

Ukrainian Easter Tradition

For Ukrainian Catholics, no other holiday stirs the soul or is so glorious and joyful as that of Easter, when we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, Son of God, from the dead. It is a holiday filled with many symbols and rituals.

The week before Easter is called Holy Week. The days are busy with physical and spiritual cleansing and rebirth. On Thursday evening the Twelve Gospels of Christ's Passion are read in a special service. On Great Friday, we attend service at 3:00 p.m., the hour of Christ's crucifixion. To commemorate His death, in procession we carry a plaschynytsia— a shroud that has an icon of the crucified body of Christ. The shroud is carried along with a spear and sponge, and we hear the hollow, heart-breaking nails being pounded into Christ's hands and feet. After the procession, the shroud is placed in a "tomb" where we approach in extreme humility (usually on our knees) to kiss the wounds of our Lord.

The Resurrection Matins and liturgy was traditionally held in the early morning of Easter Sunday, before the rising of the sun. When the liturgy was ending and the priest said "CHRYSTOS VOSKRES" (Christ is Risen), the doors of the church were opened and the rays of the rising sun would envelop the faithful.

One of the more colorful of the Easter traditions is the blessing of the Easter basket. This was traditionally done on Easter Sunday after the liturgy, but now commonly is done on Easter Saturday. The basket traditionally contained a small sample of the following:

PASKA:	This is a rich, decorated bread. It represents Christ, the True Bread of Life. A candle is placed in its center and lit when the priest begins the blessing ceremony.
BABKA:	This is a sweet bread, usually with raisins, that represents the Mother of God.
PYSANKY:	Decorated Easter eggs, with designs and colours that are symbolic.
KRASHANKY:	Dyed eggs in a variety of colours. Traditionally, there was always a red one to represent our salvation through the blood of Christ.
EGGS:	Hard boiled and peeled. They represent new life and the Resurrection.
SALT:	A small amount. It represents our call to be "salt of the earth" and our duty to others.
BUTTER:	The butter represents the goodness of Christ. The cloves, placed to outline a cross represent the oils and spices used to anoint the body of Christ.

CHEESE:	A sweet cheese made by mixing farmer cheese with confectionery sugar, raisins, cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg, represents that we as Christians should practice moderation in everything.
HORSERADISH/BEETS/VINEGAR/SUGAR:	The bitterness of horseradish is combined with beets, vinegar, and sugar. The bitterness reminds us of Christ's bitter suffering. The red of the beets reminds us of His Passion and the blood He shed for us. The vinegar reminds us of the gall He was offered when He was thirsty. The sugar reminds us that Christ's sufferings and passion are seen in the light of the Resurrection.
KOVBASA/HAM	These rich meats remind us of the richness and joy of the Resurrection. They are also symbols of God's overabundance and limitless mercy and generosity.
CHOCOLATE	This is a modern addition to the Easter basket. It reminds us to be thankful that our ancestors made sacrifices so that we could have a life in a country where we are free to worship God in the faith that was handed down to us.

Easter dinner includes all of the blessed foods, and might include pyrohy, holubsti, mashed potatoes and gravy, salads, vegetables, headcheese, cakes, cheesecakes and tortes. It is important not to waste any of the blessed food. The crumbs, bones, etc. are buried so that the earth receives blessing from the Resurrection.



Often the Easter festivities included HAHILKY – VESNINKY, ritual spring songs and dances. These group dances, songs and games were meant to entice spring and chase winter away. They also imitated planting and growing of crops, and tried to ensure a bountiful harvest.

