

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

The idea of resurrection was not unknown to the people of Jesus' day. Jesus had certainly spoken about it. *"An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear [the Son of Man's] voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment"* (Jn. 5:28-29). Remember Martha speaking to Jesus at her brother Lazarus' death: *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day"* (Jn. 11:24). Jesus, of course, raised Lazarus up, but only to live for a while longer before he would die and await that final resurrection.

The Jewish priestly party, called the Sadducees, rejected these ideas of resurrection. They had tested Jesus about the resurrection shortly before His crucifixion and death: a woman's husband dies leaving her childless, so her husband's brother marries her to give her husband children, and this happens seven times. And they asked Jesus, *"In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife"* (Mk 12:23). Of course, they didn't believe anyone would rise; they just thought they had Jesus in a theological pickle with this little conundrum. Of course, they didn't. Jesus corrected their thinking, affirming the resurrection of the dead.

Many intellectuals in Paul's day didn't believe in resurrection. While in Athens, *"Epicurean and Stoic philosophers"* scoffed at Paul, calling him a *"babbler"* *"because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection"* (Acts 17:18). And in the great resurrection chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Paul acknowledges that *"some of [them] say that there is no resurrection of the dead"* (1 Cor. 15:12). Paul addresses them, too, affirming Christ's resurrection as the firstfruits for us who follow after Christ, falling asleep in Him (1 Cor. 15:20).

And, of course, today many reject resurrection. It's unscientific. It's ahistorical. It's but a fable. Jesus didn't rise physically, but only spiritually in your hearts. Blah, blah, blah, for we celebrate Easter because we know the truth.

For the resurrection accounts like we have here in the Gospel of John, and later in Mark, bear witness to the historical fact of the resurrection. We have eyewitnesses. It's not just made up, that is, a false story that is useful to serve some good purpose or teach a good lesson.

Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early on that Sunday morning when Jesus rose. The other Gospels tell us that other women were with her. They found the stone had been rolled. Again, the other Gospels tell us they peered in; perhaps Mary Magdalene did, too, but I don't think so. Rather, not hearing the Easter proclamation of the angels, she ran back to Peter and John to tell them: *"They*

*have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.*” “Oh! How shameful,” she must have thought. “They won’t leave Him alone even in death. They have desecrated the tomb and stolen away the body!” She would later be relieved.

That announcement animated the two disciples to run to the tomb to check things out. John got there first, but Peter entered the tomb before John. The tomb was empty save only for the linen burial cloths that had been wrapped around the lifeless Jesus. But this didn’t seem the work of grave robbers. Why would grave robbers take the time to fold the linen cloths so neatly where the body had lain?

When John saw it, he “*believed,*” he said, but what did he believe, for, by his own admission, “*as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.*” Did he believe Mary Magdalene’s announcement that someone had taken the body? Or at least that the tomb was empty? These don’t necessarily imply resurrection.

The disciples would come to understand the Scriptures better and with that also Jesus’ words, for the Scriptures do foretell Jesus’ resurrection. As Paul says, this teaching is something “*of first importance,*” namely “*that Christ ... was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures*” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Whether it be David singing in Ps. 16: “*For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption,*” which Peter would later use to preach Christ’s resurrection, saying: David in this Psalm “*foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ*”; or it be the sign of Jonah three days in the belly of the fish, “so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40); or it be Job speaking about his “*Redeemer [who] lives, and [who] at the last ... will stand upon the earth*” (Job 19:25), the Scriptures bear witness to Jesus and His glorious resurrection. And this would help the disciples understand Jesus’ sayings better: like when Jesus spoke of the temple of His body, and the disciples only understood it after Jesus “*was raised from the dead*” (Jn. 2:21-22).

Of course, Jesus’ later resurrection appearances to Mary Magdalene, and to Peter and the disciples, all buttress the Scriptures’ assertion, not only that Jesus had to die, but also that He would rise again from the dead. And this is what we are given to believe: the Scriptures — for us, not only the Old Testament, but also the New; not only Moses and the Prophets, but also now the Evangelists and the Apostles.

Hear how the risen Jesus appeared to Mary and gave her comfort. It comforts us, too, as we listen to the Prophets and Apostles. In the weeks ahead, hear how Jesus appeared to the disciples assuring them that He is living, and that it all was

done, as necessary, in accordance with the Scriptures. The Scriptures provide us with that same assurance that this is not fable, but real; that this is not fiction, but historical.

And though resurrection isn't scientific — it can't be tested in the lab using the scientific method — it is nonetheless fact — it is knowledge that we have gained from God's own mouth in His Holy Word. Christ is risen from the dead, having been sacrificed as our Passover lamb, that eternal death might not visit us, but that we might have life. Christ is risen from the dead; the tomb is empty; the eyewitnesses are trustworthy; they bear witness to us, that we might also know the truth and believe in the Way and rejoice in our life in His life.

Yes, let us rejoice. Let us *“sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously.”* Christ is risen. Alleluia! He is risen, indeed. Alleluia! Alleluia!

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