

# Sharing Easter with Your Children

by MaryJane Pierce Norton

Easter is the key experience of the Christian faith. Do you believe that? After all, we are Easter people.

Yet we often find it difficult to talk with children about Easter. Oh, not the part about new clothes, changes in the seasons, and the joy of Easter day. What makes it hard to talk with our children about Easter is that we cannot come to Easter without death. And talking with a child about death is no easy task.

Look at how differently we approach Christmas. Talking about a new baby, the joy of Mary and Joseph, the angels, the shepherds, and the wise men is fun. There is a hint of danger, for the Herod plots to kill all the boys in Bethlehem two years old or younger. But we also know that Jesus escapes.

We feel at ease with Christmas. We give gifts, remembering the gifts of the wise men. We sing songs, recalling the familiar words of the scripture. We look forward to Christmas with joy. And we impart that same joy and excitement to our children. Part of our task as adult Christians is to share the Easter story with same ease.

"Why was Jesus Killed?"

Often we have done a good job helping our children see Jesus as a man worthy of love. They learn that Jesus loved people. Jesus taught people about God's love, and he cared for people whom others ignored or ridiculed.

It's really hard to understand how a man we see as good could then be mocked, tortured, and put to death. It is always a shock to be confronted with the events of Holy Week.

Children will have questions about Jesus' death. Particularly older boys and girls will be struck by the injustice. They see Jesus as good, and it won't seem fair for such a man to be beaten and killed. It is important to struggle with our children around this question. We can help children understand that it was not God who put Jesus to death but other people.

The scripture tells us that there were people who did not like Jesus, his teachings, or his actions. These were people who brought about his death. It might even be helpful to look with your child at specific teachings of Jesus. Talk together about why people might not like what Jesus had to say about loving your enemy, trusting God, or dealing with anger.

## **Resurrection is Surely God's Act**

Jesus' death is one part of the Easter story. For us, the Easter message comes in what happens next: new life and resurrection. Pick up your Bible and read again the wonder of the resurrection. What a powerful witness we have in the Gospels to this act of mystery and wonder! If Jesus' death was the act of humans, the resurrection is surely God's act. Through the Easter experience, we make the simple faith statement: Jesus lives.

Talking about the resurrection can be as frightening to adults as talking about death. How in the world do we explain to our children that Jesus was dead and in the grave for three days, then lived? Younger children may not ask the questions of "how" and "why" expecting detailed answers from adults. Older children do want to know how and why.

So how do we deal with the resurrection? Think a minute about this event. Pick up your Bible and reread the account in all four Gospels. After reading the scripture, write down your thoughts and feelings.

Can you explain the resurrection? Probably not. It is a mystery and a wonder -- and a statement of faith. Saying "I believe" does not always mean understanding fully and event or happening.

In talking about this with children, it may be helpful to say, "I wonder about that, too." You may want to share other things that happen in the world that you do not fully understand. Invite your child then to reflect on times when they might not have factually understood an event but felt it to be real.

### **Preparing for Easter**

As you prepare for this Easter event in your family, try the following:

- Talk with your children and listen to their thoughts and feelings about Easter. Using the phrase "I've often wondered about ..." can be the way of opening up the conversation.
- Share memories of past Easters. Share some from your childhood as well as remember together past Easters in the family.
- Try keeping a journal. Find time each day to talk together about your thoughts and feelings leading up to Easter.
- Really prepare for Easter. Again, we so a good job of preparing for Christmas. There are signs everywhere that something special is going to happen. Our homes contain symbols of the season: wreaths, candles, gifts. What symbols do we place in our homes that signal the coming of Easter? What can be done? Planting bulbs that will bloom on or about Easter day would be one sign. Making banners that say "Jesus lives" to be displayed on Easter day and following would be another. Dying Easter eggs and talking about the significance of the egg as a symbol of life can help us prepare.
- Participate fully in the worship life of your church. Many churches have special services not only during Holy Week but also during the entire season of Lent. We stand with those in the scripture saying, "Jesus lives." We pass on this statement of joy and assurance to our children as we deal openly with their questions, talk about our own faith, and include them in family and church celebrations of Easter.