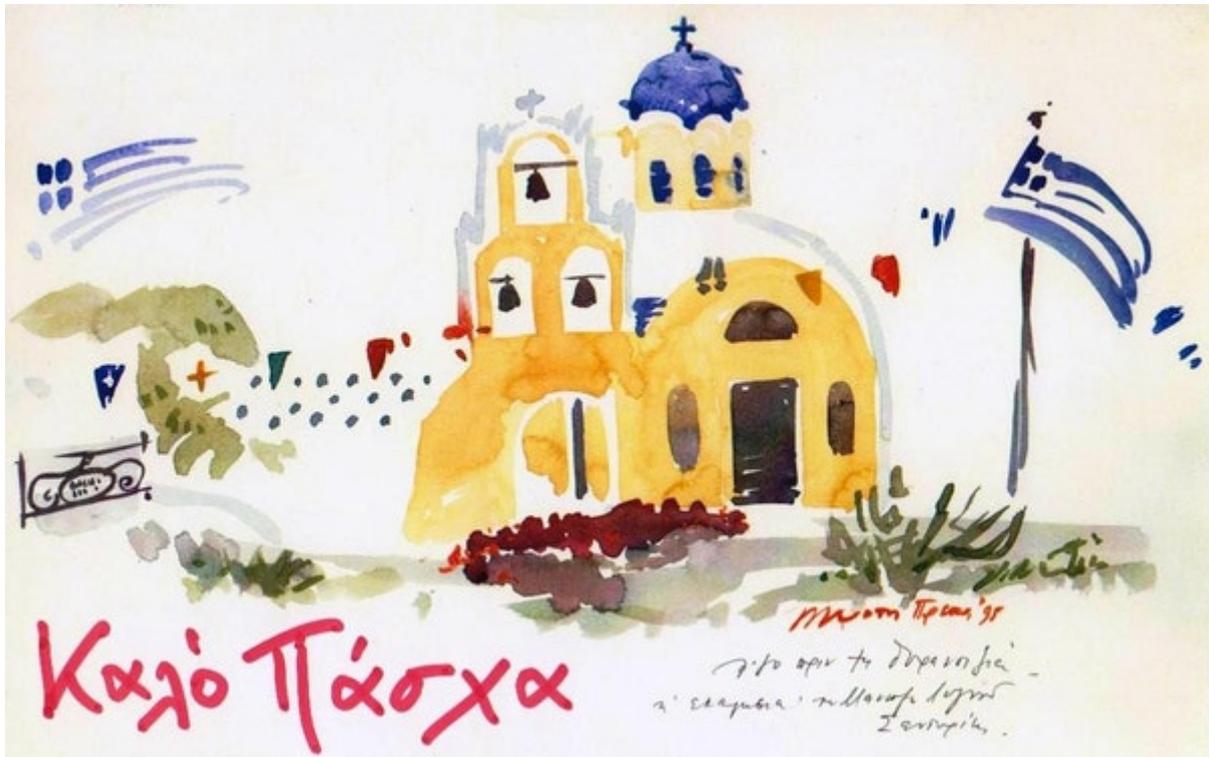


EASTER (PASCHA) IN GREECE:

THE CELEBRATION OF SPRING



Spring in Greece is a celebration – and Easter is the pinnacle of this celebration!

Ships in ports all over Greece sound their horns. Local customs, marching bands, the Epitaphs that the parish women spend all night decorating on Holy Thursday, the solemn Good Friday processions, the Ascension ceremony on Easter Eve with its candles and fireworks, the services in churches, monasteries and chapels will entrance and uplift you.

A fantastic time to be in Greece, Easter is best enjoyed in the countryside, in the villages and small towns where old traditions keep strong and communities come together to enjoy the springtime weather and celebrate the most important Great Feast of the Orthodox tradition. The religious ceremonies are moving and a sight to behold and the ensuing feasting and celebrations are bound to stay with you forever.

AT A GLANCE

Fiery and ethereal Greek Easter traditions

While each region may have its own local customs associated with Easter, there are several traditions observed by everyone.

Why it falls on a different date from the other Christian Easter celebrations?

Since the date of the Greek Orthodox Easter is based on a modified Julian calendar, which is some 13 days behind the more modern Gregorian calendar, the festivities do not usually occur at the same time as other Christian Easter celebrations. Greek Orthodox Easter should fall on the Sunday that follows the first full moon after the spring equinox.

Starting 40 days before...

