

# How do Christians across the world celebrate Easter? Why?



## Background knowledge for the teacher

- Christianity is a global religion.
- From the period leading up to Lent through to the end of Easter, many Easter traditions differ across the world.
- Although there are differences and similarities in practice, there are reasons behind the practices – many of which lead back to the Easter story and beliefs about the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- The four countries in this unit give a taster of Christianity across the world. Although finding out about one festival in four countries is just scraping the tip of the iceberg when it comes to global Christianity, it is a great start to understanding the richness and diversity of Christianity worldwide.

There are opportunities for cross-curricular links, but this unit is designed for RE learning and thinking that should not get lost in the excitement of finding out about the different countries. Encourage pupils to focus on the religious reasons for the Easter practices to ensure that this unit has a clear RE focus.

This unit should be taught after pupils have some understanding of Easter and knowledge of the Easter story, related Christian beliefs and some practices in the UK.

There are fact files on Easter in Kenya, Italy and Greece on pp. 18–20, while the fact file on Brazil can be downloaded (see eResources). These can form the basis of pupils' research, and teachers may wish to use them as the focus of shared or group reading. However, there are many ways to find out about Easter in different countries, so teachers and pupils are encouraged to look beyond these fact files in their teaching and learning activities.

Activities in this unit are designed for pupils throughout all stages of primary education; teachers should select the most relevant for their classes. The activities are not numbered as we would usually do. As all primary pupils can be involved in this learning, schools could organise an 'Easter across the world' day with pupils focusing on age-appropriate activities in class and coming together to share learning and work at the end. With art, poetry, reading, writing and discussion opportunities in the activities, the day is sure to be a memorable one!



## Essential knowledge for the pupil

Pupils will know:

- that Christian traditions surrounding Easter differ across the world
- the ways that Easter is celebrated in other countries
- some reasons behind the Easter practices studied



## Assessment for 4–11s

This section shows some of the expected outcomes achievable by pupils of different ages in the 4–11 age range. Adapt them for the age of pupils you are teaching.

### Expected for 5-year-olds

- Listen to information about Easter and respond with relevant questions, comments or actions.
- Know and talk about signs of Easter and some things that people from outside the UK do at Easter time.

### Expected for 7-year-olds

- Give at least three examples of how Christians show their belief in the Easter story through their actions at Easter.
- Recognise links between actions of Christians in Kenya at Easter and belief in Jesus' death and resurrection.

### Expected for 11-year-olds

- Make clear connections between Christian beliefs about the Easter story and practices of Christians in more than one country at Easter.
- Use evidence and examples to show how and why Christians from more than one country put their beliefs into practice in different ways at Easter.

This unit helps pupils in Scotland to achieve RME 0–03a and 2–03b.



## eResources



Go to [www.natre.org.uk/inspiring-re/](http://www.natre.org.uk/inspiring-re/) to access the resources below.

- A knowledge passport to print and use in class.
- An additional fact file on Easter in Brazil.

Members are able to download extra resources to support this unit:

- Key pictures from each of the fact files.
- A postcard outline for the activity on p. 17.

### Activity for 4–6s

## Signs around us, signs in the church

Discuss signs that Easter is coming – did anyone in the class:

- see signs of spring outside?
- eat pancakes on Shrove Tuesday?
- notice hot cross buns in the shops?

Take an Easter walk with the children to spot signs that the festival is coming – children may find instances of new life, posters in shop windows, notices outside churches, etc.

If possible, finish the walk with a visit to a church. During the visit, look at the way in which the church is decorated during the period leading up to Easter, and discuss reasons for this. Although churches will differ here, pupils may find minimal decoration, no fresh flowers, and purple fabric on the altar and on the vicar's robes. Pupils should compare and contrast their findings with images of the way in which a church is decorated on Easter Sunday, discussing the differences they can see and explanations for the Easter Sunday decorations.

Share the words said at many services on Easter Sunday in the UK: 'Christ is risen' and 'He is risen indeed'.

