





Sunday School Lesson
Matt. 28:1-10
 by Lorin L. Cranford
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Encounters



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This Bible study comes on Easter Sunday and rightly focuses upon the resurrection of Jesus. Although the title in the Formations series, "Living with Purpose," may be stretching things a bit as a part of the multipart series, one can certainly find the idea of purpose present in the Matthean text.

Any serious study of the resurrection of Jesus will have to take into account the several depictions of this event contained in the four canonical gospels. These are found not only in [Mt. 28:1-10](#), but also in [Mk. 16:1-8](#) (the earliest and the source for Mt. and Lk.), [Lk. 24:1-12](#), and [John 20:1-18](#) (the most distinctive of the four accounts). Additionally, numerous passages elsewhere in the New Testament interpret the meaning of this event for early Christians. Some attention to them should become a part of the larger picture. One of the more detailed such passages is [1 Cor. 15](#), especially verses 12-34. Secondary sources touching on the biblical theology topic of "Resurrection" will be helpful in gaining a clearer wholistic picture. One readably accessible example of this is the one by Eric W. Adams in the online [Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#). These treatments will attempt to pull together the biblical teaching into a coherent presentation.

[An earlier Bible study](#), entitled "Easter Sunday" and taken from Luke 24:1-12, will provide some helpful background material for our study of Matthew 28. Relevant materials from that study will be incorporated into this study.

I Context

Because of the use of multiple scripture texts for this study, the contextual issues take a different turn. With Mt. 28:1-10 as the main passage, more attention will be given to the Matthean background, but some attention to the others will be included.

a. Historical

From an earlier study on Matthew ([Mt. 3:1-12](#)), I will draw insights regarding the external history of the first gospel. The **external history**, that is, the compositional history, of the Gospel of Matthew comes up against the anonymous nature of the document at the outset. That is, no author identification is contained inside the document itself. The heading, "The Gospel according to Matthew," usually printed in most English translations reflects the Greek heading KATA MAΘΘΑΙΟΝ, which was added to the document after it had gone through about a century of being copied after the initial writing of the document in the late 60s to middle 70s of the first Christian century. The heading, which links Matthew with this document, reflects the viewpoint of post-apostolic Christian tradition as to authorship. As Howard Clark Kee ("The Gospel of Matthew," *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible*, iPreach) describes:

From the early 2nd cent. down to the present, Christians have believed that the first gospel in the NT was also the first to be written and that the author was [Matthew](#) the tax collector, a disciple of Jesus (9:9). The source of this persistent belief can be traced back as far as ca. A.D. 130, when Papias, a bishop in Hierapolis, a city of Asia

Minor, wrote a work titled "Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord." His writing, which is known only from fragments quoted by later Christian writers, reports that Matthew, the disciple, compiled the sayings of the Lord in Hebrew. Those who have quoted Papias seem to have accepted his statement without question as referring to the First Gospel.

Yet, several major barriers must be overcome before this ancient Christian tradition gains full acceptance. Kee addresses one of these in relation to the major source of that tradition with Papias:

There are several difficulties with this assumption, however. (a) The gospel consists of a rather full account of Jesus' public ministry, not merely of a series of sayings. (b) Detailed analysis of Matt. shows that the author used Mark as one of his sources (see below). (c) Mark and therefore Matt., for which Mark was a source, were written in Greek, not Hebrew. In view of these difficulties, it is plausible to assume that Papias is referring, not to Matt. as we know it, but perhaps to a now lost collection of sayings of Jesus.

Other obstacles exist as well. Most notable among them is the difficulty in explaining how a Jewish tax collector, whose job automatically placed him on the fringe of Jewish religious life, could develop the skills to be able to argue his case for Jesus as the promised Messiah using patterns of scribal argumentation ranked among the best one can find in ancient Jewish writings. The presentation of his case reflects persuasion skills matching and following thought patterns found among the most skilled of the ancient rabbis in the Mishnah etc. Several other barriers also exist in regard to this early church tradition and are a part of the challenges to be faced in attempting to assert the accuracy of Matthew as the author of the first gospel.

For me, it's better to speak of the Matthean community, without fully assuming the early church tradition, as the source of this document. This divinely inspired document arose out of a desire to defend the belief in Jesus as the promised Messiah prophesied in the Hebrew Bible. Evidently this need was occasioned by the First Jewish War (appx. 66-70 AD), which resulted in the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and a huge fear among Jewish people for the continuing existence of their way of life and religious heritage. The religious community of mostly Jewish believers, probably in the Roman province of Syria in either Damascus or Antioch -- or both -- came under strong pressure to abandon their Christian faith in favor of the synagogue tradition of Judaism as a way to help preserve that threatened heritage. God inspired this community -- along with individuals within it -- to produce the Gospel of Matthew in order to demonstrate just the opposite. In order to be consistent with what God had begun in the Old Testament faithful Jews should accept Jesus as their Messiah, since Christ represented the culmination of the Old Testament revelation and promises for His covenant people. This is Matthew's message.

