

KEITH J. WILSON

THE CHRISTIAN HISTORY
AND DEVELOPMENT
OF EASTER



During the past four decades, President Gordon B. Hinckley has addressed the Church on a great variety of topics. One theme that he has repeatedly taught and emphasized is the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Three times during the last twelve years alone he has centered his remarks in general conference on this miracle and its importance. In each of these talks, he employed lofty superlatives to emphasize the significance of Christ's Resurrection. In 1994 he referred to it as "the greatest miracle in human history." Two years later he called it "the greatest victory of all time." And then in 1999 he declared it to be "the greatest event in human history."¹ The prophet wants us to know that nothing can

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approach the significance of this transcendent event that occurred some two thousand years ago. This chapter will trace the development of Easter as a religious celebration and will then discuss the Latter-day Saint observance and perception of Easter.

The prelude to the Easter celebration might best be traced from the onset of the Savior's mortal ministry, even though His death and Resurrection were certainly foreordained (Revelation 13:8, "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"). As soon as His earthly ministry commenced, Jesus began to point toward His death and Resurrection. John highlighted Jesus's first prediction of His sacrifice and Resurrection. Jesus had cleansed the temple of the money changers, after which a contingent of defiant Jews had challenged His authority and power by asking Him for a sign. His metaphoric response—"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19)—must have left them wondering. The Jews misinterpreted His comment as if it referred to Herod's monumental temple. John, however, parenthetically inserted that Jesus's disciples remembered this prediction later after He had risen from the dead and had shown them His body. So from John we receive a very early reference to the anticipated Easter event.

As the ministry of Jesus unfolded, so did His predictions of His death and Resurrection. Matthew records that during His Galilean teaching Jesus fielded questions about signs twice (see Matthew 12:39–45; 16:1–4). He answered His inquirers that no sign would be given to unbelievers except the sign that was given to Jonah of three days in darkness. Not long after this, He told His disciples twice

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that the Son of Man—a prophetic circumlocution that was unclear to some of those who heard it—would be killed and raised again on the third day (see Matthew 16:21–22; 17:22–23). At the Mount of Transfiguration, heavenly messengers spoke to Jesus “of his death, and also his resurrection” (Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 9:31). John recorded that following the Feast of the Tabernacles, Jesus said that the Father loved the Son because He offered His own life and that He had power to take it up again (see John 10:17–18). All these predictions preceded the final week of Jesus’s life and directed His believers toward the quintessential Easter morning. Yet these predictions were neither comprehensive nor comprehended by all.

A few weeks before His Resurrection, Jesus prefigured that miraculous moment. In a highly publicized miracle, Jesus raised a friend from death and commanded that friend, Lazarus, to leave his tomb. During the process He declared to all assembled, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). The miracle had a magnetic effect upon His followers so that when Jesus later entered Jerusalem they flocked to see Him. Once again He taught them of His imminent death and Resurrection after three days (see Matthew 20:19). And finally, after the Last Supper, the Lord reminded His disciples that though He would be smitten He would rise again. Although Peter presumably faltered during the difficult hours of Jesus’s trial, it seems apparent that he and the other disciples were repeatedly taught of Jesus’s death and Resurrection. The first Easter did not occur unannounced.

And yet when Easter morning dawned, the believers appear to have been stunned by the reality or timing of

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the Resurrection. Both John and Luke record that as the disciples encountered the risen Lord or evidence of His Resurrection they resisted emotionally. Jesus's rebuke to them was pointed: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:25–26). As He revealed Himself to them and "their eyes were opened" (Luke 24:31), He commissioned them to carry forward the glorious news of that first Easter with the words, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). In another passage He proclaimed: "Thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day. . . . And ye are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:46, 48).

So the event and the moment of Easter became the singular message of early Christianity. Luke highlighted this message as he commenced his account of the Acts of the Apostles. He wrote, "To [the Apostles] also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Then Luke quoted the risen Lord directly as He charged His disciples to "be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem . . . and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (v. 8). These disciples heeded His commandment and boldly went forth proclaiming Jesus Christ and the Easter message.

