

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

The disciples heard these words or something like them on that first Easter morn. Brave women had made their way to Jesus' tomb at early dawn. They had seen the garden tomb where Jesus had been laid. They had seen how Joseph of Arimathea with Nicodemus, his compatriot on the Council, had wrapped Jesus up in a linen shroud, and prepared His dead body with burial spices. But it had been done hastily – the sun was setting; the Sabbath was upon them.

Jesus was laid in the tomb on Friday, the day of Preparation; Jesus rested in the tomb on Saturday, the Sabbath. It was now Sunday, "*the first day of the week,*" the third day since Jesus had been crucified, and the women went to the tomb to finish with care the work of preparing Jesus' dead body.

Their spices went unused. Jesus had risen from the dead, just as the Scriptures had foretold (Job 19:25-27; Ps. 16:10), just as Jesus had said (Luke 9:21-22; Luke 18:31-34). Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Of course, reading all of the accounts of Jesus' passion and resurrection, one quickly recognizes that the evangelist Luke leaves out details that other evangelists include. There is nothing of the stone rolled over the entrance to the tomb to close it up, for example, and nothing of the conversation about how the women were going to gain entrance to the tomb. There is nothing of the earthquake that rolled away the stone, giving the women access. Interesting omissions. Luke simply introduces the stone by saying, "*they found the stone rolled away.*"

There is nothing in Luke about the soldiers standing watch over the tomb or placing a seal on the tomb to prevent someone from stealing away Jesus' dead body. There is nothing of how the soldiers were scared stiff at the appearance of the Easter angel.

These may seem like "discrepancies" in the resurrection accounts that make for doubts in the story. But they do not call the fact of Jesus' resurrection into question. Quite the contrary ... they add an air of authenticity. There was no collusion among the eyewitnesses to "get their stories straight," so that they might spread the false story of Jesus' resurrection. Rather, different witnesses told their own recollections with the details that seemed important to them.

I've heard this analysis from many different experts on eye witness testimony, former cops and prosecuting attorneys. It's the view of author Lee Strobel in his book *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*, though he called it "plagiarism," not collusion. Strobel is journalist and lawyer, and he began his investigation into the evidence for Jesus because of his wife's conversion. That investigation would turn him from staunch atheist to believer.

That turn of events makes sense. Luke himself told of his purpose for writing his gospel — what he called “*an orderly account*” (Luke 1:3). He wrote it, he told Theophilus, “*that you may have certainty concerning [these] things*” (Luke 1:4) — that we might have this certainty, that we might come to believe as Strobel did, or that we might have our faith strengthened.

In fact, in my view, much like the journalist Strobel, Luke’s telling reads more like an old-school reporter’s account of the resurrection of Jesus — not like modern reporters that add their own biases to the story, but like it used to be ... just the facts. That too makes sense. He told how he “*compile[d] [his] narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us*” (Luke 1:1), that is, among the believers, including Jesus’ resurrection, by examining the “*eyewitnesses and ministers of the word*” who themselves had been telling these stories.

What does Luke report? Surely, that Jesus died — He “*breathed his last*” (Luke 23:46), Luke says. That’s generally how people being crucified died — by being deprived of breath. The body, worn out from pain and the constant effort of lifting one’s body up to catch a breath, can no longer do it. It stops breathing; the body dies. That’s why John reports that the soldiers broke the legs of the condemned — that their deaths might be hastened, that their bodies might not “*remain on the cross on the Sabbath*” (John 19:31).

But Jesus’ legs were not broken. He had already committed His Spirit to the Father — said not as someone weak and worn out and unable to breathe, but with “*a loud voice*” (Luke 23:46), lungs filled with air. Then Jesus let loose the spirit, as Matthew says (27:50); or as Luke says, He expired. Truly, Jesus died as He said He would: by laying down His own life, not that anyone should take it from Him (John 10:18).

Luke also reports that the women watched Joseph and Nicodemus hastily prepare the body, as I mentioned before; and they “*saw the tomb and how his body was laid*” (Luke 23:55). Moreover, they didn’t doubt Jesus’ death; they themselves returned home to prepare “*spices and ointments*” to bury Jesus properly.

Again, Luke reports that when they arrived at the tomb, the stone that had closed up the tomb was already rolled away. Thus, the women were able to peer into the tomb. They found it empty, the body gone, much to their bewilderment. But Luke doesn’t report their speculation for the missing body — did someone take it away? Luke merely reports the facts. The tomb was empty, the body gone. We know why! And the women would soon, too. Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Next, Luke reports that two men appeared to the women — they were angels, really, in human appearance, for their “*dazzling apparel*” gives them away. Here, we have the climax of the Easter story told by these messengers of God. They announced to the women that Jesus’ word was sure, that He had done what He had

said He would do, that He would die at the hands of sinful men, but that He would rise from the dead on the third day. Therefore, the angels told them: “*Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.*” And the women remembered Jesus’ words.

Finally, Luke reports that the women went and told the apostles, who didn’t believe their story; they thought it “*an idle tale.*” And who would believe it? It would be incredible, if it were not true. The apostles’ skepticism also adds an air of authenticity. Peter, at least, wanted to see for himself; so he ran to the tomb and found it as the women had reported . . . empty save only the linen cloths. Christ had risen from the dead; He has triumphed; He is living.

One resurrection proof missing in this Easter gospel is Jesus’ physical appearance to the eyewitnesses — Paul makes a big deal about that in his great resurrection chapter in 1 Corinthians. But Luke does later report on that, too, starting with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Then he goes on to report resurrection appearances to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34) and to the disciples gathered in Jerusalem (Luke 24:36ff). And with all of these, we can be sure; it is established as historical fact: Jesus Christ, the crucified, is risen from the dead, just as the Scriptures say.

And this means everything for us as Christians. It is a bedrock of our faith, an “*of first importance*” (1 Cor. 15:3-4) article of faith. Without the resurrection, this faith “is not Christianity at all” (Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 206). We confess it in all our Christian creeds: the Apostles’ — “The third day He rose again from the dead”; the Nicene — “the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures”; the Athanasian — He “rose again the third day from the dead.”

Indeed, Paul says, “*if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied*” (1 Cor. 15:17-19). But we are not pitiable people; we are most blessed, for we have hope not just in this life but for eternity, for “*in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*” And we believe and confess that when Christ comes again in glory, He will raise us up from the sleep of death, and we shall “*be made alive*” again. And He will give to all believers in Him a restored and glorified body, imperishable, immortal. For death has been swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:54). In Christ, we have conquered all our enemies: “*thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Cor. 15:57).

This is what Easter is all about; it’s why it’s the great festival of the Church, the Feast of Feasts. God grant us to rejoice today and always, living in hope of eternal life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, for Christ is risen! Alleluia!

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