

Easter Sunday 20th April 2025

Easter Acclamation: Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Hymn StF 298 Christ the Lord is risen today!

Alleluia

All creation joins to say: *Alleluia!*

Raise your joys and triumphs high; *Alleluia!*

Sing, you heavens; let earth, reply: *Alleluia!*

Love's redeeming work is done, *Alleluia!*

Fought the fight, the battle won; *Alleluia!*

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal; *Alleluia!*

Christ has burst the gates of hell: *Alleluia!*

Lives again our glorious King; *Alleluia!*

Where, O death, is now your sting? *Alleluia!*

Once he died our souls to save; *Alleluia!*

Where's your victory, boasting grave? *Alleluia!*

Soar we now where Christ has led, *Alleluia!*

Following our exalted Head; *Alleluia!*

Made like him, like him we rise; *Alleluia!*

Ours the cross, the grave, the skies: *Alleluia!*

King of Glory! Soul of bliss! *Alleluia!*

Everlasting life is this, *Alleluia!*

You to know, your power to prove, *Alleluia!*

Thus to sing, and thus to love: *Alleluia!*

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Prayer Living and resurrected Christ. We thank you for this day of praise and celebration; a day of joy after sorrow, of life after death; a day to lift up our hearts and offer you praise! Today we remember all you have done for us, and for all the world; your great victory over death and sin, and your triumph over everything that keeps us from you and prevents us from living the life you want us to lead. Sovereign God, breathe new life into our hearts this day. Inspire us with renewed confidence and enthusiasm. Fill us with resurrection power, that we may meet and walk with you, this and every day. **Amen.**

Gracious God, we live the joy of Easter Sunday, but we may not have walked through Holy Week. We may not have been humbled by Jesus' hands washing our feet. We may not have shared bread and wine together at his last meal. We may not have known that

aloneness in the garden of Gethsemane, or the bewilderment of the disciples at his betrayal.

We may not have known the way of sorrow to Golgotha, the blood, sweat and tears of a crown of thorns and the weight of a cross that will bear our dying body. We confess, therefore, our failure to feel at one with Jesus in his dying as well as in his resurrection life. As we celebrate our risen Lord, we remember the man of sorrows who died for our sins, as we ask for forgiveness.

Lord in the warmth of your hands washing our feet, we are forgiven. In your willingness to drink the cup of suffering for us, we are forgiven. In the wide embrace of your arms upon the cross, we are forgiven. Risen Lord, in the empty tomb we know that death is defeated. We are forgiven. **Alleluia!**

Amen

Introduction

The Easter weekend is the most significant festival weekend of the Christian year coming after the 7 week period of Lent and the amazing events of Holy week. Palm Sunday praise, Maundy Thursday quiet reflection and communion, Good Friday walks of witness. The disciples thought their journey with Jesus had ended. We always come to this day knowing a different ending. Today we travel with one of the women followers of Jesus as she discovering life after death!

Hymn StF 293 All heaven declares

the glory of the risen Lord ;
 who can compare
 with the beauty of the Lord ?
 For ever he will be
 the Lamb upon the throne ;
 I gladly bow the knee,
 and worship him alone.

I will proclaim
 the glory of the risen Lord,
 who once was slain
 to reconcile us to God.
 For ever you will be
 the Lamb upon the throne ;
 I gladly bow the knee,
 and worship you alone.

Noël Richards (b.1955) and Tricia Richards

Reading John 20 : 1-18 The empty tomb

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped round Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb

¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?'

'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' ¹⁴ At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?'

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'

She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher').

¹⁷ Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' "

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her. (NIVUK)

Hymn 309 See what a morning

See, what a morning, gloriously bright,
with the dawning of hope in Jerusalem ;
folded the graveclothes, tomb filled with light,
as the angels announce Christ is risen !
See God's salvation plan,
wrought in love, borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,
fulfilled in Christ, the Man,
for he lives : Christ is risen from the dead !

See Mary weeping, 'Where is he laid ? '
as in sorrow she turns from the empty tomb ;
hears a voice speaking, calling her name ;
it's the Master, the Lord raised to life again !

