

Explaining Easter to Children: A note to parents and grandparents
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It was dinner time at our house.

“Well, girls; how was your day?”

“Good. Hey Daddy?”

“Yes?”

“Why did Jesus die?”

Good question...although I was thinking we would talk about nursery school.

How do parents respond to questions of faith, especially in the Easter season when we adults may be uncertain about how to understand the wonder and mystery of it all? Here are some thoughts about talking with your child about Jesus’ death, a risen Lord and an empty cross.

Why did Jesus have to die?

God’s dying, and that is what we understand—that it was God’s self crucified on the cross—is a hard concept to grasp.

Dying for others...the Harry Potter story

Are you familiar with the Harry Potter stories? Harry, a young wizard, had a difficult start in life. When he was a baby, his parents were killed by the evil wizard, Lord Voldemort, who tried to kill Harry that terrible night, too. Voldemort, however, was foiled in his attempt to kill young Harry when Harry’s mother put herself in Voldemort’s way. That powerful gift of love protected Harry from the Dark Lord throughout his young life. Talk with your children about the Harry Potter story and see if they can relate it to the Easter story.

Dying for others...the Lion King story

You can find another example of sacrificial love in *The Lion King*. See what Mufasa does for his son Simba.

Dying for others...the Jesus story

We see the power of sacrificial love in the way Jesus gave himself so that we would not face death or be held by the powers of violence and sin in the same way ever again. Jesus went ahead of us and transformed everything. God did for us something we could not do for ourselves: defeat the power of death.

Dying for others...can we believe this?

It is difficult to acknowledge that much of what we have is the result of someone giving something up. We live because others were willing to sacrifice their time and energy, sometimes even their lives, so that we might live. And, as difficult as the lesson of sacrificial love can be to accept, it fills us not with guilt, but with gratitude. It inspires us to love as selflessly and generously.

The *Survivor* TV show is probably the antithesis of sacrificial love. The game only works if you sacrifice others. Jesus never would have won the million dollars. He would have given it away.

Why do we call it Good Friday?

Some think that this day—the day we remember Christ’s death on a cross—was originally called *God’s Friday*. *God’s Friday* was the day God ruled. Death, violence, a political empire—these did not rule. God ruled. On *God’s Friday*, God started to make everything that was wrong right again.

Over time, *God’s Friday* was lost in translation. It eventually became *Good Friday*. This is similar to how the parting blessing *God be with you* became for us *good-bye*. But whether *God’s Friday* or *Good Friday*, the point is the same; God did something very creative and profound on what looked to everyone else like just another cruel day in a cruel world.

That dreadful day on Golgotha was the beginning of a great plan. It took time to realize this, of course. Not one of Jesus’ friends would have called that day “good”. What they eventually understood was that Friday was good because Sunday was great. Why do we assume we always know how something will turn out?

Why do we call it Easter?

Does Easter sound like this at your house? “*C’mon, get up and get to church. It’s a special day, and church will be busy, and I have a ham to cook by 3 p.m., and no more chocolate.*”

The word *Easter* was an ancient word that referred to the goddess of dawn. (The sun rises in the *east*). While we have borrowed many words and given them meaning for our tradition, many Christians (especially non-English-speaking) use the word Pascha, instead of Easter. Pascha is like the Hebrew word for Passover.

Easter and Passover—the connection

Passover is an important Jewish feast. At Passover, people remember the story of the Exodus from Egypt and how they were *passed over* by death and saved. The Last Supper was, in large part, a Passover celebration. One writer notes that much of our language describing the cross—redeemed, rescued, saved—comes from the language Jewish people use when speaking of Passover. What Israelites praise God for doing in the Exodus, we praise God for doing in Christ.

Maybe we could take Easter back from the culture of Hallmark cards and chocolate bunnies if we started to say Happy Pascha! Whatever the name, Easter is when we celebrate God’s defeat of death.

Every day is Easter in our church

We worship on Sunday—not Saturday but Sunday—because it is the day of the resurrection and we are an Easter people. Every day we remember we are Easter people,

defined by love, shaped by forgiveness and delivered from death. One small way of helping children think about resurrection is to talk about Gandalf in Lord of the Rings. He returned from death, the same but different.

What's with the eggs and Easter bunnies?

As difficult as it can be to picture or explain the Easter story, have you ever tried to explain the Easter bunny? Well, you see, there's this giant bow-tie-wearing bunny rabbit that makes chocolate eggs, and he hops around the neighbourhood delivering...who made this up? I guess rabbits got in on the act since they can be a sign of spring and fertility. For Christians, eggs came to be associated with the tomb. Once the tomb was opened, life sprung forth. Eggs came to symbolize this and were often painted with religious symbols and given as gifts. And chocolate, well; is chocolate ever a bad idea?

It is important to keep talking with children about Easter. What happens in church is important and valuable but most learning about faith happens at *home*. You are your children's and grandchildren's best minister. You have all the faith and resources needed to help your child appreciate and grow in God's love.

Blessed Pascha!