

# Easter Sunday

Easter is the story that defines and distinguishes Christians. It also is the point where Christians offend against common sense and science. While some speak confidently about the Resurrection, others hold back in confusion. In our raising with Christ, we celebrate life's promise. We can witness to fear's limits and love's power. Thanks be to God!

## Focus Scripture: Matthew 28:1–10

In Matthew's gospel, the account of the Resurrection is not tame. Resurrection summons forces and images of creation. An earthquake shakes the land. An angel, likened in appearance to lightning, descends from heaven. Life and death will never be the same.

The narrative begins with the journey of "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary" to Jesus' tomb. Earlier, it was reported that these two were present at the crucifixion and the burial (Matthew 27:56, 61). As they approach the tomb, a "great earthquake" accompanies an angel who comes to roll the stone from the opening of the tomb. The angel speaks peace and announces "[Jesus] is not here; for he has been raised...go quickly and tell his disciples" (Matthew 28:6, 7).

And so the women run with the news. Along the way, they stop for one extraordinary moment to worship at the feet of the crucified one now living. Jesus also tells them to "go and tell" (Matthew 28:10). Then, off they go. The women witness not only to the joy of Christ's raising, but also the assurance of Christ's forgiving. They tell the disciples who deserted Jesus in his time of suffering that Christ still chooses to call them "brothers."

Resurrection does not end all fears. As told in Matthew 28:11–15, guards return to tell the religious leaders what has happened. Their fear spawns an alibi of grave robbing to explain a missing body. They were right to a point, only it was God – not the disciples – who robbed death and the grave.

In the scriptures, it may be said that the opposite of faith is fear. Consider the angel's first word to the women and Jesus' word to them later: "Do not be afraid." It is the word given to fearful shepherds outside of Bethlehem (Luke 2:2:10). It is the word spoken to fearful

disciples on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:27). It is God's word of new life, spoken to us.

In the optional gospel reading, **John 20:1–18**, Jesus' words "do not weep" parallel "do not fear" in Matthew. While some details vary between these gospels, the central message is that once faith comes, Mary goes and tells about what she has seen.

Later, Peter preaches to the household of a gentile centurion about the resurrection power that transforms fear. This story is told in **Acts 10:34–43**, and marks how the message of Christ crucified and risen moved out from Galilee and Judea. Peter tells the good news of God's impartiality.

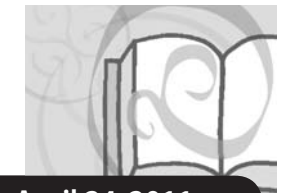
The baptismal language in **Colossians 3:1–4** seems to flow from Peter's sermon. Our dying and rising in Christ anchors our hope in the revealing of Christ. That revealing, which will be fulfilled at history's end, has already begun in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

The certainty of God's rescue and the sweetness of new life are proclaimed to God's people in exile in **Jeremiah 31:1–6**.

The words of **Psalms 118:1–2, 14–24** could easily be heard as Christ's own "psalm" of God's rescue. Human rejection is reversed. Steadfast love is more enduring than suffering. All is God's doing.

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The church does not have to be arrogant in its testimony about the Resurrection, for its proof is not in human arguments. The proof lies more, as Matthew's gospel suggests, in our willingness to hear the call of the risen Christ and respond in faith – to go with the women to tell the good news. Where do you find Easter calling you to go? What is the good news you are going to tell? Whom will you tell and how?



April 24, 2011

**Focus Scripture**  
**Matthew 28:1–10**

**Additional Scriptures**  
**Acts 10:34–43 or**  
**Jeremiah 31:1–6**  
**Psalms 118:1–2, 14–24**  
**Colossians 3:1–4 or**  
**Acts 10:34–43**  
**John 20:1–18 (optional**  
**gospel reading)**

**Holy God,  
powerful God,  
surprising God,  
we rejoice in this  
day that you have  
made – a day  
of wonder and  
celebration, and  
a day of joy and  
trust. Make us  
bold witnesses  
of Easter joy. In  
Christ. Amen.**

If you have Internet access, visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

# The Focus for All Ages



This session is designed for all ages to come together for approximately one hour to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. If, for reasons of space or numbers, you choose to meet in age-specific groups, the session offers ways to customize the materials for different age groups.