First were Peter, James, and John; they were followed later by Matthias, Paul, Barnabas, and others. Their messages were both bold and powerful, centering on the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Acts 4:29, 33). Paul the Apostle possessed perhaps the most commanding

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voice among them, and he ardently defended the Easter message. In his first letter to the Corinthian Saints, Paul defended the Resurrection in what is now the fifteenth chapter of Corinthians. He began with the words, “I declare unto you the gospel . . . that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:1, 3–4). He buttressed his claim with the fact that the Twelve, in addition to five hundred other brethren, saw the risen Lord. Then he reversed the tables in his argument and pressed the notion that without the Resurrection there is no gospel of Jesus Christ, no faith, no hope, no future. He concluded his treatise with his witness of the Resurrection, the defeat of death, and the great “victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57). From the writing and preaching of the early Apostles, the centrality of Christ’s Resurrection became the doctrinal center of nascent Christianity.

THE FORMATION OF EASTER AS A RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY

It comes as no surprise, then, that the early Christian Church developed many traditions and celebrations to commemorate this central event of that first Easter morning. Even though the first historical mention of Easter as an annual event did not occur until the late second century,² there is evidence from the New Testament that the early Apostles shifted their Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day of the week to commemorate the Resurrection on a weekly basis. Both John and Luke note that Christ’s

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followers met together on “the first day of the week” (John 20:19; Acts 20:7; see also John 20:26). Luke also adds that the disciples were there to “break bread.” The reason for the abrupt shift seems to be the miraculous Resurrection; each Sabbath day for those earliest Christians was either a commemoration of or a reflection on the Easter miracle. Early Christian apologists Justin Martyr and Tertullian corroborate the celebration of Easter every Sunday in the Christian congregations of the second century.³ Eventually these weekly commemorations appear to have melded into one annual Easter celebration. Early Church father Irenaeus documented this annual celebration as he wrote against the dogmatic position of Bishop Victor of Rome, who demanded that Easter be affixed to only one day (Irenaeus favored a date that coincided with the Jewish Passover). The fallout from that exchange confirms that by about AD 160 the Christian community had adopted a single, annual celebration.⁴ The Christian community, however, was far from unified concerning the date of Easter.

In the second and third centuries, controversies surfaced over which day of the week and which calendar to prefer for situating the Easter observance. In Rome the first Sunday after Nisan 14 (Passover) became the Christian feast of Easter. Others opted for a stronger paschal connection and insisted on the Jewish Passover as the exact date (these people were called “Quartodecimans”). And finally those in Syria and Mesopotamia insisted on following the spring equinox upon which the Jewish Passover was calculated, thereby removing the need to base Easter on the annual Jewish announcement of the date of Passover. The Council

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of Nicea ostensibly settled the controversy when it decreed in AD 325 that Easter would be on the first Sunday after the paschal moon, which could not precede the vernal equinox. In practical terms this meant that Easter Sunday could fall on any one of the thirty-six days between March 21 and April 25.⁵

Overlooked in this fiat was a decision about which calendar would be the standard. Alexandria and the eastern churches chose the Julian calendar, while western Christians selected the Gregorian calendar. These differences have persisted for thousands of years and account for the modern discrepancies between eastern and western Christian dates for Easter.

During the first few centuries of early Christianity, the term *Easter* did not yet exist. Early Christians referred to Easter simply as *Pascha*, the Greek term for the Hebrew word *pesach*, or passover. In Latin and Romance languages the word for Easter is still a derivation of the Hebrew word *pesach*. In the English and Germanic cultures, the earliest mention of the word *Easter* comes from the English historian Saint Bede the Venerable. Writing in the eighth century, Bede claimed the term *Easter* referred originally to a pagan holiday centered on the Anglo-Saxon goddess Eostre, celebrating both spring and fertility. He buttressed his account by citing a provocative letter from Pope Gregory I. In this letter the pontiff suggested that missionary work among the heathens would improve if pagan holidays were synchronized with Christian celebrations. These assertions lead to the widespread conclusion that the Christian holiday Easter had its origins in a pagan fertility rite.⁶

