

All Saints April 5th Easter Day **Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18**

Easter Day Witnesses, Introduction:

Easter hosting 2026: spring into the season with a splendid Easter spread. Whether you're shopping for spring lamb, tender beef joints or a meat-free alternative, you can find the perfect centrepiece for everyone at your table. Pair with crispy roast potatoes, ready-made sides, sauces and seasonal veg for the ultimate meal. Looking to finish with something sweet? We've got that covered too. Choose from our collection of tarts and cheesecakes or try our Finest Tiramisu Gelato. We've got Easter décor, spring garlands, DIY essentials and garden must-haves. So, you can plan the perfect celebration. Shop in-store or online at Tesco to make your Easter weekend one to remember.

But for us as Christians there is far far more. We celebrate the resurrection of Christ at Easter, which is central to the Christian faith, but much more than this, it is an event that has relevance for every person. It addresses one of our primary concerns, namely our mortality and what happens to us at death. It has opened up the possibility of what may happen after death, of life after death.

In the previous verses in John 19 we see that Jesus is really dead and buried: Joseph knew that Jesus was dead and so he requested the body; the centurion knew that Jesus was dead and testified to Pilate; Pilate was assured that Jesus was dead and released the body; Joseph and Nicodemus prepared the body of Jesus for

burial; and Jesus was placed in a tomb, which was sealed.

God intervenes in history when, from the human point of view, everything is lost. The significance of what has happened will not be understood until Jesus encounters them and sends the disciples out as witnesses in the power of the Spirit.

Good News for everyone

John's account recalls Mary Magdalene discovering the empty tomb. She told Peter and John who went to the tomb and found it empty, but they still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

Then Jesus appears to Mary in the garden, she thought that he was the gardener, but he spoke to her and she recognised him. Jesus told Mary to go and tell the other disciples – Mary was the first evangelist – the proclaimer of good news.

In our second reading, Peter is at the home of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, to whom God had appeared when he was in prayer. He invites Peter to his home, the Holy Spirit anoints all in the house, and Peter proclaims the good news.

The first witness to the resurrection is a woman; and early in the life of the church Peter takes the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Good news for everyone.

Mary Magdalene

Mary went to the grave twice and went to recount her experiences to the disciples twice.

Her first visit to the grave was early in the morning while it was dark. Graves in ancient as well as in contemporary times are distressing places that people avoid. Many people still believe that graveyards are inhabited by evil spirits. In some cities today you may find thieves and drug addicts. The place of demons is recorded by Mark in the story of the healing of the Gadarene demoniac. Thieves would frequently steal the strips of linen that covered corpses.

So Mary was brave in going to the tomb, but her love for Jesus led her to take the risk. The tomb was empty and she rushed to tell Peter and John. Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen strips – there had been no grave robber. John entered, saw and believed; his was the first post-resurrection belief.

After sharing her witness account Mary returned to the tomb, crying. She was imprisoned by her grief for Jesus. He was the one who fought against oppression, defended the widow, empowered the orphan, and stood with marginalised women. He defended truth, destroying the kingdom of the devil. He was a Palestinian Jew who fought against evil everywhere, and exposed it in all its forms. He suffered political, religious and social evils of his time, but different to others he forgave sins, healed the blind, opened the ears of the deaf and dumb, and raised the dead to life.

But like the rest he died. Could it be that evil had the last word? Could oppression have won the battle?

Mary Magdalene was sad and hopeless. The hope found in Jesus had gone. She came to the graveyard, to the place of death and defilement, and imprisoned in grief

her mind was clouded. She was not able to perceive the prophecies about the resurrection of Christ. Grief blinded her insight and deafened her ears, even though it testified to her loyalty to and love for Christ.

