




Sunday School Lesson
Luke 24:1-12
 by Lorin L. Cranford
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Easter Sunday




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Quick Links to the Study

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The lesson for this Easter Sunday quite naturally focuses on the depiction of the resurrection of Jesus. Since our focus for several weeks has been in the Gospel of Luke, this gospel source will be the foundational scripture text. But one should remember that all four gospels contain an account of this significant event: [Matt. 28:1-10](#); [Mk. 16:1-8](#); [John 20:1-18](#) as well as the account in [Luke 24:1-12](#). Each writer provides his own interpretation of the event in a way that best related the meaning of the event to his initial readers in the first Christian century. Although none of the gospel writers attempt to spell out the religious significance of this event, others in the New Testament will build upon the occurrence of this event as an important part of the gospel message. Without question, the most detailed explanation of this is found in [1 Corinthians 15](#), reflecting the view of the apostle Paul regarding the importance of the resurrection of Jesus.



At the outset of that lengthy discussion, Paul summarizes the essence of the gospel message that he preached to both Jew and Gentile (vv. 1-4): “1 Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, 2 through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain. 3 **For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures...**” The death, burial, and [resurrection](#) of Jesus is linked to the experience of salvation by believers. Our baptism and our observance of the Lord’s Supper are also linked vitally to the resurrection of Jesus.

Thus it is appropriate for Christians to spend time learning all that can be discovered about this central affirmation of our religious faith.

I Context

Since the study continues in the gospel of Luke the background material to the passage remains the same as the previous studies in Luke’s gospel. This will be repeated here for convenience sake.

a. Historical

Two levels historical exploration are important to the interpretative process. *First*, we need to explore the composition of the gospel document this passage occurs in, and, *second*, we need to locate the occurrence of this event in the public ministry of Jesus. Both of these issues pose challenges, but honest study of scripture needs to learn as much as can be legitimately gleaned. This knowledge helps prevent distorted interpretation of the meaning of the scripture passage.

Regarding the compositional history of the Gospel of Luke, let me summarize a lot of Lukan scholarship by the following. William Beard in the *Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible* (iPreach online) summarizes the basic issue this way: "According to tradition this gospel was written by Luke, 'the beloved physician' and travel companion of Paul (Col. 4:14; Philemon 1:24; 2 Tim. 4:11). Actually the tradition is not very old. It appears first in the writings of Irenaeus, who was a theologian living in Gaul during the latter part of the 2nd cent. The Muratorian fragment (ca. A.D. 200), a document which presents an official list of Christian scriptures, supports the same conclusion." With the acceptance of this early church tradition -- although not all do and since the gospel itself makes no effort internally to identify its author -- then the issue becomes trying to locate a setting for the writing of this gospel. Again Bill Beard summarizes quite effectively these questions:

"The exact date and place of the writing of this gospel cannot be ascertained. Since the author uses Mark as a source and since he seems to have accurate knowledge of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (19:41-44; 21:20-24; see pp. 1029-31) he evidently wrote after A.D. 70. He must have written before 140, when his gospel was included in the canon of the heretic Marcion. Since the situation of the church reflected in the gospel fits well the political situation of the reign of the Emperor Domitian (81-96), a date from about 85 to 95 is most likely.

According to one tradition Luke wrote his histories in Rome. Another locates his writing in Greece. Since there is a correlative tradition that the evangelist died in one of the Greek provinces, this latter tradition has better support. Any of these locations assumes the traditional authorship and bears the same burdens. Perhaps all we can say is that the gospel was written from some locale where Greek was the primary language and where cultured readers like Theophilus (1:3) would be at home."

According to [Luke 1:1-4](#), this gospel -- and subsequently the book of Acts (cf. Acts 1:1) -- were dedicated to a Theophilus who as a patron supported the cost of producing these documents as well as the making of copies of them for distribution to various Christian communities in the late first century world. Evidently [Theophilus](#) was a wealthy Roman who had become a Christian and wanted to contribute to the spread of Christianity by supporting Luke's writing of these two documents. The gospel preface ([Lk 1:4](#)) suggests the purpose of the document was "so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed."