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In recent years a number of alternative explanations to the pagan theory have arisen. Among them is the notion that Easter is the abbreviated form of the German word for resurrection, *aufstehung*. Still another explanation is that the early Church referred to Easter week as “white week” because the newly baptized members dressed in white clothes. The plural of “white week” was very similar to the Old German word for dawn, *Eostarum*. When this was translated into English, it became the word *Easter*. While the etymology of the English term *Easter* remains uncertain, we have evidence that the annual Christian festival was firmly established by the second century.⁷

CHRISTIAN EASTER TRADITIONS

The early establishment of Easter as the foremost Christian celebration facilitated almost two thousand years of religious traditions and rituals. Many of these practices developed from theological or liturgical moorings, while others emerged from a purely cultural context. Additionally, the Orthodox, Roman, and Protestant branches of Christianity heavily influenced the emerging traditions of Easter. From the onset, Easter became the center of the Christian calendar year. As a result, there were traditions to mark Easter both before and after this special event. Forty days before this holiday, a period of fasting and penitence was instituted as early as the fourth century. Known as Lent, this period was intended to purify the believer before the actual celebration of Easter and to serve as a reminder of the Savior’s forty-day fast in the wilderness. Following Easter, a fifty-day period of celebration known

as Eastertide commenced and concluded with Pentecost.⁸ In all, ninety days of the calendar year either anticipated or reminded the believers of this important day.

Christian churches today usually begin the Lenten period of fasting with a celebration called Ash Wednesday. Ashes are placed on the forehead of believers to symbolize penitence. Fasting has often given way to various forms of self-denial during these five weeks. The last week of Lent is called Holy Week.

The Sunday before Easter commemorates Jesus’s triumphal return to Jerusalem before the Passover, known as Palm Sunday; many churches today reenact His triumphal entry by bringing palm fronds to their services. Four days later many Christians observe Maundy Thursday, also called Holy Thursday. This remembrance recalls the evening of the Last Supper and particularly emphasizes the washing of the disciples’ feet. It was at that ancient event that Jesus commanded His Apostles to serve one another. The term *maundy* means “mandate” or “commandment.”

For modern Christians, the Friday before Easter is the most important pre-Easter event. Known as Good Friday, this day highlights the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Generally, there is a worship service at midday followed by a period of fasting and contemplation. Orthodox churches and many Spanish-speaking countries reenact the procession of the cross. Often these same communities designate Good Friday as a public holiday. The day before Easter Sunday is called Holy Saturday. On this day Catholics commemorate Jesus’s death in the tomb with a worship service known as the Great Vigil, or watch. The gathering occurs after nightfall and contrasts candlelight with

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darkness to symbolize the darkness of Jesus's death and the great light of His Resurrection. The service generally follows a precise schedule so that as midnight strikes, all the candles are lit from one great paschal candle. As was the custom from early times, modern Great Vigil services often include new baptisms and the dressing of cleansed individuals in white clothing. After the Easter mass, the service concludes with exultant music and celebrations.⁹ A common Easter greeting is then shared with fellow worshippers—"Christ is risen!"—to which the greeted individual responds, "He is risen indeed!"

For Catholics, Easter culminates Sunday night at midnight. However, for Protestants, Easter means Sunday morning services. Many of these begin before sunrise on a hilltop and reenact the New Testament narratives of the empty tomb and the appearances of the resurrected Lord. Protestants have generally been more conservative in their Easter celebrations. While wide variations of Easter celebrations exist, Protestants with Puritan roots generally favor very modest expressions. On the other hand, the Civil War actually elevated Easter Sunday among American Protestants because it became customary to remember the casualties on this day.¹⁰ In modern times, Easter commemorations have assumed an interdenominational nature.

