



### Call to Worship

This is the Good News - the grave is empty, Christ is risen.

#### Hallelujah!

This is the Good News - the light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never put it out.

#### Hallelujah!

This is the Good News - once we were no people, now we are God's people.

#### Hallelujah!

### The Peace

The risen Christ came and stood among his disciples and said: 'Peace be with you!' Then they were glad when they saw the Lord. Alleluia! The peace of the risen Christ be always with you.

### Song

1. See, what a morning, gloriously bright,  
With the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;  
Folded the grave-clothes, 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!

2. 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!

3. 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 pow'r 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!

### Prayer of Adoration:

Glory to you, O God: you raised Jesus from the grave,  
bringing us victory over death and giving us eternal life.

Glory to you, O Christ: for us and for our salvation  
you overcame death and opened the gate to everlasting life.

Glory to you, O Holy Spirit: you lead us into the truth and breathe new life into us.

Glory to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

If we have fallen into despair,

**Lord, forgive us.**

If we have failed to hope in you,

**Lord, forgive us.**

If we have been fearful of death,

**Lord, forgive us.**

If we have forgotten the victory of Christ,

**Lord, forgive us.**

May the living God raise us from despair, give us victory over sin and set us free in Christ. **Amen.**

## Reading

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. 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!”*

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally, the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying. Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 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.”* At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 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.”* Jesus said to her, *“Mary.”* She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, *“Rabboni!”* (which means *“Teacher”*).

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.’”* 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. **John 20: 1 – 18**

## Reflection: Who is it you are looking for?

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### Song for Reflection

*“Bridge over troubled water”* (Michael W Smith)

### Prayers of Intercession

Where life is dark, **may your presence bring light!**  
Where evil is strong, **may good be stronger!**  
Where suffering destroys, **may healing restore!**  
Where sorrow bows down, **may joy lift up!**  
Where doubt creeps in, **may faith hold out!**  
Where deceit obscures, **may truth illuminate!**  
Where hatred divides, **may love unite!**  
Where war rages, **may peace reconcile!**  
Where death casts its shadow, **may life shine afresh!**  
Sovereign God, may the victory we celebrate in Christ  
transform not just this but every moment. **Amen.**

### The Lord's Prayer

#### Song

1. 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.
2. 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.  
Thine be the glory,  
Risen conquering Son,  
Endless is the victory,  
Thou o'er death hast won

3. 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.  
Thine is the glory,  
Risen conquering Son,  
Endless is the victory,  
Thou o'er death hast won.

## Closing Responses

In life, in death, in life beyond death,

**Jesus Christ is Lord!**

Over powers and principalities, over all who determine, control, govern or finance the affairs of humankind,

**Jesus Christ is Lord!**

Of the poor, of the broken, of the sinned against and the sinner,

**Jesus Christ is Lord!**

Above the Church, beyond our most excellent theologies and in the quiet corners of our hearts,

**Jesus Christ is Lord!**

Thanks be to God.

**Amen.**

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**Reflection:** *Who is it you are looking for?*

I wonder how you are feeling this Easter Day? We often think that on Easter Day we should be full of joy, celebrating: the resurrection of Jesus from the dead; victory over sin; and the hope of heaven. But a careful reading of the Scriptures does not find that to be the case on the first Easter Morning.

We usually look back on the events of that day with our thoughts very much moulded by the writings of St Paul. Paul was able to look back on the events and with hindsight write of their significance for us with words such as: *“in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us”* (Rom. 8: 37) or *“Death has been swallowed up in victory. ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting...God gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (1 Cor. 15: 54-57)

But in stark contrast, the Gospel accounts of that first Easter morning are marked by such phrases as: *“while it was still dark,” “trembling and bewildered,” “it seemed to them like nonsense,” “afraid, yet filled with joy.”* And in our reading from John’s Gospel, Mary is simply full of sadness and questions: who moved the stone? Where have they put him? Tell me where he is!

In all the Gospel accounts of that first morning there is a very real mixture of emotions, of questions, of doubt, of fear, and yes of joy and hope and the beginning of a new possibility. But it is by no means fully worked out. In fact, even despite the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples, that mixture of emotions still continues right through to the day of Pentecost when the wind of God’s Spirit blows all the doubts away and fills them with passion and conviction. But that is getting ahead of ourselves.

So how are you feeling on this Easter Day? Take a moment to touch base with your emotions and to acknowledge what is going on inside your head, your heart and your soul. (Pause)

If you are full of joy and celebration today – fantastic, that’s great! Pray for those of us who are not there yet! If, like me, you sense within you some degree of uncertainty, confusion, fear, sadness, grief – if you have questions as to where is God in all of this – know that you are in good company, not just with me, but with Mary Magdalene and the other women who went to the tomb that morning, with Simon Peter and the other Disciple who saw the empty tomb but went away wondering, with Thomas, who we call *“doubting”* and with all the other disciples locked in their own homes in fear of what the future would hold. Maybe we are closer now to that first Easter Morning than we could ever possibly have imagined!

