



Easter Myths and Stories

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There is a historical connection between "Easter" and "East" from which the sun rises. During ancient times in the Mediterranean world, the "East" services were celebrated for the resurrection of the Tammuz, a Babylonian God. It is written that what we now refer to as Easter began in Babylon as a festival welcoming spring.

The story of Tammuz tells of his wife Ianna, the Goddess of Nature, also known as Mother Nature, who refreshed the earth with spring rains assuring prosperity to all. However, Tammuz dies and journeys to the underworld. Grief stricken Ianna follows him for she cannot bear to be apart from her beloved husband. In her absence the earth was deprived of fertility, the crops stopped growing, animals would not mate and life as we know it was soon to end. These days are now known as winter. Ea, God of Water and Wisdom, sent a heavenly messenger to save the goddess Ianna from the underworld from whence no one could return. Eresh-Kigal, Queen of the Dead and the Underworld, allowed Ea to sprinkle Ianna and Tammuz with the water of life. They then could return to the earth only under the condition that Tammuz return in six months and Ianna would once again follow. Ea was again sent to bring them back to an earth that would suffer in their absence. Hence the cycle of spring and winter had begun. Spring being the day of Ianna's return and Tammuz's resurrection.

This story moved west to Syria where the names of Tammuz and Ianna were changed to Adon and Astarte. In Greece they would be called Adonis and Aphrodite. The story and myth underwent many variations throughout time finding its way to Egypt, Asia, and Europe.

The Anglo-Saxon pagan people of Europe and Asia named the day of spring, Easter, for Eostre, the Goddess of spring and dawn. A festival was given for Eostre on the day of the Vernal Equinox or spring, as we know it. Spring was known as the season of birth and renewal. During these times the pagans celebrated this day in hopes that their crops would grow and their lands would prosper.

All of the stories and myths had a universal theme, that being the drama of death and resurrection. The Church of Rome adopted many of the pagan beliefs giving them Christian meaning, thus having the first Easter services. Easter has descended from pagan spring and sun worship. Catholic doctrine paralleled the pagan death and resurrection myths of the gods with the story of Christ's crucifixion and ascension.

The Easter egg in old civilizations symbolized the creation of the world. According to the myth, heaven and earth were formed from two halves of a mysterious "World Egg." This connection comes from feelings of birth, new life, and creation. The pagans converted to Christianity believed the egg to symbolize the resurrection and were appropriate holy gifts to give at Easter. Before Christ, the pagans gave scarlet colored eggs in the spring as an emblem of life.

The Easter Bunny was not a bunny in the beginning but a hare, which was sacred to Eostre, the spring goddess. The pagan people sacrificed the hare to Eostre as symbols of fertility and the return to spring. In American folklore the rabbit or hare produced the egg. The story goes that the hare used to be a bird before Eostre turned it into a four footed creature.

It would be sufficient to say that our customs of Easter today have many historical references and various meanings from the mysteries of death to resurrection, among different race and religions dating back to the beginning of time. Many of the symbols observed in the Anglo-Saxon era have found their way to our modern day Easter celebrations and several of them have brought fun and delight to millions of children. If asked where the Easter Bunny really came from, my four-year old would say he came from the North Pole where he lives in harmony with Santa and Rudolph.

For more information on the myths and mysteries of Easter try the Web or the library. Some books you might want to check out are "Easter, it's Story and Meaning" by Alan Watts, "Easter and it's Customs" by Christina Hole, "The American Book of Days" by George William Douglas, "The Book of Religious Holidays and Celebrations" by Marguerite Ickis, and "Heathen Holidays" by Sister Denise Snodgrass.

