

Christ is indeed risen!

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Easter Sunday is the greatest feast of the Church's year, and as always, we are given a formidable array of readings to help our reflection on the mystery.

There is a thread that links together all the readings of the Vigil Service on Holy Saturday night. The point of them is that they offer a great sweep through the history of God's dealings with the people; and on this day it is very much our story.

- **The first reading** starts (where else?) with the opening lines of the Bible, and the astonishing fact that God created us.
- **The second reading**, perhaps the most chilling tale of the entire Bible, is the testing of Abraham (or the binding of Isaac); read it slowly this week, to see what it says of our journey with God.
- **The third reading**, from Exodus, narrates the almost impossible liberation of the children of Israel from Egypt; that was the event that turned them into the people of God. So the focus narrows, from creation, to God's demands for obedience, to God's unfailing fidelity
- **The fourth and fifth readings** come from adjacent chapters of the prophet Isaiah. The first goes deeper into the mystery with the assertion of God's unfailing love (despite what it might feel like): "The One who has become your husband is your Maker...my love shall never leave you." The second is a lovely poem that gives powerful expression to the thirst that we all feel for God, and asserts the undying mercy of this great God: "Seek the Lord while he may be found."
- **The sixth reading**, from Baruch, turns to the disaster of Israel's exile, and asserts the lesson, that unless we "walk in the way of God", the same thing will happen to us; it meditates on the joy that comes from knowing what God wants: "Blessed are we, O Israel, for what pleases God is known to us."
- Now **Lent finishes** and we enter into Easter, with the Gloria and bells, and **the seventh reading** is from the New Testament.

This is Paul's meditation in his letter to the Romans on what the death and resurrection of Christ has achieved for us. What it has done, according to **Paul**, is that "we have been buried through baptism into his death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the Father's glory, we might walk in a new way of life". In other words, we belong with Christ, not only with his death that we celebrate on Good Friday, but also in the Resurrection, the heart of our Christian faith, so that "we shall live with him".

- Then there are the **two Gospels of Easter: Mark at midnight, and John on Sunday morning**. Please make sure that you read those two Gospels. Both of them are shrouded in uncertainty.

In **Mark's Gospel**, the women buy spices to anoint Jesus' body (which means, of course, that they do not believe in Resurrection), and expect to have to roll away the stone. To their astonishment, God has got there first, and the tomb is open. But they do not find a decomposing or dismembered corpse, as you might expect; instead there is a young man, who knows what they are about, and utters the great Easter cry, "He is risen!", and tells them to go and tell the disciples, especially Peter. This is a story to give fill our hearts with joy.

So too is the daytime story, from **John's Gospel**, which also figures the women, or at least Mary Magdalen, though there is a hint that other women might have been involved.

Mary's report stimulates Peter and the Beloved Disciple to race to the tomb, a contest that is won by the Beloved, though he courteously allows Peter first entry; Peter sees the grave-cloths lying there, and the burial cloth lying on its own, which means, of course, that it was not grave-robbers that were responsible for the disappearance of Jesus' body.

The Beloved goes a bit further: "He saw and he came to faith." Finally they grasp that Jesus "had to rise from the dead". And, if you think about it, that is inevitable, in the light of the long reach of readings that we have through the night. **If God is God, it was inevitable that Jesus should be raised from the dead.** There is much to rejoice us today.