

***“FROM THE DARKNESS  
OF THE WILDERNESS  
TO THE LIGHT OF DAWN”***

***HOLY WEEK DEVOTIONAL GUIDE  
2023***



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# THE HOLY SEASON: LENT / EASTER

In early days Lent was a time of preparation of candidates for baptism on Easter Sunday. During the season of Lent these candidates prepared for this initiation into the Christian life. Lent for us is not only a time of preparation; it is also a time of prayer, repentance, sacrifice, soul-searching, self-denial, and service. Sundays, which are days for commemorating the resurrection, are omitted in counting the forty days of reflection and repentance. The color purple is used during this time to symbolize repentance and solemnity.

The forty weekdays in the season of Lent symbolize the forty-day fasts of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. The focus of Lent is for Christians to imitate Jesus' withdrawal into the wilderness for forty days. The sacred season of Lent concludes with Holy Week. Holy Week is a time of reflection upon the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Holy Week leads us to the joyous and glorious season of Easter.

These Holy Week devotionals, written by members of our church family, are reflections of this year's theme, *"From the Darkness of the Wilderness to the Light of Dawn"*. There are two devotionals for each day – one for morning and one for evening. You will find it helpful to read the daily Bible readings included in this book which trace the events of Jesus' last week on earth.

We hope that you will find inspiration, encouragement, and renewal not only through the reading of these devotionals and daily Bible readings, but also by participating in our worship services of this week. We hope you will let this devotional guide be a part of your daily personal and/or family worship as you "feast" on His Word.

Thanks to those of you who have received this devotional book as a gift from our church family. Thanks to those who compiled, edited, and proofed this devotional book. Thanks to all of you devotional writers for allowing God to use you to challenge and inspire us. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift of Jesus...His Son...the Risen Christ!



## **CHURCH STAFF**

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# HOLY WEEK SERVICES

## SUNDAY, APRIL 2: PALM SUNDAY

**10:45 a.m.** We remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and into our lives. The children's processional will remind us of that day when the shouts of "Hosanna" rang through the streets. Join us for worship in our sanctuary or online by going to [www.ferncreekbaptist.org](http://www.ferncreekbaptist.org) and clicking the red Worship Livestream button.

**7:00 p.m.** The Lenten Reflections will be led by readers and individual musicians who will present musical offerings that remind us, through the events of Holy Week, that Jesus is the Light of the World! The service will, also, be livestreamed.

## THURSDAY, APRIL 6: MAUNDY THURSDAY

**7:00 p.m.** The Youth Choir will lead in "A New Commandment". We will partake in the Lord's Supper as we remember Christ's work on the cross and His salvation plan for us. We are reminded to share His love with others. The service will, also, be livestreamed.

## FRIDAY, APRIL 7: GOOD FRIDAY

**7:00 p.m.** The Adult Choir and Narrators will present "*Tenebrae: Jesus, Light of the World*". In an atmosphere of darkness and candles, music and scripture, we will retrace Jesus' life from His birth to the final events in the last week of His life culminating in His death on the cross. The service will, also, be livestreamed.

## SUNDAY, APRIL 9: EASTER CELEBRATION

**9:00 a.m.** We celebrate the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ! God's Word will be spoken through proclamation and music from our church staff.

**10:45 a.m.** We continue the celebration of Christ's resurrection as God's Word is spoken through proclamation and music by the Adult Choir. Come and fill His house as we celebrate Jesus' resurrection! Bring a friend who needs a word from God. This service will, also, be livestreamed.



# DAILY BIBLE READINGS

These Bible readings correspond with the events during the last week of Jesus' life on earth.

Sunday, April 2	Matthew 21:1-11 Mark 11:1-11 Luke 19:29-44 John 12:12-19
Monday, April 3	Matthew 21:12-20 Mark 11:12-19 Luke 19:45-46
Tuesday, April 4	Matthew 21:21 - 23:39 Mark 11:27 - 12:44 Luke 20:1 - 21:4 John 12:20-50
Wednesday, April 5	Matthew 24:1 - 26:16 Mark 13:1 - 14:11 Luke 21:5 - 22:6
Thursday, April 6	Matthew 26:17-56 Mark 14:12-52 Luke 22:7-53 John 13:1 - 18:13
Friday, April 7	Matthew 26:57 - 27:61 Mark 14:53 - 15:47 Luke 22:54 - 23:55 John 18:14 - 19:42
Saturday, April 8	Matthew 27:62-65 Luke 23:56
Sunday, April 9	Matthew 28:1-15 Mark 16:1-13 Luke 24:1-49 John 20:1-25



Palm Sunday Morning, April 2, 2023

## THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

John 1:4-9

*“The Word was the source of life, and the life brought light to mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out. God sent his messenger, a man named John, who came to tell the people about the light. This was the real light – the light that comes into the world and shines on all mankind.”*

After the recent storm, we were without power. It was a normal day, and we were warned all day of the upcoming weather conditions.

