

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your correspondence to the Al Denson Show and for tuning in every week to our program. My prayer for you is to be encouraged in your daily walk with Christ through the words of this booklet. Our hope is that in turn you will tell others of what God is doing through our ministry to youth and parents on TV. I am convinced you will not find another program on any network anywhere that deals with issues today's youth and their parents are facing, and provides answers from a Godly perspective.

In addition, we would love for you to help us by going to our web site at [www.aldenson.com](http://www.aldenson.com). Here you can write to us, order additional material like this booklet, check out all my music, have a daily bible study, and stay up to date on the ministry. You can also send us a prayer request and questions for the TV show. But more importantly, please continue to be in prayer with us as we work together to help those that are in need.

Thanks for watching and God Bless!

Sincerely,



**An Outreach of Celebration Ministries**

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Most artists create for only a brief moment in time. That phenomenon was once known as “15 minutes of fame”. Yet even in a fickle world, there still emerge a talented few that transcends time and trends. With nearly 15 years as a major label recording artist and seven hit

albums to his credit, Al Denson is that kind of artist.

But the attention and acclaim his artistry has brought him over the years are anything but the routine rewards of worldly success. Rather, they are the fruits of a life of purpose and passion, and a mission that has always reached far beyond merely making music.

The millions of young people Al has performed for, befriended, counseled, consoled and clowned around with in his career already know that. And thousands more are finding out every day.

This past year has seen Al expand his efforts to a global audience through the reach of his daily syndicated television production, “The Al Denson Show.” “You’ve got to reach out to people where they are with the most powerful means and this form of media allows you to build trust and a rapport,” says Al. “This has all been so amazing. I can’t imagine what lies in store when the Lord finally calls me home, but I don’t have to wait for heaven to receive rewards. I get them every time a kid comes up to me and says, ‘I heard what you said, and I accepted Christ.’ You can’t ask for anything more or better than that.”

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# HE IS RISEN

He is Risen—what incredible words! Those words are still as full of hope and joy today as they were 2,000 years ago when the angel at Jesus’ empty tomb proclaimed them to heart-broken and hopeless women. The historical fact that Jesus was resurrected from the dead is the reason we celebrate Easter and why Easter is the most important holiday of the Christian church.

The best place to learn about Easter is in the Bible. The first four books of the New Testament are where we find the accounts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Luke gives us an eye witness account of the events

which began early on a Sunday morning, the third day after Jesus was crucified and buried in a borrowed tomb.

## Luke 24:1-12:

“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightening stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them,

‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, He is risen! Remember how He told you, while He still was with you in Galilee: The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’

Then they remembered His words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all of these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter,

however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.”

The women of whom Luke is speaking in this passage, thought that the job of preparing Jesus’ body for burial had not been completed on Friday. Jewish law required that the body be in the tomb before sunset, which was the beginning of the Sabbath, when no work could be done. They were unaware that Nicodemus and Joseph (the owner of the tomb) had finished the burial preparation by wrapping the body in linen and spices before they put Jesus’ body in the tomb.

Why do you look for the living among the dead?

The Sabbath was not officially over until 6:00 a.m. Sunday morning. These faithful followers of Jesus—these women came back to the tomb as soon as the law would allow out of their great love and respect for their Lord. They arrived at the tomb to find that there had been an earthquake and that the giant stone, which had been placed at the opening of the tomb had been rolled away by an angel. The Roman soldiers who had been assigned to guard the tomb had evidently run for their lives when they saw the tomb was empty. When the women arrived there was no one there. The Bible says that suddenly two angels appeared to the women and were the first to utter the words that have been repeated by millions down through the centuries—He is Risen!

The women went back to tell the disciples what the angel had said, but the disciples were doubtful about what the women told them. If

the very men who had spent the last three years in constant contact with Jesus were skeptical about His resurrection, it should come as no surprise that many people today are skeptics, too. The disciples decided they would see for themselves, so they ran to the tomb. Peter arrived first and found things just as the women had said.

