

How to Build a Pascha Basket

All the food articles are placed in a wicker basket, and a ribbon or bow is tied to the handle. A decorated candle is placed in the basket at the time of the basket blessing. A linen cover, normally quite intricately embroidered with various Resurrection themes and symbols of Christ, or simply an intricate multicolored border and the words "CHRIST IS RISEN," is placed over the food when it is brought to the church. The basket is blessed after Pascha services.

Following is a list of foods commonly included in the basket. It is not necessary to include every item, nor are Pascha baskets restricted to the items listed below. The general rule is to place in the basket foods from which one has abstained during Great Lent and Holy Week.

PASCHA/KULICH: Pascha and Kulich normally refer to the same thing. However, there are ethnic groups where Pascha and Kulich are quite different foods. In fact, among those groups, the Pascha becomes the bread and the Kulich becomes what will appear below as Sirets or Hrutka. Here, it will be used to refer to bread, a sweet yeast bread rich in eggs, butter and other condiments. This bread is symbolic of Christ Himself, He Who is our Bread of life. It is usually baked as a round loaf with a golden crust decorated with some symbol indicative of Christ, such as a braided cross, a lamb or something similar. Sometimes a cross of dough is placed on top, and the entire loaf rimmed with a braided plait of dough giving it a crowned effect.

CHEESE (Hrutka or Sirets): A custard-type cheese shaped into a ball which has a rather bland but sweet taste, and is intended to indicate the moderation that Christians should have in all things. Also, creamed cheese is sometimes placed in a small dish and decorated with initials or patterns by placing peppercorns or cloves in appropriate patterns.

HAM (Shoon'-ka): The flesh meat popular among Slavs as the main dish for several reasons: a) the richness of its meat is symbolic of the great joy and abundance of Easter and b) of the richness of the joy in Christ we ought to have, and c) our freedom from the Old Law, now that all things have been made clean in Christ (as indicated to the apostle Saint Peter in the dream on the rooftop at Joppa [Acts 10:9-16]). Being freed from the Old Law and from the curse of death, which is the wage of sin, all things are now permissible to eat - and ham, the most forbidden of all the "unclean" foods is now symbolic of our total redemption. Many of the faithful will include meats like roasted veal, roast beef, and other foods prepared well ahead of time - foods which can be enjoyed without a lot of last-minute preparation. Those who have been preparing all week are already exhausted, but, being filled with joy at Our Lord's Resurrection from the dead, are looking forward to sitting down to a celebratory feast.

BUTTER (Mas'-lo): The butter is usually shaped into a figure of a lamb or of a three-barred cross and decorated in much the same fashion as the sirets (cheese) above. Butter is to remind us of the goodness of Christ that we are to demonstrate to all men by our lives in Him.

SAUSAGE (Kohl-ba'-ssi): A spicy, garlicky sausage of pork, veal, beef and other products. This is indicative of God's favor and generosity to us sinners.

BACON (Sla-ni'-na): A piece of uncooked bacon cured with spices. This symbolizes of the lavishness and overabundance of God's mercy toward sinners.

SALT (Sol): A condiment necessary for flavor reminding Christians of our duties toward others to "flavor" the world.

EGGS (Py-san'-ky): These are highly decorated eggs with symbols and markings made with colored dyes and beeswax. Covered with extremely complicated and intricate designs, some of these eggs take a full week to complete. The word "pysanky" derives from the verb "pysat'," meaning "to write." A pysanka, then, is an egg which has been written (drawn) upon. Eggs represent the new life and Resurrection. There are some fascinating pious legends concerning the origin of these pysanky.

HORSERADISH (Hrin): Horseradish is commonly mixed with grated red beets to give this a rich, "blood red" hue. This is symbolic of the Christ's Passion which is still in the minds of the faithful, but which is now sweetened with some sugar because of the Resurrection. A bittersweet red-colored mixture which reminds us of the blood and suffering of Christ, at which great price was purchased the astonishing gift of our Redemption.

WINE: In some places, it is also customary to include a bottle of wine. Poorer areas of Eastern Europe tended to ignore this element of the basket (e.g. Southern Poland, Northern Czechoslovakia, Northeastern Hungary), but American descendants are beginning to include them once again.