

RECTOR'S PINT

March 2024

Easter this year may coincide well with the Spring daffodils, and that is because Easter is relatively early, on March 31st. The dating of Easter is taken from the Gregorian calendar, and it can occur on any Sunday between March 22nd and April 25th, a wide parameter. The Eastern Orthodox Church has a different dating system, taken from the Julian calendar. Here, I'm confining myself to the Western Gregorian dating. Over a 500-year period (from 1600 to 2099) Easter will most often be celebrated on either March 31st or April 16th, so we are spot on this year!

Easter Sunday always occurs on the first Sunday after the Paschal full moon, the full moon that occurs after the Spring Equinox. In the Christian story, the Last Supper, the final meal Jesus shared with his disciples on the night before his crucifixion was a Passover feast, itself one of the principal festivals that was always celebrated on, or near, the time of a full moon. That is the theory at least, that the dating of Easter links us to the Jewish lunar calendar, but there are plenty of well-qualified commentators who say that in practice it has not always worked that way!

Whatever its origins, there have been many calls to standardise the date of Easter over the years, not least from within the Church. In 2016, our present Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby said he believed that the date would be fixed by 2026 to either the second or third Sunday in April.

For many, perhaps most people, the significance of Easter has primarily become linked to cute bunnies, fluffy chicks and chocolate eggs. But for Christians, Easter Sunday is a celebration of the claim of the actual and physical resurrection from the dead of a man whom his followers very quickly came to believe was God. I do the job I do because I believe that claim to be true.

I suppose it might make practical sense and would be convenient for us all to fix the date of Easter as a part of the school holiday and as the centrepiece of a set bank holiday weekend. However, in a world in which everything is directed towards our own convenience, and in where so much is standardised, I think it is wonderful, however impractical, that we have held onto a tradition which is not simply for our convenience and there is nothing standardised about Easter! It is a reminder that God does not follow our agenda, but that we are invited to follow his, however 'inconvenient' that might be.

In this, I remain a traditionalist, although in the event of change I wouldn't fight too hard against it. The meaning, not the date is the most important thing, and every Sunday is a 'Little Easter,' the Commemoration of the Resurrection.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

Simon