

EASTER SYMBOLS AND TRADITIONS IN AMERICA

*Although many Easter traditions are quite ancient,
you won't find them all in the Bible.*

The Easter Bunny



The Bible makes no mention of a long-eared, short-tailed creature who delivers decorated eggs to well-behaved children on Easter Sunday. **1** The exact origins of this myth are unclear, but rabbits, known to be prolific procreators, are an ancient symbol of fertility and new life. According to some sources, the Easter bunny first arrived in America in the 1700s with German immigrants who settled in Pennsylvania and transported their tradition of an egg-laying hare called “Osterhase” or “Oschter Haws.” **2** Eventually, the custom spread across the U.S. and the rabbit’s Easter morning deliveries expanded to include chocolate and other types of candy and gifts, and decorated baskets replaced the nests.

Easter Egg

Easter is a religious holiday, but some of its customs, such as Easter eggs, are probably linked to pagan traditions. The egg, an ancient symbol of new life, has been associated with pagan festivals celebrating spring. From a Christian perspective, Easter eggs are said to represent Jesus's emergence from the tomb and resurrection. Decorating eggs for Easter is a tradition that dates back to at least the 13th century, according to some sources. **3**

As a result, people would paint and decorate them to mark the end of the period of penance and fasting, and then eat them on Easter as a celebration.



Easter egg hunts and egg rolling are two popular egg-related traditions. In the U.S., the White House Easter Egg Roll, a race in which children push decorated, hard-boiled eggs across the White House lawn, is an annual event held the Monday after Easter. The first official White House egg roll occurred in 1878, when Rutherford B. Hayes was president. **4**

Easter Candy



Easter is the second best-selling candy holiday in America, after Halloween. Among the most popular sweet treats associated with this day are chocolate eggs, which date back to early 19th century Europe. Another egg-shaped candy, the jellybean, became associated with Easter in the 1930s. For the past decade, however, the top-selling non-chocolate Easter candy has been the marshmallow *Peeps*, a sugary, pastel-colored confection. **5**

The original *Peeps* were handmade, marshmallow-flavored yellow chicks, but other shapes and flavors were later introduced, including chocolate mousse bunnies.

Easter Parades



In New York City, the Easter Parade tradition dates back to the mid-1800s, when the high society would attend Easter services at various Fifth Avenue churches and then stroll outside

afterward, showing off their new spring outfits and hats. Average citizens started showing up along Fifth Avenue to watch them.

6 Every year Fifth Avenue is shut down to traffic during the day, and participants often wear elaborately decorated bonnets and hats. This event in particular has no religious significance, but sources note that Easter processions have been a part of Christianity since its earliest days.

- A** Nevertheless, the Easter bunny has become a well-known symbol of Christianity's most important holiday.
- B** One explanation for this custom is that they were formerly a forbidden food during Lent.
- C** Other traditions, such as the eating of Easter candy, are among the modern additions to the celebration of this holiday.
- D** Pennsylvania-based candy manufacturer Just Born (founded by Russian immigrant Sam Born in 1923) began selling it in the 1950s.
- E** The event has no religious significance, although some people have considered it symbolic of the stone blocking Jesus's tomb being rolled away, leading to his resurrection.
- F** Their children made nests in which this creature could lay its colored eggs.
- G** This tradition reached its peak by the mid-20th century and it lives on in Manhattan to this day.