

OUR LORD GOD JESUS CHRIST

Adapted from talks by Rev. Elmo C. Acton and Rt. Rev. George de Charms

All four of the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—tell us how, on the third day after the Lord’s burial in the cave of rocks, the Marys and other women who loved the Lord came to the sepulcher “very early in the morning, on the first day of the week”; how they found the stone rolled away from the mouth of the sepulcher and heard the comforting words of the angel, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead...” (Matthew 28:5-8).

The same story, with little variation, is told by the four writers of the Gospels because it is of such great importance. The fact that the Lord rose from the tomb with His whole body, leaving nothing behind but the white linen garments in which Joseph of Arimathea wrapped Him, is the most holy and important teaching concerning the Lord’s resurrection. By it we are taught beyond doubt that the Lord is God—that the Lord Jesus Christ, who had been born as a baby in Bethlehem, who had lived with people on earth teaching and leading them, healing their diseases and giving them comfort in their troubles, was not a man as other men, but was and is our God and Savior. He alone rose from the grave with the whole body. Other people rise only with their spiritual body. They leave their natural body in the grave. The Lord, then, by rising with His whole body, showed that He is God. This is the first and most important truth to be seen and acknowledged in the Lord’s resurrection.

And, in order that all people might believe and not doubt, the Lord appeared to His followers many times after His resurrection, and not just to one or two people but to all His disciples and also to some others. The Word tells us about nine occasions on which the Lord showed Himself after His resurrection. He was seen five times on the first Easter Day, and four times later, over a period of several weeks, so that slowly every doubt might be dissipated.

On Easter itself we are told that the Lord appeared to the women as they were leaving the tomb and to Mary Magdalene by herself as well. Simon Peter saw Him at some point during that day. And two men met the Lord on the road to Emmaus, but they did not know Him until He broke bread and gave it to them. Later that night, the Lord appeared to ten of His disciples in a room in Jerusalem. He reassured them that He was no ghost, but had risen with His whole body; He showed them the marks on His hands and on His side from the wounds of the crucifixion, and He ate some bread and fish with them.

Eight days later, He came to the disciples in a room again, this time to all eleven so that Thomas, who had not been present the first time, could see the Lord for Himself, could be sure that it was truly Him, risen from the dead. We are told of a time when Peter and several of the other disciples were fishing at night, and the Lord appeared to them on the shore at dawn, and they came and ate breakfast with Him. The Lord also appeared to the disciples on a mountain in Galilee and finally, He came to them one last time on the Mount of Olives, at the village of Bethany, and spoke with them, and they all saw Him ascend up into heaven.

As well as letting them see and touch Him, the Lord brought messages to His followers after His resurrection, messages of peace and joy. He reassured them that He would always be with them—this was possible because He was God. For the Lord who rose from the tomb and showed Himself to the disciples was not partly God and partly human. He was wholly God—even to the bones and flesh. From His appearance to them, the disciples knew that the Lord was God, and they prepared to go forth and announce this truth to all the world.

Today, the principal reason for us to celebrate Easter is because we believe and love the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only God of heaven and earth. We have been entrusted with this truth, as the disciples were long ago, to proclaim it to the world. We acknowledge and believe this when we worship our Lord God Jesus Christ and live according to His commandments.