Jesus the Christ is risen! Easter is the apex of the church year. It defines all that the church is and does. Without Easter, Christmas has no meaning. Without Easter, Pentecost is merely a jumble of voices. The story of the Resurrection is the foundational story of our faith. Therefore, everyone, young and old, is empowered by hearing and celebrating it Easter after Easter.

The continuous action of the account in Matthew is a lively one for an all-ages group. Profound sadness, an earthquake, angels, and meeting the risen Christ make this story an adventure for everyone. These ten verses in Matthew hold the story of a lifetime.

The review of the Holy Week events in Gather sets the stage for the great joy of the Resurrection. While adults and youth may find it repetitive, they can assist younger children in recalling the events that began on

Palm Sunday. Once the story is told and considered, the rejoicing begins. If you are leading an all-ages group for the first time, spend a few moments pondering how each age group will hear this story and the questions it may bring. Answering all the questions is not necessary for the mystery of Easter gives the story depth and brings us to our knees in awe of God's goodness.

If you are planning this session for a single age group, pay close attention to the suggestions for children or youth and adults. Keep the format of the session to what the group is accustomed to as you plan. You might look for age-appropriate Easter songs if you are leading a group of children.

Pray that the participants will find such joy in the good news of the Easter story that they can do nothing else but tell it to others.

April 24, 2011



## Materials needed

### Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Matthew 28:1-10 and biblical background material (p. 51). When were you tempted to shout "alleluia" in the story?
- ❑ If possible, display the poster *The Seasons of the Church Year* (available from your curriculum distributor).

### Gather

- ❑ Prepare worship table with *white* or *gold/yellow cloth, Bible, Christ candle, matches* and *offering basket*.
- ❑ Bring *song* you have chosen for opening ritual.
- ❑ Select one method of reviewing Holy Week, prepare and bring the materials: *resource sheet "Holy Week Game"* (p. 50) or *art* representing Holy Week events.

### Engage

- ❑ Prepare to tell the story on *today's resource sheet "Jesus Lives!"*
- ❑ Bring *copies of today's resource sheet "The Core of the Message."*

### Respond

- ❑ **Art zone:** *photographs* or *artwork* of daylight breaking into night time, or sunrise, *dark construction paper, light construction paper* (white, yellow, orange), *glue*, and *shimmering art supplies* (sequins, glitter glue, metallic crayons, gel pens, metallic ribbon, and trims)
- ❑ **Writing zone:** *pastel crepe paper streamers, dark markers*
- ❑ **Conversation zone:** *copies of questions, New Revised Standard Version Bibles*
- ❑ **Music zone:** *hymnbooks* and (optional) *rhythm instruments, song leader*
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** *drinking straws* or *dowels, card stock/heavy paper, markers, glue, sticky tape*, and *decorations* (stars, tissue paper, Easter stickers). Prepare pattern templates from *resource sheet "Easter Messages"* for people to trace around. Prepare several shapes from construction paper for younger children.



# Easter

## Scripture

Matthew 28:1–10

**FOCUS** To rejoice with the women as they tell of the risen Christ.

## GATHER

### Opening ritual

**Call to learning** Welcome the participants as they arrive. Introduce new people to others. When it is time to begin, invite everyone to the worship table. Light the Christ candle.

**Sing** a song that the participants have sung during the opening ritual throughout the Season of Lent. If you wish, receive an offering during the song.

**Pray** this prayer, or one of your own:

God of Glory,  
we come together  
to learn more about Jesus.  
May our minds and hearts  
be open to all that  
you want us to know and understand.  
In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Extinguish the candle as a sign that the opening litany is over.

