

Church of South India - Diocese of Medak
Church of St John the Baptist
Secunderabad



The Parish Messenger



CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA - DIOCESE OF MEDAK



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Easter Greetings

Greetings to you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Resurrection is the time to celebrate God's sacrificial love. It is an act of reconciliation through the process of forgiveness of our sins. Resurrection is the assurance to the human world of His promise of restoration. Resurrection is an act of transcending all geographical boundaries giving his omnipresence as universal God of all.

*Happy Easter. God bless you, lead you and strengthen you.
Amen.*

The Rt Rev Dr A C Solomon Raj
Bishop in Medak Diocese & Presbyter-in-charge





Editorial

It left me teary-eyed when I heard Ruth Graham narrate her heart-rending testimony at the funeral service of her father, the Rev Billy Graham. Divorced after many years of marriage, Ruth’s personal life was in shambles. Shortly thereafter, she remarried on the ‘rebound’ much against the wishes of her dad, mom and her own children. In no time she realised she was in a wrong marriage! Heartbroken and shattered, hesitatingly, she decided to get back to her parental home which was perched on a mountain side. As she got to the last bend of the road, she sighted her father waiting with open arms to welcome her—not a word of rebuke or condemnation! Ruth in a choking voice said, “My father was not God but he showed me what God was like, on that day.”

The intriguing aspect of this narrative is how Rev Billy Graham being ‘The Billy Graham,’ chose to ‘bury’ the embarrassment and shame and ‘resurrect’ forgiveness and unconditional love. This exemplary story is indeed the true essence of the message of the Cross.

The ‘Easter Special’ of *The Parish Messenger* is a conglomeration of well thought-out articles relevant to the season. The nature of the articles is diverse — some are chronological and reflective, while the others introspective and cautionary in tone. Hope we will be spiritually enriched by them.

In an effort to objectively present the ‘Little Voices’ of our church, competitions were held for the Sunday School children on the theme of ‘Lent and Easter.’ Each class had a different concept to present and the tasks were commensurate with their age. It is a matter of joy that close to seventy children participated in the competitions. The prize winners’ drawings and write-ups are published in this issue.

Have a blessed and meaningful Easter!

Grace Sunder

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From the Presbyter's Desk



Dear Redeemed in Christ,

God is doing exciting things at CSI, Church of St John the Baptist. It is always a joy to see one of our quarterly Parish Messengers come together. Increasingly, as our Church grows in the presence of God, we have more and more to share with you about what God is doing in our lives. Easter is just around the corner. Let's celebrate Jesus together at our Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday services.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was Satan's most violent and desperate effort to try to destroy God. But, above everything else, the death of Jesus was God's victory over Satan, and all the powers of evil. The manner in which Jesus Himself endured the humiliation and suffering of His crucifixion was in itself an exhibition of the victory of perfect love. There was no bitterness or desire for vengeance but only limitless compassion and willingness to forgive His crucifiers; there was no self-pity but only calm strength and full commitment. At the end, Jesus affirmed His victory, "It is finished!" The soldiers confirmed Jesus' death with a spear thrust in His side. Joseph and Nicodemus came and took the body from the cross and buried it in Joseph's new tomb (John 19:16-42). These are some of the facts, and they declare that God poured out the infinite riches of grace to provide salvation for a lost world.

Jesus was victorious in death. He knew that His death would accomplish God's eternal purpose of grace. His life had not been taken from Him; He gave it as a sacrifice of love. He

had not been overcome by His enemies. He did not die as martyr to try to inspire heroism in His followers. He died voluntarily that through death, He might accomplish a death blow to the power of Satan and a finished redemption for lost humankind. The cross was in no sense a failure. It was a triumphant victory. It was the revelation of divine wisdom and power of infinite love and grace. Also, His death made it possible for God to be just and also to be the justifier of all who put their faith in Jesus Christ. We miss the meaning of the cross if we fail to understand that it was the achievement of God in Christ to execute judgment upon the forces of iniquity; and to set in operation, the redemptive force that would draw people of all nations and races to Himself in the commitment of repentance and faith.

The cross was the climax of God's saving work in Christ. We should always remember that Jesus' death assumes His resurrection. Jesus' whole life was the great act of God to provide salvation for a fallen race. The climax and culmination came when He gave His life "a ransom for many." But this was the design and purpose of God. He actually wrought redemption through Christ at the hands of wicked and lawless people. In this sense, the death of Jesus was the divine victory over sin. Nothing was left undone in the fulfillment of God's covenant promise. Nothing was left unfinished in the revelation of infinite love. Nothing was incomplete in making available the immeasurable riches of grace. Nothing was lacking in the revelation of the perfect righteousness of God. Nothing was lacking in

the purpose of God in Christ to make an open display of Jesus' triumph over principalities and powers by nailing to the cross every charge against human for disobedience and unbelief; and cancelling these charges by being made sin for us. The victory of Jesus Christ was the eternal victory of the wisdom and power and love of God.

The cross of Christ is both an invitation and a challenge. Symbolically, the nail-pierced hands of Jesus reach out to every person in the world with an entreaty to be reconciled to God and with the offer of eternal life. The invitation is given to all, everyone who thirsts for the water of life, everyone who is defeated and disappointed by sin, everyone who is bound by Satan's power, everyone who is lonely and broken by the emptiness and deceitfulness of sin. The invitation is also to the Christian believer, who needs to always remember that if we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive us our sins. However, there is more than invitation from the cross; there is also the strongest challenge. That challenge is a call to submit to the judgment of the cross - believe in the power of the cross, live according to the demands of the cross, and proclaim the message of the cross to people everywhere. The cross is meant to teach us that in order to save life we must be willing to lose it in service to others for the sake of Christ. The cross is meant to capture completely the gratitude and devotion of the Christian believer's heart so that one will feel forever bound to love Christ supremely and to follow Him faithfully as Lord and Saviour.

