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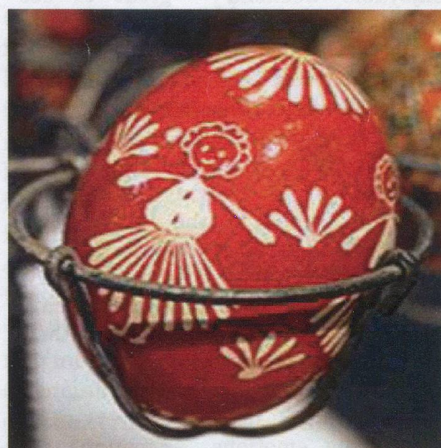
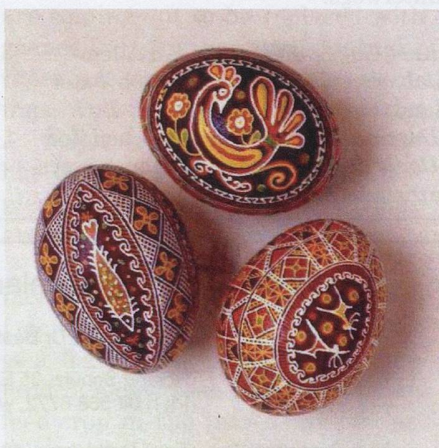
March 2008

Easter - Pâques - Ostern - Aranga - Pasqua - Pasca

Nature is at her most exuberant in springtime. Lush foliage, in the freshest lettuce greens, and copious, brilliantly coloured blooms push through seemingly barren earth in an astonishing show of

eggs were forbidden during lent, as well as on other traditional fast days. Likewise, in Eastern Christianity, both meat and dairy are prohibited during the fast (eggs are seen as dairy – a foodstuff that

roasted meats. Different countries have developed their own traditional egg dishes, breads and cakes which are specially prepared for the Easter festivities. Chocolate Easter eggs and chocolate rabbits



colour. This abundant display, all the more glorious for following the cold, bleak months of winter, has prompted civilizations down the ages to mark the season with a festival.

Our own celebration, Easter, is so entwined in the mists of antiquity that even its name comes from an ancient pagan festival, celebrated in honour of Eastre, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring and fertility. To a large extent, many of today's customs have been absorbed directly from pagan rites. The Easter bunny, for example, is the modern representation of the Easter hare, which was considered to be an incarnation of Eastre. And the egg, now symbolic to Christians of Christ rising from the grave, is an ancient and universal representation of creation and new life.

The Easter egg tradition may also have celebrated the end of the privations of lent. In the West,

could be taken from an animal without shedding its blood). That is why it was traditional to use up all of the household eggs before lent began, which established the tradition of Pancake Day.

In Christian countries, many customs and traditions centred around eggs have developed over the centuries. As well as dyeing, decorating and eating them, villagers throughout Europe would gather for egg tossing and rolling, commemorating the rolling away of the stone from Christ's tomb.

Lambs are another Easter icon, symbolizing the Paschal Lamb, which was the sacrifice offered at the Passover feast. Later, Christians came to see Jesus himself as the Paschal Lamb, offered as the ultimate sacrifice.

Following the Lenten fast, Easter has become a time of great feasting when tender new vegetables are served with celebratory

did not appear until the middle of the nineteenth century, but since then they have become a popular Easter gift. *tb*

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