

# Easter Worship

By Heather Jones



## Prologue:

Leader: Friends, we gather today to worship; to celebrate Jesus' victory of life over death; to see things differently; to be inspired by the Easter story. I invite you to think of a moment when someone that you least expected to see suddenly stands before you or a moment when some cherished thing you had lost is found again and you can scarcely believe your eyes or a moment when your fear was suddenly proved unfounded and you were surprised by joy.

The Easter season is that kind of experience. (Please join me in our responsive call to worship.)

## Call to Worship:

Leader: As people of faith, we are called to hope.

**People: Our hope is in the Lord, who made heaven and earth.**

Leader: Even people of faith and hope have times of struggle, disappointment, even despair.

**People: We have been discouraged, exhausted, despondent.**

Leader: Good Friday is followed by Easter. Suddenly life turns around.

**People: Mary went to anoint a corpse and was greeted by a Saviour.**

Leader: Christ is risen,

**People: He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!**

**Hymn:** #466 – Praise the Lord with the sound of trumpet

**Opening Prayer:**

Holy God,

The celebration of resurrection is a celebration of all life. As we experience the Easter season, we look for signs of new life in the promise of spring, the lilies, and the hope we feel in our hearts.

Resurrection casts out fear, replacing it with hope. Today, and every day, we celebrate victory over fear, that is our worst enemy.

As we come together to celebrate life, we pray that our life-denying thoughts and actions might be forgiven. We are sorry for the times that we have failed to live in your will and your way.

For your victory over fear and death, and for the hope that your victory brings, we give you our prayers of gratitude and our lives of discipleship.  
Amen

**Scripture:** Mark 16: 1–9

**Reflection:**

It is very common for humans to feel afraid when facing something new. When something happens that is unexpected, or that we don't understand, we are often afraid. We are not surprised that the women who visited the tomb were frightened by what they found, or more precisely what they didn't find.

Those women had visited tombs before. Jewish tradition required that a body be cleansed after death. They would have performed this ritual for any number of their relatives. They knew what to expect. They were prepared, carrying spices to anoint the body of their well-loved teacher and friend. They knew that when they entered the tomb, the smell of dead flesh would surround them; they were preparing themselves to touch his body. They were as ready as anyone could be for the powerful wave of mourning that is the natural human response to seeing the corpse of a beloved friend. It was quite likely that they stopped for just a brief

moment before crossing the threshold, to set themselves for what they knew was coming.

But as soon as they passed the entrance, and were in the tomb, all of their senses were confused. What they were seeing didn't make sense. It didn't fit with any of their expectations; it wasn't anything like what they had prepared for. They heard the angel's message, but they couldn't process it; they didn't understand. Shocked and confused, they were seized by terror and amazement. They didn't know how to understand what they were seeing and hearing; they fled.

The Easter story requires a huge shift in perspective. We know that the women managed, somehow, to process their experience. Initially they ran away and said nothing; they were afraid. But somehow, they came to realize that they had seen an angel, who had given them a message to share. Probably after some shaking, perhaps after crying and holding onto each other, certainly after discussing among themselves, Mary and Mary and Salome accepted that something very new, very different, and very important had happened. They went and told the story to the disciples; the disciples too, had difficulty believing what had happened. Greatly assisted by their own experiences of the risen Christ, the disciples too had to shift their perspective.

There is a story that is told at Easter time. There are quite a few versions of this story—you may have heard one of them. This is a story about a Sunday school class led by a committed, creative teacher, that happened to include a student who was developmentally challenged. Over the course of the year, with just a little bit of understanding and encouragement, the class became a supportive community, where the children enjoyed and respected each other. The week before Easter, the teacher brought into class a collection of plastic eggs: the kind that can be opened to reveal a fun surprise inside. She gave each student an egg, and instructed them to bring the eggs back the next week, with something inside that helped them to think about Easter.

When the class assembled the next week, the teacher gave each student the chance to open their egg and explain why their 'surprise' made them think of Easter. She was pleased to see that many of the students had chosen symbols of spring and new life. Only one child thought that a piece of chocolate was the best reminder of Easter. One egg contained grass, most of it brown, and dry, but the

child pointed out the few small blades of fresh green grass visible among the remains of last year's lawn. Another child had found a cocoon and hoped that a butterfly would be born. There were pictures of babies of a few different species: some chicks, some kittens. One of the plastic eggs contained pieces of a small blue egg that had been found under a tree. That child was proud to describe how she watched the nest from an upstairs window, and saw the mother bird feeding her babies. Most of the children had opened their eggs when the student with special needs said, "It's my turn."

The teacher smiled and invited him to show everyone what he had found. He stood proudly, opened the egg and showed the inside to his classmates. The teacher was taken aback for a moment, and one of the other students started with a nervous giggle. Quickly stepping in the teacher said, "I'm glad you brought your egg in today; I'm sorry you didn't find anything to put in it, but we have a wonderful collection of things here that helps us to remember that at Easter we celebrate new life that Jesus offers us."

"No, Miss. I didn't want to put anything in my egg. The tomb was empty too."

The Sunday School teacher had to adjust her expectation of her student. The women at the tomb had to shift their perspective. The disciples too, had to change their expectations and understanding of what Jesus had taught and what his life and death meant. We are also called to look at situations and experiences differently; to be ready to shift perspectives so that we can understand the meaning of the empty tomb.

**Hymn:** #641 – One more step along the world I go

### Prayer

Leader 1: Risen Christ,  
As we look at your world, we ask that you  
open our eyes to the needs of our brothers and sisters,  
Leader 2: direct our ears to the cries of the poor, the suffering, the  
marginalized,  
Leader 1: move our hands to reach out to support, comfort, and encourage  
those who struggle,

- Leader 2: position our feet to stand for justice, and against selfishness, greed, and violence.
- Leader 1: Give us the courage and the will to act on the intentions of our prayers.
- Leader 2: Help us to risk, to stand with people everywhere, knowing that you, Spirit of God, will support us.
- Leader 1: Lead us Lord, reassure us, revive us, restore our convictions, so that we can recommit ourselves to a life of service offered freely to any of your children who are in need.
- Leader 2: Risen Christ, in this Easter season, may things change because of us. Amen.

**Hymn:** #262 – Come to us, beloved Stranger (can be sung to the tune for Love divine, all loves excelling which is #371 in the Book of Praise)

### **Blessing**

As we go forward in faith, celebrating all that God is, and all that God calls us to be, may we continue to love and serve the Lord and the creation in all that we do. Amen.

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