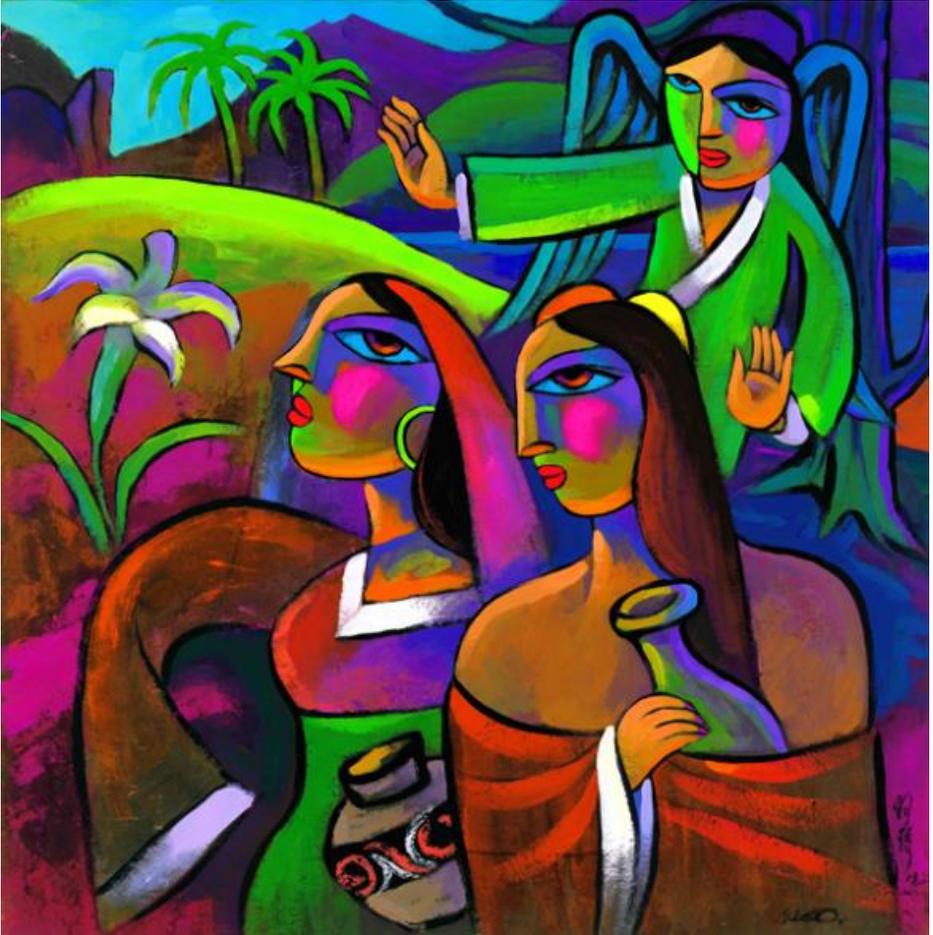


# Greeting the Easter Dawn



An 'early Easter Morning' reflection  
for worship at home,  
whenever it is needed

## **Introduction**

*As we celebrate Easter ‘together, apart’ this year, there are quite a number of moments when we’d normally gather physically, that we need to find different ways of marking. Perhaps the smallest of those gatherings begins just before sunrise on Easter morning, when a handful of us return to the place where we’ve done the Holy Saturday vigil the night before, light our brand new Paschal (Easter) candle, and walk it through the streets of our neighbourhood to bring it into church – the new light arriving, from which all our little lights are then lit.*

*This year, the Paschal candle will remain unlit until the COVID-19 ‘lockdown’ is over – until the tidal wave of deadly infection has passed, and we are once again able to greet each other face to face.*

*For now, our little candles, in our scattered homes, will be the first glimmers of Easter – knowing that for many in our world the days of suffering, death and grief are still ongoing, while nevertheless Jesus’ resurrection is rolling away stones, meeting the fearful behind locked doors, and breathing hope-filled new life.*