We may well look back and ask, what new understandings and convictions have we gained from the message of the cross? The resurrection victory is real. Something happened, Jesus arose from the dead. He is now alive in the world in our time. Countless

number of people declare that they know the peace of His forgiveness, the moral power of His strength, the compassion and motivation of His constraining love, and the enduring hope of eternal life in this world and the world to come through faith in Him. Persons in the depth of moral corruption, mental confusion and spiritual rebellion have found release from guilt, frustration, resentment and despair through encounter with the living Christ; and their lives show forth something of the beauty and strength and unselfishness which declare them to be the children of God.

The love of the Father was manifested in the life of the Son. The love of the Son for the Father was manifested by perfect obedience. Our love for Christ should not be superficial. If we love Him, we will keep His commandments. Love is always on trial. Christ wants love marked by strength and unselfishness, fidelity and courage. He wants love that will stand the test of ridicule, threat, loneliness and suffering. He wants love which gives until it gives all.

Christ calls us to continually follow Him. Following Christ means loyalty to His teaching; joy in His companionship, and inspiration and strength through His presence. No Christian believer is denied the privilege. No preferred status is a condition. No special gifts are required. Following Jesus is not a matter of spurts and timeouts and detours to explore the lures of the world. Instead, it demands sustaining under the discipline of loyalty, under the compulsion of the cross and under the authority of Christ as Lord.

He is risen, Christ has risen indeed!

Rev K M Charles Wesley

Resident Presbyterian
Church of St John the Baptist



Secretary's Report



Dear Members of St John's Church,
Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died" (1 Cor. 15:20).

Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Church in Corinth on how the Church of the New Testament was to celebrate Easter/ Passover, and what or rather who is the true Passover. He reminds us that for early christian faith affirmation, Christ is Risen.

"Get rid of the old 'yeast' by removing this wicked person from among you. Then you will be like a fresh batch of dough made without yeast, which is what you really are. Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us. ⁸ So let us celebrate the festival, not with the old bread of wickedness and evil, but with the new bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:7-8).

Paul was referring to the Passover, when on the eve of the Festival, Jews had to clean the house of anything that was old and dirty. It symbolized a separation from sin, to which Christians are called to do today. As a practice, the Lenten season is intentionally set aside for inward transformation and renewal. Lent is also a time of giving things up—just like the time Jesus fasted in the desert as a test of self-discipline.

The words 'Celebrate the Festival' are not related to Easter, or the Lord's Supper, but rather they are used in a general sense, describing the life of a believer. Our whole life should be a celebration of joy, and it should be celebrated without the old sinful lifestyle, but with the new lifestyle of sincerity and truth.

We not only celebrate the death of the Lamb of God on our behalf, but His glorious resurrection from the dead, for "God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him" (Acts 2:24). The resurrection of Christ marks the triumph of good over evil, sin and death. It is the singular event which reminds us that those who trust in

God and accept Christ will be raised from the dead and will become the rightful heirs to the Kingdom of God.

Easter represents the fulfillment of God's promise to humankind and provides each of us with "New Hope." Let us all share in the hope of peace, joy and renewal of life. The Resurrection of Christ is a victory of life over death! May we be blessed! He is Risen. He is Risen Indeed. Hallelujah!

The following are the updates on the events in March:

At Church of St John the Baptist, the 'World Day of Prayer' was observed on Wednesday the 7th of March. International Women's Day was celebrated on Sunday, the 11th of March and Rev. Mrs. Jyothi Sundar brought the message. For the first time in St John's Church, Easter Sunday Sunrise Service will be held on the 1st of April, Sunday, at 5:00am. The message will be brought by Rev. Dr. A B Joseph Kishore.

The Church cleaning program was held on 10th of March. Many members participated in this project. Our sincere appreciation and thanks to the editorial team for successfully bringing out the Parish Messenger. We appreciate Mr. Verghese and Mrs. Rama Verghese for their commitment and dedication in maintaining the Church official website. We thank the members who have supported our dear sister, Mrs. Phyllis Philomena Sebastian by contributing towards her healthcare.

The Pastorate Committee will complete its extended tenure of holding office for 3 years by the end of March, 2018. We would like to thank our Presbyter in-charge and Bishop of Medak Diocese, the Rt. Rev. A C Solomon and our Resident Presbyter, Rev. K M Charles Wesley, for their continuous support, guidance and prayers.

God Bless Us All!

Dr M Udaia Kumar

Honorary Secretary

Church of St John the Baptist

Lent: Certain Church Beliefs

The Rt Rev Dr P Surya Prakash



Lent is a time for the church and its members to prepare for reflecting on Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. Traditionally, we are called to participate in this season through:

- 1. self-examination and repentance,*
- 2. prayer, fasting and self-denial, and*
- 3. reading and meditation on God's holy Word.*

Lent is often associated with 'giving something up' and we are called to self-denial, but what does that mean? Some may choose to fast or abstain from certain meals or foods during Lent. Others may choose to replace time in front of the television or computer with time in the presence of God by praying, meditating or studying God's word or any good spiritual book. Whatever may be our choice of practicing self-denial, let us remember that our sacrifice is about remembering the suffering of Jesus and His sacrifice. It is not about losing weight or telling someone else what we gave up for Lent. Let us ask God to guide us in making our personal decisions about self-denial. Read St Mathews Gospel 6:16-18.

