

Easter Vigil 2026
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, Texas
4 April 2026

Matthew 28:1-10

One Easter morning, a woman was on her way to church when her car broke down. Not wanting to be late for the special service, she ordered an Uber to pick her up. The car arrived, and she quickly jumped in the back. Halfway through the ride, she asked the driver a question, but the driver didn't respond. So she leaned forward and tapped the driver on the arm. The driver let out a loud scream, swerved into the other lane, almost hit another car, slammed on the brakes, and skidded over to the shoulder. The woman and driver sat in silence for a minute from the shock of what just happened. Finally, she said apologetically, "Wow, I'm so sorry. I had no idea that tapping your shoulder would alarm you like that." "No, you really didn't do anything wrong. It's just that it's my first day driving an Uber. You see, for the past 25 years, I've been driving a funeral home hearse."

Today we celebrate the resurrection of the Son of God. Matthew's account of this great event is a bit different from the other accounts. For starters, it only has "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary." But he doesn't tell us who the other Mary was. She could be one of many women named Mary. It could be Jesus' Mother, it could be the wife of Clopas, it could be the mother of John and Andrew, it could be any other Mary. In many ways, I like the fact that she is not identified. Perhaps she is a namesake or a stand-in for all grieving mothers, sisters, spouses who have lost dear ones. Perhaps she represents all of us who have to deal with the pain and anguish of mourning. Perhaps, she represents the communities of Christians in the First Century forced to watch their brothers and sisters die to persecution. Perhaps, she still represents all those in the Middle East and in Ukraine who have lost family members and friends in these senseless wars. In either case, the other Mary, can be any of us and all of us.

Only Matthew tells us that "there was a great earthquake; caused by the angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, to roll back the stone." This is the second act of nature he gives us in close succession. At the death of Jesus a great earthquake broke open the tombs of many of the faithful and many saw their spirits in the city of Jerusalem. Now, this earthly phenomenon marks the resurrection of the Son of God. The Bible tends to have two different types of theological language: Language of creation and language of uncreation. Language of creation brings something from nothing. It is the voice of God saying, "Let there be!" We see this every time blessing follows a period of great pain. We hear in Exodus how

“God remembered his people and brought them back from Egypt.” This is language of creation, from slavery to freedom, from death to life. We hear this language of creation in Ezekiel’s Valley of Dry Bones. From death and decaying bones to a promise of life. On the other hand, language of uncreation or judgement goes from something to nothing. We see this judgement when God calls for a great flood. When God separates the peoples with a multiplicity of languages. When great earthquakes show God’s judgement on sin.

We see both languages here. God’s judgement is visible in the earthquake that follows Jesus’ death, and in the quake that breaks the tomb open. But then we see language of creation, which is language of new life and blessing. The Son of God is risen from the dead. An Angel announces God’s victory over death and sin. Matthew gives us more information than any of the other Gospels about this Angel. The Angel looks like the figure who appeared to Ezekiel at the start of his visions. He appears like the Son of Man who appears to Daniel: “His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.” This fits with Matthew’s theological understanding of Jesus as one who fulfills the Jewish Scriptures, especially the prophets. Frequently, we hear from Matthew that an event took place to fulfill what was written by the prophets.

The Angel shows great empathy to the two women. He says, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here... He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." This is the only gospel where Jesus directs the disciples back to Galilee. In fact, the Gospel will end in Galilee when Jesus will direct his friends to a mount where he will give them the Great Commission to baptize in his name and to preach to the ends of the world. But in addition to the message of the Angel for the disciples, in Matthew, Jesus himself will appear to the women. “Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

I love this interaction between Jesus and the women. He knew they would have been terrified after seeing the Angel, so he decides on a sudden appearance to them. When they least expected to see him, he shows up in their midst. Quite naturally, lovingly reassuring his friends and repeating the message for the apostles. There was no great thunder, there was no loud heavenly voice. There was no earthquake at this moment. He just simply appears when the women need his reassurance the most. Perhaps this teaches us a great lesson. We are often so busy looking for signs in the skies and extraordinary proofs that God is with us that we

miss God's quiet presence in our lives. Perhaps the God of Matthew is a God who speaks in silence. Perhaps the Messiah speaks and can be found in silence.

Today, God speaks a language of blessing in our midst. The tomb could not contain the Son of God. Christ risen for us is the greatest affirmation of God's love for humanity. He reminds us today that he is empathic and cares deeply for the human race. Today, the risen Christ welcomes Emma into his family and the Church uses the liturgy of baptism to remind us all of the baptismal covenants we made at our own baptism. Central to those vows is the promise that we will be witnesses of the resurrection. The way we will do this is by loving our neighbors as we love ourselves and by respecting the dignity of every human being.

Today, God breaks into our lives with new life and a new hope. Through the resurrection of the Son of God we now know that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, not even our sin, our insecurities, our propensity for cruelty. God has now become incredibly accessible and we can find his grace in our midst if we are willing to open our eyes to see it and our lips to ask God for it. Please join me in that most famous Christian proclamation, which has become the cornerstone of our faith.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen, indeed, alleluia!"