

And they saw Him

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How shall we understand Easter and the Resurrection?

First, there is the first story: Jesus died on a cross of crucifixion on a Friday afternoon. The time was set because it was the week of the Jewish Passover, the major religious and cultural holiday of the Jews. And it was held in their capital city, Jerusalem, reportedly one of the most beautiful of all Mediterranean cities of the time. Thousands of people of all nationalities crowded the city for the festivities.

Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, Idumaea and Samaria, led his legions from Caesarea by the Sea to Jerusalem, partly to join the holiday, but mostly to keep the peace.

Part of their peace-keeping work included the crucifixion of three condemned Jews on Friday, the day before the Passover Sabbath. It was important to the Jews that the execution be finished before sundown, when the Jewish Sabbath day began.

One of the three was Jesus, of Nazareth. He was buried late that afternoon, a stone rolled in place to seal the tomb.

After the 24 hours of Sabbath, on the first day of the week, a friend, Mary of Magdala, came to finish burial procedures and found the tomb open and empty, except for the burial cloths his body had been wrapped in that Friday afternoon, which were still laying where his body had lain.

She ran to tell other friends and companions. They came, and they were all puzzled, wondering what had happened—and wondering what to do. They went home.

Next, there begins the second story. Mary seemed not satisfied with just going home. She returns to the empty tomb, but finds herself not alone. A man is there who, from a distance, seems to belong there—a caretaker, perhaps.

Coming near, eyes diverted as was appropriate, she speaks, “Please, Sir, if you could help me.” He replies, but it is no stranger’s voice, and no strange reply— “Mary.” And her head is jerked around. “Rabbi!” she exclaims in their native Aramaic tongue. She starts toward him, but he says, “Go tell the others. And tell them to meet me in Galilee.”

And then the third story. Mary flies off to find the disciples. Does she just leave Jesus standing there? Apparently so, as she quickly obeys. And finding them, proclaims, “I have seen the Lord!”

The rest of the story is that, as promised, they met him in Galilee—the Risen Lord, as they had never understood. Never, from all he had taught and shared. Never caught on, from all he had touched and healed, rescued, fed, gave sight, taught to stand again—never.

Until meeting him there, as Mary said they would, they found themselves repeating Mary’s words to one another with amazement, “I have seen the Lord!”

This Easter Sunday, this one coming, in congregations and gatherings celebrating again and

again the Resurrection, you may not have to listen hard to hear: "I have seen the Lord!"
From that Galilee to every Galilee since, the Mary Proclamation is heard: "I have seen the Lord!" And to hear replied, "And I, too. Praise the Lord!"