

THE SYMBOLS OF EASTER PART 3: THE EASTER BUNNY

“I came that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

The exact origin of the Easter Bunny as we know it today is lost to history. Ancient cultures recognized the rabbit, or hare, as a symbol of fertility and life due to the creature’s habit of breeding prolifically. The appearance of baby rabbits in the spring no doubt contributed to the association with Easter. Just as the new rabbits emerge from their burrows, so Christ emerged from the tomb, and just as the rabbits symbolize life, Christ rose from the dead that we “might have life and have it more abundantly.”

This connection may also explain the association of the rabbit and eggs, which also symbolize new life. The practice of exchanging decorated eggs at Easter goes back centuries. Sometime in the late Middle Ages, German folklore began speaking about a special, egg-laying rabbit called the “Osterhase” or “Oschter Haws” - the “Easter Hare” - who, much like Santa Clause at Christmas, brought gifts of decorated eggs to good children at Easter. According to some traditions, children would build nests in baskets for the Easter Hare to leave the eggs, the origin of the Easter basket. In other traditions, the Easter Hare would hide the eggs and the children would have to find them, the origin of the Easter egg hunt. In time, other gifts, such as candy and toys, began appearing in Easter baskets along with the eggs. In the 1700’s, German immigrants brought these traditions with them to this country, where they soon spread. The Easter Hare eventually became the Easter Bunny, and thus we have the tradition that we know and love today.

In our secularized society, it is easy to lose track of the true, religious meaning of so many of our beloved holiday traditions. I hope that our reflection these past few weeks on some of the most prominent symbols of Easter has helped to recover that meaning for this holiest of seasons, when lambs symbolize the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, eggs symbolize the new life of the resurrection, and the Easter Bunny symbolizes the fullness of life that Christ died and rose to give us. For more reading, please see <https://www.history.com/topics/holidays/easter-symbols>.