

## OSTERSITTEN UND BRÄUCHE / CUSTOMS and TRADITIONS

### bayerische Osterbräuche (Bavarian Easter Customs)

Easter is the oldest and most important festival of Christianity. Since the second century it has been celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon in spring. Traditionally, before Easter there is "Lent", the period of fasting which lasts for the six weeks between carnival and Easter. Many people eat less than normal during this time.

The name "Easter" is derived from "Austro", a Germanic goddess of the spring season. In other languages the connection between the Christian Easter and the Jewish Feast of the Passover is even clearer (e.g. French: "paques").

Easter starts in many communities with the celebration of the Easter Night. Before sunrise, around 6 o'clock, the Easter Fire is lit, usually on some open place in the community (e.g. on some sports field). The light is the symbol for the victory of life over the darkness which stands for death. At the Easter Fire people light their candles which they have brought with them and then they go to church where the priest tells them about the resurrection of Jesus. Then people usually have very nice breakfasts.

Many people also celebrate Easter at home or with relatives or friends. Traditional food is the Easter lamb (as a meatloaf or as roast meat).

Then starts the best time for the children: Looking for the Easter eggs! It was the parents who hid the eggs but the children believe (or pretend to believe) that it was the Easter bunny.

Another tradition: Freshly cut twigs from the garden are decorated with beautiful eggs and put into the living-room as an Easter bouquet. They were often painted by family members.

If the weather is nice, many families go for a Easter walk in the afternoon.



Finding an Easter basket in Bavaria



In Bavaria many old customs of heathen origin concerning Easter have been preserved through the ages. Many of them are symbols for the cycle of the seasons and the beginning of new growth. Besides, they try to express the joy after the long time of solemn lent and penance. The German word for Easter is Ostern and contains the syllable 'Ost', reminding of the goddess Ostara. Thus, many Easter customs praise the constellation rising in the East.