The word 'Lent' comes from an old English word for the spring season. We often associate spring season with new life. The climax of Lent in the church year is the Passion Week and the ultimate surprise of the passion week is the Easter - the celebration of the resurrection of Christ, offering new hope and life and above all new creation.

Some common doubts:

1. Why do we not say 'Alleluia' or 'Gloria' in Lent?

Lent is a penitential season. The forty days

of Lent from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday exclusive of Sundays is a time of self-examination, confession and repentance. Turn to God and Rejoice in Hope. During this time we also notice that the altar in the church is not decorated with flowers, the banners are plain, and the music has a more reflective rather than an exuberant tone. All this helps to create a sense of solemnity and anticipation and even greater joy and celebration when the familiar word of praise returns on Easter Sunday - day of resurrection of Jesus from the grave.

2. When we count from Ash Wednesday to Easter, there are more than forty days. How can we say forty days of Lent?

Sundays are always days of rest and celebration and are not counted as part of Lent. 'Rest' because God set apart a day of rest (Jews still observe the Sabbath as a day of rest and Christians observe Sunday as a day of rest and celebration because of the day of resurrection of Jesus). This tells us that traditionally fasting is not done on Sundays. There are at least three narratives of forty days of fasting in the Bible: Moses on the mountain, people of the city of Nineveh and Jesus in the wilderness. Therefore forty days of fasting and praying.

3. Why do we call the day that Jesus was crucified 'Good' Friday?

While a solemn and reflective day, the 'Good' in Good Friday reminds us that this day marks God's triumph over sin and death. It is a day that evil is defeated and goodness has prevailed. The evil is depicted in the betrayal, cunning enmity and choosing injustice over justice, untruth over truth on one hand and the good is reflected in the silent bearing of the cross, pronouncement of



forgiveness, promise of heaven, standing by the mother, going through human physical suffering, fulfilling God's will and purpose in life and committing oneself into the hands of God.

4. Why is the last week in Lent called Passion Week?

'Passio' in Latin language means suffering. Since the events mentioned during the last week leading to the crucifixion of Jesus deal with suffering, it is called Passion Week.

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of the Passion/Holy week and commemorates Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem for the Jewish festival of Passover. Great crowds of people who have come for the festival lined up the streets, waving palm branches to welcome Him. They were excited and shouted 'Hosanna' which means 'Save us now.'

Maundy Thursday is the name given to the day on which Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples called the Last Supper. Two important events are the focus of Maundy Thursday: one, Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples and thereby established the Lord's Supper, also called 'Holy Communion,' (Luke 22:19-20); two, Jesus washed the disciples' feet as an act of humility and service, thereby setting an example that we should love and serve one another in bold humility (John 13:3-17). Maundy is derived from the Latin word for 'command.' The word 'Maundy' refers to the command Jesus gave to the disciples at the Last Supper to love and serve one another; commemorate His death and resurrection by breaking the bread and drinking from the cup.

5. What are the 'stations of the Cross?'

We are familiar with the 'Seven Words' of Jesus from the cross. However, there is another strong tradition that commemorates the 'Stations of the Cross.' These stations tell the story of Jesus' suffering and death. On Good Friday, Christians around the world remember Jesus Via Dolorosa (the Way of the

Cross) with scripture and prayer as they pause at each of the fourteen stations.

Stations of the Cross:

- i. Jesus is condemned to death
- ii. Jesus takes up His Cross
- iii. Jesus falls the first time
- iv. Jesus meets His afflicted/sorrowful mother
- v. The Cross is laid on Simon of Cyrene
- vi. A woman wipes the face of Jesus
- vii. Jesus falls a second time
- viii. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
- ix. Jesus falls a third time
- x. Jesus is stripped of His garments
- xi. Jesus is nailed to the Cross
- xii. Jesus dies on the Cross
- xiii. The body of Jesus is placed in the arms of His mother
- xiv. Jesus is laid in the tomb

Devotional Calendar for the Holy Week-2018

25.3.2018 Palm Sunday-Read Luke 19:29-40, Ask God that your enthusiasm will be contagious so that others can join and sing hosannas in joy.

26.3.2018 Read Luke 22:16-20, Each time we drink from the cup and eat the bread of communion we are reminded that Jesus is with us.

27.3.2018 Read Matt. 26:20-25, Jesus knows our hearts better than we do.

28.3.2018 Read Luke 23: 32-38, We can experience the power of God's love and forgiveness because of Jesus.

29.3.2018 Maundy Thursday-Read Luke 23:39-43, Remember to be with Jesus even in the worst of circumstances.

30.3.2018 Good Friday-Read Luke 23:44-46, Jesus' final earthly prayer expresses simple trust in the goodness and victorious power of God.

31.3.2018 Read John 19:25-30, Jesus completed the work that the heavenly Father had sent Him to do.

01.4.2018 Easter Sunday-Read resurrection narratives of your choice from the Gospels.

(various Lenten resources consulted while compiling)



The Essence of Easter

Mesa James Samuel



The Resurrection of Christ which we celebrate as EASTER is the greatest festival of Christians worldwide. It marks the end of the humiliation, pain and suffering our Lord underwent on the Cross on Good Friday. God sent Christ to us as a Lamb - the perfect sacrifice for our sins, to cleanse us with His blood and be assured of a new life in Him. The 'Crucifixion' of Christ - His physical death on the Cross shows us how we too ought to die (although not physically), to everything that is not of and from Christ - Rising above the 'Physical Realm' and being transformed in the Spirit. His 'Finished Work' for all mankind on the Cross wipes away all sin, condemnation and death and ensures us of Everlasting Life and Freedom in Christ - that Restores, Reforms and Renews us.

