

Faith Tidbits..

*a little food for thought
and some knowledge
about your
Catholic faith*

April 2008

This monthly series will answer questions you always wondered about or questions you never even thought to ask... all about our Catholic Faith. If you have a question you want answered, call Diane Hardick at 633-3672.

This month, here is a little about the Easter Season and its traditions.

How do we determine the date of Easter?

Unless you are over the age of 95, this is the earliest date of Easter you will ever see. The last time Easter was this early was 1913, and the next time it will be this early (March 23) will be the year 2228. The only earlier date for Easter is March 22, and we will not see that date again until 2285. The last time Easter was March 22 was in 1818. Easter is always the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox (which is March 23). This dating of Easter is based on the lunar calendar that Hebrew people used to identify Passover, which is why it moves around on our Roman calendar.

How did some of our Easter traditions get started: Easter eggs, the Easter parade and Easter lilies?

Easter Eggs: The egg has become a popular Easter symbol. The egg is a natural symbol, not only of creation, but also of re-creation and resurrection. In ancient Egypt and Persia friends exchanged decorated eggs at the spring equinox, the beginning of their new year. Christians of the Near East adopted this tradition, and the Easter egg became a religious symbol. It represented the tomb from which Jesus came forth to new life. Because eggs were at one time forbidden by the Church's Lenten discipline of fasting and abstinence, they were a precious Easter food.

Easter Parade: During the middle Ages in Europe, people in their new Easter clothes would take a long walk after Easter Mass. This was a kind of procession preceded by a crucifix or the Easter Candle. Even though its original meaning was lost, the tradition evolved into the Easter parade.

Easter Lilies: Easter lilies did not exist in North America until about 100 years ago. The white trumpet lily, which blooms naturally in springtime, was introduced here from Bermuda by Mrs. Thomas P. Sargent. The popular name "Easter lilies" comes from the fact that they bloom around Easter time. In early Christian art the lily is a symbol of purity because of its delicacy of form and its whiteness. For the same reason it serves well as a symbol of resurrection.

What is the tradition and history of the Easter Candle?

The lighting of the Easter candle seems to have originated in the ancient daily ritual of *Lucernare* ("lighting of the lamps") as darkness fell. The tradition of lighting candles held by people present began in Rome in the early centuries. There the dark of night at the Easter Vigil was filled with candles symbolic of the resurrected Christ. In the Frankish kingdom further symbolism was added. A cross is cut or traced into the candle with the proclamation: "Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the end," adding the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, "Alpha and Omega." The numbers of the current year are added in the four angles of the crossbars with the proclamation: "All time belongs to him and all the ages; to him be glory and power through every age forever. Amen." Four grains of incense, sealed in wax red nails, are inserted at the ends of the crossbars and one is inserted where the crossbars meet. At our parish, the red wax nails are inserted earlier in the day. Father then traces the cross and adds the Greek letters with their proclamations just before the lighting of the Easter candle at the Easter Vigil Mass.