

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

This is our Easter confession, regardless the language: English, Macedonian, Spanish, German. It's the third day, and Jesus Christ the crucified has risen from the dead!

And this is not a message that the church jokes about. Of course, you are probably aware of the convergence of Easter this year with April 1st, April Fool's Day, a day devoted to joking around and pulling little harmless pranks on people.

But God is not into fooling people or joking around, not when it comes to our salvation—nor is the Church on Easter. All of Holy Week is a most serious business, indeed—joyful, but serious. Jesus Christ, God incarnate, gave up His life on Friday afternoon — that's no laughing matter. It's "for us men and for our salvation." He was laid in the tomb that same afternoon, and a large stone sealed the tomb. And there in the stone cold darkness of that sepulcher, Jesus' lifeless body lay Friday night and all day on the Sabbath — Saturday.

And this is no prank either, although some have tried to make it out to be a cruel joke, but Jesus Christ, some time before dawn on the day after the Sabbath, awoke from His three day sleep in death, and He rose triumphant from the grave. "*He has risen; he is not here,*" was the angel's message to the women who had made their way to the tomb early that first day of the week.

What a cruel joke that would have been, as this morning we heard Mary Magdalene complain to Jesus whom she mistook for the gardener. "*Sir, ... tell me where you have laid him ...*" (John 20:15). She didn't yet understand that the reason for Jesus' missing body was just what He had told them: "*after three days [the Son of Man would] rise again*" (Mark 8:31). Jesus would live again, He had told them, and the empty tomb is the first bit of circumstantial evidence that it was so.

Of course, Matthew tells us that the chief priests and Pharisees thought that Jesus' disciples might want to play a joke on them and steal the body away, because Jesus had predicted: "*After three days I will rise*" (Matthew 27:63). So they got permission from Pilate to secure the tomb. They sealed the tomb and set guards before it. They weren't going to let the disciples pull off this resurrection fraud and say, "*He has risen from the dead*" (Matthew 27:64).

But the joke was on them. "Neither could the gates of death Nor the tomb's dark portal Nor the watchers nor the seal Hold Him as a mortal" (LSB487:4). Lifeless, Jesus' body lay in the grave until some time before dawn on that third day. And then the breath of life returned; His lungs again ballooned with air; His chest expanded and

contracted again. His heart started beating again; blood uncongealed, for God would not permit His “*holy one see corruption*” (Psalm 16:10), would flow again through His arteries and veins. Jesus’ human spirit, offered up to the Father as He breathed His last from the cross and held at the Father’s side, returned from its exalted place and re-animating Jesus’ body. Jesus was alive again.

Of course, you can imagine, Jesus had a lot to do after three days of sleep in death. The first thing He had to do was to inform Satan and his angels, and all those unbelievers imprisoned in hell, that the joke was also on them. They had howled with delight as Jesus was falsely accused and arrested, smitten and stricken, crucified and killed. But their riotous laughter was silenced with the words, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). What might that mean?

Might it mean that this one sacrifice was a sufficient payment for the sins of the world? Might it mean that this sacrifice of the righteous Jesus was sufficient for the unrighteousness of mankind?

Their answer would come before dawn on the third day... Jesus who had been “*put to death in the flesh*” has been “*made alive in the spirit*” (1 Peter 3:18). And that’s not to say that only Jesus’ spirit was made alive — no, no, no. It’s saying that Jesus’ body was raised a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44); that is, a body that has been set free from our sin which He carried (Rom. 6:7). It’s a body that will never die again. This spiritual body is a body over which death has no more dominion (Romans 6:9).

It’s with this body, still before dawn, before the stone had been rolled away for the women to look inside, that Jesus descends to hell and proclaims “*to the spirits in prison*” (1 Peter 3:9), that the joke is on them. Jesus’ death was His victory! Those spirits surely saw the wounds that Jesus’ crucified body still wore. They came to realize — and no doubt their laughter turned to weeping — that even though Jesus was living, Jesus was and ever will be the crucified One. He was the One who would ever supply the church not just with some “spiritual presence,” whatever that might mean, but especially with His body broken on the cross and His blood shed there. The resurrection still points us back to the cross, as our own Bill Weinrich says, Jesus’ “resurrection places the cross in power” (quoted by Voelz—see unpublished manuscript on Mark 16:1-8). Or as our own Jim Voelz says, “as a result of the resurrection of Jesus” “the cross and all that has been accomplished through it” “is endowed with divine authority.” Yes, even on Easter, we still preach Christ crucified.

For the women too, who boldly went to the place where Jesus had been laid, were given a message. Jesus’ body was long gone by the time they arrived. As we heard, He had been busy, but the stone had been rolled away for them to look in. And what did they see? Not Jesus’ dead body, but the body of a young man dressed in white, sitting where Jesus had lain.

They were startled — that's not surprising. The young man — an angel — comforted them first. *“Don't be alarmed.”* And then no doubt with knowledge granted him by the Divine, he gave answer to all of their and our Easter questions.

He begins: *“You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.”* Perhaps that is better translated *“Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified One.”* The point is made again — Jesus' cross, though suffered once for all, is never to be cast aside as if it has no ongoing significance. Jesus is always the crucified One. He always wears His wounds. We see it in the heavenly scenes in Revelation. Jesus is the Lamb who was slain (Rev. 5:9, 12); He is ever the Lamb who bleeds from His wounds, supplying the church His grace.

The young man continues, *“He has risen; he is not here.”* The women could verify with their own eyes that Jesus was not there. But, *“He has risen!”* This was unexpected, even though Jesus had told them it would happen on several occasions. Their fear had not abated, and they weren't ready to believe it.

But the young man was not done. *“Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”* That was all the women could take. Out they ran in fear, not saying a word.

But they would come to believe for this was not a hoax. It was true, as we heard Paul proclaim. Jesus did show Himself — to Mary Magdalene, to Peter, to the twelve, to many others, and even to more than 500 all at once. The crucified One showed them His wounds. And the women would speak as the angel told them — as Jesus told them — for we know that Jesus appeared to the disciples in Galilee.

Which finally brings this Easter to us! I know that sometimes in our lives and in the world we have fears, and we have incomplete knowledge. Don't be alarmed. Trust in Christ. Your faith is not in vain — nor is this preaching. What we preach is no joke. Jesus is still the crucified One, and He is still the One risen from the dead. As you exit from church today, you'll not hear me say, “April Fools,” but “Christ is risen,” or “Hristos voskressen,” or “Cristo ha resucitado” or “Christus ist auferstanden.”

For God is faithful; He does not lie. He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). He was faithful to the women and to the disciples. He has been faithful to us, and He will be faithful to us to the end. Therefore, we look to Him and pray that when our last hour comes He will grant us a blessed end and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven, where we will await our own resurrection at the coming again of Christ, our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!