

# Easter

## – British and Czech traditions

*Easter is at a different time each year. It's celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the first day of spring in the Northern Hemisphere. This means that Easter can be on any Sunday between March 22<sup>nd</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup>. But Easter isn't just the end of the winter – it's also the end of Lent<sup>1</sup>, traditionally a time of fasting<sup>2</sup> in the Christian calendar. It's often a time of fun and celebration. / ALASTAIR S. EDWARDS (UK)*

### British Easter

#### What is Holy Week?

The week before Easter is called **Holy Week**, and it starts on **Palm Sunday** and ends on **Holy Saturday**. When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, people welcomed him by waving palm branches and putting them on the streets. Today, on Palm Sunday, Christians make palm crosses and garlands to decorate the church.

- In the UK on **Maundy Thursday** (the day of Jesus' Last Supper), the Queen gives money to poor people who have done something for their community.
- **Good Friday** is when Jesus was crucified<sup>3</sup> and died on the cross.
- On **Holy Saturday**, Christians think about Christ lying in the tomb<sup>4</sup>, and sometimes keep a vigil<sup>5</sup> through the night.

In the UK, Easter is one of the most important Christian festivals of the year. It's full of customs<sup>6</sup>, folklore and traditional food. However, Easter in Britain began long before the arrival of Christianity. Pagans<sup>7</sup> had many gods and goddesses, and Easter is probably named after the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring – Eostre. Good Friday and **Easter Monday** are bank holidays\* in the UK. Over Easter, schools in the UK close for two weeks – just enough time to eat all that chocolate.

Many of the symbols and traditions of Easter are connected with renewal<sup>8</sup>, birth, good luck and fertility<sup>9</sup>.

#### Easter Eggs

Eggs are a very old symbol of spring and new life. On Easter Sunday in the UK, before there were chocolate Easter eggs, people gave each other real eggs. The eggs were hard-boiled and then dyed in various colours and patterns (just like in the Czech Republic today). Bright colours represented spring and light.

#### Rolling eggs

In some parts of the UK, children roll eggs down a hill to see whose egg goes furthest\*\*. In other places, children hold an egg in the palm of the hand and bang it against their opponent's egg. The loser is the one whose egg breaks first.

#### Egg hunt

Today people give each other Easter eggs made of chocolate, usually hollow and filled with sweets. British children also hunt for (chocolate) Easter eggs hidden by the Easter Bunny about the home or in the garden.

#### Easter Bunny

Rabbits have always been a symbol of fertility. Easter rabbits are called bunnies. In the UK, children believe that if they're good, the Easter Bunny will leave (chocolate) eggs for them.

#### Hot cross buns

Hot cross buns were first baked in England to be served on Good Friday. They're small, sweet yeast<sup>10</sup> buns with raisins or currants and sometimes chopped candied fruit. Before baking, a cross is cut into the top of the bun. They're best when they're still warm!



## Czech Easter

Czechs, like people in Britain, get ready for Easter a week or two before – they also decorate their homes with colourful eggs, hares (or “imported” rabbits) and spring flowers. In the Czech Republic, people often cut young branches from willows<sup>11</sup> and birches and wait for them to flower at Easter. There are a number of traditions, some of which are similar to British ones, but others are absolutely different.

### Food

On Maundy Thursday (*Zelený čtvrtek* in Czech) Czechs bake yeast cakes, called *jidáše*, which are similar to British hot cross buns. They symbolize the rope<sup>12</sup> that Judas hung himself with. Czechs also bake an Easter lamb cake (in Britain people usually eat roast lamb), and a large bun, called *mazanec*. Czechs also make Easter stuffing<sup>13</sup>, with spring vegetables, young nettles<sup>14</sup> and herbs.

### Easter eggs, and boys whipping girls

Czech girls decorate hard boiled eggs, which can be all colours and designs. Boys make a whip usually woven from eight young, fresh willow twigs. They visit girls – friends and relatives – on Easter Monday and whip them to make them younger and more fertile. The girls usually thank the boys and give them the painted eggs, and very often chocolate eggs and a bit of alcohol, too. However, if the boys visit after midday, the girls can pour water over them in self-defence.



### LANGUAGE NOTE

- \* **bank holiday** – public holiday, a day off work and school (shops and banks are closed)
- \*\* far, further, **the furthest**

## MATURITA QUESTIONS

- *What is Easter?*
- *When is it celebrated?*
- *Describe some British Easter traditions.*
- *Describe some Czech Easter traditions.*
- *Which traditions are similar, and which are different?*
- *Which traditions do you like? Which don't you like?*

## VOCABULARY



- <sup>1</sup> **Lent** [lent] – postní doba
- <sup>2</sup> **to fast** [fɑ:st] – postít se
- <sup>3</sup> **to crucify** ['kru:si,fai] – ukřižovat
- <sup>4</sup> **tomb** [tu:m] – hrob
- <sup>5</sup> **vigil** ['vidʒɪl] – vigilie (bohoslužba v předvečer náboženského svátku)
- <sup>6</sup> **custom** ['kʌstəm] – zvyk
- <sup>7</sup> **pagan** ['peɪgən] – pohan
- <sup>8</sup> **renewal** [ri'nju:əl] – obnova
- <sup>9</sup> **fertility** [fə'tɪləti] – plodnost
- <sup>10</sup> **yeast** [ji:st] – droždí
- <sup>11</sup> **willow** ['wɪləʊ] – vrba
- <sup>12</sup> **rope** [rəʊp] – provaz
- <sup>13</sup> **stuffing** ['stʌfɪŋ] – nádivka
- <sup>14</sup> **nettle** ['netl] – kopřiva