

EASTER: IN FAITH WE CELEBRATE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

The Resurrection of Our Lord

Easter Day

April 8, 2007

Isaiah 65:17-25 or Acts 10:34-43

Psalm 118:1,2, 14-24

1 Corinthians 15:19-26

Luke 24:1-12 or John 20:1-18

He is Risen! Alleluia!

Lent, with its forty days of prayerful introspection and repentance, now gives way to triumph as Christians greet a gloriously resurrected Savior.

The resurrection story in Luke's Gospel, as experienced by the women, is a short one—a mere twelve verses. But deeply embedded within those lines lies the heart of the Christian faith. These faithful women who had tearfully witnessed the crucifixion, waited around to see how Jesus' body was being placed in the tomb. According to custom, they had prepared spices to anoint his body, but had to refrain from doing so on the Sabbath (Luke 23:55, 56).

On Sunday morning, the day after their Sabbath, they rose early expecting to complete the task at hand. Not only was the great stone that had sealed the tomb rolled away, but upon examining the tomb, Jesus' body was nowhere in sight! Was this an inexplicable mystery? A cruel hoax? Where was their Lord?

The Scripture says that "suddenly," as they began to look and to ponder, they were addressed by "two men in shining white clothes" (Luke 24:4b, *CEV*). Fear gripped their hearts, but the men brought words of comfort. "Why are you looking in the place of the dead for someone who is alive? Jesus isn't here! He has been raised from death" (Luke 24:5,6, *CEV*).

Alive? Alive!

Would *you* have believed it? Like the women, we are sometimes interrupted "suddenly" in the midst of everyday tasks to take note of a message from God. We are called to suspend our disbelief of the impossible and trust God who makes *all* things possible. The women were told to recall Jesus' words that predicted his resurrection. "The Son of Man will be handed over to sinners who will nail him to a cross. But three days later he will rise to life" (Luke 24:7, *CEV*). We are told that these words jogged the women's memory ...and it all came rushing back.

How could they have forgotten so marvelous a promise? Why had they not taken him at his word? We, too, are guilty of forgetting God's promises. Overwhelmed by the difficulties in our lives, we focus on the moment and forget our salvation history with God: the obstacles he helped us overcome, the blessings of daily provision, the assurance of ever-present protection, and peace that cannot be explained.

Yet, it is precisely because of our shortcomings that we need the resurrection. The apostle Paul says, "if Christ wasn't raised to life, our message is worthless, and so is your faith" (1 Corinthians 15:14, *CEV*). We need the resurrection because it reminds us that evil is defeated and we are free from the penalty of sin. Jesus' resurrection validates our faith and authenticates our Christian convictions. The resurrection calls us to remember the passion of Christ, the awesome price that Jesus paid for rescuing us from sin, and it reminds us of God's undeserved kindness toward us. It is Christ's death-shattering resurrection that causes us to take hold of the hope that Job was assured of when he said: "I know that my Savior lives, and at the end he will stand on this earth" (Job 19:25, *CEV*).

All of us can have this hope because of the message the women received, "Jesus isn't here! He has been raised from death." Yes, he is risen, indeed. Alleluia!

This week's Reflection was prepared by Dorette Saunders, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Senior Research Editor in the Education Unit of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Angola – With thanks to God for opportunities to distribute the Scriptures in new areas, and with prayers for the Portion, *Good News for Angolan Mothers*, and for plans to buy land on which to build a Bible House; **Zambia** – With thanks to God that the HIV/AIDS awareness program is taking off, with thanks to God for 40 years of Bible Society work in Zambia, and with prayers for new translation projects and the launch of the Mambwe-Lungu New Testament; **Malawi** – With thanks to God for the *Operation Berea* program through which communities are encouraged to engage with God's Word, and for the partnership with World Vision and Life Ministry (Campus Crusade) to develop *Faith Comes By Hearing* listening groups, and with prayers for four translation projects and that the newly launched Sena Bible and Tumbuka audio New Testament will have a lasting impact on people's lives.

Activity Corner: "Fifty Days of Easter" Devotional

Supplies needed: Bible; white construction paper; cross pattern (approximately 1-1/2" x 3"); pens or pencils; scissors; hole puncher; string.

To mark the 50 days of Easter, cut out a cross a day and link them with string.

Read a verse a day from 1 Corinthians 15, where the apostle Paul describes Christ's victory over the power of death and the new life we all share in Christ. Since there are 58

verses, combine the following: Day 1 - verses 1 & 2; Day 3 - verses 4 & 5; Day 4 - verses 6 & 7; Day 10 - verses 13 & 14; Day 21 - verses 25 & 26; Day 25 - verses 30 & 31; Day 48 - verses 54 & 55; Day 49 - verses 56 & 57. Select a key word from each day's reading, and write that word on the cross for the day. Incorporate that word into a closing prayer. Display the growing chain throughout the Easter season where you gather for family devotions. At the end of the 50 days of the Easter season, you will have a chain of crosses as a reminder of Christ's victory over sin and death and God's gift of eternal life.

"Hands On" Easter Lily Bouquet

Supplies needed: Bible; 8-1/2" x 11" white construction paper; pipe cleaners; pencils; scissors; scotch tape.

Invite everyone to trace their hands on white construction paper (paper may be folded in half so that two hands can be made simultaneously). Cut out the hands and, using a pencil, curl the fingers. Roll the hands so that the curled fingers face outward, insert a pipe cleaner down the center of the lily, and tape the bottom of the flower. Place the lilies in a vase and use as an Easter centerpiece at meals or display them on a window ledge. Read together Song of Songs 2:11-12 and celebrate the beauty of spring!