

St Augustine's Centre, Halifax, UK

English for Life in the UK

Season 2 - Episode 20 - Easter in the UK

April 2021

Mark Hello, and welcome to the podcast **English for Life in the UK**. This podcast is for those people who want to improve their English by listening to native English speakers and at the same time learn more about life in this country. I'm joined today by Sheena and Christine. Sheena - how are you?

Sheena Oh, fine, thank you, Mark.

Mark Good. Christine?

Christine I'm well too. Feeling cold.

Mark Yes - it was a lovely warm day, yesterday, wasn't it? But now it's gone cold again, hasn't it? But that's a typical English spring: lovely one day and cold the next.

Well, today we're going to talk about Easter. Easter is the most important Christian festival and it's just about to happen so that's why we're doing it this week. So today is Thursday - sometimes called Maundy Thursday; tomorrow is Good Friday, which is the Friday of the Easter weekend; and then, this Sunday is Easter Day, and then there's Easter Monday. And both the Friday and the Monday have, for quite a long time in this country, been what we call "Bank Holidays" - that means most people get the day off work.

Christine - I think you were going to tell us a little bit about different ways of looking at Easter.

Christine Well, yes - in this country - I know that you interviewed the Vicar who's going to tell us about the Christian aspect of Easter, because, of course, it is the biggest Christian festival, but also some of our celebrations are pagan - or date from pagan times. And the truth is, now, that there's a third aspect of Easter celebrations and that is the commercial ones. You will see, in this country, as soon as you walk into a supermarket, it is full of Easter produce - mainly made of chocolate, in the form of eggs or rabbits - Easter bunnies - that's the commercial traditions of the moment. And of course, we eat a lot of chocolate on those days. And we're going to start with your interview, Mark, with Reverend John Helliwell.

Mark Well, I'm delighted to say I'm now joined by Reverend John, who is the vicar at St Augustine's. Nice to have you with us again, John.

Revd John It's good to be with you again.

Mark Thank you. And as you know, this episode is about Easter. So, I'd like you to tell our listeners a bit about why Easter is important to Christians.

Revd John So, for Christians, Easter is really the central celebration of the Christian faith. It celebrates the central saving act of God, in world history. As Jesus sacrificed his life upon the cross and then, Christians believe, was raised by God, three days later. It's so central that that's why Christians worship on a Sunday, every week, because they're celebrating on a Sunday, that Resurrection on a weekly basis, but the annual event of Easter is a more in-depth celebration of that event.

(3 minutes: 55 seconds)

Mark That's great - tell us a bit about what happens over that Easter weekend. And what's your involvement in that.

Revd John Well - it ... Easter weekend really starts the week before, so the week running up to Easter weekend, we call Holy Week. That starts with a celebration the Sunday before, which we normally call Palm Sunday. So, we remember Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey - fulfilling some Old Testament¹ prophecies about God's chosen Messiah - and people celebrate his coming in peace: hence, the riding on the donkey.

But then, very quickly, we move into some of the more detailed events of Holy Week. He overturns the tables of the money-changers and the people selling various sacrificial animals, in the temple - proclaiming that it should be a house of prayer for all nations, and yet, people have made it a den of robbers. That sets off a chain of events that eventually lead to Jesus's arrest. That happens on what we now call Maundy Thursday. So we celebrate a lot of things on Maundy Thursday: it's the day we remember Jesus starting the, what we call, the Lord's supper, or the Eucharist, or the Mass, depending on your churchmanship², his use of bread and wine to point to his sacrificial death, his giving of his flesh and blood on the cross. But we also celebrate on that day, his washing of his disciples' feet, signifying a lifestyle of service to others. And it's called Maundy Thursday because it comes from the Latin of one of the things that Jesus said on that day: "A new commandment I give to you: to love one another". And that's where Maundy comes from: "a new commandment".

¹ Old Testament is the earlier part of the Bible, concerning the period before the birth of Jesus

² Churchmanship refers to the different tendencies or schools of thought within the Church of England and sister churches

And we then remember him going to pray in Gethsemane, wrestling with God, about whether the cross was really necessary. Asking God to take it from him if it was possible, but submitting his will to his Father's³ will on that day, and then him being arrested, after being betrayed by one of his own disciples - Judas - with a kiss on the cheek. He's then arrested and tried on trumped-up charges⁴, which he doesn't really make any answer to. We also see his disciples effectively disowning him because they don't want the same thing to happen to them - they're frightened the same thing might happen to them. And, eventually, that all leads to his condemnation by the Jewish authorities and they hand him over to the Roman authorities, because the Jews were not allowed to invoke the death penalty. So they hand him over to the Roman authorities, because that was the penalty they wanted. And so famously, of course, he's tried before Pontius Pilate who eventually washes his hands and says "I'm not guilty of this man's blood" and makes the famous statement [question] "What is truth?"