*You might want to share in these brief reflections on Easter morning, as the sun rises – or they might be here for you at another time, when the moment is right. The new life of Easter is dawning every day, waiting for us, waiting for when we are ready to greet it.*

## **Preparing the space**

*If you're feeling brave, you might want to get out into your garden, or even take your daily walk as you do this. Or if you're inside your home, why not find a space where you can open a door or a window nearby.*

*If you're sitting still to do this, you might want to prepare yourself to re-light last night's fire, or find a candle to light.*

*As you light your fire, or candle, join in these words (from the very early days of Christianity):*

Christ yesterday and today,  
the beginning and the end,  
Alpha and Omega,  
all time belongs to him,  
and all ages;  
to him be glory and power,  
through every age and for ever.  
**Amen.**

## **Gospel Reading** (Mark 16:1-8)

**16** When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup> And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup> They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the

tomb?” <sup>4</sup>When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. <sup>5</sup>As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup>But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. <sup>7</sup>But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” <sup>8</sup>So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

### **‘What happens now?’**

*We’ve used the following prayer every year that we’ve gathered together for Easter sunrise. Its question, ‘what happens now?’, is a good one to stay with at the moment. Its response, ‘may we go back...’ is usually a confident commitment – this year, it is a prayer both of commitment and also of **longing**, for the time ‘after’ this current crisis.*

God,  
now set loose from the grave,  
what happens now?

May your new dawn footprints take us back into  
and not away from the world.

Now you are risen,  
may we go back to Galilee  
and believe again,  
trust again,  
and follow you again,  
knowing what we know now.

May we go back to the poor, and say,  
**“Yes! God is on your side,  
and we will be your companions.”**

May we go back to the imprisoned, and say,  
**“Yes! God’s intent is to set you free,  
and it is our fight too.”**

May we go back to the hungry, and say,  
**“Yes! God is preparing a feast right now,  
and we would love to accompany you to the  
table.”**

May we go back to the blind, and say,  
**“Yes! God has a vision for you,  
and we want you to lead us into it.”**

May we go back to the oppressed, and say,  
**“Yes! God is freeing the world,  
and we want to work for each other’s freedom.”**

Now you are set loose from the grave,  
before we forget,  
and slip back into our normal ways:  
our routines that save us from being transformed;  
our habits that save us from thinking about recreation;  
our patterns that save us from stretching our faith;  
may we go back to where we have been,  
and begin again,  
with this new trust resurrection brings,  
the new colours we see,  
and the new confidence we hold,

and lead us into every future  
that resurrection brings,  
that we may go with you, and say,  
**“Yes! You are risen in us,  
and we will be the community  
that bears witness to you  
alive into the world.”**

So be it  
**Amen!**

*Roddy Hamilton (2007)*

## **The Easter Song ('The Exsultet')**

*From the very earliest days of Christianity, on Easter night Christians have sung 'the Exsultet', a song of Easter light, life and hope. In Hodge Hill, we have usually sung it as we've brought the Easter candle into church at the end of our Easter morning walk. You might want to use these words for quiet reflection – but if you feel like singing, they fit well to the tune of 'Ye holy angels bright' (the tune is called 'Darwall's 148<sup>th</sup>').*

**Rejoice, all heav'nly pow'rs,  
O choirs of angels sing!  
and let the universe with alleluias ring!  
For Jesus lives in glory bright,  
and endless light to us he gives.**

**Rejoice, O shining earth, in glorious hope reborn,  
and praise the Light  
who wrought the first creation's dawn.  
Redeemed and free, in Christ we rise,  
and darkness dies eternally.**

**O God of hope and love, who lit the desert way,  
and led from slav'ry's night to liberation's day:  
still go before, till we rejoice,  
with heart and voice, on Canaan's shore.**

**We light these gentle flames  
to be our pledge and sign:  
we share the risen life of Christ, the light divine.**

***Throughout the earth, oppression's night  
shall flee the light of human worth.***

***Arise O Morning Star, O Sun who never sets,  
and raise these humble flames to greater glory yet.  
Let all adore, in glorious strains,  
the Christ who reigns for evermore.***