POPULAR EASTER CUSTOMS AND SYMBOLS

Many of the popular Easter customs have become a blend of the sacred remembrances of Christ's Resurrection and the secular celebrations of spring. Some of the more

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prevalent religious symbols are the empty cross, the lamb, and the Easter egg. The empty cross often projects the Protestant view that Jesus rose from His death; it symbolizes His ultimate victory. The lamb ties most Christians to both the Passover symbolism of the Paschal Lamb and the New Testament appellation of Jesus as the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29). Some Christians eat lamb as a part of the Easter feast, while others hang up pictures of lambs or bake lamb-shaped cakes.

Perhaps the most universal symbol of modern Easter celebrations is the Easter egg. Disdained by some as a pagan perversion and enthroned by others as a symbol of new life, the Easter egg probably had much milder origins. During the ancient practice of Lent, eggs were one of the forbidden foods. So when Easter dawned and those proscriptions were lifted, early Christians greeted each other with an egg as a gift. By the thirteenth century, these eggs were colored and decorated; in imperial Russia the egg custom was elevated to include precious objects decorated like eggs and adorned with jewels. While other explanations abound, such as the egg symbolizing new life or the worship of spring, the Lent-fasting explanation is well documented and appears to have a historical footing.¹¹

On the other side of the spectrum are those Easter symbols and customs with a definite secular flavor. Among these are the Easter bunny; Mardi Gras, or Shrove Tuesday; and Easter promenades. For many, the Easter bunny tops the list of secular and commercial Easter customs. As with most modern traditions, however, the Easter bunny probably did have legitimate Easter roots. One plausible explanation ties this practice to Protestants in nineteenth-

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century Europe. As a rejection of the Catholic practice of fasting and then giving eggs as gifts, Protestants supposedly created a rabbit that laid the eggs, decorated them, and hid them.¹² Shrove Tuesday, or “confession Tuesday” (Mardi Gras in French), stands as another example of a wandering tradition. To begin a forty-day period of fasting in preparation for Easter, Christians created a day to revel and party. The result was a very nonreligious week of revelry and licentiousness.

Finally, the Easter promenade has become a prominent walk on Easter Sunday to display the new clothes purchased especially for Easter. (The most pretentious of these is in New York City around the Fifth Avenue area.) Yet this custom too seems to have a religious heritage. In the early church, congregants baptized on Easter Sunday were dressed in new white clothes to symbolize their purity and rebirth. Quite likely this practice merged with the commercialism of modern times to surface in the purchase of new clothes for Easter and the desire to display them. In some European countries, “these promenades are led by a person holding a cross or an Easter candle.”¹³ So while many Easter traditions and customs seem far removed from Easter, most of them are a blend of religious traditions with modern culture. It is amazing how diverse Easter traditions have become. But considering their two thousand years of historical development, perhaps these traditions demonstrate the deep need for devout Christians everywhere to remember the miracle of the Resurrection.

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LATTER-DAY SAINT EASTER TRADITIONS AND ATTITUDES

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not have a two-thousand-year tradition of Easter celebrations. Restored in 1830, the Church is unique in many of its traditions and celebrations. Nonetheless, the Church places great doctrinal emphasis on the miracle of the Resurrection and the importance of Easter.¹⁴ What are the attitudes and traditions of faithful Latter-day Saints concerning Easter?

To ascertain the attitudes of Latter-day Saints, an informal survey was recently given to 404 active members in five different wards (local units) and two Brigham Young University classes. The survey consisted of fifteen questions and bore the broad title “LDS Holiday Survey” to avoid predisposing the participants toward Easter. It was administered three to five weeks before Easter Sunday. The results identified some interesting attitudes and trends among Church members. For discussion purposes, seven of the more relevant questions will be highlighted here (see the appendix for the complete survey).

