

LENT-EASTER-JEWS-CHRISTIANS-MUSLIMS

Passover and Easter come in the Spring; the season of new life. Promoters of Christianity have been adept at identifying with the celebrations and practices of other traditions. Easter was never mentioned in the original Scriptures, although it appears in one English translation. The term Easter is derivative of Eastre; a goddess of Spring. The Easter Bunny and Easter eggs harken back to rabbits because of their fertility and the myth of the Goddess Astarte. She was believed to have been hatched from an egg that fell from heaven into the Euphrates River.

Religion is full of stories that attempt to provide context and insight. Far too often such stories can send people in a direction that leads them away from contemplating what the stories mean. The thing about Easter is that it recognizes the significance of new beginnings, no matter what is going on in the world and in our own lives. Easter is about hope that the world can and will be better than it is. All genuine and authentic faiths encourage that. Passover is the festival that recognizes the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery. One of the religious rituals of Muslims is fasting to commemorate the Exodus.

When the familiarity of a story is practiced but not well understood, the opportunity exists to think about what the story means. That is why there is a season of the Church known as Lent. Lent is the 40-day period leading up to the death of Jesus. Lent encourages humanity to become mindful of what is happening and is about to happen, by considering who Jesus was and the significance of his life. It is one thing to be taught that Jesus is the son of God and that he died for our sins. It is something else to think about what that means.

Soon after Jesus spoke his last words and drew his last breath, imagine what it was like for the men who killed him. The guards who were ordered by Pilate to kill Jesus encountered the reality that they had tortured and killed an innocent person. Even Pilate understood that Jesus did not deserve to suffer or die at the hands of the state. Imagine being present for the murder of Jesus and asking: O God, what have we done? The answer to that question can have transformative power. When we are able to acknowledge the truth of our own complicity, we are on the way to being saved from ourselves.

Lent begins with the imposition of ashes, a sobering smudge to remind us of how brief and transitory life is and can be. The days leading up to the Last Supper and Good Friday give us pause to contemplate our own mortality and whether we believe that there is more to life than life itself. Holy Saturday is the day before Resurrection Sunday, when people began to realize that the spirit of God can not be put to death by killing the body.

Just as a seed produces new life, the witness of Jesus who lived and died for what he believed is a sign of new life. Resurrection is an indication of liberation, that frees us from the way things are and renews our attention on the way things can be. Resurrection is a new beginning for people who are not satisfied with the world the way it is. Out of his integrity Jesus showed us the way to be. This is a good time to put into practice your own answers to what Lent and Easter are all about. -Rev. James Briney