





# Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Sunday of the Paralytic

April 25, 2010

Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor; Subdeacon Daniel  
J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris, Cantors

Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

## We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

*It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 - 8.*

## GLAD TIDINGS

+++ Today we have festal anointing on the occasion of this past week's simple feast of the Great Martyr, St. George. Presently the customary greeting is "Christ Is Risen!" to which we respond, "Indeed He Is Risen!"{

+++ This coming Saturday we are having the Pirohi Sale for the month of May. Although we just had a delayed sale due to the Resurrection feast day, we are retaining the regular schedule for the sale. Please attempt to secure orders as usual. Preparations will take place Thursday morning at 7:00 AM.

+++ Next Sunday at 9: 15 AM, we will celebrate a Memorial Service for the repose of the souls of his beloved parents, +Andrew and +Haratina, requested by George and Debra Szmaida. We pray the Lord continues to comfort George and Debra and their loved ones in their loss and that He grants a blessed repose to the souls of +Andrew& +Haratina and creates for them Eternal Memory, Christ Is Risen!

+++ We remind our faithful that at the last Diocesan Council this past summer, the Diocesan Dues were raised, due to inflation and need, from the past \$50.00 per adult individual, eighteen years and older, to \$60.00 per year. Our envelope offering system still has the old amount on it, so please disregard that figure and make your offering according to the new mandated amount. If this offering was made in the old amount, please correct it by submitting the additional amount with a notation on the envelope because the parish must send the entire amount to the diocesan chancery.

+++ We will have Bake Sale on Friday, May 28 in time for the Memorial Day celebration. Please secure orders for Nut Rolls, Poppyseed, Lekvar and Apricot Rolls at \$12.00 each.

+++ The offering for flowers for the coming feast of Pentecost will be taken on Sunday, May 16. Please plan on being generous for the beautification of our church as we celebrate its birthday.

+++ The sign-up sheet for both the Web Site and Bulletin sponsors is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. Please sign up as soon as possible. Do NOT make payment until your sign-up month has arrived. This will make it easier for Father to keep track of payments. Thanks in advance to all who support the parish in this way.

+++ We offer thanks to the Blessed Trinity for inspiring generosity in the souls of our faithful and the blessing of abundant grace in our midst with the offering received this past week-end: Tithe Offering, ~~\$631.00~~; Candles, ~~\$17.00~~; Kitchen, ~~\$1174.00~~; Holyday, ~~\$20.00~~; Food Coupons, ~~\$680.00~~; Christian Fellowship, ~~\$5.00~~, for a total of ~~\$2547.00~~. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offered their God-given treasure for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls! The attendance was 41 adults and 13 children last Sunday.

+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Pani Lucas, +Paul Szmaida, Kent Pasquino, Kyle Pasquino, and Pani Buletza.

+++ We make a PENNIES FROM HEAVEN Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of ~~\$1572.00~~ from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ For the expansion of our much needed parochial facilities, our parish pledge support to date totals ~~\$103,715.00~~. As we thank the Lord for inspiring generosity in the hearts of our faithful, we also thank the donors for accepting the challenge of the Lord in building up His Body. We cordially invite and look forward to receiving additional and increased pledges from all our devoted parishioners.



# RESURRECTION

## PRIMER





# DEAD MEN DON'T RISE

## The “problem” with Christianity

When we stop breathing, we die and our bodies return to dust. Everyone agrees with this reality, but Christianity seems to be based on a belief that is diametrically opposed to this.

## Jesus' Resurrection and Christianity

The bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the crowning proof of Christianity. Everything else that was said or done by Christ and the Apostles is secondary in importance to the Resurrection. If the Resurrection did not take place, then Christianity is a waste of time. The Resurrection is the heart of the gospel message.

## Meaning of “Resurrection”

The word “resurrection” means “rising up from the dead.” It comes from the Greek word, *anastasis*, which in the New Testament means “rising up” or “standing again.”

## Summary of New Testament Teaching about Jesus' Resurrection

Jesus rose on the third day victoriously from the grave and showed himself alive to his disciples. “...but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead” Acts of the Apostles 10: 40, 41.

The risen Jesus was seen. “He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and he appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep” 1 Corinthians 15: 4 – 6. “After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God” Acts of the Apostles 1: 3.

Unless we believe as literally in the Resurrection as we do the passion and death, we are not Christians at all.

## **Why is Christ's Resurrection so important and comforting?**

Christ's Resurrection proves that Christ is the Son of God. "...and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord" Romans 1: 4.

His teaching is eternal unchanging truth. "Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple and I will raise it up again in three days'" John 2: 19. "So Jesus said, 'When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know who I am and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father taught me'" John 8: 28.

## **Does the Resurrection of Jesus matter?**

Christianity is based on Christ's Resurrection from the dead. The first century Christians derived their power from Jesus' Resurrection to witness for Christ and to "...turn the world upside down" Acts of the Apostles 17: 6.

## **The basics of Jesus' Resurrection.**

God's revelation to us in Scripture gives a clear understanding about Jesus' Resurrection:

Jesus said He would rise on the third day. "From then on Jesus the Messiah started to indicate to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly there at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the scribes and be put to death, and rise up on the third day" Matthew 16: 21.