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### **'Christ is risen!'**

*On our usual Easter sunrise walk, we would stop along the way, at a number of points on the streets of our neighbourhood, and holding the Paschal candle high we would proclaim the good news of Easter ('Christ is risen!') as loudly as we felt able!*

*Right now, you might want to let your imagination wander through the streets near you, seeing in your mind's eye the places and people that are longing for resurrection today. And whether you feel able to say it in whisper, or shout it out loud, claim the promise of resurrection for that place, for those people, with the repeated refrain, 'Christ is risen!'*

*1<sup>st</sup> set:*

Where the touch of love is felt

**Christ is risen!**

Where children laugh and play

**Christ is risen!**

Where the hungry celebrate with feasting

**Christ is risen!**

Where the voiceless shout and sing

**Christ is risen!**

Where enemies are reconciled

**Christ is risen!**

Where neighbourhoods flourish

**Christ is risen!**

*2<sup>nd</sup> set:*

Where compassion is earthed

**Christ is risen!**

Where generosity overflows

**Christ is risen!**

Where trust takes root

**Christ is risen!**

Where friendship grows

**Christ is risen!**

Where hope blossoms

**Christ is risen!**

Where love bears fruit

**Christ is risen!**

Where life comes anew

**Christ is risen!**

*If you are able to go for a walk later today, take these words with you as you go. Again, whisper them or shout them – whatever feels most possible and appropriate!*

## **Words to finish**

*On a 'normal' Easter day, as the Paschal (Easter) candle is lit, it is held up high and these words are spoken. Today, as we wait with longing for the time when we can fully celebrate Easter together, we offer them in hope. You might want to hold your own Easter candle up, as we lift up our hearts in hope and praise to God.*

May the light of Christ, rising in glory,  
banish all darkness from our hearts and minds.

**Amen.**

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

**He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

*Who can you phone, call on (you can speak safely to others from a 2m distance!), or send a message to, this morning, sharing with them this Easter greeting of joy and promise?*

*(This might be least surprising on Easter day – but how about continuing to use it in the days and weeks to come – as the Easter season slowly unfolds, and as we continue longing to see Easter life come in its fullness in our world?)*

## **Finding your way around our Easter resources**

Although we've prepared these resources especially for the weekend from Good Friday to Easter Day, **they are designed for you to be able to use them whenever you want to or need to**, in the coming weeks. You might want to think of 'Good Friday', 'Holy Saturday' and 'Easter Sunday' as different 'moods' – pick what feels most appropriate for the mood you're living through right now.

### **GOOD FRIDAY**

- *Journeying with Jesus on the road of suffering, death & grief*  
'Stations of the Cross' – images and prayers

### **HOLY SATURDAY**

- *Grieving and waiting in the in-between time*  
Poems and prayers, & suggestions for an 'Easter fire'

### **EASTER SUNDAY**

- *Greeting the Easter dawn*  
Gospel reading and prayers for an Easter sunrise
- *Meeting the Risen Jesus*  
A liturgy for the Easter season (a 'eucharist without communion', closest to our Sunday 10.30am service)
- *Journeying with Jesus on the Emmaus Road*  
A guided reflection on the Road to Emmaus story, including breaking bread, for 'Easter Sunday evenings'

## **Suggested timings for sunset & sunrise prayers...**

*As we celebrate Easter 'together, apart', many of us are finding it helpful to know we're praying at roughly the same time as other members of our church community. The timings below – for Holy Saturday and early Easter morning – are just a suggestion, based on the times of sunset and sunrise...*

- Sunset on **Holy Saturday** (11<sup>th</sup> April) is 7.56pm.  
We suggest beginning prayers at **7.45pm**.
- Sunrise on **Easter Day** (12<sup>th</sup> April) is 6.16am.  
We suggest beginning prayers at **6am**.