

Ministry of Grace Church

Easter 2024

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was very perplexed at this statement, and was pondering what kind of greeting this was. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. (Luke 1:26-31)

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people. (Luke 2:8-10)

So, why am I quoting Christmas passages at the beginning of an Easter message? It's because Christmas and Easter have so many things in common. Well, let's see - they both are centered on Jesus, and they are both foundational to the Christian faith. Easter and Christmas are the only two days of the year that some Christians go to church. They are also two events in the Bible that were announced to mankind by angels. You know, those cute, winged creatures that grace the front of a lot of Christmas cards?

Let's talk about angels for a minute. The Greek word is *aggelos* (angelos). Its most basic meaning is "a messenger." The primary responsibility of angels is to deliver God's message to mankind. As I just quoted, while Mary was still a virgin, an angel told her that she would give birth to a son. And, at the birth of Jesus, the shepherds were visited by an angel who delivered a very special message. And what was common between these two messages delivered by these cute little guys? "Fear not." Why? Because it is a fearful thing to stand in the presence of angelic beings. Mary was afraid! The shepherds were afraid! These were not some cute little cherubim like we see depicted on greeting cards. These were holy, heavenly angels radiating the glory of God! They appeared to the shepherds for the purpose of delivering the second most important and joyous news ever delivered to man. The Messiah, The Savior, Emmanuel is born. God has taken on human form. Hallelujah! Notice that I said that was the second most important and joyous news ever delivered to man. So, what could possibly be more important and joyous than that? Hang on to that question. We'll get back to it in a minute or two.

First, however, we need to determine what's so significant about God taking on human form? You see, He actually did more than just take on human form. He became a man, a real living, breathing,

human being. But, when he became a human being, He did not cease being God. He was both, and He still is today. He is completely God and He is completely man. By becoming a human being, by becoming a man, God experienced all the temptations, feelings, and emotions of being human, including physical and emotional pain. We are told that on at least two occasions Jesus even cried. In **John 11:35** (celebrated as the shortest verse in the Bible) upon seeing Mary crying over the death of her brother, Lazarus, we are told that **Jesus wept**. This is from the Greek verb *dakruō*, which means “to shed a tear.” Later, in **Luke 19:41**, as Jesus was making His triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem, we are told, “**as He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He cried over it.**” Most translations say, “... **He wept over it.**” But - this is an entirely different Greek word than the one in **Luke 19:41**. It is the verb *kliō*. According to The Complete Word Study Dictionary, *kliō* means,

“to weep, to sob, to wail, implying not only the shedding of tears, but also every external expression of grief.”

The next time you're so sad that you cry, whether you silently shed a tear or cry uncontrollably with tears and sobbing, remember Jesus experienced the same feeling of sorrow and grief! But wait! He's God. He's omniscient; He knows everything, including what it's like to have to walk in your shoes or mine. He didn't need to become a man just to understand what it's like to be a man. So, I ask again, “What's so significant about God becoming a human being?” He did it so that we would know that He understands what we go through on a daily basis. He did it for us! In Hebrews we are told,

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things like we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Because Jesus became a human being, He can sympathize with everything that we go through.

OK. So, the first great miracle of salvation is that God came to earth and lived like we have to live, yet without ever sinning. But that wasn't His main purpose for becoming a man. His main purpose for becoming a man was so that He could die. If you have read through the book of Romans, then you know that the penalty for sin is death. But Jesus didn't sin, so Jesus didn't have to die. And, because He lived a perfect life, His death was an acceptable payment for all the sins of Adam's family. Our sin debt has been paid and we don't have to be afraid.

A few minutes ago, I said that the announcement of Jesus' birth was the second most important and joyous news ever delivered to man. So, what could possibly be more important and joyous than that? It's this; Jesus died the slow, excruciatingly painful death of crucifixion. Well, actually, if we stop there, it's perhaps the saddest, most heartbreaking news ever delivered to mankind. Just ask His disciples how they felt on Friday night and all-day Saturday, and even Sunday morning.

Let's walk beside Mary Magdalene and the other Mary as they went out to the tomb just before sunrise on Sunday morning:

Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards quaked from fear of him and became like dead men. And the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. “He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. (Matthew 28:1-6)

Did you notice what those brave Roman soldiers did when they saw an angel? They trembled and became like dead men. The soldiers weren't just afraid. No, they were terrified! But did you notice the first words out of the mouth of the angel when he spoke to Mary? “Do not be afraid!” That's the same thing that Gabriel told Mary and it's the same thing that the angel told the shepherds! Why would Mary be afraid? Perhaps because the angel had the appearance of lightning and his clothing was white as snow. That might frighten anybody. It certainly terrified the soldiers. But I think it was a lot more than that. For the past three years Mary and Jesus' other disciples had walked with Him and talked with Him. They had seen Him perform many miracles. Mary had even experienced His casting seven demons out of her that had been tormenting her for years. They all knew He was someone very special. Several of them had even confessed that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. And – even though He told them several times that he was going to be betrayed and killed, they were still horrified when He was nailed to a cross and died. The Christ, the Messiah, the One who was going to save Israel, was now dead - and buried! What could be more tragic than that?! They were all afraid. With Jesus out of the way, they might be next!