Jesus was crucified and his dead body was placed in Joseph's tomb and great precautions were taken to guard against any fake Resurrection. "...a wealthy man from Arimathea arrived, Joseph by name. He was another of Jesus' disciples and had gone to request the body of Jesus. Thereupon Pilate issued an order for its release. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in fresh linen, and laid it in his own new tomb which had been hewn from a formation of rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance of the tomb and went away...'Sir,' they said, 'we have recalled that that imposter while he was still alive made the claim, 'After three days I will rise.' You should issue an order having the tomb kept under surveillance until the third day! Otherwise his disciples may go and steal him and tell the people, He has been raised from the dead. This final imposture would be worst than the first.' Pilate told them, 'You have a guard. Go and secure the tomb as best you can.' So they went and kept it under surveillance of the guard, after fixing a seal to the stone" Matthew 27: 58 - 66.

But when the two Marys arrived at Jesus' tomb, the angel of the Lord greeted them with the words: "He is not here, he is risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where they laid him. Then go quickly



and tell his disciples, 'He is risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. Now I have told you...'" Matthew 28: 6, 7.

Hundreds of people witnessed the risen Jesus during his eleven recorded appearances."...that he was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve. After that he was seen by five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still alive, although some have fallen asleep" 1 Corinthians 15: 5, 6.

If Christ did not rise from the grave, the whole scheme of redemption is a failure, and all the predictions and anticipations of its glorious results for time and for eternity, for men and for angels of every rank and order, are proved to be deceptions. "But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept" 1 Corinthians 15: 20. Therefore all of God's revelation to us is perfectly true in its manifestation. The kingdom of darkness has been overthrown. Satan has fallen as lightning from heaven, and the triumph of God's truth over error, of good over evil, of happiness over misery is forever secured.

## **Why is the Resurrection important?**

Jesus' Resurrection is a public witness to his death for us; evidence of the Father's acceptance of Jesus' work of redemption and a victory over death and the grave for all Christians of all times.

## **Is there anything about the Resurrection in the Old Testament?**

Jesus once explained to his disciples and to Cleopas and his unnamed traveling companion: "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'this is what is written, the Christ will suffer and then 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'" Luke 24: 45 – 47.

Jesus teaches that the Old Testament teaches about his death, his Resurrection and the global preaching of the gospel. Christianity does not hold the Resurrection to be one among many tenets of belief. Without faith there would be no Christianity at all. Once you disprove it, you have neatly disposed of Christianity.

The Book of Job contains a hint of future hope, while not developed in particular detail, it is present in the understanding of suffering Job. "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God" Job 19: 25, 26.

The Psalms contain several references from the inspired mind of David where he speaks of not being left in the grave. "...because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay" Psalms 16: 10. "...my body will live on in hope to the nether world, nor will you suffer your



faithful one to undergo corruption" Acts of the Apostles 2: 27. St. Luke the Evangelist uses this precise quotation in his history of the early Church. It is directly applied to Jesus and specifically to his resurrection. "Seeing what was ahead, he (David in the Psalms) spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay, thus proclaiming before hand the resurrection of the Messiah" Acts of the Apostles 2: 31.

In the book of Daniel, the Resurrection is in sharper focus. "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt" Daniel 12: 2.

A Resurrection image in the Old Testament reflects the idea of eternal life. Abraham displayed great faith in God when he was prepared to obey God and sacrifice his only son, Isaac. "Take your son, Isaac, your only one, whom you love to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you....Thereupon Abraham took the wood for the holocaust and laid it on his son Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife...Isaac continued, 'Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the holocaust?' 'Son,' Abraham answered, 'God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust.'...Next he tied up his son Isaac and put him on top of the wood on the altar and he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the Lord's messenger called out to him from heaven, 'Abraham, Abraham, do not lay your hand on the boy...I know you are devoted to God since you would not even withhold from me your own beloved son'" Genesis 22: 2 – 12.

St. Paul's letter to the Hebrews explains Abraham's faith in terms of his son being brought to life again. "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring shall be counted.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death" Hebrews 11: 17 – 19.

## **Did Jesus ever predict his own Resurrection?**

It would be quite unusual to predict one's own death in general terms. It would be amazing to predict one's death in the detail Jesus predicted his. Jesus predicted not only his own death in general detail but also his subsequent Resurrection.

There are many predictions to death and Resurrection made on at least five occasions. "Destroy this temple," was Jesus' answer, "and in three days I will raise it up."...only after Jesus had been raised from the dead did his disciples recall that he had said this and come to believe the Scripture and the word he had spoken" John 2: 19, 22.



"From then on Jesus the Messiah started to indicate to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly there at the hands of the leaders, the chief priests and the scribes and to be put to death, and raised up on the third day" Matthew 16: 21.

"The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men who will put him to death, and he will be raised up on the third day" Matthew 17: 22.

"Jesus then said to them, 'Tonight your faith in me will be shaken, for Scripture has it: I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I am raised up, I will go to Galilee ahead of you'" Matthew 26: 31, 32.

As they were coming down the mountain, he strictly enjoined them not to tell anyone what they had seen, before the Son of Man had risen from the dead" Mark 9: 9.

"We are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" Matthew 20: 18, 19.

Jesus' supreme credentials to authenticate his claim to divinity was his Resurrection from the dead. Five times in the course of his life He predicted He would die. He also predicted how He would rise from the dead three days later and appear to his disciples.

Jesus Christ said He would be betrayed to the Jewish leaders and would be killed by the Gentiles. Non-Jews would mock him, flog him, crucify him. But then Jesus said He would rise again on the third day.

## **"DESTROY THIS TEMPLE"**

When Jesus spoke about destroying "this temple" and building it up again in three days, he was referring to himself, not the magnificent stone temple Herod had been building. Jesus speaks about his body being raised. "Then the Jews demanded of him, 'What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple and you are going to raise it in three days?' But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken" John 2: 18: - 22.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the epicenter of Christianity. For Christians the decisive evidence for Jesus' Resurrection is found in the record of the four gospel writers. What did SS. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John say about Jesus' Resurrection? The best way to come to a reasoned faith fair view about the Resurrection is to read the primary records. The rest of the New Testament adds supplementary information and crucial deductions about this historical event. It was not Christ's personality that survived death, or his influence, but his literal body that was raised from death.

