

EASTER HOPE

Jesus is risen! Look for him among the living, not the dead.

The evening of the day Jesus died, his body was buried in a tomb. He was buried in so much haste there wasn't even time to anoint him properly. So three days later, Mary Magdalen and a small group of his other women friends rose from their beds with the first light of day. They hadn't slept much since Jesus had been so cruelly captured, mocked, and killed. With heavy hearts they mixed spicy ointments, and then set out for his tomb. Oh, to look on his face again!

Mary and the other women, peering into the cave in the early morning light, found his tomb empty! Had someone taken his body? Strangely, his shroud and other burial cloths were lying in folds on the stone slab. Then they noticed a man standing nearby who looked as if he might be caretaker of the grounds. Maybe he had removed the body, or at least knew what had happened. They approached him and Mary asked. In response the man spoke her name, "Mary ..." Something like a bolt of lightning went through her whole body. Her heart jumped. Stunned, she gasped and cried out the name she had always used for Jesus: "Master!" It was too much to take in. But Jesus immediately sent the women out on a mission: "Go and tell the others that you have seen me."

Mary knew where his friends and apostles were hiding, afraid of the men who had killed Jesus. They didn't believe her, of course. Silly woman! But two of the men,

Peter and John, ran to the tomb, just the same, to check it out. Soon there was no end to the shocking reports. At one point over five hundred people in many different parts of the country reported seeing him at exactly the same time. Many people who had been dead for several years were seen walking about the city, and their graves were found to be mysteriously open. Everyone was astounded with all that was happening.



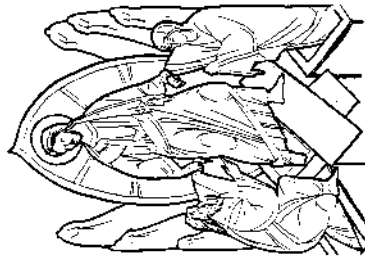
Much later Jesus' followers realized that he had been 'busy', during those three days even while his body apparently lay in the tomb. While asleep in the dark earth, he had been gainfully occupied! As we say in the Creed, he "descended into Hell" or "to the Dead." In his human soul, united to his divine person, he went to the realm of the dead. He went to open heaven's gates for the just who had gone before him, and to draw them into heaven with him.

Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, and their disobedience to God, human beings had been unable to be fully face to face with God in heaven.

In an Ancient Homily of Holy Saturday an anonymous author said that Christ went "to search for our first parent (Adam) as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve...I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. Out of love for you and for your descendants I now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I order you, O

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Pass It On! #15



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#15

sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form only one person and we cannot be separated...

“For the sake of you, who left a garden ... I was crucified in a garden. See on my face the spittle I received in order to restore to you the life I once breathed into you. See there the marks of the blows I received in order to refashion your warped nature into my image... See my hands, nailed firmly to a tree, for you who once wickedly stretched out your hand to a tree... The enemy led you out of the earthly paradise. I will not restore you to that paradise, but I will enthrone you in heaven.”

Church artists have painted icons or holy images of this scene, called Christ's Descent into Hades. The icon shows our Savior descending into the very depths of the earth—into a gaping, black abyss. In the center of the icon, dressed in luminous white, Christ stands victorious against the gates of Hades, or hell. On the right are the saints of the Old Testament, and the first to be freed is Adam. In a corner of the icon there is a pit where demons lie, deprived of their power. Christ gives his helping hand to draw humanity, represented by Adam and Eve, out of their tombs. A radiant new light comes from Christ and penetrates everything in heaven and on earth and beneath the earth.

Today all of us walk at the edge of an abyss of despair, of evil; and yet out of this mess that is all around us, an icon from long ago brings hope. Icons are always symbolic. God fulfilled the hope of the Old Testament people who waited for him. Tomorrow he will fulfill the hope of all humanity.

Twelve men, the Apostles, christianized the world of their day. Today we have to start all over again to do that. Where are we going to get the strength to get hope for ourselves as well as to give it to others? On our knees! We also get hope by reading the book of hope: the Bible. We can give courage to each other. Christ is in our midst!

Adapted from *Season of Mercy: Lent and Easter*, with Catherine de Hueck Doherty, pp 110-113.