



Galaxies Service
22 March 2015

Service by Pete Cowley



Welcome:

Welcome to our service tonight

Easter is almost here and today we are looking at what Easter means for us here and now - we are looking at Easter down-under, an upside down Easter.



Easter means many things these days, from rabbits and chocolate eggs to the saviour of our souls!

That's a lot of ground to cover so we had better go back to the beginning to find out how it started.

Overview:

Modern-day Easter is derived from two ancient traditions: one Judeo-Christian and the other Pagan. Both Christians and Pagans have celebrated death and resurrection themes following the Spring

Equinox for millennia. Most religious historians believe that many elements of the Christian observance of Easter were derived from earlier Pagan celebrations.

Easter is not celebrated on the actual anniversary of the resurrection. Among Christians in the West it may fall on any date between MAR-22 and APR-25. Eastern Christianity uses the Julian Calendar which is currently delayed by 13 days from the Gregorian Calendar that Western Christians use. Easter is observed in the East between APR-04 and MAY-08. There have been efforts to have all Christians observe Easter on the same day, and other efforts to hold it on the same day each year. However, these have not been successful.

The equinox occurs each year on March 20, 21 or 22. Both Neopagans and Christians continue to celebrate religious rituals linked to the equinox. Wiccans and other Neopagans usually hold their celebrations on the day or eve of the equinox. Western Christians celebrate Easter on the Sunday on or after the full moon that follows the nominal date of the Equinox -- MAR-21. The "full moon" is not the actual astronomical event; it is set at the 14th day of the month according to a lunar calendar.

Origins of the name "Easter":

The name "Easter" originated with the names of an ancient Goddess and God. The Venerable Bede, (672-735 CE), a Christian scholar, first asserted in his book *De Ratione Temporum* that Easter was named after Eostre (a.k.a. Eastre). She was the Great Mother Goddess of the Saxon people in Northern Europe. Similarly, the "Teutonic dawn goddess of fertility [was] known variously as Ostare, Ostara, Ostern, Eostra, Eostre, Eostur, Eastrā, Eastur, Austron and Ausos." Her name was derived from the ancient word for spring: "eastre." Similar Goddesses were known by other names in ancient cultures around the Mediterranean, and were celebrated in the springtime. Some were:

- Aphrodite, named Cytherea (Lady of Cythera) and Cypris (Lady of Cyprus) after the two places which claimed her birth;

- Ashtoreth from ancient Israel;
- Astarte from ancient Greece;
- Demeter from Mycenae;
- Hathor from ancient Egypt;
- Ishtar from Assyria;
- Kali, from India; and
- Ostara a Norse Goddess of fertility.

An alternative explanation has been suggested. The name given by the Frankish church to Jesus' resurrection festival included the Latin word "alba" which means "white." (This was a reference to the white robes that were worn during the festival.) "Alba" also has a second meaning: "sunrise." When the name of the festival was translated into German, the "sunrise" meaning was selected in error. This became "ostern" in German. Ostern has been proposed as the origin of the word "Easter". There are two popular beliefs about the origin of the English word "Sunday."

- It is derived from the name of the Scandinavian sun Goddess Sunna (a.k.a. Sunne, Frau Sonne).
- It is derived from "Sol," the Roman God of the Sun." Their phrase "Dies Solis" means "day of the Sun." The Christian saint Jerome (d. 420 CE) commented:

"If it is called the day of the sun by the pagans, we willingly accept this name, for on this day the Light of the world arose, on this day the Sun of Justice shone forth."

Pagan origins of Easter:

Many, perhaps most, Pagan religions in the Mediterranean area had a major seasonal day of religious celebration at or following the Spring Equinox. Cybele, the Phrygian fertility goddess, had a consort, Attis, who was believed to have been born via a virgin birth. Attis was believed to have died and been resurrected each year during the period MAR-22 to MAR-25.

Gerald L. Berry, author of "Religions of the World," wrote:

"About 200 B.C. mystery cults began to appear in Rome just as they had earlier in Greece. Most notable was the Cybele cult centered on Vatican hill ...Associated with the Cybele cult was that of her lover, Attis (the older Tammuz, Osiris, Dionysus, or Orpheus under a new name). He was a god of ever-reviving vegetation. Born of a virgin, he died and was reborn annually. The festival began as a day of blood on Black Friday and culminated after three days in a day of rejoicing over the resurrection."

Wherever Christian worship of Jesus and Pagan worship of Attis were active in the same geographical area in ancient times, Christians:

"... used to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus on the same date; and pagans and Christians used to quarrel bitterly about which of their gods was the true prototype and which the imitation."

Many religious historians and liberal theologians believe that the death and resurrection legends were first associated with Attis, many centuries before the birth of Jesus. They were simply grafted onto stories of Jesus' life in order to make Christian theology more acceptable to Pagans. Others suggest that many of the events in Jesus' life that were recorded in the gospels were lifted from the life of Krishna, the second person of the Hindu Trinity, or were taken from the life of Horus, an Egyptian god. Ancient Christians had an alternative explanation; they claimed that Satan had created counterfeit deities in advance of the coming of Christ in order to confuse humanity. Modern-day Christians generally regard the Attis and Horus legends as being a Pagan myths of little value with no connection to Jesus. They regard Jesus' death and resurrection account as being true, and unrelated to the earlier tradition.