I just said that the announcement of Jesus' birth was the second most important and joyous news ever delivered to man. I also said that an even more important and joyous piece of news was that Jesus died the slow, excruciatingly painful death of crucifixion? Well, I didn't finish that thought. Because the single most important piece of news ever delivered to man is this: Jesus died the slow, excruciatingly painful death of crucifixion to pay for your sins and mine – AND – He rose from the dead! He came back to life. He's alive! He is risen! He is risen! He - is - risen! Halleluia!

Let me remind you of the power of the expression, He is risen. In Greek as in English, there is a verb tense called the perfect tense. Remember, “perfect” does not mean that it is without flaw, it means it is completed. So, in English, the perfect tense indicates an action that was completed in the past. But the Greek language takes it one step further. In Greek, the perfect tense focuses, not on the past completed action, but on the ongoing effect. Yes, Jesus rose from the dead. That's the past action. But, because of it, there is forever an ongoing effect. He is risen, now and forever!

Without the resurrection Christianity is dead. It's no more than a set of religious exercises and is as empty as the Pharisees' religious practices. Without the resurrection, our faith is as empty as so many religious exercises and works performed by so-called Christians today. The birth of Jesus, when God became man, was certainly an important event and part of what makes Christianity different than every other religion. It is the only religion in which God reaches out to man. But if

it stopped there, it would be a dead religion. Because of the resurrection, however, we have a living faith.

So, what does the resurrection mean to us?

1) **It proves that Jesus is the Son of God** – And, because He gave His life, He was able to take it back again. In John’s gospel account it says:

“For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one takes it away from Me, but from Myself, I lay it down. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. ... (John 10:17-18)

On the cross, after Jesus had received the sour wine vinegar, he said, “**It is finished,**” and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. Jesus’ life was not taken from Him; He gave it up as a sacrifice for you and me. Because of that, as we just read from John’s gospel account, Jesus was able to take up His life again. That is proof that He was more than just a man. He is the Son of God.

2) **It verifies the truth of Scripture** – Jesus had taught His disciples on at least 4 occasions that He would be killed and that He would rise again. They did not believe or even understand what He was saying. However, this should not have been new information to the disciples because the Old Testament also taught His resurrection.

... Yahweh says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand Until I put Your enemies as a footstool for Your feet.” (Psalms 110:1)

For You will not forsake my soul to Sheol; You will not give Your Holy One over to see corruption. (Psalms 16:10)

If Jesus had not come out of the tomb, then the Scriptures would not be believable. But, because He did rise from the dead, we know that the Scriptures are completely believable. This isn’t the only proof of the truth of the Scriptures either. Remember the triumphal entry and the Passover? Remember how many prophecies were fulfilled and how Jesus perfectly fulfilled the requirements of the Passover Lamb?

3) **It assures our own future resurrection** – According to the Apostle Paul, it is because we believe in the resurrection that we will be raised ourselves.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught

up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

The entirety of the Christian faith is founded on the resurrection of Jesus. It is our hope and assurance that we will be raised too. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we can believe all His promises including the fact that we will be raised from the dead. And, not only that, Jesus is coming back to take us home with Him, whether we are alive at the time or are sleeping in Christ. We have a future, and it is a living future.

4) **It proves there will be a future judgment** – Jesus will be the judge of all mankind:

because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He determined, having furnished proof to all by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31)

When we see those who are evil prospering in what they do, even though they may mock our faith and call us fools, we can wait patiently as Psalms 37 says:

Be still in Yahweh and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out schemes of wickedness. (Psalms 37:7)

We can wait patiently and endure their reproach because the resurrection assures us that Jesus will judge everyone in righteousness. The non-believers and evil ones will pay for their arrogance and lack of faith. We, on the other hand, will be seen by the Great Judge as having the righteousness of Christ and will be rewarded for our faithful actions.

5) **It gives us the power to live the Christian life** – Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we have assurance of a new life.

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

We cannot live for God in our own strength. It is by His resurrection power working in and through us that we can do His will and glorify His name. The resurrection promises us that we can walk in newness of life. This does not just mean that we are changed when we believe. It also assures us that if our Christian walk has been selfish and separate from God, we can change and walk in newness of life, because of His resurrection.

6) **It gives us hope for now and the future** – Not only do we have an assurance of our own resurrection, we are given assurance that we will be resurrected to a glorious future.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, having

been kept in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

So what is an inheritance? An inheritance is **a possession, condition, or trait received from past generations**. In most instances, an inheritance is received upon the death of the relative. Our heavenly inheritance, however, will be received from our Heavenly Father because Jesus died and came back to life. Many of us received a little from our parents when they died, some may have even inherited some debt. Our heavenly inheritance will be different.

