A brief history of Easter and how Christians celebrate this holiday:

What do the Easter bunny and Easter eggs have to do with Jesus Christ being crucified, buried and rising to life again? These symbols are a result of combining different traditions and cultures that have been passed down over the years. Easter owes its origin to old Teutonic mythology. The name Easter was originally derived from the word Eostre. Eostre was the ancient Teutonic goddess of spring and fertility, coming from Germanic Paganism (European mythology around the 12th century). It was believed that every year, Eostre returned to Earth after a long, cold winter and brought along with her the light and warmth of Spring. Thus, ancient Greeks held pagan festivals to welcome Eostre and herald the onset of spring. Traditions associated with Eostre’s festival survive in the Easter rabbit, a symbol of fertility, and in colored Easter eggs, originally painted with bright colors to represent the sunlight of spring, and used in Easter-egg rolling contests or given as gifts.

In the 1st century the “Easter” festival for Christians was first named in Greek, Pascha, which is derived from the Hebrew word Pesach, which means Passover. It is can be also called, The Feast of the Resurrection of the Lord. According to the Hebrew calendar Passover occurs on the 15th day of the month of Nisan (a Jewish celebration/holiday remembering when God freed the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt, recorded in Exodus 11-12). It is interesting to note that in Spanish, Easter is know as Pascua and in French it is called Paques. Again, these Spanish and French words are derived from the Hebrew word Pesach or possibly the Latin word Pasch for Passover. Pascha festival (we now call Easter in the US) was to commemorate Jesus Christ's resurrection two days after the Passover celebration. According to the New Testament of the Bible, Jesus Christ was crucified on the eve of Passover and in 3 days rose from the dead (Luke 22-24). In time, a serious division over the date of the Easter festival arose among Christians. Christians of Jewish origin celebrated the resurrection immediately following the Passover celebration, which according to their lunar calendar, fell on a different day each year. However, Christians of different origins, wished to commemorate the resurrection on the first day of the week, Sunday. An important historical result of the difference in reckoning the date of Easter was that the Christian churches in the East, which were closer to where Jesus was crucified and in which old traditions were strong, observed Easter according to the date of the Passover celebration. The churches of the West, descendants of Greco-Roman civilization, celebrated Easter on a Sunday. This was reconciled in 325 AD by the Council of Nicaea (a church council) and the Roman Emperor Constantine, who stated that Easter would be on the Sunday after the full moon after the Spring Equinox.
As Christianity spread throughout Europe different pagan holidays and traditions, like the Eostre’s festival, influenced and blended with Christian traditions & celebrations. **Therefore, Easter in the United States has many different traditional symbols that combined both the pagan & Christian celebrations.** Christians do not believe in the pagan goddess, Eostre, however they may embrace some of the pagan/cultural traditions of Easter that have been passed down with no recollection to the goddess of Eostre. For the Christian the first Easter tradition that was developed in the 1st century and passed down over time was the lighting of the Paschal Candle. The flame was a reminder of Christ’s resurrection; a symbol of light coming into a dark world (John 1:9). Christians adopted the Easter egg tradition sometime in the 13th century. Some Christians said that the yoke inside the egg was a symbol of Christ’s resurrection from the tomb (Matthew 28:1-10) and eggs were painted red to represent Christ’s blood that was shed on a cross as a sacrifice for the sins of people (1 Corinthians 15:3). For some 2000 years since Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection the Easter holiday has evolved into what the United States celebrates today. There is an important spiritual significance as well as a fun part to the Easter holiday that has been added over time. **The Easter holiday in general denotes life, renewal, and rebirth. For the Christian it is a celebration of the mercy of God and restoration to God because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 4:25, Hebrews 10:10, 1 Peter 1:3, & Colossians 2:13-15).** It is important to note that the Bible states that without the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead the Christian faith would be meaningless (1 Corinthians 15:17).

For the Christian there are some important days leading up to the celebration of Easter Sunday. **The Sunday before Easter/Resurrection Sunday is called Palm Sunday** and this is to remember when Jesus entered Jerusalem and people waved Palm branches and hailed him as King (John 12:12-15). **The Friday before Easter Sunday is called, Good Friday.** This day is focused on Christ’s death and may seem to be a sad day, but actually it is a day of joy. This is the time when Jesus died on the cross to be the payment for all our sins in order that we can have a relationship with a Holy God now and forever (Romans 5:9-11, 6:23 & Ephesians 3:12). The way to be made right with God has been made through Christ’s sacrifice (Romans 3:23-25). **The Saturday before resurrection or Easter Sunday is called Holy Saturday,** the day before Jesus rose from the dead. **Finally, Easter Sunday we celebrate the fact that Jesus rose from the dead proving He was God and conquering sin and death. Happy Easter and/or Resurrection Sunday!!**