One of the first issues that the survey tackled was in question 3. It asked the Latter-day Saint respondents to rank four major holidays in order of their “importance to you and your family today.” The choices were Christmas, Easter, the Fourth of July, and Thanksgiving. The term “importance” was not further defined or nuanced. Christmas gained an expected 1.2 average rank (1 was most important, 4 was least important). Thanksgiving came in second with 2.4, Easter tallied third with 2.8, and Fourth

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of July came in last with 3.6. The remarkable result here was that Thanksgiving outpaced Easter by a substantial margin.

Question 4 was, “How far in advance do you begin preparations for [these] holidays?” Because of some extreme answers the median answer was computed for this question. Once again, the order of preparation time spent followed the same order the holidays were ranked. The largest preparation value was for Christmas at thirty days in advance of the holiday, followed by Thanksgiving at seven days, Easter at four days, and finally the Fourth at two days. The most interesting contrast here appears to be between Christmas and Easter. For most members, Christmas begins well before Thanksgiving has even been celebrated, while the Easter season begins in earnest only four days before the event.

Question 5 asked the respondents if they knew when the date of Easter was for this year. Again, the survey was administered three to five weeks before the holiday. Forty-four percent claimed that they knew the date for Easter, while 56 percent did not. Keep in mind that a number of these members were giving their answers within three weeks of Easter Sunday. Also, the percentages might have been substantially higher on the side of ignorance if the question had required the actual date rather than a simple “yes” or “no” answer.

The final four relevant questions moved from general recognition to specific traditions and practices. Question 7 asked, “Did you read from the scriptures the Christmas [or Easter] story this past year?” During Christmas, 81 percent read scriptures. However, only 41 percent said they did for

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Easter. This means that almost 60 percent of these active Latter-day Saints did not read the Resurrection story during the Easter celebration. Question 10 asked how much time was spent reading the scriptures during the holidays. The median value was thirty minutes for Christmas and twenty minutes for Easter. Answers to these questions indicate that Easter scripture reading occurs in only a minority of Latter-day Saint homes and that the total time spent doing so is rather abbreviated.

The final two content questions examined the extent to which Church members engage in pre-Easter traditions. The five pre-Easter events mentioned in these two questions were the Triumphal Entry, Passover, Trial of Jesus, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. The first question looked at the five events in a ward context, and the second looked at them in a home setting: “Which of the following [five pre-Easter events] was discussed in your ward this past Easter?” and “Which of the following did you discuss (or review) in your home?” Concerning the Triumphal Entry, 8 percent discussed it with their ward, whereas 6 percent discussed it with their family. Concerning the Passover, 15 percent discussed it with their ward, while only 11 percent mentioned it at home. As expected, the highest participation came with the Resurrection itself, where 35 percent discussed it with their ward and 36 percent talked about it at home. The trend here was fairly consistent: the more time between the pre-Easter event and Easter morning, the less attention it received among Church numbers. Likewise, discussion of pre-Easter events (excluding the Resurrection) received less attention at home than at church. The overall observation from

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these two questions is that the Church members place little emphasis on traditional pre-Easter activities.

In conclusion, these seven questions posed to approximately four hundred Latter-day Saints revealed that the Easter celebration comes behind both Christmas and Thanksgiving in intensity. Ninety percent of these faithful members indicated Christmas was most important, while only 2 percent marked Easter as most important. Members also spend less time, only four days, in preparation for Easter, less than both Christmas and Thanksgiving. Fewer than half read the Easter story at home or knew when Easter was this calendar year. Finally, only one in six discussed or reviewed the events of the Passion week. Only one in nineteen discussed the Triumphal Entry. These participants sent a consistent message from their candid answers: the celebration of Easter among the Latter-day Saints receives little attention beyond a regular Sunday worship service.

IMPLICATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS OF EASTER TRENDS AMONG LATTER-DAY SAINTS

These numbers and attitudes seem to misrepresent the doctrinal position of the Church. Did not President Hinckley unabashedly proclaim Easter as the greatest day, event, and miracle in all of human history? How, then, can we as Latter-day Saints project such incongruity between our doctrine and our practices? Perhaps the answers to these questions emanate from our religious position as a nontraditional Christian church.

