



EASTER

CULTURAL RESOURCES

(See today's worship unit for more than fifty songs and many great worship ideas for Easter.)

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I. Etymology

The modern English term *Easter* developed from the Old English word *Ēastre* or *Ēostre*, which itself developed prior to 899.

Easter (Old English: *Ēostre*; Greek: Πάσχα, *Paskha*; Hebrew: פסח, *Pesakh*, “Passover”) is the central religious feast in the Christian liturgical year. According to Christian Scripture, Jesus rose from the dead on the third day after his crucifixion. Some Christians celebrate this resurrection on Easter Day or Easter Sunday (also Resurrection Day or Resurrection Sunday), two days after Good Friday and three days after Maundy Thursday. The chronology of his death and resurrection is variously interpreted to be between AD 26 and 36, traditionally 33. Easter also refers to the season of the church year called Eastertide or the Easter Season. Traditionally the Easter Season lasted for the 40 days from Easter Day until Ascension Day. The first week of the Easter Season is known as Easter Week or the Octave of Easter. Easter also marks the end of Lent, a season of fasting, prayer, and penance.¹

Easter is a moveable feast, meaning it is not fixed in relation to the civil calendar. The First Council of Nicaea (325) established the date of Easter as the first Sunday after the full moon (the Paschal Full Moon) following the northern hemisphere's vernal equinox. Ecclesiastically, the equinox is reckoned to be on March 21 (even though the equinox occurs, astronomically speaking, on March 20 in most years), and the “Full Moon” is not necessarily the astronomically correct date. The date of Easter therefore varies between March 22 and April 25. Eastern Christianity bases its calculations on the Julian Calendar whose March 21 corresponds, during the 21st century, to April 3 in the Gregorian Calendar, in which calendar their celebration of Easter therefore varies between April 4 and May 8.²

In Western Christianity, using the Gregorian calendar, Easter always falls on a Sunday between March 22 and April 25, inclusively.

Easter is celebrated

Gregorian dates

	Western	Eastern
2012	April 8	April 15
2013	March 31	May 5
2014	April 20	April 20
2015	April 5	April 12
2016	March 27	May 1
2017	April 16	April 16
2018	April 1	April 8
2019	April 21	April 28
2020	April 12	April 19

II. Resurrecting Our Children

One part of Easter has always been about children—children in chiffon dresses with ribbons in their hair; children in knee pants or little boys in new suits and ties or bow ties; the bunnies, the eggs, and the assortment of other great candies that make up every good Easter basket. Then there are the children reading their Easter poems and speeches, some nervous, some stumbling, some totally poised, but each brave and adorable in their own way. Here’s my oldest child’s (now 20) first Easter Poem: “I am happy to be here today to say that Jesus rose on Easter Day. Jesus rose with all power in his hand and he is now the Savior for every boy and girl and woman and man.” I did an Easter poem too when I was a child. My grandmother told me that the children’s Easter program were a carry-over from the days when education was not funded by public initiatives especially for black kids in the south. Yes, I taught my children the Easter story and why we celebrate Easter, but I also dressed them up in their finery and helped them practice their new Easter poem, and they always had Easter baskets too.

When I think of Easter, right beside the wonder of the resurrection is the wonder I remember seeing in the eyes of children during Easter. Both are images for which I am grateful—both are images of life in all of its splendor and beauty!

Since its beginning, The African American Lectionary has purposely combined issues affecting black people in America and abroad with the liturgical moments on the African American Lectionary calendar. This Easter they have combined the subjects of baptism, resurrection, and death. This trinitarian-styled coupling is so timely in 2011 for the black community. We are

deeply searching for the type of baptismal waters that will wash our community clean from all of the death-dealing sources that are decimating our community, especially the children of our community. Once we are washed then we are praying and pleading for a resurrection that will bring back our health, happiness, and dignity. Last but not least, we are trying to find ways to get the message heard that death is not the final word and is not the arbiter of life.

But how do we get these messages heard over the noise of so much violence, screaming, blaming, demeaning, depression, and hate? I believe that we must begin with children. The black church has untapped potential that it must begin to use to preach and teach resurrection theology over death. It must teach it through its ministries, by where it places its money, and by the causes it chooses to support/advocate for. We are in a crisis, so this Easter we really must provide more than Easter Baskets and cute outfits for children. What of those children who are homeless, those who are child prostitutes, those who do not have basic health care, and those who daily live in squalid conditions that are borne of poverty? What about these children on Easter? Where is their resurrection? Who has risen to save them?

