

## What is the Easter Season About?

➤ = next PowerPoint slide

### ➤ Intro:

- with **Fat Tuesday and Ash Wednesday in the news** lately, I've had some **questions from young folks** about it, and thought it'd be good to have a Sunday evening lesson, while taking a break from series on Bible study
- **title:** What is the season of Easter all about?

### ➤ **Easter Calendar** – changes every year

#### - **2009 Western Easter Calendar**

- **February 24** Fat Tuesday
  - end of Mardi Gras (French for “Fat Tuesday”)
- **February 25** Ash Wednesday
- **February 25 - April 11** Lent (starts with Ash Wednesday and ends the day before Easter)
- **April 5-11** Holy Week (last week of Lent (week before Easter), beginning with Palm Sunday
  - **April 5** Palm Sunday
  - **April 8** Holy Wednesday (Spy Wednesday)
  - **April 9** Maundy Thursday (Holy Thursday)
  - **April 10** Good Friday
- **April 12** Easter Sunday (Western Christianity - Roman Catholic, Anglican Communion, Protestant Churches, etc. - USA)
  - **note: April 19** Easter Sunday (Orthodox Christianity - Eastern Orthodox Churches)

#### - **Differences in the dates of Easter**

- **In Western Christianity**, Easter is determined by using the Gregorian Calendar to calculate the date, is set as the Sunday after the Paschal Full Moon.
  - **After the council of Nicea in 325 AD**, these churches stopped determining the date by actual lunar events, but from historical tables without reference to lunar events.
- **In Eastern Christianity** (Orthodox churches that retain old Catholic traditions), Easter is determined using the Julian Calendar, which was used during the Council of Nicea in 325 AD, and still calculate the date in reference to actual astronomical full moon and the actual vernal equinox as observed along the meridian of Jerusalem.

➤ **Observances of the Easter Season**

**Fat Tuesday (Mardi Gras, French)**

- **pic.:** King of Niece, Carnival 2007 – hard to find a clean pic to use

- **last party before Lent:** Mardi Gras (Carnival) includes days of carousing, lascivious behavior before Lent

➤ **- Ash Wednesday**

- **pic.:** ashes on w worshiper's forehead

- first day of Lent, season of penance and fasting that lasts till Easter

- church services include pray, asking God for forgiveness, ashes put on worshiper's foreheads, shape of a cross, as a sign of repentance which can be washed off at sundown

➤ **- Lent**

- **pic.:** Roman Catholic Pope, Lent, 2006

- **purpose:** prepare for Easter

- **representative** of 40 days Jesus was in wilderness before beginning His public ministry

- **time of** fasting, prayer, alms giving, penance, self-denial – usually choose a food not to eat

- **illus.:** Fox News, 3/8/09, Pope wants Roman Catholics to give up **technology** for Lent, like cell phones

- **mostly observed by** Roman Catholic Church, and Protestant denominations

➤ **- Palm Sunday**

- **pic.:** Oriental Orthodox congregation in India, outside its church with palm fronds on Palm Sunday

- **Sunday before Easter** (one week before), beginning of Holy Week

- **commemorates** the Triumphant Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, the week before His crucifixion

- **called Palm Sunday because** of the palm branches the disciples put on the ground (in addition to coats) for the donkey to walk upon as it carried Jesus into the city

- **church services include** processions (parades), and giving of palm branches

➤ - **Holy Week**

- **week before Easter** (not including Easter)
- **commemorates** Christ's last week of Christ's life before His crucifixion
- **major days / observances: – some churches different**
  - **Sunday:** Palm Sunday
  - **Wednesday:** Holy Wednesday
  - **Thursday:** Maundy Thursday
  - **Friday:** Good Friday

➤ - **Holy Wednesday (Spy Wednesday)**

- **pic.:** Judas dropping the 30 pieces of silver priests gave him to betray Jesus
- **observes** the first day Judas conspired with the Sanhedrin to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver
  - **earliest allusion** to this observance is in the **late 3<sup>rd</sup> century**
  - **Bible:** no reference to the “first day” Judas conspired with the Sanhedrin
- **customs:**
  - **churches services**, especially among Orthodox churches
  - **Poland:** children traditionally hurl an effigy (doll) of Judas from the church steeple. It was then dragged through the village, pounded with sticks and stones and what was left of it was drowned in a nearby pond or river.
  - **Czech Republic:** the day is traditionally called Ugly Wednesday, Soot-Sweeping Wednesday or Black Wednesday, because chimneys used to be swept on this day, to be clean for Easter.