The voice that spans the years,
speaking life, stirring hope, bringing peace to us,
will sound till he appears,
for he lives : Christ is risen from the dead !

One with the Father, Ancient of Days,
through the Spirit who clothes faith with certainty;
honour and blessing, glory and praise
to the King crowned with power and authority!
And we are raised with him,
death is dead, love has won, Christ has
conquered ;
and we shall reign with him,
for he lives : Christ is risen from the dead !

Stuart Townend and Keith Getty

Message

Introduction: Our reading from John 20 is one of the most powerful and intimate resurrection narratives in the New Testament. It presents not just the empty tomb, but the deeply personal encounter between the risen Christ and Mary Magdalene.

Luke introduces us to Mary Magdalene in Luke 8, where she is one of the women with financial means that supports Jesus and his band of disciples. Luke tells us that Jesus had driven out seven demons from her, so from a troubled background where she would have been ostracized, she discovers love and acceptance and commits herself to follow and support Jesus.

A Morning of Darkness and Surprise

It was early. Too early. John tells us it was “**still dark**” when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. Darkness covered the earth, but more than that, darkness covered her heart. She had watched the One she loved, the One who healed her, die a brutal death. She came not expecting resurrection—but to grieve, to mourn, to anoint a dead body.

But what she found shattered all expectations. **The stone was rolled away. The body was gone.** She ran, frightened and confused, to tell the disciples. Hope was nowhere in sight.

The Empty Tomb Doesn't Immediately Bring Faith (vv. 1–10)

Mary finds the tomb open and immediately thinks: *someone has taken Him*. She hurries to report to the disciples, the empty tomb. Peter and the beloved disciple run to see it for themselves. They see the linen cloths, the face cloth—everything neat and left behind. But it still doesn't click. Despite the fact that Jesus had told them about death and rising again. Peter and John return to the room where they were staying.

Even for those closest to Jesus, the empty tomb was not immediately **proof of resurrection**. It was mystery. It was confusion. Sometimes we, too, stare into the empty places of our lives and feel only absence—not victory. But God is patient with us. Faith doesn't always come in a flash. Sometimes it grows through tears, through questions, through sitting in the unknown.

Jesus Meets Us in Our Tears (vv. 11–15)

Mary stays at the tomb, weeping. And that's where Jesus finds her.

He doesn't appear with thunder or lightning. He doesn't preach a sermon or unfold Scripture. He simply shows up in her grief. He comes quietly, and she doesn't even recognize Him at first. Sometimes, we are so overcome with sorrow that we can't see what's right in front of us. But Jesus is near—even when we can't see Him clearly.

Jesus asks, *"Woman, why are you weeping?"* He enters her pain with compassion. He is not offended by our sadness. He is not distant from our heartbreak.

Everything Changes When He Calls Your Name (v. 16)

Then it happens.

"Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'"

And with that one word, **the fog lifts**. The darkness breaks. She turns, and in a moment of recognition, everything changes. He calls her by name.

This is the voice that cast out her demons. The voice that taught her. The voice she thought she'd never hear again.

When Jesus calls your name, it's not just about information—it's about relationship. He knows you. Personally. Deeply. Intimately.

He doesn't say, *"Behold, it is I, the risen Christ!"* No. He says, *"Mary."*

And to each of us, He speaks personally. *"John... Sarah... Michael... I see you."*

I can still vividly remember the time when I sensed Jesus speaking my name during a service on the theme of silence led by our chaplain.

From Mourning to Mission (vv. 17–18)

Jesus tells her, *"Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father."*

It's a gentle way of saying: "The relationship is not ending, but it is changing. You can't cling to the past—I'm leading you into something new."

And then He gives her a mission: *"Go to my brothers and tell them..."*

The first preacher of the resurrection is not Peter, not John—but **Mary Magdalene**. A woman. A formerly broken woman. A woman once silenced by society, now given the most powerful message in history: **"I have seen the Lord."**

She came to mourn a death. She left proclaiming life.

Conclusion: He Still Calls Names

This resurrection story is not just historical—it's personal.

Jesus didn't just rise for the world—He rose for **you**.