### Connecting with the focus

**Events of Holy Week** Select one of these methods to review the events of Holy Week with the group:

- Enlarge the symbols from the resource sheet "Holy Week Game" (p. 50). Mount them on

individual sheets of construction paper. Show them to the group in this order: palm branch (entry into Jerusalem), stack of coins (money tables Jesus overturned in temple and money Judas Iscariot received for betraying Jesus), bread (the last supper), cross (Jesus' death), rooster (Peter's denial), and tomb (Jesus' burial). Have the group recall the stories and tell them.

- Provide several pieces of art (teaching pictures or posters) that represent the events of Holy Week. Mix them up and have the group arrange them in order and then tell the stories represented.
- Form groups of two or three. Give each group one set of cards from the "Holy Week Game" (see p. 50). Have each group arrange the cards in chronological order and tell the stories of Holy Week.

To move to Engage, look at *The Seasons of the Church Year* poster, if available, to locate Lent and Holy Week. Remind the participants that the story of Jesus did not end with Jesus' death. Today, on Easter, the story continues.

## ENGAGE

### Preparing for the story

Remind the group that the story of Jesus is found in the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All four gospels tell of Jesus' resurrection. The story for this session is based on **Matthew 28:1–10**.

### The Bible story

**Matthew's story** Bring in the person representing Mary of Magdala, also known as Mary Magdalene, to tell the story from today's resource sheet "Jesus Lives!"

Following the story, form small groups of three or four. Give each group a copy of today's resource sheet "The Core of the Message" and a pencil. Have them work together to find the important message in the Bible story for this session.

Answer: J (Jesus); E (earthquake); S (Sabbath); U (crucified); S (suddenly); L (lightening); I (I); V; E (feet); S (see).

### The Bible story and us

When everyone has found the message, come together. Teach them the ancient Easter greeting. One person says “Christ is risen.” The other person responds “Christ is risen

indeed.” Then have each child find another partner to say the greeting together. Have the pairs say it several times, getting louder each time.

# 3

RESPOND

Explain the choices in the zones. Invite everyone to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Art zone: Shimmering art** One way to imagine the contrast between Good Friday and Jesus’ death and the Resurrection is to contrast light and dark. The participants can create individual works of art or contribute to a larger collage. Bring photographs or artwork of daylight breaking into night time or sunrise. Display them. Ask the participants:

- **How does art like this remind us of the Easter message of good news?**

Provide dark construction paper as the background for their work. Set out yellow, white, and orange paper along with a variety of art materials that shimmer and shine (sequins, glitter glue, metallic confetti, gel pens, and ribbons with metallic trim).

*To use this activity with youth or adults who are reluctant to work with art materials, suggest that they begin by selecting an area on the background that will be the light space. Then they can think about how they will fill that space.*

- **Writing zone: Easter streamers** These streamers have a written message of Easter good news. They come as a surprise because they can be hidden in a hand before you throw them. Cut pastel crepe paper streamers into lengths about 1 m/1 yd long. Provide dark markers to write simple messages on the streamers, such as “Alleluia! Jesus lives!” or “Christ is risen indeed!” Encourage the group to create other Easter messages. Roll up the streamer tightly, so it can be hidden in your hand. In Bless, they will throw the streamers in the air, while holding on to one end, when they respond to the traditional Easter greeting.

*To include the congregation, make streamers to distribute during worship (pre-arranged with worship leaders) or at the end of worship.*

*To use this activity with a group of children, prepare the streamers in advance with the same message on each one. Writing on crepe paper is not easy, but the children can enjoy rolling the streamers up and throwing them in the air over and over.*

- **Conversation zone: Meaning for Christians today** It is easy to get caught up in the joy of the day and lose some of the important meaning for the church. In this zone, youth and adults can talk together about deeper meanings of the Resurrection. Provide Bibles so they can read **Matthew 28:1–10**. Provide copies of these questions:

- **What is the joy of Easter for you?**

- **What is the challenge of Easter for you?**

- **What came clear to you during the reading of the Easter story?**

- **What part of the Easter promise is most precious to you?**

- **What is the good news you want to tell?**

- **How might you tell it?**

- **Music zone: Joyful songs** Celebrating Easter is not complete without songs of joy. Select Easter songs from your congregation’s hymnal to sing together. You might ask a choir member or your choir director to staff this zone.