When the two angels appeared she was not afraid, she was overwhelmed by her grief and was rooted to the spot. When Christ appeared she thought he was the gardener. She accused him of stealing the body of Jesus. She insisted on grieving and giving in to the world view that excluded resurrection. But the risen Christ appeared to her and said 'Mary'. He ended her captivity to grief, her enslavement to sorrow and a world view that lacked resurrection. He did this by calling her name. Jesus has already told his disciples that the time will come when the dead will hear his voice; that his sheep will hear his voice; all demonstrated when he calls the four days dead Lazarus to come out of the tomb.

Mary has to relate to Jesus as resurrected, the age of resurrection has dawned. Mary returned to the Apostles, but with a different message since Christ had commissioned her to be a messenger of the resurrection. She is the first post-resurrection missionary.

Her first message of the empty tomb caused confusion, but her second message spread life and hope. Mary now has a different message; she had left the circle of death, grief and lack of understanding to be a messenger of life, joy, and good news.

Mary became the first missionary for the resurrected Christ and the coming age – an age in which all forms of evil will end: the evil of individuals, political evil, social evil, and the evil of discrimination of all kinds.

Palestinian theologian, Yohanna Katanacho (*Dean of the Nazareth Evangelical College*) comments that Mary is similar to modern day Palestinians, who are grieving because they have lost their young men and women. They continually experience political and religious oppression. They frequent graveyards carrying with them the burden of sorrow and despair. Although they live in a circle of hopelessness and death, the one who released Mary from her circle of death can also empower them with his life. And can also do this for us.

There are some important messages here

The least in Jewish society is the first witness to the empty tomb, the first to whom Jesus reveals himself as alive, and the first to share the good news as a witness to the resurrection.

We move on in Acts to the account of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples at Pentecost and their going out as evangelists throughout Judea.

Then we have a second Pentecost with the anointing of the Holy Spirit on the Gentile household gathered with Cornelius. The Gentiles were considered to be outsiders and unwelcome in the family of God's people Israel, but here they welcomed, empowered and included.

Jesus breaks free of the power of death: the tomb is empty. God's revelation to Mary breaks the power of patriarchy: she is the first witness and the first evangelist. And a mere 2000 years later Sarah Mullally is the first female archbishop.

God's Spirit has no favourites: Cornelius' Gentile household is baptised in the Holy Spirit.

The Good news of new life and eternal life in Christ is for every one: no boundaries, no favourites.

At the empty tomb was the evidence that would be the start of their journey of faith; the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Faith is: believing, following, and telling others.

This is the risky journey of faith that we are called to undertake, but with the assurance that Jesus has gone ahead. Faith is confirmed in encountering the risen Jesus, and not in the empty tomb. For those whom the living Jesus has encountered, the fact of the empty tomb is a sign that points to a unique act, an act of God, which brings life out of death.

Afterword

You like me probably do not recognise the name Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin. He became one of the most powerful men on earth as Stalin's right-hand man in the 1920s in the Soviet Union. He was determined to destroy faith – responsible to tearing down churches, imprisoning and killing Christians and speaking and writing politically on the evils of religion. This was at the time when Sundays were banned – this happened for 11 years – to ensure people could not go to church. He was determined to destroy faith. The story is told of Bukharin travelling to Kiev in 1930 to address a huge assembly on the subject of atheism. Addressing the crowd he aimed his attack at Christianity hurling insults, argument, and proof against it. An hour later he was finished. He looked out at what seemed to be the smouldering ashes of people's faith. "Are there any questions?" Bukharin asked, knowing that no one would dare challenge what he had said.

Deafening silence filled the auditorium but then one man approached the platform and mounted the lectern standing near the communist leader. He surveyed the crowd first to the left then to the right. Finally he shouted the greeting that has been beloved by Russian Christians for centuries: "CHRIST IS RISEN!" Immediately the crowd got to their feet – everyone of them and the response came crashing like the sound of thunder: "HE IS RISEN INDEED!"