Then everything was quiet. No humming of refrigerator motors, no television, just silence.

As darkness set in, there were glows of the candles and some battery lanterns throughout the house.

Looking out the windows, I could see the flickers of faint light in my neighbors’ windows.

Through the dark, there was a comfort to see those little bits of light. I knew others were out there.

Just like those little bits of light I saw on those quiet nights; Jesus is our light in life.

In our dark times of life, we know he is there, and we are not alone.

John 8:12

*“I am the light of the world,” he said. “Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness.”*

I accepted Christ at the age of eight. I felt then I was in the light. I was sure of my conviction. In my teen years, I strayed from church. I always knew God was with me, but I wasn’t always with Him.

I am thankful to be back in a church family to share, pray, and study with as I grow in faith. You can do those things alone, but it is easy to stray away. You need support, too. That is where you are in the best light.

As you read the following devotionals, think each day about your journey of darkness to light, but also of the darkness that fell when Jesus was on the cross and the light that came when He arose.

Have a glorious Easter season!

Glenda Coddington



## JESUS' TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

There are four gospels that describe Jesus' entry into Jerusalem: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but only one, Luke 19:29-44, describes what Jesus was thinking and saying as he made His way to Jerusalem riding upon that colt. The people were shouting, "*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*" Of course, the Pharisees did not want the people to believe what they were shouting and tried to get Jesus to rebuke the people, but Jesus knew how important this time was and said that "*if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out!*"

Jesus then saw the city and wept. He said, "*If You, even You, had only known on this day what would bring you peace but now it is hidden from your eyes*". Jesus went on to describe what calamity would embrace the city and people there for not recognizing who He really was and what He offered. Thankfully, we are blessed to have the benefit of the scriptures so that we know who Jesus really is and what He offers. For those who believe, He is no longer hidden from our eyes. We celebrate Easter to bring glory to God and to remember this very premise. We do not want Jesus to weep over us but to rejoice in our belief and our willingness to follow Him for all that he gave up for us.

*"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"*

Matthew 21:1-11

Mark 11: 1-11

Luke 19:29-44

John 12: 12-19

Have a Blessed Easter,  
Danny Hass



Monday Morning, April 3, 2023

## FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT OF DAY

What do you think of when you think of the word “wilderness”? The first syllable ‘**wild**’ is what jumps out to me. Untamable like the weeds in my garden sometime! Or, in biblical reference, I think of the forty years the Israelites in the book of Exodus wandered trying to find their way, first under the leadership of Moses and later Joshua, from their bondage in Egypt to God’s Promised Land of freedom and abundance.

Few of us like darkness unless there is some source of light so we can gauge what progress we are making toward our destination. I personally don’t like to drive at night, but some people do. However, those who *do* are depending on their headlights to keep them safe and on the right road.

Yesterday’s devotional readings concentrated on Jesus’ welcome on the Jerusalem Road as the people waved palm branches, spread their cloaks along the way and shouted “Hosanna!” They perceived that He was coming as a political savior—one who would free them from their subjugation to Rome.

While Jesus was in Jerusalem for the religious observance of the Jewish Passover with His disciples, He continued to teach and at one point went into the temple. He was angered by what He saw: the buying and selling of goats, sheep, and doves to be used as blood sacrifices for the people’s sins. He was so irate he flipped over the tables in the courtyard and rebuked those participating in such activity. He said, “*My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers.*” (Matthew 21:12 New International Version, Copyright 2011)

All of us in our houses of worship need to make sure our place of worship is “called a house of prayer.” Let us include prayers of giving thanks. Prayers confessing our transgressions and asking for forgiveness. And prayers asking for direction in our lives.

Our story this morning of what some call ‘the cleansing of the temple’ takes us one step closer to the Suffering Savior who becomes the ultimate blood sacrifice for the sins of all who believe. He is beyond the Baby in Bethlehem’s manger. Beyond the twelve-year-old Child amazing the teachers in the Jewish synagogue. Beyond the thirty-three-year-old crucified and risen from the dead.

This Suffering Servant becomes our Good News and our escape from the darkness of the wilderness into the Light of the dawn.

This idea is beautifully expressed in the following words, “*For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.*” 2 Corinthians 5:19 NIV, Copyright 2011.

