



## THE PASKA - THE CENTERPIECE OF EASTER

*Paska - round sweet bread baked for Easter; Easter basket of food to be blessed*

Easter has its origin in spring. Prior to Christianity coming to Ukraine, people celebrated nature's awakening: birds returned, the sun was warmer giving growth to plants, new life sprung from eggs and the earth. The young people celebrated spring with songs and games (haivky) and they decorated eggs with signs of spring: birds, flowers.

The idea of resurrection after death is the focal point in our culture. Ukraine's Easter rituals are comprised of nature's revival and God's resurrection. An example of the concept of return of nature and Christianity is the pussy willow. It is sprinkled with holy water on Palm Sunday, inserted into the paska for the blessing. In Ukraine, it is added to the fire baking the paska (bread). The willow is the dormant shrub first to respond to a warm sun.

The baking and blessing of the Paska is the center of Easter preparation. Prior to accepting Christianity, the word "Paska" meant a big holiday. Since Christianity is connected to the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ, the Paska came to represent the holy death and resurrection of Christ.

In Ukraine, the paska came into being at the end of the 10th century. (Ukraine became a Christian nation in 988 AD). The paska was baked of wheat flour, chicken egg yolks, honey and raisins. Baking the paska in the village pich (oven) was of concern as the hospodynia was not sure how the paska would come out. She wondered if

it would fall in the center! Rules for the baking period were that there be no noise in the house and no opening of outside doors as cold air would have an affect on the baking paska. The hospodynia had to guard the paska from things one doesn't expect or guarantee that it will turn out a beautiful paska.

The paska was regarded as a symbol of the sun. That is the reason it is always round and on top it is decorated with a symbol of spring. Often the symbol is a cross, flowers or a lark.

The blessing of the paska was on Easter Sunday after Liturgy. In the basket were butter, cottage cheese, hrin (horseradish), a head of garlic, boiled eggs, salt, ham and the paska. A candle was inserted into the paska and lit during the blessing. The easter baskets were lined in a semi-circle on the church grounds. The priest sprinkled holy water on the baskets and the people sang Christ is Risen.

After the bless-

ing, the family hurried home. Their belief was that they who hurry with the blessed food, will have God's blessing and good luck all through the year. The paska is set in the center of the table on a brightly embroidered rushnyk and it remains there all through the Easter holiday. Blessed crumbs from the table were shaken over the green grass or the river for other God's creatures to enjoy.

*Easter Bread*

### EASTER BREAD BA-BA

2 cups boiled milk – cool to lukewarm	
or 1 cup milk and 1 cup cream – bring to a boil and cool	
2 packs yeast	1 cup sugar
1 tsp. salt	6 egg yolks
4 whole eggs	¾ cup butter
1 tsp. vanilla	½ c. raisins
2 orange juice and rind	12 cups flour

Soak yeast in ½ c. warm water and 1 tablespoon of sugar. Beat eggs well, add sugar and beat again. Add melted butter and beat together. Add yeast and the rest of the ingredients. Let the dough rise twice. Bake ½ hour at 350 degrees – then ½ hour at 325 degrees.

