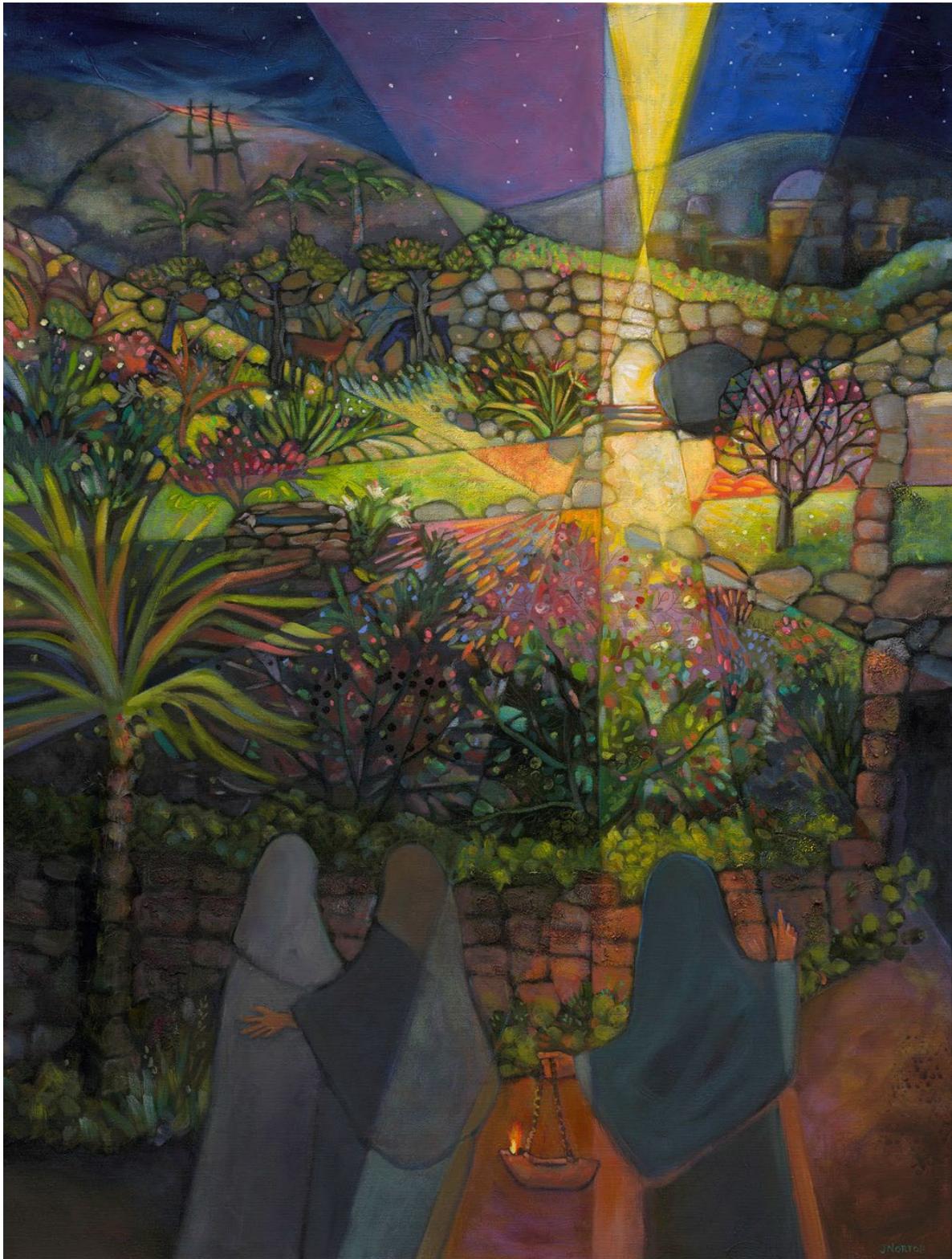


## Easter Morning: Meditation

*"He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay."*  
Matthew 28:6.



