

Celebrating Easter

Ideas for Busy Parents

“What is today about?” asked the Sunday school teacher to a group of preschoolers one Easter morning. “The Easter bunny brought eggs,” was the immediate and unequivocal reply. An unbiased observer, perhaps a visitor from another planet, might conclude that our Easter celebration is as much a festival of bunnies, eggs, candy, and new clothes as a celebration of Jesus’ resurrection.

We’re not suggesting that you should banish all of your Easter traditions, but read on for some suggestions on how to make Easter a more joyful and faith-filled experience for your whole family.

The Reason for the Season

The first step is to share the Easter story with your child. Even if your child knows the story, tell it again. We all pick up different insights over time.

There can be no resurrection without death, so the Easter story includes the Passion and death of Jesus. For younger children, be sensitive about discussing the violent details of Jesus’ death. You are the best judge of what your child is ready to understand. You can share more details when he or she is older.

Easter Sunday is our most joyful holiday and it starts a 50-day-long Easter season, when we hear what happened next each week in Mass. Read more about sharing the Easter story on the next page.

How to Celebrate

Easter is a time for joy because of what God has done. It is also a time for serious reflection about what it means for us to be followers of Jesus and to participate in his ministry. His resurrection was, after all, God’s answer to the forces that opposed Jesus’ ministry. It was a sign

that the ministry of healing, teaching and suffering on behalf of the poor and outcasts did not end on the cross. What does this say about how we might best celebrate Easter?

We don’t have to toss all the candy or ban the Easter Bunny—and we most definitely should still be celebrating—but we can be intentional about how we choose to do so. You might be concerned about how your child would react to making any changes to your tradition, but you might be surprised.

Try this: after telling your child what the Easter story is about, ask what *they* think would be good ways to celebrate that. Then have a family conversation to make some decisions together.

Easter Celebration Ideas

Here are suggestions we have gathered from other families for how you might do things a little differently this year.



✦ Brainstorm ways to adapt your existing traditions or start new ones to incorporate the real meaning of Easter. Add “Jesus Is Risen” alongside “Happy Easter.” Search online for “Christian Easter crafts.”

✦ Explain the connections between the Easter message traditions you will continue. For example, eggs and rabbits remind us of new life.

✦ Find ways to decorate that are less wasteful. Reuse decorations from year to year. Avoid plastic (who came up with the idea of plastic grass?!) as much as you can. Less can be more in decorating.

✦ Do your research and be very thoughtful before buying baby animals for Easter. The American Humane Society

reports that the vast majority of the baby bunnies, chicks, and ducks given for Easter die within a few weeks.

✚ Don't shop just for the sake of the sales or season. Shop for what you really need.

✚ Moderate the amount of candy you eat. Americans buy over 120 million pounds of Easter candy (\$2.1 billion worth) each year. Make it a treat, not a binge. Your bodies will thank you. Some families stuff at least some of their plastic eggs with alternates to candy (erasers, mini crackers, coins, etc.).

✚ We strongly recommend having a special Easter feast as a family. Use it as an opportunity to connect well with family and/or friends. The food does not have to be super fancy, but try to do something differently. Get everyone involved in the preparation so no one has to do too much. Light candles. Begin with prayer. Enjoy each others' company!

An Easter table blessing

Lord,
You are our light and salvation.
You are the stronghold of our lives.
The brightness of the resurrection of Christ
has shattered the darkness of our world
and made our faces glow with new life
he has bestowed through the Holy Spirit.
As we share these Easter gifts of food and drink,
grant that we may dwell in your presence
all the days of our lives
and one day behold your beauty in heaven,
where you live and reign as one God,
forever and ever. Amen.

from *These Thy Gifts: A Collection of Simple Meal Prayers*
by Mark G. Boyer.

Telling the Easter Story

There are two sides to the Easter story: what physically happened, and what it means to us. Here are ideas for sharing both with your child.

Storytelling

The first side comes to us from the Gospels. If your child is old enough to understand the language, you can read it together. We recommend reading from chapter 20 of John and/or chapter 24 of Luke.

The adult language in the Bible can be difficult for younger children to understand, though. A good children's story Bible could help here. Or you can read the passages yourself—perhaps a couple times—and then tell your child the story

in your own words. It's easier than you might think. Be playful and have fun with it. Don't just relate the facts, but draw your child into the rich emotions (they were sad, scared, surprised, happy!).

What It Means

Your child is likely to start asking questions (perhaps many starting with the famous "why?"). Don't be intimidated. A good place to start is to ask your child what he or she thinks. You may be surprised at how much insight your child has!

Continue the conversation with them. If a question comes up that you don't know how to answer, tell them it's a great question and that you don't know (you might choose

to ask a parish staff member the next Sunday).

Key points to share with your child:

✚ Jesus rose to show us that even though people do bad things and sad things happen, God's love overcomes them.

✚ Jesus' resurrection means that we will also rise after we die someday, so we can be with Jesus and everyone who died before us.

✚ Jesus is still alive and we still encounter him today (even though it can be hard to recognize him). Jesus left the Holy Spirit to be with us in a special way.

For more tips about using the Bible at home, visit:
<http://GrowingUpCatholic.com/bible>.