Pupils should move onto learning Easter greetings from other countries on the fact files (pp. 18–20), or the Ukraine's '*Khrystos Voskres!*' and '*Voistyno Voskres!*'

If you can't take pupils out of school, do the work virtually with a series of pictures.

### Activity for 5–7s

## Easter in Kenya

Look together at the flag on the fact file on p. 18. Ask pupils to see if they can work out where it is from before discussing the fact that Kenya is a country in Africa and locating it on the map.

Look at the image in the centre of the fact file and explain that it is from the night before Easter Sunday in Kenya. People will light candles from a blessed fire to symbolise eternal life.

Read through the fact file together and ask children to spot the words 'family' and 'church' (or their plurals). Whenever pupils spot these words re-read the point again carefully and give pupils the opportunity to explain their meaning. Where necessary, further pupils' explanations with relevant questions and comments to ensure they have a full understanding.

Provide some sensory experience of Easter in Kenya. For example, feel some palm fronds, as these are waved in processions across Kenya on Palm Sunday, or listen to some songs sung at Easter time in Kenya.

### Activity for 4–7s

## Pysanky

Look at some online examples of these Ukrainian eggs with pupils. Although *pysanky* have their origins before the Christian era, over time they have been incorporated into Ukrainian Easter traditions. The eggs are created during the last week of Lent, and pupils may be able to spot some symbols linked to Christianity on them, including:

- **spots** for Mary's tears
- **nets** for Jesus' disciples who were fishermen
- **a cross** for Jesus and his love
- **fish** for Christianity
- **a triangle** for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Help pupils find out about the symbolism and use their knowledge to create their own *pysanky* linked to Easter.

*Pysanky* are placed in Easter baskets in the Ukraine. Pupils can find out about the other items contained in the baskets, and their symbolism, and even go on to recreate a basket.

### Activity for 5–7s

## Easter poets

Share or write an Easter acrostic poem with pupils. For example:

**E**aster is a time when Christians think about Jesus.

**A** time when Jesus died on the cross.

**S**ad parts of the story are remembered at Easter.

**T**here are such happy parts too!

**E**specially when Jesus rose from the dead.

**R**ejoicing happens at Easter.

Discuss features of the poem, including each line starting with a given letter from the word, lines all relating to the topic, and the fact that no rhyming is necessary. List the features as success criteria for pupils to focus on when writing their own acrostic poems about Easter in Kenya, using the letters K, E, N, Y, and A at the start of each line.

## Activity for 7–11s

### Knowledge passports

Show pupils the Easter knowledge passport from the downloadable resources (for younger or lower-ability pupils, reduce the amount of countries). Explain that they can receive a passport stamp for each country. They will do this by answering three questions and giving adequate extra information about Easter in that location. Most of the key questions are already included in the passport, but one for each country will be written by pupils.

Next, pupils must decide upon one key question of their own for each country. Display the key image for one country from the downloadable resources. Ask pupils to discuss:

- what is happening in the image
- what they would like to know about the image

Ask pupils to write a key question about the image in the space on the country page of their knowledge passport. The question might be quite a wide one about Easter in the country linked to the image. Repeat this step for all the other countries about which pupils are learning, so that they have written their own question about Easter in each of the locations that they are studying.

Using the fact files on pp. 18–20 and other relevant sources, pupils should research Easter in each of the countries and record their findings in the knowledge passports. After answering the three questions about each country, pupils need to record extra ‘fascinating facts’ on the bottom half of the page. On completion pupils can collect their ‘passport stamp’ in the space provided.

To make this more active, set three or four stations around the classroom, one for each country. Place the appropriate fact file at each, alongside other helpful sources of information (including books, video clips, relevant web pages and even visitors!). Allow pupils to visit each station and research.

## Activity for 7–11s

### Marking Easter meaningfully

Look at many ways in which one event from the Easter story is marked at the festival of Easter, e.g. Jesus’ death:

- A church service focusing on the importance of Jesus’ death (Kenya).
- A Way of the Cross procession led by the Pope (Italy).
- A symbolic funeral procession (Greece).

