

# Jesus is the Reason for the Season!

## The Easter Season

(50 days following Easter to celebrate the Resurrection joy and thanksgiving)

Now that Palm Sunday, Holy Week and the Easter Vigil and Easter Day activities and liturgies, are literally “in the rearview mirror (or have passed)”, what is so special – what is the significance -- about the “Easter Season”?

As Christians know, the Easter Vigil is the "Mother of All Vigils." Therefore, Easter Sunday is the greatest of all Sundays and Easter Time is the most important of all liturgical times. Easter is the celebration of the Lord's Resurrection from the dead, culminating in his:

- (1) Ascension to God, the Father (40 days after Easter), and
- (2) Sending of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles (i.e., the Church) at Pentecost (Easter + 49 days).

Historically, Eastertide (also known as Eastertime or the Easter season) or Paschaltide (also known as Paschaltide or the Paschal season) is a festal season during the liturgical year of Christianity that focuses on celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; His post-resurrection appearances and teachings; his Ascension into heaven; and Pentecost (derived from the Greek word Πεντηκοστή (Pentēkostē) meaning "fiftieth").

There are 50 days that mark the Easter Season (from the first Sunday to Pentecost). It is characterized, above all, by the joy of glorified life and the victory over death, expressed most fully in the great resounding cry of the Christian: *Alleluia!* All faith flows from faith in the Resurrection, as St. Paul reminds us: "If Christ has not been raised, then empty is our preaching; empty, too, is your faith." (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:14)

The Octave of Easter comprises the eight days, which stretch from the first to the second Sunday, following Easter Day.

The word "*Easter*" comes from Old English, meaning simply the "East."\* The sun which rises in the East, bringing light, warmth and hope, is a symbol for the Christian of the rising Christ, who is the true Light of the World. The Paschal Candle is a central symbol of this divine light, which is Christ. In the Catholic Church, it is kept near the ambo throughout the Easter Season, and lit for all liturgical celebrations. Additionally, it is lit and holds a prominent place in the Church's liturgy during baptisms and funerals.

Interestingly, Easter Sunday and Pentecost correspond to longstanding Jewish feasts: The first day of Pesach (פסח) [Passover] and the holiday of Shavu'ot (שבועות) [Feast of Weeks]\*\*. In the Jewish tradition, the 49 days between these holidays are known as Counting of the Omer (ספירת העומר)\*\*\*.

Commemorating the slaying of the true Lamb of God and the Resurrection of Christ are the cornerstones upon which the Christian faith and the Church are built. As old as the roots of Christianity, it reveals that Jesus, the Christ is the connecting link between the Old and New Testaments.

For example, the connection between the Jewish Passover and the Christian feast of Easter is real and scripturally based. Real, in that Christ died on the first Jewish Easter Day; and scripturally based, because Jesus's death and Resurrection had its predictions and revelations written long before the actual events by the Old Testament (or Hebrew texts) prophets and in the Old Law, particularly in the paschal lamb, which was eaten towards evening of the 14th of Nisan [the Hebrew month that coincides with March-April on the secular calendar we use today].

As we know, Easter has no fixed date, like Christmas, because the 15th of Nisan of the Semitic calendar shifted from date-to-date on the Julian [Roman] calendar. Since Christ, the true Paschal Lamb, had been slain on the very day when the Jews, in celebration of their [Pasach] Passover, immolated the figurative [sacrificial] lamb, the Jewish Christians in the Orient followed the Jewish method, and commemorated the death of Christ on the 15th of Nisan and His Resurrection on the 17th of Nisan.

From apostolic times the Feasts of Easter and Pentecost were primary, and the paschal mystery was the first celebration to have both a time before the Feast of Pesach Preparation and a time afterwards for the extension and completing the celebration.

In the revised Catholic Church's Roman Missal and Lectionary, the Sundays following Easter are no longer termed "after" for they are "of" Easter, since they do not follow a solemnity, but they are to be taken with or as a unity to form one complete season of solemnity and exaltation at the triumph of Jesus over sin and death.

#### FOOTNOTES:

\* ***Easter/East***: If we stop and think about it for a moment, today all three of the world's monotheistic religions (Monotheism = belief in one God) have their foundational roots in the Middle East (in their historical order: Judaism, Christianity and Islam). As a longstanding religious practice, each religion has prayed facing toward the East ("East-ers") (toward Jerusalem (Jews and Christians) and Mecca (Muslims)).

In the Roman Catholic Church, we can easily recall that during the pre-Second Vatican Council Latin Mass, the priest faced and offered the sacrifice of the Mass facing the East (i.e., ***ad orientem*** (facing the East) versus ***ad populum*** (facing the congregation or assembly of worshippers today)).

\*\* Initially, ***Shavuot*** was a harvest festival, commemorating the ancient obligation to bring the harvest's "first fruits" [best of the gifts] to the Temple in Jerusalem as an offering to God.

\*\*\* The ***omer*** (Hebrew: עֹמֶר 'omer) is an ancient Israelite unit of dry measure used in the era of the Temple in Jerusalem. It is used in the Bible as an ancient unit of volume for grains and dry commodities, and the Torah (the first 5 books of the Old Testament) mentions its use.