

# Greeks celebrated Orthodox Easter

ATHENS -- The Greek Orthodox Church on Sunday celebrated Easter, the country's biggest holiday, with a special mass and family gatherings around the traditional meal of roasted lamb.

With 97 percent of Greeks identified as Orthodox Christians, preparations for the Easter began earlier this week with millions traveling to their home villages to mark the holiday with their relatives.

Greek President Karolos Papoulias and other political leaders visited military units to celebrate Easter with the troops, conducting such traditional rituals as breaking the red-coloured Easter eggs to mark the end of Lent, the 40-day period of fasting and reflection leading up to Easter.

Papoulias visited a military base near the Greek border with Albania while Prime Minister Costas Caramanlis went to the Dekelias base northwest of



Athens.

The religious holiday began with an Easter mass at midnight Sunday where the faithful lit candles from the "Holy Fire", which comes from the Church of the

Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the site where most Christians believe Jesus was crucified and buried.

For believers, the Greek Orthodox patriarch enters the Holy Sepulchre, recites special prayers and waits in the darkened church at Jesus's tomb for the Holy Fire to light an oil lamp.

The flame is shared by candles and transported by a special plane on Saturday from Jerusalem to Athens, and then flown to churches around Greece.

On the Greek island of Chios, a century-old Orthodox Easter mock fireworks battle took place, despite a safety crackdown earlier this week.

On the night of Holy Saturday, parishioners of the Virgin Mary and St Mark churches in the village of Vrontado fired off some 50,000 rockets at the opposing belfries, public television Net reported.



## Spinach Pie (Spanakopita)

**Ingredients:** 3 ½ lbs spinach - 4-5 spring onions, chopped - ¾ lb feta cheese - 2-3 eggs, beaten - salt and pepper - chopped parsley and dill - 1 cup olive oil - 1 lb filo pastry

Wash the spinach and chop it finely. Add 1 tablespoon salt and rub it in with the hands. Leave for an hour. Squeeze it well. Add 1/3 cup olive oil, the onions, the feta cheese crumbled, eggs, parsley, dill and pepper. Take a buttered baking pan 10" X 14" X 2" and line with one pastry sheet. Brush liberally with oil. Add 6 more pastry sheets, brushing each with oil. Fill with spinach mixture and cover with more sheets of filo pastry. Brush the top sheet with oil and carve the top three sheets with a sharp knife into 3-inch strips from one end of the pan to the other. Sprinkle the top with water, to prevent the pastry sheets from curling upwards. Bake the spinach pie in a moderate oven for 40-45 minutes. Cool slightly and cut into squares. Serve hot or cold. Makes 20 pieces.

## Eggs crack and families unite in week of ritual

*A GREEK Easter is never a small affair, but the Apostolidis family of Oakleigh South take the cake. Their biggest week of the year is a marathon of prayer and family feasts.*

It culminates in a four-hour church service, a 3am banquet, and a lamb-on-a-spit lunch on Sunday.

Their youngest two, Dimitri, 7, and Tammi, 12, helped grandmother Vasiliki and great-aunt Paula make traditional cakes, and to dye red the hard-boiled eggs they cracked after the feast, to symbolise the resurrected Christ's tomb-opening.

Dimitri's parents, Maki and Vicki, are proud Australians, but are keen to keep Greek traditions alive for their five children, aged 7 to 27.

The City of Monash says more than 15,000 residents have a Greek background. Bakeries have been selling lampatha (festive candles) and tsoureki (sweet bread). Locals wish one another "Kalo Pascha" (Happy Easter).

Since last Sunday, Mr and Mrs Apostolidis have gone to services at



Dimitri Apostolidis, 7, of Oakleigh South, helped prepare the eggs that were cracked to symbolise the opening of Christ's tomb. Photo: Angela Wylie

Oakleigh's Saints Anargiri Greek Orthodox church twice a day;

During Friday night's service, worshippers held candles and icons and sang as they walked through Oakleigh streets behind the Epitaphios, an elaborate, two metre-high shrine representing Christ's tomb.

Mr Apostolidis says the church holds about 500, but up to 3000 spill out into

Willesden Street. At midnight, the priest lighted 33 candles to symbolise Christ's 33 years, and then lighted the worshippers' candles, to symbolise the spread of hope. The clergy moved outside the church, chanting that Christ's rising has trampled death and given us eternal life.

The service continued for another two hours, until the priest gave everyone a red, hard-boiled egg while saying, "Christos Anesti", (Christ is Risen). They reply, "Alithos Anesti" (Truly he is risen).

At home, the Apostolidis family broke the fast of the past seven weeks — no meat or dairy — with the magiritsa soup — sheep intestines mixed with rice, aniseed, and an egg-and-lemon sauce. That's was followed by roast lamb and chicken, potatoes, tyropita (cheese pie), and spanakopita (spinach and feta pastry) washed down with Greek wine. Then there are the oodles of cakes, made of honey and butterscotch and walnuts. Finally, there was a competition to see whose egg cracks first.

Mr Apostolidis and Dimitri woke up at 8am on Sunday to prepare a full lamb for lunch. The spit was set up in the Prahran backyard of Maki's daughter Allis and son-in-law Kon Sardellis. The family lunch went on into the night. "There's was a lot of drinking and dancing and music," Mr Apostolidis said.

Article from The Age

## Happy Greek Easter!

Technically, I guess that should be "Happy Eastern Orthodox Easter". It has something to do with the calendar. This Easter has to come after Passover. Of course, there's the best part--the half price Easter candy. And there's the tapping of the dark red Easter eggs--the person with the uncracked egg wins. And there's the yeast cake made with masticha with a whole hard boiled egg in it.

When I was 19 my family traveled to Athens to have Easter with our family there. From a balcony in a tiny house in a small suburb of Athens, we watched at midnight as hundreds of the faithful traveled down the streets carrying candles. We lit candles from each other and we sang "Christos Anesti" and felt buoyed by the beauty of the night.

The best part for me was the aroma of roast leg of lamb with lemon juice and oregano and quartered potatoes roasting in the broth. By the way, when Greeks put lemon juice on something, we are not talking about a slender sliver of lemon and a quick spritz. We're talking about three or four lemon halves squeezed. We're talking a lot of lemon juice. There's ovgolemono soup -- egg and lemon -- whisked into lamb broth or chicken broth till it thickens to a silky veloute. Then there's the Baklava. Spanakopita. Galaktobouriko. Tarama Salada. It's all so, so good. Have a beautiful day.