It is embarrassing that thousands of churches around the world will hold Easter services this year who have not taken even one affirmative step to breathe life into the souls of the children in the communities in which those churches are located.

III. Resurrecting Our Children Using the Arts

A. Music

I believe that music is a universal language with healing and teaching power. Whether in a subway station in New York, in a tent city in Haiti, or in downtown New Orleans, if left to their own devices, children and youth will do at least two things: play and make music. They'll rap, bang items, and use their hands and bodies—whatever they need to do, they will make music. Over the years we've read one study after another detailing the wonderful difference music makes in the lives of children. As an aside, if the current financial crisis has hit your state, join with others and fight to keep music and arts in the schools. If music has already been taken out, what a wonderful opportunity for the black church to bring it back by getting several churches together to teach children everything from how to play the piano, violin, organ, cello, drums, and more to teaching them how to make music. Children love digitization and can figure out sound boards so quickly it will make your head spin. There are adults in your community who can teach, and they will work with you to build a music academy; this is a great Resurrection Sunday idea.

Now, back to the specific subject of using music to resurrect the lives of our children as we celebrate Easter in 2011. We fuss over wanting our children off the streets, we lament the latch-key kids who get into trouble between 3:15 and 6 p.m. around the country because parents are at work or otherwise unavailable, we shake our heads over the fact that juvenile offenders are getting younger and younger and that their numbers continue to climb. Well, it's time to stop talking about it and do something about it. That's the attitude of Nathan Jones and the CODA Program in Philadelphia. They use have long used hip-hop to teach English, math, and of course, music. Through their CODA Program called INSPIRE, the group has as one of its missions bettering the lives of children through music. Learn more about their efforts. Through a program that I would recommend for a consortium of churches **in every city**, INSPIRE and the Free

Library of Philadelphia partnered to provide the “In the Studio!” music workshop at ten different Library locations throughout the City of Philadelphia. In this hands-on workshop, each participant explored the music production and recording process while contributing to an original, city-wide theme song, “Inspire”: Our voices, Our thoughts, Our world; Inspire and be inspired. See the wonderful video below for a taste of what they are doing and **what you can do** too!

<http://www.givethechildrenmusic.com/>

Read the article by University Chaplain Charles Howard as he discusses Nathan Jones and INSPIRE: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/charles-howard/give-the-children-music-i_b_828468.html. See the online website www.givethechildrenmusic.com for additional information.

B. Theater Arts

Mime and Gospel Hip Hop. A combination of mime and gospel hip-hop dance preceded by a short depiction of Christ’s death would powerfully portray the Easter story in a unique way. Alive 2 celebrates a risen and living savior and transcends age barriers to describe how Christ conquered death, hell, and the grave! (See the song lyrics below in section IV.)

Drama Skits. Lifehouse’s Everything Skit is a youth-oriented video that convey Easter messages. This skit is great for a youth group to minister to the congregation. In addition, it is powerful and effective if played on video screens for the congregation to view.

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=cyheJ480LYA&feature=related>.

C. Dance

Contact the Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation on how to bring dance classes to your church and community. Also, you can teach your kids praise dancing and make a kids-only dance troupe. As a former dancer and instructor, I can tell you that it’s best not to mix too many age groups for dance routines. Usually children ages 4–9 should be placed in a group and children ages 10–15 in another. Make a decision early on if you want your dance groups to be really good or just have fun. If you want your dancers to be excellent, you will have to make hard choices about which children can participate and the dance instruction will have to be rigorous. If you just want children to just have fun, the routines will not be as challenging and a more relaxed attitude can be taken toward uniforms, schedules, dance routines, the size of dancers, etc. Use real dance professors from local colleges and studios if you want to develop first-rate dance troupes. Few church members are trained as dancers and are skilled enough to be dance instructors. All God’s Children Praise Dancers of Sacramento worked and worked until they were good enough to travel and perform.



All God's Children Praise Dancers of Sacramento

D. Oratory

Oratorical Contests. See the website below to see how powerful oratorical training for kids can be. This training includes teaching children to recite Easter speeches. At the Blackpower.com website, see a video on teaching children public speaking while also teaching them black history. <http://www.blackpower.com/black-power-blogs/have-you-checked-the-children/abolitionist-douglass-words-inspire-competing-student-orators/>

IV. Songs to Make This Moment Memorable for Youth and Children

For Youth, I recommend Alive 2 by Tonéx

Alive 2

Go ahead call me out my name
I'll holla back in 3 days
Hear me when I say I'm gonna turn this party out.
They nailed me in my feet
They nailed me in my hands
But in 3 days I promise you that I'm gonna rise again.

