

**What Does the Empty Tomb Mean?**

Can you imagine it?! Can you even for a moment imagine what those women felt—what they thought—what they themselves imagined—when they got to that tomb . . . and THEY FOUND IT EMPTY! What must have gone through their minds? Did they think they were dreaming? Did they think they might have come to the wrong tomb? After all, it was early in the morning; perhaps not even completely light out yet. And their eyes were blurred with tears and from lack of sleep. But it had to be the right tomb. They could never forget the tomb in which they had placed Jesus' body. It was absolutely the right tomb. The stone was rolled away . . . and went they went into the tomb . . . but his body was gone! Luke says, “. . . they were perplexed about this.” PERPLEXED? PERPLEXED!?

This is another one of those examples of where the Greek simply does not translate well into English. The Greek word used here is *aporeisthai*. Yes, on one level they were perplexed, but perplexed doesn't begin to express the emotions conveyed by the Greek. I mean how would you feel if you were standing in that empty tomb? Would you be simply *perplexed*? It might be more accurate to say that they were *looking around apprehensively and in fear*.

That's what it was—apprehension . . . and fear. Jesus was dead. Everything they had dreamed of—all their hopes, all their joys—everything that gave life meaning had been buried in that tomb and sealed up when that massive stone had been rolled across the opening. Jesus was dead. His body was supposed to be in that tomb. And now his body was gone. How was that even possible? PERPLEXED!?! They were probably TERRIFIED! They were probably on the verge of emotional collapse.

But then—and again try to imagine this—then there are these two men standing there telling them that “he isn't here, but is risen.” And in addition to that, both of these men are dazzling bright in appearance. If these women weren't terrified before, they probably were at this point. They had to be wondering just what was going on and whether their minds were slipping. Now, here's what I find so amazing and so wonderful about this Gospel passage. It didn't take these women very long to work things out. Luke tells us that once these men—were they angels?—once they had reminded the women of what Jesus had said about his own passion and death and resurrection, they left all their doubts behind. They weren't perplexed; they weren't apprehensive; and they weren't fearful. They knew absolutely what that empty tomb meant, and they headed straight out to share the Good News.

What's important here is to understand the meaning of the empty tomb . . . and that means you have to understand something that is beyond comprehension.

The origins of the word “Easter” actually comes from the pagan holiday celebrating the life of the goddess Oestre. Some people also believe Christians adopted a pagan holiday so that converts could feel comfortable with it. And this prompts the next question which is something like, “So, why DO Christians use the name of a pagan goddess for this holiday?”

To which my response would be, “You're missing the point.” As Christians we aren't celebrating the NAME of a holiday. We could call this day “George” or “Rising Day” . . . it's not the name of the day that matters. What we're celebrating is what happened on this day. What we're celebrating is that empty tomb. But most importantly, we're celebrating what that empty tomb means. That empty tomb means one thing and one thing only—Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! Jesus Christ has conquered death. He has conquered death not only for himself but also for every one of us. What we're celebrating is our salvation and to celebrate that, we should be shouting ALLELUIA! Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! ALLELUIA!

You know . . . those women at the tomb . . . they were amazing. Once they understood the meaning of the empty tomb, they left the tomb behind. Let me say that again . . . “they left the tomb behind.” They ran to tell others what had happened. They didn’t run and tell others, “go and look at the empty tomb.” They ran to tell others the Good News. They didn’t tell others, “ALLELUIA, the tomb is empty.” They said, “ALLELUIA, he is risen.” It’s interesting the reaction these women got from the Apostles; the men in the room. Luke says, “the words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.” This statement has always seemed a bit ironic to me . . . especially in light of the bad press that poor Thomas gets a little bit later on for doubting. But then one of the apostles—Luke tells us that it’s Peter; John tells us that it’s Peter and implies that John goes along—gets up and runs to the tomb. When he gets there and sees that it’s empty, Luke tells us that he “went home, amazed at what had happened.” Notice what Luke says! Peter went home “wondering what had happened.” He didn’t go home amazed that the tomb was empty; he was amazed at what had happened. Peter—like the women before him—understood the meaning of the empty tomb, and he left the tomb behind.

The tomb plays only a part in this Easter Drama, it is not, and indeed should not be the focus of attention.. It has its moment of glory on the stage, and then it’s gone. The Gospel leaves it behind . . . and we need to leave the tomb behind so that we can understand what has happened on this amazing day. If we continue to gaze at the tomb, all we’ll see is dark emptiness. We’ll miss the blazing brightness of the risen Lord. **If we continue to gaze at the tomb, all we see is the reminder of death. We’ll miss the meaning of the empty tomb—the glory of salvation; the glory of life.**

During the Crusades, kings and princes and knights searched for the places mentioned in the Gospels. They searched for the stable in which Jesus had been born; they searched for spot on the Jordan where he had been baptized; they searched for the site of the Last Supper; they searched for the site of his crucifixion; and they searched for the tomb. What were they searching for? Why were they searching? They were searching because they thought that by finding those places they would be closer to Jesus . . . closer to God. But what they failed to understand; what they failed to hear and to understand—was what those men in dazzling clothes told the women on that first Easter morning . . . **“He isn’t here, but is risen.”**

You know, we have to be careful. The empty tomb **IS** pretty amazing. And when we see amazing things, we tend to find ourselves staring in amazement. We find it difficult to tear ourselves away. But the empty tomb is just that—it is empty; just as death is now empty for us; because that is the real meaning of the empty tomb. The tomb no longer holds a person who is dead; it holds death itself.

So let’s seal that tomb back up in our minds and turn our backs on it. Walk away from the empty tomb and never give it another thought, because **He is not there; he is risen.**

Let us pray.

On this Easter morning, we sing praises and give thanks, O Lord, that you loved us so much that you gave your only Son so that we might eternal life. Thank you Lord. Thank you Lord Jesus.

**Amen**