The 'Empty Tomb' shows his Victory over the Grave. To us, it is not living as our old selves, but being made anew in Christ. After being raised on the Third Day, He proves that there is Life after Death and as believers we all enjoy this 'Eternal Life with God and Christ.'

The 'Easter' morning indicates the new life Christ enjoys in God and we in Him, and the beautiful hope that as we lead Christ-like lives, we will be welcomed into God's loving and open arms at the Gates of Heaven and can rest eternally in

His care after our earthly journey. Let us all be transformed, embracing the risen Christ and emulating Him in every way and living in love and peace with friends and foes alike.

Happy Easter everyone.



How does the Easter Day get determined every year?

Easter and the holidays that are related to it are moveable feasts, in that they do not fall on a fixed date in the Gregorian or Julian calendars (both of which follow the cycle of the sun and the seasons). In 325CE the Council of Nicaea established that Easter would be held on the first Sunday after the first full moon occurring on or after the March equinox. From that point forward, the Easter date depended on the ecclesiastical approximation of March 21 for the March equinox.

Although the Council of Nicaea established the Easter date for churches around the world, not all Christian churches observe Easter according the Gregorian calendar. Many Orthodox churches still observe Easter in accordance with the Julian calendar.



The Theology of Suffering

Jeevan Perumalla



The Cross of Christ within the New Testament tradition and in some of the contemporary re-imaginings of the cross is understood to be the divine identification with the suffering humanity. This identification as a theme embodies other themes like solidarity and recapitulation.

In the cross of Christ, God by offering God's son expresses God's identification with the suffering communities. As the second person in the trinity, Christ the Son of God expresses His identification with the suffering humanity. As the collective human person, He takes into the life of God the suffering of human communities. As the divine is brought to the oppressed human communities, the suffering human communities are taken into the life of God. In this two-way passage, God identifies with the sufferers, and sufferers are taken into the triune life of God. This makes possible the imagination of God as the suffering one.

In the event of the Father experiencing the death of the Son and the Son experiencing the abandonment by the Father, the human experience of pain, suffering and death are taken into the very life of God. God who is manifested in the incarnation of the Son is the God crucified and God interred: the one who is pierced, broken, torn asunder, killed and buried. If in the cross of Christ, God has identified and expressed God's solidarity with the extremities of human predicament and pain, I suppose it is theologically legitimate to engage in such imagination. If incarnation is a revolution in the life of God and the life of human, this would involve, what in Martin Luther's language called, *Communicatio idiomatum*, the exchange of attributes.

As God imputes God's righteousness on the humankind, God takes into Godself the infirmities of the humankind. In the incarnation of God in Christ, not only God came to us but humanity also is taken into the life of God. In this passage of human into the life of God, God takes into Godself the human brokenness, pain and pathos. Thus the cross of Christ is an event of divine hospitality. Reconciliation happens in this occasion of divine hospitality. God in His participating in the suffering of human communities opens Himself and invites the humanity into God's life. In the same event, the humanity is taken into the life of God, through the participation of Jesus the broken people in this event. It is these broken people who mediate the reconciliatory process. Thus, reconciliation happens when those who perpetuate violence turn towards the victims in repentance and receive the pardon from the broken ones.

This perception of the cross has consequences as we imagine our Christian discipleship and mission as engaging in peace and reconciliation. Church happens when the church finds its identity in remembering the dangerous memory of the cross, thus affirming that remembering of the body happens in the participation of the broken and fragmented lives. May the Christ who shed precious blood on the cross be with us in our sufferings and bring peace and reconciliation in our lives.

May God Bless You! Amen.

(Article officially sent to St John's Church from ACTC on concurrent work.)



The Atoning Blood of Christ

Prameela Sadanand



Since our childhood, we have been observing Lent for 40 days. Lent is based on two important incidents of the Holy Bible. The first is that Israelites, God's chosen race, travelled 40 years to reach the promised land, Canaan. The Second is that Jesus fasted and prayed for 40 days in the wilderness before the crucifixion, at which point He was tempted by Satan.

Lent starts with Ash Wednesday. In some churches, ash is applied on the forehead of each member, which symbolises that we are mortal people. Hence, we need to introspect, repent and rectify ourselves under the shadow of the cross all these 40 days until our death. Lent is a time of fasting and praying, spending more time at the feet of Jesus and examining ourselves. Palm Sunday reflects Jesus' Triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem. The following Thursday, also called the Maundy Thursday, Jesus celebrates the last supper with His disciples. On Good Friday, we witness the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross of Calvary culminating in Easter Sunday—the day Christ overcame the powers of death, suffering and darkness. Easter is indeed the most important Christian festival, for it affirms our faith in the living God. Every Christian knows the significance of lent and Easter, but let us try to know about the atoning blood of Jesus.