In one of the other gospel accounts of the resurrection, it says that Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb after the others left. Still believing that someone has stolen the body, she was standing outside the tomb weeping, when Jesus appeared to her in what was to be the first of many post-resurrection appearances. The first Easter Sunday was celebrated by a small group of followers who would go on to turn the world upside down with the good news, “He is Risen!”

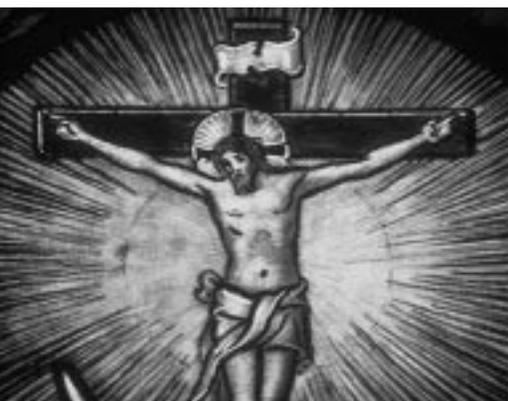
Today, not all Christians celebrate in the same way, but the one thing that is consistent among Christians the world over is that Easter is to commemorate the most significant event in all of history—the resurrection of Jesus. The way we celebrate Easter today is something which has evolved through the years. In Steve Russo’s

book, *Why Celebrate Easter*, he traces that evolution for us:

In the three centuries after the Resurrection the churches of Alexandria and Rome couldn’t agree on how to calculate the celebration for Easter. In A.D. 325, it was decided that the date should be determined by the Jewish Passover, so each

year Easter must occur somewhere between March 22 and April 25 on the Gregorian calendar. The first title given to the celebration—both in the East and in the West—was “Pascha.” This name was used by Europeans for Easter because of its close association with the Jewish Passover.

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No one is sure where the name “Easter” may have originated. Some people believe that the name comes from the German goddess of rebirth, Eostara. The feast of Eostara, was the celebration of the rebirth of the earth, and the two symbols for fertility—the bunny and the eggs—are carry-overs from that feast. Many believe that the word “Easter” comes from an ancient German word, eostarum, meaning “dawn.” This was largely due to the fact that in the early church Easter week was called hebdomada alba, meaning “white week,” because of the white garments those who had just been baptized wore during this week of celebration. Later, the plural of “white” was misunderstood as the plural of “dawn,” and was translated eostarum.

Others think that the eighth-century English scholar, St. Bede, named Easter after a mythical goddess of spring and fertility. Her name was “Ostern” or “Eastre.” A month called “Easturmonath” that corresponded to April was dedicated to this goddess and a festival was celebrated in her honor on the vernal equinox. Again, traditions from this festival that have remained are the rabbit (symbol of fertility) and the colored eggs. Some believe that the word “Easter” comes from the word, oster, which means “to rise.” Whatever the origin of the word, “Easter,” it is a reference to the east and the rising of the sun.

Easter was celebrated by the early Jewish Christians on the same day as Passover. Gentile

Christians wanted to celebrate the Resurrection on Sunday, the first day of the week. Around A.D. 465, an astronomer named Victorinus, proposed a method of calculation that was finally adopted by the church. Victorinus had been commissioned to improve the calendar and to assign the date of Easter. More adjustments were made in the sixth century and a terrible argument broke out in the seventh century over the adoption of those changes.

Finally, in 1582, the Gregorian calendar (named for Pope Gregory XIII) was adopted, and it became the official church calendar. Since the Gregorian calendar was adopted by

Great Britain and Ireland in 1752, the entire Western world has celebrated Easter on the same day. Eastern churches never adopted the Gregorian calendar, so for them, Easter usually falls on a Sunday, a week or more after the Western observation of Easter.