Note that in each gospel narrative the description of Jesus' death is immediately followed with an account of his Resurrection. There is no question in the minds of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John that Jesus rose from the dead. Recent mythological views of the Resurrection of Jesus fail to do justice to scriptural evidence. Many in fact will continue to find it easier to believe the empty tomb produced the disciples' faith than that the disciples' faith produced the empty tomb.

## **GOSPEL EVIDENCE**

### **The Resurrection according to St. Matthew**

*After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.*

*There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.*

*His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you look for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he is risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: He is risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. Now I have told you.'*

*So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid, yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me'" Matthew 28: 1 – 10.*

*As the women were returning, some of the guard went into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. They, in turn convened with elders and worked out their strategy, giving the soldiers a large bribe with the instructions: You are to say his disciples came during the night and stole*



him while we were asleep. If any word of this gets to the procurator, we will straighten it out with him and keep you out of trouble. The soldiers pocketed the money and did as they had been instructed. This is the story that circulates among the Jews to this very day. The eleven disciples made their way to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had summoned them. At the sight of him, those who entertained doubts, fell down in homage. Jesus came forward and addressed them in these words: 'Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth; go, therefore and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!' Matthew 28: 11 – 20.

### **Gospel evidence in St. Mark**

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so they might go to anoint Jesus' body.

Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?'

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, he is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid Mark 16: 1 – 8.

Jesus rose from the dead early on the first day of the week. He first appeared to Mary Magdalene out of whom he had cast seven demons. She went to announce in the good news to his followers, who were grieving and weeping. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it. Later on, as two of them were walking on their way into the country, he was revealed to them completely changed in appearance. These men retraced their steps and announced the good news to the others, but the others put no more faith in them than in Mary Magdalene. Finally, as they were at table, Jesus was revealed to the Eleven. He took them to task for their disbelief and their stubbornness, since they had put no faith in those who had seen him after he had been raised.



Then he told them; 'Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation. The man who believes in it and accepts baptism will be saved; the man who refuses to believe in it will be condemned. Signs like these will accompany those who have professed their faith; they will use my name to expel demons, they will speak entirely new languages; they will be able to handle serpents, they will be able to drink deadly poison without harm and the sick upon whom they lay their hands will recover.' Then after, speaking to them, the Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven and took his seat at God's right hand Mark 16: 9 – 19.

### **The observations of St. Luke**

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces on the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he is risen! Remember how he told you, while he was with you in Galilee: The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' Then they remembered his words.

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened Luke 24: 1 – 12.

Two of them that same day were making their way to a village named Emmaus seven miles distant from Jerusalem, discussing as they went all that had happened. In the course of their lively exchange, Jesus approached and began to walk along with them. However, they were restrained from recognizing him. He said to them, 'What are you discussing as you go your way?' They halted in distress, and one of them, Cleopas by name asked him, 'Are you the only resident of Jerusalem who does not know the things that went on there these past few days?' He said to them, 'What things?' They said, 'All those that had to do with Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet wonderful in word and deed in the eyes of God and all people; how our chief priests and leaders delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him. We were hoping that he was the one who would set Israel free. Besides all this, today, the third day since these signs happened, some women of our group have just brought us



some astonishing news. They were at the tomb before dawn and failed to find the body, but returned with the tale that they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our number went to the tomb and found it to be just as the women said, but him they did not see.'

Then he said to them, 'What little sense you have! How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have announced! Did not the Messiah have to undergo all this so as enter into glory? Beginning then, with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted for them every passage of Scripture which referred to him. By now they were near the village to which they were going and he acted as if he were going farther. But they pressed him; "Stay with us. It is nearly evening, the day is practically over." So he went in to stay with them.

When he had seated himself with them to eat, he took bread, pronounced the blessing, then broke the bread and began to distribute it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, whereupon he vanished from their sight. They said to one another, 'Were not our hearts burning inside us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us? They got up immediately and returned to Jerusalem, where they found the Eleven and the rest of the company assembled. They were greeted with 'The Lord has been raised. It is true! he has appeared to Simon'. Then they recounted what had happened on the road and how they had come to know him in the breaking of the bread Luke 24: 13 – 53.

### **The Resurrection according to St. John**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary of Magdala went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciples, the one Jesus loved and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him.'

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead John 20: 1 – 9.

'Peace be with you,' he said again. 'As the Father sent me, so I send you.' Then he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound.' It happened that one of the Twelve, Thomas whose name means twin,

*was absent when Jesus came. The other disciples kept telling him, 'We have seen the Lord!' His answer was, 'I will never believe without probing nail prints in his hands, without putting my finger into the nail marks and my hand into his side.*

*A week later, the disciples were once more in the room and this time Thomas was with them. Despite the locked doors, Jesus came and stood before them. 'Peace be with you,' he said; then to Thomas, 'Take your finger and examine my hands. Put your hand into my side. Do not persist in your unbelief, but believe!' Thomas said in response, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus then said to him. 'You became a believer because you saw me. Blessed are they who have not seen me, but have believed.' Jesus performed many other signs as well, signs not recorded here, in the presence of his disciples John 20: 20 – 24.*

## **What if Jesus is not risen from the dead?**

If Christ is not risen,

He would have remained in the grave cave.

He would have been an outright liar.