Here is a prayer I’ve written which I encourage you to pray if you need to get out of the darkness of your life. Make this prayer your own by adding words you need to say:

Dear God,

I want to know You through the Jesus who lived on this earth, became a blood sacrifice for all my mistakes, and now lives in heaven, but can also live in my life and in my heart. I admit my imperfect life. [Say specifically wrongs you have committed; God already knows them, but you need to confess to Him.] I ask forgiveness. I ask for direction to get on the road to heaven. Help me to grow alongside the practicing believers of my church where I can learn more about You and how to serve You.

In Jesus’ name,  
Amen!

Connie Carlisle Polley, 2023  
ConnieCarlislePolley.com

## THE BEAUTIFUL PRESENCE OF CHILDREN

Matthew 21:15-17

*But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things, he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him.*

*"Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, 'From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise?'"*

Have you ever seen children running in church?

Have you ever heard them singing or shouting their praises to God?

Yes, and yes...doing music with children at church through the years.

"Walk at a steady pace" soon breaks into a run.

"Sing, matching the volume of the rest of the choir" becomes a "who can sing the loudest" contest.

Attempting to follow Jesus' lead....in the midst of it all, I am hesitant to squelch the enthusiasm children bring to any situation.

Jesus was not going to stop the children from singing His praises, because He knew every ounce radiated from their pure hearts.

Nothing is more beautiful than their songs of praise...whether by themselves - unaware of anyone listening, or in front of a congregation.

Remembering:

\*A big dad holding his tiny NICU infant as he sings a praise song. His precious baby raised his hands in praise as his daddy sang. That can't be taught to a two-week-old.

\*A one-year-old listened to "In Christ Alone" on her parents' DVD recording. She gently raised her hands each time the chorus returned, and silently praised as she swayed with the music.

\*In the early 50's in St. Louis, there was a daily Bible service/meal for the homeless men who lived down the river. One of those men was at the back of the room one day, unrecognizable in a suit, tie, and top hat. When the service ended, he came up to explain why he was no longer dirty, disheveled, drunk, and hungry.

"A family took me in.

And they had three children."

God can use the presence of children to change a life.

I pray we will always love children we encounter with the love of the Lord...so they will always want to worship Him.

God inhabits their praise. He's not finished working in their lives - just as He's not finished working in our lives.

Praise His name and let the little children lead the way!

Karen Love



Tuesday Morning, April 4, 2023

## **THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS**

John 12:35-36

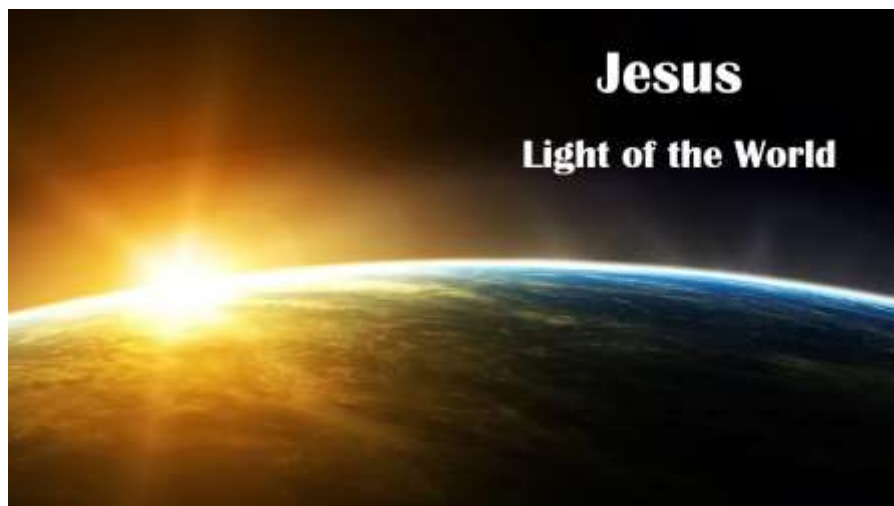
*Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the Light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the Light before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the Light while you have it, so that you may become sons of Light.”*

Can you imagine being with Jesus and He says He will be with you for a little while longer? I don't think the disciples, or His followers really understood that Jesus would be taken from them and crucified in just a few short days. Jesus told them to take advantage of His presence while they had it. This a perfect example of not seeing what is right in front of us. They truly had Jesus in their presence but couldn't see He was the true Light. They truly had Jesus “the Light” in front of them but were still blinded by the darkness.

In this passage Jesus refers to Himself as the Light. When we think of Light, it is pure, true, holy, and reliable. Even the small flame of a candle illuminates the darkness. This world is full of darkness, sin, temptation, and those things we know are just wrong. But why are we so tempted by those things? A friend pointed out in the movie *The Passion of Christ* how from a distance Satan's character is beautiful but up close you see the evil and ugliness. I think so many things in this world are that way: from a distance they are attractive and beautiful but up close you see the ugliness or even danger.

