



EASTER IN POLAND



Easter is the most important holiday in the Christian religion and many church ceremonies and customs are linked with Easter. We want to explain some of them to you how they affect Polish life in a religious and everyday manner. We hope that this will help you understand what is happening when you visit Poland during this period. And if you are a believer and would like to see the differences or similarities between your church and the Polish church we hope that this brief text will be of some help.

Let us begin with the religious aspect of Easter as any tradition or custom without faith and a sacred base would not have the strength to survive in society for so long. Easter is the most important Christian holiday and commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, offering hope of eternal life after death for believers. At the beginning Easter was fixed in calendar and held on the Jewish holiday of Pasha. From 325 AD (The Council at Nicaea) Easter was decided to take place on the first Sunday after the Spring full moon - that is between 21 March and 25 April (in 2008 it will be the 23 and 24 March).

The Easter Period starts 40 days prior Easter Sunday on Ash Wednesday. On this day Lent starts and lasts 40 days to remind us the 40 days Christ spent in the desert tempted by the Devil. The time of Lent is for retrospection and to prepare for Easter with understanding and respect. During Lent Christians do not have parties or any other forms of entertainment and on Fridays, the day of the Crucifixion, they fast. Fasting culminates on Good Friday when a stricter fast is practiced - according to the church one full meal can be eaten that day but no meat.

Before Easter we have Holy Week and the triumphal holiday of Palm Sunday. This day symbolizes the welcome from people with palm leaves Christ received when he entered Jerusalem as the Messiah only to be

crucified a few days later. This tradition of palms can be found in Poland though the palms do not resemble palm tree leaves at all. They are usually bought at markets or outside churches and are no longer than 30 centimeters. There are regions in Poland where palms are several metres high and special presentations and competitions are organised to choose the highest or the most beautiful palm made by its proud owner. Polish palms are made of wheat stalks, dried flowers, colourful paper, dried fruit, etc. To see this tradition you have to leave the larger cities and visit a small village. The best known competitions are held in the Kurpie region and in Malopolska, in Rabka and Lipnica Murowana.

Palm Sunday reminds us of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem as well the sacrifice He is about to make after which we begin the celebration of Holy Week.

Maunder Thursday - first day of Pasha Triduum, a very important Christian day. Church liturgy reminds us of the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples when Jesus established the ritual of the Eucharist (changing bread into his flesh and wine into blood) as well as calling his disciples to the priesthood. On that day in churches special ceremonies such as the blessing of holy oils are conducted. These oils are used during the year in baptisms and other sacraments. Priests also renew their vows on that day. At the end of Holy Mass the statue of Christ is taken by procession to darkened chapel. This symbolizes the last hours of Christ's life spent with disciples in prayer.

Good Friday - the most important Pasha Triduum day, the day of the Crucifixion with strict fasting for believers. It is the most distressing day in the year. There are no masses in churches and the ceremonies in church relate to the Cross as the symbol of death of Christ. The Cross

is taken around the church in procession, The Way of the Cross, with 14 stops at each station from the sentencing to the placing of His body in the Tomb. In the evening the body of Christ symbolized by The Host is placed in a specially prepared tomb till Easter Sunday. Most churches are open until the next day and many people gather in silent prayer, sing hymns and meditate even at late night. Many of these tombs are decorated with objects related to the present day political situation and are interesting and sometimes very controversial (they were very controversial in communist times when the church could express more by symbols that officially could be said in public). After these church ceremonies which are not obligatory on that day most Christians continue fasting very strictly and private life is limited to calm and orderly events. Good Friday means a lot of work for Polish women in the kitchen as it is one of the last days to prepare the delicacies to be eaten during the Easter days to come.

Holy Saturday - the day of study and peacefulness. There are no masses in the churches and the only celebration is the evening liturgy in preparation of the Resurrection on Sunday. During the evening vigil there are small bonfires lit outside churches and candles are lit from them. Priests enter the dark church with this light as a symbol of breaking the chains of death and enlightening the darkness over humankind. During this evening's celebrations baptismal oaths are renewed and the Tomb of Christ is prayed over by special hymns for that occasion.

In the customs and traditions in Poland this day is singular for one event which takes place from morning till afternoon with frequent prayers in churches during the blessing of the food. This is a very popular custom and widely respected. Food, in small amounts, is placed into willow baskets with spring decorations. There must be an egg - a symbol of new life, salt to keeps from being spoilt, and bread as a symbol of the everyday bread people pray for. There are many foods which can be taken to be blessed, fruit, bread. Obligatory there is a lamb made from sugar symbolizing the Resurrected Christ. After the food is blessed in church fasting is over though the rest of the day is spent in peace and meditation.

Easter Sunday - the day of Resurrection, the most important day for Christians, starts at 6 a.m., with a special Mass commencing with a procession round the church to the accompaniment of all the church bells. Easter Sunday ends this period of Lent and the contemplation of death. This day brings joy for eternal life for believers and the joy of Christ Resurrected. It is a special day with hymns in churches (but not at home as at Christmas). Families gather at the Easter breakfast table (as important as Christmas Eve supper or Christmas dinner) and many journey to visit their relatives from all parts of Poland and lately parts of Europe as our citizens have emigrated in large numbers to other countries in the EU. Before Easter breakfast starts the food that was blessed on Saturday is distributed and eaten, accompanied by special



3 CATS GALLERY

Polish Gifts – Handcrafted and Unique

Unique amber and silver jewelry,
Boleslawiec Polish pottery,
Easter ornaments, engraved crystal,
hand painted glass,
linens, other small
beautiful presents
from Poland.

All products are handcrafted
with pride by Polish
gifted artisans and artists.



discount
with this ad
10%

Open: Mon-Fri 10am - 7pm, Sat 11am - 5pm
26 Chmielna Str., 00-020 Warsaw
Phone +48 22 828 11 69, www.galeria3koty.pl

47. Emilia Plater Str
tel. 004422 620 59 30
www.bombkarnia.pl

Bombkarnia

Painted eggs are a very important symbol of Easter in Poland. Their significance has come to us from pagan times and is linked to life newly born. Eggs carry life and are a symbol of vitality and strength. According to tradition they are decorated and placed in baskets to be taken to churches to be blessed. There are hundreds of decorations and styles available depending on the region or family traditions. Hand painted Easter eggs can be wonderful souvenirs of your holiday in Poland.

All hand painted Easter eggs presented here are on sale in the BOMBKARNIA gallery where you will be taken on a fairy tale journey of special souvenirs! All items are original and handmade by Polish craftsmen. Prezentowane ręcznie malowane pisanki wielkanocne można kupić w BOMBKARNI, która niedługo klienta przeniesie w magiczny świat baśni. Ozdoby są przygotowywane przez najbardziej uznanych polskich producentów. Zapraszamy!