His disciples would have been deceived.

The preaching of the disciples would have been pointless.

The apostles would have been false witnesses.

The whole of Christianity would have been a sham.

Our Christian experience would be simply imaginary.

We remain in our sin with no hope.

If Christ is not risen from the dead, the centuries long course of God's redemptive activity to save his people ends in a dead-end street, in a closed tomb. If the Resurrection of Christ is not reality, then we have no assurance that God is the living God, for death has the last and decisive word. Faith is futile because the object of that faith has not vindicated himself as the Lord of life. Christian faith is then incarcerated in the tomb along with the final and highest self-revelation of God in Christ – if Christ is indeed dead.

The devastating consequences of Christ remaining in the grave are that we are encompassed by devastating results. Christian believers are the very first to be aware of these results. The classic



passage in the New Testament about this very obvious result is found in St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

*But if it is preached that Christ has not been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men* 1 Corinthians 15: 12 – 19.

## **How do you explain the empty tomb?**

The stone had been moved. The stone that had sealed the entrance to the tomb-cave in which Jesus was buried was guarded by Roman soldiers. "Pilate said, 'You have a guard. Go and secure the tomb as best you can.' So they went and kept it under surveillance of the guard after fixing a seal to the stone" Matthew 27: 65, 66.

The fact that this stone had been moved was first observed by Mary Magdalene on Sunday morning. "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance" John 20: 1.

What was this seal? When Pilate heard about the possibility of Jesus' disciples stealing the body of Jesus, he arranged for this Roman seal to be placed on the tomb. It was put there in the presence of the Roman soldiers who guarded the tomb.

This Roman seal was attached to the stone so that the tomb was made secure. It consisted of a heavy cord, which was placed across the stone at its widest part. Then each end of the cord was attached to the stone with sealing clay pressed into deep holes in the rock of the wall of the cave, on either side of the stone. The two clay packs were stamped with the official signet of the Roman governor.

The seal stood for the power and authority of the Roman Empire. Anyone who dared to break the Roman seal would be sentenced to death and executed by being crucified upside down.



The body was gone. On the day of Resurrection, the stone had been moved, the seal broken and the tomb was empty. Jesus' remains, his dead body had disappeared. "So she (Mary Magdalene) came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken our Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him'" John 20: 2.

The Resurrection message could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as fact. Christ by his Resurrection has turned our sunsets into eternal dawn!

## **The evidence of the grave clothes**

The empty tomb was not quite empty. When we speak of the empty tomb we mean that the tomb no longer contained the dead body of Jesus in it. For, strictly speaking, the "empty tomb" was not actually empty.

*It still contained Jesus' grave clothes: "So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally, the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead"* John 20: 20 – 24.

When John arrived at the tomb, as he ran faster because he was much younger than Peter, he did not go inside at once. From the entrance he observed that the strips of cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' body were lying there, slightly caved in and empty of any dead body.

When Peter arrived at the tomb he rushed past John and entered it and saw the linen strips, as well as the burial cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. John, in his gospel, notes that this cloth was folded up all by itself and was separate from the linen strips.

Seeing Jesus' burial clothes and no body of Jesus was the turning point for Peter and John. They saw and believed.

The grave clothes in which Christ had been buried were found in very good order, which serves as evidence that his body was not stolen while men slept. Robbers of tombs have been known to take away the clothes and leave the body; but none ever took away the body and left the clothes, especially when they were fine linen and new as described by St Mark, "...bought a linen shroud...wrapped him in linen..." Mark 15: 46. Any one would rather choose to carry a dead body in its clothes than naked. Or if they that were supposed to have stolen the body had left the grave-clothes behind, it cannot be supposed they would find leisure to fold up the linen.



## **What happened to Jesus' body?**

Who took the body? Any explanation about the death and Resurrection of Jesus must account for the fact that the tomb was empty and the body was missing.

Did the Jews steal the body? This is quite feasible. If they could arrange for the soldiers to be bribed and promote the fake story that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, they were quite capable of stealing the body themselves.

Did the Romans steal the body? This is also quite possible. For the Romans were in complete control of the tomb. If they had wanted to steal Jesus' body, all they had to do was give the command to the soldiers guarding the tomb.

Did local grave robbers take the body? Even if such grave robbers had managed to deal with the guards, it is hardly likely that they would take a body and leave the valuable grave clothes behind. Also, this theory cannot account for the grave clothes being left in a position as if the body had just passed through them.

Why was the body never produced? But if either the Jews or the Romans had stolen the body of Jesus, we have to ask: Why was the body never uncovered or produced or recovered? The Jews longed to discount all that Jesus' followers said and preached about Jesus' Resurrection. They were keen to somehow counter all the Resurrection appearances of Jesus. When the disciples preached about a 'risen' Jesus, all the authorities had to do was parade the earthly remains of Jesus on a cart through Jerusalem and that would have been the end of Christianity. This never happened because they did not have the body of Jesus to produce.

## **Could the disciples have taken the body of Jesus?**

If Jesus' disciples stole the body of Jesus then they could peddle the lie that Jesus had been raised from the dead and nobody would be able to disprove this. So runs the idea behind the theory that Jesus' own followers stole his body.

But this theory is confronted with massive problems. Could unarmed men overcome athletic, powerfully built, highly disciplined Roman guards? The Roman guards could not have been overpowered by a few fishermen. Roman law laid down that if the prisoner being guarded escaped, the guard himself had to take the prisoner's place and be killed. The Roman guards would have been executed had they allowed Jesus to escape from the tomb.