Wiccans and other modern-day Neopagans continue to celebrate the Spring Equinox as one of their eight yearly Sabbats (holy days of celebration). Near the Mediterranean, this is a time of sprouting of the summer's crop; farther north, it is the time for seeding. Their rituals at the Spring Equinox are related primarily to the fertility of the crops and to the balance of the day and night times. In those places where Wiccans can safely celebrate the Sabbat out of doors without threat of religious persecution, they often incorporate a bonfire into their rituals, jumping over the dying embers is believed to assure fertility of people and crops.

So an interesting background to how we got to Easter of Christianity. But for those of us who no longer hold that we are miserable sinners needing to be rescued by Jesus who gave his life for us on the cross - a situation theologically twisted beyond belief what do we do ... we can re cast it in a modern setting.

Setting the Scene

WORDS from the crowd

On Good Friday, many churches have a tradition of walking round the grounds and sanctuary, listening to readings and looking at visuals or sculpture, travelling the stations of the cross. This is followed by a time of meditation and reflection on the seven words Jesus is recorded as speaking while on the cross, for an hour or so, up to the time of Jesus' death, traditionally celebrated at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

This collection of reflections by JOHN L. BELL focuses on these seven words; a different character responding each time, in their own way, to what they've heard.

Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.

... on the contrary;

you do not know what you have done.

The stage of history
was erected, trod and tested
long before your brief sortie
from the wings.

The drama of salvation
- you are religious,
you will understand -
has been played, continuous,
in repertory
and found, in the main,
to please....

and that without a saviour
except God and the system.
But you, upstart from outside,
decided to change the script,
to subvert the plot,
to personalise the absolute,
and, ad libbing with the audience,
to infer that the new travesty
is true.

Who are you?

You do not know what you have done.

But it is not irreparable.

Two days, three perhaps,
and your face will be forgotten
as the actor is
who plays the clown at night
and, unmasked,
feels a fool in the morning.

Your listeners will stop speaking of you;
your followers will stop following;
religion will return to normal -
we've had such sects before -
and your theatre in the round

will close its invisible doors
forever
when the hero dies and
exeunt omnes.
- A travelling player

Group Discussion

Today you shall be with me in paradise.

In paradise
a boy with lice
is showered clean with kisses;
a girl with spots
gets lots and lots
of cuddles that she misses.
Eachie peachie, eachie peachie
where's the evil eye gone?
Where's the bogey, where's the polis,
where's the ones they spy on?
Eachie peachie, eachie peachie,
children who were naughty,
always got their trousers torn
or always missed the potty
now can sit on Jesus' knee
and now can feel him tickle.
What a shame that adults get
the Saviour in a pickle.
Eachie peachie, eachie peachie
where's the evil eye gone?
Where's the bogey, where's the polis,
where's the ones they spy one?
In paradise
the doctors find
that surgeons all are men born blind;
the clergy find
that those who teach
were all beyond their preaching's reach.
Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief
find that heaven's like a coral reef,
a coral reef that sinks a ship
and all the differences on which we trip.
We trip on past, we trip on present,
we loathe the prince and we mock the peasant.
But paradise is where we find
that good and bad are of a stranger kind.
In Paradise
you sometimes stare
at who's arrived and at who's not there;

and bigger yet
is the surprise
that you are there in Paradise .
- A child

Group Discussion

Mother, there is your son... there is your mother.

Knit two, purl two, knit two,
drop a stitch...
which...
wumman?
Knit four, purl four, drop two,
knit one...
which...
son?
Jamesie, cum here.
Who'se thir mammie's boy?
Jamesie, gie back that toy
tae the wee lassie.
It's hur teddie.
Jamesie, when yoo're ready!!
Don't greet hen.
Ye'll get him back agen.
But here's anither wan tae haud
till that wee bugger brings back yir wain.
Knit two, purl two, knit two,
drop a stitch...
which...
wumman?
Knit four, purl four, drop two,
knit one....
which....
son?
- A woman with child

Group discussion

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Him too?...
like every other Jew
or, if not all,
like me.
Through God created,
to God related,
by God mistaken,
by God forsaken.

His groan,
like every heavenward moan,
or, if not all,
is mine.

Through God extracted,
to God attracted,
by God conceived,
by God deceived.

He asks
what every fear unmasks,
or, if not all,
mine do.

Through God undaunted,
to God unwanted,
by God impressed,
by God depressed.

He'll cry
and like all flesh he'll die
or, if not all...

This Jewish Jesus must be listened to,
though many hear, only a few
or less might dare to see
that either society's scarecrow
is hanging on the tree
or God, if He's his father,
is like this broken creature
looking through much pain at me.

- An agnostic

Group discussion

I thirst

Thursday?...
Whit?...
Aw....thirsty?

Aw....thirsty?

I thoat he wis a day oot!

Right enuf, it's awfa waarm.

The swet's rinnin oot ma oexter

like creesh oot a mutton pie...