One other external history aspect has to do with an assumption of the literary connection among the first three gospels, the so-called synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In current scholarship this discussion tends to revolve around two major viewpoints, with almost limitless variations off these two core perspectives. The older, and more influential, Two Source Hypothesis sees this connection as follows. Mark was the first gospel to be written in the late 50s to mid 60s. When Matthew prepared to write his gospel account in the late 60s to mid 70s, he had multiple sources of material available for use. The two major ones were the Gospel of Mark and another document or collection of documents composed mainly of things that Jesus said, rather than of what he did. This second document is commonly labeled the Q document after the German word Quelle meaning source. Luke also had access to either the same document or else one very similar to Matthew's version. Thus, Q comes to refer to the material found common between Matthew and Luke, but not found in Mark. Luke in composing his gospel sometime in the 70s to the mid 80s also had access to Mark and Q as the two major written sources for his gospel.

The other viewpoint with less, but growing impact upon gospel studies is called the Two Gospel Hypothesis. Its perspective is quite different. Matthew is the first gospel to be written, followed by Luke who had access to a copy of Matthew's gospel. Mark is the last to be written, and draws from both Matthew and Luke as a summarizing account of the two much longer gospels. That is, something of an ancient Reader's Digest Condensed Version of the story of Jesus. Although I have numerous friends who hold to this view, I have not been persuaded of its ability to better explain the data in the texts of the three gospels. Thus, I still hold to the basic idea of the Two Source Hypothesis.

The next logical question is why is taking a stance important? Numerous reasons can be set forth in answer. But for me one of the more important ones has to do with the effort to understand Jesus as a

historical person who lived at a specific time and in a specific place in history. Where the three gospel accounts overlap one another either in double tradition or triple tradition materials, one simply cannot attempt serious study of these depictions of the same event without addressing the issue of who is borrowing from whom. The Greek text especially makes it clear that borrowing is unquestionably taking place. The interpretative process just isn't complete until the issue of sources has been addressed. Beyond this aspect, such an analysis is essential as a part of the effort to understand the distinctive theological viewpoint of each gospel writer in his own telling the story of Jesus. How the writers used their sources reveals much about how they understood Jesus. The gospels were not intended to be a biography of Jesus, neither in the modern nor the ancient definitions of the term biography. Rather they were written as religious interpretations of the spiritual significance of Jesus of Nazareth in order to foster commitment to Him (cf. Lk. 1:4 and Jn. 20:30-31). This is particularly true of the fourth gospel, and helps to explain why this gospel is so different from the synoptic gospels. Thus a working conclusion about the literary connection of the synoptic gospels is an essential part of the interpretative process.

The **internal history** aspect has to do with identifying the time and place markers inside the scripture passage itself. In Mt. 28:1-10 the following time markers surface:

- v. 1: “**After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning**” [Οψὲ δὲ σαββάτων τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ εἰς μίαν σαββάτων].
- v. 2: “**suddenly there was a great earthquake**” [ἰδοὺ σεισμὸς ἐγένετο μέγας].
- v. 7: “**go quickly**” [ταχὺ πορευθεῖσαι].
- v. 8: “**they left...quickly**” [ἀπελθοῦσαι ταχὺ]
- v. 9: “**Suddenly Jesus met them**” [ἰδοὺ Ἰησοῦς ὑπήντησεν αὐταῖς]

One of the observations arising from this listing is the minimal amount of time markers contained in the text. Also, the markers fall into two distinct categories: (1) the initial marking out of the date and time of the occurrence of this episode, and (2) the emphasis upon quick, unexpected movement. What remains undefined is how much time is consumed from the beginning to the end of this episode. Probably just an hour or so of time, but the scripture doesn't provide adequate details to gain a clear sense of how much time transpired.

