols, in your sunday morning studies.

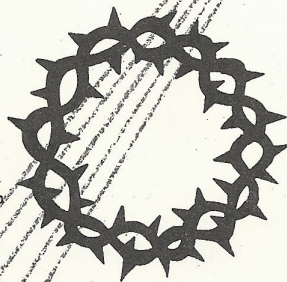


1

The bunch of grapes represents Holy Communion. The wine is the symbol of the blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus said of the vine: "I am the vine; you are the branches."

2

The crown of thorns pictures the pain and humiliation imposed upon Jesus by his enemies.

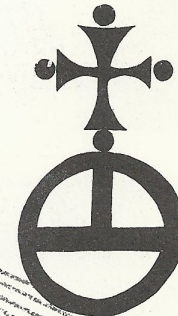


3

The cock, or rooster, is a reminder of Jesus' warning to Peter that very shortly Peter would deny him.

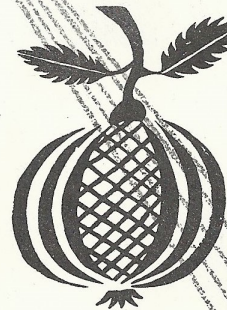
4

The cross of triumph. The circle stands for the wide world. But over and above it is the Cross.



5

The pomegranate tells us that just as seed comes out of the fruit, so life comes out of death.





PRELENT

SHROVE TUESDAY AND MARDI GRAS

Shrove Tuesday & Mardi Gras

- Shrove, past tense of shrive, meaning to hear a confession, begin penance, and receive absolution from sin, is a practice from the Middle Ages the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday in order to enter the season of Lent with a penitent frame of mind and spirit.
- Fasting became a part of Lenten penitence and as a reminder of Christ's great sacrifice for us.
- Called *fasching* from the 13th century in Germany, it is related to *fastenschank*, the last serving of alcoholic drinks before Lent.



Shrove Tuesday & Mardi Gras

- Originally believers practicing the fast would abstain from all animal products, so to prepare for the fast, on Shrove Tuesday they would eat up their butter, eggs, cheese, and fat by putting them all together in pancakes, thus the day is also called Pancake Day and Fat Tuesday.
- Over time, the strictures were lessened to Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent, including Good Friday.



Shrove Tuesday & Mardi Gras

- In addition to the lessening of the strictures of Shrove Tuesday, by many but not all believers, the day became more festive over time. Fat Tuesday became more widely known by its French translation, Mardi Gras.
- Of course, the secular world only wants the fun part of the celebration, and without the focus on Christ, Mardi Gras has come to include excessive frivolity, including indulging in evil rather than repenting of it.





LENT

THE MEANING OF THE TERMS
LENT AND EASTER

The Two Main Aspects of Easter Celebration (1) Lent

Lent, an Anglo-Saxon word meaning “spring,” refers to a 40-day period of penitence, examining our lives and reflecting on our need for forgiveness in Christ, in preparation for the highest festival of the church year, Easter. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and lasts until Easter eve, though some say until Maundy Thursday. Sundays, always a joyous celebration of Jesus’ resurrection, historically are not considered part of Lent.

Lent began in the 6th century, when Pope Gregory established a 40-day period of fasting and repentance, beginning with Ash Wednesday. He patterned this period of preparation on Jesus’ 40 days of fasting in the desert. (Matthew 4:1-11) The church has always used the events of Lent and Easter as ways to simulate walking along with Jesus in the final days leading to the climax of his mighty acts of redemption and salvation.

Use these 40 days to focus on Christ Jesus’ death and what it means in your life. It’s an important time to draw close to God. Doing so will help you to grow in your relationship with God throughout the year and always!

The Two Main Aspects of Easter Celebration (2) Easter Sunday

Two main theories exist as to the derivation of the word, Easter.

1. The most commonly held theory maintains that the word, Easter, is derived from the name of the pagan Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring, Eostra, whose festival was held at the vernal equinox. As with other pagan festivals, early Christians purposely set their festivals in close proximity to eclipse the false religion. The words Easter and Eostra are too close for the comfort of many Christians, who prefer to call Easter, Resurrection Day, the celebration of the resurrection of the Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ. However, careful study has shown how historical evidence disproves this theory. For example, it's origin is based on a comment by the English monk, the Venerable Bede (673-735), which even he admits is speculation, and outside of Bede, no other mention is made of such a pagan goddess, Eostra. British scholar, Anthony McRoy, explains more in his article, "Was Easter Borrowed from a Pagan Holiday?" See below the Sources and Resources slide.

The Two Main Aspects of Easter Celebration (2) Easter Sunday

2. The second theory is that the English word Easter and the German word *Ostern* (Easter, Passover) come from a common origin (*Eostur, Eastur, Ostara, Ostar*), “which,” as the Roman Catholic scholar Francis X. Weiser writes, “to the Norsemen meant the season of the rising (growing) sun, the season of new birth. The word was used by our ancestors to designate the Feast of New Life in the spring. The same root is found in the name of the place where the sun rises (East, *Ost*). The word Easter, then, originally meant the celebration of the spring sun, which has its birth in the East and brought new life upon earth. This symbolism was transferred to the supernatural meaning of our Easter, to the new life of the Risen Christ, the eternal and uncreated Light.”

The Two Main Aspects of Easter Celebration (2) Easter Sunday

While these and related hypotheses as to the origin of Easter are considered, the key understanding to maintain is that the historic Christian church has superseded the pagan religious festivals by holding the Christian festival on or close to those days to correct the pagan errors and witness to the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. The church has not in the process adapted any part of the pagan festival it is replacing (so-called contextualization). That is, the church has not brought aspects of paganism into its own celebrations, as is often said. Someone may say, “Well then, what about Easter eggs and rabbits?” As will be explained later in this program, these are peripheral, where included are always linked to a Biblical teaching and clearly distinguished from the most important and essential meaning of Easter, and for many Christians eggs and bunnies are not even a part of the church Easter festival.

The Two Main Aspects of Easter Celebration (2) Easter Sunday

Francis Weiser also observed,

“The keener are the eyes of faith, the more penetrating is the vision of personal immortality behind the veil of death: When Christ rose, Death itself died.” (See the accompanying commentary.)

- The eyes of faith become keener through the process of sanctification, the Biblical and theological term for growth in Christlikeness, in which the believer throughout his or her life cooperates with the Holy Spirit and matures in the faith in holiness to God.
- Pertaining to the central tenet of the Christian faith, the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the purpose of this program is to facilitate our sanctification, and in so doing strengthen our hope and joy in Christ.

The Two Main Aspects of Easter Celebration (2) Easter Sunday

The date of Easter, and other Christian festivals, was not a major concern for the first three centuries A. D., when Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire, and Christians were frequently persecuted. However, after 313 A. D., when Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity, it was possible to consider such matters.

The first general council of the Christian church, the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., followed Constantine's position that Christianity and Judaism be totally separated, including that the celebration of Christ's resurrection not be on the Jewish Passover. Therefore, the Council ruled that the feast of the resurrection be celebrated on a Sunday and never on the Jewish Passover. The Council required that the Christian celebration was to be the Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox.

(See the accompanying commentary.)

LENT

THE 40 DAY PERIOD OF PENITENCE AND
PREPARATION (NOT INCLUDING
SUNDAYS) PRIOR TO EASTER

The Lenten Color: Purple

- The color used throughout Lent, including Holy Week is purple.
- Purple combines blue (royalty, Jesus' Kingship) and red (Jesus' blood); at Lent it signifies penitence and mourning.
- Black, is used extensively on Good Friday.
- Black symbolizes death and mourning.

The Imposition of Ashes on Ash Wednesday

- Repentance, utmost sorrow, and mourning in Bible times was expressed by sitting in (Job 2:8; 42:6) or putting on (Esther 4:1) ashes. (Daniel 9:3; Matthew 11:21)
- The ashes also remind and help us reflect on the fact that we were created from the earth, (Genesis 2:7) to which we will return. (Genesis 3:19)
- The ancient Roman church sprinkled ashes on the heads of believers as a sign of penitence, humiliation, contrition, and mourning.



The Imposition of Ashes on Ash Wednesday

- Today, Ash Wednesday services include an opportunity for worshipers to receive the sign of the cross on their foreheads, typically with ashes from last year's palm leaves mixed with oil or water calling to mind the cyclical aspect of the church year.
- This photo illustrates one other way to engage even small children in our corporate worship of God and the joy they have in doing so. As they mature, they will understand more of the concept of repentance for their sins and sinfulness.



Pretzels

- Christians in the Roman Empire made a Lenten bread with flour, salt, and water when believers fasted from milk, butter, eggs, cheese, meat, and fat.
- Since Lent was a time of penance and devotion, the dough was shaped in the form of two arms crossed in prayer and was called in Latin, *bracellae*, “little arms,” a reminder of the need for prayer. (Luke 22:40)



Pretzels

- When the *bracellae* was brought to Germany, it was called a *brezel*, the precedent of the pretzel.
- The oldest known picture of a pretzel may be in a 5th century manuscript in the Vatican.
- Pretzels remain a Lenten food in many parts of Europe.
- They are sometimes given as food to the poor.
- Three-part pretzels also symbolize the Trinity.





LENT

HOLY WEEK: THE DAYS OF
PALM SUNDAY THROUGH EASTER

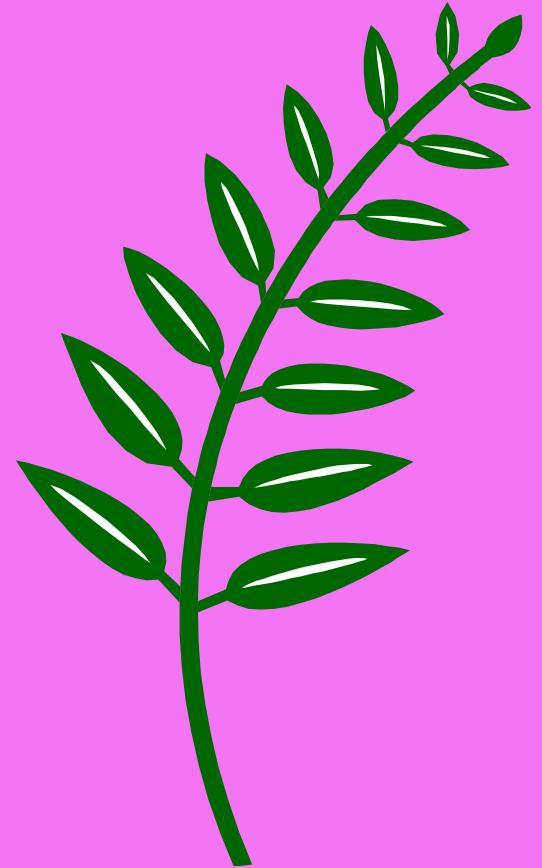


Holy Week

Evidence of the celebration of the events of Holy Week, the last week of Jesus' life on earth before he was crucified, is found from the fourth century. In her pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the end of the fourth century, a believer called Egeria or Aetheria, wrote a detailed account of the Holy Week events she saw, as Christians used liturgical drama to re-enact the events Christ experienced that week.

The Palm of Palm Sunday

- Palm leaves symbolize victory and were used in triumphal processions by Romans and Jews.
- Palm leaves were strewn in front of Christ during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.
- Palm Sunday begins Holy Week, the week leading up to Easter.
(John 12:12-19)



The Cross over the Orb within Palms: Christ's Victory

- The orb, representing the world, with the cross over the world, symbolizing the triumph of the Lord and Savior over the world's sin and evil, both encompassed within the palms, portray Christ's victory.
- Palm Sunday is also called Passion Sunday, because this day begins his week of great suffering leading to his death and resurrection victory.



Palm Sunday: Jesus Enters Jerusalem Riding on a Donkey

Very significantly, the donkey was a symbol of Davidic royalty. Kings rode donkeys, not horses, thus Jesus was fulfilling a Messianic prophecy by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, also symbolizing humility and peace. (Zechariah 9:9)



Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday

“The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Hosanna in the highest!’” (Matthew 21:6-9)

- The gate has been sealed since 1541 A. D.



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*To return press ESC and back arrow
(See the accompanying commentary.)*

Jesus Drives the Money Changers out of the Temple

Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

¹³"It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'" (Matthew 21:12-13)

- People who do evil should not think they can continue to do so just because they are in God's house. (See R.C.H. Lenski, *Matthew*, p. 816)



The Lord's Last Supper

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)

- Maundy Thursday of Holy Week, preceding Easter Sunday, is the day the church celebrates the Lord's Last Supper.
- The day is called Maundy from the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning command, referring to Jesus' command in John 13:34-35.