The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts together stand as a two volume testimony of the beginning of the Christian religion with its founder, Jesus Christ, and the first three decades of the beginning of this movement in its spread from Jerusalem to Rome from AD 30 to AD 61. The author was closely associated with the apostle Paul. For the gospel account Luke made use of a variety of sources, as he indicated in [Lk 1:1-3](#), since he was not personally present with Jesus during his earthly ministry. Modern scholarship generally concludes that among these sources are the gospels of Mark and perhaps also Matthew, although more likely the material in Luke, that is also found in Matthew, may very well be drawn from a common, unknown source. That is generally called the Q document from the German word Quelle meaning source. Thus with at least Mark and Q in front of him, along with notes from interviews with various people around the earthly Jesus, Luke set out to tell his story of Jesus in a way that would enhance understanding of the enormous significance of this Jewish carpenter from the little village of Nazareth in the northern Palestinian province of Galilee. As best as we can determine, this happened sometime in the 70s or perhaps early 80s of the first Christian century, possibly while Luke was living in Rome.



b. Literary

One important aspect here is the contextual setting for this event. Each gospel writer comes at the depiction of the resurrection with two emphases: (1) the event of the resurrection with the women as the first witnesses, and (2) subsequent resurrection appearances to the Twelve over the forty days before Jesus ascended back to Heaven. From the outline of the [life of Christ](#) [<http://209.238.128.31/Christot.htm>] posted at Cranfordville.com comes the basic summary:

	Matthew:	Mark:	Luke:	John:
VI. Resurrection appearances and ascension	28:1-20 (2%)	16:1-20 (3%)	24:1-53 (5%)	20:1-21:25 (6%)
A. The Empty Tomb	28:1-8	16:1-8	24:1-12	20:1-10
B. The Appearances to His Disciples	28:9-20	(16:9-20)	24:13-53	20:11-21:25

For a more detailed explanation of these matters, click on the [Lecture Notes](#) discussion that is found in Cranfordville.com under the [Life of Christ](#) outline [section VI.](#), where the professor at the blackboard icon is located. Interestingly, in the resurrection appearances the only overlap is with the women among the gospel writers.

The original writing of the Markan gospel ended at 16:8, which narrates only the events of Sunday morning. Several centuries later different versions of a so-called “Ending of Mark” began appear. Because of the influence of the Latin Vulgate on the King James Bible translation, the longest of these versions appears as 16:9-20 in Mark’s gospel in earlier English translations. Most modern English translations will end the gospel with verse eight, but will include footnotes containing one or both of the most frequently found additions to the gospel. For a more detailed explanations of the issues involved here see my *Lecture Notes on the Resurrection of Jesus* at <http://cranfordville.com/NT-Lec325.html#3.2.5.6>. Also, the hyperlink to [Mark 16](#) in the Bible Study Tools online site (<http://bible.crosswalk.com>) used in our study contains English translations of these different endings beginning with Footnote 136.

Quite interestingly, among the eight different appearances of Jesus to the Twelve over the forty day period before his ascension back to Heaven, each gospel writer contains unique accounts of his appearance; no duplication of account is found among the three gospel writers. But the so-called “Longer Ending” in Mk. 16:9-20 contains interpretative expansions of either Luke (three accounts) or John (one account). Of these, the most fascinating is the ‘snake handling’ passage in [16:15-18](#), where the ability to handle poisonous snakes without harm is seen as evidence of true faith in Jesus.

Also important in a larger background study is to compare the stories of [the supposed resurrection](#) of other major figures in the ancient Greco-Roman world. These primarily were connected to a number of deities worshipped mostly in the [mystery religions](#) of the ancient world. What is clearly seen from such a study is that the idea of someone coming back to life after death was not a point of skeptical ridicule in that world, as it sometimes is in our modern society. The ancients may be wiser than we sometimes give them credit for!

The gloom felt by the followers of Jesus after his death on Friday afternoon suddenly turned to joyous excitement when news spread like a prairie wildfire on Sunday morning that Jesus was alive.

