

Lent and Easter 101

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by Christopher Seifferlein

Where does the phrase “He is risen. He is risen, indeed. Alleluia!” come from?

The angels proclaimed the Easter greeting to the women who arrived at Jesus’ tomb (Matt. 28:6). The women were sent by the angels to speak the words to the disciples (Luke 24:9). The disciples also began to speak these words to one another (Luke 24:34). The followers of Jesus continue to this day to speak the Easter greeting, which is more than a report. It’s a proclamation of the Gospel. It proclaims the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation to all who are condemned by sin and death. In this way, we participate in that first announcement of Easter. We proclaim one to another that death has been swallowed up by the death of Jesus, and we shall live forever because Jesus is risen.

What do the stripping of the altar on Good Friday and the replacing of the paraments for Easter symbolize?

Jesus underwent great humiliation during His trial when His clothing was stripped from Him (Matt. 27:28). When Jesus died, His followers came and wrapped His body with linen cloths. When the women came to the tomb three days later, they expected to find His body there but only found His grave clothes. Jesus left the clothes of death behind Him. The stripping of the altar and the replacing of the paraments make us part of the wonderful events surrounding Jesus' death and crucifixion. We are not observers but participants. The altar is fully clothed again on Easter, proclaiming to us the things the women saw when they went to the tomb of Jesus.

What is the purpose of the Paschal candle at the Easter Vigil?

The paschal candle is the largest candle in the church. This candle represents the pillar of cloud and fire that led the children of Israel through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. One of the most important moments of the Easter Vigil is the lighting of this candle. The people's mini-paschal candles are lit from the new flame. Jesus was crucified, buried and sealed in the tomb but rose again in glory. The light that dispels all darkness is renewed for us as Christ leads us into life eternal by His mighty resurrection. The darkness of Good Friday gives way to the light of the early Easter morning. We are led from darkness into new life in heaven through Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Why are many churches designed in the shape of a cross?

The aisles at the front and center of our churches intersect to form the shape of the cross. In larger churches, side apses make this cross shape even more apparent. Those who have been marked with the sign of the holy cross both upon their foreheads and upon their hearts in Holy Baptism live their lives under and in the cross of Christ. Cross-marked lives are shaped as they come to the cross-shaped house as Jesus puts the mark of His cross on them again. Meaning, life and forgiveness are found in the place where the message of the cross is preached and the fruits of the cross are given out.

What's the difference between a crucifix and an empty cross?

Baby Jesus appears in our manger at Christmas even though He is now risen from the dead. We know that Jesus is no longer in the manger, but His bodily presence there comforts us with what He did when He came to earth and was born for us. The body of Jesus on the cross proclaims the Christ who died but is now risen from the dead. Jesus is no longer on the cross, but the cross with Jesus' body on it proclaims what Jesus has completed for our salvation. The cross, full or empty, proclaims the atonement of Christ for sin. In both cases, we are reminded of the one person who was crucified whose cross was not the end of the story.

Where does the name *Easter* come from?

German and English speakers call the day of Christ's resurrection "Easter." Christians in other countries refer to Easter by some form of the name for Passover. While the origin of the name

of Easter is disputed, some believe that it comes from the German word for “resurrection” or the German word “east.” The women went to the tomb when the sun had risen. As we gather in our churches during the early morning light, the sun, rising in the east, proclaims Easter, the light of Christ who has risen from the dead.

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