The Lord's Supper: Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:15-17)

- Jesus is not instituting a sacrament. He is setting an example of humble service and the essential teaching that we must not just know the truth but do, and keep doing (Greek present tense), the truth. We'll be blessed in so doing.



The Lord's Supper: Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

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- Therefore, along with fasting, abstinence, almsgiving, penance, and other forms of self-denial, many Christians include intentional acts of giving their time, energy, and possessions for those in need, as Christ gave himself for us.



Biblical Interpretation: Is the text teaching a principle or an application of principle? (See the accompanying commentary.)

The Lord's Last Supper

“When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁹And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ ²⁰In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” (Luke 22:14, 19-20)



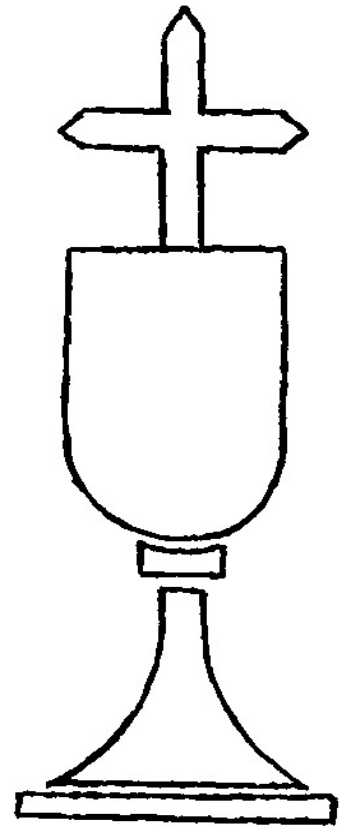
The Lord's Last Supper: Grapes and Wheat

- Wheat indicates the bread which reminds us of Christ's body broken for us.
- Grapes represent the wine symbolizing the Lord's blood shed for us.
- Both represent the sacrament of Holy Communion. (Matthew 26:26-28)
- Grapes and the vine also remind us that we are linked to Christ to abide in him and bear fruit. (John 15:5)



The Lord's Last Supper: Chalice and Passion Cross

The cup represents the wine in the sacrament, which signifies the shed blood of Jesus, and the pointed passion cross portrays, and helps us to remember, the agony Jesus suffered in his scourging and on Golgotha, so we would not have to suffer forever, separated from God who is holy, holy, holy as well as being all love, as seen in this most wonderful demonstration of love ever at such great cost to himself! (Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 22:44; Isaiah 6:3; Romans 5:8; Revelation 4:8)



The Mount of Olives

“When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” (Matthew 26:30)

- These olive trees have been authenticated to be 2,000 and 3,000 years old; i.e., their root systems, for the Roman Emperor Titus cut down the trees when he destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A. D. (Cf. Matthew 24:1-2)
- Thus the 2,000 year-old trees were here when Jesus and the disciples were here, and the 3,000 year-old tree was here at David’s time.



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(See the accompanying commentary.)

The Mount of Olives: Gethsemane

“Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’” (Matthew 26:36)

- Gethsemane means “olive press” and was a place on the Mount of Olives for squeezing oil from the trees.
- The Church of All Nations is built over the place where it is likely Jesus in great agony prayed, “not as I will but as you will” (Matthew 26:39) and where he was betrayed and arrested.



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<https://youtu.be/GpvXqGRQ1mg>

(See the accompanying commentary.)

The Mount of Olives: Jesus Prays While the Disciples Sleep

“...Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’...³⁴‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,’ he said to them.

‘Stay here and keep watch.’...

³⁶‘*Abba*, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.’

³⁷Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping... ³⁸‘Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.’” (Mark 14:32-38)



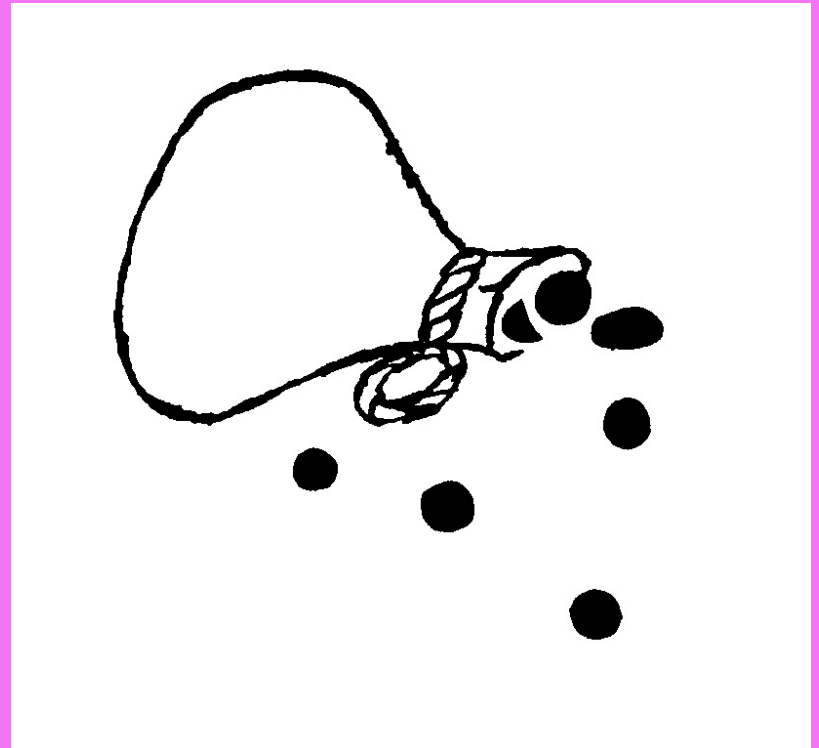
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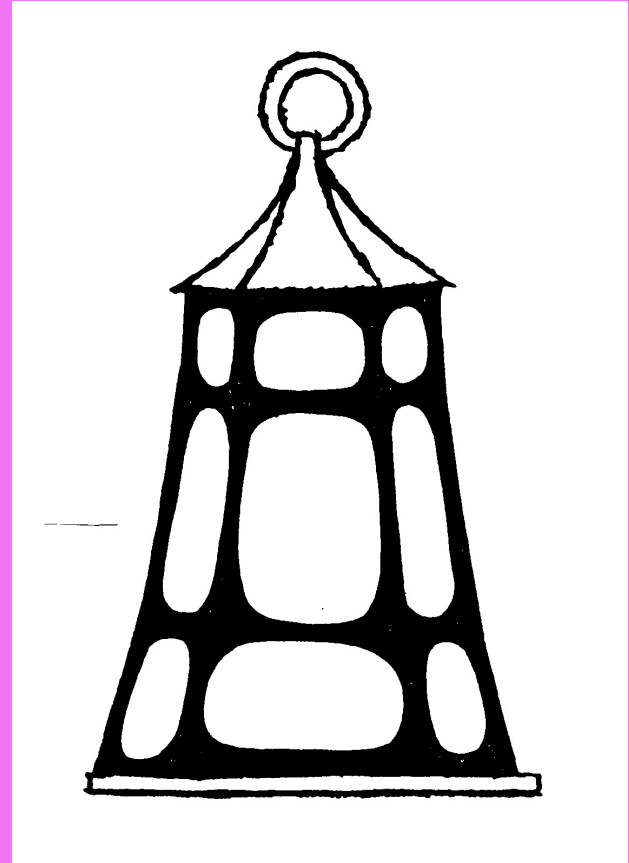
Judas' Betrayal: Silver Coins

- Judas betrayed Jesus to the chief priests for the price of thirty silver coins.
- The chief priests used the money Judas returned to them to buy the potter's field.
(Matthew 26:14-16, 27:1-10)



Judas' Betrayal: The Lantern

Another symbol of Judas' betrayal is the lantern, which the soldiers and officials, sent by the chief priests and Pharisees, carried when Judas led them to arrest Jesus. (John 18:3)



The Mount of Olives: The Betrayal of Judas

“Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: ‘The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.’ ⁴⁵Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, ‘Rabbi!’ and kissed him.” (Mark 14:44-45)

- Judas’ betrayal occurred near where Jesus prayed and the disciples slept, all now within the Church of All Nations on the Mount of Olives.

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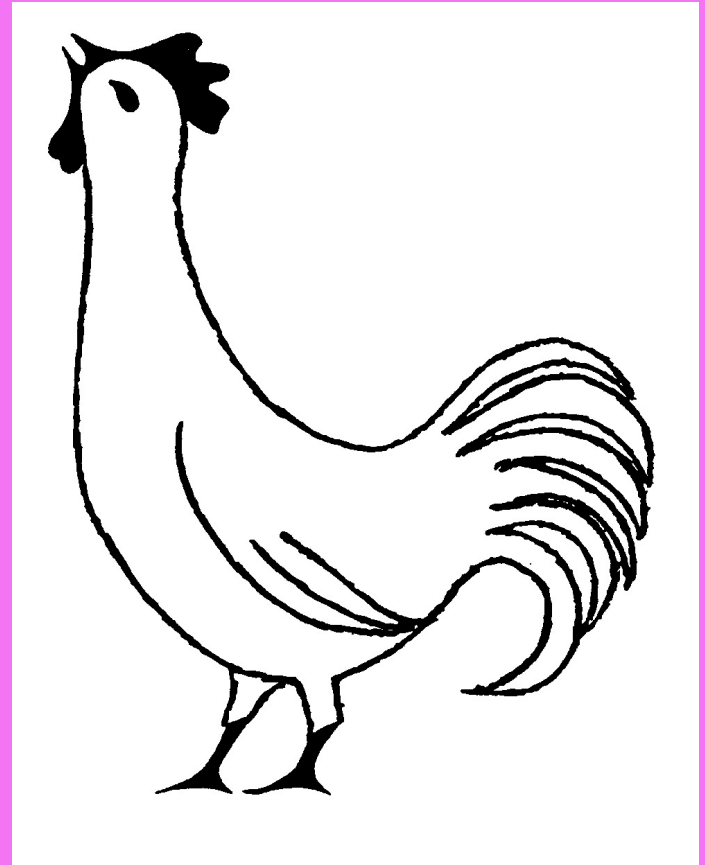
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(See the accompanying commentary.)



Peter Denies Jesus: Rooster

- The crowing cock reminds us of Jesus' trial and the abandoning of his friends, specifically Peter. (Matthew 26:56, 69-75)
- This sign also reminds us of our calling from God to be Christ's witnesses. (1 Peter 3:15)
- A very comforting dimension of this event is the awareness that the Lord restored Peter. (John 21:15-19)
- Since he reinstated Peter, we know he forgives us.



Jesus' Trek from Mount of Olives to Caiaphas & the Sanhedrin

- When Jesus was arrested on the Mount of Olives, he was brought to the high priest, Caiaphas, and the ruling council of the Jews, the Sanhedrin. (Matthew 26:47-68)
- The original steps and path where Jesus walked still exist.

Click here to see video:

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(See the accompanying commentary.)



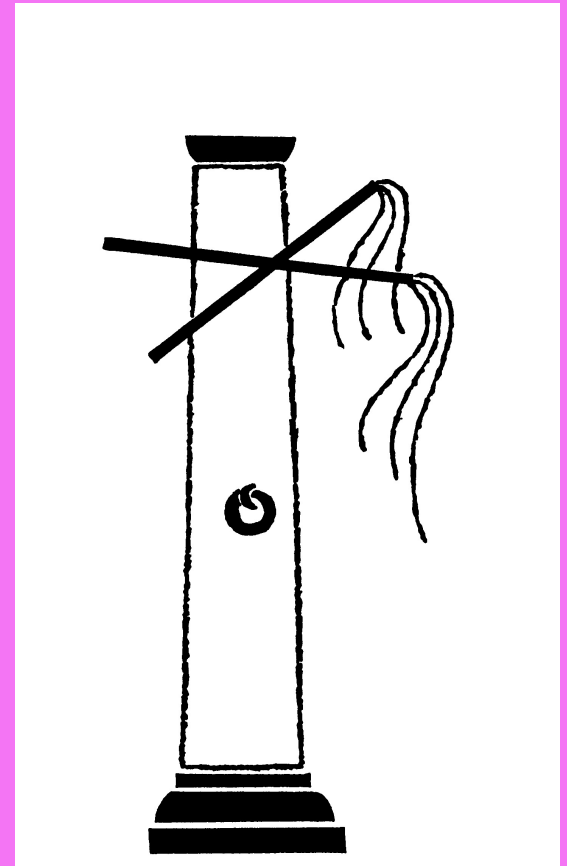
The Basin and Ewer

The basin and ewer
(vase-shaped pitcher)
recall the attempt by
Pilate to remove his guilt
for condemning Christ to
death. (Matthew 27:24)



Scourges and Pillar

- These symbols remind us of Pilate's having Jesus flogged, scourged. They are grim symbols.
- Roman scourges had pieces of lead on the end of each strand, or 8-10 pieces of bone on the latter part of each strand, to rip the flesh. (Matthew 27:26) Prisoners were lashed to a pillar to keep them standing so the floggers could have easier access to the body of the prisoner being scourged.