II. Message

The focal passage of Luke 12:1-12 emphasizes three aspects of the event: (1) the discovery of the empty tomb by the women, leaving them puzzled, (2) the sudden angelic appearance to reassure them of Jesus’ resurrection, and (3) the women’s actions to tell the Twelve what had happened. We will bring in the other gospel accounts at these points, even though their narratives aren’t necessarily focused the same way Luke’s is.

In reading through each of the gospel accounts at this point, one notices several things.

First, there are certain common elements uniformly in all four narratives. (1) the first day of the week time marker; (2) women as the chief characters in the story; (3) Mary Magdalene’s being one of the women; (4) the stone’s being rolled away; (5) the women’s finding the tomb empty; (6) an angelic message (For more discussion, see Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24 of the *New American Commentary*, p. 603.) Yet, each account is very different in the way these six elements are introduced and each contains unique elements not found in the others. Stein helpfully details the Lukan distinctives (p. 604): “Although Luke omitted the women’s questioning of how the stone would be rolled away (Mark 16:3), he added a reference to their bringing spices they had prepared (Luke 24:1; cf. 23:56). He also recalled Jesus’ earlier prophecies concerning his betrayal, death, and

resurrection (24:7) and transposed the names of the women from the beginning of the account (cf. Mark 16:1; Matt 28:1) to the end (Luke 24:10).”

The consequence of this is that the Bible student cannot clearly set forth the exact sequence of events and exactly who was involved in them. But, the positive aspect is that the independency of each gospel writer strongly suggests the historical nature of this event.

a The Empty Tomb, vv. 1-3

Comments:

Mt. 28:1 (NRSV)

1 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

Mk. 16:1-4 (NRSV)

1 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. 2 And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3 They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" 4 When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.

Lk. 23:55-24:3 (NRSV)

55 The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. 56 Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.

On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body.

Jn. 20:1 (NRSV)

1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

The gospel writers mention that the women went to the tomb “on the first day of the week” (τῆ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων). In the ancient Jewish calculation of time, the beginning point for this day was sundown Saturday. The women had prepared spices Friday afternoon for Jesus’ burial but observed the Jewish sabbath from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Then before sunup on Sunday morning, they made their way to the place where Jesus was buried in order to do the proper burial procedure on his body. The exact location of both the crucifixion and burial sites is not absolutely certain, but lay somewhere outside the city walls of the old city of Jerusalem.



Each gospel writer focuses on different sets of women present. Matthew lists Mary Magdalene and the “other Mary.” Mark stresses Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Salome. Later (v. 10) Luke will list Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and “the other women.” John will zero in only on Mary Magdalene.

Several [Marys](#) show up and can become confusing. Altogether in the NT, six different women by the name of [Mary](#) are mentioned: 1 Mary the mother of Jesus; 2 Mary Magdalene, a women from Magdala; 3 Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha; 4 Mary of Cleophas the mother of James the less; 5 Mary the mother of John Mark, a sister of Barnabas; 6 Mary, a Roman Christian who is greeted by Paul in Rom.

16:6. Collectively from the gospel accounts, numbers 1, 2, and 4 are listed as present at the empty tomb. The “other Mary” in Matthew may perhaps be number 3. In addition, [Salome](#) (Mk) and [Joanna](#) (Lk) are mentioned, along with some other unnamed women (Lk). The Joanna mentioned here is most likely the same person mentioned in [Luke 8:1-3](#), as the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and part of a group of women who traveled with Jesus and the Twelve during Jesus' Galilean ministry. These women most likely are the ones that Luke means by the expression “the other women.”

Although a frequent part of the interpretative emphasis of these verses, one needs reminding of the central role that women played in the resurrection event, as well as the larger ministry of Jesus. Luke especially emphasized this in his story of Jesus. Christianity's first witnesses to the resurrection were women, who lived in a society that frequently did not value them beyond being a wife and a mother. The reason for them being the first witnesses is their devotion to the Lord and desire to make certain that his body was properly prepared for burial. In showing their love in a risky situation they found marvelous blessing. One never knows the blessing to be derived from simple, sincere demonstration in ministry the love for the Lord that is possessed.

b. Angelic Appearance, vv. 4-7

Mt. 28:2-7 (NRSV)

2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."