*To include children or to use this activity with a group of children, choose songs with an easy refrain for them to learn. Add rhythm instruments to this zone. Teach a movement to do each time “alleluia” is sung. It can be as simple as waving arms over heads.*

□ **Outreach zone: Easter messages**

Telling others includes remembering people who are unable to join the congregation for the Easter celebration. See today's resource sheet "Easter Mes-



sages" for directions for making messages to put in potted plants or bouquets of flowers. These posted messages can decorate the plants or flowers delivered to church members or friends who are housebound.



**Gather** When it is almost time to conclude the session, ask the participants to finish their activities and come to the worship table.

**Prayer** Explain that they are to say, with great joy, "alleluia!" when you raise your hand during this litany prayer.

God, we rejoice in your great love that turns the grave into a place of new life (*raise hand*).

The good news of Easter fills our hearts, minds, and souls (*raise hand*).

With the women who went to the tomb, we go out to tell of your glory (*raise hand*).

Amen.

**Easter greeting** Say to the participants: "Christ is risen!" When they respond "Christ is risen indeed!" all those with streamers toss them into the air.



Describe the mood of this session in three or four words. How did you see the joy grow as the participants explored the Easter story?



# Jesus Lives!

based on Matthew 28:1–10

## *As told by Mary of Magdala*

My sisters and brothers! I have wonderful news. Jesus is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Why, I can tell from the looks on your faces that you doubt my word. It is true, but let me start at the beginning. I am Mary of Magdala, also called Mary Magdalene. I have been among the men and women who have gone with Jesus all over the country. I was near the cross, and watched him die. I don't believe any of you were there.

Never mind. The other Mary and I got up this morning when it was barely light to go to the tomb where Jesus was buried. I am not sure now what we thought we could do, but we wanted to be close to Jesus. Our sadness was so great. Two days ago, Jesus was buried in the tomb that belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, who rolled a huge stone in front of the door. That is where we went early in the morning when no one else was around.

Just as we got to the tomb, the earth shook so violently that the stone, that huge stone, rolled away from the tomb. Amazing! For at the same time an angel appeared in clothing that was as white as snow that has just fallen from the sky. The angel shimmered like lightening. Mary and I clung to each other because we were frightened.

The Roman guards at the tomb were as frightened as we were. They fell to the ground like dead men, too afraid even to run away.

Then a voice came from the angel: "Don't be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus, who was arrested and died on the cross. Come, see where he was laid in the tomb. Jesus has been raised from death. Go, tell Jesus' followers to go to Galilee where they will see him. You have Jesus' message, now hurry."

Can you imagine how we felt? Our hearts were pounding hard and we were almost out of breath. But we hurried off to tell the followers what Jesus wanted them to do.