'Easter Morning' by Jen Norton. American contemporary Catholic artist.  
Painted c.2019. Acrylic on canvas. Prints in various sizes available to buy from [Etsy](#).

### **Easter Morning: Meditation**

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Matthew 28:6.*

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is mentioned in the New Testament but there are very few details of the event itself. Nobody knows what time it occurred or how it actually happened. We just know that it was recorded by several writers from the reports of various witnesses to the empty tomb and to encounters with the risen Jesus. Looking back into the Hebrew Scriptures early Christians saw images and echoes that seem to anticipate the Resurrection.

### **Gospels and Letters**

Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24 and John 20-21. Acts 1:3.  
Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Peter 1:3.

### **Old Testament echoes**

Job 19:25-27; Isaiah 53 and Jonah 1:17 – 2:1-10.

### **Scripture and Tradition**

In the New Testament we read that after the Romans crucified Jesus, he was buried in a new tomb provided by one of his followers, but three days later God raised him from the dead. Jesus' burial was hurried because he died late on a Friday afternoon, around 3pm - "... there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two." This was roughly three hours before the Sabbath Day and the Passover began. During the Sabbath period, Jewish law prohibited any funeral preparations or burying of the dead as contact with a corpse rendered the person unclean. Therefore, the burial of Jesus had to be completed before sundown to avoid violating the holiness of the Sabbath.

According to Jewish tradition, the bodies of executed persons should not remain on the cross overnight, especially on the Sabbath. This is described in Deuteronomy 21:22-23 - "And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance." As Jesus died around 3pm on the Friday, this now presented a challenge, there was very little time before sunset to request the body from Pilate, remove it from the cross, transport it, and then bury it.

Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy, secret follower of Jesus and an influential member of the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court and highest Council of Jerusalem, responded to this urgent challenge. He gained Pilate's permission to remove Jesus' body after the crucifixion and donated his own, unused, tomb for the burial since it was located in a garden near Golgotha and the distance was manageable. The early Church saw this as a fulfilment of the prophecy in Isaiah 53:9 which predicted that the Messiah would be buried with a rich man: "And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth."

However, in the rush to make sure Jesus was securely buried and his body not stolen or violated further, Joseph and Nicodemus simply wrapped Jesus' body in linen cloths, myrrh and aloes, and laid it inside the tomb and rolled a stone in front. Since the correct burial rites were not completed in time, the women returned on the Sunday morning to finish anointing the body properly. That Jesus rose from the dead three days later is recorded, but we only know of its effects. Jesus revealed himself to his disciples beyond death. This series of unique encounters were to women and men. He forgave them, prayed with them, blessed them and ate with them. He called them again to continue his mission, promising guidance from the Holy Spirit who he would send in due course.

*In this wonderful modern painting by the Catholic artist Jen Norton, we discover several clues as to the extraordinary nature of this Resurrection miracle.*

## **1. The Tomb**

The tomb had been guarded by the soldiers, but when the women arrived to anoint him, they saw that the tomb had been abandoned and was empty and they were met by two men in dazzling clothes who told them Jesus was risen (Luke 24:4). The artist depicts this as a great light shining from within the dark tomb.

The women knew where the tomb was because they had been with Joseph and Nicodemus when they buried Jesus. Mark's Gospel tells us that: "Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid." Mark 16:46-47. (cf. Matthew 27:61; Luke 23:55).

In the picture the women are pointing to the tomb and to the light emerging from within it. One of them is holding a portable lamp because the gospels say they went early in the morning while it was still dark. The lamp guided their path without drawing too much attention to them along the way.

### *Commentary from the artist.*

"In this painting, the lamp held by the women represents our man-made light... anything we seek to control and call our own. In the distance is the sunrise, God's gift to divide our earthly days between work and rest. And finally, the light of the Resurrection, shining brightest of all, the light that we cannot extinguish."

## **2. The Women**

The risen Jesus appeared to the women first. In the picture the three women in the foreground are: Mary Magdalene found in all four gospels, with her encounter with Jesus in John 20:1-18; Mary, mother of James (the other Mary) in Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1 and Luke 24:1-12 and either Joanna mentioned in Luke 24:1-12 or Salome mentioned in Mark 16:1.

