

# **“You Know, Easter is Pagan...”**

It is not.

It is often stated, every year, in numerous articles on the internet, on television programs, and by friends and neighbors, that Easter is really a pagan celebration which Christians later stole. They seem to prove this by pointing to ‘pagan’ customs which surround the Christian celebration of Easter, that is, the painting of eggs and the focus on rabbits.

They will then point to the fact that ‘Easter’ is named after the Anglo-Saxon goddess Eostre.

The name of Easter in almost all other Christian countries is some variant of the word *pascha* meaning ‘Passover’, from the Hebrew word ‘*pesach*.’ Only in English do we use the odd word ‘Easter’. So it is that Christians were celebrating the Resurrection of Christ on this day long before there were Christians on the British Isles.

When Christianity came to what is now England, the Feast of the Resurrection, the *pascha*, was often informally referred to as ‘Easter’ which is merely Old English for ‘April’, the month in which the Feast of the Resurrection most commonly falls.

Concerning the painting of eggs, our modern tradition of elaborately decorating eggs is derived from an older custom of dyeing eggs scarlet by boiling them in water with the skins of red onions. The scarlet dye represents the sufferings of Jesus, the egg represents His rebirth and rising from the dead.

As for the rabbits, as odd as it may sound, the rabbit has long been a symbol in Christianity for God, as it was once believed that rabbits ‘self-generated’, procreating without the need for sexual relations.

The specific idea of ‘the Easter Bunny’ we, as Lutherans, can proudly claim as our

own contribution to the Christian tradition. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the custom of having the above mentioned scarlet dyed Easter eggs being delivered to children in the village by '*an Easter hare*' arose among German Lutherans as a confession that God (represented by the hare) would deliver ultimate rebirth (the egg) to the Christian, though there be much suffering in life (the scarlet dye).

Now go paint eggs and rejoice.