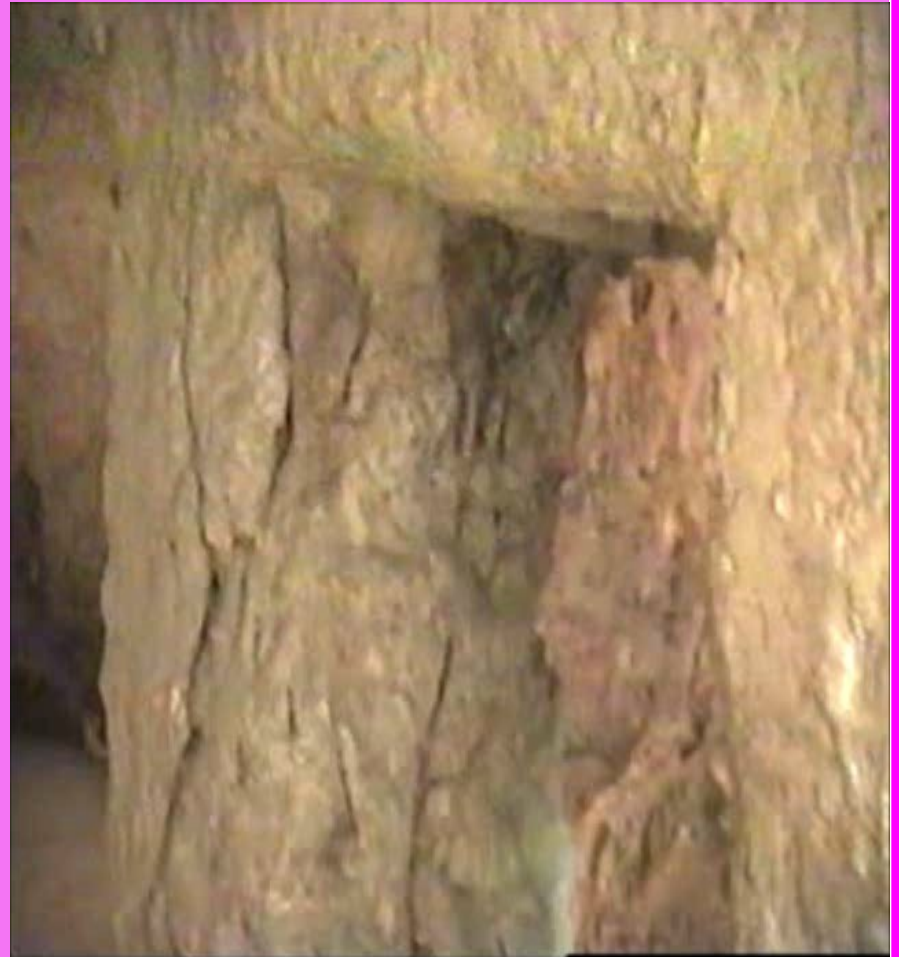
Scourges and Pillar

Excavations at the site of the house of the high priest, Caiaphas, now located under the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu (Cock-Crow), show some of what Jewish flogging involved. But Jesus was flogged much more viciously by the Romans. (Mark 15:15)

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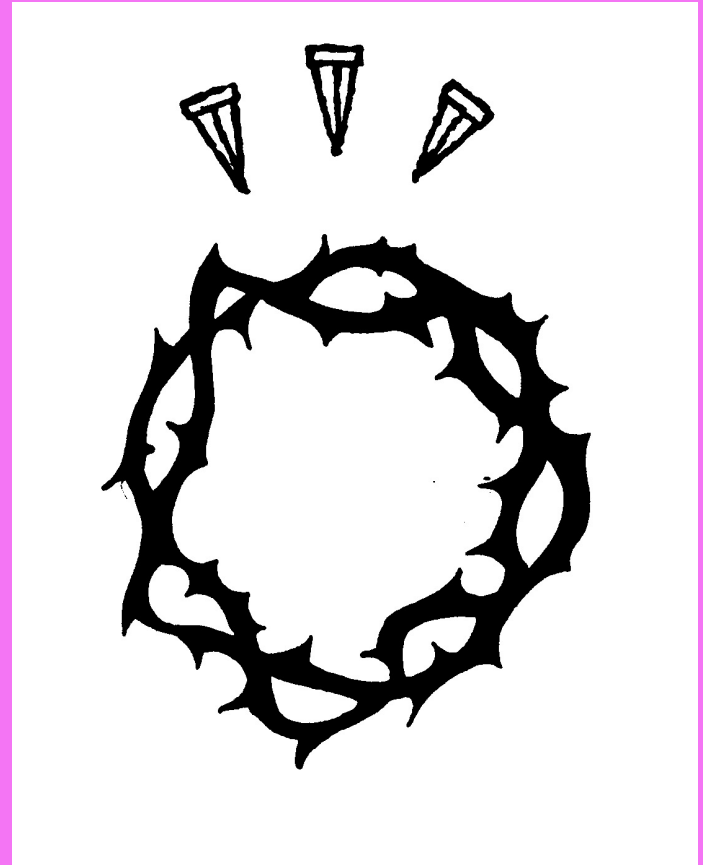
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(See the accompanying commentary.)



Crown of Thorns and Nails

- The soldiers mocked Jesus by making a crown of thorns and beat it into his head again and again. (Matthew 27:30)
- Until the end of the 12th century four nails symbolized Christ's crucifixion; from then on three. (Matthew 27:27-35)



The Maypop Flower and Seedpod

- Growing on vines in tropical America, this plant is used to tell about Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.
- The lobed leaves represent the hands of Jesus' tormentors.
- The tendrils signify the whips that flogged him.
- The sepals and petals recall the 10 disciples (Peter and Judas were absent).
- Three nails can be seen in the pistil.
- The five stamens point to Jesus' five wounds.
- The seedpod symbolizes the sponge dipped in vinegar and offered to Jesus who was thirsty.
- The fringed corona is the risen Jesus' halo.



The Maypop Flower and Seedpod

Roman Catholic missionaries originated the use of the Maypop flower and seedpod to proclaim and explain the Gospel story of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. The plant is a vine that travels underground and emerges in the spring with large purple blossoms. <http://edibleplantproject.org/maypop/> (Accessed 1/30/2017)



Good Friday: Cross of Passion

- Numerous depictions of the cross have been designed throughout church history to teach specific aspects of Jesus' crucifixion.
- The pointed ends here indicate Good Friday, the day on which Jesus was crucified. It is called Good Friday, for what he did for us is very, very **good**. (John 19:18)



Good Friday

This day is called Great Friday in the Eastern Orthodox tradition because of the difficulty of seeing the good in Good Friday. However, the incalculable goodness is strikingly evident when thinking about what occurred on Good Friday. In the light of God being most holy (i.e., holy, holy, holy as he reveals in Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8), God's love, the core of his being (1 John 4:8) from which all his other multitudinous blessings flow, is plainly evident and clearly observable. Without the death of God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, no one would have forgiveness of his or her sinfulness and sins; no forgiveness would be possible. There was, still is, and forever will be no other way for the sufficient satisfaction of Divine justice, and therefore no relationship with God was, is, or forever will be available apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus himself said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) God does not change; he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17)

Good Friday

Believers in and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, because of him, are able and prefer to focus on the positive rather than the negative. As noted above, the mighty act of love that Jesus did in his suffering in our place, thus making atonement or propitiation for our sins (Romans 3:25; 5:11; 2 Corinthians 5:17-18; Hebrews 2:17), powerfully demonstrates that as well as being most holy, God is love to the core of his being and brings good out of evil, and at great cost to himself in the most wonderful demonstration of love ever! “Propitiation” comes from the Greek verb, *hilaskomai*, which means propitiate. What does propitiate mean?

Good Friday

“‘To propitiate God’ (to find his favor and thus avert his wrath) is to reestablish the communion with God which was shattered because of sin. [In addition to being all love, God is also most holy, just, and righteous. Therefore, he will not allow sin and evil to go unaddressed, which would harm people he loves and compromise his integrity.] According to the Bible this can only take place through propitiation. Such a condition is realized through the substitutionary punishment of a sacrifice. The Atonement is effected when an innocent life is given in exchange for a guilty life; it redeems that which is otherwise condemned. The innocent life is offered (sacrificed) on behalf of the one deserving punishment. As a consequence of the sacrifice the guilty party is freed from guilt since payment has been made to God by the offering. The sinful acts are not nullified (expiated); rather, God’s wrath is executed upon the substitute.” (The Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary – Zeta-Kappa)

Good Friday

God has called his believers in Christ to be his witnesses, i.e., to faithfully follow Jesus in word and in deed, to explain God's plan of salvation in Christ and to live accordingly. (Genesis 12:3; Matthew 28:18-20; Galatians 3:26-29; 1 Peter 3:15)

Here is a good starting place in our witness for Jesus Christ. All other religions who believe in a god are trying to propitiate that god, that is to avert his or her wrath. *A **huge** difference between all other religions and Christianity*, is that all other religions are autosoteristic, that is, literally self-saving; they are prescriptions for how humans earn their salvation by following a set of rules prescribed by that religion as to how to avert the wrath of their god or goddess and earn their own salvation.

Good Friday

In Biblical Christianity, God takes the initiative and justly propitiates his own wrath against sin and evil in the sacrifice of his innocent and perfect only begotten Son, who willingly out of love accepts the task, the benefits of which come to us by our faith, not by doing works to try to earn salvation. Works are an essential part of our faith in Christ Jesus, but they are an effect, **not** the cause, of our salvation. Christians do good works only to express thanksgiving to God for what he has done for us and to show the genuineness of our faith which saves us. See, e.g., “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Good Friday: Cross of Passion

See these and many other related Scriptures texts:

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;” (Romans 3:23-25 NASB)

Thus, a good starting point for a witness to someone who is in one of these other religions, is to ask, “How do you feel about having to earn your own salvation? What occurs when you fail to live up to your own goals, much less your religion’s? What do you do with your guilt?” Then ask, “How would you like to have complete peace of mind and heart and be relieved of the burden of appeasing your god’s wrath and/or of trying to earn your own salvation?” Gladly tell this person about Jesus and what he has done for all who will believe in and follow him.

Good Friday

- “And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. ¹²Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—” (Romans 5:11-12 NASB)
- “For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. ¹⁷Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” (Hebrews 2:16-17 NASB)

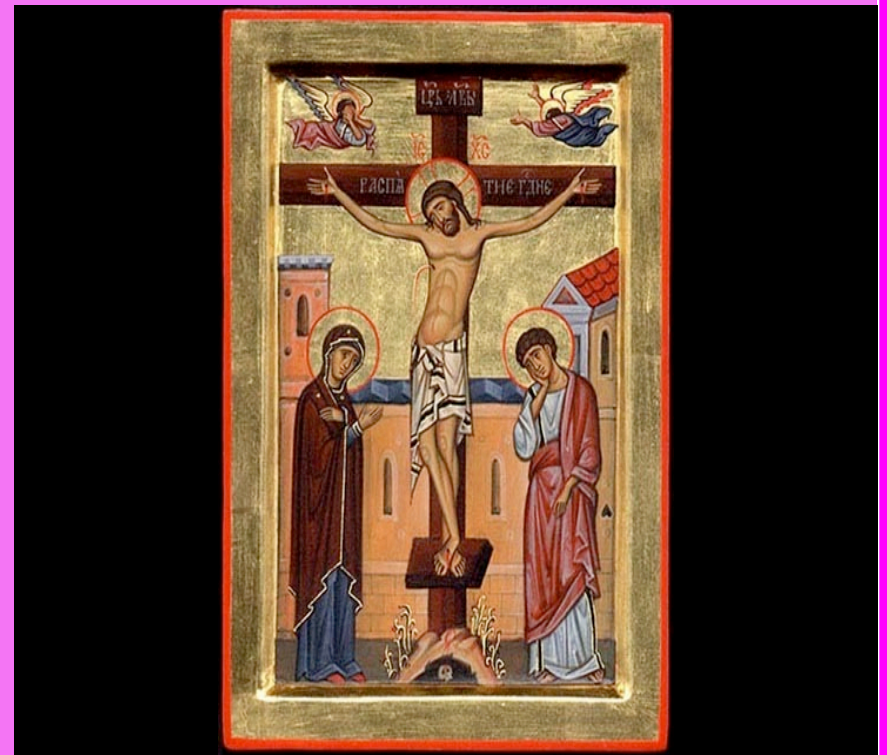
Good Friday

- “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. ¹⁸Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:17-19 NASB)

This reconciliation with our just and loving God gives us great relief from the burden of our sin, sins, and guilt. Thanks be to God! And that is good, indeed very, very GOOD!

