

## 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 the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*

## Easter Day

### Principal Service readings

Acts 10.34-43 *or* Isaiah 65.17-25

Psalm 118 [1-2], 14-24

1 Corinthians 15.19-26 *or* Acts 10.34-43

John 20.1-18 *or* Luke 24.1-12

### 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 angels' message*

<sup>1</sup>On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women who had accompanied Jesus came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they went in they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup>While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. <sup>6</sup>Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup>that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' <sup>8</sup>Then they remembered Jesus' words, <sup>9</sup>and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup>Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup>But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup>But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Luke 24.1-12 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

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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.

## Comments and Questions

Luke began his gospel account with infancy narratives that were uniquely his own. Although the gospels have much more in common in their endings, Luke's ending still has some features unique to him. The opening of his resurrection story clearly draws on Mark 16.1-8, but the empty tomb is particularly prominent in Luke. The discovery of the opened tomb and the missing body not only opens Luke's narrative of the resurrection but is repeated when the women return to the other disciples, and is discussed again by the two witnesses on the road to Emmaus (24.22-23). Of course, an empty tomb does not of itself present a persuasive argument for the resurrection. What is significant is the experience of the risen Christ by his followers, as Luke would later say: Jesus' life and death all of you know, but that God raised him from the dead, 'of that we are all witnesses' (Acts 2.32; cf. 3.15).

Luke does not at first tell us who the women are who had accompanied Jesus to the tomb – their identity does not matter so much as the symbolism of them. They saw where the body was laid, but they did not immediately join in with burial preparations for they didn't have the necessary spices or ointments. The parallel account at John 19:39 indicates that Nicodemus brought "a roll of myrrh and aloes" (which weighed about 100 Roman pounds, or 33 kg/72 modern lbs) to be used in preparing Jesus's body for burial. They obtained the spices and then rested on the Sabbath. The following day they started early in the morning, such was their eagerness to show their devotion and love.

The brevity of the account of the stone being rolled back should be noted. Mark 16.3 has a discussion among the women about who would roll the stone away. Matthew 28.2 is still more dramatic, having an earthquake occur and an angel rolling back the stone. The important point, though, is that the body is not there, and that 'they went in' (24.2) to see for themselves. The women are puzzled. It should be noted that the empty tomb does not by itself create faith; it has to be interpreted.

There is a sense of sudden appearance as the two figures are noticed. The word 'men' is used as the Greek *andres* is definitive. However the shining clothes indicate that they are supernatural figures. Perhaps there is a reminder of the scene of the transfiguration (9.29) – the 'two

men' then were Moses and Elijah. The messengers issue reprimand then a reminder. 'Remember how he spoke to you' (24.6): here we see one of the distinctive features of Luke's account, the way he recapitulates the earlier story and shows how Jesus' words have been fulfilled. The messengers urge the women to remember rather than telling them to go and tell Peter and the others. They are given as summary of the message of crucifixion and resurrection (24.7),

Although the women have not been told what to do, they do go and tell the other disciples about their experience (24.9). The disciples are obviously feeling superior to the women because they are quite dismissive (24.11). Perhaps not completely dismissive, though, for Peter goes to investigate (24.12). When he gets to the tomb he discovers that the body is missing but the grave clothes are there. It's a puzzle.

## Quotations

1

Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone but in every leaf of springtime.

Martin Luther, 1483–1546

2

If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead.

Tim Keller, 1950–

## Related topics

*For further study:*

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