

Easter Celebrations

Traditions such as Easter customs help humans mark the passing of time. We can recall what we did as individuals or as a family on Easters of the past and invoke the meaningful thoughts and feelings that surrounded the service or the family meal. This issue, we asked contributing writers to recount past Easters, some from decades ago, and some from last Easter. You may relate to the writers' memories with memories of your own.

Easter 2020, an Unusual Year for a Familiar Celebration

Kevin Moll

In our home we look forward to Easter with joy and anticipation. Usually, the cold Minnesota winter is giving way to warm spring air and it feels like our attitudes are brightening with the weather. Often there is a Passion Week or Easter presentation in Sunday school and evening services on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Easter Sunday morning is full of excitement and candy bags. Then we wash sticky hands and faces and put on Sunday best clothes. The commotion and repeated calls that "Moll's bus is leaving in 15 minutes" are forgotten when we are lined up on the church bench. There we are reminded of the great victory of our Lord and Savior.

Last year, this normal routine was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Minnesota governor had made a shelter-in-place order that restricted gathering to "flatten the curve." This meant we would pause our church services.

At the time, many things were unknown, and we were anxious and startled by the sudden changes in our routines. How would this Easter be? We knew that we would be at home for services, listening online. I was scheduled to serve on Maundy Thursday evening, so we felt fortunate that we were able to go to church that night, even during the shelter-in-place order. It felt strange to be in church with only a

few essential workers there to assist with the recording and to play organ and sing. But once the service started and we heard God's Word, it brought comfort and felt somewhat normal.

Good Friday evening, we sat at home and attended services online, happy that there was such a thing as the internet, and we could be reassured by God's Word in a time of uncertainty. Easter morning our routine of the candy bag hunt was paused while we watched a video that the LLC had published. "Risen Is Our Sun in Victory" filled the living room with song and we blinked back tears to better see the many faces of familiar believing friends who sang for the recording. *When would we be able to get together again?* we wondered. Next was an online Sunday school lesson that covered the events of Passion Week. It felt good to be reminded of the love that Jesus has for us. He paid dearly for our sins.

After online services, our traditional ham dinner was eaten from great grandma's "nice" dishes. Hannah was careful not to get any food on her best teal dress. We were thankful that we were able to, for the most part, forget about the turmoil outside our door and throughout the world. We had a secure place where we could celebrate Easter and peacefully keep many of our familiar traditions.

How We Observe Good Friday

Maria Loukusa

In reflecting on Good Friday, both Dan Rintamaki and Margaret Oja express thankfulness that in these times they can observe the church holiday by attending services.

Dan and Margaret, brother and sister, grew up in Ishpeming, Michigan in a believing home. When they were growing up, their family observed Good Friday as they did the Sabbath. "We did our daily chores, but aside from that, we didn't work," recalls Margaret. Dan remembers that it was important to his mother that they pause on all church holidays such as St. Stephen's Day and Ascension Day as well. In those years, Good Friday was also acknowledged in the community, with businesses closing from noon to 3 o'clock to allow for church services.

Although they observed Good Friday at home, Dan and Margaret remember that there were not always services held in Ishpeming. Dan recalls that in the 1960s and early 1970s, there was a lenient spirit, and services may not have occurred as regularly as they do today. After the heresy in 1974, the siblings remember that there were always services scheduled for Good Friday, for which they have been thankful. They remember singing “The Hour in Gethsemane” at services (now SHZ 97), and also have fond memories of SHZ 107, “Easter Is Our Day of Great Festivity,” later in the weekend on Easter Sunday.

In the years raising children with his wife Marilyn, Dan remembers often traveling for Easter weekend. In those days, children had the week before Easter off of school, and Dan’s work often allowed for time off as well. The family traveled to the Detroit area several times in the 1960s to visit family for the weekend. Dan especially remembers that in 1962, a Finnish speaker named Hannes Kamula spoke at Easter services in Detroit during an eight-month speaking tour. As a young man, Dan would not have imagined that twenty-four years later, he would be staying with Hannes and his family during his own 1986 speaking trip to Finland! In later years, the Rintamaki family would also travel to the Minneapolis area to visit believing family for Easter. After the heresy, there would often be ministers from other areas serving the Upper Michigan area for Easter weekend, speaking in both Pelkie and Ishpeming. In the years that they did not travel, Dan’s children remember attending Good Friday services in the neighboring congregation of Pelkie, as the visiting minister would usually be speaking there.

When asked if any specific songs came to mind in thinking of Good Friday, Dan mentioned, “Voice of the Blood of Jesus.” Although it isn’t necessarily a Good Friday or Easter song, it emphasizes the blood of Christ, which He shed for us on that day. For Dan, this blood represents the love of Christ, which is what Good Friday means to him: *From Jesus’ wounds is flowing this blood that calls to all. Where Jesus’ blood is preaching, the throne of grace is found: It gushes forth from Zion unto eternal life; the cup of joy o’erflowing dispels distress and strife (SHZ 190:4).*

Discussion Questions:

1. Easter's meaning is of utmost significance for believers – how does the unbelieving world view Easter?
2. What can we do to prepare our hearts for Easter and its solemn message?
3. Discuss the significant events of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday.
4. After reading the two articles about Easter's past, share your childhood Easter memory or a special memory from last year's Passion week.