Blood is necessary for our Salvation. If Jesus Christ had not died on our behalf none of us would have any hope of salvation. If His blood had not been shed on the cross no one would have the least hope for eternal life. When God makes a prediction, you can

depend that it is going to happen. The Bible is filled with the prediction about the slain Lamb. One of the greatest predictions in the Old Testament about the Lamb who would be slain is found in Isaiah 53. In the New Testament, the prediction of the slain Lamb comes true. As we read in the Gospels about these events, which theologians call the Passion of Christ, we need to remember that everything that transpired, took place according to God's divine plan.

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, many cruel and ugly things were done to Him, but none of these things were done without God's permission. It is very important for us to understand that everything that happened to Jesus on the cross of Calvary was predicted first in the Old Testament long before it ever took place. The predictions of the slain Lamb and the Passion of the slain Lamb go hand in hand. These assure us that it was absolutely necessary for Jesus to die on the cross of Calvary and that He died there for you and me. The Old Testament saints looked forward to the coming of the Lamb and faithfully predicted this event, even His agony on the cross (Is. 53 & Ps. 22). Their ministry was one of the prophesying about the Christ who was to come. On the other hand, the New Testament saints, including we, look back on His life, death and resurrection. Our Ministry is not to predict but to proclaim what has already taken place.

The pivotal theme of Scripture is the blood of the slain Lamb. The central message of Gospel is the blood of Christ which was shed on the cross of Calvary. So, let us try to get



greater understanding of the blood of Christ and what it means to all of us and why it is necessary.

1) When we turn to the Scriptures, we clearly see the need for the blood of Christ for the atonement of our sins. Without the crucifixion there is no atoning blood, no hope and no future. From the beginning to the end, the Bible reveals that atonement requires a blood sacrifice.

2) The necessity of blood to cover sin goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve sinned, they realised that they were naked; they knew that something had to be done to cover them, so they covered their bodies with fig leaves. Adam and Eve thought that their physical coverage was enough to cover their sin but they needed a much costlier coverage than this simple physical one. Atonement for sin is never successful if it is our own effort. God took skins of animals and made clothes for them (Gen. 3:21). God always required blood sacrifice for the atonement of sin. The only difference today is that God Himself provided the sacrifice. God met His own requirement when His son died at Calvary to pay the penalty for our sin. At the cross, Jesus had to do more than dying; He had to bleed and die so that our sins might be washed and forgiven.

The Blood and importance of cross

The focal point in the shedding of the blood of Christ is the cross. When the triune God planned the sacrifice of His own Son, Jesus, He planned it through crucifixion, not any other way. That was God's eternal plan—and that makes the cross essential to Salvation. It was only when Jesus bled and died on the cross that man's age-old struggle with sin found its ultimate solution.

When Christ died on the cross, He won the decisive Victory for us. His final cry was not one of defeat but of triumph. His cry "It is finished!" has echoed down through the ages as the believer's unlimited answer to Satan's accusations. With those words Jesus meant that His agony on the cross was coming to an end. Rather it was the declaration that there was no further price to be paid. The penalty for the sin had been met and fulfilled in its totality. No more burnt offering, no more slain lambs. Jesus paid it all. The blood that Jesus shed on our behalf on the cross of Calvary does not merely cover up our sins, it puts them away as though they had never been committed. This is the very reason cross is so important and the blood of Jesus so necessary. "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold...but with precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1Pet. 1:18-19). He defeated death and the one who had power over death, the devil. He suffered nakedness to cover our nakedness of sin and covered us with God's righteousness.



RESURRECTION

When that great Christian and Scientist Sir Michael Faraday was dying, some journalists questioned him as to his speculations for a life after death. "Speculations!" said he, "I know nothing about speculations. I am resting on certainties. I know that my redeemer liveth, and because He lives, I shall live also."

-Gospel Trumpet

Lent: A Time to Introspect

P John Churchill



Lent is not a ritual but a holy, solemn and meaningful time to re-charge our spiritual batteries to fight the evil designs of Satan every day for 40 days starting from Ash Wednesday to the Easter. This is like the 40-day fasting and prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ in His wilderness sojourn, before He launched His “Mission” work. Jesus virtually wrestled with temptations and defeated Satan in His own game by thwarting the irresistible temptations – Lust of eyes, Lust of flesh and Pride of life. Lent is an opportune time for self edification and purification. It may be called an extended Sabbath in which each day of the 40 days is meant to introspect whether we walk our talk.

The traditional purpose of Lent is to help born-again Christians to replenish their spiritual strength afresh through prayer, penance, and repentance of sins. That is why many faithful commit themselves to fasting and prayer; give up certain types of luxuries as a form of penitence. Some Churches re-enact the heart-rending scene of “Jesus Christ carrying the Cross,” a distance of 600 meters before He was nailed to the Cross. While there is nothing wrong in re-enacting the events that preceded the crucifixion and meditating on the seven words of Jesus Christ on the cross, the question remains whether we Christians have been honest to ourselves. Are we living as true followers of Jesus in thought, word and deed? Remember that our Lord and the people of other faiths are watching us (2 Chr.16:9). We are under constant scrutiny!

Lent –A Time to Introspect

Introspection is essential to recollect and

remember the way God is guiding our every step. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” (Ps. 37:23). No wonder God guides not only our steps but also our stops as well to protect us from the evil designs of Satan. Lent is a time to re-examine all our acts of commission and omission to enable us to give a mid-stream course correction to the remaining part our life’s journey.

Lent –A Time to Reset our Compass

Lent is a time for self-auditing and stock-taking of our acts of the past years. So count your blessings and also count the number of times that you have failed to live up like a true Christian at home, at work place and in dealings with Christians and non-Christians. That brief flash back would be sufficient to reset our compass to walk the straight and narrow path of our Lord.

