

Jesus is Alive!

preached by Rev. Paul Sakasov on April 21, 2019

Luke 24:1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’ 8 Then they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

This morning as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on this Easter Sunday, I would like to focus our attention on the larger narrative in Luke’s gospel as a means of increasing our understanding of this central story in the Christian faith.

So let us begin our journey towards the empty grave in Luke, chapter one. After providing the historical context in which Jesus’ life and ministry occur, the gospel of Luke begins with the angel of the Lord appearing to Zechariah in the temple. Thus, the gospel of Luke begins with an angelic declaration announcing the birth of John the Baptist, who will prepare the way for the long awaited Messiah by turning many people back to God.

Shortly afterwards, the angel Gabriel is sent to Nazareth to tell Mary that she will be filled with the Holy Spirit and become the mother of Jesus, the Son of God. Then Mary visits Elizabeth who is filled with the Holy Spirit and declares that the baby in Mary’s womb is the Lord. Still in Luke chapter one, John the Baptist is born, and his father, Zechariah, is filled with the Holy Spirit and declares the salvation of God that is at hand.

Moving onto Luke chapter two, Jesus is born in Bethlehem and the angel of the Lord appears again, this time to shepherds. The angel declared, “Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.” Then, when Jesus is taken to the temple to be circumcised, eight days after he was born, a righteous and devout man named Simeon, who is filled with the Holy Spirit,

comes to Jesus and thanks God, saying, "My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

In Luke chapter three the story continues as the word of God comes to John in the desert. Notice that this word, like all the words that have been spoken so far in the story are words of special revelation. In other words, all that has been spoken so far concerning the gospel has come directly from God, either through the mouths of angels, or through the mouths of saints who are filled with the Holy Spirit. This trend will continue throughout the entire gospel. But, back to the story. The word of God comes to John and he goes about the country around the Jordan river preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and announcing that the Messiah was at hand.

Then, Jesus comes to the Jordan river and is baptized by John. At this time the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in a visible manner and an audible voice came from heaven saying, "You are my Son, whom I love; with whom I am well pleased."

After his baptism, Luke tells us that Jesus, full of the Spirit, is led to the desert for forty days. During this time he was tempted by the Devil in the wilderness. Jesus responded to all the Devil's testing by reciting words of Scripture.

At this point in the gospel, Jesus begins his public ministry. Starting in Galilee, he went to their synagogues and taught in the power of the Spirit. The next seventeen chapters expound upon the teaching of Jesus and the miracles he performed to verify the authenticity of the words he spoke.

In chapter nine, just before Jesus starts his journey towards Jerusalem and towards the cross, we find Jesus with his inner three disciples, Peter, James, and John. At this time Jesus is transfigured in their presence and Moses and Elijah come and speak to him. Then, a voice came from heaven saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen, listen to him."

After the transfiguration, the next twelve chapters of Luke give us more stories about Jesus teaching and performing miracles. Then in chapters twenty two and twenty three we have the stories of the Last Supper, Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion and burial.

This brings us to today's reading in chapter twenty four, which is the final chapter of Luke's gospel. In this chapter the fulness of God's salvation is revealed. Starting in the empty tomb, the angels declare for the first time that Christ is risen!

Then, later in the day, Jesus appears to some of the disciples while they were walking to a town called Emmaus and he opened the Scriptures to them, starting with Moses and the Prophets and he taught them all it said concerning him. When they had heard the Word, Luke tells us, the disciples' eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus.

The gospel of Luke concludes a few verses later when Jesus appears to the disciples in Jerusalem. At this gathering, he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. Then he told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Putting all of this together, from the opening words of the angel of the Lord in chapter one, through to the final words of Jesus in chapter twenty four, St. Luke tells us the story of God's salvation that is planned by God, announced to the world by God (through special messengers; either angels or Spirit filled people) and executed by God through his Incarnation, sinless life, and his death, resurrection and ascension. As an insider to all these things, St. Luke tells the essential story that God has chosen to be the basis of our salvation, and he ignores all the other details, as they are irrelevant.

While Luke gives us the essential story, he also clearly points out that the Spirit of God is absolutely necessary to interpret this story properly and for it to achieve its redeeming purpose. For without the Spirit, we will be like the Scribes and Pharisees, who studied the Scriptures day and night, and yet were completely blind to the presence of God in their midst. In fact, they were so blind, that when God came to them, they crucified him.

Furthermore, without the grace of God, even Christ's disciples could not understand his simple and direct teachings. After all, Jesus had been telling his followers for a long time that he was going to die on a cross and rise on the third day. And yet, even with his direct words, we find the women going to the tomb in our reading this morning looking to anoint a dead body. In other words, after all their time with Jesus, they didn't believe; they didn't understand. Only after the angel spoke to them did things become clear. Likewise, Jesus had to open the Scriptures to his disciples on the road to Emmaus in order for them to see what they had not seen before. Then in Jerusalem, through a special act of grace, he opened their minds so they could understand Scripture. This was key to their understanding and to their transformation. Without this special grace, we would not have the church today.

That being said, it is God's desire that his plan of salvation be revealed to the

world. This is why God sent the angels to declare Christ's birth. This is why God sent the angels to declare Christ's resurrection. And this is why Christ sent his disciples into all the world to preach; and that is why Luke through the power of the Spirit recorded the words we read today.

Furthermore, it is God's desire that the message of his great salvation be spoken first to the poor and the marginalized. That is why the birth of Christ was first proclaimed to shepherds rather than kings. That is why the resurrection was first announced by angels to peasant women, like Mary Magdalene who had been a demon possessed prostitute. That is why Christ used uneducated fishermen and other men of low esteem to go into all the world to preach the good news.

And what is the good news that God wants us to hear? The good news is that God loves us and he has come to save us from the destructive power of self centered living that kills not just the body, but, the spirit and soul. In order to do this, God sent his Son into the world to cure us and to cure creation from the affliction of selfishness, also known as sin. However, in order to fully eradicate this world of sin, Christ's blood had to be shed, as it is the only thing powerful enough to overcome sin's deadly power. While this is a sad reality, as seen by the grief of his disciples that we read about this morning, this sadness was shortly replaced by joy as the disciples understood that Christ had overcome the power of sin, and death, and hell, having risen from the grave in a glorified body.

Then, after he did all this, Christ gave power to his disciples that they may understand the Word of God, that they may live the Word of God, that they may share the Word of God with others, and that they may have the hope of being with the Word of God, Jesus Christ, forever. This is the good news that the disciples received on Easter Sunday. This is the good news that they spent the rest of their lives sharing with the world.

And this is the good news that we celebrate two thousand years later on this Easter morning. God loves us. God has saved us from sin and the judgement that it brings. God will raise us from the dead. We will possess a renewed and glorified body that is so much better than the ones we live in now. We will live with Christ forever. This is the good news. By the grace of God, may we believe it. May we live it. And may we proclaim it to the world, all to the glory of God.