We need to examine our lives. We need to be in the Light (Jesus). We do that by being in His Word (the Bible), active in study, and active in the fellowship (church). We are called to be sons and daughters of the Light. Are you a child of the Light? Have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior? If not, I pray you make that decision to follow Jesus with your whole life. If you are a child of the Light, I pray you are Walking in the Light daily and sharing the Light in a dark world. The world needs to see our Savior. Will you be that Light in the darkness?

God Bless,  
Renee Bryant



## **THERE IS A LIGHT**

There is a light that shines for me.  
It is a light for the world to see.  
I found it when my life was dark.  
I had no hope, no life, no spark.

When I cried aloud with my head turned down,  
Tears of pain fell to the ground.  
He heard my pain and picked me up.  
He whispered nothing, but of His love.

When I asked Him how He could love me that much,  
He simply said "hush".

When He speaks to me through the book He wrote,  
My love for Him grows and grows.  
He came to earth to save a soul like me.  
He came in love to set me free.

If your life is dark and you are in despair,  
Take comfort in knowing He is always there.  
Open your heart and cry out His name.  
His light will shine upon you, and you will never be the same.

Becky Frizzell

I John 1:4-5

I Peter 2:9



Wednesday Morning, April 5, 2023

## GOD'S TIMING Mark 13:32

*“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in Heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”*

Do you ever drive by an accident and think “a minute earlier, and that could have been me,” or when you hear about a storm in a place that you were in just the day before, or sadly, about a shooting at the mall you just shopped at last week, and realize how God’s timing saved you from harm?

Last year, December 22, 2022, was the day that snow and ice blanketed Louisville and most of the east coast, causing travel delays right before Christmas and disrupted the daily lives and holiday plans of so many. The evening before, I had packed my car with every emergency item imaginable in case I got stranded the next morning on my three-mile drive to work. I even backed my car into the driveway to get a rolling start down the slight decline to make a sharp left out of the driveway and up the hill to the main street.

The next morning, rolling a few feet down the driveway, things were going well until I turned the wheels left, and then the rear tires got stuck in deep snow in that dip between the driveway and the street. I tried and tried ... and tried to get past the dip. The tires spun, but the car wouldn’t budge. I slowly tried to move forward, then backward, hoping to get some traction, but I was just stuck – rear tires in the dip and the front of the car blocking half the street. I then got the little shovel from my “emergency kit” in the trunk and tried to dig behind all the tires. Then forward, reverse, then shovel again, then forward, reverse, shovel again. I kept at this for nearly an hour, and each time I’d get back in the car and ask God, “please let it move this time.” Time after time, I dug and prayed, but nothing happened.

In nearly six years at my Kroger job, I had never once been late. This day would be the first. In all my life, and despite some difficult circumstances, I can’t remember a single time I was ever angry with God – until now. I sat in my car and screamed “*WHY, WHY, WHY, GOD, do you always make things so hard for me?*” It was dark and cold, and I was tired, frustrated, and so, so angry. I sat there, took a deep breath and tried to calm down. Then I gave it another try. Almost in slow motion, the rear wheels rose up over the snow, and I crept to the top of the hill. After rolling onto flat ground, I stopped and said a prayer of thanks to God, and asked for his forgiveness at my anger and loss of control. At that very moment, I felt God’s presence closer than any time I can remember. It was as if another person were sitting right there in the passenger seat. There was! It was God! He was right there in the seat next to me! **And then, ever so clearly and in a powerful voice He said to me “I just saved you from having an accident.”**

Jesus died, was buried, and resurrected according to God’s plan And timing. He is coming again! We do not know the day or hour, but we do know His timing is perfect.

Jan Miller



## I WANT TO LET MY LIGHT SHINE

*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let you light shine before men, that they may see you good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*  
Matthew 5:14-16 NIV

I've been thinking about my age recently. 71 for anyone guessing! Nothing morbid, not dwelling on, just thinking. I've lived well over half my life, 3/4 of my life. My paternal grandmother, most longevity on either side, lived to be almost 95. So, I figure, at best 24 years. left. Could be more, could be less, we aren't privy to that information.

So, thinking about this, I start thinking about my dash.

You know.....Born November 18, 1951-----Died ???, ??, 20???. My DASH!

What have I done with the time God has blessed me with on this earth? How have I used my dash to glorify Him? Before salvation I surely did not live my life glorifying Him, but when I accepted The Source of Light into my life, how have I used that time? Have I told enough people what He has done for me? Have I told people that He is my light, shining in the darkness, guiding me along the way? Not only is He my Light, but He is also my Comforter, He is my friend, He is my Redeemer, He is my salvation. *I truly could not live a day without Him* is not just a song, it's what I know.