Take one day of Holy Week and set pupils the challenge of creating a way of marking it that Christians from all over the world could find meaningful.

Pupils should think of actions that could be carried out, words that could be said and music that could be used.

## Activity for 5–9s

### A postcard home

Ask pupils to close their eyes and imagine what it would be like to celebrate Easter in one of the countries they have learned about.

- What would happen? Why?
- How would they feel?
- What would be the best part?

Using their prior learning about Easter in this country and their thoughts when they had their eyes shut, pupils should take on the role of a traveller in that country over the Easter period. Their task is to write a postcard home to the children at their school.

**On the back of the postcard:** Alongside the school’s address, pupils’ writing on the back of the postcard should include:

- at least three things that happen at Easter (amend the number for age and ability of pupils)
- reasons for these practices
- their thoughts and feelings when experiencing Easter in another country

**On the front of the postcard:** Pupils should choose the part of the Easter practices that they think would be the most important to Christians living in that particular country. This should be the picture on the front of the postcard, with a sentence explaining why it was chosen.

## Activity for 9–11s

### Compare, contrast, create

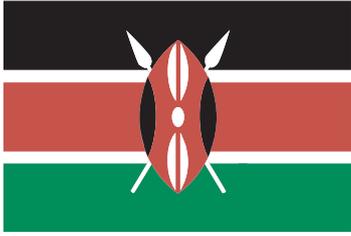
Split the class into pairs. Ask each pair to focus on Easter practices on Good Friday or Easter Sunday for two or more countries. Pupils should put these into a Venn diagram to see where practices are unique to one of the countries studied, or are shared by countries. If pupils’ have extended their research beyond the fact files, pairs can focus on other periods such as Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Lent.

Each pair should create one page of an ‘Easter across the world’ scrapbook. The page should show similarities and differences in the ways that their given day is marked. Crucially, it should also show similarities and differences in reasons behind the practices.

Pages could include photographs, the Venn diagrams, explanations of reasons behind practices, relevant quotes, etc.



# Kenya



The Kenyan flag

Most people in Kenya are Christian.

On Good Friday there are processions in lots of towns. These processions end at churches, which hold services. The services help people to remember why the story of Jesus dying is so important.

On Easter Sunday people often eat a special Easter meal with their family. They may have Kenyan-style chicken or beef stew. *Nyama choma* is also a favourite food.



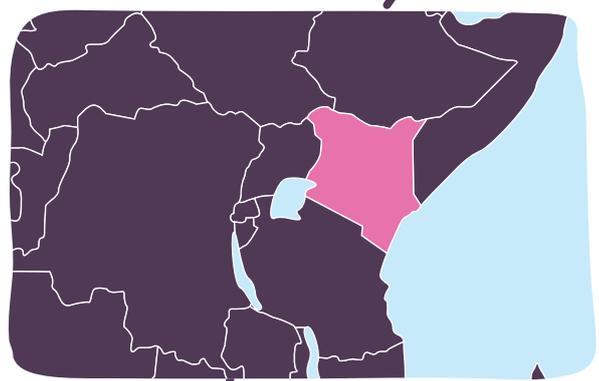
A late Saturday vigil Mass.

When Easter Sunday arrives, you can hear lots of people saying the Easter greeting '*Heri kwa sikukuu ya pasaka!*' This means 'Blessed be the Passover feast.'



The Washington Post/Matt McClain

After church on Easter Sunday is family time. In some families, the husband washes his wife's feet. This is to remember how Jesus washed his friends' feet in the Bible.



On Easter Sunday is a church service where people hear about how Jesus was resurrected. They sing songs about it too. The church service can last for three hours.



# Italy



The Italian flag

**Language:**  
In Italian, Easter is **Pasqua**.  
'Buona Pasqua' means 'Happy Easter'.

**Before Lent** there is a period called **Carnevale**. During this time there are street parades, parties and dressing up. Lots of foods that people would not usually have during Lent are eaten. The final day of *Carnevale* is *Martedì Grasso*, which means 'Fat Tuesday' – a lot of food is eaten on this day, just like these frittelle!