First of all, we will receive our inheritance from our Father the King. And, not just any king, but the King of Kings, the King of the universe. And – our inheritance will be imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. It will be eternal – and – we don't have to be afraid!

So What?

Easter Sunday is the most joyous day of the entire year for Christians. He is risen! This is both a shout of victory and a battle cry. It's a shout of victory because "It is finished." It's a battle cry because tomorrow is Monday and we have to go back to work or just go back to our everyday living. We have to go back to the toil, the heartbreak, and the troubles of our everyday lives. Can the resurrection change us so that all of our tomorrows are different? Can it change our lives so that we no longer have to be afraid? Yes, it can! We can face tomorrow because He is risen.

Let's take a look at a couple of disciples who had their lives significantly impacted by the resurrection. I'm referring to the two disciples who were on the way to the village of Emmaus on the day of Jesus' resurrection. Luke's gospel account tells us this:

And behold, two of them were going that same day to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty stadia from Jerusalem. And they were conversing with each other about all these things which had happened. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus Himself approached and was going with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. (Luke 24:13-16)

At a normal walking pace, it would have taken these two disciples about 2 hours to walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. As they went, they talked about what had been happening over the past few days. At some point, another person joined them, someone they didn't recognize. He asked them what they were talking about.

And He said to them, "What are these words that you are discussing with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. And one of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" (Luke 24:17-18)

When Jesus asked what they were talking about, the two disciples stopped and said, "What? Are you kidding me? Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have been going on here these past few days?" (my paraphrase)

And He said to them, “What things?” And they said to Him, “The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a mighty prophet in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. “But also some women among us astounded us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and not finding His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. “Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also said, but Him they did not see.” (Luke 24:19-24)

The two disciples told Him about the prophet Jesus who had been unjustly condemned and crucified. They had hoped that Jesus was going to deliver Israel. Notice that these two disciples had the basics down, but they didn't know the specifics. They still thought that Jesus was a prophet. They didn't really believe He was the Messiah. They didn't really know the Scriptures very well. Also notice that they didn't yet believe in His resurrection. They had heard that the tomb was empty and that angels had been seen, but the resurrection? That was just too much of a stretch for them to believe. So, this stranger explained some things to them.

And He said to them, “O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He interpreted to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:25-27)

As I said, the disciples' problem was that they didn't really know the Scriptures very well. So, being a consummate teacher, Jesus proceeded to explain all the prophecies that talked about the Messiah, especially the ones that talked about His suffering and His glory.

And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. But they urged Him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is now nearly over.” So He went in to stay with them. (Luke 24:28-29)

We often read this passage and assume that it only took Jesus a few minutes to explain all the prophecies about the Messiah. However, as I said earlier, it was about a two hour walk to Emmaus. We have to assume that Jesus spoke to them for at least an hour, perhaps an hour and a half. That's a lot of prophetic Scripture passages to talk about and explain.

Then, as they approached Emmaus it appeared that Jesus was walking further but they asked Him to come and stay the night with them. So, they went in together and sat down to eat dinner.

And it happened that when He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and after breaking it, He was giving it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him. And He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was opening the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:30-32)

As they were about to eat, Jesus gave thanks for the bread, He broke it, and He handed each of them some of the bread. I have to stop here and ask you, “What was it that caused them to suddenly recognize that it was Jesus eating with them?” Was it the way he said the blessing? Surely, they had been with Jesus and had heard Him bless the food before a meal many times before. Or was it the way he lifted up the bread as He broke it? I’m pretty sure they had seen Him do that on more than one occasion. Or was it, perhaps, the nail holes that were visible in His hands as He handed the bread to them? I have to think it was His wounds.

These two disciples were suddenly brought face-to-face, or should I say, face to fact, with the reality that not only did Jesus die on the cross, but He has risen again from the grave! Until they saw the holes in His hands, it was just a story, an emotional and tragic one, but just a story. Once their eyes were opened to the truth, they were filled with joy and couldn’t wait to get together with the other disciples to recount the gospel truth. They returned the seven miles back to Jerusalem, in the dark, without fear.

Now What?

Consider this. The disciples on the road to Emmaus were discouraged because Jesus had not done what they had wanted Him to do. They were afraid because their future was uncertain. The Scribes and Pharisees hated Jesus because He hadn’t done what they had wanted Him to do. They were now afraid because He might still be around. His closest disciples were sad, and discouraged because Jesus hadn’t done what they had wanted Him to do. They were afraid because they didn’t know what to make of the stories about His resurrection.

Are you sad, discouraged, or even afraid because your future is uncertain, and God has not answered your prayers the way you wanted Him to? Well, I have an angelic message for you. It was an angel who announced Mary’s coming motherhood. It was an angel that announced the birth of Jesus, and it was an angel who announced that he was no longer in the tomb. The primary angelic message for all of us today is simply this: “**Do not be afraid!**” No matter what is going on in your life, there is really no reason to be discouraged, depressed, or afraid. Why?

Because it’s no longer Friday!

Sunday is here!

– And –

He is risen!