Did the soldiers fall asleep? Nightly duty for a Roman soldier was not novelty. They would hardly drift off into sleep, as they knew that their own lives were on the line if they did. The penalty for sleeping on guard duty was death. In another set of circumstances, we read, "Herod initiated a search for him.



When it proved unsuccessful, he had the guards tried and executed” Acts of the Apostles 12: 19; “The jailer woke up to see the prison gates wide open. Thinking that the prisoners had escaped, he drew his sword to kill himself” Acts of the Apostles 16: 27. But if these soldiers had nodded off they would hardly be likely to admit such a thing as it was a crime. And if the soldiers were asleep how did they know it was the disciples who took the body? “You are to say, ‘his disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep’” Matthew 28: 13.

If the soldiers had dropped off to sleep in the middle of the night would they not have woken up as the disciples huffed and puffed as they tried to roll away the massive stone from in front of the tomb?

The historical evidence for the Resurrection is stronger than for any other miracle anywhere narrated.

## **Precautions taken against a Resurrection**

Without Christ's Resurrection you have no standing at all. Thus the Jews and Romans unite. Every human precaution against the idea of Jesus' Resurrection taking place was initiated by the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities.

The tomb was sealed and secured by guards. The Jews realized that if the disciples stole Jesus' body they would claim Jesus was risen from the dead. So the chief priests and the Pharisees had no problem in persuading Pilate to seal the stone over the opening of the tomb and to place a guard outside the tomb. This guaranteed that the body of Jesus could not leave the tomb.

They made the stone secure. “The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, “after three days I will rise again. So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worst than the first.” ‘Take a guard,’ Pilate answered, ‘Go and make the tomb as secure as you know how.’ So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard” Matthew 27: 62 – 66.

The bribe that bought silence was successful. St. Matthew's gospel (28: 1 – 10) then describes what actually happened and how Jesus rose from the dead. This was the deathblow to the plans of the Jewish authorities and to Pilate. So they invented the following story. They bribed the soldiers to keep quiet.

The last chapter of St. Matthew's gospel records the first false theory used to explain away the Resurrection of Jesus. “As the women were returning, some of the guard went into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. They, in turn, convened with the elders and worked out their strategy, giving the soldiers a large bribe; with the instructions, you are to say, ‘his disciples came during the night and stole him while we were asleep. If any word of this gets to the procurator,



we will straighten it out with them and keep you out of trouble.' The soldiers pocketed the money and did as they had been instructed. This is the story that circulates among the Jews to this very day" Matthew 28: 11 - 15.

## The Conspiracy Theory

Did the Apostles make up the Resurrection of Jesus? The conspiracy theory asks the question: 'Why could the disciples not have made up the whole story about Jesus Resurrection?

The French mathematician and philosopher, Blaise Pascal (1623 – 1662) in his *Pensees*, countered this suggestion in the following way: "...the Apostles were either deceived or deceivers. Either supposition is difficult for it is not possible to imagine that a man has risen from the dead. While Jesus was with them, He could sustain them, but afterwards, if He did not appear to them, who did make them act? Who inspired them? The hypothesis that the Apostles were charlatans is quite absurd. Follow it out to the end, and imagine these twelve men meeting after the death of Jesus and conspiring to say that He has risen from the dead. This means attacking all the powers that be. The human heart is singularly susceptible to fickleness, to change, to promises, to bribery. One of them had only to deny his story under these inducements, or still more because of possible imprisonment, torture and death, and they would all have been lost. Follow that out."

The fact that the disciples were able to proclaim the Resurrection in Jerusalem in the face of their enemies a few weeks after the crucifixion shows that what they proclaimed was true, for they could never have proclaimed the Resurrection and been believed under such circumstances had it not occurred.

In theory, we might think that it was possible for the disciples to make up a story about Jesus being raised from the dead. But there is no evidence about this. If it was just a made-up fiction then we would have expected that some disillusioned Christian would have said so. But there is no instance of any Christian, even under torture and enduring martyrdom, saying that the Resurrection of Jesus was deliberate deception.

Far from cracking under imprisonment and physical suffering, the early disciples counted it a privilege to endure such treatment for the risen Saviour for whom they lived. "They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. The Apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ" Acts of the Apostles 5: 40 – 42



If Jesus' Resurrection had been a lie, all the Jewish authorities had to do was to produce the dead body of Jesus. That would have ended the spread of Christianity in a day. The Jewish leaders did not display Jesus' dead body because they could not. There was no dead body of Jesus to be found.

On the day of Pentecost Peter preached the first Christian sermon: "Men of Israel, listen to this; Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But if God raised him from the dead...." Acts of the Apostles 2: 22 – 24.

## **The Swoon Theory**

According to the swoon theory, Jesus did not actually die on the cross, he only fainted, passed out or swooned. This theory asks two questions: Was Jesus really dead? Did He revive in the cool of the shaded tomb? This theory supposes that Jesus did not really die but was only unconscious when he was taken down from the cross.

Is it possible that Jesus actually revived from complete exhaustion in the cool of the shaded tomb? The swoon theory supposes that as Jesus was suffering from shock, pain, and loss of blood, He passed out from exhaustion. Then, believing him to be dead, Jesus' body was taken down from the cross and buried in the tomb. Later, in the cool air of the tomb, He revived and came to himself. This theory then goes on to propose that Jesus lived in obscurity, thankful for survival, and died years later. The swoon theory concludes that there is no need to believe in Jesus' Resurrection, for He never died in the first place.