➤ - **Maundy ('mon-de-) Thursday (Holy Thursday)**

- **pic.:** Catholic Bishop washing feet on Holy Thursday, 2007.
- “**Maundy Thursday**” is the name for this day in England, and often used by English-speaking Protestant Churches, **also called Holy Thursday**
- **commemorates the Last Supper**, the Passover which was observed by Jesus with the apostles the evening before He was crucified
  - **ironic:** many churches observe Holy Thursday, but not the Lord's Supper as God instructs in word
- **church services** commonly include reading of Scripture regarding the Last Supper, taking communion, and washing feet

➤ - **Good Friday** (Great Friday, Dark Friday)

- **pic.:** Good Friday procession in Bombay by Indian Roman Catholics, depicting the Way of the Cross

- **Friday before Easter**

- commemorates Jesus' crucifixion

- **Bible:** Jesus convicted 6a, crucified 9a, died 3p

- **observances include** fasting, street processions, church services, and special prayers

- **Philippines:** some people have themselves nailed to crosses (crucified) as expressions of penance

- **some countries observe** the day as a national holiday (not USA), when business close

➤ - **Easter Sunday**

- **pic.:** Russian Orthodox priest blessing Easter baskets in Lviv, Ukraine

- **many churches believe this is the most important feast** of the liturgical year

- **Bible:** the Lord's Supper, observed weekly by Christians, commemorating Christ's death

- commemorates the resurrection of Jesus

- observance began in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (Schaff, History of the Christian Church II:207; Latourette, A History of Christianity, I:137)

- **1<sup>st</sup> century Christians did not observe Easter**

- **KJV mistranslation:**

- **Acts 12:4 KJV**, "Easter" appears as a mistranslation of *pascha*, which is elsewhere properly translated "Passover" and was corrected in the NKJ

- **Encyclopedia Britannica** (14<sup>th</sup> edition)

- "There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the apostolic Fathers. The sanctity of special times was an idea absent from the minds of the first Christians" (VII:859).

- **A Dictionary of Religion and Ethics**

- "In apostolic times the Christians commemorated their Lord's resurrection every Sunday, by meeting on that day for worship" (p. 140).

- **observances include** Saturday evening and Sunday sunrise services, some churches consider it a special time for baptisms, sprinkling of holy water over the congregation, communion

- **religious and secular traditions:** Easter Eggs, Easter baskets filled with candy and gifts, Easter Bunny, Easter Egg hunts, Easter Egg rolls. etc.

- as with Christmas, some of the Easter traditions have **roots in paganism**, such as the **egg and bunny**

➤ **Can we observe the Easter Season as a church?**

- Paul warned Christians not to observe unauthorized feast days and festivals
    - **Gal. 4:9-11** brethren had turned back to pagan practices they previously observed
  - - **Col. 2:16-19a (sr)** if observe these, **not holding fast to head, being defrauded of prize** (salvation)
  - - **Eph. 5:23-24** Christ head of church – church subject to Him in everything
  
  - - observing man-made religious ordinances of no value
    - **Col. 2:20-23 (sr)** man-made religious decrees no value against fleshly indulgences
    - **illus.: Mardi Gras, Carnival**, Easter Season promotes immorality, they very thing men tried to prevent through human religious decrees
    - **illus.: vs.21 Lent**, do not handle, touch, taste
  
  - - churches observing man-made religious decrees. . . .
    - **2 Jn. 1:9** not have God
  - - **Mk. 7:6-9** worship is vain
  - - **Rev. 22:18-19** lost in sin, not have part in tree of life or holy city
  
  - if we participate in any man-made religious observances as a church, we are lost, having rejected God, His Son, and His word
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➤ **Can we observe the Easter Season on an individual basis?** – quick review, same as with X-mas

- **1 Cor. 9:20-21** Paul kept secular customs wherever he was living, but only those in accord with the Law of Christ
    - **Acts 20:16** includes secular-religious days, such as observing the Passover, which Paul observed after becoming a Christian
    - **could not include Mardi Gras (Carnival) because of immoral behavior**
  
  - - **Rom. 14** instructions regarding observance of special days
    - **vs. 5a** regard one day above the other – e.g., Passover
      - **personal basis, not as work of the church or salvation**
      - **Easter basket, Easter Egg, gifts, etc.**
  - - **vs. 5b, 23** be fully convinced in our own minds before observing the day – **faith vs. 23**
    - **not observe Easter, any other day, if not by faith**
  - - **vs. 6-8** be done for the Lord, as with all things
    - **do all for the Lord, including observance of special days**
  - - **vs. 19-22** observe it in a way that wouldn't be a stumbling block for other Christians
    - **not observe if hurts someone else so they'll sin and lose their soul**
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➤ **Summary / Inv.**

- **Easter is a man-made religious festival**
  - **as a church**, we can not observe it, because it's not of Christ (Eph. 5:23-24)
  - **as individuals**, we can keep the secular-religious customs that are lawful

- **inv.:**