Jesus is then taken out, made to carry the cross through the streets of Jerusalem to a place called Golgotha, where he is eventually crucified between two thieves on Good Friday, in the afternoon. He's on the cross, dying, he was reserved the death purely for traitors, because it was considered such an⁵ horrific death, that you had to be a traitor to Rome, to be crucified. Hence the sign that is put over his head on the cross - "Jesus, King of the Jews", the charge against him. Unusually, Jesus seems to die relatively quickly. Normally, the procedure was: after some hours - they would break the legs of the people that were crucified, just to make sure that they wouldn't survive and people wouldn't take them down. But there was no need to do that for Jesus because he had already died. His friends take him down and he's placed in a borrowed tomb.

That's at the end of Good Friday, just before sunset, which would mark the start of the beginning of the next day for the Jews. The next day was the Sabbath, so they couldn't do anything about it and early on the Sunday morning - the first day of the week - some women go to anoint the body of Jesus, still imagining that he's dead. They arrive at the tomb and find it empty, finding angels there, telling the women that he's already risen and gone ahead to Galilee and to tell his friends to meet him there. And the women are rather surprised by all this but they go and tell the other disciples who come and verify for themselves, and then they have various encounters with Jesus over the next 40 days or so before his Ascension⁶.

³ Father's - by convention, references to God, are shown with a capital first letter.

⁴ trumped-up charges = false, untrue, accusations of illegal acts

⁵ an horrific death - "an" - the indefinite article, "a" or "an" ; "an" usually seen only before vowels - an animal, an unhappy girl, etc - but sometimes used in front of words beginning with "h", normally when the "h" is silent as in "an honest mistake" used because it is set against the vowel sound in "honest". This is one of the exceptions to that rule as the "h" in horrific is usually pronounced. There are also regional variations.

⁶ Ascension - rising into Heaven

(10:04)

Mark That's great - thank you, John. What about what happens in terms of services of the Church and things like that, over this period? So, I guess, Palm Sunday - you've already said there is a celebration that takes place, then - what are the other things that happen?

Revd John Yes - so Palm Sunday: often, there's a procession with palm leaves or palm crosses, often with a donkey, in some places. The next main service would be Maundy Thursday - in many churches, they re-enact the washing of the disciples' feet, by those in a leadership position in the church, usually washing somebody's feet.

Of course, there's also a royal tradition of handing out the Maundy Money, which the Queen does, every Maundy Thursday, at a different cathedral. There's also a remembrance of the institution of the Lord's Supper, so many Christians will celebrate some form of Communion⁷ that evening. Many churches will finish that celebration either with what they call the "stripping of the altar" where they take all the, sort of, finery, so to speak, out of church - so all the metalwork, all the fancy linen that they have, so it's stripped bare, to recognise the desolation of Jesus's arrest. And many churches will also hold a vigil at that point, so people will just be sitting quiet[ly] and pray[ing], remembering the sacrifice that Jesus made.

We move then on to Good Friday - very often churches have a service, in the afternoon, either of one hour or of three hours. There's a slight debate as to exactly how long Jesus was on the cross, but many churches will hold a service for three hours, meditating on Jesus's sacrifice and what it meant, often thinking of some of the things he said, from the cross; some of the significant statements such as "It is finished"; or "Father, forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing".

In some traditions, there is also a tradition of doing, what they call, the "Stations of the Cross", where they will visit different areas of the church, that represent different events as Jesus carries the cross through Jerusalem, through to his crucifixion, and through to his being laid in the tomb.

And in many churches - particularly the Roman Catholic Church and those in the Catholic churchmanship - will venerate the Cross, so they will come and kiss the foot of a cross that's held for them.

The Saturday tends to have very little in ways of service, because it's a day of remembering Jesus being laid in the Tomb, but the celebration of Easter then begins - in some churches, on the Saturday evening, in quite a few churches at midnight, and in other churches, which is what we do, at sunrise on the Easter Sunday - but they often

⁷ Communion = that part of the church service when individuals may participate in the celebration of the Eucharist

include lighting of fire, lighting a new *Paschal* candle or an Easter candle - to symbolise the Resurrection of Jesus. And quite a lot of churches now have developed a tradition, in relatively recent years, of taking the Christmas tree from Christmas, stripping off the branches, but creating a cross out of the Christmas tree and then decorating it on Easter Sunday with flowers, to celebrate the Resurrection, linking the two sort of major events.

