

ORTHODOX EASTER – PAȘTE ORTODOX

On *Easter*, Christians throughout the world celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The symbolism itself inspires people with hope, confidence and the wish to be better, making of Easter one of the most important and widely celebrated church holidays.

In Romania, the period of forty days before Easter is called *Postul Pastelui (Lent)*. During the Lent, religious people observe a period of fasting and penitence. It is the period when any Orthodox Christian is not allowed to eat meat, cheese, milk, eggs or any combination of these. People use to pray for their dead relatives all Saturdays before the holy night by going to church with special food and cakes. Also, in this period of time, merry customs such as weddings or baptism feasts are forbidden .

The week before the Easter holiday , people in Romania are busy cleaning their houses. In the countryside especially, the housewife cleans everything in her house or in her garden, washes the curtains and carpets, weaves fabrics for new clothes and buys all necessary things for the special dishes she will cook two or three days before the holy night of Resurrection.

Painted eggs are the most representative symbols of Easter. Numerous tourists to our country are amazed by the brightness of colours, by the patterns and the harmony of nuances used to paint eggs. The patterns are very different: animals, plants, branches, geometric motifs, crosses, domestic tools, sun, stars and even angels.



The Romanian Orthodox Easter begins with the holy night and it lasts for the next three days : Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. It is said that the gates of heaven will open exactly on the night of Resurrection and they will remain open for the next seven days. Anyone who dies in this period of time will enter in heaven despite his sins. On this particular night the whole family goes to church together holding candles in their hands in order to attend the ceremony. After the religious ceremony, the priest comes out of the church and blesses the community saying all the time "*Christ has risen from the dead*" (*Hristos a inviat!*) and everyone responds as a single voice : "*He has truly risen*" (*Adevarat a inviat!*). The candles are burning, the air is full of magic and happiness is everywhere. It is an uplifting and touching atmosphere.

In many Romanian families, the first meal is taken right after coming back from church, early in the morning. They still wear their best clothes and have the candles burning. In many others, Sunday morning starts by washing their faces and hands with fresh water in which they add a painted egg (usually red) and a coin. The common belief is that the next year they will be healthy and rich. The breakfast on this day consists of coloured eggs, *pasca* and *cozonac*. Now people clink painted eggs. This works like a ceremony : the person who is in action (generally the older person) must say "*Christ has risen*" and the one who is waiting with the egg in his hand must reply immediately "*He has truly risen*".

After the long fast, the Lent, tables full with all sorts of good dishes and brightened up with beautifully painted Easter eggs create a festive atmosphere. *Pasca* and *cozonac* are also on the Easter tables in everybody's home. These are sweet types of bread specific to Romania and they symbolize the face and body of Christ. Women generally cook them on the last Thursday before Easter. They also prepare *lamb roast* and many other dishes made only once a year- at Easter.

Easter is so very popular also because it marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring. After the cold and dull winter days , nature springs to life again at Easter time. Life is bright and coloured again, trees are in blossom and flowers are in bloom. We feel more cheerful, fresher, vibrant with life and warmth and we seem to smile for no reason at all.

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