

Easter Baskets – The Saint Therese Center HIV Outreach and Community Outreach at Saint Joseph Husband of Mary Church



Easter baskets are a symbol of the holiday. What would Easter be without baskets filled to the brim with candy treats such as chocolates and jellybeans, all of these usually in the shape of an egg or a rabbit.



In addition, these candies may be hidden in hollow plastic eggs in a variety of colors. If you were lucky, there would be Easter egg hunts where you could search for boiled, colored eggs or the plastic ones filled with chocolates of every conceivable shape and flavor. Have you ever considered where the idea of Easter baskets originated?

Easter as a holiday is the result of many different cultures and religions combined. The history of the Easter basket has a similar lineage. Some of the origins are from ancient pagan customs, some stem from a Judeo Christian background.

Vernal or spring equinox was special time to ancient cultures. They were very dependent on the success of their crops and livestock to live. They celebrated the seasons and prayed to different Gods in the hopes that their fields would be fertile. Spring Equinox is a time when day and night are equal time. This was a signal that the long harsh winter was over and that spring a time of renewal and rebirth was at hand.

Cultures from the Middle East such as the Hebrews, Arabs, Babylonians, and Assyrians had special traditions such as bringing the first seedling of the new crop to the temples to be blessed. This was in the hope that God would be happy and bless their crops that year. One of the most significant connections of Easter to these ancient religions is that the date is based upon astrological signs. Easter occurs on the Sunday after the first full

moon following Spring Equinox. This first moon was a sign to farmers to make sure they planted the first seeds of the season.

Easter baskets grew out of the more out of modern traditions and symbology of Christianity. To Christians, Easter represents the resurrection of Christ. Lent is the season that proceeds Easter and lasts for forty days prior to Easter Sunday. This season of Lent is begun on Fat Tuesday. This is the last time to party before the season of lent.

During the Lent season, Christians believe you must give up something and fast until after Easter. The fast can include giving up meat, eggs, and dairy. The custom of having a large Easter supper represents the end of the Lenten fast. In more ancient times, this large feast was brought to the church in large baskets, hence the connection to treats in an Easter baskets today. This basket was blessed by the clergy much like the ancient Hebrews brought their first seedlings to the temple to be blessed.



So what about that Easter grass? This comes from the tradition of Dutch children waiting to deliver eggs on Easter Sunday. They would deposit these eggs in little bird's nests much like the purple, yellow, or green plastic grass nests that can be found in modern Easter Baskets. This Easter as you create a special Easter basket for friends and family, you now know that you are participating in a tradition that been passed down for many thousands of years.

One of the local parishes that helps the Saint Therese Center HIV Outreach in its Easter Basket Distribution is the parish of Saint Joseph Husband of Mary. The Outreach Program helps many agencies and creates over 750 baskets. This year due to a large donation of candy (individually wrapped Snickers® bars 1,000 plus) and stuffed animals (neo Pets – which look like a character from current movie: HOP) from Feed The Children, as well as hundreds of individually wrapped bags of cookies from local company Barcell, we were able to help Saint Joseph's Outreach in their outreach to us and many other agencies.



Some of their baskets are specific as filled with baby lotion and wipes for the infant outreach; new socks for the homeless teens as well as wonderful games, coloring books, and story books, as well as the most important candy, jelly beans and surprise filled Easter Eggs. One of the members of the community filled over 1,200 plastic Eggs himself. The Saint Therese Center always likes to share the following prayer with its distribution of jelly beans:



Jelly Bean Prayer

***Red is for the blood He gave,
Green is for the grass He made,
Yellow is for the sun so bright,
Orange is for the edge of night.***

***Black is for the sins we made
White is for the grace He gave,
Purple is for His hour of sorrow,
Pink is for our new tomorrow.***

***A bag full of jelly beans,
Colorful and sweet,
Is a prayer, is a promise
Is a friend's small treat.***



Other places that help us during this time of the year with Baskets and goodies are: Saint Francis de Sales School and Wells Fargo Bank Community Outreach. We are grateful to all who make Easter a wonderful experience and blessing in the lives of our Men, Women and Children living with the HIV virus in their lives. Thank you ALL for participating!