

THE SYMBOLS OF EASTER PART 2: EGGS

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely he cannot re-enter his mother’s womb and be born again, can he?’ Jesus answered, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:3-8).

Eggs have long been a symbol of new life, going back even to pre-Christian times. In fact, some ancient cultures viewed the creation of the world as the hatching of an egg. This corresponds well with the liturgical season of Easter, which takes place during the spring time, as birds build their nests and lay their eggs. The new life that we celebrate in Christ’s resurrection, and that the baptized celebrate through our rebirth in Christ, finds its symbolic parallel in the new life of the hatchlings emerging from the eggs, which is also why baby chicks are a symbol of Easter. Like the emergence of baby chicks from the egg, Christ’s emergence from the tomb and the emergence of the baptized from the baptismal font bring new life.

The symbolism of the egg most likely first became associated with Easter because of the strict Lenten fast observed by many earlier Christians, which required abstinence from all meat products, including eggs. Eggs became part of the baskets of food that people would bring to be blessed for their Easter meals, breaking the fast, and thus later acquired the symbolic meaning. Combined with the symbolism of the Easter bunny, which we will look at in next week’s column, this in turn led to the tradition of hiding eggs and Easter egg hunts. The tradition of coloring Easter eggs also has roots in earlier times, in which people exchanged gifts of dyed eggs during spring festivals. Christians adopted and modified this practice, coloring their eggs red, as a symbol of Christ’s blood, or gold, as a symbol of how precious the new life of Christ is.

(For more information visit <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/undertanding-the-history-and-symbols-of-easter-1256039.html>.)