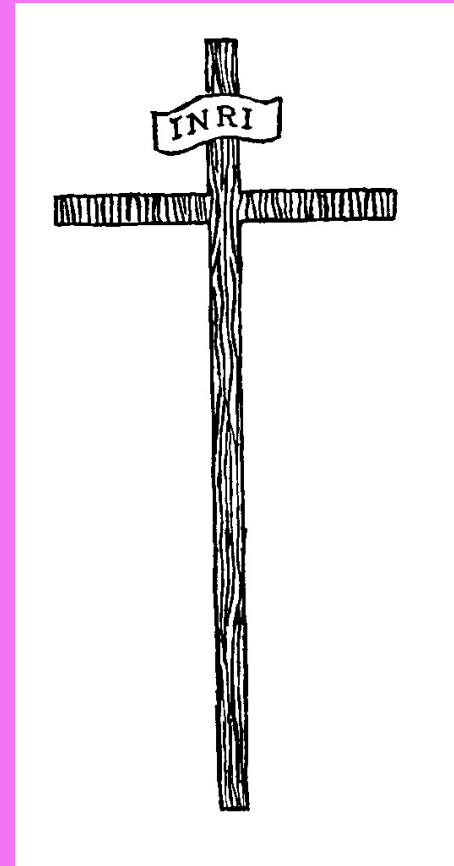
Crucifix

- Some denominations emphasize the suffering and death of Jesus and so portray him on the cross, this image being called a crucifix. A skillful artist can help us increase our sense of the agony Jesus endured for us.
- With unbelievers denying that Jesus died, it is vital that we witness to his death, his death being the only way we are free from our sins. (1 John 2:2)



The Latin Cross

- This is the actual form of the cross on which Jesus died.
- INRI = Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum, Latin for Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, the sign Pilate added to the cross. (John 19:19-22)



Cross of Love

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)

- Jesus’ suffering for us is the greatest demonstration of love ever.

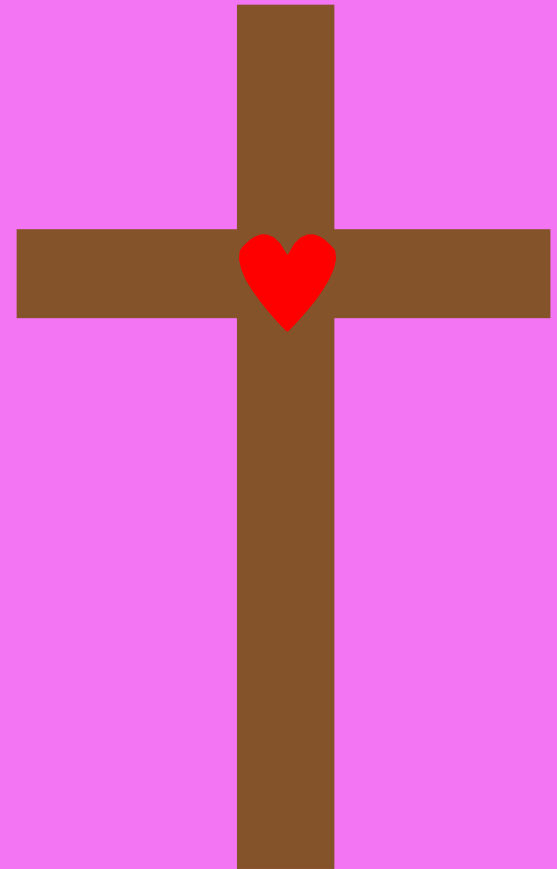


Cross of Love

“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

“²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” (1 Peter 2:24-25)

- Christ Jesus’ suffering for us is the greatest demonstration of love ever!



Hot Cross Buns

“...our old self was crucified with him...” (Romans 6:6)

- At the spring equinox, ancient Saxon tribes sacrificed an ox (called a *boun*) to obtain their gods' favor for bountiful crops. After the ritual they celebrated by eating cakes marked on top with a symbol of the ox horns.
- To eclipse the pagan ritual, the Early Church made these buns with the cross instead of the horns.



Some of the Reasons Why Scholars Believe the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Covers the Authentic Places Where Jesus Died and Was Buried

1. Despite many people's aesthetic preference for the recent (since the late 19th century) alternative site called Gordon's Calvary (named after the British general who advocated it), no ancient time-tested traditions exist to authenticate this site as the location of these events in spite of some thoughtful but insufficient speculations.
2. As early as the reign of the Roman emperor, Hadrian (117-138 A. D.), the location of these sites was unintentionally preserved. Trying to obliterate the Christian sites in his attempt to Romanize Jerusalem, he built a pagan temple to Venus, the Roman goddess of love, fertility, prosperity, and victory, which only preserved the memory of the location of these sites.

Some of the Reasons Why Scholars Believe the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Covers the Authentic Places Where Jesus Died and Was Buried

3. After Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal in 313 A. D. and the official religion of the Roman Empire in 325 A. D., at the first official council of the church at Nicea in 325, Bishop Macarius of Jerusalem persuaded Constantine to help him restore the holy sites. Constantine's mother, Helena, visited the sites and became a great benefactor in this restoration in the 4th century, including initial buildings (in 336 A. D.) that were eventually encompassed by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Some of the Reasons Why Scholars Believe the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Covers the Authentic Places Where Jesus Died and Was Buried

4. The sites fit within the Biblical and first century A. D. facts, e.g., that executions and burials were done outside the city walls and typically located very close together (cf. John 19:42), and the evidence of the earthquake. Current archaeological data demonstrate that these sites were outside Jerusalem's walls at that time.

Geological research, disclosed in the journal, *International Geological Review*, focused on earthquakes at the Dead Sea, which is only 13 miles East of Jerusalem. The study, reported on in *Discovery News*, revealed the research team concluded that, when all the data are analyzed, the best match indicates the earthquake at the time of Jesus' death occurred on Friday, April 3, 33 A.D., which coincides with the crucifixion as recorded in Matthew 27 and helps identify the date of Jesus' death on the cross.

Some of the Reasons Why Scholars Believe the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Covers the Authentic Places Where Jesus Died and Was Buried

5. People in that region and their ancestors and descendants have lived there for generations. Oral traditions where such important information is shared from generation to generation are strong, well reinforced by frequent conversations and visits to the sites, and not forgotten by everyone, if anyone. The sites were not only pointed out but venerated.
6. By the 4th century, written information about the location of the sites was being generated, including by the first outstanding church historian Eusebius.
7. Archaeologists have noted differences in the structure of first century tombs from the one in Gordon's Calvary, which has been documented to date from the Iron Age II (8th—7th centuries B. C.).

For more information see the Sources and Resources cited below by Maier and McRae.

Golgotha: Where Jesus Was Crucified and Died

“...He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha. ¹⁸There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between.”
(John 19:17-18 NASB)

“...when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.”
(Matthew 27:50-51 NIV)

Video: <https://youtu.be/rjL9cYviDWM>

(See the accompanying commentary.)



The Monumental Significance of the Tearing of the Temple Curtain

In Matthew 27:50-51, we read that at the moment of Jesus' death the temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. The curtain separated the Most Holy Place, where God dwelt among his people, from the Holy Place where the priests representing his people served, and from the people themselves in the outer court. Why is this tearing of the temple curtain so important?

- + Most significantly, the tearing apart of the curtain relates to the suffering in the tearing apart of Jesus' body (Hebrews 10:19-20) that provides the access (the way, John 14:6) to God, who is most holy, that believers in Christ have by being credited with Christ's righteousness by faith (Romans 4) and made holy. (Hebrews 10:10)
- + The powerful significance of the tearing of the curtain also includes its demonstration of who Jesus is and what he accomplished in his perfect life; in his suffering in the breaking of his body and shedding of his blood; and in his death on the cross, all of which would be verified by his resurrection on the third day.

The Monumental Significance of the Tearing of the Temple Curtain

- + To more fully understand the tearing of the temple curtain, we need to turn to the explanation in Hebrews 6:17-10:39. Here we read of Melchizedek, whose name means king of righteousness, who was king of Salem (Jerusalem) in Abraham's time. Melchizedek held two offices at the same time; he was both king and priest and thus a type, a forerunner, of Christ, one of God's many ways of preparing people for the coming of Christ.
- + The reference is very significant. The required perfection, necessary to come into the presence of God who is most holy, was not provided through the priesthood of the Levites (Hebrews 7:11ff.), only a temporary provision in the old covenant, that pointed to what Christ Jesus came to provide completely and forever in a better covenant, the new (καινός [*kainos*], i.e., new in nature or quality, more in the sense of renewed) covenant God promised through the Prophet Jeremiah. For more about this continuity and how Jesus fulfills the old covenant and institutes new dimensions that constitute the new covenant, see the accompanying [Commentary](#).

The Monumental Significance of the Tearing of the Temple Curtain

- + The tearing of the temple curtain is another powerful indication of Jesus' initiation and fulfillment of the prophecy pertaining to the new covenant. (Jeremiah 31:31-35; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Hebrews 8:13; 9:15)
- + In the old covenant, only the high priest, a sinner himself, entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year; he never entered without blood to be offered for himself and for the people. (Hebrews 9:7ff.) But this regulation was imperfect (Hebrews 7:11ff.); done by sinful priests who needed to keep making the sacrifices, who themselves died; was not able to remove sins and cleanse the consciences of the worshipers (9:9); and was only a temporary type, a foreshadowing pointing to the perfect, permanent, vicarious, once for all sacrifice done effectively with a divine oath and an indestructible life by the sinless high priest Christ Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, and eternal mediator of the new covenant, who meets our need, removes our sins, cleanses our consciences, and gives eternal life, bringing us into the Triune God's presence forever. And Jesus does so with a guarantee. (7:22; 9:14ff)

The Monumental Significance of the Tearing of the Temple Curtain

- + Think about the implications, for now as well as eternity, of Hebrews 9:14, “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”
- + This cleansing of our consciences removes the cause of the devastating and destructive effects of sin throughout a person’s whole being, relieving him or her of the guilt (cf. 10:2) that produces depression, loneliness, fear, and a host of other mental and emotional disorders that are at the root of most of the psychological problems people have today. Attempts to overcome those problems only by drugs or secular counseling fail to address their cause.
 - Thus, counseling that does not include helping people have and develop a relationship with Jesus Christ will not be fully satisfying and effective.
 - Counseling also needs to be alert to, and when needed address, matters pertaining to spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-18)
 - When counseling is needed, seek out a mature Christian counselor.

The Monumental Significance of the Tearing of the Temple Curtain

- + The temple curtain was massive, indicating the seriousness of sin that offends God, who is holy, holy, holy (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8), who will not permit sinful beings in his presence, and that this tearing apart of the curtain was done by God himself, not man. God, who is also all loving (1 John 4:8), has torn down the barrier between himself and his believing children, who are by their/our faith credited with the perfect work, at such great cost to himself, of his sinless only begotten Son Jesus Christ.
- The curtain in the temple Solomon built was thirty feet high. The first century A. D. Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote that the temple Herod built was extended to 60 feet high and that the curtain was four inches thick. It was so heavy that it took 300 priests to lift and manage it. No human could have ripped it.
- Also, the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom. This, too, shows that it was God, and not human beings, who tore the curtain in two, thus permitting access to his most holy and loving presence.

