

Interfaith Voices GT Column: Easter Is More Than Eggs and Bunnies

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Tomorrow is Easter Sunday. But Easter wasn't always celebrated on a Sunday. The Holy Bible tells of Jesus Christ coming to Jerusalem for the Passover. It was during this visit that He was crucified and resurrected. Early Christians remembered this Easter resurrection by counting three days from the Passover. Since Passover fell on a different day of the week each year, the Council of Nicaea, in A.D. 325, designated that the Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox would be the official Easter. That is why Easter comes this year on March 27 and on April 16 in 2017.

How did we end up with bunnies, eggs, and baby lambs to represent Easter? The rabbit was an ancient symbol for the moon. Known for its fertility, the rabbit demonstrated the ability to recreate life. To early Christians, the egg meant new life. The empty shell represented an empty tomb.

Baby sheep have roots in the Passover ceremony when an unblemished young lamb was sacrificed. John 1:29 reads, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Among the colorfully dyed eggs and stuffed animal toys like chicks, bunnies, and lambs, we find ancient symbols of a most holy event.

On the website for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, www.lds.org, the days leading to Easter Sunday are described in these meaningful words:

Thursday, The Garden of Gethsemane — Jesus observes the Passover with His Apostles in what is often referred to as the Last Supper. He shares His love for them, through both His words and His actions. Then together they depart to a quiet garden called Gethsemane. But what happens next Jesus must endure alone. He prays and is overcome by unfathomable agony. This is the beginning of the culmination of Jesus Christ's sacred mission. He takes upon himself the sins of the world.

Friday, Crucifixion and Burial — In the early hours of the morning, Jesus is betrayed into the hands of the local authorities. After a series of one-sided trials, He is sentenced to death by crucifixion. He dies on the cross that afternoon, with his disciples and accusers present as witnesses. Because Jesus Christ experienced such profound suffering, He has perfect empathy for us when we are in pain, be it physical or spiritual. Because He overcame death to live again, He has the power to help us rise above the challenges in our lives, no matter how dark and difficult things may seem.

Saturday, The Tomb — The night before, Jesus Christ's body had been placed in the tomb. The scriptures are mostly silent on the day after His crucifixion.

Sunday, The Resurrection — Early in the morning, Mary Magdalene, a friend and follower of Jesus, comes to the tomb to care for Jesus Christ's body. To her astonishment, she finds the tomb empty. But she is not alone. A man addresses her, a gardener, she supposes. But then He says her name, "Mary." And she sees. He is Jesus. The Christ lives. Jesus Christ overcame death and was resurrected, and because He lives, all of us will live again. Because He lives, not just on the third day, but this day, every day, we can find Him."

Easter is much more than dyed eggs and an Easter bunny. I am grateful for this day which is tied intrinsically to Jesus Christ. Through Him, I believe that our sins, large and small, can be forgiven and forgotten. Christ's life exemplifies overcoming hardships and finding peace. Because of His resurrection, I believe we will reunite with friends and family members for eternity. What a gift for us all.