



Christian symbols associated with Easter

One of the most common Christian symbols, especially associated with Easter, is the lamb. It is often depicted with a banner that bears a cross, and it is known as the Agnus Dei, meaning "Lamb of God" in Latin.

The popularity of lamb as an Easter food is undoubtedly related to its importance as a symbol. During the middle ages roast lamb became the traditional main course of the Pope's Easter dinner, and it is still customarily served on Easter Sunday in many European countries.

The **Easter Egg** is associated with beliefs of particularly ancient origin. The egg was an important symbol in the mythologies of many early civilizations, including those of India and Egypt. It was commonly believed that the universe developed from a great egg and that the halves of its shell corresponded to Heaven and earth. The egg was also connected with the springtime fertility rituals of many pre-Christian and Indo-European peoples, like the old Cretans, and both the Egyptians and the Persians made a practice of coloring eggs in the spring.

Greeks mainly color eggs red (scarlet) to signify the blood of Christ. They use hard-boiled eggs (painted red on Holy Thursday) which are baked into twisted sweet-bread loaves or distributed on Easter Sunday; people rap their eggs against their friends' eggs and the owner of the last uncracked egg is considered lucky.

RED EASTER EGGS

(Kokkina pasxalina avga)

One of the nicest Greek customs is the use of red eggs for the Easter celebration. It is unthinkable to set an Easter table without them, for they add to the celebration and happy atmosphere.

INGREDIENTS

Uncooked Eggs
Water
3/4 cup Vinegar
Red food dye or coloring
Vegetable oil
A few cotton balls

METHOD

Carefully wash and dry each egg. Set a

large pot of water to boil. Add a red dye or food coloring and 3/4 cup of vinegar to the water, and boil for a few minutes. Slowly lower the eggs into the pot, and when the water comes to a boil, lower the heat. Let eggs simmer for 15 min., then remove them carefully from the pot. If you plan to cook more eggs, add an additional 2 tbs. vinegar to the water. Wipe cooked eggs with an oil-soaked cotton ball, then wipe each egg with a clean dry cloth. Place on a platter. Serve cold.

TSOUREKI (Greek Easter Bread)

This braided bread recipe has its origins in the Byzantine Era. You don't have to be a theologian to comprehend the correlation between the Easter season and bread making as nearly any yeast-activated bread will rise again when diligently prepared.

INGREDIENTS

2-7 gram Packets Active Dry Yeast
2 cups Warm Milk
9 to 10 cups All-purpose Flour
1 1/2 cups Granulated Sugar
2 tsp. Makhlepi (Optional; essence drawn from the seeds of Mediterranean wild cherries)

8 Tbs. Butter; Melted and Cooled
6 Eggs; 1 Lightly Beaten
1 tsp. Salt

1 Tbs. Grated Orange Rind (Zest)
1 Tbs. Grated Lemon Rind (Zest)
2 Hard-Cooked Red-Dyed Eggs (Optional)

2 Tbs. Black Cumin Seeds

PREPARATION

In a large bowl, dissolve yeast in warmed milk. Stir in 1 cup flour and 1/2 cup sugar, cover bowl with plastic

wrap and set aside for 1-hour. Steep makhlepi (if utilizing) in 1/2 cup simmering water for about 5-minutes. Strain mixture and discard seeds. Set remaining liquid aside to cool.

Stir 1/2 cup water or makhlepi-scented liquid into the yeast mixture. Add butter and 5 eggs and thoroughly combine. Sift in 8 cups of flour, salt and remaining sugar into bread mixture. Add salt, orange and lemon zest, and mix thoroughly with a large wooden spoon. Turn out dough onto a floured surface. Knead, adding more flour if necessary, until smooth, approximately 10-minutes. Form the dough into a ball and place in a lightly greased bowl. Cover the dough with a clean dish towel and set aside to raise for about 2-hours.

Return dough to the floured surface. Divide the dough into 6-equal parts and roll into ropes about 15-inches long. For each loaf, loosely braid 3 ropes, turn under ends and press 1 dyed egg (optional) near one end of each braid. Set bread aside to rise again for at least 1-hour on a lightly greased cookie sheet.

Pre-heat oven to 350° F/ 180° C degrees. Brush bread with remaining beaten egg and sprinkle with black cumin seeds. Bake until golden, approximately 40 to 50-minutes. Store cooled bread in an airtight container or serve warm.

In Christianity, the egg is a symbol of Resurrection, representing the emergence of Christ from His tomb to everlasting life. Over the centuries the symbolic associations of the egg have been more or less forgotten, and modern Easter eggs are valued primarily for their colorful appearance. Eggs of

chocolate or other kinds of candy are favorites of the season.

At this time Greeks also eat a lot of koulouria and flaounes (Easter cakes).

* Pascha is the period before Easter Sunday, so you wish "Kalo Pascha" then, especially when the Holy Week starts. You wish "Kali Anastasi" when Easter Sunday is very close, especially after Holy Thursday and Friday. And of course you wish "Christos Anesti" on Easter Sunday when Christ is already risen

The solemnity of Holy Week, the week before Easter, in the Greek Orthodox Church ends with the commencement of Easter celebrations, where it glorifies the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Greek religion, every Sunday is dedicated to the Resurrection of the Lord, but one hundred days also are dedicated to Easter, 50 before its actual preparation, and another 50 after it in commemorating the glorification of the Lord. Easter is therefore considered, the "Feast of Feasts".

The 50 days before Easter, known as a part of the period of Triodion, are the period for strengthening faith in the Lord, and starts with Clean Monday (Kathara Deftera), the first day of Megali Sarakosti, the season of Great Lent, the seventh Monday before Easter. It is also known as Pure Monday, Ash Monday, Monday of Lent or (in Cyprus only) Green Monday actually translated as such, is the first day of the Eastern Orthodox Christian Great Lent. It is a moveable feast that occurs in the beginning of 7th week before Easter Sunday.

The 50 days which follow Easter are signified by the Pentecostarion, which are dedicated to the spiritual enjoyment of the participants in the deep belief that God is with all men in everyday life and thoughts.

· Easter begins on the Saturday of Lazarus (the Saturday before Palm Sunday, 1 week before Easter Sunday) with children going from door to door singing the hymn of "Lazaros" and collecting money and eggs.

· On the morning of Palm Sunday people gather in church and are given a cross made from palm fronds, which they put on their icon-stands at home and keep it for the whole of the coming year.

· On Holy Tuesday, housewives