The Monumental Significance of the Tearing of the Temple Curtain

“Therefore...since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:19-25)

Preparing Jesus' Body for Burial in the Tomb

“Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.” (John 19:38-40)



Click here to view video:

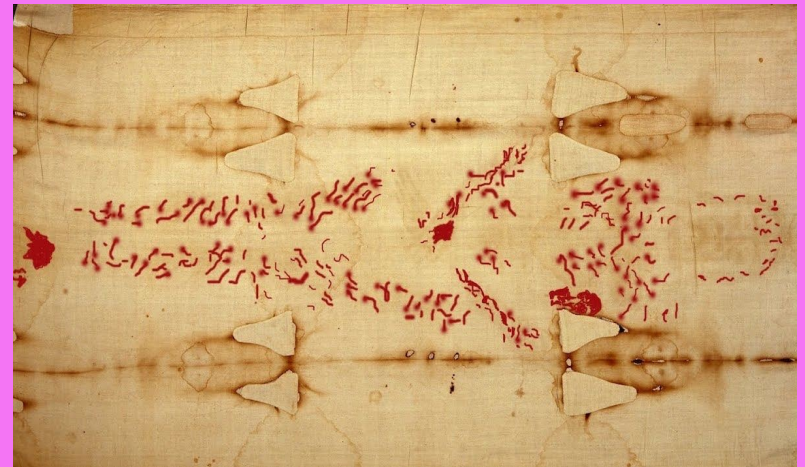
<https://youtu.be/V7bDPuAfVvo>

(See the accompanying commentary.)

Preparing Jesus' Body for Burial in the Tomb: Reflections on the Shroud of Turin

Is the shroud in Turin, Italy the actual linen cloth (Luke 23:53) in which Joseph of Arimathea wrapped Jesus' body? After much research by historians, Biblical scholars, and scientists, using increasingly advanced technology, but sometimes with error in methodology, a conclusive to answer this question still eludes scholars. However, these findings and many more are significant:

1. Head blood stains are consistent with a crown of thorns.



2. The over 120 scourge marks are consistent with Roman practice.

3. Nail wounds in the wrist part of the hand for supporting weight are present as expected.

4. The wound in the side is consistent with a Roman spear tip.

Preparing Jesus' Body for Burial in the Tomb: Reflections on the Shroud of Turin

5. The legs are not broken, as the Romans usually did but not with Jesus, in accord with Scripture. (Exodus 12:46; Psalm 34:20; John 19:33) Also, no bones were broken by the spear.

6. No stains appear from body decomposition.

7. Ignoring archaeologists' caution, the 1988 C-14 tests were conducted in violation of established sampling protocol, including testing on a medieval reweave, rather on the original part of the fabric, which scholars have verified is from the first century A.D.



Such evidence is not proof, but support for our faith and witness.

For more, see the following at:

<https://www.Christianity.com/wiki/jesus-Christ/what-is-the-shroud-of-turin.html> (Accessed 3/29/2020)

Jesus' Burial in the Tomb

“At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid.
⁴²Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.”
(John 19:41-42)

“Then [Joseph] rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.
⁴⁷Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.” (Mark 15:47)

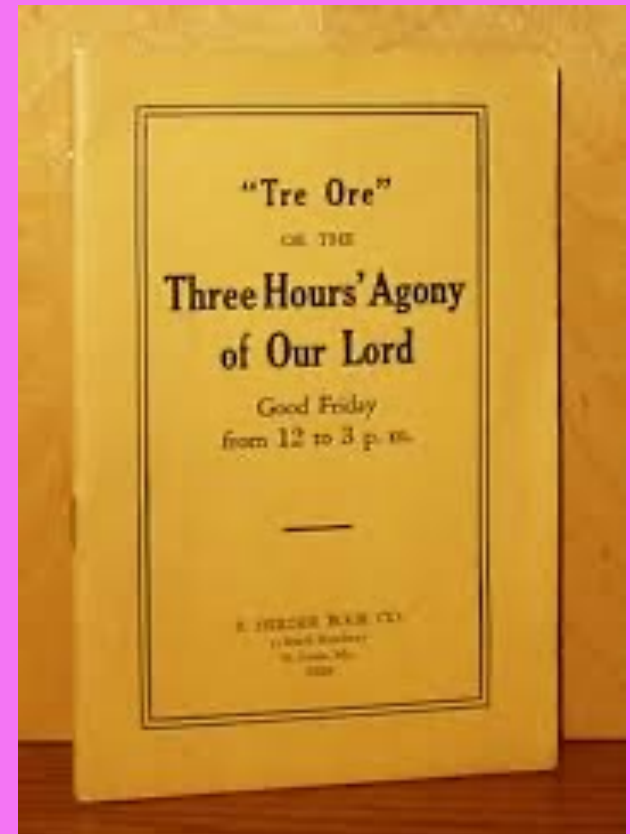


Video: <https://youtu.be/FgsY8Ar2Gg4>
(See the accompanying commentary.)

Good Friday Worship: Tre Ore

“It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.” (Luke 23:44-46)

- Many churches hold a solemn worship service on Good Friday, called Tre Ore (three-hour) observance, from 12:00 noon until 3:00 PM (the 6th hour to the 9th hour in Hebrew reckoning), remembering the time Jesus was on the cross.



Good Friday Worship: Tre Ore

“It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.” (Luke 23:44-46)

- Some more simple, some more elaborate, Tre Ore services typically consist of Scripture readings including Jesus’ seven last words from the cross, meditations on each, with music interspersed.



Good Friday Worship: Tre Ore

“‘Take a guard,’ Pilate answered. ‘Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.’”⁶⁶“So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.” (Matthew 27:65,66)

- Some more simple, some more elaborate, Tre Ore services typically consist of Scripture readings including Jesus’ seven last words from the cross, meditations on each, with music interspersed. Elements of the Tenebrae services are also included.
- For churches not having Tenebrae or Easter Vigil services, after worshipers leave, a sealing of the door until Easter sunrise is a significant conclusion for the Tre Ore service.



Good Friday Worship: Tenebrae

“From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land.” (Matthew 27:45)

- A Good Friday evening service held since medieval times is called Tenebrae, meaning darkness or shadows. Though churches conduct it with somewhat different nuances, as the service proceeds, Bible texts, such as the seven last words of Jesus from the cross or a similar number of passages about Holy Week events, are read, hymns are sung, and more light is extinguished after each reading.



Good Friday Worship: Tenebrae

⁴⁶About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*"--which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"...⁵⁰And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. ⁵¹At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split." (Matthew 27:46, 50-51)

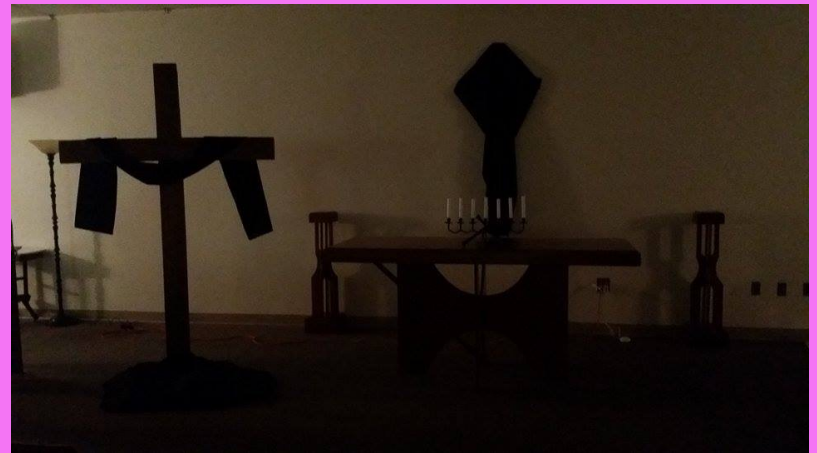
- Jesus' words should be read as he in agony strained to say them, his weight pressing hard on his diaphragm. The service concludes with the soul-stirring *strepitus*, the loud and long mallet roll on a cymbal, signifying the death of Jesus, the tumult of the earth, and the rending of the temple curtain.



Good Friday Worship: Tenebrae

The service, which should not be rushed, is designed to facilitate meditative reflection on the cosmic implications of Christ's redemptive work in his perfect life, including his taking our place in his suffering and death on the cross.

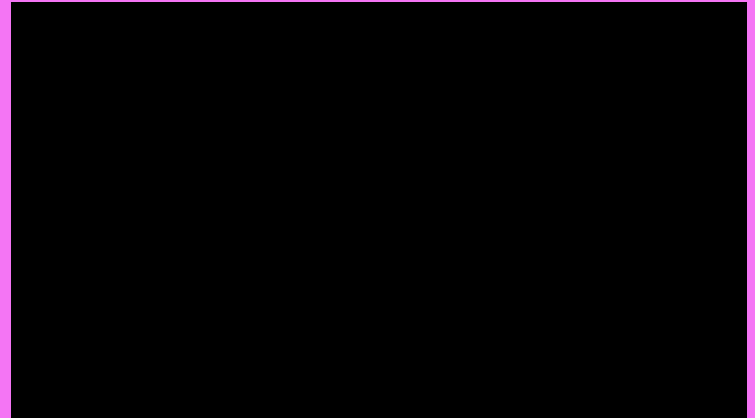
Worshippers leave the darkened sanctuary in silence, considering the meaning of what the Lord has provided for them, and looking forward to Easter Vigil in ever-increasing gladness anticipating the supreme joy awaiting them early on Sunday morning!



Saturday, Easter Vigil: The Paschal Candle

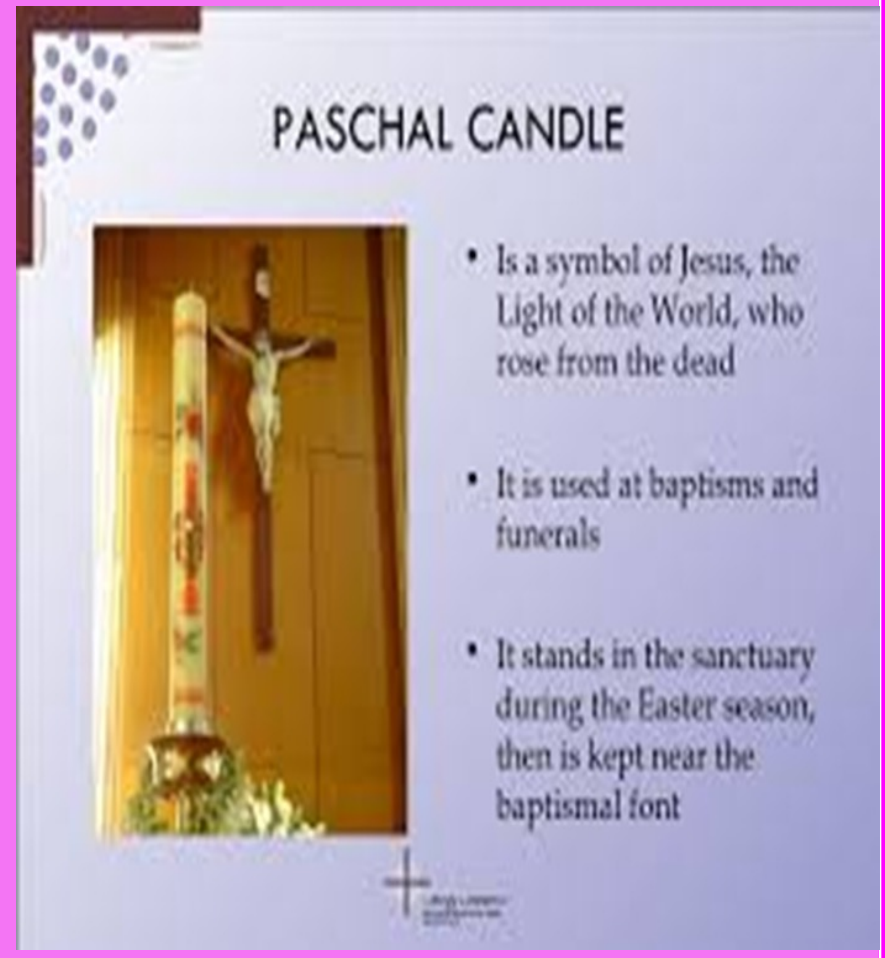
“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning,...” (Luke 12:35)

- The next day, some churches celebrate Easter Vigil, a profoundly inspiring worship experience.
- The service begins in darkness, representing all the darkness of the world, including the sin that led to Jesus having to die, all the evil in the world, and our own sins together with all the disharmony, discouragement, and depression they cause.
- Then a light emerges, piercing the darkness; it is the Paschal Candle.



Easter Vigil: The Paschal Candle

- Paschal means Passover. It comes from the Greek word *πάσχα*, *pascha*, Passover. (Cf., e.g., Matthew 26:17) In the romance languages, e.g., Spanish, paschal is the basis of the word, Pascua, for Resurrection day.
- In liturgical churches the candle is lit on Easter Vigil, the day before Easter.
- Representing the risen Savior who is the Light of the World, it is also burned in his worship services throughout the year.