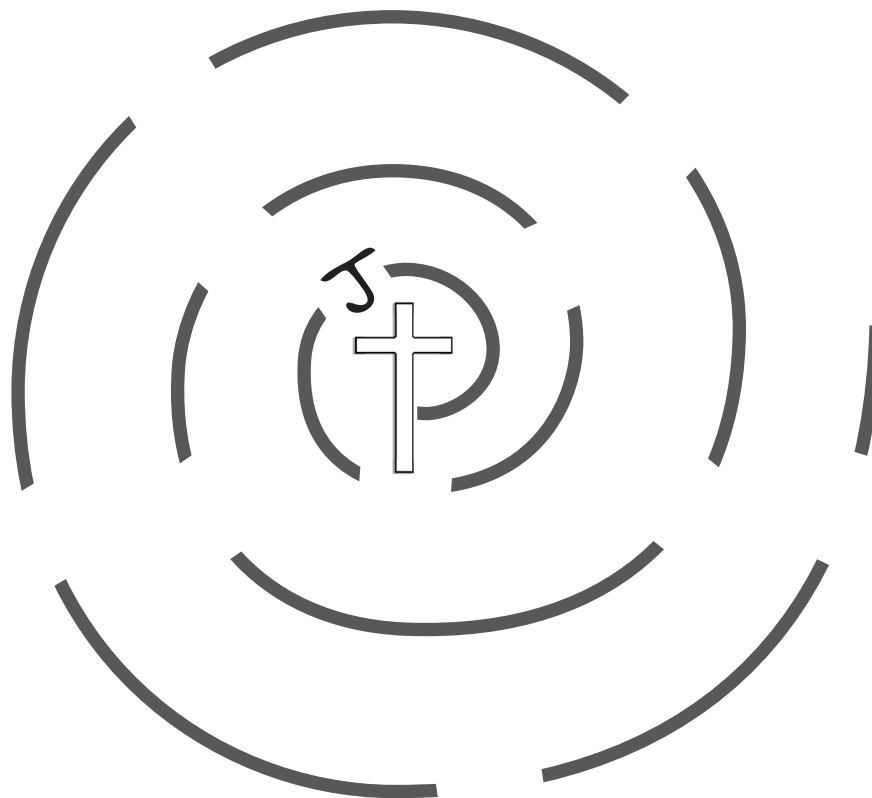
We were going so fast that we didn't notice someone in our path. Then Jesus greeted us. We fell at his feet and worshipped him. We could hardly lift our eyes to look at Jesus. "Don't be afraid," Jesus said to us, "but go quickly and tell the others to meet me in Galilee."

Our heads in a flurry and our hearts overflowing, we ran again to find Jesus' followers. Jesus lives!



# The Core of the Message

Find Matthew 28:1–10 in your Bible. These verses will help you solve the puzzle to find the core of the message of Easter. (You will need the *New Revised Standard Version*.)



## Begin at the middle of the spiral.

- In the first gap, print the first letter of the name of the person that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary could not find. (This has been done for you.)
- In the second gap to the left of the first one, print the first letter of the word for the natural disaster that happens in this story (v. 2).

## Continue around the spiral, adding a letter for each clue.

- Print the first letter of the day before this event took place in the next gap (v. 1).
- In the next gap, print the third letter of the word that describes how Jesus was killed (v. 5).
- In the next gap, print the first letter of the word that begins Matthew 28, verse 9.
- Here's an easy one: skip the next gap. Don't print anything in it.
- In the next gap, print the first letter of the word that describes the appearance of the angel (v. 3).
- In the next gap, print the fifth word of the angel's message to the women in verse 5.
- In the next gap, print a letter that rhymes with Galilee. Careful, there is more than one, but only one works here.
- In the next gap, print the letter that appears twice in the part of Jesus' body that the woman took hold of (v. 9).
- In the last gap, print the first letter of a short word that is in both the words of the angel and those of Jesus. It is an important word to the Easter story (verse 7 and 10).

