

EASTER

THE SEASON OF NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

In the Catholic Church Year, the two major cycles of seasons, Christmas and Easter, are far more than a single day of observance. Like Christmas, Easter itself is a period of time rather than just a day. It is actually a seven-week season of the Church year called *Eastertide*, the fifty days that begins at sundown the evening before Easter Sunday (the Easter Vigil) and lasts for six more Sundays until Pentecost Sunday. For the newly baptized, this is a period of *mystagogy* (being “led into mystery”), a time for prayerful reflection on the experience of their sacramental journey. The symbols and rites of the Easter season are channels of this grace.

THE PASCHAL CANDLE

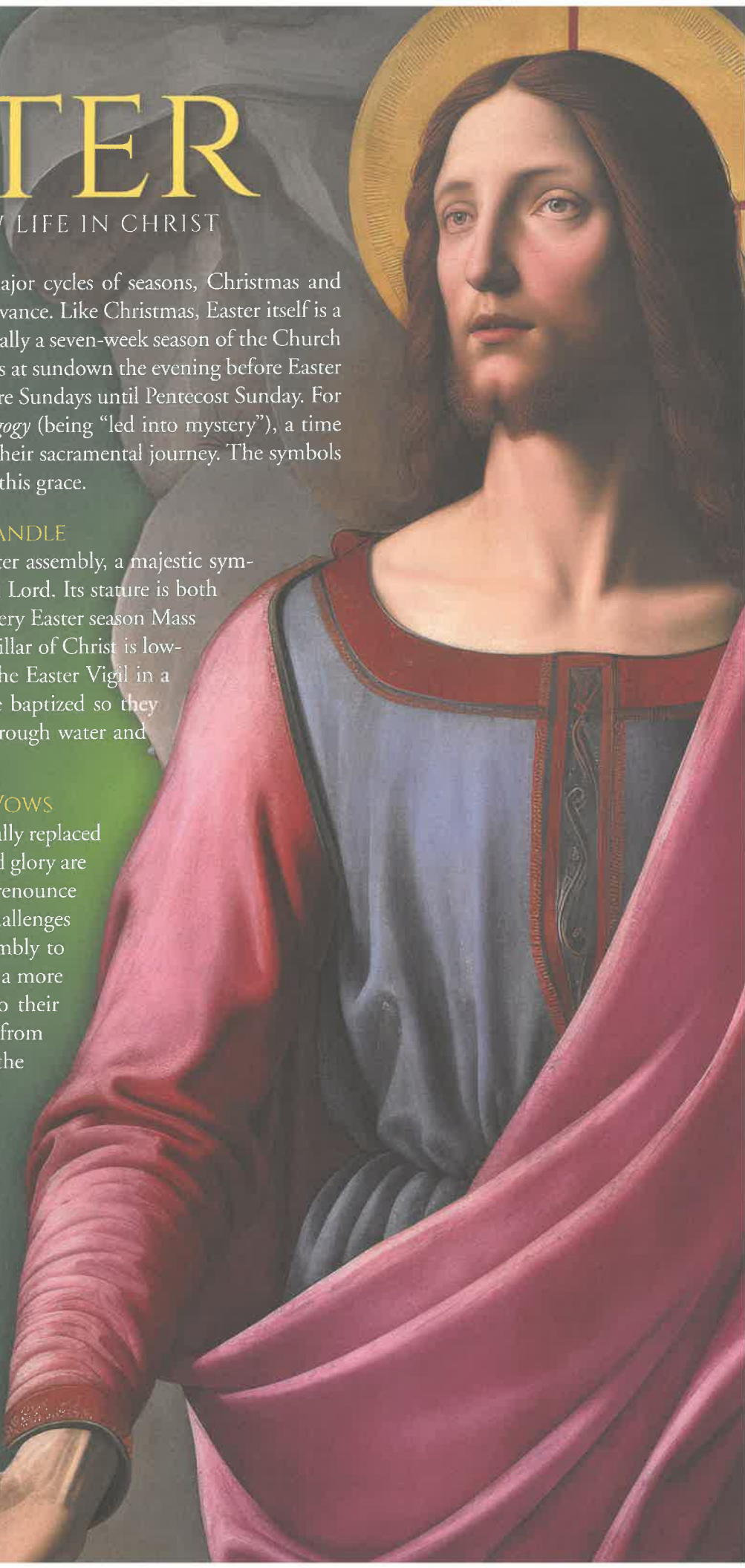
The new Paschal candle towers over the Easter assembly, a majestic symbol of the joy and glory radiated by the risen Lord. Its stature is both inspiring and pragmatic, for it will burn at every Easter season Mass and every funeral rite during the year. This pillar of Christ is lowered into the baptismal font three times at the Easter Vigil in a symbolic relationship that gives birth to the baptized so they may “rise to the life of newborn children through water and the Holy Spirit.”