It is hard to identify the exact date of the first Easter because of all the early confusion and the inaccuracy of the early calendars. We do know it was in the spring, sometime in late March or April. The thing we can know, without a doubt, is that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead that first Easter morning, just as He said. We don’t need a precise date to celebrate that!

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## Easter, to many non-Christians, may simply be a...

Many members of the early church came out of pagan backgrounds and so they struggled with the gods they left behind, and the traditions to honor these gods. The pagan traditions were hard for these new followers of Christ to break. As a result, many of these traditions found their way into early Easter customs. Many church leaders, such as Saint Patrick, the eighteenth-century missionary in Ireland, took pagan customs that people were having a hard time ignoring and gave them new Christian meanings. For example, the spring bonfires that were to honor the sun god became a Christian fire ceremony that symbolized light and life conquering darkness and the grave.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ impacted history and changed our world. Easter, to many non-Christians, may simply be a symbol of life and the rebirth of a new season—a celebration of spring. The true meaning of Easter is a spiritual one, for there would be no Christian faith without the Resurrection. That makes the celebration of Easter among Christians imperative.

There are many days surrounding Easter that are special to secular and religious people. Many of these are customs that have been passed down through the centuries, having been given a new slant by each generation to form the traditions we now have in this century. One of the best known is “Lent.” Easter is preceded by forty days of Lent and continues for forty days afterward until Ascension Day (when Jesus

ascended back into Heaven). The name “Lent” comes from the old English word, Lencten, which means “the spring” or “lengthening of days.” Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes on the Easter eve. For the most part, Lent was viewed by the early church as forty days of fasting. But more than likely, it was observed by candidates for Easter baptism as a forty-hour fast.

In the seventh century, this forty-day period was set aside as a way to commemorate the forty-day fast of Jesus recorded in Matthew 4. Over time, it also came as a way to honor the

forty days Moses spent on Mount Sinai with God, as well as the forty hours Jesus spent in the tomb. Lent has always been known as a time for abstinence for Christians, acts of charity for others, and devotion to God, in order to prepare for the Easter celebration. For some Christians, Lent is a sacred time of being still and knowing He is God—a time of meditating on God’s Word and reflecting on Jesus’ sacrifice. Unfortunately, for others who don’t understand salvation by grace, they believe Lent is a time to try and earn favor with God through their good works.

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Many people see all of Lent as a carnival time. The best known of these being Mardi Gras in New Orleans, which marks the final forty days before Lent begins. The term Mardi Gras is French for Fat Tuesday. Even though the name refers to a certain day, the term also refers to a longer period of celebration leading up to Mardi Gras Day. The states of Alabama, Florida, and Texas, also have Mardi Gras celebrations.

Maudy Thursday is another special day for many people. This is the Thursday before Easter Sunday, also known as Holy Thursday, Green Thursday, or Pure or Clean Thursday. It is set aside to observe and commemorate the Last Supper Jesus had with His disciples, which was held the evening before the Crucifixion.

The name “Maudy” is derived from a Latin word *mandatum*, which means “commandment” and refers to the new commandment Jesus gave at the time He washed His disciples’ feet. The name Pure or Clean Thursday was given at a time in history when people could not bathe themselves as frequently as they can today, so they would bathe themselves out of respect and in preparation for the Easter celebration. Green Thursday is the name used in countries where criminals, who are being pardoned on that day, wear green or carry pieces of green plants. People in these countries believe it is bad luck not to eat green foods, so in many parts of Europe that still consumes green salads, herb soups, and spinach served with eggs on that day.

There are many other special days surrounding Easter which are too numerous to mention. Easter is celebrated in some very interesting ways throughout the world. In America, the customs

can even vary from state to state. But across this country, Easter seems to be a season filled with new clothes, white lilies, baby chicks, colored eggs, candy, baskets, and bunnies. All of these symbols have come to represent Easter to most Americans.

