

Defending the Faith



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April 2018

The Awe and Mystery of the Crucifixion and Resurrection

As Christians, we have heard time and time and time again, the story of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, perhaps so many times that Holy Week and Easter have become times of fasting and feasting without the awe and mystery of the events, which occurred two thousand years ago. To truly appreciate the magnitude of these events, we must contemplate the person of Jesus Christ. We must comprehend who He is? Jesus is called the Word by John: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made...He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth...No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him (made him known)”* (John 1:1-18 KLV). Jesus of Nazareth is a mystery to us because we cannot fully comprehend God, yet, as Christians, we know Jesus is God. We cannot fully know God, but we can know God through Christ.

As best as you can, take a moment and envision God in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, together as one in eternity. Paint a picture for yourself of the three as one, planning to create our universe, knowing that the pinnacle of their creation would be man who would reject God’s love and choose evil. It was at a time when there was no time that God chose to sacrifice Himself to save us, long before we even existed. Christ, the Son of God, seated on His throne of glory, immeasurably loved by His Father and worshipped by angels, would choose to take on flesh and become a human being, knowing that He would suffer betrayal, rejection, and crucifixion. Have you ever been betrayed or rejected by someone you loved deeply? Knowing this, would you choose the horrifically painful death on the cross for that person?

When we stop and contemplate our all-powerful God, who willingly took on flesh for us, so He could die on the cross and save us, we are in awe! Reverence and wonder fill our spirits! We drop down to our knees in humility and gratitude and fear! *“For God so loved the world (each and every one us) that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life”* (John 3:16). Amazingly, God offers us an invitation to live eternally in His love. *“But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8).

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The Awe and Mystery of the Crucifixion and Resurrection (cont'd)



Incredibly, He chose to die for us, even though we are not worthy of His love. We are not able to love Him perfectly as He loves us, for each time we sin, we reject His divine love and choose evil. When we come to realize this, we are stirred by a profound repentance for our sins. Our flesh may be weak, but our spirit loves our Lord. *“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God”* (1 John 3:1). Even as sinners, God desires a relationship with us, not just a friendship, but rather, He wishes to call us His sons and daughters! *“He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus*

Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:5-6). What a good and loving God He is!

The cross, an inhumane means of suffering a painful, shameful, public death, was meant to produce fear. God transformed this instrument of execution into a symbol of hope, life and salvation. Through the Resurrection, God confounds evil by recreating the cross into a glorious banner of our faith. Thus, Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled, *“he will swallow up death forever”* (Isaiah 25:8). Consequently in 1 Corinthians 15:54-55, Paul triumphantly declares:

*“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”
“Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”*

We are astonished and in awe that Christ rose from the dead to reveal Himself as God, to free us from sin, and to offer us eternal life through salvation! Through the resurrection, we possess the hope of eternal rewards in the presence of God, cleansed from all evil, in communion with His infinite love, destined to live in unimaginable joy and peace. Paul refers to the prophecy in Isaiah 64:4 when he asserts the mysteries of our heavenly blessings (1 Corinthians 2:9):

*“But, as it is written,
“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him.”*

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As Easter approaches, ask the Holy Spirit to reintroduce you to those feelings of childlike wonder in the awesome mysteries of the crucifixion and resurrection. Allow yourself to experience God's infinite love revealed to us through the cross of Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ to you in all His humility, meekness, and mercy, for this is the kind of love He offers us. God humbled Himself and offered to wash our feet as He washed the feet of the disciples. He offers Himself to us each time we participate in Holy Communion. We receive the blood and body of Christ to spark that mystical union we have through the Holy Spirit who lives within us as Christians. When you go forward to receive the Eucharist, know with all your being that Christ lives in you!

If you have not known Christ, ask God to reveal Him to you! God knows what it takes to make Himself real to you. Open your heart! He will create a miracle within you, and you will rejoice in experiencing His overwhelmingly, infinite, divine love firsthand. There is nothing else like it!

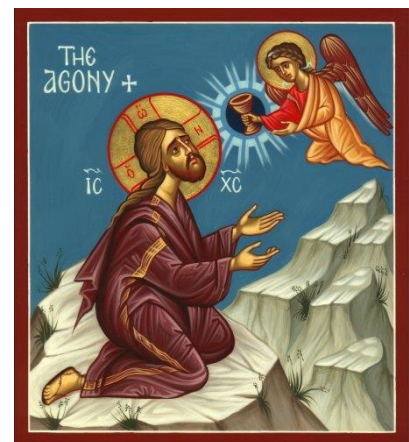
Helen Kamenos
Readers' Favorite Author

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

Matthew 26:36-46

This passage reveals Christ's humanity as He awaits the moment of His arrest. He dreads the cross and prays three times for God to spare Him from impending suffering and death. In obedience and love for us, Jesus freely chooses to die on the cross.