Oohh, oohh, ohhh,
I was there
When they pierced him in his side
The Savior's dead
But I just left the tomb and he's...

[Chorus:]

(altos) Not there (sopranos) Not there
(tenors) Take it easy
(altos) Not there (sopranos) Not there
(tenors) What are ya sayin' to me?
(altos) Not there (sopranos) Not there
(tenors) Are you kidding me?
He's not there
(altos) He's not there (sopranos) Not there
(tenors) Where's his body at?
(altos) Not there (sopranos) Not there
(tenors) Who rolled the stone back?
(altos) Not there (sopranos) Not there
(tenors) I don't believe that
He's not there

[Verse 2:]

Go ahead whip me on the three-nine
Look into my eyes
You could never kill me I was murdered willingly
I could've called ten thou'
To come and bail me out
But I took it like a champ, grave can't hold me down
Now I'm invincible

Oohh, oohh, oooohhh,
I was there
When the sun refused to shine
The Savior's dead
But I just left the tomb and he's...

[Chorus:]

(altos) Not there (sopranos) Not there
(tenors) Take it easy
(altos) Not there (sopranos) Not there
(tenors) What are ya sayin' to me?
(altos) Not there (sopranos) Not there
(tenors) Are you kidding me?
He's not there
(altos) He's not there (sopranos) Not there
(tenors) Where's his body at?
(altos) Not there (sopranos) Not there
(tenors) Who rolled the stone back?
(altos) Not there (sopranos) Not there
(tenors) I don't believe that
He's not there

(repeat)

[Vamp]

Who would've trespass the Savior's tomb
Who could have stolen his corpse from the grave?

I went down into hell
And I snatched the devil's keys
The stone was rolled away
Death where is your sting... sting

Sunday morning it was on and popin'
The stone was rolled away
I told death behave

Alive!
Jesus is not there
Got up like he said
All power in his hands
and he's...
(repeat x 2)³

Children and youth can sing "Saved" by John P. Kee.

Saved

Verse 1

I was living a life entangled with sin,
then the Lord rescued me,
and I'm happy down within.

Chorus 2

I confess with my mouth and believe in my heart,
that You raised Jesus Christ, and He entered my life;
I've got to tell everybody,
I've got to tell everybody,
I'm so glad I'm saved.

Verse 2

Deliverance didn't come 'till I made up my mind,
now that I'm saved, said I'm feeling mighty fine.

Chorus 2

Bridge

I'm so glad, I'm so glad Jesus rescued me.
I'm so glad, I'm so glad Jesus set me free.

I'm so glad, I'm so glad Jesus rescued me.
I'm so glad, I'm so glad Jesus set me free.

Chorus 2

Vamp 1

Saved,
saved,
saved,
so glad I'm saved.

Vamp 2

Saved,
saved,
saved.⁴

“Hurray, It’s Easter Day!” is a fun song especially for children ages 3–6. It is intended to be performed complete with all of the movements that will bring each line alive. Have children pantomime as if they are asleep. Jump when the song says “spring up from the ground,” peep when the songs says so, wave arms as butterflies and spread their wings in surprise. This is a fun one.

Hurray, It’s Easter Day

The seeds and flow’rs all sleep so sound,
‘Til Easter time, glad Easter time,
And then they spring up from the ground
At happy Easter time,
And as they rise, they seem to say
“Hurray, it’s Easter Day!”

The songbirds all return again,
At Easter time, glad Easter time,
The chicks peep ‘round their mother hen,
At happy Easter time,
And as they sing, they seem to say,
“Hurray, it’s Easter Day!”

The butterflies and bees arise,
At Easter time, glad Easter time,
And spread their wee wings in surprise,
At happy Easter time,
And as they fly, they seem to say,
“Hurray, it’s Easter Day!”⁵

V. Focus on Health

Most churches will hand out Easter Baskets this year. However, we must begin to aid our children and parents in healthier living. All kids expect candy in their Easter baskets. However, we can no longer make candy the majority of what is inside Easter Baskets. The health of our children in the United States is poor. The main reason that it is poor is because adults have not been proactive in making children healthier. We know the role that corporations (especially those that sell fast food, sugary beverages, and fattening snacks) are playing. However, we adults give children the money and the acceptance to eat and drink products that harm them.

This year, start a new tradition at your church—healthier Easter baskets. Here’s one with contents sent to me by a friend who attends a church in New York where the mission and Sunday School teachers create the basket and each year stores donate most of the contents and parents donate items too. I’ve seen images of past baskets and they were works of art. They plan to give out 150 baskets this year.