(14:20)

Mark That's really interesting. I didn't know that: that's a new one for me.

Revd John Yes - I think it came from Iona - which is a relatively-recently renovated abbey in Scotland. It's one of their traditions that's caught on a lot, around the UK, at least. Many churches will now have crosses with flowers on them. We usually do that as well. And of course, some churches will also have the usual Easter egg hunt and all that kind of thing, as family celebrations, as part of their service. We always give away Easter eggs as well.

Mark I was going to ask you that - I remember that when we talked at Christmas, I asked you how you felt about the fact that there were all these other things that go on, at that time of year, which people associate with that, but don't really have a Christian tradition to them. So I was going to ask you about Easter eggs. How do you feel about that? So obviously, you feel that it is fine, as part of the celebratory event.

Revd John Yes. It's not something we particularly focus on, but **the symbolism of eggs** when you think about it, is relevant, obviously - I say, obviously - it's linked between, sort of, other I suppose pre-Christian festivals with spring and new life, But, of course, Christians would say that Easter is the celebration of new life and therefore anything that relates to that is also ...it's possible to use, to point to what we believe is the truth of Easter, so it's OK to use those things. I quite often use Easter eggs - chocolate Easter eggs - to talk about Easter with school-children, because there's a lot of the **symbolism** there, about the empty eggs **symbolising** the empty tomb, and the shape potentially of the stone that was rolled away⁸ and so forth. So there's a lot of **symbolism** that you can draw out of it and Jesus said "I have come that people should have life in all it's fullness"; so, we want to make it - Easter - of all celebrations, a fun celebration. And being somebody who is rather partial to chocolate - I'm rather fond of using things like that, to celebrate.

Mark That's brilliant. That's great - thanks very much, John - that's really helpful.

So where ... what's the pagan tradition of Easter about, Christine?

⁸ rolled away - the stone said to have covered the entrance to the tomb in which Jesus's body was placed

Christine A lot of the current Easter celebrations are based on much older traditions and, of course, Easter is at spring time and so it's a celebration of fertility and that's where the eggs come from, and also, the rabbits - you know, symbols of fertility.

I remember when I was a child, I can't remember having a chocolate Easter egg, particularly. I mean, of course, I'm well into my sixties now, so it was a long time ago, but I ... we had ...we boiled eggs and then we painted them or dyed them and rolled them down a hill. And we used to have ... race our eggs to see whose egg got to the bottom first. And when I had my own child, we had chocolate eggs; in fact we had an Easter egg hunt - where we'd hide eggs - usually in the garden or outside - and the children would run to try and find them. That was good fun.

And we have another tradition, here, in the Calder Valley, in the north of England. On Good Friday, we have the Pace Egg play - and these are players⁹ - and it's been going on for hundreds of years - on Good Friday. A group of players go round villages and they act out ... act out a story, often in verse or .. it usually involves St George, killing some terrible villain and then there'll be a doctor that will bring that villain back to life; and then there's an idiot - "Tosspot" - is the name of the idiot, in our local Pace Egg play, but that's good fun. What about you, Mark - what did you do in your family?

(19:21)

Mark Well, we certainly did have chocolate Easter eggs, as a child, and we do that now with our children and grandchildren. But the tradition I remember most, because it is an unusual one - less common - is something called "jarping" and it comes from the North East of England - because that's where my father was born. We call people who come from around Newcastle in the north east, Geordies. My dad was a Geordie. And the tradition there was this thing called "jarping" and you took ... you had hard boiled eggs and you first - you painted them, a bit like you were describing, Christine - but then you take the sharp end of the egg and you'd sit round the table and you bash your sharp end against the person's sat next to you, sharp end of their egg and whichever one stayed ...didn't get broken - that one then went on and did the same with another egg. You went round the table until you'd only got one egg where there was an unbroken sharp end. And then you did exactly the same with the other end of the egg - the rounded end of the egg - and so you'd end up with one sharp end and one round end and then those two would bash against each other, and you'd end up with a winner.

Sheena - I think you've been looking at what happens in the Easter period in some other countries.

Sheena Yes - just a few things, Mark - the idea in England is the Easter Bunny - and in America, as well, I think. So the Easter bunny often brings Easter eggs - and apparently, in

⁹ players - usually indicating members of a sports team, or participants in all sorts of games, but here used as an old word for "actors"

Switzerland, Easter eggs are delivered by a cuckoo, and in some parts of Germany, by a fox - so very different traditions. In Germany - trees are hung with decorated eggs at Easter time and they're called Easter egg trees.

