

Christ the Victor

Prayer: O God of life, with Paul I can say, "Now Christ is risen from the dead." One beautiful Easter song asks, "Did the earth rejoice to feel you again?" I know that my heart rejoices because of the fact that you are alive. I praise you for the new life you've given me by being my Savior. Hallelujah! Amen.

Postscript: In the Garden

MONDAY John 20:11-16

"Mary stood outside the tomb crying." Sooner or later, we all meet times so painful, losses so devastating, that all we can do in the face of them is weep. However, Mary was not forsaken as she wept—and neither are we. Two angelic heralds, and then Jesus himself, told Mary she did not need to weep any more. Hope lived—because Jesus lived!

- John 18:1 says Jesus went to "a garden." Many scholars believe John was comparing Jesus to Adam and Eve (Genesis 2-3), who chose their will over God's in a garden. Mary first thought Jesus was "the gardener." In what ways did the risen Jesus begin restoring this world as God's "garden"? How has his restoring work shaped your life?
- John also says Mary saw two angels, one each at the head and foot of where Jesus had been. This seems to refer to Exodus 25:19, 22, the place where God's presence dwelt between two sculpted angels on the Ark of the Covenant. How did Jesus' death and resurrection make real the divine mercy that the Ark symbolized for Israel?

Walking to Emmaus

TUESDAY Luke 24:1-35

Note the honest, authentic way the gospels report Jesus' resurrection. Luke says that the women's testimony seemed "like nonsense" to the disciples. Luke alone adds the story of the two men walking to Emmaus. They were locked in despair, and they walked and talked with Jesus for seven miles before they finally recognized him.

- "Two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning" asked: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!" (verses 5-6) Repeat those words as you look at a photo of one site where Jesus may have been buried: (link to photo of empty tomb) How does the fact that "he is not [in the tomb]" affect your life?
- Jesus' resurrection changed something about his physical being. He would vanish, or appear in locked rooms. At times his closest friends did not recognize him. (See 1 Corinthians 15:35-54 for what Paul said about "the resurrection body.") What helps you stay alert to Jesus' presence in your life? What things make that hard for you?

Luke's story goes on

WEDNESDAY Luke 24:36-53, Acts 1:1-14

Luke wanted Theophilus (and all other readers) to know Jesus' story didn't end in Jerusalem with the cross and the resurrection. The risen Jesus told his followers that the saving work he had begun would go on through the rest of history and eternity. So from the gospel of Luke, the story continued directly into "volume 2," the book of Acts.

- Was it easier for "naive" first century people to believe Jesus rose again? People then, as now, knew that those who die don't come back to life (Luke 24:38), yet believed Jesus did just that. What doubts, if any, disturb your faith in the resurrection? How can the Bible's candor about the disciples' doubts help you have faith?

- Jesus told his disciples, "...wait for the gift my Father promised...in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:4-5) Americans tend to be driven and impatient. How would you react if Jesus told you not to try something without God's power? What spiritual risks does "going it alone" pose for a Christ-follower?

"Go and make disciples"

THURSDAY Matthew 28:1-20

Like the other gospels, Matthew says women were the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection (hardly a fact anyone would invent in that male-dominated culture). He notes the plot to spread a false account of what happened to Jesus' body. He ends with a grand summary of Jesus' mission for, and promise to, all of his followers (the "Great Commission").

- Christ the victor, risen from the dead, began his final commission with the words, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). What, or whom, did Jesus defeat through the cross and resurrection? What does his victory over evil, suffering and death mean in your daily life?
- Matthew's description of the women's reaction—"afraid yet filled with joy"—carries a ring of truth. It's often the way we feel when something amazing happens that will bring about huge changes in our life. What is there about having God at work in your life that might make you afraid? What fills you with the greatest joy?

"Written that you may believe"

FRIDAY John 20:19-31

Matthew noted in passing (Matthew 28:17) that some of the disciples doubted, even after the Resurrection. John gives a fuller account of Thomas' reluctance to accept the witness of others, and then of his joy when he met the risen Lord. Again and again, Jesus called his first followers to peace. He extends the same call to all who believe in him.

- You'll notice that the disciples hadn't gathered for a worship service. They were together "with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders." It's little wonder, then, that Jesus twice said, "Peace be with you." In what part(s) of your life do you most need the assurance of Jesus' peace? How can you live into that peace today?
- Thomas could have been a good Missourian. In effect, he said, "You'll have to show me." What do you learn about how Jesus deals with doubts from the fact that he didn't shun Thomas, or shut him out? What do you learn from Thomas' openness to being convinced about dealing positively with your doubts?

"Christ has indeed been raised"

SATURDAY 1 Corinthians 15:3-20

Paul answered some in Corinth who denied the Christian hope of resurrection. They probably reflected parts of Greek philosophy. We still hear arguments like theirs: "Dead men don't rise." "Miracles don't happen." Against such "common sense," Paul spoke of his meeting with the living Jesus, along with the support of over 500 eyewitnesses (verses 6-7). If Jesus' didn't really rise from the dead, he said, nothing about the Christian faith could stand.

- David Prior has written, "Take out the resurrection of Jesus, and there is nothing left on which to rest faith—only the decomposing corpse of an itinerant Jewish carpenter-turned-rabbi." Or, as Pastor Hamilton says of the resurrection, "I not only believe it, *I am counting on it.*" Do you trust the testimony of the eyewitnesses who risked their lives to preach that Jesus was truly alive? Can you stake your life, now and forever, on the truth of Easter, the truth of the resurrection?

Family Activity: Jesus is risen! Jesus is alive! Exult in this incredibly good news by designing a family creation of praise for God. Begin by taking a spring walk and noticing the buds on the trees, sunshine, and green grass. Listen to the birds sing and hear the wind blow through the trees. Taste fresh fruits and vegetables. Play in the dirt or pet an animal. Smell the flowers and the fresh, spring air. When you return home, read Psalm 106:1. Keeping in mind your experiences on your walk, create your own family prayer, song, collage, poem or litany of praise to God. Use your family creation each day as a celebration of God's ever-present faithfulness and love in your lives.