If the swoon theory is true, if it is to be believed, then the following things must have happened. But to believe them is harder than believing the incredible and astounding Resurrection of Jesus itself! Jesus must have extricated himself from the tightly wrapped strips of burial clothe that were anointed with oil and ointment. This would have been a feat in itself for a healthy person. Jesus' body was buried all wrapped up, like a mummy, in the usual way of preparing a Jewish body for burial. He then must have rolled away, from the front of the tomb, the one or perhaps two ton stone with his nail-pierced hands. "Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away" Matthew 27: 59, 60.

Obviously He eluded the Roman soldiers as they stood guard outside the tomb and walked away from the scene on his badly wounded feet. Then, of course, He had to convince his disciples He had not just swooned, but was really raised from the dead.



Each of the evangelists concur that Jesus did die on the cross, that He suffered death after being crucified. One of the Roman soldiers at the cross used his spear to pierce Jesus' side. If He was not really dead, that alone, would have made sure He was. "Now it was the day of preparation and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have their legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus, and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has borne witness and his witness is true. He knows that he tells the truth and he testifies so that you may believe" John 19: 31 – 35.

Roman soldiers generally insured that there were no survivors because each knew that if he was responsible for allowing a prisoner who had been condemned to death to escape, Roman law stated he himself would face the death penalty. This included allowing anyone to survive a crucifixion. The Roman soldiers had procedures in place that completely eliminated this possibility.

When Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus to bury it, the Roman centurion confirmed to Pilate that Jesus was dead. "Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph" Mark 15: 43 – 45.

We find testimony about the death of Jesus from the well-known Roman historian, Tacitus about 112 AD, who wrote "*Christus the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberias.*"

In the book, *The Passover Plot*, Hugh J. Schonfield, the author maintains the swoon theory as a serious objection to belief in Christianity.

There are numerous serious flaws in the swoon theory. Jesus' physical condition, after having been flogged of some forty-nine lashes across the bare back with a whip made up of many leather tongs, which had embedded in them pieces of metal or glass which inflicted open wounds, reduced him to a gravely weakened state. Many people died from such a flogging. "Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged" John 19: 1.

Jesus was crucified by being nailed to the cross. "When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots" Matthew 27: 35. All four gospel writers make this rather clear: Matthew 27: 35 – 54; Mark 15: 24 – 39; Luke 23: 33 – 47; John 19: 16 – 30.



Jesus did in fact die. There is no suggestion that Jesus swooned or fainted on the cross. The gospels specifically record that He died. "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit" Matthew 27: 50; Mark 15: 37, 39; Luke 23: 46; John 19: 30, 33.

Many people saw Jesus die. Both his friends and his enemies. There is no subsequent suggestion from any of them that He merely passed out on the cross, exhausted from his suffering ordeal. "When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away" Luke 23: 48.

In addition to Jesus' women followers, his mother Mary, and his disciples, the Roman centurion and soldiers saw him. The Roman soldiers were professionals and were used to executing people and knowing when they were dead.

There are so many problems raised by the swoon theory that it is surprising that it ever gained any credibility. If the evidence found in the four gospels is given due weight the swoon theory must be totally discounted. The blood of Christ may seem to be a grim, repulsive subject to those who do not realize its true significance, but to those who have accepted his redemption and have been set free from sin's chains, the blood of Christ is precious.

Jesus' lifeless body was prepared for burial in the traditional Jewish way. A significant amount of spices were used as His remains in the flesh were wrapped in strips of linen by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus "Later Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs" John 19: 38 – 40.

This was witnessed by various women from Galilee, including Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. (See Luke 23: 50- 56; Matthew 27: 57 – 61; Mark 15: 42 – 47).

The massive stone would have to be rolled away to one side from the inside of the tomb by an exhausted Jesus. It was so large the women who came to the tomb knew that it would be impossible for them to move. "...and they asked each other, 'who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?'" Mark 16: 3.

Jesus was prepared for burial by his devoted friends. If He had shown any signs of life, they would have made every effort to resuscitate him. It is not credible that Joseph or Nicodemus would not have observed any vital signs of life in Jesus' body had He indeed been still alive.

How could the doubting Thomas be convinced? When Jesus appeared to doubting Thomas in one of his post Resurrection appearances, Thomas was utterly convinced Jesus was alive and well. "My Lord



and my God" John 20: 28. A half dead, sick man in need of serious emergency medical assistance would hardly have produced such an effect.

If the swoon theory were true the apostles would have been liars and frauds and Jesus himself would have also been a liar for allowing a lie to spread for years.

The nineteenth-century Protestant German so-called theologian, David Friedrich Strauss, who discounted many of the miraculous parts of the gospels, nevertheless once wrote: "It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulcher, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given to the disciples the distinct impression that He was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life!"

What he is saying is Christ is unique in his Resurrection. Strauss, although no real believer in the Resurrection, gives the death blow to the idea that Jesus revived from being temporarily incapacitated.

The uniqueness of Jesus' Resurrection is that it is totally different from the incidents found in the New Testament, where dead people were brought back to life. After Lazarus had been dead for four days, Jesus miraculously raised his friend from the dead. (John 11: 1 – 57).

Jesus also brought Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter back to life (Mark 5: 21 – 43).

Jesus raised the widow woman's son in Naim and restore him to her (Luke 7: 11 – 17).

Peter brought back to life a disciple named Tabitha/Dorcas (Acts of the Apostles 9: 36 – 43).

But none of these were like Jesus' Resurrection. For Lazarus, the widow's son, Jairus' daughter, and Tabitha, all, eventually died, after they had been brought back to life. Jesus was brought to life again, NEVER to die again.