Lent–A Time to Emulate Jesus

During the Lenten Season, we can strive to reach closer to the benchmark set by Jesus in living a righteous life. Jesus, during His brief three and a half-year ministry established an extraordinary way of righteous set for us to emulate.

Lent –A Time to Pray

Lent is especially dedicated for prayer and supplications. This is our duty. So pray for the forgiveness of those who are hurting us. The Lord’s Prayer is indeed a daily reminder to this end. Pray for the communal harmony and religious tolerance in India, Islamic countries (Syria, Iraq, Indonesia, Yemen) and other countries; Pray for the transformation



of the anti-social elements that are spreading communal hatred, vandalizing and desecrating churches and places of worship and persecuting the followers of Christ Jesus. Pray for the unity of the Christian community in India; and for every conceivable problem - big or small - on the planet earth. This is the indeed the need of the hour.

Lent – A Time to Obey the Greatest Commandment of God

The commandment “Love your God and Neighbour” makes Christianity unique. Lent is the time to ponder dispassionately whether we really obey this commandment. Frankly speaking the answer is an emphatic “NO.” A closer look at our day to day life reveals the truth to our shock and surprise.

Everybody agrees and affirms without a wink that he/she really loves the creator God. Since nobody can verify and nobody can disprove, we don't mind proclaiming from the pulpits and public platforms that “I love my God with all my heart...and with all my strength.” To be honest, we love our God as long as He does not upset our agenda to remain in the driver's seat of our lives. Well, deep within our hearts, our desire is to remain the masters of our destiny and we don't want to hand over the keys to God to steer us in His path. The parable of rich fool (Luke 12:19) reveals the truth.

The second part of the great Commandment namely “Love your neighbor” brings us face to face with the naked truth and challenges that we might face when we try to follow it. It is indeed a difficult task to observe this commandment as it goes against our grain and nature. This again clashes with our self interest. By nature we have resentments and reservations against

people other than our kith and kin. It is mainly because we do not want a stranger under the disguise of a ‘neighbour’ intrude into our inner circle.

After Jesus gave the definition of “our neighbor” in the Good Samaritan parable, we are left with no choice about our neighbor. He/she may be living next door to us or working with us in our office. Many a time he/she turns out to be a dubious character. When we notice the true colors, the obnoxious behavior and the dirty games of our so called neighbor, our blood naturally boils. How can we love such people? For us the Mosaic Law is good enough: an ‘eye for an eye’ and a ‘tooth for a tooth.’ We feel happy when something bad happens to our enemies or for that matter even to our friendly neighbours. We call it divine justice. It's simply a sadistic pleasure. That is our true nature. That is why we find the second part of the important commandment difficult to practice. But Jesus had set an example by practicing what He preached. He prayed for those who were nailing Him to the cross: “Father forgive them...” (Luke 23:34). Being believers, let us follow His example – Love your neighbours / enemies in spite of their intolerant behavior.

The two parts of the commandment “Love your God and love your neighbor” are complementary to each other. When we love our God, we also must love our neighbor because he/she is the creation of God. Our Love for God is measured by the barometer of the love we have for our neighbor.

During the Lenten season, it is time we introspect whether we are following the greatest Commandment of our Lord.





*Lenten Cottage Prayer Meetings
&
The Fellowship Thereafter*



Seven Illustrations

Maneesha Mohanty



1. FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO

A child was walking along a street and a large dog came out barking. She stood terrified. Soon a stranger came to her and said, “Come on, little girl, the dog has stopped barking.” “Yes,” she said, “but the bark is on the inside.” She saw in the eyes of the dog an unfriendly spirit. We Christians are too civilized today to quarrel outwardly, but is there not sometimes a bark inside—an unforgiving spirit?

Point to ponder: Do I have an unforgiving spirit?

2. TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE

One New Year’s Eve at London’s Garrick Club, British dramatist Frederick Lonsdale was asked by Symour Hicks to reconcile with a fellow member. The two had quarrelled in the past and never restored their friendship. “You must,” Hicks said to Lonsdale, “It is very unkind to be unfriendly at such a time. Go over now and wish him a happy New Year.”

So Lonsdale crossed the room and spoke to his enemy. “I wish you a happy New Year,” he said, “but only one.”

Point to ponder: Do I easily reconcile?

3. BEHOLD YOUR SON: BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER

Conversation with old parents:

“We have heard the story of Aunt Susie pouring wine in the dog’s bowl so many times, we can tell it ourselves - in our sleep.”

“I just showed you how to use the remote yesterday!”

“How can you forget to do that? Didn’t we have a lengthy discussion about it last week?”

“You could do that only if you tried. How hard is it to change the bulb in the table lamp?”

Point to ponder: Am I able to really honour my father and mother even in their old age?

4. MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?

“I was the only girl in my class with divorced parents, the only one whose mother wasn’t there watching the Christmas play or the cross-country championships,” Victoria says. “I spent my childhood, in fact my whole life, explaining why my mother wasn’t around, whether it was telling friends’ parents or explaining my situation to friends I made as an adult. My sister summed it up recently when she said that we will always be a little bit lonely, and that’s a sad thing to say, but it’s true.”

Point to ponder: Being forsaken hurts, am I sensitive enough?

5. I THIRST

“Last year I was completely alone. All alone in my journey. I couldn’t share my feelings with anyone. I couldn’t show my fear to anyone. I had lost my job already! I had lost my sound health completely! I had lost contacts or better say touch with almost all of my friends.”