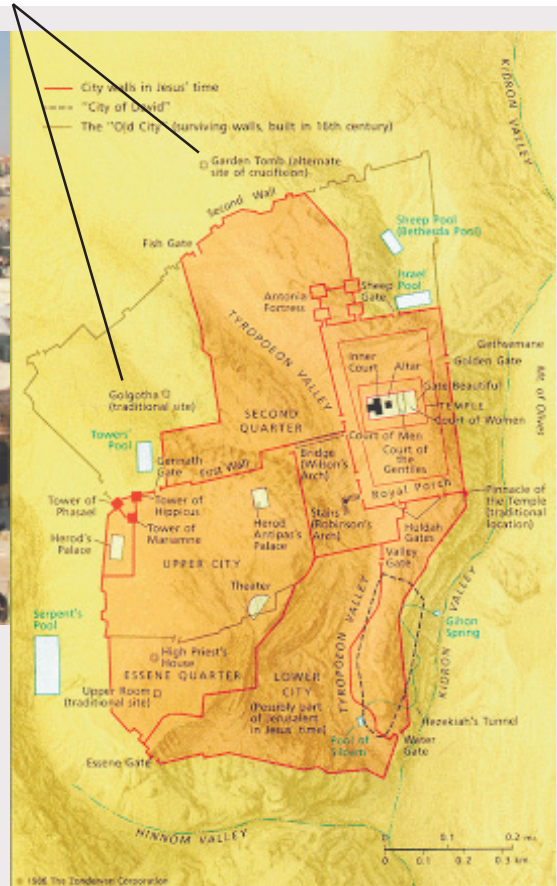
The following place (spatial) markers can be found in Mt. 28:1-10:

- v. 1: “**the tomb**” [τὸν τάφον].
- v. 2: “**descending from heaven**” [καταβάς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ].
- v. 2: “**came and rolled back the stone and sat on it**” [προσελθὼν ἀπεκύλισεν τὸν λίθον καὶ ἐκάθητο ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ].
- v. 3: “**His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow**” [ἦν δὲ ἡ εἰδέα αὐτοῦ ὡς ἀστραπὴ καὶ τὸ ἔνδυμα αὐτοῦ λευκὸν ὡς χιῶν].
- v. 5: “**who was crucified**” [τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον].
- v. 5: “**see the place where he lay**” [τὸν τόπον ὅπου ἔκειτο].
- v. 6: “**He is not here**” [οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε].
- v. 7: “**to Galilee**” [εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν].
- v. 8: “**they left the tomb**” [ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου]
- v. 9: “**took hold of his feet**” [ἐκράτησαν αὐτοῦ τοὺς πόδας]
- v. 10: “**to go to Galilee**” [ἵνα ἀπέλθωσιν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν]
- v. 10: “**there they will see me**” [κάκεῖ με ὄψονται.]



A scanning of the spatial markers indicate several locations: the tomb that had a stone needing to be rolled back in order to gain entrance and was the place where Jesus had been laid; the angel who came down to the tomb with a dazzling appearance; the reference to crucifixion without indication of how far from the tomb it may have been; the feet of Jesus that could be grabbed hold of even in his resurrected state; and the undefined location in the province of Galilee where Jesus was to meet his disciples. Thus the interpretative challenge is to identify the locations mentioned here.

On the map on the next page is a diagram of the ancient city of Jerusalem. Indicated on the map are two possible locations for Golgotha: (1) the traditional site located just outside the northwest segment of the first old city wall, and (2) the Garden Tomb located to the north of the second city wall. Various efforts to identify this location have surfaced over the centuries. The traditional location is today the place where



the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is located, as R.H. Smith (“Holy Sepulchre, Church of the,” Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, iPreach) describes:

An ecclesiastical complex in the walled Old City of JERUSALEM that comprises the traditional locations of Golgotha (Calvary) and the tomb of Jesus, which according to John 19:41 were located close to one another. The church was constructed by the emperor Constantine in the fourth century (see ART, EARLY CHRISTIAN[S] §4a) and subsequently has undergone numerous alterations, some of them extensive. Although many historical records pertain to the church, the history of this complex could not be written satisfactorily until extensive archaeological explorations were undertaken as a part of restorations begun in 1960 by the Greek Orthodox, the Armenian, and the Roman Catholic churches, the three principal Christian communities that share the edifice.

The picture above is of that church as it stands today in Jerusalem. The alternative view is known as the Gordon’s Calvary located quite close to the Garden Tomb (the picture on the preceding page). The debate flows back and forth between these two locations with arguments for both set forth with a fair amount of persuasiveness. The burial site of Jesus very likely was in the Garden Tomb, located much closer to Gordon’s Calvary, than to the traditional Church of the Holy Sepulchre. But one cannot say decisively which of the two crucifixion places was the one where Jesus was executed.

The other major location designated in our passage is the province of Galilee, which was located in the northern sector of ancient Palestine. Thus the designated meeting place of Jesus and his disciples was some 60 plus miles to the north of Jerusalem. No specific location in Galilee is mentioned, although numerous traditions down through the centuries have attempted to identify a more precise location in Galilee. Traveling there by foot would require several days of walking, but meeting there would be safer for the disciples than in Jerusalem and Judea.