The preparations for Easter truly begin 40 days before, with Kathari Deftera, meaning Clean Monday or Ash Monday. Clean Monday or Kathari Deftera, is actually the first day of Lent

(Sarakosti). While a holiday atmosphere still prevails, the foods consumed are all “pure”, without the shedding of blood. But this allows cuttlefish and squid, fish roe and other foods. “Lagana” is a flat bread traditionally served on this day. Decorated with the colorful local almond trees and mimosas bursting into bloom, nature invites children and their parents into the hills of Athens and the Greek countryside to fly kites and feast at local taverns or outdoor picnics is how Lent begins in Greece.

Holy (or Great) Thursday

Baking Tsoureki & Dying Red Eggs

Easter preparations begin on Holy Thursday when the traditional Easter bread, "tsoureki", is baked, and eggs are dyed red. Red eggs are a traditional part of the Greek Easter celebration. In the Orthodox tradition, eggs are a symbol of new life, victory over death and the blood of Jesus Christ.

Holy Thursday evening, church services include a symbolic representation of the crucifixion, and the period of mourning begins. In many villages - and in cities as well - women will sit in church throughout the night, in traditional mourning.



Holy (or Great) Friday

Church Bells, Flags, Tomb of Jesus

On Good Friday, there is a sombre atmosphere. Church bells ring all day in a slow, mournful tone and flags fly half-mast and a shrine representing the tomb of Jesus is carried in the streets.

The holiest day of Holy Week is Holy Friday. It is a day of mourning. It is also the only day during the year when the Divine Liturgy is not read..

Traditionally, women and children take specific flowers to the church to decorate the "***Epitaphios***" (the symbolic bier of Christ). On the evening of Good Friday, people go to church for the procession of the *Epitaphios*, an embroidered religious icon that is solemnly paraded through the streets on a funeral bier that parishioners lavishly decorate with flowers earlier in the day. The Service of Lamentation mourns the death of Christ, and the bier is carried on the shoulders of the faithful in a procession through the community.

Holy (or Great) Saturday

On Holy Saturday, at Greek homes, the **traditional "magiritsa" soup** -which uses the organs and intestines of the lamb that will be roasted on Easter Sunday- is prepared, which will be eaten only after the midnight service, to break the fast.

Greeks gather at the church again for the midnight service on Holy Saturday, bringing with them special tall candles called "**lampades**". At the stroke of midnight, all lights are turned off, plunging the congregation into darkness until the priest produces a flame and begins chanting "**Defte lavete Fos**"—literally, "Come receive the Light"—pronouncing the Resurrection of Christ. When the clock passes midnight, the Priest calls out "**Christos Anesti**" (Christ is risen) and passes the flame, the light of the Resurrection, to those nearest him. The flame is then passed from person to person and it isn't long before the church and courtyard are glowing with flickering candlelight. The night air is filled with the singing of the Byzantine Chant "Christos Anesti" and wishes are exchanged. As is the custom, as soon as "Christos Anesti" is called out, church bells ring joyously non-stop and ships in ports all over Greece sound their horns.

The *lampades* are then carefully carried home; The sight of hundreds of candle flames moving from churches to homes on that night is beautiful, indeed. Tradition has it that if they arrive with the flame still burning and mark a cross on the doorway with its smoke, the household will be **blessed with good luck**. From the lighting of the flame on and throughout Easter Sunday, people use the greeting "*Christós anésti*" (Christ is risen), to which you can reply with "*Alithós anésti*" (truly, he is risen).

Once home, everyone gathers around the table for a traditional meal to break the fast, which includes the magiritsa soup, "**tsoureki**", a sweet, egg-enriched bread that is flavored with mahleb and mastic, and the red eggs. But before the eggs are eaten, there's a traditional challenge: "**Tsougrisma**" the Red Egg Easter Game: **Whose egg is going to crack first?**

The word *tsougrisma* means "clinking together" or "clashing." The game requires two players and two red eggs; the goal is to crack the opponent's egg without cracking your own. The player who successfully cracks both ends of their opponent's egg is declared the winner and, it is said, will have good luck during the year.



Easter Sunday

is a day of feasting, when families come together to celebrate and enjoy traditional Easter dishes that include roast lamb, typically cooked on a spit over an open fire; *tsoureki*, a sweet, egg-enriched bread that is flavored with mahleb and mastic; and, of course, dyed red eggs.

Roasting the Lamb

Families gather at dawn to roast the lamb. The spits are set to work and grills are fired up. Preparations for the meal turn into festive celebrations with music and traditional dance even before the eating begins, which can be a three to four-hour affair, lasting long into the night.

Easter Monday

Easter Monday is a much more relaxed day when everyone gets ready to return to work and school. The main work of Easter Monday is to finish the foods that were left from the day before!

"Kalo Pascha" = Happy Easter!