Mk. 16:5-7 (NRSV)

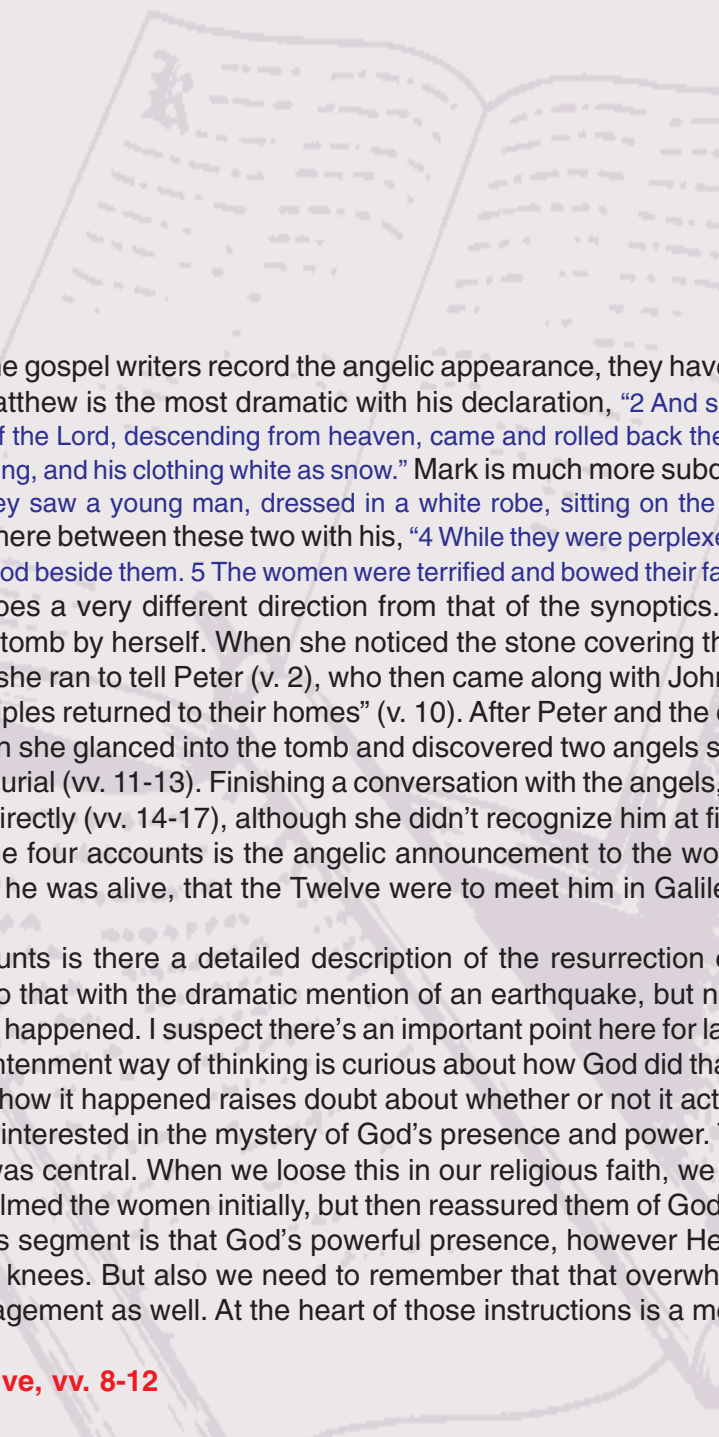
5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 6 But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. 7 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."

Lk. 24:4-7 (NRSV)

4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

Jn. 20:11-17 (NRSV)

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to



him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Comments:

Although all four of the gospel writers record the angelic appearance, they have their own very different ways of describing it. Matthew is the most dramatic with his declaration, "2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow." Mark is much more subdued in his account: "5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed." Luke is somewhere between these two with his, "4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground,..."

The fourth gospel goes a very different direction from that of the synoptics. John began with Mary Magdalene going to the tomb by herself. When she noticed the stone covering the tomb had been rolled away from the opening, she ran to tell Peter (v. 2), who then came along with John to inspect the situation (vv. 3-9). "Then the disciples returned to their homes" (v. 10). After Peter and the others had left the tomb, Mary was still there when she glanced into the tomb and discovered two angels sitting at the place where Jesus' feet had been in burial (vv. 11-13). Finishing a conversation with the angels, she turned to leave and Jesus appeared to her directly (vv. 14-17), although she didn't recognize him at first.