*Answers in Engage.*



# Easter Messages

## You need

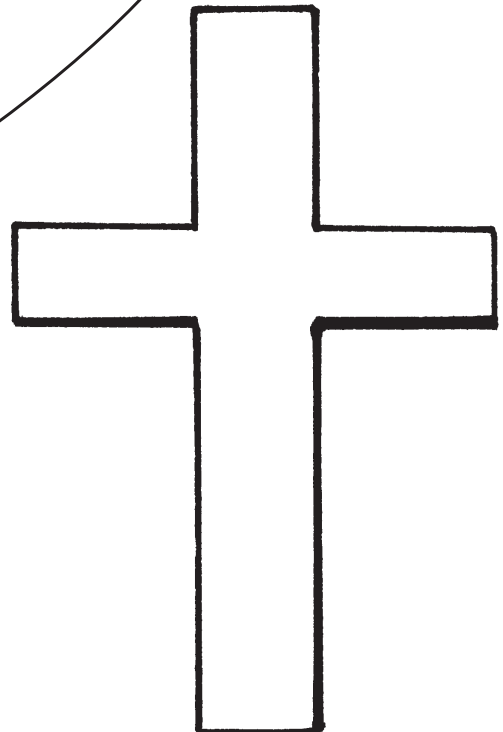
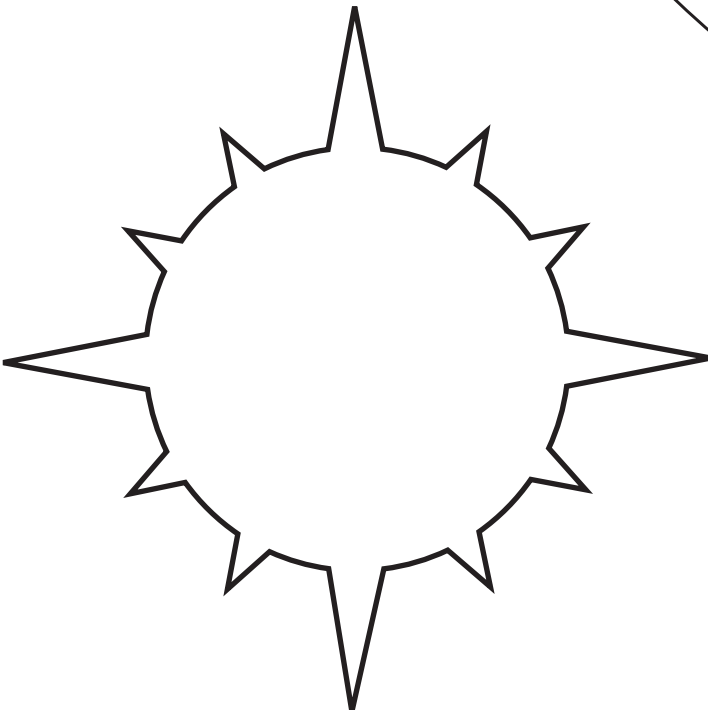
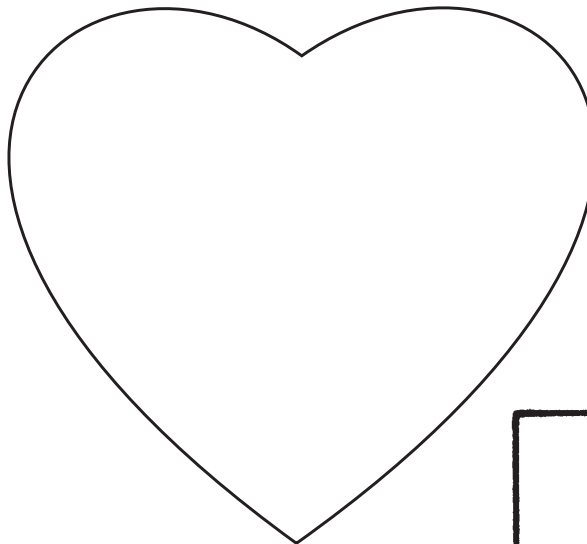
- ❑ drinking straws or dowelling
- ❑ heavy paper or card stock
- ❑ poster board templates of shapes on this page
- ❑ markers, pens, or crayons
- ❑ decorations, such as strips of shiny Mylar™, tissue paper, stickers of Easter symbols

## To make the Easter messages

1. Trace around templates onto heavy paper or card stock. Provide pre-cut patterns for younger children.
2. Write an Easter message on the shape.
3. To the back of the shape, tape several strips of Mylar™, about 5 cm/2 in long. The shape can also be decorated with stickers or Easter symbols drawn by the participants.
4. Fix the shapes to drinking straws or dowelling.

Stick the Easter message into a pot of flowers or bouquet of flowers.

If your congregation delivers Easter flowers to people who cannot come to the church, provide Easter messages to go with those flowers.





# Holy Week Game