Frittelle are fried fritters made from milk, sugar, flour, eggs and baking powder.

**For food on Easter Sunday** lots of people eat eggs to symbolise new life, lamb to represent Jesus' sacrifice and *una colomba* (sweet bread shaped like a dove) to remind them of peace.



REUTERS/Tony Gentile

**The Pope's procession with a torchlit cross on Good Friday.**

**Lent in Italy** is called *La Quaresima*. It begins on the Wednesday after *Martedì Grasso* and is named *Mercoledì delle ceneri* (Ash Wednesday). On Ash Wednesday, many people visit their church, where the priest makes the shape of the cross on their foreheads with ash. Just like in the UK, Lent in Italy is a time to remember the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness, and to prepare for Easter.

**From the afternoon of Maundy Thursday** to the morning of Easter Sunday church bells are silent in remembrance of Jesus' death. On the morning of Easter Sunday they ring loudly to remember his resurrection.

**In Rome on Good Friday** the Pope leads a torchlit procession to remember the 14 Stations of the Cross. Most Christians in Italy are Catholics. The Pope is the leader of the Catholic Church.

**During Holy Week** there are processions to remember the events of the Easter story. Lots of churches have statues of Jesus and Mary that are part of the processions.



**On Easter Sunday** the Pope leads a service inside St Peter's Basilica, which is a church in Vatican City. Although many people will be inside the building, there is also a crowd outside. After the service, the Pope steps onto the balcony of the church, where he can speak to and bless the crowd. Most other churches in Italy also have services on the morning of Easter Sunday.

**Passion Plays** are performed in some parts of Italy, often on Good Friday. These are plays showing the Easter story. A Catholic ritual of singing the gospel in different parts on Good Friday has grown into the modern-day custom of performing Passion Plays.





# Greece



The Greek flag

**Dates:** Most Christians in Greece are Orthodox Christians. As the Greek Orthodox Church follows the Julian calendar, Easter in Greece often falls on slightly different dates to Easter in the UK.

**Language:** Many Greeks call Easter **Pascha**. This comes from the Hebrew word 'Pesach', which means 'Passover'.

**From Palm Sunday onwards** there are church services every day to remember the last week of Jesus' life.

**Red dyed eggs** have lots of symbolism – the eggs themselves represent the sealed tomb of Jesus while the red is the colour of life and Christ's blood. On Easter Sunday (*Pascha*) people tap their eggs together to try and crack each other's open, showing Jesus' resurrection. The person with the last uncracked egg is said to have good luck the following year.

**Lent fasting** ends on Easter Sunday. Many people eat roasted lamb in honour of Jesus, who was sacrificed and rose again at Easter.



**A Holy Friday procession.**

leniscallegia.photography / Shutterstock.com

**On the Thursday of Holy Week** the church service focuses on the Last Supper and how Jesus was betrayed. This is also the day that the Easter bread (*tsoureki*) is baked and eggs are dyed red.



**At midnight on Holy Saturday**, priests in churches say, 'Christ has risen from the dead and in so doing has trampled on death and to those in the tombs he has given life.' People greet each other with the phrase '**Christos Anasti**' (Christ has arisen) and reply with '**Alithos Anesti**' (Truly he has arisen). Church bells ring and fireworks light the sky. Holy Saturday is over and the resurrection is remembered.



**On Holy Friday**, the death of Jesus is remembered by having symbolic funeral processions. The *epitaphios* (an icon showing Jesus after being taken down from the cross – see picture above) is put into a symbolic decorated coffin. Church bells toll, flags are at half-mast and funeral psalms are said. People scatter perfume and flowers on the *epitaphios* during the procession.

**Friday of Holy Week** is a day of mourning – a time for Christians to show they are sorry for Jesus' death. Some Greek Christians will not eat or cook at all on Holy Friday; many others will only have simple foods.

**The Holy Fire** is brought to Greece from the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem on Holy Saturday. This fire is believed to have appeared from Jesus' tomb. Priests take the fire to their local churches so that everyone in the church can use it to light their candles just before midnight.