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was restored near Rochester, New York, in 1830. This founding was not a reformation or a modification of Christianity. It occurred during the religious fervor known as the Second Great Awakening in an area that was dubbed “the burned-over district.” While the New York environment was decidedly Protestant, Mormonism embodied a more biblical Christianity and distanced itself from both Protestants and Catholics. Jan Shipps, a respected historian, has referred to Mormonism and its “otherness” in Christianity.¹⁵ Inherent doctrinal differences meant that Mormons revered modern prophets, expanded the traditional canon, adhered to a strict health code, and worshipped in both temples and churches. These doctrinal differences included cultural differences as well. Avoiding the use of the cross, eschewing memorized prayers, building close communities, and espousing conservative values were just a few of the cultural patterns that emerged. These attitudes and differences appear to have substantially shaped the celebration of Easter among Latter-day Saints.

Traditional Easter celebrations usually begin with religious observances of Shrove Tuesday followed by Ash Wednesday and then Lent. A month or so later, these celebrations crescendo with Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and finally Easter Sunday. During these events, Catholics and Protestants celebrate Mardi Gras, fast from certain foods, wave palm branches, attend special weekday services, and hold sunrise services—all in anticipation of Easter. Members of the Church celebrate in a much more subdued manner. Why? Is it because such celebrations are not biblically based? No,

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traditions such as Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Sunrise Sunday all have strong scriptural precedents. The reason appears to be grounded in the Latter-day Saint culture of “otherness.”

All Christians struggle with pinpointing the yearly date of Easter, but many have help in the traditional pre-Easter events. For traditional Christians, the larger culture continues to remind them of Easter through events such as Mardi Gras, Lent, and Palm Sunday. Weeks, if not months before Easter, traditional Christians are reminded of its advent. Mormons who eschew these pre-Easter traditions forego these systemic reminders and are left on their own to remember Easter Sunday.

A final consideration about the Latter-day Saints’ observance of Easter is the annual general conference held during the first weekend of April. For all devout Latter-day Saints, this event is as important as the State of the Union Address is for conscientious Americans. For two days the First Presidency, the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, and other high-ranking leaders address the Church on important and timely topics. General conference is a megaphone for Church counsel, and it often falls either on or around Easter Sunday. Because it calls out to every active Latter-day Saint, general conference inherently overshadows Easter and its traditions. Sometimes Easter occurs on the same day as general conference, and sometimes it falls on a regular Sunday. Combined with the difficulty of dating Easter and the desire for distinctiveness from traditional Christianity, celebrating this holiday is certainly laced with challenges for the Latter-day Saint community.

This understanding of Latter-day Saint culture does not necessarily mitigate or ameliorate the Easter discontinuity.

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Three times during a span of twelve years President Hinckley stressed the singular nature of this Easter miracle. His pronouncement appears intent on raising the importance of Easter and the miraculous Resurrection among Latter-day Saints. It is clear that a church with the fullness of the everlasting gospel must be centered on the miracle of the risen Christ. He emphatically concluded one of his recent Resurrection talks with the words, “Of all the events . . . of humanity, none is of such consequence as this.”¹⁶ It seems reasonable, then, that the central holiday of all Christianity should certainly be central in the lives of the Latter-day Saints.

NOTES

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Greatest Miracle in Human History,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 72; “This Glorious Easter Morn,” *Ensign*, May 1996, 66; “He Is Not Here, but Is Risen,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 70.
2. The careful reader of the King James Version of the book of Acts might rightfully note that there is a passage which refers to “Easter” in the days of the Apostles (Acts 12:4). It should be understood, however, that this reflected a subjective interpretation on the part of the KJV translators. The standard Greek texts of this New Testament passage use the term *paschach* which all translate as *passover* (see *The Complete Parallel Bible* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 2932–33).
3. See Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin*

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Martyr and Irenaeus (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 186.