Healthier Easter Basket Contents

- Baskets that can be reused by kids or parents, and plenty of grass, plastic wrap, and ties
- Egg-shaped chalk to be used to send kids outside to play. The chalk washes away when it rains.
- Baggie-sized health bags containing Granola, raisins, and nuts. The bags are closed using colorful ties.
- Crayons and coloring books. You can use books that teach Black History or Bible Stories.
- One fun (age appropriate) e-book or hardcover book; parents can donate these.
- One small stuffed animal
- One small chocolate Easter bunny
- A colorful toothbrush
- A DVD for kids
- Fruit that will remain fresh for several days (fresh apples, oranges, pears, etc.)
- Plastic Easter eggs containing encouraging messages such as: You are a wonderful child. You are at your best when you are kind and smiling. Jesus loves you and so do all of the members of this church; Happy Easter!

VI. Other Recommendations

- Banners should be made to provide a visual display of symbols and colors pertaining to the Easter season. See the African American Liturgical Colors Calendar for the colors for the Easter season.
- Children and youth can also create **red and white bracelets** for the congregation to wear. Tell the congregation that each time the band is worn, members are to remember the blood of Jesus that saves all and the fresh start given because of the Resurrection.
- As part of your Christian Education efforts, during the Easter Season, during Sunday School, Bible Study, or other training programs, discuss the following traditions, symbols, and Old Testament foreshadowings of the Resurrection.

Traditions of the Easter Season

Vestments and Linens (White)
Celebration: Ringing of the Bells
Baptizing of New Converts
Lighting of the Paschal Candle
Eating of Lamb for Easter dinner

Symbols

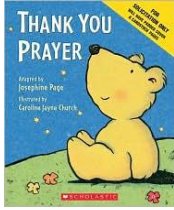
Christ as The Lamb
Lilies (flowers)
Empty Crosses (jewelry not containing the body of Christ)

Old Testament Foreshadowings of the Resurrection

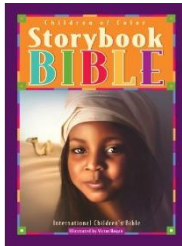
Samson carrying off the Gates of Gaza
Daniel coming forth from the lion's den
Jonah coming forth from the whale

- Free Digital Choir Music Downloads for Lent and Holy Week can be found at http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item_id=6761&loc_id=17,897,745
- See Easter Year One and Two on The African American Lectionary. Be sure to view the commentaries, the cultural resources, the worship resources, and the Liturgical Colors Corner.
- Internet Resources. These two websites are among hundreds that provide information on the Easter Season: <http://www.gbod.org/easter/> and <http://www.blackandchristian.com/cgi-bin/look/exec/search.cgi?skin=&search=Easter>

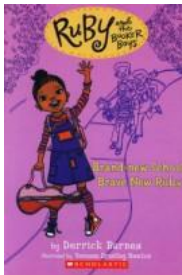
VII. Resurrection Books for Children



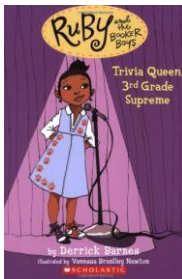
Page, Josephine. Thank You Prayer. New York, NY: Cartwheel Books, 2005. This book is designed to be read to babies–preschoolers.



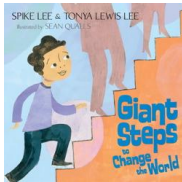
Brundidge, Regina. Michele Clark Jenkins, ed. Children of Color Storybook Bible: With 61 Stories from the International Children’s Bible. Chicago, IL: Urban Spirit Publishers, 2010 (2001). This resource includes great pictures. It is appropriate for children ages 4–10.



Barnes, Derrick. Ruby and the Booker Boys: Brand New School, Brave New World. New York, NY: Scholastic Books, 2008. This book is appropriate for children in grades 2–4.



Barnes, Derrick. Ruby and the Booker Boys: Trivia Queen: 3rd Grade Supreme. New York, NY: Scholastic Books, 2008. This book is appropriate for children grades 2–4.



Lee, Spike and Tonya Lewis Lee. Giant Steps to Change the World. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2011. This book is appropriate for children ages 9–13.

Notes

1. Online location: www.etymo.com/easter
2. Ibid.

3. "Alive 2." By Tonéx. Out the Box. New York, NY: Zomba Recording, 2004.
4. "Saved." By John P. Kee. Lily in the Valley. Brentwood, TN: Star Song, 1993.
5. "Hurray, It's Easter Day!" Words and Music by Patty S. and Mildred J. Hill. Adapted by Terry Kluytmans.