

## Symbols of Lent and Easter By Reverend Geraldine Colvin Lenten Season 2021



**Lent** is an opportunity for transformation; a movement from limitation to liberation. It is a season of reflection, prayer, fasting, and renewal; a time in which we consciously live from our oneness in God. The forty day period of this season is considered the most sacred time of the Christian year.

The word Lent is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word for spring (lencten), which means "to lengthen." Lent comes in the spring, when the days become longer with sunlight as we move from the dark days of winter to the light of spring. All life is born out of darkness; darkness is as essential as light. An infant is born from the darkness of the womb. Vegetation grows in the dark soil of the earth. Out of the dark times of challenge, we can experience enlightenment and an abundant new life.

In the spring, we prepare the soil for planting. Spiritually we prepare our consciousness for greater good. We cultivate our minds by clearing out limiting beliefs and we release resentment from our hearts through forgiveness. We plant seed ideas of loving kindness, inner peace, harmony, and abundance. We express qualities that we want to cultivate and grow within us. Daily prayer and meditation can birth us into the life we desire.



**Easter Eggs** The egg is a richly symbolic element of resurrection and new life. It is an ancient symbol of fertility. Eggs were colored red to symbolize blood (life, energy, birth). Even before Christ, people colored, blessed, and exchanged eggs as part of the rites of spring to welcome the "reappearance" of the sun. Early Christians adopted the egg, which represented renewed life, as a symbol of Christ's resurrection from the grave. Several folktales explain the origin of dyeing Easter eggs. Eastern Europeans exchanged eggs bearing the letters "XB," which means *Christ is risen*. Russians exchanged a decorated egg and three kisses. In the Chinese culture a red hard-boiled egg was given when a child was born. German immigrants to America introduced the tradition of the Easter bunny delivering colored eggs to children.



**Easter Bunny** The rabbit came to be known as the Easter Bunny from the tradition of the Moon Hare. We refer to the "man in the moon," but in ancient times they saw a rabbit in the moon, known as the "Moon Hare." The rabbit was the sacred animal of the Saxon Goddess of Spring, Eostre (e-o'-stra). In the Celtic tradition, she is called Ostara (o-star'-a). Lent occurs during the moon's cycle from Winter Solstice to Spring Equinox, nature's movement from darkness and stillness to light and new life. The rabbit reproduces prolifically, symbolizing abundance. In the spring, animals give birth to their young and seeds blossom into vegetation. Spring is a celebration of abundant new life!

**How Easter Is Determined on the Calendar** The reason Easter moves around on the calendar is because it is based on the cycles of the moon. Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon following the Spring Equinox. The order is: 1) Spring Equinox; 2) first full moon following the equinox; 3) the following Sunday is Easter. **In 2021, the Spring Equinox is March 20th. The full moon is March 28. Easter Sunday is April 2.**



**Forty Days** Beginning with Ash Wednesday and culminating on Easter Sunday, Lent is actually forty-six days long. Sundays are not counted, as they are considered "Feast Days," in which we feast on the Word of God (scripture). Therefore, the Lenten Season is counted as forty days. The Hebrew people of ancient times used numbers to symbolize ideas. The number forty symbolizes a foundation on which to build something new. Forty also metaphysically represents a time of preparation. Jesus spent forty days of prayer and fasting in the desert, and after the resurrection, he continued to teach his disciples for forty days.







**The Cross** The cross is literally a positive symbol, indicating our ability to cross over to a new way of thinking and being. As we “cross out” limiting beliefs, we cross over to knowing that we are unlimited and that we have divine potential. We experience ourselves as an expression of the wholeness and vibrant life of God/Spirit/Source.



**Easter Lilies** The beautiful white Easter lily symbolizes purity, virtue, innocence, hope and life, the essence of Easter. The white lily has long been associated with the Virgin Mary. In early paintings, the Angel Gabriel is pictured extending to the Virgin Mary a branch of white lilies, announcing that she is to give birth to Jesus Christ. Joseph is also depicted holding a lily branch, indicating that Mary was a virgin. There is also a legend that says when Mary's tomb was visited three days after her burial, it was found empty except for a branch of majestic white lilies. The lily earns its status as the flower of Easter because it grows in the thick dark waters of a pond or stream. Silently the forces of life work in the dark and damp to prepare the lily for a glorious blossoming forth into the sunlight, symbolizing resurrection.



## LENTEN JOURNEY

**Lent/Easter Colors** The colors of the Lenten Season are black, purple and white. Black is the color of the ashes used on Ash Wednesday and represents a time of dormancy and inner reflection. Purple is the traditional color used during key times in the Christian calendar year: Advent and Lent. It is the color of royalty, reminding us that we are heirs to the Kingdom of God. White, used on Easter Sunday, symbolizes the risen Christ, our divine nature. The Christ within rises above all appearances of death and limitation. The Christ within us is eternal life.



**Prayer and Fasting** In the Christian Mystical tradition, the path to enlightenment is three-fold: purgation, illumination and union. Prayer and fasting are powerful ways in which we empty ourselves (spiritually) to more easily attune to our divinity. People often release an unwanted habit during Lent as an act of surrender and commitment. Fasting for one meal, one day, or more, gives the body a chance to rest and rejuvenate. Fasting also provides the opportunity to focus on our spiritual development and consciously release resentments and judgments, including all self-condemnation.

In the Bible, we find examples of the dynamic results of fasting. Moses, Elijah and Jesus each fasted for forty days, with profound results. After Moses fasted, he received the Ten Commandments. Elijah talked with God on Mount Horeb following his forty-day fast, and Jesus began his life-transforming ministry after forty days of fasting in the wilderness.



**Ashes** Traditionally seen as a symbol of repentance, ashes also represent a time of letting go of limiting beliefs in order for new good to

spring forth. The ashes also symbolize a time of needed dormancy and enrichment. Plants receive nourishment from the rich black soil in which they grow. Jesus' body lay dormant in a cave for three days before the resurrection. This signifies the importance of having times of silence and stillness in our daily lives so that we can be aware of the presence and guidance of God. Times of stillness and reflection provide great wisdom and revelation for further growth. The ashes used on Ash Wednesday are derived from the palms from the previous year's Palm Sunday, mixed with a small amount of olive oil. The fire used to reduce the palms to ashes represents the fire of the Holy Spirit. Ashes are the essence left after all else is burned away. Our true essence is the Christ (Spirit, God, Energy, Source). The common invocation used with the imposition of the ashes is **“Remember, thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return.”** In Unity, we translate this as, **“Remember you are Spirit, the Christ of God. Return to this realization.”** Jesus said, **“I Am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he die, yet will he live. He who lives and believes in me will never die.”** (John 11:25). The Christ (I AM) of you is your resurrecting power, the power to overcome illusion..