As I am writing this, I may not have tomorrow, but what time I do have left I want to spend the rest of my dash loving Him, praising Him, thanking Him, communing with Him, praying for those who do not know Him, and telling them what He has done for me and that He is the only way to eternal life. I want to let my light shine in my community!!

Deborah Lawrence



Maundy Thursday Morning, April 6, 2023

## MAUNDY THURSDAY...A NEW COMMANDMENT

As you are reading this, either over morning coffee or perhaps as part of your daily devotional, have you ever considered the importance of this day? Many Protestant denominations give little note or celebration to the day itself...but it was a very eventful day in Jesus' ministry and should be an important day in our life and our remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice for us.

This is the day in which the Last Supper happened. This is the day Jesus Christ instituted what we know as communion at the Last Supper. *"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, Take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the New Testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he comes."* (1 Corinthians 11:23-26) Every time we partake of communion, we remember the events of Maundy Thursday that carried over to Friday and Christ's suffering and death on the cross.

All this time He was thinking of us.

This is the evening Jesus led His disciples to the garden of Gethsemane to pray. This is the evening Jesus prayed so intently that *"his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground"* (Luke 22:44).

All this time He was praying for us.

This is the evening in which the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders...came to take our Lord away to be tried and then crucified the next day. (Luke 22:47-52) He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. (Romans 4:25)

All He did He was doing for us.

And today is the day we received a new commandment. "Maundy" originates from the Latin word "mandatum", which means "command". *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* (John 13:34-35)

As you go about your activities today, remember this commandment of our Lord. Let everyone you meet see Jesus Christ shining in you!

Phil Shewmaker



## PREPARATION

***Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.” Luke 22:7-8***

This Easter you are probably doing much to prepare for the holiday. You might be getting Easter baskets ready for your children. You might even be preparing a list of groceries that will serve as the Easter meal. Preparation takes planning and getting your heart or mind ready. As we read in Luke 22, Jesus was preparing for this time. The Lord had always known the day and time of the Last Supper, His Betrayal, and Crucifixion. He had instructed His disciples, Peter and John, where to find water and those carrying the jar of water would even lead them to them to find the house and room that would be used for the Last Supper:

***“Where do you want us to prepare for it?” they asked.***

***He replied, “As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there.” They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So, they prepared the Passover. Luke 22:9-13***

Again, Jesus was ready and prepared to fulfill the Will of His Father and be the Lamb who would suffer as the sacrifice just after the Passover. I cannot imagine all the thoughts and emotions that entered His heart and mind or how He prepared Himself.

***When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” Luke 22: 14-18***

His disciples were preparing for a meal but were unaware of what Jesus was preparing to be – the Lamb, their Saviour, the Messiah that had been prophesied. As we celebrate Holy Week, it’s a good time to prepare ourselves not just for Easter baskets and dinners, but to remind ourselves of Jesus’ sacrifice and what it means for our salvation. Though we know the events, Easter helps us to be thankful for Jesus’ sacrifice. Take time this Easter to prepare your heart and mind. Be mindful and pray to receive the blessing of Easter.

Chris Towles



Good Friday Morning, April 7, 2023

## **THE LOVE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR**

Luke 22:54 - 23:55

It is my prayer as I write this devotional that I can share with you how very much our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ loves each of us. God's perfect only Son given on that cruel cross so that we may have forgiveness of our sins, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and have assurance that we will spend eternity in Heaven with Jesus! There is no price we could ever pay to purchase this gift. There is no work we could ever do that would be enough to purchase our place in Heaven. It is a free gift. We need only ask in faith.

My Jesus willingly laid down His life for me. No one took His life from Him. He was arrested, beaten, spit upon, jeered, denied, and deserted by His beloved disciples, nailed to a cruel cross. He suffered and died an unimaginable death for me. He did this that I might be forgiven of my sins and know that He will never leave me nor forsake me. His death assured my forgiveness and His resurrection guaranteed that my eternal life would be spent in Heaven with Him. There is no greater gift we could ever receive than the one given to us by Jesus Christ. When He gave His life on the cross that day so many years ago, He was thinking of ME. He was thinking of YOU. As we read and study the verses listed above, we see the story of perfect love unfolding. My heart hurts with the cruelty of it all. His love is freely given because He loves and cherishes each one of us and wants to come into our hearts and share every moment of our lives, today, tomorrow, and always. We can't buy this precious gift. We can't earn it. I am not sure we can even fully comprehend all He went through on our behalf to purchase this priceless gift with His own blood, His own life.

