

John 20:1-18  
Welcome, Happy Morning

**20** Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. **2** So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." **3** So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. **4** Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5** And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. **6** Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, **7** and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. **8** Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; **9** for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. **10** Then the disciples went back to their homes.

### **Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene**

**11** But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. **12** And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. **13** They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." **14** Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. **15** Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? "Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." **16** Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). **17** Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" **18** Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

### **May God add his blessing to the reading and teaching of his Holy Word.**

*Let us pray:* Gracious God our Father, thank you for that happy morning when you raised your Son from the dead. Teach us, Lord, about the events of that morning, and help us see what a great morning it was. In Jesus precious name we pray. Amen.

The morning time of the day is a special time among the 24 hours. Many of us are able to wake up refreshed and rested. It is a new day, a new opportunity.

No doubt many individuals in the history of God's people experienced happy morning times of the day. Moses and the people of Israel had a happy morning the day after they escaped from Egypt.

After King Cyrus of Persia announced to the Jewish captives in Babylon that they would be free to return to their land and rebuild their temple, they must have awakened the next morning in eager anticipation of beginning the journey home.

When Mary bore her Son whom she and Joseph named "Jesus," what joy she must have had when she awoke the next morning with the infant at her side.

Today we're going to look at another happy morning, the most happy morning in the history of the human race: the day when Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, crucified for our sins, arose from the dead after lying in the stone-cold tomb for three days.

But it was a sad day for the devil and his demons, a terrifying day. But it was a glad day for the people of God. It was the day that Jesus defeated death, sin, and the devil. It was the day that demonstrated his suffering on the cross was received by the Father as the fully accepted sacrifice for the sins of his people. It was the day that confirmed that Jesus' own righteousness would now be applied to his people's account. It was a day of victory. Jesus, the holy warrior from heaven, had conquered all the evil enemies of God and his people and had won for them a secure place in the presence of God.

Today I'd like for us to observe the following things in this passage:

- I. The Astonishing Empty Tomb v.1-10
- II. Mary's Deep Devotion to Jesus v.11-17
- III. The Reality of Christ's Physical Resurrection v. 14-17
- IV. Christ's Announcement of his Ascension v.17
- V. Jesus' Unfailing Love for His Unfaithful Disciples v. 17
- VI. Mary, the Faithful Message Bearer v. 18

Let's begin with...

#### **I. The Astonishing Empty Tomb v.1-10**

Verse 1 of John 20 says, ***Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.***

Who was this Mary Magdalene. The scriptures tell us that she was one of the women from Galilee that Jesus had delivered from demons and infirmities. In fact, he had delivered her from seven demons. This group of women followed Jesus' band of disciples and ministered to them – probably cooking their food, maybe washing their clothes and so forth. The scriptures says the women supplied the needs of the disciples out of their own means.

We must note also that Mary was one of those faithful women who had not run away in fear when Jesus was being crucified, but in fact she had stood by the cross, watching the in sorry and prayer his agonizing death. She and the other women were not intimidated by the Roman executioners – their love and loyalty for Jesus pushed aside their fears. They were bold and courageous. This kind of love casts out fear of self-preservation. They laid themselves on the altar of sacrifice if need be so they could be close to their Lord and support him in his suffering.

So we read that Mary Magdalene rose early while it was still dark and went out to the tomb where Jesus had been placed. When she arrived, she was alarmed because the great stone that had been rolled over the entrance of the tomb had been removed.

She was shocked. What had happened? She did not know what do. But she had to tell Peter. So she turned and strolled back to where they were staying. No! She didn't stroll – she *ran*. She ran with all her might. *"I must tell Peter what has happened."* She found Peter, and he was with "the other disciple," that is, with John and she burst out, ***“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”***

She was astonished to see the stone rolled away. When Peter and John heard this news they were astonished also. And they too immediately began to run. What was going through their minds? Who in the world had rolled the stone away? Was Jesus' body still there, or had it been carried off? Had some of the other disciples decided to take the body so they could claim that Jesus resurrected from the dead? They just didn't know what had happened.

So as they ran back to the tomb, although they had started out at the same time, John outran Peter. Probably because he was younger and in better shape. John got there first, and he stooped to look in. What he saw was the linen cloths lying there, but he didn't go in. Then Peter arrived. He did not hesitate but went into the tomb. It was a like a cave, carved out of the rock. What he saw astounded him, confused him. There was not body of Jesus there, just the linen clothes that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had used to wrap Jesus' body in for burial.

