THE ESTERN AND WESTERN CHURCHES CELEBRATE EASTER THE SAME DAY.

What a great coincidence! Both the Eastern (orthodox) and Western will hold Easter on the same day this year April 20, 2025 a joint celebration that doesn't happen often.



Pope Francis and Patriach Abune Mathias Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarch

Why do Christians in the East usually celebrate Easter on a different day than those in the West?

Coincidentally, the story dates back to exactly 1,700 years ago, when the world's first Ecumenical Council, the Council of Nicaea, was held in A.D. 325.

Most famous for rejecting the Arian heresy, and confirming Jesus Christ is God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father as we repeat at every Sunday Mass the council also unified the time of Easter.

At the time, some areas followed the Jewish calendar more closely, and the council ordered Churches to follow the Roman calendar.



Time can be a complicated thing, and days, months, and years don't always match. Easter is supposed to be tied to the Jewish Passover, but given 12 months don't really match up to one year, the way these things get put together can differ.

Much like the Arian issue, the Council of Nicaea didn't really get accepted by every Church for a few hundred years. And even though the council established that the date of Easter would be the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox, the method of measuring these things differed from place to place.

Things got muddled up again when the Gregorian calendar was established in 1582, officially replacing the Julian calendar in Catholic countries. Even though its more accurate way of connecting months to the length of the year had been accepted across the world by the 1900s, the Eastern Orthodox religions still observe the Julian calendar for Easter, which usually takes place after it is celebrated in the Western Churches.

That brings us to 2025, which will see a remarkable coincidence: Both the Eastern and Western will hold Easter on the same day this year.

Pope Francis found an opportunity to bring the topic up in remarks at an ecumenical prayer service marking the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity last month.

"I renew my appeal that this coincidence may serve as an appeal to all Christians to take a decisive step forward towards unity around a common date for Easter. The Catholic Church is open to accepting the date that everyone wants: a date of unity," Francis said Jan. 25.

It wasn't the first time that the pope has broached the topic.



In 2022, for example, he told an Assyrian Orthodox patriarch: "Let us have the courage to put an end to this division that at times makes us laugh" with the ridiculous possibility that Christians could ask each other, "When does your Christ rise again?"

For most Christian laity, this topic isn't really an issue they celebrate Easter when it is celebrated in their parish church. Even the beginning of Lent isn't a real issue among most people even when Easter falls on the same day, the "40 day" preparation begins on a Wednesday in the West, and on a Monday in the East, and nobody panics about the disparity.

But the pope's remarks are a reminder that the Catholic Church leadership is less committed to the date in the Western churches. In recent times, various popes have suggested just celebrating it on the second or third Sundays of April, and Eastern Catholic Churches often follow the Julian calendar, like their Orthodox counterparts.

Last December, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople said the mutual celebration of Easter in 2025 will be "an amazing convergence."

"As we have repeatedly highlighted lately, more than a calendrical coincidence, this alignment offers a great opportunity for togetherness, especially since the way of celebrating the date of Easter was one of the issues that the Council of Nicaea resolved," he said, before **urging Francis to accept the Julian calendar for the Catholic celebration.**

Practically speaking, the Eastern method also makes sure Easter comes after the Jewish celebration of Passover again, an issue less fundamental in the West.



However, it can affect things if the West accepts the Julian calendar for Easter. The latest date for Easter in the West is this year, April 25. In the East it is May 8. This means Pentecost could be in late June and push the celebrations of Most Holy Trinity and the feast of Corpus Christi into July, which is the beginning of the secular holiday season in many Western nations that are at least nominally Christian.

Still, you'd be hard pressed to find ordinary faithful clamoring for such a change. Personally, I've never lost a moment's sleep over the thought that my Orthodox friends would be celebrating Easter on a different day, yet when Christians deny the divinity of Christ, I tremble.

Even at Easter's most sacred site the city of Jerusalem celebrating Easter on the same day is more of a "platonic ideal" than a practical one. The truth is, letting Catholics and Orthodox use the Church of the Holy Sepulcher on different days to observe the Church's most significant celebration makes things easier for all involved.

Even Bartholomew acknowledges a unified celebration wouldn't solve the differences that divide the East and West. But Church leaders insist it would still be an important step for Christian unity.

At least until Christmas, which Orthodox Christians celebrate on Jan. 7.

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