

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

It was 3 PM on Friday, and Jesus was dead. This is most certainly true—that’s a nice little Lutheran phrase that brings to mind our catechisms, right? Jesus had died. He had undergone the agony of Roman scourging, mockery, torture, and execution. He did not deserve this death; this cross was placed upon Him. You did it to Him. Your sins did. For you, He most certainly died. The Romans were especially efficient at these things. Indeed, had the scourging and crucifixion not done it, the spear thrust into His side would have finished Him off. Instead, it merely showed that Jesus was already dead. Yes, this is most certainly true.

It is now the morning of the third day, Sunday as we call it, and we find Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb. She was not alone, for the other Gospels tell us that other women accompanied her. They were going to the tomb to care for Jesus’ corpse in death, something that had been done hastily by Joseph and Nicodemus on that Friday evening before the Sabbath.

The women were concerned as they approached the tomb. A stone had been rolled over the tomb’s opening. That could be a problem. How would they deal with that? So, too, might be the guards posted to ensure that Jesus’ body would remain in the tomb. The women’s worries quickly dissipated, for the Lord took care of those. An earthquake and dazzling angels in white removed those obstacles.

John tells us that when Mary saw the stone rolled back, she ran right away to tell the other disciples. The other women, we’re told in the other accounts, looked inside. They saw the place where Jesus had been laid now empty. They heard the angels’ proclamation. “*He is not here. He has risen.*” And they, too, ran to tell the disciples.

What a fantastic story! Yet, Peter and John raced to the tomb to see for themselves. They stooped to look in the tomb. The women were right! It was empty, just as they had said. The tomb was empty! This is most certainly true.

Yes, the tomb was empty, and no one has ever disputed that. The Jews didn’t dispute it. The Romans didn’t dispute it. The tomb was empty, but what does this mean? There’s another Lutheran phrase, a question. What does this mean?

There really is only one explanation. We heard it already from the angels’ mouths: “*He has risen.*” Jesus rose from the dead. Indeed, that is what Easter is all about. Jesus, who was proclaimed the Christ and Savior and God’s own Son, is our Redeemer who lives. And this redemption has consequences, eternal consequences, for Jesus Christ’s fulfilling of the law means that the power of sin has been drained away. And since sin has lost its power, death has lost its sting, for “*death [has been] swallowed up in victory*”! Jesus rose from the dead, and so

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death, which had reigned ever since Adam's Garden transgression, "*no longer has dominion over him.*" Jesus won!

And Jesus' victory over death is our victory over death and the grave. That doesn't mean that we won't die — we likely will fall asleep as the Scripture now talks about death. But not everyone will experience it, for the risen and ascended Jesus will come again in glory at the sound of the trumpet. And if you're alive, you'll be changed. And if you're dead, you'll be changed. Your mortal bodies will put on immortality; your perishable bodies will put on the imperishable. You will, like Jesus, rise from the dead. Even though you may have turned to dust, turned to ash in a fire, become food for worms in the ground or fish in the sea, you will rise restored to meet Him face to face, to see Him with your own eyes. Oh, it's too awesome to imagine.

Of course, that's only so if Christ rose from the dead. If not, we Christians are the most to be pitied, for then all our preaching and your faith is in vain. And people have tried to dispute it (not that the tomb wasn't empty, but that Jesus didn't rise from the dead). Jesus really didn't die, they'll say; that is, the Romans were incompetent at killing. Ah...no. That Jesus regained strength and pushed away the stone Himself. No, that's not plausible. That the women couldn't find the right tomb. As if, guards were sent to watch someone else's grave. That's not credible. That someone stole the body away. That's what the Jews feared. But that's what the guards were placed at the tomb to prevent. And it's funny. Even Mary asked Jesus, thinking Him the gardener, "*if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him.*" No, none of these are believable.

There is only one plausible reason for the tomb to be empty. That's the one given by angels and is confirmed by Mary's encounter with Jesus, the first of many appearances. Jesus is living. Jesus rose from the dead. And His resurrection gives confirmation of all He did and said. He is our Savior and Lord. Believing in Him whom God raised from the dead, we are saved, and He will give us everlasting life.

Jesus died, this is true. The cross is the symbol of this death — and we usually have Jesus' body on the cross as an even more vivid symbol of His death for us. The cross is no symbol of resurrection; He did not rise from the cross. But He did rise from the grave. That's why eggs and butterflies that emerge from cocoons are resurrection symbols. They represent the empty tomb and Jesus bursting forth from death.

Jesus' tomb was empty. This is most certainly true. Jesus did rise from the dead. Jesus lives, and He promises life to all look to Him. God grant you that hope until the day you die to await your own resurrection.

Christ is risen. Alleluia! He is risen, indeed. Alleluia! Alleluia!