4. See Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 84–85. For the dating of Easter, see F. L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 522.
5. See Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 85.
6. See Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 107–9.
7. See *Encyclopedia Americana* (Danbury, CT: Scholastic, 2005), s.v. "Easter."
8. See *Encyclopedia Americana*, s.v. "Easter"; *New World Encyclopedia* (Funk & Wagnall, 2002), s.v. "Lent."
9. See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Easter"; *World Book Encyclopedia*, 2006 ed., s.v. "Easter."
10. See *Encyclopedia Americana*, s.v. "Easter."
11. See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Easter"; *Encyclopedia Americana*, s.v. "Easter."
12. See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Easter"; *Encyclopedia Americana*, s.v. "Easter."
13. *World Book Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Easter."
14. See Hinckley, "The Greatest Miracle in Human History," 72–74; "This Glorious Easter Morn," 65–67; "He Is Not Here, but Is Risen," 70–72.
15. Jan Shippy, "Difference and Otherness: Mormonism and the American Religious Mainstream," in *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream*, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 100–101.
16. Hinckley, "This Glorious Easter Morn," 67.

APPENDIX

LDS HOLIDAY QUESTIONNAIRE

N = 404

1. Were you raised LDS?

_____ yes _____ no

2. Rank each of the following holidays (from 1 to 4) in order of their importance to you and your family **when you were a child** (1 being *most* important and 4 being *least* important).

Fourth of July	3.6	Christmas	1.1
Thanksgiving	2.5	Easter	2.9

3. Rank each of the following holidays in order of their importance to you and your family **today** (1 being *most* important and 4 being *least* important).

Fourth of July	3.6	Christmas	1.2
Thanksgiving	2.4	Easter	2.8

4. How far **in advance** do you begin preparations for the following holidays (not including meal planning and preparing)? (**median values**)

Fourth of July	2 days	Christmas	30 days
Thanksgiving	7 days	Easter	4 days

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5. Do you know what day and month Easter falls on this year?

Yes 44% No 56%

6. Which of the following holidays were discussed in talks or lessons at **church** last year?

Fourth of July	17%	Christmas	29%
Thanksgiving	25%	Easter	29%

7. Last year at home did you:

Read the Christmas story from the scriptures?

Yes 81% No 19%

Read the Easter story from the scriptures?

Yes 41% No 59%

8. How does celebrating **Thanksgiving** help your **family** the most? (choose just one)

<input type="checkbox"/> increases gratitude	<input type="checkbox"/> improves family unity
<input type="checkbox"/> deepens spirituality	<input type="checkbox"/> other

9. Last year what percent of your family holiday celebrations (outside of church) was spent on religious versus nonreligious traditions? For example: 95% nonreligious + 5% religious (or) 50% nonreligious + 50% religious, etc.

Fourth of July

<input type="checkbox"/> % nonreligious traditions	<input type="checkbox"/> % religious traditions
(fireworks, picnics)	(scriptures, inspiring talks)

Thanksgiving

<input type="checkbox"/> % nonreligious traditions	<input type="checkbox"/> % religious traditions
(football, parades)	

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Christmas

___% nonreligious traditions ___% religious traditions
(gift shopping, tree)

Easter

___% nonreligious traditions ___% religious traditions
(eggs, clothing, food)

10. Last year approximately how much **time** did you spend at **home** discussing the **scriptures** on: (**median values**)

Thanksgiving	10 minutes
Christmas	30 minutes
Easter	20 minutes

11. In the past did your family reenact the Christmas story?

_____ yes _____ no

12. Which of the following was discussed in your **ward** last year during **Easter** time?

The Triumphal Entry	8%	Crucifixion	28%
Passover	15%	Resurrection	35%
The Trial of Jesus	14%	none of the above	0%

13. Which of the following did you discuss (or review) in your **home** last year during **Easter** time?

The Triumphal Entry	5%	Crucifixion	26%
Passover	11%	Resurrection	36%
The Trial of Jesus	14%	none of the above	8%

