

## Jesus Rose On Easter Day.

Text: Matt 28:1-10

Suggested Hymns:

768, 95, 103, 294, 88

1) The Facts Say, "Christ Is Risen!"

2) Our Faith Echoes, "He Is Risen Indeed!"

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 28:1-10, <sup>1</sup> *Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.* <sup>2</sup> *And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.* <sup>3</sup> *His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow.* <sup>4</sup> *And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.*

<sup>5</sup> *But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.* <sup>6</sup> *"He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.* <sup>7</sup> *"And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you."*

<sup>8</sup> *So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.* <sup>9</sup> *And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him.* <sup>10</sup> *Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

*Which is the greatest Christian festival?* To a child it is probably Christmas. On that day the children receive special recognition. An entire service is dedicated chiefly to them and largely conducted by them. Also on that day they receive gifts of toys, clothes, lollies, and the like.

In the course of time we have developed a special greeting for the occasion, wishing each other a *Blessed Christmas*. Also we send greeting cards to acquaintances, some of whom we don't hear of for the rest of the year.

*Which is the greatest Christian festival?* A thoughtful adult Christian would probably reply that it is Easter. True, the volume of Easter greeting cards is insignificant in comparison with those sent at Christmas time. The exchange of gifts is certainly less. Special children's services are rare. Nor do we have a universally recognised verbal Easter greeting.

Yet the reason for observing Easter, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, is so important that St. Paul exclaimed in 1 Corinthians 15:14, 17-18, *“And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty, ... your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!”* <sup>18</sup> *Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.* Our hope of heaven is based on the certainty of the Easter message.

There was once a Russian official responsible for Popular Education, who delivered a public lecture in a large Moscow auditorium. He said that the Christian religion was now completely overthrown and that the Bible could be easily disproved. He felt so sure of himself that he challenged anyone in the audience to find a flaw in what he had just presented.

A young priest came forward, turned to the audience, and said, *“Christ is risen!”* (This was the usual Easter greeting.) With one accord the vast audience cried out, *“He is risen, indeed!”* (This was the customary reply.) “I have finished” said the priest. “I have no more to say.” The meeting was closed at once.

The official's eloquence and flowery language had availed him nothing. The belief in the resurrection of Jesus was so firmly planted in the hearts of all the people that they made an instinctive confession to that effect.

The theme of today's message is *Fact and Faith Triumphantly Say, “Jesus Rose on Easter Day!”* May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. The Facts Say, “Christ Is Risen!”**

Speaking from the point of view of human reason, Job said, <sup>10</sup> *But man dies and is laid away; Indeed he breathes his last And where is he? ...* <sup>12</sup> *So man lies*

*down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, They will not awake Nor be roused from their sleep. ...<sup>14</sup> If a man dies, shall he live again?<sup>1</sup>*

But in triumphant faith he added in Job 19:26-27, <sup>26</sup> *And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God,* <sup>27</sup> *Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!* He based his faith on the fact, *“I know that my Redeemer lives.”<sup>2</sup>*

We, too, know that our Redeemer lives. No historical event of ancient times is better documented. It is important to remember that those who were best qualified to investigate the circumstances never denied the fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

This is true not only of the friends and disciples of Christ, but also of His enemies. Unintentionally they provided one of the most unshakeable proofs for the Easter miracle.

Joseph of Arimathea had reverently wrapped the lacerated body of our Lord in fine linen, which he purchased for that special purpose.<sup>3</sup> Then he laid Jesus in his own new tomb. Then the chief priests and Pharisees came together to Pilate, saying, *“Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’”<sup>64</sup> “Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’<sup>4</sup>*

Pilate assigned men to stand guard over the grave and told the chief priests to make it as secure as they could so that nobody would disturb the body. So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting a guard.

You can be very sure that the guards and Pharisees took a look at the body of Jesus before they sealed the stone in place. They made certain He was still there. Then the soldiers saw to it that nobody came near the grave.

There really was no need for the guard, because the Apostles and disciples were too frightened to venture far from their homes. They were afraid of the Jews. They were afraid that they too might be put to death, because the Jewish High Council was determined to root out all traces of Christianity.

Neither was there any need to seal the stone. Jesus did not have to push it away in order to leave the grave. Just as light passes through a window, so the

Saviour passed through the solid rock wall of the tomb, without disturbing it in any way.