The “Easter Bunny” is probably the best known. No one is exactly sure when he came on the scene. The Easter rabbit has links to a time when people worshiped the sun and the moon. The white rabbit is a symbol of spring fertility and supposedly brought gifts of colored eggs to children who had been good. The Easter rabbit has also been accepted throughout history as a symbol of new life. Traditionally, because the rabbit is a weak animal, it has been seen as a symbol for man, who places his faith and trust in Christ.

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The egg, another established part of Easter traditions, was adopted by early Christians because of its relationship between the renewal of life and Easter. Colored eggs were originally part of the ancient Anglo-Saxon festival for the goddess of spring and fertility. The eggs were painted bright colors to represent the sunlight of spring and were used in egg-rolling contests or given as gifts. During the Middle Ages, the winters in northern Europe were very harsh and food would be scarce by spring. Giving up meat and eggs for Lent was also a way of conserving food. A fresh egg at Easter was a very special gift, indeed. Children who were hungry would beg on the streets for eggs at Easter.

Throughout ancient history eggs were symbols for life. No one really knows how the egg became a part of Easter celebrations in the Western world. Easter eggs were first mentioned in a book written more than five hundred years ago. Even though eggs don't reflect the deeper spiritual meaning of Easter, they are another tradition which has brought many children and adults much delight over the years.

New clothes seem to be as much a part of the Easter celebration as bunnies and eggs. Easter is traditionally the time to bring out new, colorful, lighter clothes in favor of the dark, heavy clothes of winter. In many parts of the country, Easter Parades are still popular ways to celebrate the day. These parades are a way for people to

show off their new clothes. This is a custom that actually has roots which go way back into history.

The "White Week" that was observed for two or three hundred years after the resurrection of Christ was a week to baptize all new believers. As mentioned earlier, these new believers wore white robes to identify themselves as new converts. By the Middle Ages, people were expected to dress in fresh clothing even if they

had not been recently baptized. "Pure Thursday" was the day they would bathe and put on new clothes, or at least freshly washed clothes. After going to church on Easter Sunday, people would take a walk through town and

into the fields. These family processions would stop along the way to sing Easter hymns and pray. Over the years, these "Easter Parades" lost their spiritual meaning but people would still continue to dress up and take walks as part of their Easter celebration.

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It is easy to see how much of what is traditionally a part of Easter in America has little, if anything, to do with the Resurrection. So, what is the right way for a Christian to celebrate Easter? One extreme is for believers to strictly avoid everything that isn't directly related to Christ—the bunnies, baskets, candy, eggs, the new clothes—all of these would not be an option. The other extreme would be for these traditions to be the primary focus of the Easter celebration and miss out on the real reason for celebrating Easter all together.

Perhaps there is a balance. If the death and Resurrection of Christ is the main focus in our families and as long as our children know the difference between fact and fiction, the traditions that surround Easter in this country

could be a part of a believer's celebration. The most significant factor in making this decision is the motivation behind the choice. If the overwhelming desire is to glorify God and lift up and honor Christ, then other things will pale in comparison.

Too many times, Christians battle “smoke” issues, when they should save their influence (and their energy) for the “fire” issues of life. If Christians today were to stop using everything that has its root in paganism, we would have to throw out all our calendars, the days of the week, and never have another birthday cake, either. Many American holidays, customs, and traditions have roots in paganism. At its inception, Easter, like other Christian holidays, was taken from pagan celebrations. Although

some of the pagan symbols remain, the practices and anti-Christian beliefs once associated with Easter have long since disappeared. The way in which these symbols were originally used shouldn't determine our attitude toward them today.

It may be much like the issue the apostle Paul faced of whether or not to eat meat that has been offered to idols. There were Christians in those days who believed that it was wrong to

buy meat in the marketplace to eat which had been used as a part of a pagan ritual. Paul responds in I Corinthians 8:8 by saying, “But food does not bring us near to God. We are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.” In other words, meat is just meat. It won't hurt you if you eat it, and you won't be any better off if you don't. Don't make a big deal out of something that is not a big deal to God.