Remember that it told us earlier that Nicodemus had brought about 75 pounds of “myrrh and aloes” – also designated “spices” (John 19:39-40) and he and Joseph had put them inside the linen cloths with which they had bound around Jesus’ body. So it seems that when Jesus’ body exited the graveclothes they did not just fall down into a flat pile, like a shirt removed and thrown down on the floor. The linen clothes had substance in them, they evidently resembled the casing of mummy, without a body inside.

Then Peter and John saw the face cloth “folded up by itself” in a separate place. What is going on here? Where is Jesus’ body? What had happened to it? They may not have been able to put the pieces together – they may have not been able to put the evidence together at that time.

But reflecting on all this and discussing it with the other disciples later, they probably came up with these conclusions:

- 1). Jesus’ body was not stolen. If it had have been, the grave robbers would not have taken the trouble to unwrap the body; they would have carried off the whole body.
- 2) Something supernatural happened. They recalled the situation when Jesus’ friend Lazarus had died and had been dead for four days. He had been buried like Jesus had been buried and laid in a tomb with a stone rolled in front of it. He had been wrapped in linen strips of cloth. When Jesus arrived on the scene after he had been dead four days, he commanded him to “come out” of the tomb and Lazarus came out, struggling to walk and move being all wrapped up linen cloths. The text even says in John 11: 44 that “his face was wrapped in a cloth.” It would have been very hard for Lazarus to get out of the grave cloths; he was barely able to walk. So Jesus gave the command, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

But in Jesus’ tomb there were no human helpers to unbind him. Only the Holy Spirit was there; only the power of God was there. But that was enough. In fact, he was not unwrapped by the power of God came upon him and transformed his earthly body into a resurrection body. Paul in 1 Cor. 15 distinguished between a “natural body” and a “spiritual body.” What he meant, I believe, was not that the spiritual resurrection body is a spirit, like a ghost, but it is of a different nature from the natural body of humans on earth. The spiritual body of the resurrection is a physical body, but it is suited for dwelling in God’s presence. For the believer, their resurrection body will be “like unto Christ’s glorious resurrection body.” This is the body that emerged, changed, from the linen grave clothes.

After he came out of the grave clothes, he removed the face cloth. But he did not just toss in down in the floor of the tomb, but he folded it up neatly and placed it apart from where his body had lain.

So this empty tomb was astonishing to Peter and John, but Mary also had her share of astonishment. After she had returned to the tomb after running to tell Peter and John, the scripture tells us in v. 11 that “*she stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she*

*stooped to look into the tomb. <sup>12</sup> And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.<sup>13</sup> They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."*

Mary, this second visit to the tomb, looked in the opening and saw two angels sitting where Jesus body had laid – probably a rock slab. And they asked her why she was crying. Of course, they knew why she was crying. And so Mary had a little conversation with the angels – expressing her consternation about who had happened to Jesus' body.

So here we have this astonishing phenomenon of the empty tomb with evidence that pointed to the resurrection of Jesus' body.

*The next thing I want us to notice is...*

## **II. Mary's Deep Devotion to Jesus v.11-17**

Let us remember that she and other women had been tagging along with the apostolic band and ministering to their needs. So Mary had been serving Jesus and the others for some time. She was no doubt profoundly grateful that the Lord Jesus had set her free from the demons that harassed or tormented her. Peace came to her mind and body. The evil powers that had tormented her were broken. Those chains were broken and she was free to live and think and breathe again as a normal human. How could she ever thank Jesus enough. In gratitude she followed him and his disciples and did what she could to help be free from some of the practical necessities of life to be able to do their ministry.

When she found Jesus' body missing, she was in deep distress. As she stood outside the tomb weeping, (v. 14) ***"...she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."***

Mary brushes aside all practical reality and says to the gardener, that if he would tell her where Jesus' body is, she will go fetch it, go pick it up, and bring it back. Mary doesn't think how she would transport the body of a grown man by herself. If she could just find him, she will somehow rescue him, retrieve him. She doesn't consider the logistics and accomplishing this, but in her devotion to him she is determined to find him and save him.

And then when Jesus does appear to her, she falls down and grabs his feet and ankles. She clings to him as if to say, "I've found you and I'll never let you go. I'll be with you

again and walk with you and serve you and hear your teaching and receive your kind words of love and encouragement once again.”

She had stayed with him at the cross when all the disciples except John had fled from fear of the Jews. Their Master had been crucified and they were afraid and didn't want to be next. But Mary Magdalene threw all caution to the wind. They could kill her if they wanted, but she wanted to be near to her Lord. The courage of women to stand by, defend, and protect those they love, is amazing, it is exemplary - it sometimes puts men to shame. Such was Mary's courage because of her love for her Master.

Next, let's just be sure we are clear about...

