

### **330 An empty tomb**

After the horrors of Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion and burial, we read of the subsequent visit to Jesus' tomb by a few faithful women, named in Luke 24.10 as Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James, with some others. They were keen to complete the usual Jewish rituals at a time of death, in this case to anoint Jesus' body with the spices they had prepared (Luke 24.1). After all, this was the last little deed they could carry out to show their love for their murdered Lord and Master – or so they thought.

At first sight it was a hare-brained scheme! There were Roman guards in place (Matthew 27.62-66), whose response to the women asking them to remove the stone was likely to be, shall we say, rather blunt. Then there was the stone itself, commonly a 6-foot diameter stone disc rolled in a stone slot to cover the entrance to the tomb. To move this aside would take several strong men, with levers and bulging muscles, pushing hard on its rim to roll it clear. But the women came anyway, in their simple devotion to Jesus.

The Gospel narratives then pick up on different details of what turned out to be a chaotic couple of hours, with individuals and groups coming and going in their efforts to try to find out whatever was going on concerning Jesus and His now-empty tomb. Reactions among the women ranged from perplexity, fear, joy, trembling and amazement (egs., Matthew 28.8 / Mark 16.8 / Luke 24.4-5), while at least initially among "the apostles", the women's words "seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not" (Luke 24.11).

Through John we are given the exquisite account of Jesus' meeting with Mary Magdalene, who had obviously returned to the tomb by herself after telling Peter and John, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him" (John 20.2). Having suddenly recognised her risen Lord by His speaking her name, Jesus explained to Mary, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father ..." (20.17a). This prohibition, which no longer applied for some other women later on (Matthew 28.9), has a beautiful explanation.

In Leviticus 23.10-14 we read of the instruction that the people were to bring "a sheaf of the firstfruits" of their harvest to the priest, which with hindsight we now see to be a "Type" of the Lord in His resurrection. In I Corinthians 15.20 we read, "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept". Now until this "sheaf of the

firstfruits” had been waved before the Lord no one was allowed to partake of the harvest (Leviticus 23.14).

It is worth our now quoting briefly from page 440 of ‘The Restored Vision’ by Arthur Ware where this matter is clearly set forth: ‘Our Lord knew only too well that under no conditions whatsoever could anyone in the universe partake of or worship Him – “the Firstborn from the dead” – until God the Father had had his portion. To effect this our Lord had to ascend to Heaven and present Himself to God as the Offering of the “firstfruits” of that vast harvest of human souls yet to be raised from the dead as the result of His own triumph over death’.

So Jesus’ words to Mary sprang from His immediate need to ascend to His Father in His resurrected body as the “Antitype” of the “firstfruits” to be waved before the Lord. He then entrusted Mary with this wonderful message - “... go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20.17).

And the rest, thanks be to God, is history – His Story, which is far from completed yet. The resurrection is the unparalleled, irrefutable bedrock of the Christian Faith: not only for those who were there at that empty tomb that morning, many of whom faced appalling persecution and martyrdom later on rather than deny the Fact of the resurrection; but also for those of us who follow in their footsteps today.

The world does not like this Fact of the empty tomb because it is the ultimate proof that Jesus Christ really is “the Resurrection and the Life” (John 11.25), so every believer who bears the name of the Risen Christ inevitably “swims against the tide”. Whether that contrary tide is strong or weak, it is always present, so there need be no surprise when we find indeed, “In this world you will have tribulation” (John 16.33). But see how the Lord continues, “but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”. And He has done just that - overcoming the world by dying on that cross, and by rising, as the firstfruits of the great harvest of souls from the dead, from that cold, silent tomb.

So, praise God, the victory cry bursts forth afresh – “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!”