

Rabbits, Chickens & Eggs: Bestiality, Chimera or Folklore?



So how did this thing about rabbits bringing chocolate eggs in baskets come about?

The Easter egg tradition may have merged into the celebration of the end of the privations of Lent in the West. Historically, it was traditional to use up all of the household's eggs before Lent began. During Lent, since chickens didn't abstain from producing eggs, a larger than usual store might be available at the end of the fast. One would have been forced to hard boil the eggs that the chickens produced so as not to waste food.

The practice of decorating eggshells as part of spring rituals is ancient, with decorated and engraved ostrich eggs found in Africa 60,000 years old. The Christian use of eggs may have been influenced by practices in pre-dynastic Egypt, as well as in the early cultures of Mesopotamia and Crete. Eggs were associated with death and rebirth, as well as with kingship. Ostrich eggs decorated in gold and silver were commonly placed in graves of the ancient Sumerians and Egyptians as early as 5,000 years ago.

The Christian custom of Easter eggs started among the early Christians of Mesopotamia, who stained eggs with a red coloring "in memory of the blood of Christ, shed at His crucifixion". The Ukrainian art of decorating eggs for Easter (*Pysanky*) also dates to ancient, pre-Christian times. They later added an Orthodox Christian cross to the red colored Easter eggs. The Christian Church officially adopted the custom of regarding the eggs as a symbol of the resurrection of Jesus in the first edition of the Roman Ritual, published in 1610 which also includes texts of much older dates.

Easter eggs are also called Paschal eggs. They are decorated eggs, usually used as gifts on the occasion of Easter or springtime celebration. The Easter Bunny (aka the Easter Rabbit or Easter Hare) is a folkloric figure and symbol of Easter, depicted as a rabbit bringing Easter eggs. According to a German Lutheran tradition, the "Easter Hare" originally played the role of a judge, evaluating whether children were good or disobedient in behavior at the start of the season of

Eastertide. According to the legend, only good children received gifts of colored eggs in the nests that they made in their caps and bonnets before Easter.

Although the Christian tradition is to use dyed or painted chicken eggs, J.S. Fry & Sons of England introduced the first chocolate Easter egg in Britain in 1873. The modern custom is to substitute chocolate eggs, or plastic eggs filled with candy such as jelly beans. These eggs can be hidden for children to find on Easter morning, which may be left by the Easter Bunny. They may also be put in a basket filled with real or artificial straw to resemble a bird's nest.

So much for history and folklore. What is the take-away for our reflection? The most obvious one is that the arrival of Spring has been celebrated across many cultures over many millennia. It is the celebration of the cycle of life, death and renewed life. As Catholic Christians, we celebrate the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God. This event transcends the annual renewal of plants or the births of bunnies and birds by a couple of orders of magnitude.

It is one of the pivotal events in the history of the Universe. To summarize:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

He rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Can I get an “AMEN?”

Whew! Now that we know what it's all about, we can look forward to breaking our Lenten Fasts with a chocolate Easter bunny...starting with the ears, of course.