

GREEK EASTER AND ITS TRADITIONS



One of the most family oriented festivities in Greece is Easter and it is also a significant celebration within the Greek Orthodox Church. Even in today's modern society, centuries-old traditions are still being kept alive and respected by younger generations. It is the one time of the year when families are expected to be together and people travel all over the country to celebrate Easter with their loved ones.

Preparations for Easter start on "Clean Monday", seven weeks before Easter Sunday when the Greek people start to fast for lent. During these forty days, the Greek diet consists of seafood, pickles and meals without oil. Meat, fish, eggs and dairy products are also excluded from the diet.

Although the Holy week leading up to the Easter weekend is quieter and the atmosphere in communities is somewhat subdued; after the resurrection of Christ, Easter celebrations in Greece become lively and loud.

HOLY THURSDAY



Holy Thursday is a day of baking and the dyeing of dozens of boiled eggs bright red to symbolize the blood of Christ and the renewal of life. Young children delight in joining their mothers and grandmothers in the preparation of making the “Koulourakia”, the special Easter biscuits and there is always the lingering aroma of newly baked “Tsoureki”, the sweet bread that is actually eaten all year round.

Holy Thursday is the saddest day of the Easter celebrations as it marks the day of Christ’s crucifixion. People visit their churches to light candles and to sit and say a private prayer. It’s a day of mourning and church services are held throughout the country in the

evenings. Many of the Greek people can be seen shedding a tear and some will keep a constant vigil next to the cross bearing a figure of Christ in the church.



HOLY FRIDAY

On Holy Friday, church bells toll all over the country and are a poignant reminder of Christ's crucifixion. Flags fly at half mast and a great sadness is felt in communities. During this period of mourning, afternoon church services are held and after a re-enactment of the crucifixion, the figure of Christ is removed from the cross and placed in a shrine decorated by women and children with carnations and roses.



In the evening, the shrine representing Christ's tomb is carried through the neighborhood in a somber funeral procession and the silent congregation follow behind showing their grief and their mourning for Christ. When the shrine has returned to the church, members of the congregation can take a flower away with them.



HOLY SATURDAY

Holy Saturday is all hustle and bustle as Greek families shop and make their last minute preparations for Easter Sunday. The forty days of fasting will come to an end at midnight when the Greek soup, Mayiritsa, made with lamb offal is served after the church service and the resurrection of Christ. During the day, homes become filled with decorated candles, candies and brightly wrapped gifts, while the excitement of younger members of the family gradually begins to take hold.

Late in the evening, crowds of people arrive at every church in the country, leaving no room inside for many of the congregation. Hundreds of people follow the service outside from the large microphones. Shortly before midnight, lights in the church go out and bells start to toll to announce Christ's resurrection. Loud fireworks go off leaving spirals of smoke and the priest appears to share the eternal flame from his own candle among the congregation. "Christos Anesti", Christ has risen, the crowds shout amongst themselves.



The Eternal flame is then carefully carried home by everyone to mark a black cross with the smoke over the doorstep. This tradition is believed to bless the home and bring it good luck. After that, it is time for the Mayiritas soup and to crack the red boiled eggs with an opponent before eating and drinking wine until the early hours of the morning.

EASTER SUNDAY

Surprisingly, on Easter Sunday, people are up as early as the break of dawn to prepare the lamb or goat ready to be roasted on a spit. The lamb is cooked along with the “Kokeretsi”, a favorite Greek dish of wrapped seasoned lamb offal. There is a smell of barbecued meat all across the country, while families and their friends prepare to enjoy a very large feast. Loud music and singing complete the high-spirited celebrations of a very traditional Greek Easter.



Happy Easter

From 20th Primary School of Larissa

GREECE

Καλό Πάσχα!