

Easter customs in Serbia

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Alongside Christmas, Easter is the greatest holiday of Christianity. It represents the victory of life over death. Through the act of resurrection, Christ confirmed his divine powers and opened the gates to the eternal life, joy and happiness. Its date is not fixed, but it is always celebrated on Sunday.

Traditionally, Good Friday is the day when Easter eggs are traditionally painted, and on that day nothing else should be done. The housewife first makes the sign of the cross and says a prayer. After that, she puts a bit of holy water (from Easter or Epiphany) into the pot in which the eggs will be boiled and painted. When the water starts to boil, she adds paint to the pot and pays attention that the eggs are painted evenly. The first egg that gets painted, also known as "the housekeeper", is put away until the next Easter. Before painting, the eggs can be decorated with wax or using a pen, and the figures or letters applied to the egg will remain visible as a decoration. There are also special kinds of sticky labels which can be put on the eggs after the painting is finished. The painted eggs stay in the bowl and are not used until Easter.



Egg tapping starts on Sunday morning, for Easter breakfast. The head of the house first picks an egg, followed by the rest of the family. Then they start a cheerful egg tapping competition which creates a lot of joy and happiness, especially for the kids. During the tapping, "Hristos Vaskrese" (*Christ is risen*) and "Vaistinu Vaskrese" (*In truth, he is risen*) phrases are pronounced. On Easter, boiled eggs come first on the menu, and only then comes everything else. Likewise, if a guest comes into the home, first they get an egg as a present and after that the guest gets served. In our region, an old touching custom is preserved: painted eggs are carried to ancestors at the cemetery. The custom comes from a folk belief that all humans are alive in the God's eyes and that we should share the joy and festive spirit with our ancestors.

In the Easter morning, bells can be heard from all the bell towers of orthodox temples, celebrating the onset of the great holiday. The head of the home takes his family to the church to attend the holy Easter liturgy. When they return home from the church they kiss each other and say Easter greetings. The head of the house lights a candle, takes the censer with frankincense and performs a purifying ritual in all the rooms in the house. The whole family says the Lord's Prayer and other prayers they choose. After the common prayer, they all together sit at the festive table.

