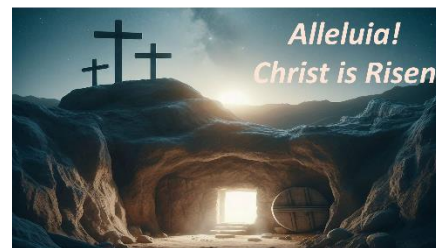


**The tomb was empty,
but this was no empty promise**



Call: Christ the Lord is risen He is risen indeed Alleluia!

Hymn: Christ the Lord is risen today STF 298 Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15dmjnB8FZU>

Christ the Lord is risen today; *Alleluia!*
All creation joins to say; *Alleluia!*
Raise your joys and triumphs high; *Alleluia!*
Sing, you heavens; let earth, reply: *Alleluia!*

Love's redeeming work is done, *Alleluia!*
Fought the fight, the battle won; *Alleluia!*
Vain the stone, the watch, the seal; *Alleluia!*
Christ has burst the gates of hell: *Alleluia!*

Lives again our glorious king; *Alleluia!*
Where, O death, is now your sting? *Alleluia!*
Once he died our souls to save; *Alleluia!*

Where's your victory, boasting grave? *Alleluia!*

Soar we now where Christ has led, *Alleluia!*
Following our exalted head; *Alleluia!*
Made like him, like him we rise; *Alleluia!*
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies: *Alleluia!*

King of glory! Soul of bliss! *Alleluia!* (*omitted from video*)

Everlasting life is this, *Alleluia!*
You to know, your power to prove, *Alleluia!*
Thus to sing, and thus to love: *Alleluia!*

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Prayers & Lord's Prayer

Living and resurrected Christ. We thank you for this day of praise and celebration; a day of joy after sorrow, of life after death; a day to lift up our hearts and offer you praise! Today we remember all you have done for us, and for all the world; your great victory over death and sin, and your triumph over everything that keeps us from you and prevents us from living the life you want us to lead. Sovereign God, breathe new life into our hearts this day. Fire us with renewed confidence and enthusiasm. Fill us with resurrection power, that we may meet and walk with you, this and every day.

AMEN

Gracious God, we live the joy of Easter Sunday, but we may not have walked through Holy Week. We may not have been humbled by Jesus' hands washing our feet. We may not have shared bread and wine together at his last meal. We may not have known that primeval fear in Gethsemane, or the bewilderment of the disciples at his betrayal. We may not have known the way of sorrow to Golgotha, the blood, sweat and tears of a crown of thorns and the weight of a cross that will bear our dying body. We confess, therefore, our failure to feel at one with Jesus in his dying as well as in his resurrection life. As we celebrate our risen Lord, we remember the man of sorrows who died for our sins, as we seek forgiveness. Lord in the warmth of your hands washing our feet, we are forgiven. In your willingness to drink the cup of suffering for us, we are forgiven. In the wide embrace of your arms upon the cross, we are forgiven. Risen Lord, in the empty tomb we know that death is defeated. We are forgiven. Alleluia! **AMEN**

Reading: John 20: 1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned

around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”). Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Hymn: See what a morning, gloriously bright STF 309 Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Rs529D0HQU>

See what a morning, gloriously bright
with the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;
folded the graveclothes, tomb filled with light
as the angels announce Christ is risen!
See God's salvation plan,
wrought in love, borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,
fulfilled in Christ the man,
for he lives; Christ is risen from the dead.

See Mary weeping, 'Where is he laid!'
as in sorrow she turns from the empty tomb;
hears a voice speaking, calling her name;
it's the Master, the Lord raised to life again!

The voice that spans the years,
speaking life, stirring hope, bringing peace to us,
will sound till he appears,
for he lives; Christ is risen from the dead.

One with the Father, Ancient of Days,
through the Spirit who clothes faith with certainty,
honour and blessing, glory and praise
to the King crowned with power and authority!
And we are raised with him,
death is dead, love has won, Christ has conquered;
and we shall reign with him,
for he lives; Christ is risen from the dead.