So let’s lay St Paul aside for a few minutes and focus instead on our emotions and questions and let’s bring them into the story of Mary Magdalene as she sets out for the tomb.

The very first thing we notice in the text is this: *“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...”* Darkness (and light) is one of the major themes of St John’s Gospel. For John, darkness conjures up the emotion of fear. But it does more than that. It is a picture of unbelief and sin, of not being prepared to hear or receive the Truth and Light that Jesus offers. We find a great emphasis upon darkness as a theme in the prologue of Chapter 1, in the encounter with Nicodemus in Chapter 3, and in the story of the man born blind whom Jesus healed and the subsequent conversation about spiritual blindness in Chapter 9.

Then, it gets darker still when Judas leaves the Last Supper and goes out into the night. And of course the arrest, the denial by Peter, the trial before the Sanhedrin and Pilate all take place at night. It is not meant to just be a factual record of events. It is also John saying that the powers of this world and the power of Satan himself are at work in the night-time, they are seeking to extinguish the light of life. And then remember that the sky turned black when Jesus died.

So it is significant for Mary that she sets off while it is still dark. She is living in the chaos, the powers of darkness are still at work. And yet she sets off. With fear, uncertainty, doubt, sadness, grief and so many questions in her heart and mind. Still she sets off. And she finds the stone removed. And once

Simon Peter and the other Disciple have been and gone, she is left alone in the garden with the thought that not only was her dear friend and Lord, dead, but now she could not even give him a proper send off. And so she wept.

Like Mary, our fear, our uncertainty, our doubt, our sadness, our grief might bring us to a place of tears for what we feel we have lost. At this point, the empty tomb brings no reassurance. It is not just a place of burial but a place of emptiness – a wilderness place. I wonder if you have a sense of emptiness or wilderness in your soul at this time?

Mary is in a moment, a state of bewilderment, and when she can feel no worse she encounters the divine! She does not understand what is going on, she cannot comprehend it. The darkness is not just outside her, it is in her mind, preventing her from thinking and seeing clearly. And then comes the question – the million dollar question, from Jesus himself, though Mary does not perceive that – *“Who is it that you are looking for?”*

Who is it that you are looking for today – now, at this moment?

Mary was looking for a dead friend – she was desperately trying to cling on to the only thing that made any sense. She wanted to be able to say her own goodbye. She could not see God in the midst of her trouble. And often, neither can we. But that does not mean that God is not present. It means that we have not learned to look in the right way and the right place.

Who is that you are looking for? We cannot answer that question without considering the whole sweep of the Gospel because it is the whole sweep of the Gospel that presents to us the answer as to who it is that Mary actually finds in the Garden on that first Easter morning.

St John’s great themes are that: Jesus is the Light in the darkness; Jesus is the One who turns the old and ordinary things of life into the new and extraordinary; Jesus is the One who reveals God’s love to the world not God’s judgement; Jesus is the One who includes those who our world excludes and heals those who are sick in body, mind or spirit; Jesus is the One who opens the eyes of the spiritually blind that they may indeed see God; Jesus is the One who walks on water, turns water in to wine and a packed lunch into a meal for thousands; Jesus is the One who speaks with the authority of God; Jesus is the One who gives to all who believe the most wonderful gift of the Spirit of God to stand in the gap for us, to speak on our behalf, to guide us into truth and life, to empower us as witnesses; Jesus is the One who came to seek and serve and save the lost, the One who would serve even you and even me; Jesus is the One who prays to the Father for us that we might live in Him; Jesus is the One who dies for us; Jesus is the Light of the World; Jesus is the Gate through him we can find the eternal kingdom; Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep; Jesus is the Water of Life to those who thirst; Jesus is the Bread of Life to those who hunger; Jesus is the Way, the Truth, the Life to those who need fulfilment; Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life to all those who know they are dead on the inside. Jesus is the One who can bring joy and hope into any circumstance; only Jesus is the One who can offer us life in all its fullness.

Are you, like Mary, looking to cling on to what is passing from us? Or are you looking for more than that?

Into Mary’s grief, doubt and despair, Jesus speaks one simple word, *“Mary!”* And everything changes because she suddenly knows that she is known more fully than she could ever have imagined.

I believe that today, in the midst of our fear and darkness, Jesus is speaking our names, Jesus is speaking your name, because you are fully known and fully loved by him. Turn your face towards him because he is more than you could ever imagine. He is Light and Life itself. He is the Word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us. Turn your face towards him and you will be able to say with St John, with Mary Magdalene, with all the other disciples and countless more down the ages: *“We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only Son, who came from the Father, full of Grace and Truth.”* Thanks be to God. Amen.