The guards did not see Him as He passed among them. The true human body of Christ can be rendered invisible to human sight. We know that He is with us always, even to the end of the world, but our eyes cannot see Him.

We know that He is truly present in, with, and under the bread and wine when we celebrate Holy Communion, but only our faith can tell that He is there.

When *“an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it”* he said to the women, *“I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> “He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”<sup>5</sup>*

The tomb was empty while the soldiers were still guarding it. Many people saw Jesus die, but none saw Him rise.

The Roman soldiers were brave men, but they had not been trained to cope with the supernatural. They trembled and shook and then *“became like dead men,”* that is, they fainted with fright.

Later some of them made their way to Jerusalem and reported truthfully what had happened. The elders made no effort to discredit the story told by the guards. There were too many witnesses. The evidence was indisputable. Instead, the elders resorted to bribery. After taking counsel, debating the question thoroughly, *they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, <sup>13</sup> saying, “Tell them, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.’”*

Even a child can see the absurdity of such a tale. Granted that the disciples could overcome their fear of the soldiers, there would still be the problem of moving the stone which blocked the entrance to the tomb.

Mark tells us in his Gospel that the stone was very great. Anyone who has ever moved a large stone knows that it cannot be done without grunting and straining and heaving. There would be the noise made by crowbars and rollers. Someone would have to call out directions and orders to the others. In the darkness of night the difficulties would have been multiplied enormously. The guards certainly would have been roused almost immediately.

It must, of course, also be remembered that the Roman soldiers were far too well trained to sleep while on guard duty. They could not have conquered so much of the then-known world if they had been so careless. Besides, the penalty for such a neglect of duty is death. When, as we read in Acts 12, an angel delivered Peter from prison, Herod commanded that the keepers should be put to death, even though they were not to blame for his escape.

The soldiers must have voiced their objection to the scheme of the elders, knowing that their lives would be forfeited if Pilate ever heard them admit that they slept while supposedly standing guard. So the chief priests assured them that *if this comes to the governor's ears* (for investigation), *we will appease him and make you secure.*"

They certainly knew how to persuade Pilate. <sup>15</sup> *So [the guards] took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.* But only the most ignorant ones among them believed this story.

Witnesses by the hundreds saw the risen Lord. We learn from 1 Corinthians 15:6 that Jesus *was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.* They talked with Him and ate with Him and observed Him by the hour. It is utterly ridiculous to assume that they all were mistaken. Nor can we assume that they entered into a gigantic swindle to hoodwink the public. They would have made conflicting statements in the course of time.

The entire ninth chapter of John is devoted to an account of the healing of a blind man, and of the efforts made, first by his neighbours and acquaintances, and then by the Pharisees, to discredit him and to make him change his story.

They certainly worked much harder on the witnesses who testified to Jesus' resurrection. We read in Acts 4:1-3, <sup>1</sup> *Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, <sup>2</sup> being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. <sup>3</sup> And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.*

But, and this makes the fact of the resurrection of Christ even more certain, bribes and threats and even the killing of Stephen,<sup>6</sup> did not shake the testimony of those who saw the risen Redeemer.

Those timid men and women became bold as lions because they knew from personal observation that the Lord's promise, *"On the third day I will rise again,"* had come true.

In his great sermon on the day of Pentecost Peter said,<sup>32</sup> *"This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses."*<sup>7</sup> To the multitude which had congregated after he healed the lame man, Peter said, You *"killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses."*<sup>8</sup> Yes, *"with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."*<sup>9</sup> How can we account for this amazing change, this bold testimony on the part of the Apostles, unless the Easter message is true?

All fair-minded and intelligent people must conclude, after a study of the evidence presented in the Bible, that the facts say, *"Christ is Risen."* And our faith echoes, *"He is risen indeed!"*

## 2. Our Faith Echoes, "He Is Risen Indeed!"

It is a great comfort to know that our Saviour's resurrection can be established as a fact. It gives us assurance when we must face those who assail this cornerstone of our Christian religion. We can say to them without fear of successful contradiction, as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:20, <sup>20</sup> *But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

But a mere knowledge of the facts and details of the Easter miracle is not enough. Caiaphas knew the facts. The Pharisees were acquainted with the details. But they hardened their hearts and persecuted the followers of Christ. It is not very difficult for a well-informed Christian to silence a scoffer by confronting him with the facts. But a man convinced against his will is still of the same opinion.