Easter Vigil: The Paschal Candle

- The paschal candle is a large candle, and it is typically decorated with a considerable number of symbols that all refer to Jesus' mighty work in redeeming his creation.
- The paschal candle is often dated with the current year and new at each year's Easter Vigil.
- Called the Christ Candle by some, it points to the risen Savior, the Light of the world.



Easter Vigil: The Paschal Candle

“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning,...” (Luke 12:35)

- In some churches, the candle is lit at a bonfire for the Vigil and carried into the church while it is still dark in the building. From the Christ candle, believers receive light for their candles.
- On the evening called the Great Sabbath (the Saturday before Resurrection Sunday), when Jesus' body lay in the grave, the faithful come together to await the glorious resurrection morning!



Easter Vigil: The Paschal Candle

“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning,...”
(Luke 12:35)

- This text is primarily about being ready for Jesus’ second coming. Yet the principle, as he indicates by analogy, is the importance of always being prepared for any eventuality, the main application being for Jesus.
- Thus, this text is a fitting one the church has used to urge believers to gather to await the coming of the Lord, arisen from out of the grave in his resurrection glory!



Easter Vigil

- The service begins with Bible reading, singing, and prayer.
- Baptisms; confirming and receiving new members who have been receiving instruction, some for several years; and the Lord's Supper, the first for some new members, are typically celebrated at the Easter Vigil.
- The covenant signs of circumcision and Passover, are in Christ replaced respectively by baptism (Colossians 2:9-12) and the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).



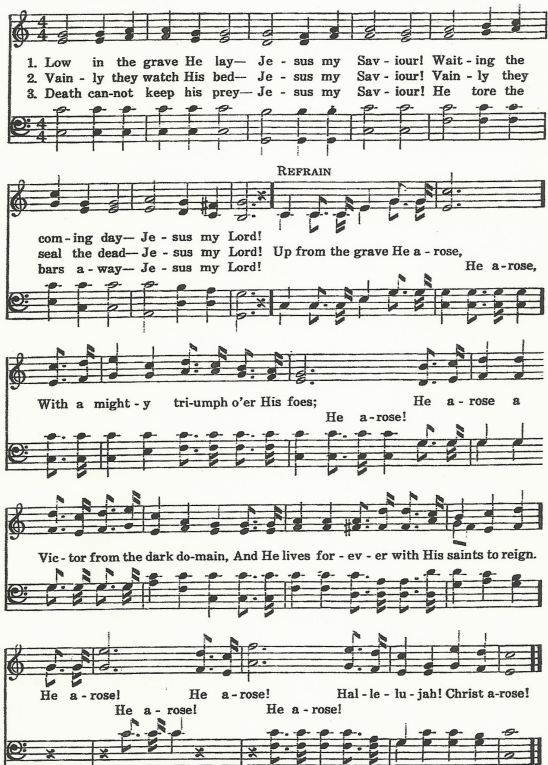
Historic Hymn: *Low in the Grave He Lay*

“...an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it...⁵The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.’” (Matthew 28:2,5,6; cf. John 21:19)

- This stirring hymn powerfully proclaims the Biblical truths: Jesus’ resurrection body had already risen and left the tomb, passing through the stone before the angel arrived.
- The hymn can be used e.g., at Easter Vigil, Easter Morning, church school, family devotions.

JESUS CHRIST THE SAVIOUR
79
Robert Lowry, 1826-1899

Christ Arose
Robert Lowry, 1826-1899



1. Low in the grave He lay— Je - sus my Sav - iour! Wait - ing the
2. Vain - ly they watch His bed— Je - sus my Sav - iour! Vain - ly they
3. Death can-not keep his prey— Je - sus my Sav - iour! He tore the
com - ing day— Je - sus my Lord!
seal the dead— Je - sus my Lord! Up from the grave He a - rose,
bars a - way— Je - sus my Lord! He a - rose,
With a might - y tri-umph o'er His foes; He a - rose! He a - rose a
Vic - tor from the dark do-main, And He lives for - ev - er with His saints to reign.
He a - rose! He a - rose! Hal - le - lu - jah! Christ a-rose!
He a - rose! He a - rose! He a - rose!



RESURRECTION DAY

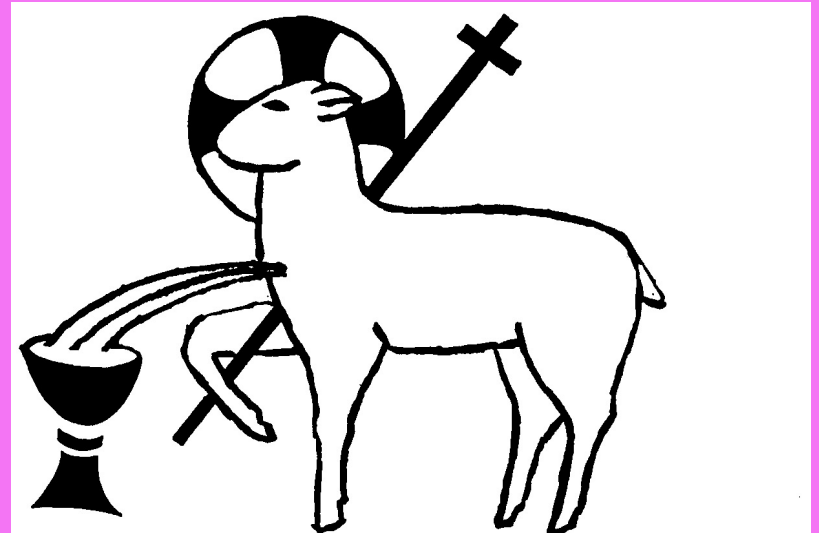
EASTER CELEBRATIONS

What Does It Mean that Christ Jesus Descended into Hell and What Did He Do There?

With his spirit and his resurrected body reunited very early on the third day of his death, Jesus' first act in his state of exaltation, glorification, was his glorious and immediate descent into hell, where he proclaimed the accomplishment of God's redemptive purposes, specifically the Lord's victory over Satan, the demons, and over all those who have disbelieved and disobeyed the triune God, for example those in Noah's time, and the final judgment to come. The risen and reigning Lord also affirmed his faithful and obedient followers, such as Noah. All of this is to encourage and assure us, when we are persecuted for Christ's sake. As Lenski has explained, "Noah and his family are saved; we, too, are saved 'by the resurrection of Christ,' by this exaltation of Christ at God's right hand." (See the accompanying commentary.)

The Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)

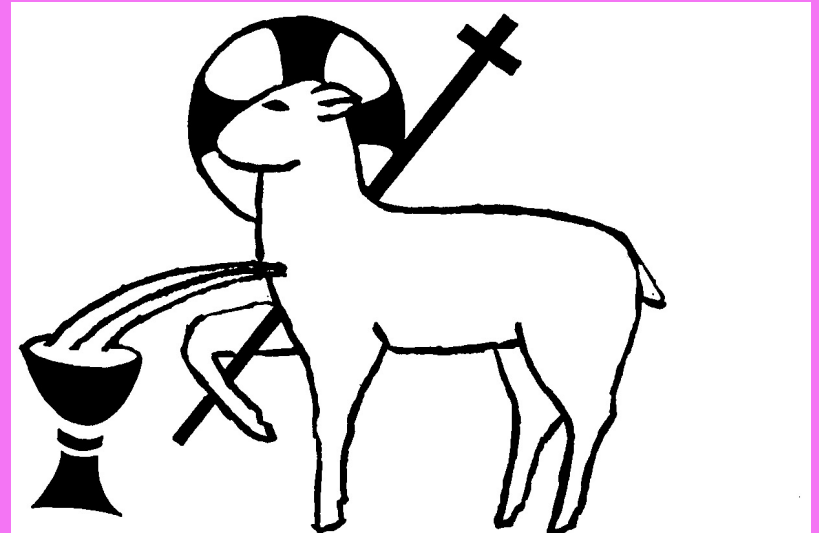
- An especially striking symbol of our Lord's death and resurrection is this one: The Lamb is slain in our stead. Yet he stands & lives!
- The communion cup unites us in him.
- The tri-radiant nimbus shows the Lamb is a member of the Trinity.
(Revelation 5:6 Hebrews 9:26-28)



The Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)

“Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders....”
(Revelation 5:6)

“...Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. (Hebrews 9:28)



The Tree Cross

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’” (Galatians 3:13)

- The Tree Cross, used as a worship aid in this church, is made from the trunk of a Christmas tree, and is used at Easter to remind worshipers of why Jesus came. It links Christmas with Easter. The figures are Mary and the Risen Christ.



The Tree Cross

“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree,...” (Acts 10:39)

- A Tree Cross can be a very effective symbol to facilitate Christian worship.
- Located in the Narthex by the central door leading into the Nave, it represents the access to the presence of God that Christ has provided for those who believe in and follow him.



Color White

- The color symbolizing Easter is white.
- White symbolizes purity, victory, and joy.
- Jesus' perfect obedience and death on the cross is victory over Satan and the forces of evil, which frees us from their bondage and from the defilement of sin that makes people unfit for fellowship with a holy God. (Revelation 5:5, 19:11-16, 20:11-15)

Color White

- The character of God is the key to understanding Lent and Easter, as well as everything else in time and eternity.
- If God is not holy, Lent and Easter have no meaning. If he is holy, indeed holy, holy, holy, as he has revealed himself to be, a person outside of Christ is in jeopardy of eternal separation from God, who is perfectly just as well as loving and merciful.

The Sunrise Service

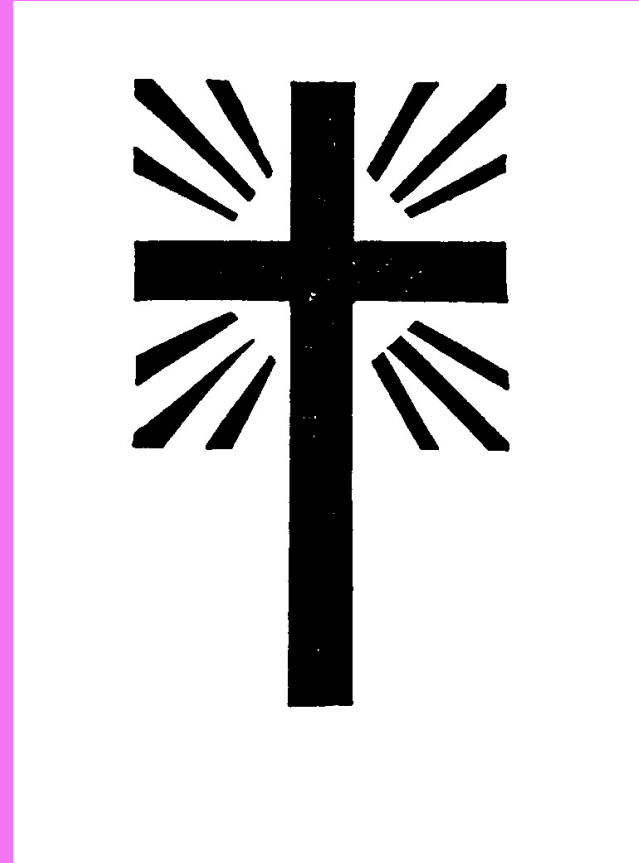
“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.” (Luke 24:1)

- The first known Easter sunrise service was in 1732 in Herrnhut, Germany, where some young Moravian men went to the cemetery at dawn to meditate on Jesus’ resurrection.
- Moravians in Bethlehem, PA, held the first known Easter sunrise service in America in 1741.



Cross of Glory

In this symbol the Latin Cross is emblazoned with the rising sun extending out from the intersection of the arms in a graphic depiction of Jesus' triumph and glory. The Cross is empty, testifying that Jesus is no longer dead; he is risen and reigning! (Luke 24:26)



The Empty Tomb on the Third Day

- “³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living,...” (1 Corinthians 15:3-6)
- Jews counted any part of a day as a whole day, thus Good Friday through Sunday are the three days.



No one could find Jesus' dead body after Sunday morning when he was resurrected. And, you can be sure they tried!

The Empty Tomb

- This is the most important symbol of Easter. (1 Corinthians 15:3,17)
- The empty tomb, which Pilate had officially sealed and guarded, is the chief answer for the rival hypotheses to the Biblical account of Jesus' Resurrection. (Matthew 27:57-28:15)
- Pictured here is a first century A. D. tomb outside Megiddo.