The day I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior my life was changed forever. Not one moment of my life have I spent alone since that day. Jesus did not promise we would never have trials or that we would never feel pain or shed tears. This world can be hard and very cruel. What He does promise is that He will be with us through it all. Jesus hears my every prayer. He is my Comforter, my friend, my Savior. His love is the greatest most precious gift I have ever been given. His love is greater than the love of our family or friends. Greater than any earthly treasure we may possess. I know when I breathe my last breath on this earth, I will see His face and His outstretched arms of love. His love is perfect, and I thank Him for Calvary.

As we think about Easter and its true meaning, I try always to make it a time of reflection. As a Christian I want to spend time thinking about my Savior's love for me. It's difficult to even think about the cruelty of His death, the horrible pain He endured for me so that I might be forgiven of my sins. I think of the wonder of the empty tomb and the fact death has no power over our Savior. Thank You, God, for Your Son. Thank You, Jesus, for giving Your life for me. Thank You that I know I will spend all of eternity in Heaven with You. Thank You for the greatest blessing, the greatest gift anyone could ever have.

This Easter if you have never asked Jesus to come into your heart and forgive you of your sins, I pray with all my heart you will ask Him this moment to be your Lord and Savior. There is no more important decision you will ever make. You can KNOW your sins are forgiven and that because of His precious gift He will be with you every day of your life. He will never leave you or forsake you. He will never leave you comfortless. You can have the assurance you will spend eternity in Heaven with Him. It is really so simple. Tell God you know He sent His Son Jesus to give His life for your sins. Ask Him to forgive you and to come into your heart. Tell Jesus you know His death on the cross was for you. Tell Him you believe God raised Him from the dead and that He is seated at the right hand of God for all eternity. It is a gift freely given, we need only to ask. You never have to be alone or face life alone again. You can experience the perfect love of our Lord and Savior. He is as close as your prayer today.

Nancy Shewmaker

## THE LOVE ON THE CROSS

The aftermath of the cross became a dark gloomy day. People mourned (followers, family, disciples, etc.) and some rejoiced (Pilate, Pharisees, anyone who did not like Jesus). In my mind, it is the worst day in history that the man who is perfect and never committed a crime died for us sinners so that one day we can go to heaven. That is His love for us.

*“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:8)

When I was younger, I knew what Jesus did for us, but I could never fully picture it. With all that happened I only ever saw a very tiny glimpse of what it could have looked like in pictures, but never truly vividly. As I got older (I am now 13.), I finally decided that one night I would sit down and watch *The Passion of the Christ*. After watching so many things that were very cruel and bloody, I never thought that it would be like that and affect me so much. Considering that I am not scared of blood or watching painful things, that affected me more than anything else ever has. But as I was watching I had to turn away from the reality of the beating and the carrying of the cross. I could not bear seeing how badly Jesus was treated; and it was probably even worse than that. After I was done watching the movie, I took some time and really thought about it. I could never imagine that happening to me, but I also imagined that it was probably worse. I made a promise that I will never watch it again (probably will) for it was truly painful to watch how much Jesus endured. Jesus could have stopped it. But He said “no” because He loves us so much. If He didn’t love us, none of it would have happened.

If I were in Jesus’ shoes, I would have stopped it because I wouldn’t be able to handle the pain and torture. But for us to have salvation and see Jesus one day, this was the price to pay. He paid it all for us!

Jesus knew that after He died on the cross that the pain and suffering would soon be gone. His physical body was healed. However, even when Jesus rose from the grave, He did have the scars and gashes to show what He had done. He did the best thing ever while on this earth. The cross was the only way. It truly showed that He was the light in the darkness.

*“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”* (1 Peter 2:12)

*“For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* (Hebrews 12:2)

Emma Towles



Saturday Morning, April 8, 2023

## **TODAY IS DARK SATURDAY...THE LIGHT OF SUNDAY IS COMING!**

*“Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.” Luke 23:56*

Today is Saturday of Holy Week. The crucifixion is over, and the glorious resurrection is not yet here. We are stuck in the middle between tragedy and triumph as we wait for dawn’s new light. How do we live in such a place? Where do we go? What do we do? How do we endure?

Luke tells us that on Friday the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee had followed Joseph of Arimathea and had seen the tomb and how Jesus’ body was laid. That evening they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But on Saturday they rested in obedience to the Sabbath commandment.

Matthew’s gospel tells us that the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate on Saturday and reminded him that Jesus said that He would rise again in three days. (They were actually breaking the Sabbath Law – their own law – by doing this on the Sabbath.) The Pharisees said that they were afraid that the disciples may come and steal the body and say that Jesus had been raised from the dead. So, with Pilate’s permission the chief priests and the Pharisees went and sealed the tomb and posted a guard there.

Do you see the contrast? The women at the tomb were confident that Sunday would come! They knew that Jesus would rise again! The chief priests and the Pharisees were afraid that Sunday might really come and that the resurrection could possibly be a reality.

