

The Very First
EASTER



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Easter books for children often focus on the delights of spring or bunnies, colored eggs, and chocolate candies in an Easter basket. And why not? Nature coming back to life has been celebrated ever since early pagans named their April fertility festival in honor of Eostre, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring—thus the name Easter. However, because the resurrection of Jesus also happened at the same time of year, Easter took on a profoundly sacred significance, which is too often missing in literature for the young.

These pages return the sacred dimension to Easter. As in the companion book, *The Very First Christmas*, the setting is America's western mountains where a forest ranger and his wife tell their bright ten-year-old son about the ministry, trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Their secluded location has prevented the young man from attending Sunday School regularly. In this book, his parents answer the questions he—and perhaps many like him—have about “the *very first* Easter.”

Some vocabulary or events may be beyond the understanding of your child. Take time to explain them and share the story of your own faith as, together, you read about “the *very first* Easter.”

Paul L. Maier



Christopher sat at the kitchen table, dyeing Easter eggs. “I just *love* this time of year, especially the jelly beans and chocolate rabbits,” he said. “Remember when I used to believe in the Easter bunny? You know, some kids at school say he’s a myth—whatever that is.”

“A myth? Well, that’s like a fairy tale,” said Mom, smiling.

“Remember, Mom? I don’t *like* fairy tales anymore,” Chris sighed.

“Oh, that’s right. You want only *true* stories—like the one I told you about the birth of Jesus.” Mom rescued several eggs from getting dyed to death, then her face brightened with an idea.

“Chris, why don’t we read the *true* story about the *very first* Easter?” Mom asked. “It’s much more important than the Easter bunny, colored eggs, or even jelly beans.”

“Splendid idea, dear!” Christopher’s father said as he walked into the kitchen.

“Hi, Dad!” said Chris. “Hey, you used to be a teacher. Maybe *you* should tell me about Easter instead of Mom.”

“Okay,” Dad agreed as he sat down next to Chris. “Since Easter is next week, let’s read about it tonight.”

That night after supper, they sat down for evening devotions. “Chris, this has been called ‘The Greatest Story Ever Told,’ ” Dad began. “Do you remember how you and your mom read from the gospel of St. Luke to learn more about the birth of Jesus?”

“Sure! But I read more of it than Mom did!”

“Good for you! Well, let’s continue reading from Luke.” Dad reached for the family Bible, opened it, and pointed to a verse that Chris read aloud.





And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:52)

“Jesus grew up in Galilee,” Dad explained. “He began His marvelous ministry there and called 12 men to be His disciples, or students. They followed Jesus around and learned from Him. He taught thousands of people in the hills and valleys, at the seashore, and in villages and towns. Jesus’ words showed people the way to God—the God who loved them enough to come down to their level in that very extraordinary man who was speaking to them.”

“How do we know Jesus was really God?” asked Chris.

“Jesus spoke the truth as only God could. And He did incredible miracles. He gave hearing to the deaf and sight to the blind. He cured the sick and made the lame walk. He even stopped the wind and calmed the waves. Only *God* could do those things.”

Chris nodded slowly. Dad read several familiar accounts from Luke, then added, “Jesus even raised the dead. Once when He was visiting a small town called Nain, Jesus saw a young man being carried out for burial. He comforted the man’s mother who was crying. Here, Chris, read what Jesus said.”

“Young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. (Luke 7:14b–15)

“Cool!” Chris exclaimed. “I wish I could have seen that! But why did Jesus let him die in the first place? Couldn’t He have gotten there earlier and kept him from dying?”

“Of course!” Mom joined in. “But because of this miracle we can know that we don’t have to be afraid to die because Jesus, as God, has power even over death.”

“The teaching, preaching, and healing ministry of Jesus lasted for about three years,” Dad continued. “Then Jesus knew the time had come to finish the glorious task for which He had been born. The greatest events in His ministry would happen during Holy Week—the week that changed the world.





“It was a Sunday in spring,” Dad began. “Many people had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, the annual festival held to remember how God had freed His people from slavery in Egypt.

“Jesus already knew what was going to happen later during that momentous week, He decided not to slip into Jerusalem unnoticed. He rode into the city on the back of a donkey in what became a big parade, with cheering crowds waving palm branches along the sides of the road. That’s why it’s called Palm Sunday. Read on, Chris.”

The whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Luke 19:37b–38a)

Chris looked up and said, “I can understand why they cheered and called Jesus a king and all, but a king should ride in a royal chariot, not on a *donkey!*”

“The past was important to these people, Chris. They lived their history,” Dad explained. “You see, many years earlier, King David had entered Jerusalem in triumph riding a donkey, not a chariot. The donkey was like a royal carriage to these people.”

“Kind of like a limo,” Chris announced. “So did they crown Jesus?”

“No,” said Dad. “Some religious leaders didn’t like Jesus and called Him a false prophet, a fake Messiah. The Messiah would be God’s great prophet, priest, and king as foretold in Old Testament times. Jesus *was* that Messiah, but His enemies didn’t believe it.”

“After all those miracles, why not?” Chris asked.

“They said Jesus performed the miracles with help from the devil, not God.”

“*What?*” Chris exclaimed. “That doesn’t make sense! The devil does bad things, not good ones.”