Oh laam of God...

Sorry,

nae offence, missus.

Whit's he daen there onyway?

The last time I saw him

I wis as pisht as a fart in a trance.

An I asked him fur a shullin.

An he seys "Gie's a swig at yir boattle."

An I seys " huvnae goat a boattle."

An he seys "Well, I huvnae goat a shallin."
An then he dauneret intae big Susie's hoose
an made fur me tae jine him.
Hur settee' a fold-doon bed, but.
Bad memries...
know whit I mean?...
Brewer's droop an....
Sorry,
nae offence, missus.
So noo he's thursty
an no a pub in sight
an too early fur a cairy oot...
no that I could stretch ma airm that faur
tae gae him a sook et ma boattle if I hud waan.
But I'd gie it a try,
even though I'd maist likely boak up
if ma haun went near that bloody mess...
Sorry,
nae offence, missus.
So, whit dis that say, lady?
Thon thing abuv his heid.
That's no his name!
That's no whit I've heard him caa'd.
Aw....
it's his title.
Oh well,
I must go hame an tell the wife
that the day's the day
the Saivyir of the World
waantit a drink!
Christ,
I've a fair drooth on me, masel.
- A drunk man

Group discussion

Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit

It will not end,
not now.
Not with what he said.
In life,
we often give till it pleases,
seldom till it hurts,
never when pain sears, soars
and roars for death to come
and life to die.
It will not end,
not now.

Not with what he said.
This wrecked, wracked pastime of a body,
this taught, untreated plaything of a man
takes much,
but even in the throes of death
he shows his strength
and gives more.
Cling firmly to your spirit
and nothing you'll receive.
But let it go and God
the human race's running sore,
its civil sin with private core
will conquer and relieve.
You will not end,
not now
with what you said.
For on the cross you came
forgiving,
you finish,
giving.
All will return
and rise with you,
living.
- A watching woman

Group discussion

It is finished

Move along, my lovely ladies,
sure, you've seen it all before:
nasty sight for nasty people,
nothing works like blood and gore.
But for ladies sore with crying,
sunken eyes in sunken cheeks,
there are better sights to stare at
than three decimated freaks.
Move along, my boozie cronie,
lift the foot you think is stuck.
Had you come an hour early
you might just have chanced your luck
Playing pitch and toss with soldiers
who were gambling for the clothes
of a "heavenly" civilian;
his, now mine, are these and those.
Move along, my little children,
time for school or time for bed.
Fill your minds with dreams or wisdom
which will last. Don't lift your head

any higher than my elbow.
Him above's about to die.
Then we'll clear this messy business
which obscures the sun and sky.
Move along you sundry people,
suited to your Sunday best,
rooted gazing at a failure
destined for eternal rest
unless God, in his own humour,
has in mind another goal,
topping heaven's celestial goblets,
shovelling hell's unwanted coal.
Move along. Bert, did you hear him?
Sounded like he thinks it's done,
though his voice almost suggested
that perhaps he'd just begun
to expect some other ending.
What a queer fish. I don't know.
Still, for now, the show is over.
Move along please,
move along please.
Bert, wake up
it's nearly time to go.
- A soldier

The most wonderful, most difficult news

The spirit of Christ with us today

The resurrection is of a spiritual rather than a bodily kind. It shouts that the spirit of Jesus is here in all the situations and relationships that are part of our life.

Following the Jesus way means not only celebrating the good news but living it ... With responsibility, courage and vision we can open ourselves to that loving presence empowering us to live his teaching of love and acceptance, compassion and care for everyone we meet.

Quite the challenge!!



A commissioning

In God we live and move and have our being.

We receive and extend invitations to live this spirit-filled life. These invitations are sometimes spoken and unspoken, in need and in friendship.

Our aloneness often is because we do not hear or accept these invitations from one another. We trudge on never sharing our burdens. We are guilty of looking only to ourselves. We must arise out of that darkness, that aloneness. Each of us can leave that old path and respond to the new, to the call

to light and love, to the call to dance. *God* calls us to dance. Each of us has been called to dance, to move out in joy, shedding our self-consciousness and clothing ourselves with peace. No longer can we afford to wait. *God* calls us this day to the task of loving.



Departure prayer – Reaching for Rainbows

I keep reaching for rainbows . . .

Thinking one God's morning,

I will wake up with rainbow ribbons in my hair,
With hurts painted over in hues that only angel wings could brush,
Black obliterated, chaos hurled beyond the rainbow and my vision,
The world created in a myriad of colours:
The hungry fed,
The dying held,
The maimed walking,
The angry stroked,
The violent calmed,
The oppressed freed,
The oppressors changed,
And every tear wiped away.



I keep reaching for rainbows,

But instead of colours in our storm,
Gray and black infiltrate, dirtying the sky,
And I hear human voices wailing in the darkness,
The never-ending darkness . . .

Just the same

I know the promise of the rainbow.
I keep thinking I'll turn a corner one day
And find a litany of rainbows
Flung across the sky,
Hosannaing back and forth
Through all the ages and
Out into eternity forever amen!

Every tear wiped away —

It's a promise —

When we become rainbows to each other.