

# EASTER DAY

*Alleluia! Christ is risen.  
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.*

Easter Day is *the* great Christian festival, the Feast of feasts. Without the resurrection, Paul reminds us, our faith is futile (1 Corinthians 15:17). On this of all days we should seek to draw on all the imagination and resources we can offer, because Christ is risen.

The New Testament resurrection accounts for Easter Day give us much material to draw on, see especially

Matthew 28:1-15     Mark 16:1-8  
Luke 24:1-49     John 20:1-25

- as well as St Paul's great exposition of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15.

We do not know exactly *at what time* Jesus rose from the dead. Jewish people regarded Sunday as beginning with night-fall on Saturday evening, and the women came to the tomb early on Sunday morning when it was still dark, to find it empty. Clearly, Jesus rose again during the night, while it was still dark. His resurrection was revealed at dawn.

## Origins

The earliest Christians immediately began to worship on Sundays as the day of resurrection, and an annual Christian festival established itself very early, certainly by the beginning of the 2nd century, probably earlier. This was an annual Christian Passover or Pascha vigil, held through the darkness of the night and concluding with the dawn celebration of the Eucharist, and embracing Jesus's death and resurrection. This is the earliest Christian liturgy we know, and it included:

- ♦ a vigil of readings
- ♦ Baptism
- ♦ the Easter Eucharist at dawn

Here Christ, the true Passover Lamb, who was sacrificed for us, delivers us from slavery to sin and death, and inaugurates the New Creation, as we pass over with him from death to life. In the 4th century, as the shape of Holy Week became established in Jerusalem, the sequence of Maundy Thursday - Good Friday - Easter Day was established as a three-day celebration of the Christian Passover. Easter Day became the great celebration of the resurrection.

## Celebrating Easter

*Times and Seasons* includes a whole range of rich resources for Easter Day, to use or adapt depending on local needs. These include

- ♦ The Easter Liturgy, often celebrated late on Saturday evening or very early on Sunday morning
- ♦ The Dawn Service
- ♦ A Mid-morning Eucharist on Easter Day including elements from the Easter Liturgy
- ♦ An Outline Service of the Word for Easter Day

***The Easter Liturgy:*** the principal Easter service. It has four main elements:

- ♦ The **Service of Light**, including the lighting of the Easter Candle, the Easter Proclamation or *Exsultet*, a joyful prayer of celebration that 'This is the night' of our redemption.
- ♦ A **Vigil** of readings from the Old Testament, telling the story of redemption. A reading

from Exodus 14, the Passover and escape from Egypt under Moses, must be used. The Easter Gospel reading concludes this very full celebration of the word.

- ♦ The **Celebration of Baptism** (and Confirmation when the Bishop is present) or congregational renewal of baptismal vows. This is most appropriate for Easter as St Paul teaches us that we are baptised into Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6.3-4).
- ♦ The **Easter Eucharist**, as we are sacramentally re-united with the risen Christ, having remembered his death and passion.

There are many ways in which the Easter Liturgy can be celebrated, as *Times and Seasons* makes clear. For further guidance, see relevant titles in the resources leaflet.

These are some of the possibilities, as worked out in *Times and Seasons*.

***The Dawn Service:*** this has become increasingly popular, either as a means of celebrating the Easter Liturgy, or as an ecumenical greeting of Easter Day before celebrating Easter in individual churches. It is often followed by a celebration breakfast.

***A Mid-morning Service*** including elements from the Easter Liturgy: this service enables aspects of the Easter Liturgy to be incorporated into the main Easter Day worship, including the lighting of the Easter Candle, the *Exsultet* and a celebration or renewal of baptism.

***An Outline Service of the Word:*** this also incorporates aspects of the Easter Liturgy, especially for multi-church benefices where the Eucharist is not celebrated in every church.

There are other resources in the Eastertide section of *Times and Seasons* and *New Patterns for Worship*, and also from sources other than the official Anglican provision, that can also be used to add richness to the Easter provision.

### Easter Music

There are many musical resources available to enrich the music of Lent, Holy Week and Easter; some are listed on the resources leaflet in this series.



If you have a number of visitors at Easter who may not be familiar with your standard music, could you explore arrangements where a cantor sings a phrase or refrain and the congregation repeats it? Several 'Alleluia' settings work this way.

There are some joyful Taizé chants which are particularly effective as the Easter light is shared.

### All-Age Easter

There are so many different ways of celebrating Easter Day that it is hard to make definite suggestions. But here are a few pointers:

- ♦ Involve everybody in helping towards the Easter Garden - from Maundy Thursday onwards to Easter and beyond. You might need a bigger space for your garden!
- ♦ It's not just children who love chocolate and Easter egg hunts ....
- ♦ If (somewhere nearby) you have a good view of the eastern horizon why not plan a sunrise service and follow it with a good-quality celebration breakfast?

- ♦ See the resources leaflet for some of the excellent titles available.

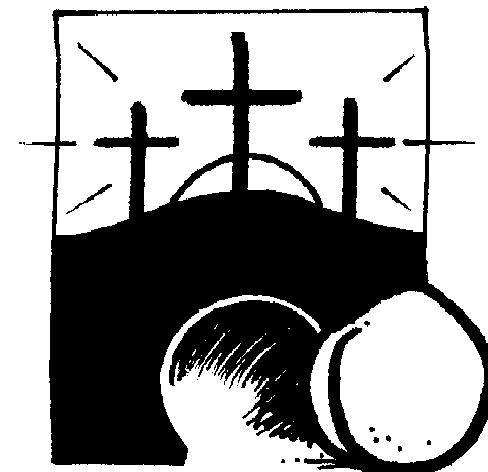
### Thinking and Planning

Easter Day is often well-attended and gives a wonderful opportunity for worship at its best. The church can be a blaze of White and Gold, and ablaze with light and alleluias as well.

Questions to consider are:

- ? How can we make Easter day the most glorious act of worship of the year?
- ? what pattern of services should we adopt to celebrate the Resurrection, in a single church or in a group of churches?
- ? how might we celebrate the Easter Liturgy?
- ? how can we make the most of celebrating and renewing baptism?
- ? what provision do we make for children and young people?
- ? what musical resources can we draw on?
- ? how shall we decorate the church?
- ? what kind of refreshments should we lay on?
- ? how shall we advertise our services?
- ? are there any ecumenical opportunities for to the celebration?

# The Christian Year



# Easter Day

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