

## ORTHODOX EASTER



**Greek Orthodox Easter in Sparta Greece**

**Greek Orthodox Easter.** The Easter is the most important holiday in the **Greek Orthodox Church**. Compared to Western Easter, **Orthodox Easter** is in no way commercialized by chocolate, Easter bunnies or pastel colors. Rather, it is a festivity deeply rooted in tradition filled with church, lamb and red dyed eggs. Therefore, Easter is the most sacred observance in the Greek Orthodox faith. Preparations and customs remain some of the most traditional in modern Greek life.

**Sample traditional Easter menu.** The first meal of the day is eaten after the midnight church service of the Resurrection, to break the 40-day fast that has led up to this most joyous of celebrations. After a too-brief night's sleep, the day begins in earnest! Traditional foods of the day are lamb or kid, red eggs, and [Tsoureki Paschalino](#) sweet Easter dessert bread. Here on the Greek island of Crete, [kalitsounia](#) (sweet cheese pastries) are an Easter tradition. Other dishes can vary widely. The Easter meal itself can range from a small family event to an elaborate feast that goes on all day and into the night.

### **Lamb and Kid**

- For casserole recipes, increase quantities per recipe instructions.
- For oven and grilled roasts, which lose a lot of volume during cooking, figure raw weight:
- bone in: 1 1/2 to 2 pounds per person
- boneless: 1 pound per person

Preparations for Easter come to a climax toward the end of Holy Week, between Palm Sunday and Easter. While there are many local customs associated with Easter, there are several observed by all.

**Holy (or Great) Thursday.** Easter preparations begin on Holy Thursday when the traditional Easter bread, [tsoureki](#), is baked, and [eggs are dyed red](#) (red is the colour of life as well as a representation of the blood of Christ). From ancient times, the egg has been a symbol of the renewal of life, and the message of the red eggs is victory over death. (More on the [history of red eggs at Easter](#).)

In times gone by, superstitions grew into customs that included placing the first-dyed red egg at the home's iconostasis (place where icons are displayed) to ward off evil, and marking the heads and backs of small lambs with the red dye to protect them.

Holy Thursday evening, church services include a symbolic representation of the crucifixion, and the period of mourning begins. In many villages - and in cities as well - women will sit in church throughout the night, in traditional mourning.

**Holy (or Great) Friday.** The holiest day of Holy Week is Holy Friday. It is a day of mourning, not of work (including cooking). It is also the only day during the year when the Divine Liturgy is not read. Flags are hung at half-mast and church bells ring all day in a slow mournful tone.

Many devout do not cook on Holy Friday, but if they do, traditional foods are simple, perhaps boiled in water (no oil) and seasoned with vinegar - like beans - or thin soups like [tahinosoupa](#), a soup made with tahini.

Traditionally, women and children take flowers to the church to decorate the Epitaphio (the symbolic bier of Christ). The Service of Lamentation mourns the death of Christ and the bier, decorated lavishly with flowers and bearing the image of Christ, is carried on the shoulders of the faithful in a procession through the community to the cemetery, and back. Members of the congregation follow, carrying candles.

**Holy (or Great) Saturday.** On Holy Saturday, the Eternal Flame is brought to Greece by military jet, and is distributed to waiting Priests who carry it to their local churches. The event is always televised and if there's a threat of bad weather or a delay, the entire country agonizes until the flame arrives safely.

On the morning of Holy Saturday, preparations begin for the next day's Easter feast. Dishes that can be prepared in advance are made, and the [traditional mayiritsa soup](#) is prepared, which will be eaten after the midnight service, to [break the fast](#). The midnight Service of the Resurrection is an occasion attended by everyone who is able, including children, each holding a white candle.

- Special candles made for Easter are called "labatha" (lah-BAH-thah) and are often given as gifts to children from their parents or God-parents. These candles can be lavishly decorated with favorite

children's heroes or storybook characters, and may be as much as three feet tall, but the candle itself is usually white. These candles are only used for one Easter midnight service.

<http://greekfood.about.com/od/festivalsholidays/a/easter.htm>

## WHY GREEK ORTHODOX EASTER IS ON A DIFFERENT DAY

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Did you notice that Greek Orthodox Easter doesn't usually fall on the same day as everyone else's? There's a good reason for this. The Orthodox Christian Church calculates a bit differently than other Christian denominations. This isn't done to confuse everyone. There are a few really good reasons why it may fall on a different date. The two Easters are calculated differently. Every now and then, both Easters do fall on the same date. This isn't done on purpose. Sometimes, the two methods of calculating Easter lead to the same date. Here's how the Greek Church approaches setting the date.

**Julian Calendar.** The Orthodox Church uses the Julian calendar, not the Gregorian calendar, to calculate when Easter is. This is the calendar that was officially implemented by Julius Caesar and was in use primarily between 45 BC and 1582 AD. This means that it was the calendar that was used when the Orthodox Church was initially set up. Though much of the world now uses the Gregorian calendar, which replaced the Julian calendar, the custom has remained to use it to calculate the date of Easter. This is one reason why Easter may fall on a different date.

**Passover.** After the forty days of Great Lent, Orthodox Christians celebrate Holy Week, which begins on Palm Sunday. When Jesus first arrived in Jerusalem, he was hailed as a king. This moment is honoured during Palm Sunday. As the events of Holy Week unfold, Orthodox Christians commemorate the events that led up to his arrest, execution, and then his resurrection.

In the Bible, all of these events took place after Passover. There is some debate amongst scholars as to whether or not the Last Supper was actually a Passover meal. However, in the Orthodox Church, it is acknowledged that Jesus and His Disciples shared this Passover meal together.

Through this meal, Jesus established Holy Eucharist, thus transforming the custom from a Jewish one to a Christian one. As you may recall, this meal happened shortly before Jesus was arrested. Judas sat at that supper table knowing that he had betrayed Jesus and that His arrest was inevitable. Note that Passover falls at a different time each year, which is another reason why the date for Easter varies.

**Spring Equinox.** Another important element to calculating Greek Easter is the Spring Equinox. Generally, the date for Easter is set on the first full moon after both the Spring Equinox and Passover. Each year, the date of the Spring Equinox is slightly different. It's usually somewhere in the third week of March. However, since it differs each year, this factor is something else that could affect when Greek Easter falls.

As you can see, calculating when Greek Easter is can be a difficult task and is the main reason why Eastern and Western Easter often fall on different days. Once every few years, however, the days coincide. This is the exception and not the rule. Also, the date for Easter can vary from early to late spring depending on how the calculations fall. One year, it could be in early April. Other years, it could fall at the beginning of May.

<http://www.greekboston.com/religion/greek-easter-day/>