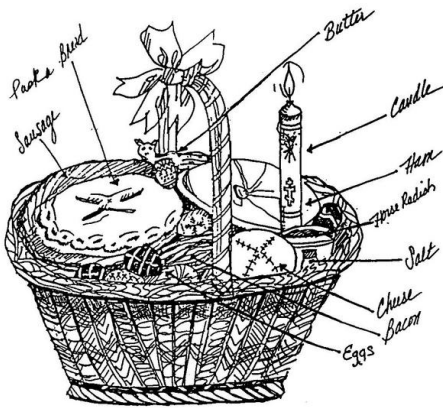




# Preparing for Pascha in the Ukrainian Catholic Church

## Pascha Baskets

One of the most joyful and colorful traditions in the Ukrainian Catholic Church is the Pascha Basket, covered with an embroidered cloth, filled with rich foods in celebration of the Resurrection, and blessed by the priest after the Pascha Sunday service. Since the strict Lenten fast excludes meat and dairy products, these and other symbolic foods are included in the basket. The blessing for these foods mentions that they are for our health and for the dispelling of diabolical snares from our lives. Each basket contains at least some of the following:



Cloth Basket Cover. Each family's basket is lined with a plain white cloth and covered with an embroidered cloth. (Two plain white cloths may be used if no embroidered cloth is available.) The cloths symbolize the linen burial clothes of Jesus and our own white baptismal robes.

Paska. This round, sweet braided bread made of white flour symbolizes Jesus Christ Himself, our bread of life. It normally bears a breaded cross and rosettes, which marks the joy of new life given to us all.

Babka. This is a tall, cylindrical sweet bread enriched with raisins, butter, and eggs. Saffron is usually added for coloring and it is decorated with a simple cross. This bread symbolizes eternal life.

Ham. The richness of this meat symbolizes the great joy and abundance of Easter.

Garlic Sausage (Ukrainian *kovbassa*). This spicy sausage symbolizes God's favor and generosity towards us.

Cottage or Farmer's Cheese (Cheese Paskha). The mild taste reminds us to show moderation in all things.

Hard Boiled/Dyed Eggs. The egg symbolizes new life and the death and resurrection of our Lord from the tomb, just as the egg is new life that will emerge from the shell. Red is the most traditional color.

Decorated Easter Eggs (Ukrainian *pysanky*). These are eggs dyed with unique symbols and special colors which serve as beautiful adornments of our Easter Baskets.

Butter. Butter may be molded or carved into the shape of a lamb, or just packed into a glass container. If you are using a glass container you may also put cloves in the shape of a cross. Butter symbolizes the goodness of Christ which we in turn need to share with others.

Salt. This addition to our baskets recalls Jesus words to us that "You are the salt of the earth" and reminds us of our duty as Christians to carry the Word of God to others around us.

Horseradish. Often mixed with grated beets, horseradish reminds us the passion of and death of Christ, as well as the bitterness of our journey in our earthly life as we journey towards salvation.

## Cheese Paskha



Sweetened and decorated, cheese paskha is a traditional part of Ukrainians' Pascha baskets. You can make it with farmer's cheese (also called *quark* and *tvorog*), available in some grocery stores, or you can substitute cottage cheese (drained for a more solid consistency) or cream cheese. But it is not hard to make farmer's cheese yourself! Mix four parts whole milk to one part buttermilk or sour cream (be sure you have buttermilk or sour cream with live cultures). Pour into clean glass jars, lightly cover with a clean cloth, and let sit on the kitchen counter or in an unlit oven for 24-36 hours. Room temperature, or just slightly warmer, is ideal. (If the room is on the chilly side, turn on the oven light or place a pan of very hot water in the oven.) The live cultures will grow and the milk will thicken. When the mixture is about as thick as yogurt, and smells and tastes pleasantly tangy, strain it through a clean dishcloth or several layers of cheesecloth and refrigerate. Drain and press as much liquid (whey) out as possible, using weights as needed. It should end up something like softened cream cheese: holding its shape but spreadable. To make a cheese paskha for your basket, blend the farmer's cheese with grated cooked egg yolks, heavy cream, and butter (proportions vary, but you can look up a variety of recipes on the internet). Grated lemon rind and powdered sugar may be added for flavoring; sometimes raisins or grated almonds are also used. Paskha cheese can be molded and decorated in many different ways—search the internet for ideas!

## Paskha Bread and Babka

These two traditional yeast breads are also part of Ukrainians' Pascha baskets.



Paskha bread loaves are round and decorated with additional braided or otherwise shaped dough.

Babka loaves are baked in a cylindrical shape. Saffron is often added to the dough for a rich yellow color, and sometimes the loaves are decorated with sugar icing. (Our mothers and grandmothers in North America used large, clean, metal cans, opened at one end, with sharp edges smoothed, to bake these tall loaves of bread; but these days cylindrical loaf pans and paper molds are available in specialty kitchen shops and on the internet.)



Many recipes are available on the internet for these traditional breads.

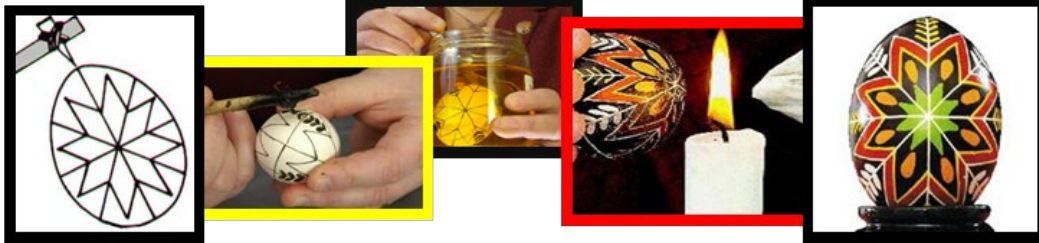






## Pysanky

One of the most beautiful Ukrainian traditions is the dyeing of eggs in the weeks before Pascha. Simple or elaborate designs are created by the “wax-resist” method: applying wax to the egg using a “kistka” tool, dipping the eggs in successive colors of dye, adding to the wax design each time, before finally removing the wax. Fortunately, the art of pysanky is experiencing a revival in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as children and grandchildren of Ukrainian immigrants to North America, as well as many others, have discovered the intriguing beauty of the interplay of color and design on a simple egg. Dyes, beeswax, and “kistka” tools are readily available for order on the internet, and workshops are often offered in parish churches.



*"As long as pysanky are being made, evil shall not prevail over good in the world."*



Photographs from Pinterest, Joan Brander (babasbeeswax.com), and Luba Petrusha (“pysanky,” Wikipedia.com).

**Paskha Basket Cover: Beginners’ Level Cross Stitch**

Embroider your own basket cover, using 11- or 14-count white “aida” cloth from any craft store (15” x 18” is a good size), one or two skeins of embroidery floss in desired colors, tapestry needle size 22, and a 6-inch embroidery hoop. Stitch one or more border patterns at each narrow end of the cloth, add a cross and the initials “XB,” for “Христос Воскрес” (“Christ Is Risen”) in the center, and finish with a simple self-fringe, folded-over hem, or lace. Experienced cross-stitchers will be happy to help you get started, or look for basic cross-stitch directions online. Below are simple patterns which can be repeated, layered, extended, and combined in many ways.