Awareness of these items will help the interpretative process of the scripture verses. Additionally, noting both similar and different time/place markers in the parallel scripture texts will highlight the distinctives of Matthew’s recounting of this episode.

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) [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 hyper-link 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

In a distinctive manner, Matthew blends elements of his sources into two distinct scenes: (1) the women’s encounter with the angel (vv. 1-8) and (2) their encounter with Jesus (vv. 9-10). This is unlike the other gospel narratives who divide out the scenes differently. Since Matthew is the focal passage, it will become the organizing framework with the other gospel narrative supplementing it.

a. Meeting an Angel, vv. 1-8

Mt. 28:1-8 (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. 2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the

Mk. 16:1-8 (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

Lk. 23:55-24:12 (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,

Jn. 20:1-9 (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.

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." 8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.



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. 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."

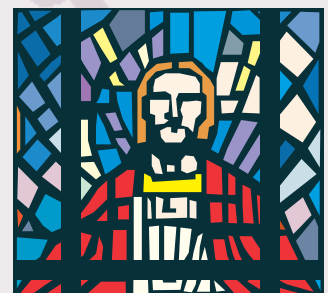
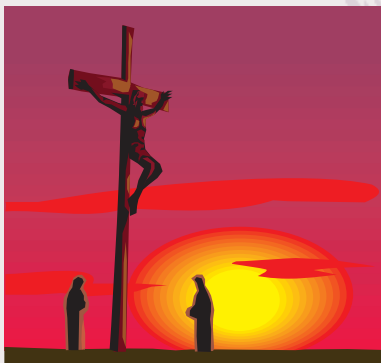
8 So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

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. 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." 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 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

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 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.



GNT

<28:1> Ὅψε δὲ σαββάτων τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ εἰς μίαν σαββάτων, ἦλθεν Μαριάμ ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ ἡ ἄλλη Μαρία θεωρῆσαι τὸν τάφον. <28:2> καὶ ἰδοὺ σεισμὸς ἐγένετο μέγας· ἄγγελος γὰρ κυρίου καταβάς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ προσελθὼν ἀπεκύλισεν τὸν λίθον καὶ ἐκάθητο ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ. <28:3> ἦν δὲ ἡ εἰδέα αὐτοῦ ὡς ἀστραπὴ καὶ τὸ ἔνδυμα αὐτοῦ λευκὸν ὡς χιών. <28:4> ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ φόβου αὐτοῦ ἐσειίσθησαν οἱ τηροῦντες καὶ ἐγενήθησαν ὡς νεκροί. <28:5> ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ ἄγγελος εἶπεν ταῖς γυναῖξιν, Μὴ φοβεῖσθε ὑμεῖς, οἶδα γὰρ ὅτι Ἰησοῦν τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον ζητεῖτε· <28:6> οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε, ἠγέρθη γὰρ καθὼς εἶπεν· δεῦτε ἴδετε τὸν τόπον ὅπου ἔκειτο. <28:7> καὶ ταχὺ πορευθεῖσαι εἶπατε τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ ὅτι Ἠγέρθη ἀπὸ τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ ἰδοὺ προάγει ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν, ἐκεῖ αὐτὸν ὄψεσθε· ἰδοὺ εἶπον ὑμῖν. <28:8> καὶ ἀπελθοῦσαι ταχὺ ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου μετὰ φόβου καὶ χαρᾶς μεγάλης ἔδραμον ἀπαγγεῖλαι τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ.

**GNT**

<16:1> Καὶ διαγενομένου τοῦ σαββάτου Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ Μαρία ἡ [τοῦ] Ἰακώβου καὶ Σαλώμη ἠγόρασαν ἀρώματα ἵνα ἐλθοῦσαι ἀλείψωσιν αὐτόν. <16:2> καὶ λίαν πρωὶ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων ἔρχονται ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον ἀνατείλαντος τοῦ ἡλίου. <16:3> καὶ ἔλεγον πρὸς ἑαυτάς, Τίς ἀποκυλίσει ἡμῖν τὸν λίθον ἐκ τῆς θύρας τοῦ μνημείου; <16:4> καὶ ἀναβλέψασαι θεωροῦσιν ὅτι ἀποκεκλύσται ὁ λίθος· ἦν γὰρ μέγας σφόδρα. <16:5> καὶ εἰσελθοῦσαι εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον εἶδον νεανίσκον καθήμενον ἐν τοῖς δεξιotoῖς περιβεβλημένον στολὴν λευκὴν, καὶ ἐξεθαμβήθησαν. <16:6> ὁ δὲ λέγει αὐταῖς, Μὴ ἐκθαμβεῖσθε· Ἰησοῦν ζητεῖτε τὸν Ναζαρητὸν τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον· ἠγέρθη, οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε· ἴδε ὁ τόπος ὅπου ἔθηκαν αὐτόν. <16:7> ἀλλὰ ὑπάγετε εἶπατε τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῷ Πέτρῳ ὅτι Προάγει ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν· ἐκεῖ αὐτὸν ὄψεσθε, καθὼς εἶπεν ὑμῖν. <16:8> καὶ ἐξελθοῦσαι ἔφυγον ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου, εἶχεν γὰρ αὐτὰς τρόμος καὶ ἔκστασις· καὶ οὐδενὶ οὐδὲν εἶπαν· ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ.

home, amazed at what had happened.

