

BRITISH FESTIVALS AND TRADITIONS

EASTER STORY

by Nick Clowes

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The Easter story is often called the "greatest story ever told". It is a fascinating tale of betrayal, murder, miracles, and life after death. It is the story of a Messiah, a Christ who is the "Son of Man." Yet Jesus the Messiah makes claims that cause his followers to doubt him, then turn against him in rage.

This is the story of the miracle that ensues, and has stood the test of time. It is a story that intrigues believers and non-believers alike. It is a story that challenges scholars and adventurers to find the locations of the gardens, the tomb, and other sites in the story.

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, and this miracle sets the plan to murder Jesus into motion, for he is calling unwelcome attention to the Jewish people. The leaders of the Jewish religious council are worried, for they fear Jesus' growing popularity. Jews who live under Roman rule may suffer as a result of the attention Jesus brings to them.

Jesus continues to become more popular with the people, and less and less popular with the Jewish authorities, so the leaders plot his death. One of the disciples betrays Jesus to the soldiers who come to take and arrest him. Several trials follow, judged by various leaders, and Jesus is sentenced to death on the cross.

Although death by crucifixion is a common practice in Roman times, Jesus' ordeal is particularly cruel. He endures the customary beating, and then must carry his own cross. He falls from the heavy weight, and another man must carry the load for him. Jesus hangs from the cross by spikes driven through his hands and feet, receives vinegar to quench his thirst and suffers

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a horrible death. Following the crucifixion, his body is placed in a guarded tomb but he rises from the dead 3 days later.

Jesus appears to his disciples several times after he rises from the tomb. He visits some who doubt him, like Thomas. Fearing that they have seen a ghost, Jesus tells them to touch him, because he has flesh and bones unlike a ghost. He appears to a group of his disciples who are fishing with no luck, and suggests that they try a different area to cast their net. After a successful catch, they realize that they had just seen Jesus.

A few days later, he ascends into heaven as he is blessing his friends. This is called the Ascension. Many famous artists portray many of these scenes, and the artwork depicts much of the often-told story.

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