

## Easter Day

### Principal Service readings

Acts 10.34-43	Peter's address in the house of Cornelius
or Jeremiah 3.1-6	The conversion
Psalm 118.1-2,14-24 [or 118.14-24]	The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone
Colossians 3.1-4	Life-giving union with the glorified Christ
or Acts 10.34-43	Peter's address in the house of Cornelius
John 20.1-18	The empty tomb; the appearance of Mary Magdalene
or Matthew 28.1-10	The empty tomb

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *The empty tomb and the appearance of Mary Magdalene*

<sup>1</sup>Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup>So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' <sup>3</sup>Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. <sup>4</sup>The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup>He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup>Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup>and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup>Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup>for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup>Then the disciples returned to their homes.

<sup>11</sup>But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup>and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus

had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup>They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' <sup>14</sup>When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' which means Teacher. <sup>17</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."<sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

John 20.1-18 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

## Comments and Questions

Mary Magdalene was first to the tomb on that first day of the week, the first Easter morning. It must have been very early in the morning for it was still dark (20.1). Her initial thought was not that Jesus had been raised from the dead, but that someone had stolen the body – she says 'they', but is not more specific. In her distress, she immediately goes to tell Simon Peter and 'the other disciple' (20.2). This 'other disciple' is never named in John's gospel, and there is no mention of him in any other gospel, yet he is portrayed as the model disciple, and we are told that he is the disciple whom Jesus loved. The two disciples go into the tomb and find folded linen grave cloths but no body. Here we are told that the Beloved Disciple 'saw and believed' (20.8), something that was even beyond Peter. The gospel passage tells us that until that moment the disciples had not understood that Jesus must rise from the dead. Despite this, the Beloved Disciple did believe. This gives us hope for those who did not travel with Jesus – people today. If we feel we have a lack of understanding and a lack of experience, we can be sure that the early disciples felt the same after the resurrection of Jesus.

As Peter and the Beloved Disciple return home, Mary lingers. She is too upset to go away. Her standing outside the tomb in tears shows her continuing inability to understand what might have happened. As she

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<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

stoops to peer into the tomb she sees, not the folded grave cloths but two angels. When they ask: 'Woman, why are you weeping?', she gives the same answer as before: 'they' have taken away the body of Jesus. She still does not understand. She turns to see Jesus standing in front of her but does not recognise him, showing how unbelieving she is. Jesus repeats the question of the angels, then adds: 'Whom do you seek?' (20.15). Ironically, it is the one she seeks who is asking her the question. With deepening irony her earlier 'they' becomes 'you', and Jesus is asked where he has put the body. She continues to think the body has been taken away. Jesus then calls Mary by her name, 'Miriam'. She turns again, recognises him, and knows him, addressing him with the Aramaic name used throughout Jesus' ministry, 'Rabbouni' (my master). We can recognise that she is making a confession of faith. She doesn't understand completely, but she is acquiring faith. As well as declaring her faith she wants to hold on to Jesus, but Jesus forbids her and says why all clinging should cease – because he is moving on. It is not possible to go back to the past. He gives her a task: 'go to my brothers', he says. They are no longer disciples but brothers. Mary does exactly what he asks of her, she 'went and said to the disciples' that she has seen the Lord and she told them what he had said to her. So, her faith develops to the point where she becomes the first messenger of the resurrection. 'I have seen the Lord' is at the heart of the Christian story.

## **Quotations**

### **1**

My former bishop Allan BJORBERG once said that the greatest spiritual practice isn't yoga or praying the hours or living in intentional poverty, although these are all beautiful in their own way. The greatest spiritual practice is just showing up. And Mary Magdalene is the patron saint of just showing up. Showing up, to me, means being present to what is real, what is actually happening. Mary Magdalene didn't necessarily know what to say or what to do or even what to think when she encountered the risen Jesus. But none of that was nearly as important as the fact that she was present and attentive to him.

*Pastrix: the cranky, beautiful faith of a sinner and saint / Nadia Bolz-Weber. 2013*

## 2

Every Holy Saturday, the Church waits as it were beside the tomb, meditating on Christ's death while awaiting the announcement of his resurrection. Like John, we can take Mary into our homes and ponder with her the last words of Christ. Like her, we can rest in a place between anguish and joy, waiting in quiet hope. We can pray the Divine Office, which parts the veil to show us Christ defeating death and releasing sinners from captivity. The King is not dead; he rests from his work. A new day will come. His Cross is not defeat; it is victory!

*Walk in her sandals: experiencing Christ's passion through the eyes of women*  
/ Sarah Christmyer. 2016

## 3

The resurrection completes the inauguration of God's kingdom ... It is the decisive event demonstrating that God's kingdom really has been launched on earth as it is in heaven.

The message of Easter is that God's new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and that you're now invited to belong to it.

N. T. Wright. 1948–

### **Related topics**

*For further study:*

Paschal mystery; resurrection; Eucharist; baptism; confirmation;  
symbols: bread, water, oil; Christian witness

### **Closing Prayer**

God of undying life,  
by your mighty hand  
you raised up Jesus from the grave  
and appointed him judge of the living and the dead.

Bestow upon those baptized into his death  
the power flowing from his resurrection,  
that we may proclaim near and far  
the pardon and peace you give us.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, first-born from the dead,  
who lives with you now and always in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers · Easter morning<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for Years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.