In Bermuda: kites are flown, to represent the Resurrection and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church celebrates Easter two weeks after us and they fast for 56 days, and after that fasting, the families dress in white and eat *doro wat* and *injera* and drink honey wine, to celebrate Easter.

I also found out a little bit about Easter bonnets because that can be an Easter tradition and apparently that started in the 1800s, in New York, when people would walk from church to church, that would be decorated with flowers, and then the people in the parade started to wear flowers, on their clothing and on their hats, and then eventually, people called them Easter bonnets.

Coming back to the religious ideas about Easter - one country that I know celebrates Holy Week, in a very religious way, is Spain. It's called "*Semana Santa*". Now I have never been to Spain at Easter - I've been there when they have been preparing, but I've never actually seen the processions. I do know that, in the parades, people wear almost medieval costume, with big pointed hats.

(23:05)

Christine Yes - I have been there at Easter to see the processions - exactly that. Often, in silky fabric and strong colours and they might wear full-length gowns and they will walk through the town, often with a holy relic, perhaps taken from the church, that will be paraded through the town and the streets are lined with people coming to pay their respects and pray. I believe the people in the big tall hats are "sinners" - I believe they're confessing their sins, as they walk.

Sheena Yes - I think that is what it's about: penance¹⁰, isn't it? Where I would like to go to see these parades, is possibly Malaga, because I heard there, that the float that they carry their sculpture on, is hundreds of years old - as a lot of these holy statues are - and the one in this throne in Malaga weighs 5,000 kilos, apparently - and takes 250 people to carry it in a procession, so that must be quite a spectacle to see and I think, in Malaga, I don't think it's always so solemn¹¹. I think there's some singing and clapping and celebration, so I would like to go to Malaga.

(Music) (24:54)

¹⁰ penance means a punishment you give yourself for sins or wrongdoing

¹¹ solemn means formal and serious

Mark Language Support

This is the part of the podcast where I choose a word or phrase from the episode and we discuss it.

Today, I wanted to talk about **symbolism** and also related to it, the idea of **metaphors**. So - in this episode, we talked quite often about **symbols and symbolism**. So, what is a symbol? **A symbol is something that represents, or stands for, or suggests, an idea or a belief or an action.**

In this episode, we talked about the egg being a symbol of spring and new birth. And that was true before Christianity. For Christians, the egg can be a symbol of rebirth - that is, the Resurrection and rebirth of Jesus Christ but, of course, the most important symbol for Christians is the cross, so the cross recalls the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the redeeming benefits of his death and resurrection.

In literature, a lot of **symbolism** is used; for example, night or darkness is often used as a symbol for death. A rose can be used as a symbol, for romance or for love. A snake, is often a symbol for corruption or evil. A chain can be used as a symbol for bringing things or people together. So lots of symbolism in stories, in literature and in all forms of art - so most visual art contains symbols of some sort. So a symbol has meaning beyond its original form.

Now a **metaphor** is a figure of speech that uses symbols. So, for example, you could say "life is a roller coaster" : so, a roller coaster is something that you get at fun fairs or theme parks, and you get this scary ride, going up and down and up and down. So, the idea is that life is a bit like that: it's scary at times, it's exciting, at other times. It has its ups and downs.

You can talk about a person - you can say, "she is my rock". Obviously, "rock" is a hard substance, so if you describe somebody as being "your rock", it means they're very solid, very reliable, a very stable kind of person, to work [be] with.

So, those are the ideas of **symbolism** and **metaphor**.

That's it, for this week. If you want to find out more about how to get hold of the transcript of this and other episodes, and if you wanted to make contact with us, through our email address and website, then stay listening. Otherwise, we'll be back with you after a short break, this time.

(Music) (29:00)

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how to donate, to help our work. We are a charity, supporting particularly, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants but also, all those in need in our local area and we would welcome your support, if you felt able to give it. If you follow on the website, the links to "**Get Involved**" and "**Donate**".

We also have an email address - that's **englishforlifeintheUK@gmail.com**
And we would love to hear from you - your thoughts on our podcast and ideas for the future.

We also have a Twitter account : **@EsolSaint**
and there is additional material on that site.

I'll spell out all those addresses:

So, the website: w-w-w-.s-t-a-u-g-u-s-t-i-n-e-s-c-e-n-t-r-e-h-a-l-i-f-a-x.org.uk

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(Music) (31:41) Ends