Point to ponder: Can I be of help to someone in thirst for love or for water?

6. IT IS FINISHED

“I sit on the plane thinking - If the guy next to me doesn’t like my talking about Jesus, it’s going to be awkward. Oh, no, I’ll have a hard

time to deal with, sitting next to this guy for two whole hours being awkward.” Awkwardness is perhaps the biggest threat to evangelism for far too many of us.

“There is a way for everyone ... to participate in this great work. We can each find a way to use our own particular talents and interests in support of the great work of filling the world with light and truth” (Dieter F. Uchtdorf).

Point to ponder: Am I making efforts to finish my task?

7. FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT

Parents put their children through the pain of having injections knowing that a small amount of distress at the time is far better than serious illness later. How often we wonder: why did God let me suffer that injury or lose my job or involve in a car accident or give me such a spouse? Indeed the list is unending!

Point to ponder: Do I really commit myself into His hands?

(Illustrations are from random sources including the internet)



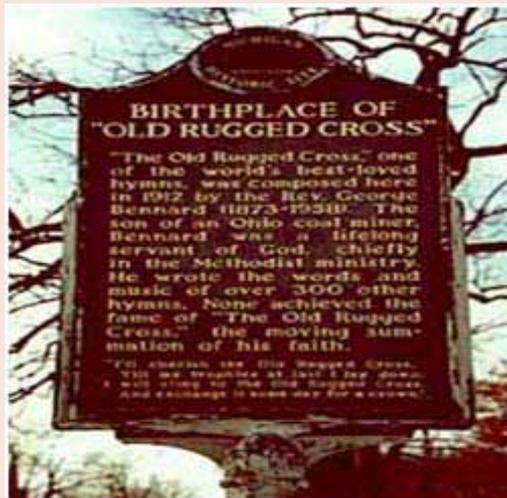
The Old Rugged Cross

The popular hymn: “The Old Rugged Cross” has been the most favored of the approximately 300 songs written by George Bennard.

George served for several years as an itinerant Methodist preacher and had a favorite scripture verse, John 3:16. When quoting the verse, he seemed to always have a vision of a cross — a crude Roman instrument of death. It was stained with the blood of Christ, who gave his life in order that we might become Christians.

On one occasion, as he was thinking of Christ’s crucifixion, an original melody ran through his mind. Although it was a complete melody, very few words came with it. He struggled to write some

appropriate lyrics, but all that came was the passage, “I’ll cherish the old rugged cross.” The song seemed to take shape in bits and pieces.



He took the song manuscript and placed it on the kitchen table. In a very short span of time, he was able to rewrite the stanzas with each word falling perfectly into place. He asked his wife to join him in the kitchen. She did so and he joyfully sang his prized, new song.

A plaque, identifying a State of Michigan Historic Site, marks the location on Michigan Avenue in Albion, Michigan, where Bennard wrote the song. It reads, in part: Birthplace of “Old Rugged Cross.”

<http://www.staugustine.com>



Forgiveness and God's promise of Abundant Life

Sunita David

“...But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little” (Luke 7:47).

This is the answer given to Simon, the Pharisee who invited Jesus home for a meal and questioned the appropriateness of a woman weeping, washing with tears and wiping the feet of Jesus with her hair. He questioned in his heart the mission and character of Jesus. Jesus was unfazed, by the outpouring of emotion on one side and the disbelief coming from the other end. He compares the little sin of Simon with great sin of the woman; and gives Simon the Pharisee an answer for the woman's deluge of tears. He confirms it with an illustration of a creditor who forgives two debtors. The one who owes Him more loves Him more when his debts are forgiven. Forgiveness works on the same principle as the material world Jesus explains. The spiritual lessons Jesus draws from the natural world of cause and effect is for the benefit of Simon, the Pharisee.

Is it true that the measure of forgiveness is great or less according to the sin? By the incident Jesus meant, it is truly up to us to decide the extent of forgiveness. Forgiveness is extended depending on how ready we are to admit error. Complete surrender as the “sinner” woman or partial admission of sin as the Pharisee determines the measure of God's forgiveness of sins. God's forgiveness through Christ is not from natural cause and effect but supernatural grace. Lavishing love in worship is the sign of a total surrender; to be at His Mercy! The “sinner” woman was overwhelmed by the abundance of God's mercy and responded likewise: “Is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem?” (Is. 50:2). God's love, His readiness to forgive is immeasurable.

Having decided on the quantity, can we take a look at the quality of that forgiveness? In a role reversal, Jesus washed the feet of the disciples at the Passover meal. Peter protests, and Jesus tells him: “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” Impetuous Peter bursts out and asks Him to wash not only his feet, but his hands and his head too! Jesus tells him: “He who is bathed need only wash his feet, but is completely clean...” Bathing and washing seem to be finer points in our daily routine of hygiene. Yet again, there is a spiritual truth embedded in it.

The salvation of the soul is expressed in Eph. 2:8: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” Salvation is a one-time experience but cleansing and drawing close to Jesus is inevitable to be a part of Him. The discipline of a daily routine of soul-searching and cleansing alone can sustain a relationship with Him. Cleansing determines the quality of our relationship with Him. The lyrics :

*Are you washed in the blood,
In the soul-cleansing blood of the Lamb?
Are your garments spotless are they white as snow?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?*

The lines draw us to the Saviour as a fount of cleansing and the way to abide in Him and continue in Him. John 15:4 says: “Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” Relationships follow the law of nature established by God. We are made whole again by our remaining in Christ Jesus.