GNT

23:55 Κατακολουθήσασαι δὲ αἱ γυναῖκες, αἵτινες ἦσαν συνεληλυθῦσαι ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας αὐτῶ, ἐθεάσαντο τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ ὡς ἐτέθη τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, 23:56 ὑποστρέψασαι δὲ ἠτοίμασαν ἀρώματα καὶ μύρα. Καὶ τὸ μὲν σάββατον ἡσύχασαν κατὰ τὴν ἐντολήν. 24:1 τῇ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων ὄρθρου βαθέως ἐπὶ τὸ μνήμα ἦλθον φέρουσαι ἃ ἠτοίμασαν ἀρώματα. 24:2 εὔρον δὲ τὸν λίθον ἀποκεκλυσμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου, 24:3 εἰσελθοῦσαι δὲ οὐκ εὔρον τὸ σῶμα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ. 24:4 καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ἀπορεῖσθαι αὐτάς περὶ τούτου καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνδρες δύο ἐπέστησαν αὐταῖς ἐν ἐσθῆτι ἀστραπούσῃ. 24:5 ἐμόφωβον δὲ γενομένων αὐτῶν καὶ κλινουσῶν τὰ πρόσωπα εἰς τὴν γῆν εἶπαν πρὸς αὐτάς, Τί ζητεῖτε τὸν ζῶντα μετὰ τῶν νεκρῶν; 24:6 οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε, ἀλλὰ ἠγέρθη. μνήσθητε ὡς ἐλάλησεν ὑμῖν ἔτι ὧν ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ 24:7 λέγων τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὅτι δεῖ παραδοθῆναι εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων ἀμαρτωλῶν καὶ σταυρωθῆναι καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναστῆναι. 24:8 καὶ ἐμνήσθησαν τῶν ῥημάτων αὐτοῦ. 24:9 καὶ ὑποστρέψασαι ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου ἀπήγγειλαν ταῦτα πάντα τοῖς ἑνδεκα

GNT

20:1 Τῇ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ ἔρχεται πρωὶ σκοτίας ἔτι οὔσης εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ βλέπει τὸν λίθον ἠρμένον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου. 20:2 τρέχει οὖν καὶ ἔρχεται πρὸς Σίμωνα Πέτρον καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἄλλον μαθητὴν ὃν ἐφίλει ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς, Ἦραν τὸν κύριον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου, καὶ οὐκ οἶδαμεν ποῦ ἔθηκαν αὐτόν. 20:3 Ἐξῆλθεν οὖν ὁ Πέτρος καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητῆς, καὶ ἦρχοντο εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον. 20:4 ἔτρεχον δὲ οἱ δύο ὁμοῦ· καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητῆς προέδραμεν τάχιον τοῦ Πέτρου καὶ ἦλθεν πρῶτος εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον, 20:5 καὶ παρακύψας βλέπει κείμενα τὰ ὀθόνια, οὐ μέντοι εἰσῆλθεν. 20:6 ἔρχεται οὖν καὶ Σίμων Πέτρος ἀκολουθῶν αὐτῷ καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον, καὶ θεωρεῖ τὰ ὀθόνια κείμενα, 20:7 καὶ τὸ σουδάριον, ὃ ἦν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ, οὐ μετὰ τῶν ὀθονίων κείμενον ἀλλὰ χωρὶς ἐντετυλιγμένον εἰς ἓνα τόπον. 20:8 τότε οὖν εἰσῆλθεν καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητῆς ὁ ἐλθὼν πρῶτος εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐπίστευσεν· 20:9 οὐδέπω γὰρ ᾔδεισαν τὴν γραφὴν ὅτι δεῖ αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῆναι.



καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς λοιποῖς.
24:10 ἦσαν δὲ ἡ
Μαγδαληνὴ Μαρία καὶ
Ἰωάννα καὶ Μαρία ἡ
Ἰακώβου καὶ αἱ λοιπαὶ
σὺν αὐταῖς. ἔλεγον πρὸς
τοὺς ἀποστόλους ταῦτα,
24:11 καὶ ἐφάνησαν
ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν ὡσεὶ
λῆρος τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα,
καὶ ἠπίστουν αὐταῖς.
24:12 Ὁ δὲ Πέτρος
ἀναστὰς ἔδραμεν ἐπὶ τὸ
μνημεῖον καὶ παρακύψας
βλέπει τὰ ὀθόνια μόνα,
καὶ ἀπῆλθεν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν
θαυμάζων τὸ γεγονός.



Notes:

First, we should note the framing of these events by each gospel writer. The synoptic writers set us up with the reference to the women watching Jesus be buried on Friday evening:

[Mt. 27:61 \(NRSV\)](#)

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

[Mk. 15:47 \(NRSV\)](#)

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James saw where the body was laid.

[Lk. 23:55-56 \(NRSV\)](#)

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.

Then, it was the women who devotedly sought early Sunday morning to go to the tomb to administer the proper burial procedure. John's gospel ([19:38-42](#)) indicates that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had hurriedly arranged for Jesus to be buried before sundown on Friday in a tomb that was close to the place of crucifixion. Thus women made their way to the tomb before sunup on that Sunday morning. Each gospel writer has a different version of the women's experience. Matthew names Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" who went to the tomb (Mt. 28:1). Mark, on the other hand, names Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome as those going to the tomb (Mk. 16:1). Luke identifies a larger group of women: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and "the other women with them" (Lk. 24:10). Interestingly, John focuses attention only on Mary Magdalene as going to the tomb (Jn. 20:1). The divergent early traditions utilized by the gospel writers are uniform in identifying [Mary Magdalene](#) as going to the tomb. She first [surfaces](#) in Luke 8:2 and then in the empty tomb narratives. In the Luke 8 reference, she is described as the one "from whom seven demons had gone out." Beyond that we know little about her.

The exact sequence of events when the women arrive at the tomb varies among the gospel writers as well.

For Matthew, the sequence is (1) a great earthquake; (2) descent of the angel who rolled the stone away from the entrance to the tomb; (3) the fainting of the guards at the sight of the angel; (4) the speaking of the angel to the women; (5) the departure of the women to tell the disciples what they had seen; (6) Jesus appearance to them as they are leaving the tomb area.

For Mark, the sequence is (1) the women wondering how they would gain access to the tomb on their way there; (2) upon entering the tomb they saw "a young man...dressed in a white robe" inside the tomb; (3) the instructions of the angel to the women to tell the disciples about what they had seen; (4) their departure from the tomb with fear so that they spoke to no one.

For Luke, the sequence is (1) the women's discovery of the tomb rolled away from the entrance to the tomb; (2) upon entering the tomb they didn't find Jesus' body but instead "two men...in dazzling apparel";

(3) the two angels instruct them to go tell the disciples what they had seen; (4) the women leave the tomb and go tell the disciples and Peter who are somewhat skeptical of their report.

For John, the very different sequence is (1) Mary Magdalene comes alone to the tomb and discovers the stone rolled away; (2) she runs to tell Peter who, along with John (the other disciple), rush back to the tomb to see what was going on; (3) after Peter and John had left, Mary looked inside and saw “two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been”; (4) after a brief conversation with them she turned toward the outside of the tomb and saw Jesus who spoke to her briefly; (5) she then went and told the disciples what Jesus had said to her.

For some folks these vary different sequences, together with different listings of which women were present, becomes bothersome, and suggests that the event may not have factual history behind it. Yet, this variation of narrative detail can just as easily be understood as a confirmation that women were the first at the tomb and thus played a critical role as messengers to the disciples. To be sure, these variations make it impossible to know exactly how the events unfolded. But in ancient patterns of pseudepigraphy, the attempt to fabricate events based on earlier written accounts follows the pattern of careful harmonizing of the narrative details. If someone were making up the stories out of their imagination, we can be certain that the narrative details would be much, much closer together than they stand in the four gospels.

In fact, we have an example of this in the various versions of the so-called “shorter and longer endings” of Mark’s gospel immediately following the empty tomb narrative. In most English translations, Mk. 16:9-20 is listed as not being included in the earliest and most important Greek manuscripts of this gospel. The [footnotes](#) of the New Revised Standard Version at 16:8 help explain what is going on here:

F136: Some of the most ancient authorities bring the book to a close at the end of verse 8. One authority concludes the book with the shorter ending; others include the shorter ending and then continue with verses 9-20. In most authorities verses 9-20 follow immediately after verse 8, though in some of these authorities the passage is marked as being doubtful.

