

I come in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!

Alleluia! Rejoice! For He is Risen! It is no surprise that this is how the story goes. After all, it's been handed down from generation to generation for 2000 years. We've heard it time and time again. It's predictable. No sequels. No trilogies. Over time, the story can become routine - mundane. It's just the same old story over and over again, possibly losing the impact of its profound message.

You know it. Jesus is buried in a cave with a rock in front of the opening. When the women come to do their burial preparations, they find him gone. Tah Dah – Jesus is resurrected. The end. Let's go hunt for Easter eggs.

But if we scratch away at this a little, we find that what is not written in the Scriptures adds layers of richness to what is written. So, let's rewind the story a bit. Consider what Passover must have looked like for Jesus' mother, his disciples, his friends. Passover was a huge holiday. They should have been caught up in preparations, food, story-telling and traditions! They should be celebrating how their ancestors were liberated from captivity in Egypt. Passover recalls how the blood of the unblemished lamb was spilled on the wood of the doorframes of the family homes.

We hear how death from passed over the homes of those **who placed their lives in God's hands** by spilling the blood of a sacrificial lamb on their doorframes.

The Israelites would pass through the door of spilled blood and be liberated from death by the plague, as well as their captivity by the Egyptians. God offered them a promise of hope.

For Mary, and all those gathered with her, this profound act of God, was the foundation of their Jewish faith. And now, rather than celebrating liberation, they were living in fear and captivity. They could be targeted by the Romans, as well as the Jewish leadership. It was a time of hopelessness and despair.

They had such hope in Jesus. He taught about love and forgiveness, mercy and kindness. He broke down barriers and practiced inclusivity. He welcomed the marginalized, he played with the children, he showed mercy to sinners, he promised that there was more to life than what they were experiencing. He taught his followers that if they truly knew him, they truly knew God. His message and actions demonstrated the immeasurable love and mercy of His Father. And now, Jesus is dead.

So, does that mean that it was all a sham? Does it mean that hundreds, if not thousands, of people were lured into believing 'fake news.' What is just a pipe-dream? Does it mean that if Jesus is dead, then God is dead, too?

Whether his message was true or not, they loved him and believed in him. They were drawn into his message, his actions, his promise. Where did they go wrong?

Regardless, Jesus deserved a proper burial. So the women gathered up the supplies that they needed in order to dress his body for burial, have the tomb sealed up, and try to figure out how to move forward. Jesus has been dead for over 2 days. That will make this process even more difficult and unpleasant.

I'm going to get a little morbid for a few moments, but it adds to the nuances of our story. It should be noted that when a person dies, it can take about 3 days for evidence of decay to become apparent. For Jews who believed in the afterlife, it was the belief that sin resided in the flesh. Death was the result of sin, a message that St. Paul consistently preached. So, as a body decays, sin decays away, as well. Once it gets to the point in which only bones remain, it was believed that sin was stripped away, and the bones would serve as the framework upon which the persons afterlife body. Ok – I'm done with the morbid stuff. Pretty interesting, but why does it matter?

So, the women go to the tomb and find it empty. Where's his body? They have an encounter with divine messengers indicating that Jesus had risen. That can't be, can it? He was clearly dead. They saw it. The centurion made sure.

But there is no sign of him. Could someone have stolen Jesus' body in order to make it look like he rose from the dead? Well, probably not. Pilate assigned centurions to guard the entrance of the tomb to ensure no one would steal the body. It was to prevent any 'conspiracy theories.' So, where's his body?

They recalled Jesus' words about rising from the dead on the third day. If he overcame death, then there would be no body. If there is no body, there is no decay. If there is no decay, then he was without sin, pure and good. If there is no sin, then Jesus MUST be divine, the Son of God. It must be true! It was not a sham! It was not a pipe-dream! Jesus was all he said he was – God made flesh – the messenger of the Good News!

Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Christ, fulfilled the ultimate, and eternal, liberation that began with Passover in the Old Testament. The blood of the unblemished lamb was spilled on the doorframes of the homes of the Israelites. Jesus, as the perfect, unblemished, sacrificial Lamb of God, spilled his blood on the wood of the cross. By passing through sacrificial blood, liberation was gained. The Israelites were liberated from the plague and captivity. As Christians, in faith, we pass through the blood of the cross, being liberated from our captivity to sin and death. In faith, we look through and beyond the cross and see a life that is free from sin and death. We meet a glorified Jesus, face to face, who escorts through the veil of death into eternal life.

Our story today is a story that is worth repeating over and over again for all future generations. It is a story of eternal liberation and joy! It is a story that gives us hope when we are held captive in the complications of human life.

We are promised that, in faith, we can endure whatever life throws at us with confidence that we, too, will pass over death and join the hosts of angels and saints in eternal joy! Jesus showed us that nothing is impossible with God.

Today, as you come to the table to receive His body and blood, remember that you participate in, if even for a moment, the new and eternal Passover celebration that promises life everlasting. Death has been defeated – for you! He is Risen! Rejoice, you have been liberated! Party on! Alleluia!!