

Easter 2025

When Life Begins

Happy Easter! This is a time of year that draws people out of their homes, draws them to gather, draws them to church. The season is filled with hope, color, and new life.

Easter and Christmas act as bookends of our Christian faith representing God's gift of Jesus in birth and death. God delivered His Son to the world as observed at Christmas and later delivers Him to the cross as seen at Easter. But, why? Let's see together the Gift of God and see where real life begins!

1 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." 8 So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and 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, and there they will see me." (Matthew 28:1-10)

Churches around the world will proclaim that He is risen! (He is risen, indeed!). This celebration of Christ's resurrection holds such truth and power that it simply can't be ignored. That's why churches are typically more full at Easter than any other day of the year. Yet, Easter is neither the beginning of the story nor the end.

Easter Sunday, also known as Resurrection Sunday is the day we remember and celebrate that Jesus, who was dead, came out of the grave. It demonstrates God's power and is hope for us that we might receive new life as well when our time on this Earth is finished. Yet, we can't simply read this story without seeing that Easter doesn't stand alone.

You see...Easter Sunday begins life with Good Friday. There is no Resurrection without there first being a death. Jesus came out of the tomb on Sunday, because He was laid to rest in it on Friday.

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:45-46)

37 And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. 38 And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. (Mark 16:37)

47 Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!" (Luke 23:47)

28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." 29 A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:28-30)

Jesus said, "It is finished." The Greek word for "it is finished" is TETELESTAI. Tetelestai was used in everyday Greek life. It is found throughout antiquity at the bottom of receipts as "paid in full". It carries the same weight and meaning in the church signifying the completion of Christ's mission. He came for one reason and that was to pay a debt that was owed by each of us and His death on the cross paid that debt in full.

Easter Sunday begins life as Good Friday. There would be no resurrection without death. And, there would be no death without sin.

God is quite clear that "the wages of sin is death." God tells us to love our neighbor...and we hate them in our hearts and actions. God commands we tell the truth...and we twist it out of fear or pride. God tells us to love...and we can be indifferent to the needs of others. And, each of these dig a pit deeper and deeper. Our debt to God grows.

So, we try to resolve that the best way we know how. We try to "do the right thing" or "be a better person". Yet, our debt to God grows.

We are drowning in debt. We are suffocating under the weight of this insurmountable burden. We keep trying to "do better" by maybe going to church or helping someone. We rationalize that God will save us if we are good enough. We trade IOU's to God in exchange for the things we want from God. He answers us and our debt to God grows.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The Good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that God knows. He knew before you were born that you could not get back to Him on your own. He knew before creation that the very trees He created would be used to crucify Jesus. He knew...and He did it anyway to offer you new life.

Life began at creation...when God knit you in your mother's womb.

Life gets messy. For some as a child. Perhaps you have encountered or experienced things that no one should. This creates wounds that we try to cover up or fill. It changes the way we look at people and separates from each other and God.

Maybe as a young adult or even as a senior. We wait for things to get better kind of doing the same things over and over hoping it will change. We come to church hoping and praying that it might make a difference. Then, we go back to "life" and dream of something new.

It seems impossible, even inconceivable, that God could remove this insurmountable mountain of debt we each owe.

Jesus said, "For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you." He repeated it, "Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him."

God does the impossible work of saving us...Tetelestai...it is finished and your debt is paid in full.

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

You don't have to be a better person to receive it. You simply must seek it with a sincere heart.

9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

It was May of 1994. I had been going to church for a couple of years and heard our pastor telling Bible stories. He passionately presented the invitation believe and be saved.

I sat in those pews for two years listening and this one particular Sunday changed everything. My separation from God became real...even though I was sitting in a church at the time...my separation could not have been greater. And, the realization overwhelmed me that there was nothing I could do about it on my own. But, I was hearing about the promise of God and I was seeing it lived out, in real life, in those faithful around me. That's when everything changed. Immediately, the old me was gone and in its place...a new me. A mountain of debt was paid and I was free. Joy filled my heart as I walked up front and prayed. The prayer didn't save me. Walking up front didn't save me. God's love and grace delivered me through Jesus' death and resurrection.

I was gifted this Bible soon after being baptized and I preach from it every week to remind me of from where I come and the greatest act of love ever known to the world.

I mentioned that word Tetelestai. Carrie, who sings on our praise team, has that word tattooed on her arm. I saw where the famous Christian author Max Lucado, at 70 years old, had that word put on his arm as well to remind Him of the same.

Today is a day for new life. Today is a day to gather with family and friends. Today is a day to eat and play. Today, is a good day for your new life to begin.

I'm going to pray and I encourage you to pray this prayer with me. Maybe you have been a saved believer for many years. This serves to affirm what you already know and believe deep in your soul.

Maybe you sense a new stirring in your heart today. That's a beautiful thing and is God's gentle hand is reaching out to you.

Again, this isn't about being good enough, it's about trusting in what Jesus has already done for you. It's about opening your heart and inviting Him to be the Lord and Savior of your life.

Do you feel that tug in your heart, that desire for this new life, this forgiveness?

Let's bow our heads and close our eyes. I'll lead, and you can follow along in your heart:

"Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I need your forgiveness. I believe that you died on the cross for my sins and rose again. I turn away from my sin and I want you to be my Lord and Savior. Thank you for forgiving me and giving me a new and eternal life. Amen."

The Bible says that when someone believes for the first time, all of heaven rejoices! If you prayed that prayer for the first time I hope that you will tell someone today, tell your family of the decision you made, and please tell me!

We sing this next song as an invitation. This is your chance to respond to the Gospel. Maybe you made a decision today to believe. Maybe you made a decision to be baptized. Maybe you made a decision to join the church. Maybe you need prayer for yourself or others in your family. However the Lord is calling you. This is your chance to respond.

Now, this isn't the end of the journey, but the beginning. There's so much more to learn about God and His Word. I encourage you to come back to church next week, to read God's word, and to continue talking to God through prayer. Surround yourself with other believers who can encourage and support you in your walk with Christ. New life begins today!

New Life Begins Today!

The Second Mile: *Going Beyond Sunday*

Let's dig deeper together to see how God is calling and equipping each of us to reach the lost.

Monday – Easter is about new life. Do you remember when you first believed? What was happening at the time? How did you know? Who did you tell?

Tuesday – Easter is the story of Christ's death and resurrection. It is the story of our redemption. Why must Christ die for our sin and salvation? Why is there no other way?

Wednesday – Tetelestai means "it is finished" and was used by the Greek's as "paid in full". What work did Christ finish? How His one death simultaneously resolve all sin, for all who believe, past/present/future?

Thursday – Jesus is the way, truth, and life. No one comes to the Father accept through Him. His is the only answer and hope. In what ways do you follow Him? In what ways do you need to?

Friday – Jesus died once and rose once (2000 years ago). His work is finished. What must we do to receive this gift? What must we do after to be true followers of Jesus?