And 70 years of an anti-Christian state, after Stalin, the Berlin Wall came down and Boris Yeltsin was elected by popular vote as the first Russian President. On his victory parade it was noticeable that as he passed by most in the crowd crossed themselves.

Conclusion:

Easter brings many questions, as the Christian Church celebrates a mind-blowing claim, that Jesus, the carpenter's son, is no less than the Son of God, and that the proof of this claim is demonstrated in his being raised from death, by God.

This is the Gospel we profess, and which we are called to share. The proof is ultimately seen in the post-Easter changed lives of the disciples of Jesus, and continues to be seen in transformed lives of those who trust Jesus with their lives.

One Sunday morning in Rushden a young woman and her toddler daughter walked into church. She lived across the road from the church. She wanted to give her life to Jesus, and was subsequently baptised.

When I talked to her about her life she told me that she had awoken that Sunday morning and knew she should

go to church. There was no family background of church-going. But the remarkable part of this story is that Carolyn had two brothers, who unbeknown to her or to each other had awoken on that same Sunday morning and had gone to their local church!

Police responded to reports of anti-social behaviour involving a group of "several hundred young people" last weekend in Clapham, south London. About 100 officers were called to Clapham High Street on Tuesday where young people were reported to be attempting to access shops and a restaurant. They also lit fires and set off fireworks on Clapham Common.

Six teenage girls were arrested after two separate incidents of anti-social behaviour "fuelled by online trends", according to the Met Police.

With much of the population, in particular young people, struggling with mental health, loneliness, and a loss of meaning in life, church appears to be offering an answer. Research shows that churchgoers are more likely than non-churchgoers to report higher life satisfaction and a greater feeling of connection to their community than non-churchgoers. They are also less likely to be anxious or depressed.

According to Michael Marshall, the Anglican bishop emeritus of Woolwich, in an article in *The Times* on 28th October 2025, "After 50 years as a bishop, I believe revival is at hand". He went on:

What drives this quiet return is not nostalgia for a fading tradition but disillusionment with false promises. The 'tin gods' of consumerism,

careerism and technology, have failed to provide lasting meaning.

For many months now, documentation has been building around what people have called, "The Quiet Revival."

There are reports of baptisms, increased numbers at prayer meetings in England, mass baptisms in France, and students coming to faith in the United States.

Yet no-one can really explain it. These events were not prompted by excellent church missions or popular communicators of the gospel. They were not preceded by a renewed intention to seek and find those wandering far from faith. Instead, it is as if many in the western world suddenly woke up one day, came to their senses, and started to make their way back home.

Churches are finding that people are coming to them to find out how to give their lives to God, not to be persuaded. They have already made their mind up and are simply seeking a Christian to show them how. We as Christians need to be available, open and aware that those around us may just be waiting for a conversation about Jesus with someone who knows him.

We are living adverts to make someone's Easter weekend one to remember.

We are the signposts of the Easter Gospel; 'I am the resurrection and the life', 'Life in all its fullness'; 'Go and tell the Good News.'

All Saints April 5th Easter Day

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with 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; he has risen!

Please stand

Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia.*

Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia.*

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He has given us new life and hope by raising Jesus from the dead.

Hymn 357 *Jesus Christ is risen today, Hallelujah!*

Preparation

Confession

Gloria

Collect

Acts 10:34-43

John 20:1-18

Hymn 373 *Jesus lives! Thy terrors now*

Sermon

Creed

Intercessions pp.140-142 Simon Woodman

Peace

Hymn 202 *Hail the day that sees him rise*

Eucharist

Hymn 728 *We have a gospel to proclaim*

Benediction

Go now as God's chosen witnesses to testify that Christ has been raised and that we are raised with him. Do not look for him among the dead, but be glad and rejoice in his salvation. And may God raise you from all that would entomb you; May Christ Jesus call you by name and go ahead of you; And may the Holy Spirit empower you for all that is good. We go in peace to love and serve the Lord, In the name of Christ. Amen.