Where do you find yourself today? I hope that you find yourself like those women who were living in hope and grace as they waited expectantly for the Risen Lord! Yes, they were grieving! Yes, they were living through a difficult period in their lives! Yes, they were uncertain of exactly what the future would bring! But, they knew that Jesus would rise again! They lived with great hope and certainty in the reality of God’s grace.

The Saturday between Good Friday and Easter only comes once a year; however, we often find ourselves living there. Sometimes Saturday seems to last for days; and sometimes it does last for months or years. No matter how dark, dreary, unsettling, confusing, difficult, or tragic your Saturday is, there is hope!

Saturday comes in many forms. Saturdays are those days that we sit by the death bed of a loved one or when we see the coffin slip into the ground. Saturdays are those days when we realize that we live in an increasingly evil world. Saturdays are those days when we notice how we are aging and cannot do what we used to do. Saturdays are those days when our minds are spinning wondering how we will get through another day. Saturdays are those days when decisions are weighing heavily on our minds. On Saturdays we often walk through dark valleys, difficult circumstances, or horrific situations. On Saturdays we repeatedly deal with unreasonable people, self-centered personalities, and negative spirits. We can’t play leapfrog from Friday to Sunday because Saturday is real, and we must live in it. And it is accurate to say that Saturdays are intensely demanding, burdensome, and exhausting.

But, the good news is that tomorrow is Sunday!! Because of God’s grace, Sunday will come! Grace is the free and unmerited favor of God, as manifested in the salvation of sinners like you and me. Sunday only comes to those who have accepted His grace. If you have not done so, today is the day to accept His grace...to accept Him as your Lord and Savior! Because of His grace, we who are Christians know that Jesus is present, that He will never leave us or forsake us, and that His grace is sufficient for the dark days in the wilderness. Jesus is with us even on the Saturdays of our life’s journey. Praise God for the light of dawn. Sunday is coming!

Hallelujah! Tomorrow is Sunday!  
Linda Barnes Popham

Saturday Evening, April 8, 2023

## THE LIGHT OF JESUS

Do you remember the storms that came through on March 3, causing power outages throughout Louisville? We were in total darkness during the outage. I rummaged around the house, knocking things over searching for the candles I had just put away a few weeks before. The light produced by the candles wasn't much, but it was enough to help us through the evening until bedtime. I wonder how it must have been that first night after Jesus died. While we only experienced physical darkness, did those who were there at the crucifixion experience darkness too, albeit a different kind of darkness?

Then in Luke 23:56 (NIV), it says,

*“Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes.  
But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.”*

How could they rest after what had happened? I remember how difficult it was to rest that first night after my dad passed away. That was the darkest night I had ever experienced. Could they have felt that way? Did they have hope as we Christians do today?

With no electricity and no devices, Connor found it difficult to rest in the unnatural silence of the house. I, too, went to bed unusually early. We rested that night... and the next couple of nights. This was the first time my kids went through a power outage that lasted more than an hour or two. They were lost not having their game systems, full of restless energy. They waited impatiently for the power to be restored. They never asked IF the power would be restored. It was a question of when. They knew we would have light again.

I patiently spent my waking hours worshipping through music, reading the Bible, and focusing on how blessed I was to have found Jesus. To have light in my life when I had lived for years in darkness, stumbling over obstacles, knowing I am not alone.

John 3:16 (KJV) says,

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that  
whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

God sent Jesus for us. He's the light who came to earth for us. He is our hope! And I thank God for sending Him so that we don't have to face the darkness alone. He is the light shining brightly for us! I'm thankful it wasn't a question of if... I'm thankful it was a question of when. I rest knowing there is hope, knowing there is light, knowing Jesus.

I pray that you will experience the hope and light of Jesus this Easter!

Happy Easter!  
Lisa Payne



Easter Sunday Morning, April 9, 2023

## **CELEBRATE THE VICTORIES**

It's Sunday Morning and the two Marys have just seen the Angel at the tomb. The news is out, and Jesus is "Risen, just as He said" (Matthew 28:6).

Time to celebrate!! And celebrate we should. It's Sunday morning, Christ is risen, and it is a new day in the world. But if you think about it, there are a few things that have come together to make this final victory of the battle for life that took place in the very domain of Satan. Jesus won, the fight for life is over, and the promise is fulfilled.

But there are other victories involved in the celebration:

One, is the victory of obedience that happened in the Garden at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36). It is not well understood that obedience is the most visible and sincere evidence of Love. Think about it, what better way to show your respect and appreciation than to just do what is asked of you by a parent? Just do what is asked. No refusal, no debate, no hesitation, just a joyful, loving, act as requested.

Two, is the victory of endurance in the time between Jesus telling the Father, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Matthew 26:39). It was truly a victory enduring the incredible suffering of the ensuing torture, between the Garden and the Cross.