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Message : **The tomb was empty but this was no empty promise!**

The tomb was empty, but what did they see?

After the events of Good Friday, the grief and despair was overwhelming. All that Mary had left was that final chance, early on that Sunday morning, to visit the tomb in which Jesus lay.

It was the custom to visit the tomb of a loved one for three days after they had died. It was believed that the spirit of the dead person hovered around the tomb for three days, after which it departed as the body was so decayed. No one had been to visit the tomb on the Saturday, as it was the Sabbath and so would have broken the Jewish laws

Desperate to pay her final respects, Mary visited at the end of the fourth watch of the night, between 3 and 6 am on Sunday morning. It would have still been dark with only the hint of dawn breaking.

Mary arrived at the tomb expecting to find it as it was left on the Friday after Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had anointed Jesus' lifeless body with myrrh and aloes and wrapped him in grave clothes from head to toe as was the custom. The tomb had then been sealed with a heavy circular stone.

But what she found when she got there shocked and distressed her even more. She couldn't believe her eyes. The stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty.

What had happened? Had the Jewish authorities removed his body to prevent Jesus reaching people even after death? Or was it simply grave robbers?

Mary loved Jesus, her heart was broken, she didn't know what to believe. She didn't understand what had happened, so she went to tell the disciples to find out what to do next.

Peter and John in their turn didn't know what to believe either so came rushing to the tomb to see for themselves.

So here we see amazement and disbelief.

When we first hear of the story of the resurrection it seems impossible to believe, it's some fantastic made-up story, a fabrication. There is disbelief. Like Mary, like Peter and John, we may be bewildered.

However, despite not understanding what had happened, Mary didn't give up loving Jesus.

So, do we, despite our lack of understanding, continue to love and believe what happened to Jesus? Do we have to understand first and then believe, or can we, out of love for Jesus, believe and then, in time, come to understand?

We see the two disciples, John first and Peter second, arriving at the tomb. Mary had told them this garbled story about the stone being moved and the tomb being empty. They needed to check out the facts for themselves. They needed to SEE what she was talking about.

John gets there first but holds back, he looks in from outside. He considers the evidence and reflects on what he has seen. Peter arrives and immediately goes into the tomb, but still, he doesn't fully understand.

It's only when John has noted that the grave clothes were laid out in such a way as if Jesus' body had simply evaporated rather than been dragged out of the tomb. This wasn't grave robbers, or even the Jewish authorities arranging for the removal of the body.

It was then, seeing those grave clothes in the shape that they were, that John saw and believed. He then remembered that Jesus had spoken about this, he would die and then three days later rise from the dead.

It wasn't from reading books or intellectual study, but from seeing the evidence that John came to believe.

Of course, it is important to study the bible and what it tells us, but very often it is by seeing or experiencing how another Christian lives, and how their faith pervades all that they do, that we can come to an understanding about what the risen and living Christ can do for us.

When you learn a new skill, you might read up the instructions on how to carry out that skill, you may learn all the theory behind it, but it is only when you try it out and practice that you become confident in that skill.

We assume that Mary came back to the tomb with Peter and John, and remained there after they had returned to the other disciples. She was distraught with grief, blinded by her tears, and staring into the empty tomb.

Mary sees two angels in the tomb who ask her why she's crying. She tells them of her distress and confusion about where Jesus' body is. She then turns away from the tomb and sees a man who she thinks must be the gardener standing behind her. And THEN she turns back to the empty tomb, and it is only when the man, Jesus, speaks her name, that she turns AWAY from the tomb and looks directly at and recognises Jesus.

Do we spend so long gazing at the empty tomb that we fail to see the person of Jesus standing right beside us?

Mary encountered Jesus standing beside her, she saw him, she heard him, and from what Jesus says to her next, she probably reached out to try and touch or embrace him.

She didn't recognise him immediately because she wasn't expecting to see him there, alive; but when he spoke her name it was a personal and amazing invitation.