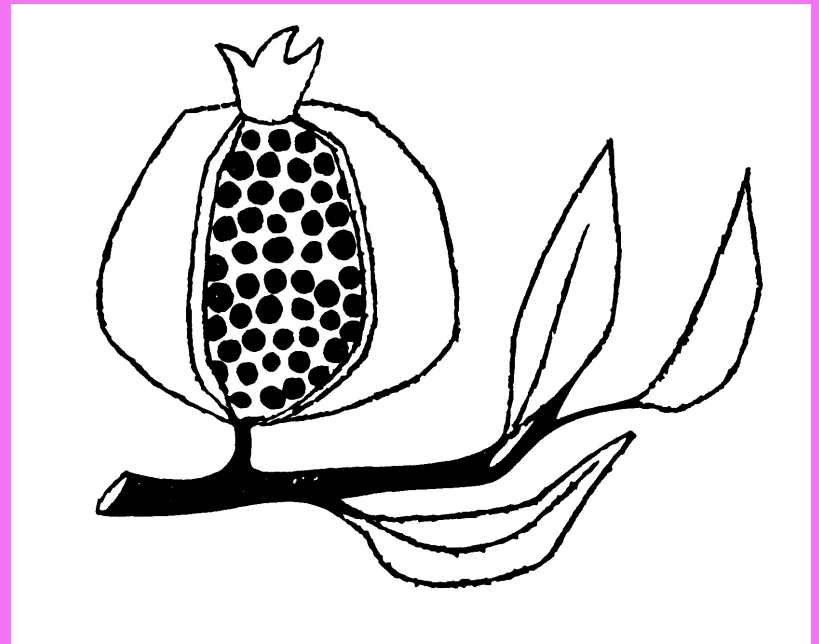


To view the video, see the accompanying commentary.

No one could find Jesus' dead body after Sunday morning when he was resurrected. And, you can be sure they tried!

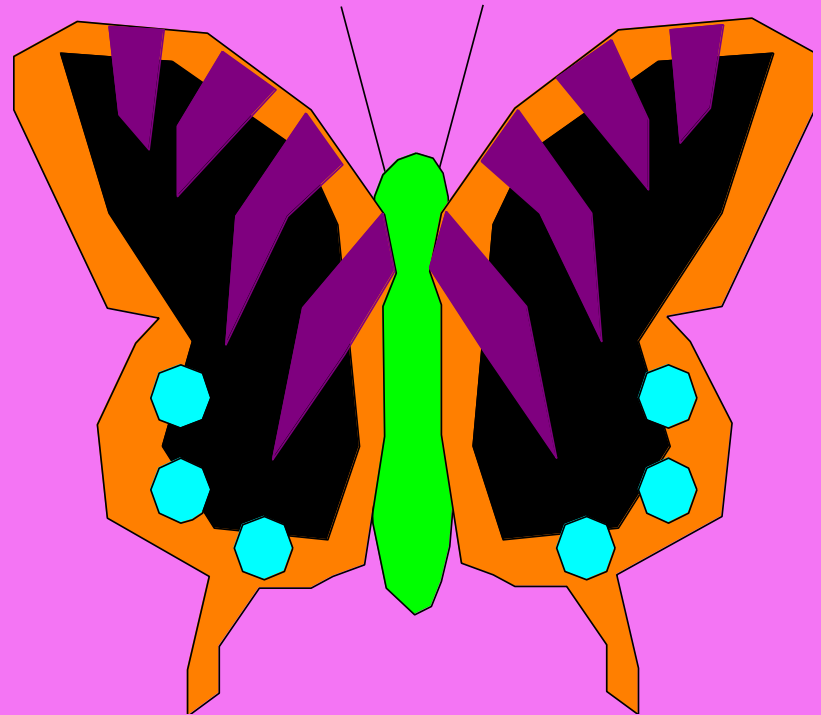
Pomegranate

- Seeds bursting forth from the pomegranate portray the power of the Lord who burst forth alive from the tomb. (Matthew 28:1-10)
- The many seeds also portray the unity of Christ and the church. (John 10:16; Galatians 3:28)



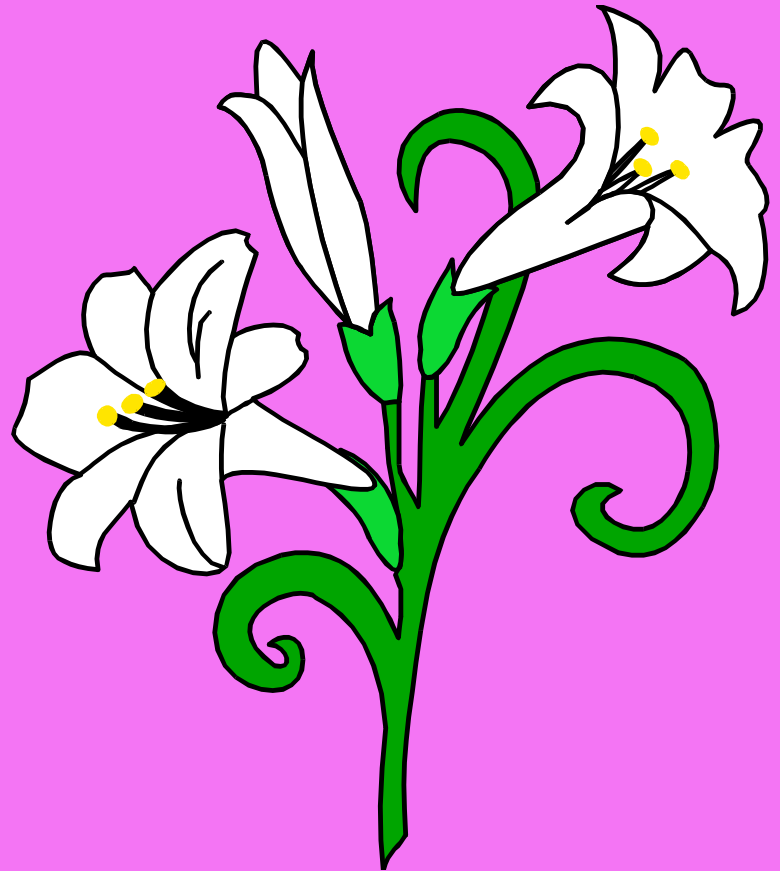
The Butterfly

- The larva represents people's less attractive nature due to sin.
- The chrysalis symbolizes the grave.
- The butterfly points to Christ's and our resurrection to a beautiful life free from this sinful state.
(Romans 6:4)



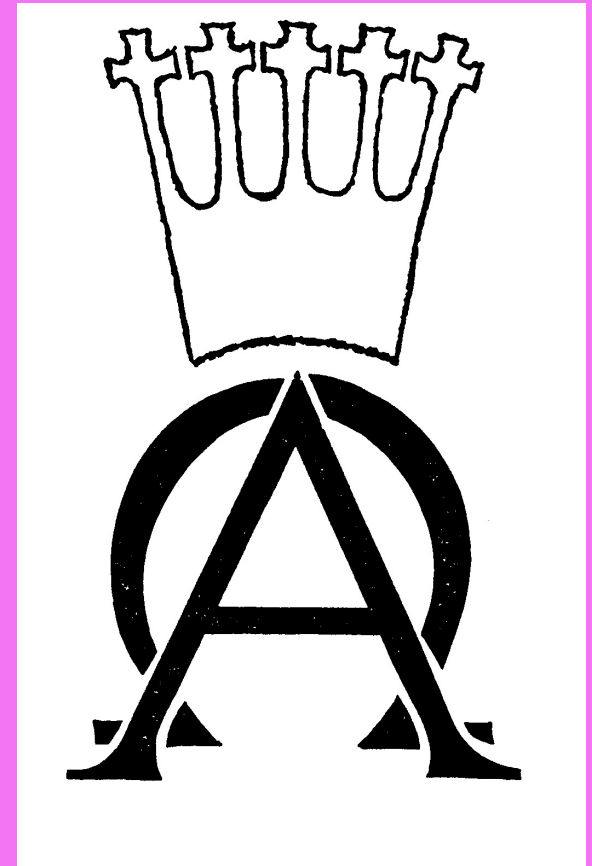
Easter Lily

The Easter lily symbolizes purity and new life through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the core tenet of the Christian faith. The lily symbolizes life after death: the seeming decay of the bulb in the ground giving rise to the beautiful form of new life which emerges in the spring around Easter. (1 Corinthians 15:35-49)



Crown, Alpha and Omega

- The crown represents a king.
- Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and omega the last.
- The combined images portray Christ as the risen and reigning king forever. (Revelation 1:8, 19:16, 22:13)



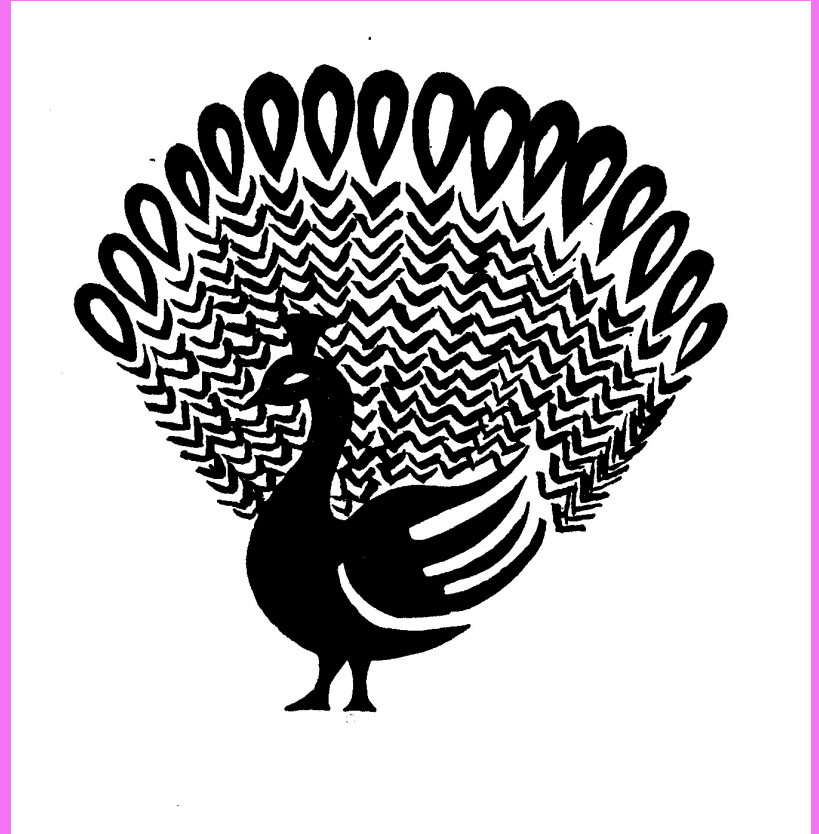
Phoenix

- In the legend of the phoenix, after 400 or more years, it dies and then rises from the ashes.
- This pre-Christian story gave early Christians another symbol for the Lord's Resurrection and ours.