He calls us out of our grief. He meets us in our confusion.

He speaks softly, but powerfully. He calls our name.

And when we hear it, when we know He is alive, we can't stay silent.

Let this Easter story remind you:

You are known. You are loved. You are called.

And because He lives, **your story isn't over**.

Let us pray:

Risen Lord, in our moments of darkness, remind us that you are near. Speak our names. Break through our fear, our grief, our doubt. And like Mary, send us out with hearts full of resurrection joy. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Hymn StF 303 I know that my Redeemer lives

what joy the blest assurance gives !
 He lives, he lives, who once was dead ;
 he lives, my everlasting Head !

He lives, to bless me with his love ;
 he lives, to plead for me above ;
 he lives, my hungry soul to feed ;
 he lives, to help in time of need.

He lives, and grants me daily breath ;
 he lives, and I shall conquer death ;
 he lives, my mansion to prepare ;
 he lives, to lead me safely there.

He lives, all glory to his name ;
 he lives, my Saviour, still the same ;
 what joy the blest assurance gives,
 I know that my Redeemer lives !

Samuel Medley (1738–1799)

Prayers

Lord, there are times when our lives seem full of empty promises. Be with those this day who feel despair and bring them hope. Be with those who feel there is no hope and show them love

There are those whose lives are an empty void, fill their hearts with a sense of self-worth.

There are those who are waiting for you to fill that space. Help us to be a friend and an example of how full life can be when we let you into our lives.

Lord, we pray for those whose lives are obsessed by money, believing that it is the source of all happiness. We pray also for those who have no money, who have lost jobs, who struggle to make ends meet. We thank you for organisations like Christians against poverty who try and help people get out of debt.

We pray for those whose plate is empty. We think especially of the families and children caught up in conflicts around the world, who are literally starving. We pray that leaders of governments will not give empty promises and will work to bring peace and food to the hungry.

Lord, we pray for those whose lives are derelict and empty, for those who have no foundation in you and whose lives are crumbling. Give them strength to build themselves up and may we help to put roots and foundations down, and for the emptiness to be filled with your promises.

We pray for those whose lives are on thin ice, who follow the empty promise of drugs or alcohol, only to find their lives discarded, lost,

empty. We pray for all who are struggling with ill health and pain.....

We pray for those who seek the empty promise of cheap tricks or a quick fix. Lord your promise is free, it is no trick and is for ever. Help us to stick with you, to persevere, to be more aware of the abundance and expanse of your love for us all.

We pray for those whose relationships are empty, who have been hurt and who want to hide away in the dark. May they know the sincerity, the honesty of a relationship with you, where there are no empty promises.

We pray for those for whom there seems to be no end, who follow one empty promise after another. May they know joy and not sorrow, happiness and not despair, fun and not boredom.

We pray for those who are running on empty, we pray for our world and its use of resources. We so often hear of promises made, may they not be empty promises but promises made sincerely and with resolve to care for this planet and look for alternative ways to preserve the diversity of your creation.

Resurrected Lord, you lead the way out of our darkness. You fill our emptiness with your light and your love. You bring us out of night into day, and death into new life. In you the tomb is empty but our lives are full. The empty tomb promises hope, joy, peace and new life.

May we know that fullness of your Easter promise, that hope of life to come, that joy of knowing you, and that peace in your unconditional and saving grace. AMEN

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Hymn StF 313 Thine be the glory

risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won ;
angels in bright raiment
rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes
where thy body lay :

*Thine be the glory,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.*

Lo, Jesus meets us,
risen from the tomb ;
lovingly he greets us,

scatters fear and gloom ;
let the Church with gladness
hymns of triumph sing,
for her Lord now liveth,
death hath lost its sting :

No more we doubt thee,
glorious Prince of Life ;
life is naught without thee :
aid us in our strife ;
make us more than conquerors
through thy deathless love ;
bring us safe through Jordan
to thy home above :

Edmond Budry (1854–1932)

translated by Richard Birch Hoyle (1875–1939)

Blessing Alleluia! Go in joy and peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of the Risen Christ. Amen