

THE CHURCH

Easter Eggs

It is interesting to attempt to trace the origin and significance of the customs that have clustered around the principal feasts of the Church, such as, for instance, the Easter custom of colored "Easter Eggs."

Like many other customs this one of colored eggs at Easter has endured so long that its origin is lost in the mists of time. It is probable that it had its beginning before the dawn of the Christian era and that in its original significance it marked the return of spring, for the egg is the emblem of the germinating life of early spring. The custom naturally gravitated to Easter which is the principal celebration of the spring season and when observed by the Christians it took on a nobler significance, the symbolic meaning of a new creation of mankind by Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

The Church has ever been ready to take established customs, purify them, elevate them and clothe them with a spiritual meaning. This Easter egg custom is a typical example. The pagan, joyful in the birth of the new life of nature, selected the egg as the fitting emblem of the new life. To him it meant that the earth was waking from her winter's sleep; that the seeds buried in her bosom were sending forth green promise of golden grain; that a new year was come. The wonders of nature are but the smaller part of the Christian's symbolism. These physical changes are but a feeble resemblance of the Resurrection of Our Saviour which is the new significance the custom has received under Christian observance. So today the eggs at Easter mark not only the birth of spring, but also the resurrection from death, the breaking of the tomb's shell by Our Lord and the promise to us of eternal life.

In the early Christian observance of this custom the eggs, the use of which had been forbidden during Lent, were brought back to the table on Easter Day colored red to symbolize the Easter joy. The highly decorated and varied coloring of eggs such as we have today dates from about 1100. The idea of the Easter Rabbit which was the pagan symbol of fertility accounts for the practice of hiding the eggs in a nest, in bushes or in the garden and for the resultant game of "egg-hunt" on Easter morning. In some parts of Germany the practice of solemnly blessing eggs at Easter time is still observed.