### **III. The Reality of Christ's Physical Resurrection v. 14-17**

Besides the empty tomb and the appearance of the angels in the tomb, Mary Magdalene was the first person to actually see and touch the risen Lord. The Lord Jesus spoke her name and told her of his coming ascension and told her to go and tell the disciples what he had told her.

#### Luther's Easter Sermon:

“This is the first sermon our Lord delivered after his resurrection and, without doubt, also the most comforting; although in words very brief, but exceedingly kind and tender, and spoken first of all to his beloved Mary Magdalene, and through her also to his disciples after their deep woe, grief and sorrow, caused by his departure and death that he might comfort and gladden them by his resurrection.”

That Jesus had really been physically raised from the dead can be seen in the facts that:

- 1) He appeared in a physical body in the garden, whom she at first thought he was the gardener. But there was a man standing in front of her. This was the risen Son of God.
- 2) Jesus spoke to Mary. He knew her, and spoke to her in such a way that she recognized his voice. So she not only saw him, but she heard his voice.
- 3) Mary, realizing that this was really her Lord, fell down and grabbed his feet and ankles. In our ESV translation Jesus says, “Do not cling to me.” (v. 17). She was holding on to Jesus. She felt his bones, his muscles, his skin. They were real feet and ankles like before

When Jesus later appeared to the group of his disciples he said,

*<sup>39</sup> See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. <sup>40</sup> Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” Luke 24:49*

Mary could testify – “yes, he had flesh and bones. I grabbed his feet and ankles in the early light of dawn on that first Sunday. I didn't want to let him go. I saw him, he spoke to me - it was him, it was my Lord.”

So it was **a happy morning** for Mary Magdalene:

*There was The Astonishing Empty Tomb*

*She was able to express her Deep Devotion to him*

*There was The Reality of Christ's Physical Resurrection*

But there were other reasons Mary Magdalene, and not only her, but all the disciples, and the church ever since welcomed that happy morning.

**IV. Christ's Announcement of his Ascension v.17**

<sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

This was actually not a new message that Jesus had been telling his disciples. He had often told them that he would be returning to his Father.

<sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you <sup>to</sup> myself, that <sup>where</sup> I am you may be also. John 14:3

<sup>12</sup> "Truly, truly, I say to you, <sup>whoever</sup> believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I <sup>am</sup> going to the Father. John 14:12

I <sup>am</sup> going to the Father, for <sup>the</sup> Father is greater than I. John 14:28

Jesus is reiterating to Mary what he had been saying all along to his disciples. He had come to earth on a mission. His Father had sent him. He had come to live and then to suffer crucifixion, and then he would rise from the dead, and then he would return to his Father in heaven. This was the complete package:

His life on earth was not enough. He had to die also. He had to die to pay for sins.

His death was not enough. He could not remain dead. He had to come alive so he could be our living Savior. He had to be resurrected from the dead.

But his resurrection was not enough. He had to return to heaven to take his place at the right hand of God at the throne in heaven. He had to return there so he could receive the glory and honor of him who had obeyed the Father and done his perfect will

- who had gone through the trial of suffering and death

- who had took his people's place on the cross of hell

- who bore the hell of God's furious wrath against sin in his own body.

-who had stayed in the dark tomb for three days and nights, even as Jonah had stayed in the whale's belly for three days and nights. Then the whale spit Jonah out on the land and he was alive. Alive to serve God and do his will.

-So Jesus came forth from the tomb of death after 3 days and night and he was alive – alive with vibrant energy. He as alive in his transformed, resurrection body. It was a real body. Mary could testify to that.

-Jesus was alive so he could come to his disciples on 10 different occasions over the next 40 days to teach them of the kingdom of God and show them irrefutable proofs of his resurrection. For example, one of those times when he appeared to the whole group, he asked them if they had anything to eat and they gave him some broiled fish which he ate in their presence. Christ was alive again. He was so alive that he could meet with his disciples and teach them and even eat and drink with them.

-but that was only a temporary time in his great redemptive work. Then on that appointed day, as the disciples were looking on, he ascended before their very eyes and returned back to heaven.

-and it was in heaven that he presented the sacrifice of his suffering to the Father as the payment for the sins of his people. And it was there that he began his great high priestly ministry of intercession for his people that continues to this very hour.

-It was necessary for Christ to ascend. It was necessary to confirm that his sacrifice on the cross was totally sufficient to remove the guilt and sin of his people, and apply to them his own righteousness.

-So, although Mary could not grasp all this at the time. It was really good news and made that a happy morning for Jesus confirmed to her that he would be ascending back to the Father. The happy morning message of his coming ascension back to his Father.