Only a true, believing Christian can get real joy and happiness out of the Easter message. Our faith must echo, *"He is risen indeed!"*<sup>10</sup> before we can say <sup>3</sup> *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to*

*His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”<sup>11</sup>*

The guards at the tomb were terrified at the appearance of the angel. He did nothing to relieve their fear and spoke no word of comfort to them. They were heathen men, without love for Christ or faith in Him. To them the Easter miracle was the most harrowing experience of their entire lives.

But it was different with the women who set out early on Easter morning to go to Joseph’s garden. It was not idle curiosity which prompted them to “see the tomb.” They had come in love, to complete the embalming of our Saviour’s body. It did not occur to them that He would keep His promise to rise from the dead on the third day.

Their faith was at a low ebb. The challenge of the Cross had been too much for them. Some of them had seen Him die. They had seen the gaping wound made by the Roman spear. Their reason and common sense told them that it was not possible for that lacerated, disjointed,<sup>12</sup> pierced body to be restored to life once more. Temporarily their reason eclipsed their faith.

But only temporarily. Their faith had been dormant but not dead. The reed was bruised but not broken; their lamp of faith was smoking, but it had not gone out. Hence, the angel spoke to them in a kind tone. **“Do not be afraid,”** he said. It is as though he would say, *The guards have reason to be afraid. They have a guilty conscience. In their present condition they have no hope of forgiveness. But you must not be afraid. For you and all believers, past, present, and future, this is the most glorious day in history.*

Why? Paul tells us why in a brief clear statement which most of you memorised as children. Romans 4:25, Christ ***was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.*** By our offences, sins, trespasses, we came in conflict with the Law. We could say nothing in our own defence. Our conscience declared us guilty. God’s judgment was only a formality. We knew in advance from His Holy Word just what sentence would be pronounced on us: Eternal damnation. That would have been our fate had we been sentenced for our offences. No human being could save us from this dreadful doom.

However, we believers do not despair. Lent and Easter teach the glorious truth: Christ was delivered for our offences. As our true Passover Lamb He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. Last Friday we heard how, by this one sacrifice, He forever atoned for all the sins of all the people who ever have lived and ever will live. ***“The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”***<sup>13</sup> ***9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.***<sup>14</sup>

The proof that Jesus rendered complete satisfaction for our sins is supplied by His resurrection from the dead. ***“He was raised again for our justification.”*** Millions have rejoiced over this Easter message. Their faith echoed the truth, ***“He is risen indeed.”*** Because He lives, I shall live also!

The hymnist writes,<sup>15</sup>

I know that my Redeemer lives;  
What comfort this sweet sentence, gives!  
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;  
He lives, my ever-living head.

True faith is a lively, active faith. It manifests itself in deeds of kindness and love. Its supreme joy is to share the assurance of eternal life with others.

After the women had seen the place where the Lord lay, in order to convince themselves that He was no longer among the dead, they literally obeyed the injunction of the angel to ***“go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him.”***<sup>8</sup> ***8 So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.***

Scarcely had they started on this errand, when they met the risen Saviour in person. It is not possible for us to describe their feelings. Filled with emotion, they uttered not a word but sank on their knees and worshiped Him.

With what joy and happiness, with what utter conviction they must have proclaimed the Easter Gospel, ***“He is risen indeed.”*** It is also our highest obligation as well as our highest privilege to tell this story to those with whom we come in contact. God had only one Son, and He made Him a missionary. As



God's children by adoption we must walk in His steps, obey His order to preach the Gospel to every creature.

It is the least we can do to show our love and appreciation for Jesus Christ who has done so much for us, who has promised that you and I should live under Him in His Kingdom of Glory and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true. Fact and faith triumphantly say, "Jesus rose on Easter Day!" Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Job 14:10, 12, 14

<sup>2</sup> Job 19:25

<sup>3</sup> Mark 15:46

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 27:63-64

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 28:2-6

<sup>6</sup> Acts 7

<sup>7</sup> Acts 2:32

<sup>8</sup> Acts 3:15

<sup>9</sup> Acts 4:33

<sup>10</sup> Luke 24:34

<sup>11</sup> 1 Peter 1:3

<sup>12</sup> Psalm 22:14

<sup>13</sup> 2 Peter 3:9

<sup>14</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

<sup>15</sup> Hymn 103