In the longer ending versions (some six or so different versions exist), the later scribes who added this material felt that the abrupt ending of Mark’s gospel in 16:8 with the women leaving the tomb was unsatisfactory and left this gospel missing some important resurrection appearances to the disciples that were contained in the other gospels. Consequently, four segments were created and then added. Three match three of Luke’s segments (Mk. 16:12-13 // Lk. 24:13-35; Mk. 16:14-18 // Lk. 24:36-49; Mk. 16:19-20 // Lk. 24:50-53). One of the four matches one of John’s segments (Mk. 16:9-11 // Jhn. 20:11-18). See my [Detailed Life of Christ](#) listing for a charting of this material. The Marcan scribal additionalists were careful to match the account with one of the recognized gospel accounts, but at the same time used the occasion to weave into their accounts their own theological biases that stand apart from the rest of the gospel of Mark. Most dramatic of the numerous versions of these longer ending accounts is the so-called “snake handling” narrative in 16:17-18 (NRSV): “17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

With our emphasis upon Matthew, we will focus attention on the way Matthew set forth this episode. Richard Gardner (Matthew, in the *Believers Church Bible Commentary*, iPreach) summarizes Matthew’s distinctive points well:

Central to the story are the women who come to the tomb, hear the message that Jesus has been raised, and thus become the first witnesses to the resurrection. While this core of the story is common to all three of the synoptic Gospels, Matthew’s version of the episode contains a number of distinctive features:

(1) Only two women go to the tomb, the two Marys who earlier witnessed the crucifixion and burial. Further, they go not to anoint Jesus (the sealed tomb would prevent that), but simply to see the tomb. Presumably they plan to resume their vigil of mourning.

(2) The mysterious young man in a white robe in Mark 16:5 becomes the angel of the Lord, whose appearance here corresponds to earlier visits mentioned in the birth and infancy stories (cf. 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19). Portrayed with vivid images from the book of Daniel (10:6; 7:9-10), this divine messenger rolls the stone away in the women’s presence before he delivers his message.

(3) The visit of the angel unleashes a powerful earthquake. Like the previous earthquake at the crucifixion (cf.

27:51-54), this one confirms that an old order is breaking up and a new one dawning. The earthquake is not itself what frees Jesus from the tomb, but rather serves as a sign that God has raised Jesus (cf. 12:38-40).

(4) The guards introduced in the prior episode witness the signlike events along with the women (neither group sees the resurrection itself). Unlike the women, the guards remain terrified, reluctant witnesses.

(5) When the women leave the sepulcher, they do so not only with fear, but with great joy. Moreover, they do not keep silent, as is the case in Mark's account (Mark 16:8), but instead carry out the command to tell the good news to the disciples.

(6) Before the women find the disciples, Jesus himself appears to the women (vv. 9-10). Only Matthew records this appearance, although the Fourth Gospel reports a private reunion between Jesus and Mary Magdalene (John 20:1-18). The upshot of this addition to the story is that the women are not only the first to hear that Jesus is raised, but also the first to see the risen Lord.

Brief as it is, the report of Jesus' appearance to the women makes several important points (cf. Meier, 1980:364). First, the resurrection of Jesus has a bodily dimension. The women are able to take hold of Jesus' feet. Second, the resurrection renews the family relationship of Jesus and his disciples. Jesus speaks of a reunion with my brothers. Third, Galilee is named again as the place where this reunion will occur. The reason Jesus chooses Galilee will become apparent shortly (cf. 28:16-20; 26:32). Finally, the One who names us his sisters and brothers is also our Lord. He is One whom the women worship when he meets and greets them.

We can learn much from Matthew about the marvelous message of Easter. The angelic message to the women remains relevant to us today: "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." We are invited to affirm for ourselves the empty tomb, and then we are commissioned to share the good news with others. May we follow the example of these women who "left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples."

b. Meeting Jesus, vv. 9-10

Mt. 28:9-10 (NRSV)

9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" 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."

GNT

<28:9> καὶ ἰδὸν Ἰησοῦς ὑπήντησεν αὐταῖς λέγων, Χαίρετε αἱ δὲ προσελθοῦσαι ἐκράτησαν αὐτοῦ τοὺς πόδας καὶ προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ. <28:10> τότε λέγει αὐταῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Μὴ φοβεῖσθε· ὑπάγετε ἀπαγγείλατε τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς μου ἵνα ἀπέλθωσιν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν, κακεῖ με ὄψονται.

Jn. 20:14-17 (NRSV)

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.'"