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# Easter, as every other day, ...

Steve Russo points out that sometimes all Christians are known for is what we are against. Our primary responsibility is to tell the incredible story of the Resurrection and a share the wonderful message of Christ. Easter, as every other day, should glorify God. We should never compromise our Biblical values in any way, nor should we become stumbling blocks to those who are weaker in the faith (1 Corinthians 8:9), or offend those with opinions different from ours regarding how Easter is celebrated.

Even though Paul didn't personally have a problem with eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols, he said he would willingly give up his freedom to do so, rather than offend a brother in Christ. Responding to the culture in which we live will always be an area where Christians will

have different opinions. So, we must guard our attitudes well so the message we have to share is not overshadowed by controversy.

We must never forget that the thing which makes Christianity unique is the Resurrection of Christ. Other religions have holy books, moral values, and thoughts about life after death. But no other religion in the world has a God who became a man, died for the sins of all mankind, and was resurrected from the dead. The fact of the Resurrection is the good news that Christians have to share with the world, a world that is in desperate need of hope, not just for today but for all their tomorrows, and eternity as well.

Christianity is not about practicing religion—it is about a personal relationship with a Savior who is alive! He is risen!

Stephen was a little boy who was mentally retarded. His teacher did her best to include him in as many classroom activities as she could and to avoid situations which might prompt his classmates to make fun of him.

In April she gave each of the eight children in her class an empty plastic egg and told them to take them home and bring them back with an object in the container that represented new life in spring. Not wanting Stephen to

be embarrassed, the teacher told all the children to place all the eggs on her desk the next day so that she could open them.

The first egg had a tiny flower in it. The next had a piece of rock with moss growing on it. The third had a picture of a butterfly in it. The teacher opened all the eggs but Stephen's, not knowing what to expect. "Teacher, please don't skip mine," Stephen said. So the teacher opened it and found nothing in it.

# ...should glorify God.

"It's empty, Stephen," she said quietly. "That's right," said Stephen. "The tomb was empty, and that represents new life for everyone." Later that summer, Stephen died. At his funeral on his casket were eight plastic eggs, all empty.

This true story reminds us of what Easter is really about. The evidence that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead is overwhelming for even the biggest skeptic. John Singleton Copley, one of the great legal minds in British history and three times the high Chancellor of England, wrote, "I know pretty well what evidence is, and I tell you, such evidence as that for the Resurrection has never broken down yet." Jesus, Himself, actually said He would rise from the dead. Since the boldest

statement Jesus ever made was fulfilled, then we must conclude that the other doctrinal statements He made are also true.

One of the greatest of these was when Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me." (John 14:6). If in reading this little booklet you have come to realize that Easter has never held any real significance for you, you can decide today to make Easter a personal reality in your life. 2000 years ago, Jesus Christ came to earth the first time to go to a cross and die a horrible death for the sins of the world. Three days later, He was resurrected from the dead, thereby conquering sin, death, hell, and the grave. One day (and it could be soon), He is coming again to take all who have trusted

Him as Lord and Savior home to Heaven to live with Him forever. If you will humbly ask His forgiveness, accept His sacrifice as payment for your sin, and give the control of your life to Him, you can have your sin forgiven and begin a new life in Christ that will last through all eternity. You can give your heart and life to Christ right now if you will pray a prayer something like this:

"Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner and that my sin must be paid for. I accept your death on the cross as payment for my sin. Please forgive me of

all my sin and come into my heart and save me right now. I give the control of my life to You. Please help me live for You here on earth until You take me home to heaven to live with you forever. Thank you for saving me. Amen."

For more information regarding Easter and the Resurrection please read Steve Russo's wonderful book, *Why Celebrate Easter* (Broadman & Holman Publishers).

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