We cannot see their faces and expressions because they are still walking towards the tomb. But we can imagine, in the way their hands are pointing toward the light, that they are being drawn into the miracle before their eyes. They are trying to absorb the reality of Jesus' Resurrection. As this event is so powerful, the woman in the middle is gently touching the woman on our left. Perhaps she is confirming that what they are seeing and believing is no illusion – it is being witnessed by three of Jesus' closest female friends. This is a Kairos moment for them, and for us all. A moment we are still living out of today.

The woman holding the lamp might be Mary Magdalene since she is the only person predominantly highlighted by the tomb's rays - while both her hands, using light and direction, guide us to the truth. Later, Jesus will commission Mary Magdalene to reveal the news of the resurrection to Peter and the other disciples. Now recognised as a saint and the first 'Apostle to the Apostles', the Catholic Church celebrates her feast day on 22<sup>nd</sup> July.

### *Commentary from the artist on Mary Magdalene and Jesus.*

'When Jesus says, "Mary," she is suddenly reminded of who she is, and of everything she had become through knowing Him. She is re-aligned with the truth. It can be the same for any of us who are willing to walk with Christ. The lies of the world fall away and we see clearly that we are all we need to be, just as we are... We are not to "cling" to the man who was Jesus... but instead allow His ascended Spirit to flow through us...'

### 3. The Signs of the Passion

We notice some of the signs of the Passion. In the top right-hand corner are the three crosses on the hill of Golgotha, casting long shadows across the earth. Shadows of the memory of what was done to the Son of God. In front of them, and in our bottom left-hand corner are palm trees. From these, the crowds had taken and waved their palms as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey at the beginning of Holy Week. While in the top right-hand corner is Jerusalem, the heart of both Jewish worship and Roman occupation, There Jesus was condemned and exiled; left to die as an outcast outside the walls of the Holy City.

On our right is the heavy grey stone eclipsed by the radiating light, echoing the lunar eclipse that occurred at the time of Jesus' death in Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33 and Luke 23:44-45. This stone that closed the tomb after Jesus' burial is seen here rolled away as described in all four gospels. This detail allows the witnesses entry, rather than letting Jesus out. The stone's removal is symbolically central to the Resurrection story as it transforms the tomb from a place of death and corruption into a place of victory and the beginning of new life.

The Catholic Catechism (CCC 638-658) defines the Resurrection of Jesus as the "crowning truth" of faith, a historically verified event central to the Paschal Mystery. It confirms Christ's divinity, fulfils Old Testament promises, and serves as the source of our own future resurrection. The risen body is glorified, existing beyond time and space." We affirm this in the Creed when we say: "On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures."

### 4. The Garden

The beautiful and lush garden that this painting portrays symbolises the new Eden - Jesus has become the new Adam. He restores the original vision of paradise that we read in Genesis by overcoming sin and death in his Resurrection. These flowers, plants and trees are rich in growth and blossom – their colours and shapes glorify the earth. We can sense peace and harmony in this moment as Jesus renews the world with his gift of new life.

In this garden we see two deer grazing together recalling Psalm 42:1-2 – "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?" And below them is an open well symbolising living water – the water which refreshes the earth and all its creatures; and the water that Jesus gives to nurtures our souls. The waters of our own Baptism. The Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 is connected to this scene since she also witnessed to the Messiah in spirit and in truth.

Can you see how many different stones, boulders and rocks there are in this picture? In Luke 19:40, Jesus says that if his disciples remain silent during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem then "the stones would cry out". He is urging them to recognise him as the Messiah whatever the cost. If they do not, creation itself would bear witness to his glory.

### Questions for further reflection and meditation

- a. How does the Resurrection deepen our faith and confidence in God?
- b. How can we bear witness to this miracle in the world today?

**"Christ has turned all our sunsets into dawns."**

*Clement of Alexandria. Early Church Father, theologian and philosopher.*