GNT

20:14 ταῦτα εἰποῦσα ἐστράφη εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω, καὶ θεωρεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα, καὶ οὐκ ᾔδει ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστίν. 20:15 λέγει αὐτῇ Ἰησοῦς, Γύναι, τί κλαίεις; τίνα ζητεῖς; ἐκείνη δοκοῦσα ὅτι ὁ κηπουρὸς ἐστίν λέγει αὐτῷ, Κύριε, εἰ σὺ ἐβάστασας αὐτόν, εἰπέ μοι ποῦ ἔθηκας αὐτόν, καὶ γὰρ αὐτόν ἀρῶ. 20:16 λέγει αὐτῇ Ἰησοῦς, Μαριάμ. στραφεῖσα ἐκείνη λέγει αὐτῷ Ἑβραϊστί, Ραββουνι (ὃ λέγεται Διδάσκαλε). 20:17 λέγει αὐτῇ Ἰησοῦς, Μὴ μου ἅπτου, οὐπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα· πορεύου δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου καὶ εἰπὲ αὐτοῖς, Ἐναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεὸν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν.

Notes:

Only Matthew and John record an encounter directly with Jesus by the women while at the tomb. Even though significant differences exist, common threads are also present in both accounts. The common

elements include a surprise, unexpected appearance by Jesus, the human reaction of worship, and Jesus' verbal instructions to the women.

In both accounts, none of the women expected to see Jesus when he showed up. Even though the angels had declared him to be risen from the dead and alive, they were not expecting to see him. There may be an important timeless point here. Typically in the Bible, the theophanies ([“Manifestation of God that is tangible to the human senses.”](#) cf. William C. Williams, “Theophany,” [Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)) contain the element of surprise and unexpectedness. This resurrection appearance of Jesus to the women follows that pattern. The point is that humans don't control when God chooses to reveal Himself, even in this kind of dramatic fashion. But the encouraging aspect is that God does manifest Himself to His people, often times in very clear, dramatic ways. In those encounters we know He is present and we can take comfort and encouragement from that. The one danger that lurks among some evangelicals is the so-called “God talk” language, where preachers especially make outlandish claims that “God told me to” The easy test of this is Does what “God said” fall within the boundaries of scriptural principle? If not, then we can know clearly that God wasn't talking to the individual in such instances. If so, then it may be a possibility that He was. But even then, there's no guarantee. When one studies these theophanies one realizes that they never become a basis for spiritual pride or elitism. Just the opposite, they evoke much deeper levels of humility from those who receive such divine visits. The attitude of the person reporting such “conversations with God” signals a lot about the genuineness of the conversation.

The women's reaction to seeing Jesus there in the area of the tomb was to worship Him: αἱ δὲ προσελθοῦσαι ἐκράτησαν αὐτοῦ τοὺς πόδας καὶ προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ (“[they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him](#)” [NRSV]). John has a similar depiction for Mary Magdalene: “[She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” \(which means Teacher\). 17 Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me,...”](#) (NRSV). Their instinctive human reaction was to grab hold of Jesus whom they loved dearly and to make sure that he didn't leave them again. Their emotions had been on a steep roller coaster for the past three days and now it was cresting at a high level in the excitement of seeing Jesus alive again. But that excitement was mingled with reverence and awe. Thus they worshipped as they felt excitement. Such encounters with the divine consistently in the Bible emphasize human reactions of fear and reverence toward God. The [divine shekinah](#) inspires a human response of overwhelmedness. We need to recapture that today in our world. The flippant way that most Americans use the word “God” reflects a cultural mentality just the opposite of that of those who have genuinely encountered God in their lives.

One side note. Dan Brown's popular novel [The DaVinci Code](#) asserts that Jesus and Mary Magdalene had an intimate physical relationship. This preposterous idea is inferred from John's account here and the reference in [Luke 8:2](#) listing of Mary along with other women who traveled with Jesus and the disciples during his ministry in Galilee. To draw such a conclusion is not only dumb, but sacra religious. Absolutely nothing in scripture even remotely points in such a direction. Yet, the popularity of this piece of fiction has convinced many in our day that Jesus and Mary were secretly married and produced children together. Unfortunately this says more about American culture and gullibility than anything else.

Thirdly, Jesus spoke to the women. In Matthew's account he re-enforced the words of the angel to them previously with words of both comfort and instructions to tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee. Thus the women were to find renewal from this meeting as well as receive instructions to share what they had experienced with others. The message to Mary in John's account is somewhat similar, but with a more personal touch. Also, the added affirmation of Jesus' ascent to the Heavenly Father is given to her to pass on to the disciples.

When we encounter the living Christ in our lives we find something of the same experience -- both encouragement and instructions to share.

Thus, the wonderful message of Easter is reaffirmed. The testimony of these women inspires and encourages still today. He is alive! Go tell the good news!