

8 Things You Need to Know About Easter Sunday

The great day has finally arrived! Here are 8 things you need to know about Easter . . .



Johan Ludvig Lund (1777-1867), "The Resurrection of Christ" (photo: Public Domain)

Note: This article originally appeared on March 30, 2013.

The great day is finally here: Easter, the most important day of the Christian calendar. More important even than Christmas.

What happened on this day?

Was Jesus' resurrection a real, historical event?

How does the Church celebrate this day?

Is Easter a pagan holiday?

Here are 8 things you need to know.

1. What happened on Easter?

Among other things:

- The women went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body.
- They saw angels, who told them he wasn't there.
- They went to tell the apostles, who initially didn't believe them.
- Peter and the beloved disciple rushed to see the tomb and found it empty.
- Mary Magdalen, in particular, had an encounter with the risen Christ.
- So did the disciples on the road to Emmaus.
- So did Peter.
- So did all the apostles except Thomas (who would have one later).
- Jesus had risen from the dead!

To read about the events in the New Testament, you can use these links:

- [Matthew 28:1-15](#)
- [Mark 16:1-20](#)
- [Luke 24:1-49](#)
- [John 20:1-31](#)

2. Was Jesus' Resurrection a real, historical event or something else?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains:

639 The mystery of Christ's resurrection is a real event, with manifestations that were historically verified, as the New Testament bears witness.

In about A.D. 56 St. Paul could already write to the Corinthians:

“I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. . .”

The Apostle speaks here of the living tradition of the Resurrection which he had learned after his conversion at the gates of Damascus.

3. What is the significance of the empty tomb?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains:

640 . . . The first element we encounter in the framework of the Easter events is the empty tomb. In itself it is not a direct proof of Resurrection; the absence of Christ's body from the tomb could be explained otherwise.

Nonetheless the empty tomb was still an essential sign for all. Its discovery by the disciples was the first step toward recognizing the very fact of the Resurrection.

This was the case, first with the holy women, and then with Peter. The disciple “whom Jesus loved” affirmed that when he entered the empty tomb and discovered “the linen cloths lying there”, “he saw and believed”.

This suggests that he realized from the empty tomb's condition that the absence of Jesus' body could not have been of human doing and that Jesus had not simply returned to earthly life as had been the case with Lazarus.

4. What significance to the post-Resurrection appearances of Christ have?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains:

641 Mary Magdalene and the holy women who came to finish anointing the body of Jesus, which had been buried in haste because the Sabbath began on the evening of Good Friday, were the first to encounter the Risen One.

Thus the women were the first messengers of Christ's Resurrection for the apostles themselves. . . .

642 Everything that happened during those Paschal days involves each of the apostles - and Peter in particular - in the building of the new era begun on Easter morning.

As witnesses of the Risen One, they remain the foundation stones of his Church. the faith of the first community of believers is based on the witness of concrete men known to the Christians and for the most part still living among them.

Peter and the Twelve are the primary “witnesses to his Resurrection”, but they are not the only ones - Paul speaks clearly of more than five hundred persons to whom Jesus appeared on a single occasion and also of James and of all the apostles.

643 Given all these testimonies, Christ's Resurrection cannot be interpreted as something outside the physical order, and it is impossible not to acknowledge it as an historical fact.

5. What significance does Christ's Resurrection have for us?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains:

651 “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.”

The Resurrection above all constitutes the confirmation of all Christ's works and teachings.

All truths, even those most inaccessible to human reason, find their justification in Christ by his Resurrection has given the definitive proof of his divine authority, which he had promised.

658 Christ, "the first-born from the dead" (Col 1:18), is the principle of our own resurrection, even now by the justification of our souls (cf Rom 6:4), and one day by the new life he will impart to our bodies (cf Rom 8:11).

6. How do we commemorate this day?

The big celebration of Easter was on the evening of Holy Saturday. It was the Easter Vigil Mass. Consequently, Easter Sunday celebrations--at least as far as the Church is concerned (as opposed to all the egg hunts and baby ducks and marshmallow peeps)--is more restrained.

According to the main document governing the celebrations connected with Easter, *Paschalis Solemnitatis*:

97. Mass is to be celebrated on Easter Day with great solemnity.

It is appropriate that the penitential rite on this day take the form of a sprinkling with water blessed at the Vigil, during which the antiphon *Vidi aquam*, or some other song of baptismal character should be sung.

The fonts at the entrance to the church should also be filled with the same water.

7. What is the role of the "Paschal [i.e., Easter] candle"?

Paschales Solemnitatis explains:

99. The paschal candle has its proper place either by the ambo or by the altar and should be lit at least in all the more solemn liturgical celebrations of the season until Pentecost Sunday, whether at Mass, or at Morning and Evening Prayer.

After the Easter season the candle should be kept with honor in the baptistry, so that in the celebration of Baptism the candles of the baptized may be lit from them.

In the celebration of funerals, the paschal candle should be placed near the coffin to indicate that the death of a Christian is his own passover.

The paschal candle should not otherwise be lit nor placed in the sanctuary outside the Easter season.

8. Is Easter a pagan holiday?

Absolutely not!

Here's a video I did on precisely that subject:

Blue Panic Orbs! (Skinwalker Ranch! Fatal Attack!) - Jimmy ...



Looking for Something Good to Read?

May I suggest my commentary on the Gospel of Mark?

It goes through the whole text and provides fascinating information that you may have never heard before.

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And it comes with a lectionary-based study guide, so you can read along with Mark in the liturgy and ponder its meaning before or after Mass.

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Jimmy Akin Jimmy was born in Texas and grew up nominally Protestant, but at age 20 experienced a profound conversion to Christ. Planning on becoming a Protestant pastor or seminary professor, he started an intensive study of the Bible. But the more he immersed himself in Scripture the more he found to support the Catholic faith. Eventually, he entered the Catholic Church. His conversion story, "A Triumph and a Tragedy," is published in *Surprised by Truth*. Besides being an author, Jimmy is the Senior Apologist at Catholic Answers, a contributing editor to *Catholic Answers Magazine*, and a weekly guest on "Catholic Answers Live."

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