*But there was another reason this was **a happy morning:***  
**V. Jesus' Unfailing Love for His Unfaithful Disciples v. 17**

<sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'

I quote again from martin Luther's Easter sermon on this passage:

"Jesus told her to go and deliver a message to the apostles that he was ascending to his Father and their Father.

Note: Jesus calls them "brethren." Luther says this is a quote from Psalm 22:22: *I will tell of your name to my brothers;*

He had never called them "brothers" before: At the Last Supper he called them "his "dear children" and his "friends."

"It is of great importance to him; for he does not delay, but as soon as he is risen, his first concern is to have them told what he intends to do, and why he is risen from the dead.

"Go, my dear sister(s) and tell the denying and disloyal disciples that they are called, and shall be, my dear brethren" Luther even notes that he himself was guilty of 15 years of

blaspheming God in his presentation of the “idolatrous mass” when he was a Roman Catholic priest.

“...this brotherhood is greater, mightier, stronger and superior to the devil, sin and all things. We are not fallen so deeply, and things are not so bad and ruined that this brotherhood cannot arrange and fully restore everything again, inasmuch as it is eternal, infinite, and inexhaustible.”

“Who can fully comprehend this? And what a heart can sufficiently believe that the Lord is so completely ours? For, indeed, it is a thing too great and unspeakable, that we poor, miserable children of Adam, born and grown old in sin, are to be the real brethren of supreme Majesty, joint heirs and joint-rulers in eternal life. As St. Paul so gloriously declares in Rom. 8:17 and Gal: 4:7 – “...we are children of God,<sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.”

Well, for these “denying and disloyal” disciples – they had all run away – only John had remained at the cross – this was a **very welcome message** to make that first morning of resurrection a happy morning for them. They had deserted Jesus, but Jesus had not deserted them.

The apostle Paul tells us in 2 Tim. 2: 12-13:

*if we endure, we will also reign with him;*

*if we deny him, he also will deny us;*

<sup>13</sup> *if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.*

So we see here **Jesus’ Unfailing Love for His Unfaithful Disciples** v. 17

But there is one more thing we see in this passage that makes it a welcome happy morning:

#### **VI. Mary, the Faithful Message Bearer v. 17-18**

<sup>17</sup> *Jesus said to her, “... go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”<sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.*

Mary Magdalene was not only devoted to her Lord, but she was obedient to him. She did exactly what he told her to do. She immediately went and found the disciples and told them that she had seen the Lord, he had spoken to her, she had grabbed his feet and ankles, and he had told her of his coming ascension and that she must go and tell all this to “his brothers.” So she did all of this.

She was a faithful message bearer. These disciples were down and out. They were extremely discouraged and depressed. Their beloved Lord whom they had followed and

spent time with and fellowshiped with for three years had just been executed like a notorious criminal and put on public display on the outskirts of Jerusalem. They were still afraid for their own lives.

They were probably ashamed that they had deserted their Lord on the cross. And here was his woman who had the love and courage to remain loyal and faithful even amid the horrible execution of the cross with all of its blood and moaning and naked bodies on the cross and the gambling Roman soldiers and the steel of sledge hammers to break human bones and the steel of a Roman spear that had been thrust into Jesus' side. They had run away from all this.

But Jesus had not run away from them. He sent Mary to them with a message of hope and encouragement: he was alive, he was physically resurrected from the dead, personal fellowship with him still existed, and he was forgiving and restoring them in spite of their failure of courage, their failure of loyalty.

What a welcome message from Mary, the faithful message bearer. Oh happy morning! Jesus is alive. He is not dead. He knows all about us. He knows all our failure. But he speaks to us as his brothers. Did you hear that, Matthew? Did you hear that Andrew? Did you hear that James? He called us his brothers! He still wants to use us in his service. He still wants to fellowship with us. He wants to forgive and restore us to his service. Oh, happy day. Oh happy morning! Has there ever been a morning like this? Has anyone ever known the joy that we share in Jesus' love and restoration?

That first resurrection morning, that Sunday morning, was a happy morning because of:

- I. The Astonishing Empty Tomb v.1-10**
- II. Mary's Deep Devotion to Jesus v.11-17**
- III. The Reality of Christ's Physical Resurrection v. 14-17**
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All these things made that morning a welcome and happy morning. The reality and power of Jesus' resurrection from the dead is just as true and real today as it was on that first resurrection morning.

Let us rejoice and be glad and serve our risen Christ with devotion, joy and fidelity.

Prayer:

Thank you, Father, for raising your Son from the dead. Thank you for the defeat of death and all evil powers. Thank you for the resurrection life you now give us. Enable us to walk ever more in the joy and power of Christ's resurrection, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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