



Looking at the Celebration of Easter around the World

By Daryll Stanton, SDMI Global Resourcing Coordinator

As we prepare to celebrate Easter this year, let's think about some of our fellow Nazarenes in our six world regions.

The 2021 Easter Sunday is on April 4 (Gregorian calendar). It is normally one of the largest worship days for Nazarenes in the [USACanada Region](#) as we celebrate Jesus Christ's resurrection. For many, Easter is preceded by Ash Wednesday as well as several Holy Week activities, including the triumphal return of Jesus to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the washing of the disciples' feet by Jesus, the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday. Hot cross buns are a traditional treat my family shares with our neighbors on Good Friday. These are small buns made from dough that contains various dried fruits. The top of the bun has a cross and is covered with a sweet glaze. The cross in my family's recipe is made of a special dough that remains whitish even after it is baked.

There are a number of similarities in the Easter celebrations in the [South America Region](#) and [Mesoamerica Region](#), but unique Easter traditions are observed in the different countries. In Latin America, celebration during the week of Palm Sunday is called Semana Santa (Holy Week). Activities often include religious rituals, processions with costumes, special church services, and games that illustrate Jesus' journey from the Last Supper to the Resurrection. An Easter festival in Guatemala is acclaimed to be the largest Easter celebration in the world.ⁱ It is a weeklong celebration that commemorates Jesus' Passion and crucifixion by conducting somber processional marches, floats, and large sculptures of Jesus. Sand and colored sawdust are carefully designed and laid in patterns in the streets. And on Easter Sunday, Christians joyously celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and the end of Lent with fireworks.

Easter on the [Asia-Pacific Region](#) is often overshadowed by other major religions. However, even in places where Christianity is the major religion, some distinctive characteristics can be seen. For example,

in the Philippines, most people identify themselves as Christians. Holy Week consists of Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday, Holy Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Black Saturday before Easter Sunday. Much of the week is dedicated to quiet time by many Filipino Christians. Even some television and radio stations participate. Many Filipinos refrain from listening to loud music or drinking alcohol. Some pray and fast. Good Friday and Easter Sunday are both religious celebrations and public holidays. Good Friday begins the holiday weekend with somber street processions and a traditional Passion play (Senákulo).ⁱⁱ Some people flog themselves and a few even have themselves nailed to crosses as expressions of self-punishment. The Filipino narrative (pabasa) of Christ's Passion, death, and resurrection usually concludes. Religious figures are also carried through some towns on top of carriages (carrozas).ⁱⁱⁱ These figures are veiled in black to mourn the death of Jesus. Many Christians attend special worship services before 3 PM on Good Friday since this represents the time Jesus Christ died on the cross. Easter Sunday is a time of rejoicing because Jesus rose from the grave. Some couples get married because Easter symbolizes their new life. Many stores re-open and people buy food for their Easter feasts.

Easter activities also vary much across the [Eurasia Region](#) and the [Africa Region](#) due to the multitude of languages and cultures on these regions. In some countries, such as Greece and Ethiopia, Orthodox churches form the dominant religion. Many Orthodox churches base their Easter date on the Julian calendar, which often differs from the Gregorian calendar. Since large portions of the populations of Greece and Ethiopia are Orthodox Christians, this year they will celebrate Easter on May 2. On Thursday evening, Greek Christians prepare for the Easter weekend.^{iv} They buy or make a sweet Easter bread (Tsoureki) to eat on Easter Sunday. This bread has three braids to represent the Holy Trinity. Before midnight on Saturday, many go to their churches for the festival of light. At midnight, the church goes dark and the bells ring out to proclaim the resurrection. People also cheer and sometimes set off fireworks and crackers.^v For many Ethiopian Christians, Easter (Fasika) follows eight weeks of Lent, fasting from meat and dairy. On Easter Eve, they participate in long worship services that end around 3 AM on Sunday, after which they break their fast and celebrate the risen Christ. Many Christians also observe Palm Sunday (Hossana) and Good Friday (Sikilet). Easter is widely celebrated as a time for families and friends to get together. Relatives travel from afar to join in festivities and be with family members.^{vi}

I hope yours is a blessed Easter this year as you remember all that Jesus has done for you.

ⁱSix tips to spending Easter, Semana Santa in Antigua, Guatemala. (2021) <https://www.viaventure.com/six-tips-to-spending-easter-in-antigua/>

ⁱⁱHoly Week & Easter 2021. (2021) <https://rove.me/to/philippines/holy-week-and-easter>

ⁱⁱⁱHoly Week in the Philippines. (2021) <https://www.tagaloglang.com/holy-week-in-the-philippines/>

^{iv}European Easter Traditions. (2021) "Greece". <https://europeisnotdead.com/european-easter-traditions/>

^v<https://greeking.me/blog/greek-history-culture/item/244-greek-easter-traditions-during-holy-week>

^{vi}When is Ethiopian Easter, or Fasika? (2015) <https://rootsethiopia.org/2015/04/09/when-is-ethiopian-easter-or-fasika/>