

Easter 2023

Mary of Magdala came to the tomb while it was still dark, after Jesus died; the shepherds, keeping night watch over their flocks, see God's glory shine around them, after He is born. The disciples ran to the tomb, looking for the Lord taken from His burial place; the shepherds go in haste to find the Lord given to the world in His birth place. The infant Jesus is wrapped in swaddling clothes; the risen Jesus leaves behind the burial cloths. The Magi follow a star and bring their gifts; Peter and John follow an anxious report of grave robbers and bring their confusion and fear. A stone was moved in Jerusalem, and the grave emptied of Death; God's mercy was moved, and the manger in Bethlehem filled with the Bread of Life.

Of the two major Christian feasts, Christmas is easier for us than Easter. Everyone has seen a baby ... in fact, everyone has BEEN a baby ... but none of us has ever seen a person risen from death. ***At Christmas, the Eternal entered Time*** – the Word through Whom all things are made is made flesh, comes into His creation and brings God to our human lives. Jesus lives the same days and nights and seasons as we do; He grows tired and hungry, laughs with joy and sheds tears of sadness. The Jesus of time, the suffering Jesus, even the Jesus Who dies, we can relate to easily from our own experiences.

But with Easter, the opposite happens: ***Time is drawn into Eternity***. While the Resurrection is a real event that happened in history, it leads us beyond history, into the eternal life of God. Jesus is the firstborn of the dead, the Good Shepherd Whose death has made our deaths something that itself passes away and yields to the fullness of life.

So birth and babies we know from experience ... but Resurrection remains a mystery we grasp only in faith. ***It is not a mystery so dark and obscure that we cannot imagine it, but a mystery so brilliant and overwhelming that we cannot comprehend it***. Our experience of life here is always accompanied by suffering, fear, loss, failure. From the tragedy of abuse to the relentless suffering of war and sickness; from persecution and violence to hopelessness and indifference, we can each name the struggles of being children of Time, immersed in things that come and go, develop and then pass away. *So becoming*

children of Eternity in the risen life Jesus prepares for us take time; time to understand that we have been freed forever from the imperfections to which we have come to believe are inevitable. Perhaps in this way, Christmas and Easter are linked ... like infants who gradually grow into an unknown world filled with questions and beauty that is all new to them, so we will need to grow into God's own joy. Maybe this is why the Church gives us 50 days of this season – longer than Lent because this joy is greater than our sorrows; and why Jesus said: “Unless you become like little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

It is good to remember clearly that Easter began in emptiness and darkness – symbolized at the Easter Vigil by beginning in a darkened church, where only the light of the Paschal Candle, burns, the very darkness around it making that light our natural focus. In the same way, it is the very emptiness we might bring to Easter that opens us to its joy ... ***for every suffering and struggle we can name find their place, and their healing, in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus.*** Christmas happened precisely so Easter could happen ... a body like ours was taken by the Son of God in His birth so it could be offered on the Cross in death, and then raised to the eternal life of God, passing over from Time into Eternity.

For those who saw the Risen Christ, the Resurrection was just as real, just as undeniable, and just as mysterious as the Cross had been. ***Both of them really happened.*** With time, they came to know that the grave of Jesus was emptied, not by vengeance, but by Mercy; not by hatred, but by victorious Love.

Easter began in emptiness, but that borrowed tomb was not robbed ... it was simply left behind, no longer needed, a temporary pause succeeded by an endless Life. ***Bring whatever emptiness you know today in prayer, and let the Light of the World illumine the darkness, fill the void, and give new birth to a hope that does not disappoint, from the things of our time to the things of God's eternity.*** Every Easter I recall those simple but profound words that sum up why we celebrate that empty tomb, because ***we do not simply remember that Jesus was ... we rejoice that He IS.***