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Again, he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."



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A Hymn from the Holy Friday Morning Service

As soldiers mocked at the foot of Your Precious Cross, the ranks of angels were amazed. For You Who painted the earth with flowers, wore a wreath of insult; the One who clothed the firmament in clouds, wore a mantle of mockery. Thus, did Your compassion and great mercy manifest in Your dispensation, O Christ. Glory to you.

A Hymn from the Resurrection Service

Be astonished and in awe, you heavens, and let the earth's foundation quake; for behold, the One who dwells in the heavens is reckoned among the dead and is a lodger in a small tomb. You youths, bless Him; you priests, praise Him; and you people, exalt Him to the ages...

Mother, it is of my own will that the earth covers me, but the gatekeepers of Hades shudder seeing me clothed in a robe stained with the blood of vengeance. For as God, having vanquished the enemies on the Cross, I will rise anew and magnify you.



St. Thomas the Apostle

The Sunday of St. Thomas is celebrated on the Sunday after Easter commemorating the event described in John 20:24-29, when he declared, *“Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.”* When Christ appeared to the disciples a second time and told St. Thomas to touch His wounds, Thomas proclaimed, *“My Lord and My God.”* Christ responded, *“because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”* Of course, we are those who are blessed because we have not seen the Lord, yet we believe.

Although many of us know him as “Doubting Thomas,” St. John Chrysostom stated, “Thomas, being once weaker in faith than the other apostles, toiled through the grace of God more bravely, more zealously and tirelessly than

them all, so that he went preaching over nearly all the earth, not fearing to proclaim the Word of God to savage nations.” The Apostle Thomas founded churches in Palestine, Mesopotamia, Parthia, Ethiopia and even as far as India. According to Church tradition, he baptized the Magi. St. Thomas died a martyr's death in India, after being imprisoned, suffering torture and finally pierced by five spears for converting the wife and son of the prefect of the Indian city of Meliapur.

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A Journey Toward Perfection

The Beatitudes from Matthew 5:

³ Blessed are the poor in spirit,

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,

For they shall be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,

For they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

For they shall be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,

For they shall obtain mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,

For they shall see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,

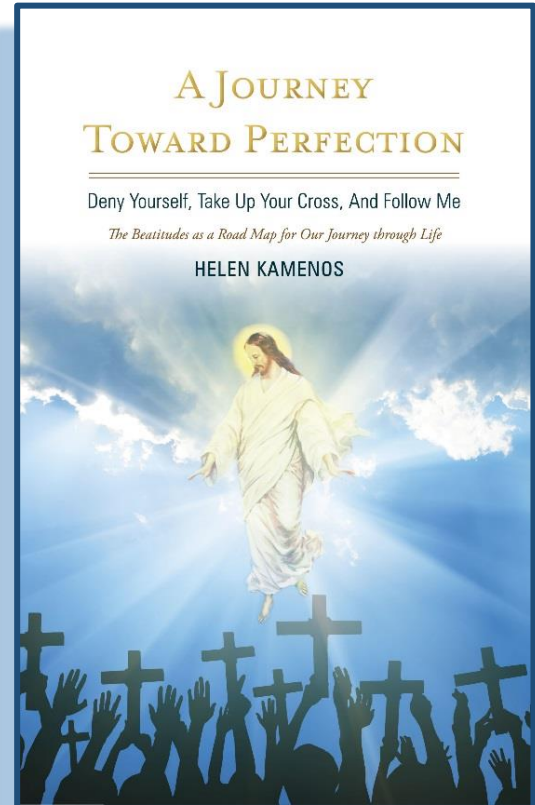
For they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.



A *Journey Toward Perfection* reveals a path toward developing an intimate experiential relationship with God. It is an in-depth study of the attributes of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. These are the attributes God bestowed upon us when He created us in His image. God created us to love. These are the traits necessary to love others as God loves us. These characteristics are central to our Christian spiritual growth. Discover how these attributes can sustain you through the many trials and tribulations of your life. Comprehend how love truly conquers all. Experience God's true presence in your life.

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