Uniformly through the four accounts is the angelic announcement to the women that Jesus was no longer in the grave, that he was alive, that the Twelve were to meet him in Galilee as he had previously arranged.

In none of the accounts is there a detailed description of the resurrection event of Jesus himself. Matthew comes closer to that with the dramatic mention of an earthquake, but none attempt to describe exactly how resurrection happened. I suspect there's an important point here for later generations of Christians. Our modern Enlightenment way of thinking is curious about how God did that. For some the inability to rationally understand how it happened raises doubt about whether or not it actually happened. But the ancient world was more interested in the mystery of God's presence and power. The sense of awe in the presence of the divine was central. When we lose this in our religious faith, we impoverish our spiritual life. The angels overwhelmed the women initially, but then reassured them of God's care and activity. One of the implications of this segment is that God's powerful presence, however He chooses to manifest it, needs to bring us to our knees. But also we need to remember that that overwhelming presence brings instructions and encouragement as well. At the heart of those instructions is a meeting with Jesus.

c. Telling the Twelve, vv. 8-12

Comments:

Mt. 28:8-10 (NRSV)

8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!"

Mk. 16:8 (NRSV)

8 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.

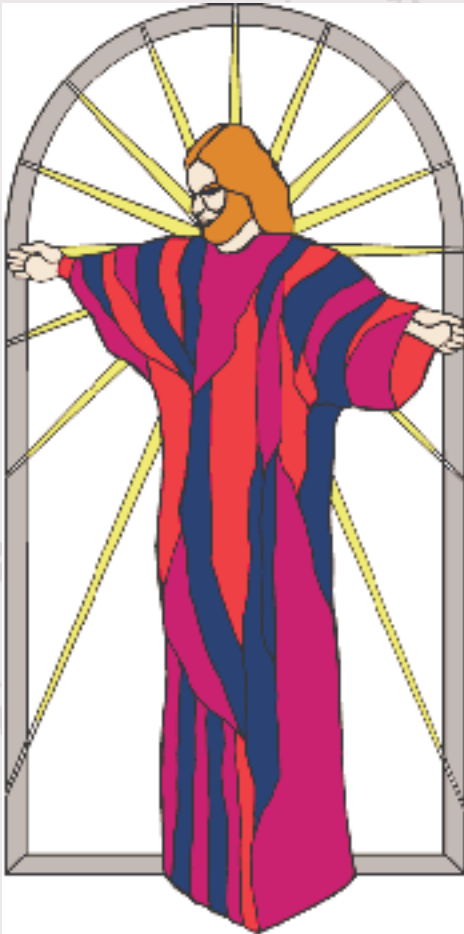
Lk. 24:8-12 (NRSV)

8 Then they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary

Jn. 20:2-9, 18 (NRSV)

2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the

And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."



Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." 3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Again the individual gospel accounts are very different from each other. Matthew describes the women excitedly leaving the tomb to go tell the disciples about Jesus as the angel had instructed them. But they meet the resurrected Jesus who intercepts them on their way to the disciples. He reinforces the angel's instructions about the meeting with the disciples in Galilee. For Matthew this meeting will become the climax of his story of Jesus with the Great Commission (28:16-20). With the original ending of Mark's gospel at 16:8, we are left with the women leaving the tomb in fear and daring to speak to no one about what they had seen. Mark evidently highlighted the women's fear and awe as the climatic moment of his story to leave us readers with the final thought of how utterly amazing this resurrection event of Jesus is. Luke brings the women to the disciples, with Peter then going to see for himself after the rest of the disciples were doubtful of the trustworthiness of the women's report. In John's account, Peter had entered the tomb but didn't initially understand the significance of it. John concluded the entire story with Mary faithfully announcing the resurrection of the Lord to the disciples.

What can we learn from this? For one thing, just the empty tomb isn't enough to understand the resurrection. We need interpretation of it by eye witnesses. Then we are caught up in the joy and excitement of "He's alive!" To encounter Him personally is life changing.