The swoon theory does not fit available evidence. Jesus endured some six trials, been beaten, and flogged, had a scalp-piercing crown of thorns pressed down on his head, been crucified, had his side pierced with a spear and was placed in a tomb in tightly wrapped strips of linen and wrapped in a shroud. To suggest that Jesus could have revived, and survived, flies in the face of all evidence and reality.

### **Did the disciples visit the wrong tomb?**

The wrong tomb theory says that what if the women, in the half-light of early morning dawn, had mistakenly gone to the wrong tomb? Is it not possible then that Peter and John also went with them to the wrong tomb?

If the women and Peter and John had gone to the wrong tomb, Jesus' body would have remained secure in the correct burial tomb. If no Resurrection took place, then the Roman authorities or the Jewish leaders could have produced Jesus' human remains when they wanted to.

The tomb in which Jesus was interred is clearly identified by St. John in his gospel. It would have been difficult, if not impossible, to make a mistake about it. It was in a garden and it was brand new, just recently cut out of rock in the hillside. "At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid" John 19: 41.

The testimony of the guards themselves also goes right against the theory of the wrong tomb. "While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened" Matthew 28: 11.

What had just happened?

An earth quake,  
the rolling back of the stone,  
lightning-like appearance of an angel.

Little wonder that the tough and rugged guards are described as  
shaking,  
dead men.

"There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men" Matthew 28: 2- 4.

The Lord has written the promise of Resurrection not in his revealed word alone, but even in every leaf of springtime.

## **Appearances of the risen Jesus**

St. Augustine of Hippo says, "Our faith is strengthened by the Resurrection of Christ." To the verifiable evidence of the empty tomb we must add the testimony of the disciples who actually saw their risen Lord. He showed himself in distinct places and on appropriate occasions that faith might be affirmed and strengthened. Those who had the privilege of witnessing his victory used it to share with others who had not. The inspiration and courage they derived from these epoch-creating events led them to announce with zeal the good news of salvation. There are recorded in the New Testament at least ten



separate occasions when Jesus appeared to his disciples after He left the tomb. These appearances may have taken place in the following order:

To whom	Bible reference	Jesus is seen as
To Mary Magdalene	John 20:11-18; Mark 16:9	Consoler
To other women	Matthew 28:8-10	One to be worshipped
To Peter	Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5	Friend
To the two on the road to Emmaus	Luke 24:13-35; Mark 16:12	Teacher
To ten of the disciples	Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23	Bringer of peace
To ten disciples, plus Thomas	John 20:24-29	Confirmer of faith
To seven disciples who went fishing	John 21:1-23	The Concerned One
To five hundred followers	1 Corinthians 15:6	The resurrection and the life
To James	1 Corinthians 15:7	Assurance to the individual
To the eleven, at the ascension	Acts 1:3-12	Giver of power

## Additional Resurrection appearances

There were probably many other times He appeared to one or more of his disciples. "After his suffering he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God" Acts of the Apostles 1: 3. "He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" Acts of the Apostles 10: 41.

## More appearances of the risen Jesus

Jesus was seen by St. Stephen as he was being martyred. "Look," he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'" Acts of the Apostles 7: 56.

Jesus was seen by Saul in his conversion experience on Damascus road, which turned him from being Saul, a persecutor of Christians, into Paul, the courageous preacher of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. "As he neared Damascus on his journey suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 'Now get up and go

into the city and you will be told what you must do” Acts of the Apostles 9: 3 – 6. “...and last of all he appeared to me also, as to the abnormally born” 1 Corinthians 15: 8.

In exile, on the island of Patmos, John had a vision of the risen Jesus. “I John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit...I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lamp stands, and among the lamp stands was someone ‘like a son of man’ dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white a snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance” Revelation 1: 9, 10, 12 – 16.

“Although we have complete salvation through his death, because we are reconciled to God by it, it is by his resurrection, not his death, that we are said to be born into a living hope” 1 Peter 1: 3.

## **Haven’t you heard of hallucinations?**

St. Paul lists most of the Resurrection appearances of Jesus in just five verses. “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he

appeared to Peter and then

to the Twelve. After that,

he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then

he appeared to James,

then to all the apostles,

and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born” 1 Corinthians 15: 3 – 8.

The hallucination theory has been suggested by some skeptics that all the appearances of the risen Jesus which are recorded in the New Testament could be put down to nothing more than mere wishful thinking hallucinations.

Since the disciples did not understand completely or totally or believe faithfully Jesus’ predictions about his own Resurrection, how could they have thought they imagined him to rise from the dead? “May you be spared, Master. God forbid that any such thing ever happen to you!” Matthew



16: 22; "They kept this word of his to themselves, though they continued to discuss what 'to rise from the dead' meant" Mark 9: 10; "They understood nothing of this. His utterance remained obscure to them and they did not grasp its meaning" Luke 18: 34: 9; "Remember as yet they did not understand the Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead" John 20: 9.

It is plain the disciples did not believe Jesus would rise from the dead.

The disciples were not looking for Jesus at all.

Often, when exposed to him, they did not even recognize the risen Jesus at all.

Some disciples thought Jesus was a ghost. "In their panic and fright some thought they were seeing a ghost" Luke 24: 37.

The disciples witnessed Jesus eat food.

Once, over five hundred people saw Jesus at the same time. Most of the people were alive when St. Paul wrote and could have testified about whom they saw.

The appearances were not just to individuals. Jesus appeared to over five hundred people at once.

The disciples touched the risen Jesus. "The women came up and embraced his feet and did him homage" Matthew 28: 9; "Touch me and see that a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as I do" Luke 24: 39; "Take your finger and examine my hands. Put your hand into my side" John 20: 27.

The disciples spoke to Jesus and He spoke to them, responding to their conversation.

