

Handwritten shorthand symbols on a blue-lined background.

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Easter

It is only a few days to Easter weekend, and the cold and snowy weather has returned. In this country people are always hoping for a warm Easter to go out and about, and get out in the garden and parks to enjoy the pleasant outdoor life. With a couple of extra days off work, it seems slightly wasted to have to spend the whole time huddled indoors, or dashing from one warm shop to another for the Easter sales instead of strolling in the sunshine. For those who have more than a few years' experience of British weather, it is quite unreasonable to expect a warm Easter, but it is more hoping and wishing than any real expectation based on previous years. When Easter falls in April then there is more chance of us getting our Easter wishes.

Although Easter is the Christian celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day after his crucifixion, the name itself is derived from a pagan Anglo-Saxon goddess, probably representing light, dawn and spring. The name comes from a word meaning "shine" and was first mentioned by the Northumbrian monk and scholar The Venerable Bede in the 8th century. Similar names are also found in other languages and mythologies, although as with all ancient history modern scholars have widely differing views. The fact that the name has persisted seems to point to a likely celebration of light and spring after the difficulties of winter.

Here is some more Easter vocabulary: Lent, Lenten, Pasch, Paschal, Paschaltide, Passover, Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Gethsemane, Golgotha, Good Friday, sacrifice, sacrificial lamb, Sabbath. The terms Pentecost, Pentecostal, Whitsun, Whitsuntide, Whitweek all refer to the seventh Sunday after Easter when the Holy Spirit descended on the twelve disciples, enabling them to fulfil their commission. The date of Easter is movable, being the first Sunday after the full moon following the March equinox, and therefore occurs between 22 March and 25 April. Eastern Christianity bases the date on the Julian calendar and their Easter falls between 4 April and 8 May.

Shop windows are now filled with chocolate and sugar eggs, tiny toy chicks made of bright yellow fluff, and chocolate Easter bunnies wrapped in gold foil, as well as a plethora of other chocolate confections in every shape and size. There will be lots of chocolate breakfasts on the Sunday, and probably little else eaten by children throughout the day. In pagan celebrations eggs were a symbol of the earth's rebirth each spring and so this has been adopted as a Christian symbol of the new life of resurrection, with the decorated empty blown shell also representing the empty tomb. The tradition of Easter bunnies bringing the Easter eggs has been going for several hundred years, and it is easy to see how rabbits would be a continuation of the fertility celebrations of the more distant past.

Easter

I was pleased recently to see an array of decorative chocolate eggs, probably aimed at adults more than children. They reminded me of the Easter eggs that my grandmother gave us every year. They came in a white box, and were covered in beautiful flower shapes and swirly patterns in coloured icing, with a yellow ribbon round the middle. This delayed the eating of them considerably, but eventually we gave in, breaking little pieces at first, and then speeding up, followed by a slowing down when we realised that it might be better to save some for later. Any other Easter eggs were shaken to find out if there were any more sweets hidden inside, and the coloured foil was carefully saved to play with, although many attempts to peel it off in goodly-sized pieces often failed.

In my primary school we once spent an afternoon making Easter baskets out of coloured card, just a shallow box with a handle across. We cut the card to shape, decorated it with our own designs, and folded and glued it. Wisps of paper were cut up to make straw. We were told that the glue had to dry before we could take them home, and so they were all left overnight on a long shelf in the classroom, each one with the owner's name on. Making things out of paper and card was a favourite activity of mine, as

it could be done so easily and without cost, and I thoroughly enjoyed that afternoon, as well as the prospect of showing my parents what I had made.

When we returned to the class the next day, we were asked to go and find our own basket. I was utterly amazed to find that inside each one was a small chocolate egg. Momentary disbelief was followed by squeals of delight from every child. The teachers obviously did this every year, but to me it was all new and entirely unexpected. I am sure that they gained huge enjoyment and satisfaction at seeing thirty young faces light up that morning, much more than we enjoyed getting the eggs.

When we are at last able to welcome the first spell of warmer weather, then I will enjoy seeing all the new spring life in my garden and surroundings, and all those daffodil flower buds open up after a long period of "cold storage". I am waiting patiently for the days when walking about is more of a pleasure, than a cold wrapped-up rush in order to get the duties done as quickly as possible. I am also looking forward to having fingers and toes remain warm all on their own without the need for double knitted mitts and extra socks. (936 words)