THE RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL VOWS

The recitation of the Creed on Easter is typically replaced by a renewal of baptismal vows. Easter joy and glory are diminished if the faithful do not pledge to renounce sin and follow Christ. This renewal rite challenges both the newly baptized and the whole assembly to a more faithful witness to Jesus’ message and a more Christ-like way of life. The faithful attest to their spoken vows by holding taper candles lighted from the Paschal flame as they are sprinkled with the waters of baptism.

THE RETURN OF “ALLELUIA”

The Easter season is marked by the return of “Alleluia” to the liturgical celebration. Its Lenten absence represented a kind of spiritual fast, but with Christ arisen we once again feast on exuberant songs of “alleluia” or “Praise God!” For Easter Sunday, the gospel procession is often extended in length and musically embellished. The dismissal rite is also enhanced with alleluias, sealing our call to go forth in the peace of the risen Christ.



CUSTOMS OF THE EASTER SEASON

The Easter Season, which follows the celebration of Easter Sunday, is a time of joy and renewal in the liturgical calendar. It lasts for 50 days, culminating on Pentecost. During this season, various customs and traditions are observed:

Easter Octave: The Catholic Church observes the eight-day period known as the Easter Octave, beginning on Easter Sunday and ending on the following Sunday, often referred to as Divine Mercy Sunday. The entire octave is celebrated as a single solemnity, and each day is considered a continuation of the Easter celebration.

Veneration of the Crucifix: During the Easter Octave, there is a particular focus on the veneration of the Cross, continuing the reflection on Christ's sacrifice and resurrection. This devotion is often seen during the Good Friday liturgy but extends into the Easter season.

Easter Water: The Easter Vigil features the blessing of water, which is then used for baptisms and for the blessing of people, homes, and other objects throughout the Easter season. Holy Water fonts are often replenished with the newly blessed water.

Easter Candle: The Paschal Candle, which is lit during the Easter Vigil, remains in the sanctuary throughout the Easter season as a symbol of the risen Christ's presence and is typically used in liturgical processions and ceremonies.

Renewal of Baptismal Promises: Catholics often renew their baptismal promises during Mass on Easter Sunday and other occasions throughout the Easter season, emphasizing their commitment to the faith.

White and Gold Liturgical Vestments: Clergy wear white and gold liturgical vestments during the Easter season to symbolize the purity, joy, and glory of Christ's Resurrection.

Easter Sunday Processions: In some parishes, especially in certain European countries, there are processions on Easter Sunday, often led by clergy, with the faithful following behind. These processions can be elaborate and may include the display of religious statues or icons.

Easter Hymns and Liturgical Music: Special Easter hymns and liturgical music are sung during Mass throughout the Easter season, reflecting the joy and celebration of Christ's Resurrection.

These customs and traditions enhance the celebration of Easter and the Easter Season, emphasizing the central importance of Christ's Resurrection in the Catholic faith.

JESUS' RESURRECTION

What happened on Easter was a complete surprise to the disciples. The Jesus that they had known and who had died was suddenly experienced as alive again. This new life, described as resurrection, was not just a restoration of one's former life—a resuscitation from the dead. The prophets Elijah and Elisha had brought people back to this life, as had Jesus for the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and Jesus' beloved friend Lazarus. Although their return from the dead left them temporarily alive, they would die again. But Jesus' resurrection was a new life that would not be subject to death again. It was eternal life, permanent and undying existence in the presence of God forever.



THE RESURRECTION MYSTERY

"O truly blessed Night," sings the *Exsultet* of the Easter Vigil, "which alone deserved to know the time and the hour when Christ rose from the realm of the dead!" But no one was an eyewitness to Christ's Resurrection and no evangelist describes it. No one can say how it came about physically. Still less was its innermost essence, his passing over to another life, perceptible to the senses. Although the Resurrection was an historical event that could be verified by the sign of the empty tomb and by the reality of the apostles' encounters with the risen Christ, still it remains at the very heart of the mystery of faith as something that transcends and surpasses history.

—*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #647