Many scholars contend they know of no other fact which is proven by better evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which our heavenly Father has given us that Christ died and rose from the dead.

Were the disciples deceivers? No. The disciples were not the ones who did the deceiving about Jesus' Resurrection. That was done, or at least attempted, by the chief priests and the elders. We are told they "devised a plan," and bribed the soldiers with "a large sum of money," Matthew 28: 11, 15, so that they would say that Jesus' body was stolen while they were asleep.

Were the disciples deceived?

Not at all. The disciples just record what they believed – that Jesus died and was buried and rose triumphantly from the dead. They back this up by saying that they saw it with their own eyes. In St. John's first letter, he writes, "The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it...We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard..." 1 John 1: 2, 3.

Any theory of hallucination breaks down on the fact, and if it is invention rather than fact, it is the oddest invention that ever entered the mind of man; that on three separate occasions his hallucination was not immediately recognized as Jesus (Luke 24: 13 – 31; John 20: 15; 21: 4). Even granting that God sent a holy hallucination to teach truths already widely believed without it, and far more easily taught by other methods, and certain to be completely obscured by this, might we not at least hope that He would get the face of the hallucinations right? Is He who made all faces such a bungler that He cannot even work up a recognizable likeness of the Man who was himself?

Even the Jewish scholar, Dr. Pinchas Lipide comments. "When this frightened band of apostles suddenly could be changed overnight into a confident mission society, then no vision or hallucination is sufficient to explain such revolutionary transformation."

### **Evidence of the changed lives of the disciples**

The change in the disciples. Before Jesus' Resurrection the disciples were a fearful group who met in secret behind locked doors. "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews" John 20: 19.

A return to fishing. They were so certain that Jesus' death was the end of Jesus that they even returned to their work as fishermen. "I am going out to fish," Simon Peter told them and they said, 'We will go with you'" John 21: 3. But we have to account for the sudden and unexpected transformation in the disciples. They became fearless preachers. The theme of their sermons centered on Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection. They were so convinced of Jesus' Resurrection that they endured martyrdom. The question is "Are people prepared to die for a lie?"

The evidence of Christianity. The fact that a small group of frightened people who were then transformed by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and founded the vibrant means of world salvation for man which still flourishes today is sound circumstantial evidence that they had met, encountered and experienced the risen Jesus. Thus, the transformation and change of the disciples of Jesus is the greatest evidence of all for the Resurrection.





## **Results and Effects of the Resurrection of Jesus**

The Resurrection of Jesus is an historical event that has wonderful consequences for Christians in every age.

### **God's promises are trustworthy.**

The Resurrection shows that God's promises can be trusted.

*We tell you the good news: what God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.*

Acts of the Apostles 13: 32, 33.

### **Jesus' identity**

The Resurrection indicates that Jesus is the divine Son of God.

*...and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord*

Romans 1: 4.

### **Justification**

Jesus' Resurrection brings about our justification in the sight of our heavenly Father.

*Jesus our Lord...was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification*

Romans 4: 24, 25.

### **Hope**

Jesus' Resurrection brings hope to Christians.

*Praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade*

*kept in heaven for you*

1 Peter 1: 3, 4.



### Power

Jesus' Resurrection gives his followers power for everyday life.

*...and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms  
Ephesians 1: 19, 20.*

### Fruit

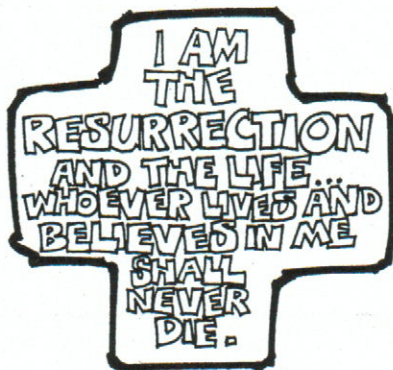
Jesus' Resurrection enables Christians to live fruitful lives.

*So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead in order that we might bear fruit to God  
Romans 7: 4.*

### Personal Resurrection

Jesus' Resurrection assures us of our own resurrection.

*Listen, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet...thanks be to God!  
He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!  
1 Corinthians 15: 51, 52, 57.*



## THE FEAST OF MID-PENTECOST

**H**alfway between the great Holy Days of Pascha and the Descent of the Holy Spirit, our Holy Orthodox Church celebrates what is appropriately referred to as the "Feast of Mid-Pentecost." It is observed on the Wednesday after the Sunday of the Paralytic and is viewed as a link between these two most important days on our Church Calendar.

The theme of the Feast centers on Christ being our great "Teacher." The Gospel lesson for the day is taken from John 7, when our Lord comes to Jerusalem for the autumn Festival of Tabernacles. He goes to the Temple and proclaims: "My teaching is not My own, but His Who sent Me. If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

In the traditional icon of Mid-Pentecost, which we see depicted on the cover of today's Church Bulletin, we see the young Jesus seated among the elders in the Temple. This is viewed as His first "teaching experience" - when He truly was going about "His Father's work." Note that the Child is seated higher than those He is questioning, clearly pointing out His superiority to them.

The Feast of Mid-Pentecost attempts to strengthen our faith in the Risen Christ as well as prepare us for the arrival of the Holy Spirit. One of the sticheras for Matins on this day brings this out beautifully when we sing: "Having been enlightened by the Resurrection of Christ and having reached the halfway mark of the Feast of the Lord, let us sincerely follow the commandments of God, so that we may worthily celebrate His Ascension and receive the coming of the Holy Spirit."

*Iconography written in Greece by Miltiadis Afentoulis*

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