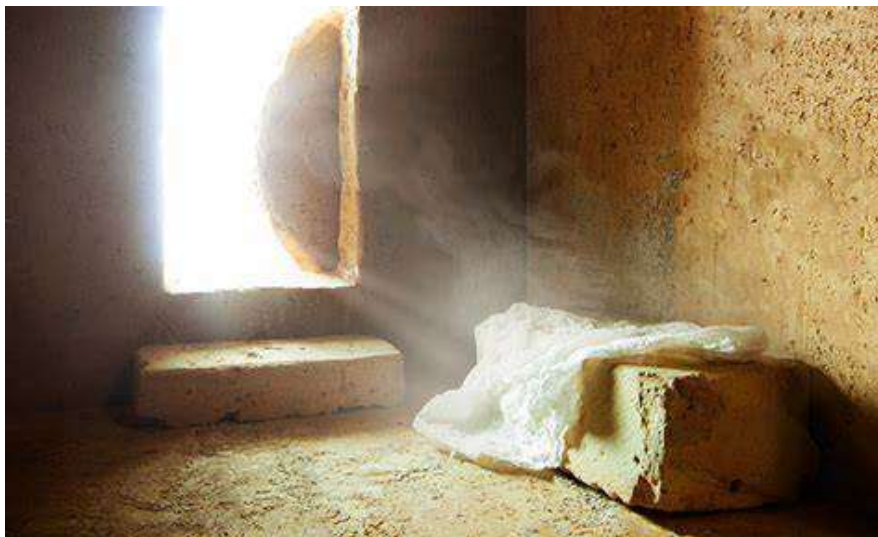
Three was the victory of completion. Three days of battle for the very life of the world. And the victories are complete!!

As we worship this Easter Sunday morning, definitely focus on celebrating the wonderful victory of a "Risen" Savior who conquered death and has earned the right to offer us the gift of life, if we will only accept the offer from a loving God who wants "ye, who are weary" to "come home". (Hymn: "Softly and Tenderly")

But also remember the other victories that make the entire Easter Sunday morning celebration complete.

Because the entire point is, **CHRIST IS RISEN, INDEED!!!!!!!**

Rick Pryor



## THE EASTER GOOD NEWS

Matthew 28:5-7

Angels are God's special messengers. In both the Old and New Testaments, angels appear to men to bring forth God's message. Throughout the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, angels played important roles. Angel Gabriel came to inform Mary that she was a chosen vessel to bear the Messiah (Luke 1:26ff.); an angel announced His birth to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-12) and host of angels appeared to the already awe-struck shepherds (2:13-15); angels came to minister to Jesus who triumphed over Satan (Matthew 4:11); and here in our passage, an angel announced the resurrection of the Lord of glory. The whole of heaven was silent while the Son of God took upon Himself the punishment of sinful men. Now the heavenly hosts are rejoicing over Jesus' triumph over death.

An unnamed angel was tasked to confirm the fact of Christ's resurrection. His message was short, direct, and powerful. He told the two Marys:

*"Do not be afraid."* Fear is a common and normal response to uncertainties. Before coming to the tomb, the Marys knew where Jesus was but now, they do not. He was not where they laid Him.

*"He is not here."* They were looking for Jesus who was crucified and was buried in the tomb. They came to the right place, but He was not there. Confusion sets in when what we are certain about, our reality suddenly crumbled. They were looking for the right person but at the wrong place. He is not where they laid Him.

*"He has risen just as He said."* Faith is believing what God said. Jesus said He will rise again on the third day, but sadly the disciples did not believe. God keeps His word and does what He said.

*"Come and see the place where He lay."* As if the angel's words are not enough, he invited the Marys to come inside and see for themselves the empty tomb. Faith seeks understanding and sometimes we need proofs to understand.

*"Go quickly and tell His disciples..."* was the urgent instruction of the angel. The good news must be announced with urgency and conviction. The Marys were the first visitors of the empty tomb, now they are the first to break forth the good news of Christ's resurrection.

*"[Tell them] He is going [to] Galilee [and there they] will see Him."* The risen Lord wanted to meet the disciples in Galilee. The Marys were tasked to tell the disciples that their calling did not end in the tomb but would resume in the Sea of Galilee where it all began (cf. Matthew 4:18ff.).

Jesus is risen to take away our fear of life's uncertainty. The empty tomb is an eloquent witness that established our faith and cleared away our doubt in the promise-keeping Savior. The grave could not keep the Risen Lord in the Same way as our unbelief and failures cannot hold back God from fulfilling His commitment to us. Jesus is risen! Praise God we serve a living Savior!

Rev. George Payocong, Jr.





Happy Easter