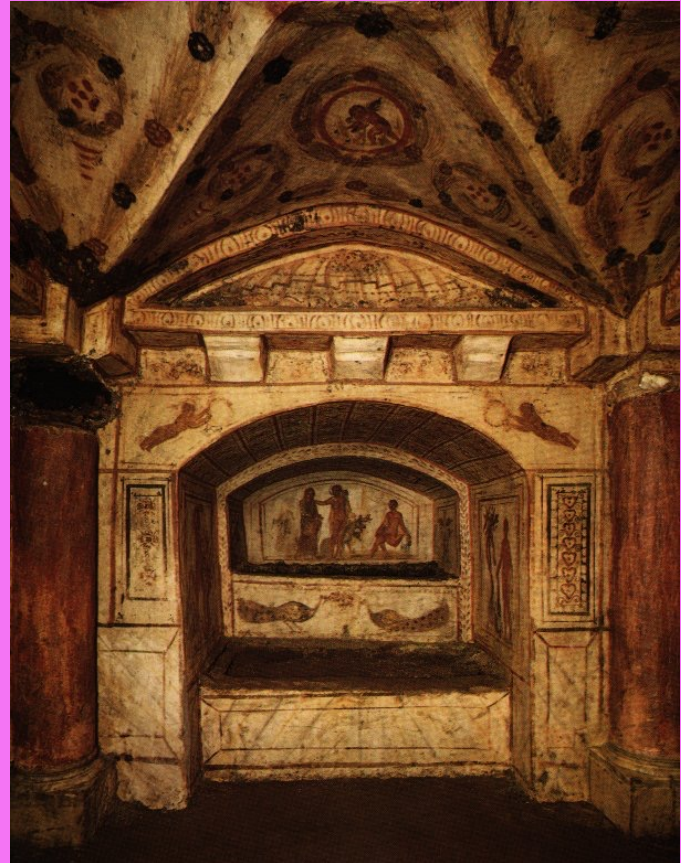
Peacock

- Commonly portrayed in the catacombs and in Byzantine art, this symbol builds on the legend that the peacock sheds its feathers each year to grow new and prettier ones.
- The link is renewal. (Romans 6:4)



Peacock in Catacomb

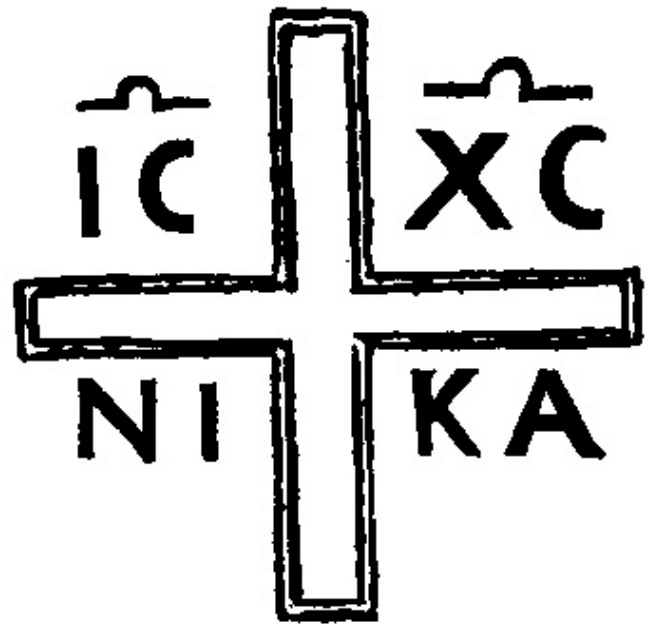
An example of early Christians using the symbolism of the peacock is in the Catacomb of Via Latina. (See the accompanying commentary.)



Cross: ICXC and NIKA

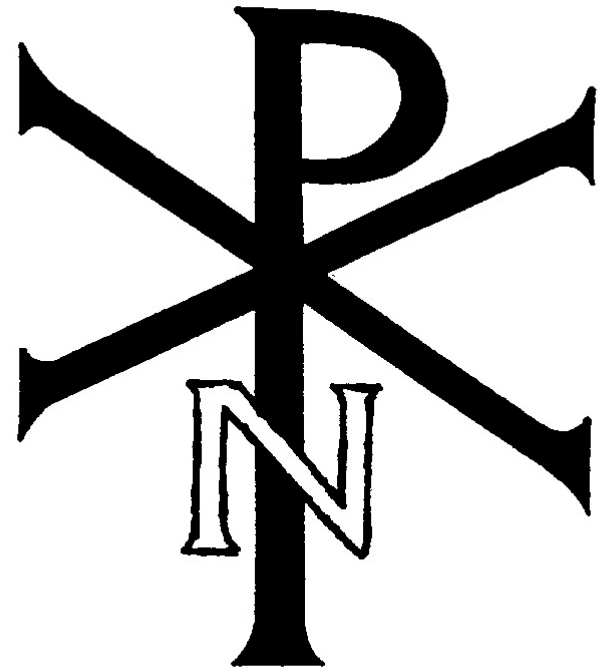
- This cross means “Jesus Christ the Victor.”
- The 4 letters on the top are the first and last letters in Greek for Jesus and Christ.
- The bottom letters are the Greek word for victor or conqueror.

(See the accompanying commentary.)



Chi Rho and Nika


- The two largest letters are the first two letters in the Greek word for Christ.
- The N is the first letter in the Greek word, NIKA, which means victor or conqueror. (Revelation 5:1-8)



Chi Rho, Alpha and Omega, Palm Wreath in Catacomb

- Examples abound of early Christian use of symbols on this casket in the tomb of Saint Peter.
- Notice the cross over and within a palm wreath (symbolizing victory over the world), the Alpha and Omega, and the other symbols discussed in the preceding slides.





CONTEMPORARY EASTER SIGNS AND CUSTOMS

USING THEM AS SYMBOLS OF THE
EASTER MESSAGE POINTING TO THE
NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Dressing in Best Clothes for Easter

- Early Christians who were baptized at the Easter Vigil wore white gowns as a symbol of their cleansing in Christ. They wore those white robes for the following week to indicate their new life in Christ.
- Other Christians who had already been baptized, did not wear white clothing, but they did dress in new clothes to signify that they, too, had risen to a new life in Christ through their penance and prayer during Lent.



The Easter Walk, Predecessor to The Easter Parade

- In the Middle Ages, after worship at church on Resurrection Day, Christians would dress in their best clothes and take what was then called an Easter Walk, another way to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- The Easter Walk would be preceded by a crucifix decorated with flowers, or in some places by the Paschal Candle.
- At specific places along the route of the Walk, prayers would be offered, and hymns would be sung.



The Easter Parade

- Eventually, the Easter Walk developed into what we now know as The Easter Parade.
- The secularization of The Easter Parade resulted in much that is unrelated to Christ's mighty work that we celebrate at Easter. And much appears that is undesirable.
- Yet, Christians remaining engaged in their culture can do a lot to highlight the real meaning of Easter, and The Easter Parade provides a great public forum to do so.



Eating Ham and Lamb at Easter

“You must never eat pigs.” (Leviticus 11:7)

- The Old Testament Law of Moses required, among other commands, that God’s people not eat the meat of pigs.
- Yet, since the Law pointed to Christ, who fulfilled the Law, the early church, led by the Holy Spirit, declared that believers in and followers of Christ were free in the Lord from the law’s burden, including free to eat the meat of pigs and in other ways. (Acts 15:28-29)
- In eating ham at Easter, Christians proclaim their freedom in Christ.



Eating Ham and Lamb at Easter

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32)

- In the liturgy of the church the Paschal lamb is a symbol of the Savior, Jesus Christ, the sacrificial lamb, whose great sacrifice has redeemed us.
- From medieval times, believers have eaten lamb on Easter in another remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice.
- Some today make a lamb out of pastry for a centerpiece at the Easter meal.



Colored Easter Eggs

- From ancient times the egg has been a symbol of fertility and immortality. During springtime rites, pagan people included the egg as a symbol in their rituals for the new life desired during the time for planting. As with many other ancient pagan symbols and practices, the church took this visible sign and applied it to the Resurrection of Christ with the intent that the Biblical perspective would eclipse the pagan practices.
- One of the earliest references to this development in church history is the acknowledgement by Pope Paul V (1605-21) in one of his official Easter prayers when he referred to “...eating it [the egg] in thankfulness to you, on account of the resurrection of our Lord.”

Colored Easter Eggs

- From ancient times eggs symbolized fertility and immortality.
- The church made this pagan symbol into one for the Resurrection of Christ. The egg symbolizes the tomb, new life coming forth from the tomb.



Colored Easter Eggs

“So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed.” (John 20:8)

- Since the eating of eggs was prohibited during Lent, in medieval times believers moved the tradition of giving eggs to Easter Sunday.
- Instead of symbolizing fertility, the Easter egg now represented the Lord's empty tomb.



Colored Easter Eggs

- The tradition of coloring Easter eggs has its origin in a legend that has no Biblical basis and no authentic oral tradition to support it. The story goes that Simon of Cyrene, the man who carried Jesus' Cross to Calvary, (Matthew 27:32) was a merchant of eggs. The legend portrays Simon returning from Calvary to discover that all the eggs in his basket had miraculously been given a variety of colors which were also adorned with drawings.
- This story does have one important lesson: the vital necessity to discern fact from fiction, especially when it comes to matters pertaining to the Bible, the Word of God.

Colored Easter Eggs

- In the Orthodox tradition some eggs are dyed red, an ancient iconographic hue symbolizing the sacrificial blood of Christ.



Colored Easter Eggs

This egg is from a Russian Orthodox church in St. Petersburg, Russia. In addition to the above-mentioned symbolism, the magnificent beauty of the church building painted on the egg, symbolizes the church that has its new birth in the Lord Jesus Christ who arose out of the tomb, represented by the egg.



Colored Easter Eggs

1. So we can see considerable historical precedent exists for taking secular, even pagan, objects and turning them into a redemptive purpose. This attempt has been made in modern times with eggs and bunnies; however, without any Christian explanation, the symbol is devoid of Christian content and remains pagan, even anti-Christian, at worst and simply secular at best. Tell your children, grandchildren, and others about these aspects of Easter eggs and bunnies.
2. There is danger in that we do not want to detract from our Lord or mitigate, including confuse, our witness to him, which is our holy calling. Above all, don't become sidetracked by attractive diversions, which are multitudinous in our society and culture in the United States. Americans live in one of the most dangerous countries in the world (spiritually). Keep your eyes on Jesus! **And do NOT remain silent.** Use the symbols to help point to Christ and his all-important Resurrection.

Easter Bunny

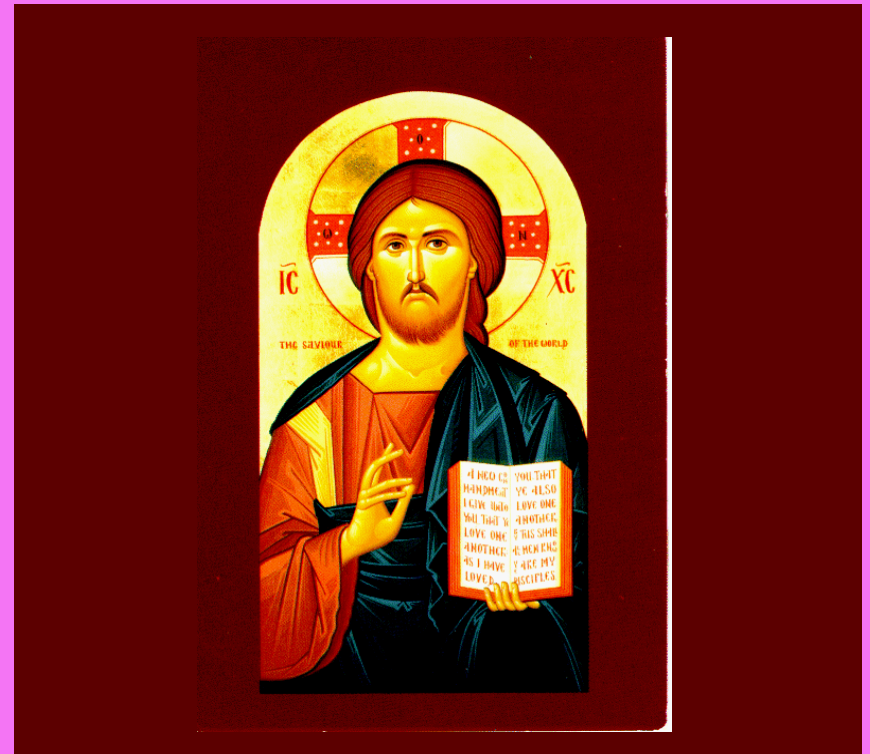
- Pagans considered the rabbit as a symbol of fertility and gave bunnies as gifts at the start of spring.
- The link with Easter occurs at least by the 16th century in Germany.
- Here is another example of a Christian attempt to redefine and supersede a pagan concept, this one associated with fertility: it refers to abundant new life associated with Easter. Otherwise, it has no profound or Biblical significance.

(See the accompanying commentary.)



Christ Pantocrator, Ruler of All

- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity (note the tri-radiant nimbus and the two and three fingers), the eternal Word of God, lives and reigns forever!
- This Eastern Orthodox icon is often seen in the dome of Orthodox churches, signifying the union of the church in heaven and the church on earth with Christ, ruler of all. (Revelation 19:6)



Concluding Application from Peter Marshall, Presbyterian Pastor and Chaplain of the U. S. Senate

No tabloid will ever print the startling news that the mummified body of Jesus of Nazareth has been discovered in old Jerusalem. Christians have no carefully embalmed body enclosed in a glass case to worship. Thank God, we have an empty tomb. The glorious fact that the empty tomb proclaims to us is that life for us does not stop when death comes.

Death is not a wall, but a door.

An eternal life which may be ours now, by faith in Christ, is not interrupted when the soul leaves the body, for we live on and on. There is no death to those who have entered into fellowship with Him who emerged from the tomb. Because the Resurrection is true, it is the most significant thing in our world today. Bringing the Resurrected Christ into our lives, individual and national, is the only hope we have for making a better world. (Peter Marshall, “The First Easter”)



Jesus Is Risen and Reigning!
Joyous Resurrection Blessings to You!

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Sources and Resources

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