When we encounter Jesus personally for ourselves, then we can really believe. When we acknowledge that Jesus came to earth, lived among a rag tag group of people, and died for us, for you and for me, then we can truly believe he is alive and living amongst and within us.

The essence of Christianity is not knowing about Jesus, but about knowing Jesus.

It's not about reading lots of books about what Jesus did, rather it's about seeing, hearing, feeling how Jesus affects everything we say and do.

It's not about discussing or debating theological arguments about Jesus, rather it is about meeting him through the lives of others, in church, but also in the work place, in the village, in the supermarket or the hospital.

It may be a specific moment in time or an awareness of a more gradual process.

Remember Mary did not meet Christ until she had seen the empty tomb, until that moment when she couldn't believe what had happened. However, when she did meet with Christ, her response was joy at seeing the living Christ, and an overwhelming desire to want to share it with others.

If you are staring at the empty tomb, Jesus may be close at hand, turn away from despair and see the risen and living Lord. Let us respond with joy and that desire to share the joy with others.

The tomb was empty but this was no empty promise! What do you see? AMEN

Intercessions:

Lord, there are times when our lives seem full of empty promises. Be with those this day who feel despair and bring them hope. Be with those who feel there is no hope and show them love

There are those whose lives are an empty void, fill their hearts with a sense of self-worth. There are those who are waiting for you to fill that space. Help us to be a friend and an example of how full life can be when we let you into our lives.

Lord, we pray for those whose lives are obsessed by money, believing that it is the source of all happiness. We pray also for those who have no money, who have lost jobs, who struggle to make ends meet. We thank you for organisations like Christians against poverty who try and help people get out of debt.

We pray for those whose plate is empty. We think especially of the families and children caught up in conflicts around the world, who are literally starving. We pray that leaders of governments will not give empty promises and will work to bring peace and food to the hungry.

Lord, we pray for those whose lives are derelict and empty, for those who have no foundation in you and whose lives are crumbling. Give them strength to build themselves up and may we help to put roots and foundations down, and for the emptiness to be filled with your promises.

We pray for those whose lives are on thin ice, who follow the empty promise of drugs or alcohol, only to find their lives discarded, lost, empty. We pray for all who are struggling with ill health and pain.....

We pray for those who seek the empty promise of cheap tricks or a quick fix. Lord your promise is free, it is no trick and is for ever. Help us to stick with you, to persevere, to be more aware of the abundance and expanse of your love for us all.

We pray for those whose relationships are empty, who have been hurt and who want to hide away in the dark. May they know the sincerity, the honesty of a relationship with you, where there are no empty promises.

We pray for those for whom there seems to be no end, who follow one empty promise after another. May they know joy and not sorrow, happiness and not despair, fun and not boredom.

We pray for those who are running on empty, we pray for our world and its use of resources. We so often hear of promises made, may they not be empty promises but promises made sincerely and with resolve to care for this planet and look for alternative ways to preserve the diversity of your creation.

Resurrected Lord, you lead the way out of our darkness. You fill our emptiness with your light and your love. You bring us out of night into day, and death into new life.

In you the tomb is empty but our lives are full. The empty tomb promises hope, joy, peace and new life.

May we know that fullness of your Easter promise, that hope of life to come, that joy of knowing you, and that peace in your unconditional and saving grace. AMEN

Hymn: Thine be the glory STF 313 Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tjz4yXUJrgU>

Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son;
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave clothes where thy body lay.
*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son:
Endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won.*

Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;
lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom.
Let his church with gladness, hymns of triumph sing;

for her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting.
Refrain

3No more we doubt thee, glorious prince of life!
Life is nought without thee; aid us in our strife;
make us more than conquerors, through thy deathless love:
Bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.
Refrain

Edmund L Budry, translated by Richard B Hoyle Used By Permission.

Blessing: They thought he was dead – He is not! They thought he was old news – He is not!
Christ is alive. Jesus is GOOD NEWS! AMEN

