

Eastertime Symbols & Traditions

Note: Not all British people are Christians, although in the past most British people followed the Christian festivals – many of our Bank Holidays were created to allow the ordinary working people to attend a religious service or were created as a day of rest and celebration associated with the Christian festival. Today, many people do not know the true meaning of festivals like Easter.

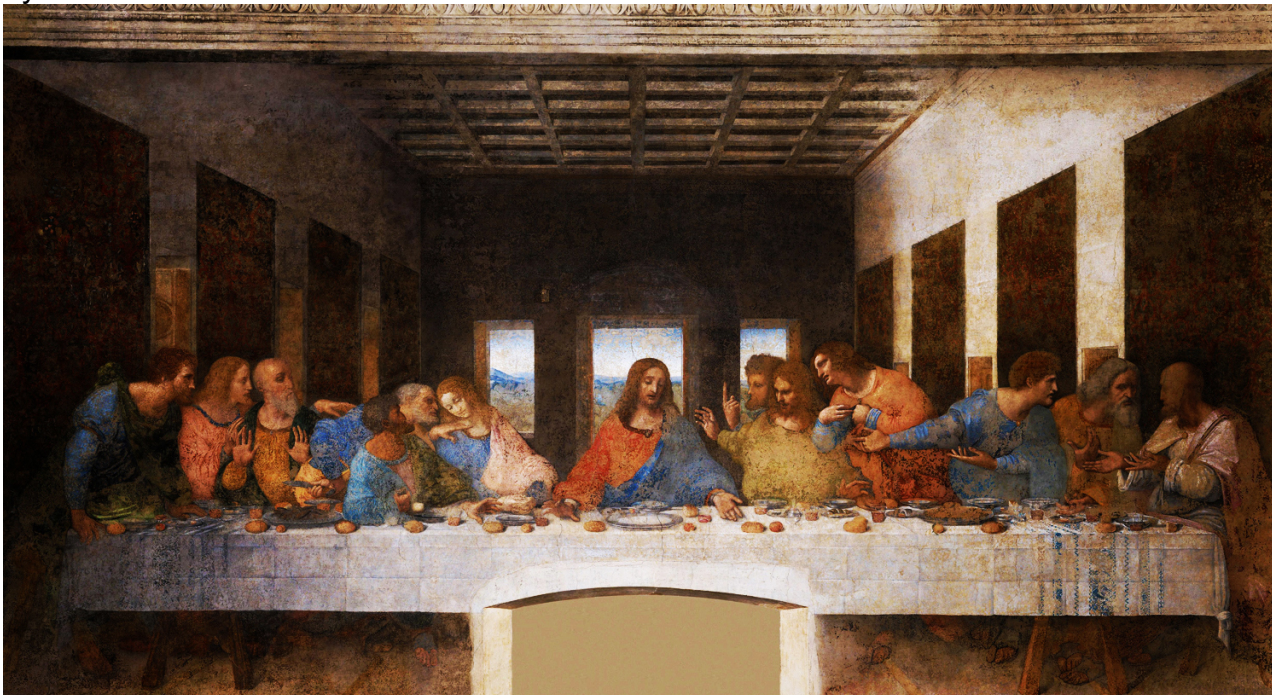
Remember when we had pancakes? That was the beginning of the season of Lent – a time when we are encouraged to examine our lives and see what needs correction. Traditionally during this time it was common to eat less food – pancakes were made to use up fat, cream, eggs and yeast in the house. Many people also went without meat until Easter.

The next significant day is Palm Sunday when Christians remember that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (a sign of humility) and the ordinary people welcomed him as their King. The Romans and the local rulers did not and were against Jesus.



The people waved palm branches, which was the traditional welcome for someone you honoured and so you may see a Palm Cross (on your table) which is given to Christians during their worship service as a reminder of that event.

The next symbolic point is called Maundy Thursday. Traditionally, this day has been recognised as the day that Jesus shared his last meal with his followers before the Romans and the local authorities arrested him. You may have seen famous paintings of The Last Supper, like this one by Leonardo da Vinci:



At this meal, Jesus told his followers that they were not to be like the local authorities, bossing and bullying the people but they were to serve, even like a slave. He commanded them 'to love one

another'. To illustrate the point he took off his jacket and washed his followers' feet, just like a slave. Up to the 18th century the King/Queen of England would wash the feet of some poor people on this day as a sign of humility. Kings are given authority and responsibility to rule for the GOOD of the people, not just for their own benefit. This tradition was to remind the Sovereign of this fact. Why 'Maundy'? - The Latin for commandment is mandatum, and it is from this that the word maundy is derived.



On Maundy Thursday, at a church service (in a different city every year), the Queen gives away special coins, called Maundy Money to some ordinary people (selected pensioners) as a sign of serving the people by sharing her wealth. The amount is based on the age of the Monarch, so in 2016 for example, 90 men and 90 women received 90p of the special money (see photos).

This money is not spent but treasured for its ceremonial significance, and you are unlikely to see any actual coins unless you know someone who received it from the Queen. The tradition of the Sovereign giving money to the poor dates from the 13th Century. The Sovereign used to give food and clothing as well as washing the recipients' feet. The last monarch to do so was James II.

After Maundy Thursday comes Good Friday. A strange title for remembering that someone was put to death by crucifixion!

Christians believe that on this day Jesus allowed his life to be taken as a sacrifice for the wrongdoing of everyone. And so although the circumstances were horrific the outcome (forgiveness) is something to be glad about in a respectful and thankful way. The name 'Good Friday' may be derived from 'God's Friday' in the same way that good-bye is derived from 'God be with you'.

So Christians celebrate in a respectful way by 'breaking the fast' – (breakfast) with a Hot-Crossed Bun – again restoring to use the fat, cream, eggs and yeast that were stopped during Lent. This is symbolic that the Cross of Jesus has restored relationship with God, just as the food items are restored to use. The bun is spicy (an expensive item until recent times), because what has been done for mankind is good and enriches life.

Try a hot-crossed bun for yourself. Many British people will be enjoying these buns again this year without realising the significance.



And then comes the climax of the season – Easter Day.

This day is celebrated as Resurrection Day or New Life Day – the day Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead as an indicator that He had overcome death and sin that caused it.

Jesus was buried in a stone tomb (as was Middle Eastern tradition) and the entrance was sealed with a large round stone. It was guarded by Roman soldiers to avoid an expected insurrection. When Jesus' followers came to attend to his body they found the stone had been rolled back and the tomb was empty.

It was traditional for boiled eggs to be eaten for breakfast (a 'good thing' restored after Lent and an ancient symbol of new life) and these were often coloured red or green with dye to make them festive. The chocolate Easter egg has largely replaced the real egg.



All over the world, we see different styles of eggs – like these Romanian hand-painted Easter Eggs.

A tradition grew up in Germany of rolling your Easter Egg like the tomb stone was rolled away. We will be trying some egg rolling later.

Of course, all these are only symbols – just reminders of the real events.

Thoughts

Palm Sunday – you can hold the cross like a dagger and become King by force or you can give up your life willingly and lay down on a cross and be crucified and gain a greater Kingdom.

Maundy Thursday – wealth can be shared by serving as well as giving money.

Good Friday –

Easter Sunday -