Ancient Israel followed the practice of the host washing the feet of his guests. Jesus did

it, a role-reversal; before the Passover meal to exemplify the principle of leadership. He who is Master must be the servant of all! A kingdom law translated from mere tradition to living practice. Simon, the Pharisee gave up dead tradition but the “sinner” woman by loving Jesus and washing His feet brought back to life an age-old custom. Jesus when accused of breaking the law, asserts: “I have come not to break the law but to fulfill it.” Jesus breathes life into dead habits and

customs; the analogy of washing-cleansing proves this.

Ps. 119:9 reads: “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.” The soul-cleansing Blood of Jesus and the Word keep us in Him. He is Emmanuel-God with us assuring us life everlasting. This is life in all abundance which He promises us. Supernatural grace in a natural world, indeed! It takes a Savior to reveal God’s plan of salvation.



JESUS, THE SAVIOR

He began His ministry by being hungry,
yet He is the Bread of Life.

Jesus ended His earthly ministry by being thirsty,
yet He is the Living Water.

Jesus was weary,
yet He is our rest.

Jesus paid tribute,
yet He is the King.

Jesus was accused of having a demon,
yet He cast out demons.

Jesus wept,
yet He wipes away our tears.

Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver,
yet He redeemed the world.

Jesus was brought as a lamb to the slaughter,
yet He is the Good Shepherd.

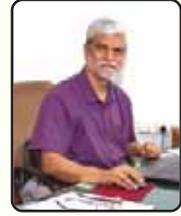
Jesus died,
yet by His death He destroyed the power of death.

-Gregory of Nazianzus, A.D. 381.



Generous Salvation of A Sacrificial Saviour

Samson Gandhi



“There is nothing like a free lunch.” So goes a popular saying. That may be true in human affairs, but not so with God. God is generous. Everything in this world belongs to God (Ps. 50:10, 11; Hag. 2:8). The air we breathe, the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the houses we live in, the grand vehicles that we drive and all the comforts and luxuries we enjoy are from God. He has given it all to humanity to enjoy. But these are all materialistic.

God is also generous in His salvation. We look around and we find many religious beliefs of how to attain salvation. Our Hindu friends go on pilgrimages, give alms to poor, tonsure their heads, roll in the porticos of temples and go on various fasts to please their gods and extract salvation. Our Muslim friends too have their own five pillars of Islam to attain salvation and all of them are to do with ‘works.’ Even then they are not sure if they will be received in *Jannat*, a place of eternal pleasures. Every pursuit of salvation is built on works, sacrifice, pain and appeasement. For that matter even Jews, it appears, had slipped into earning their salvation by works.

The God of Abraham, Jacob and Isaac is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is love. He is generous. In His generosity, He placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and gave them the best of all creation. It was given freely to enjoy unendingly. There was no lack, no pain and no hardship. But they were given a specific commandment, call it a law if you like: “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16,17). God’s generosity was never meant to be abused as licentiousness.

It came with its boundaries.

When God put Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, He unfolded the next part of His plan. He showed them the hardships of a tyrannical rule of Pharaoh. Then in His generous plan of salvation (freedom from physical slavery), God performed miracles and brought His people out of Egyptian bondage. God sustained them through wilderness and brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey. God was generous in physical salvation. But that was only precursor to a greater salvation.

God asked His people to worship Him and Him alone and keep His law. He promised safety from their enemies, prosperity of the land and happiness of their families. But they rejected Him and His law. They rebelled against Him and put Him to shame.

Not giving up, God in His abounding grace and generosity made a new covenant. He offered salvation to His people in generosity. What does His generosity include?

He gave us what mattered to Him most – His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Not to just sacrifice His glory for a while when on earth; but He became a man, then a servant, to be treated as a criminal and be crucified as a thief. He did this all for the entire humanity. His generosity knows no boundaries. Jews and gentiles, all could be saved. Someone described John 3:16 as the greatest love, greatest invitation, greatest sacrifice and the greatest gift of the greatest God.

We also see that God, if He has given us His Son, will He not also give all things with Him? (Rom. 8:32) The salvation of God in Christ was not just given grudgingly but it was lavished.

After providing salvation, God has lavished upon us the privilege of becoming His sons and daughters (1 John 3:1). Jesus called us His friends, not servants. What more could we ask for? He has given us the right to become His children (John 1:12). As His children, He made us co-heirs of His kingdom. There is nothing that God has kept from us.

As children born of the Spirit, we were given a new nature. As part of this new nature, we would bear the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22). We were set free from the drudgery of the law and given the Spirit of God so that we may desire to practise the golden law of loving God and loving humans.

God provided the sacrifice He demanded; He became the righteousness we lacked; He wrote His laws on our heart that we would love Him by keeping His commandments. Even after that if we fail, He has promised to forgive when we repent and seek His forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Only a generous God can offer such a great salvation.

Have you received Jesus as your Lord and Saviour? How can you neglect so great a salvation? Today is the day of salvation. Do not harden your hearts if you hear the voice of God. Tomorrow may not come. There is no need to go on a pilgrimage or keep special observances. Just repent of your sins, acknowledge Jesus as your Saviour and Lord. The triune God will enter your heart and you will be sealed a child of God.

Salvation that is given freely must be accepted freely. If you have tasted the salvation of God that has been offered so freely, generously and continually can we be any different? No! The Bible says, freely you have received, freely give. But if we observe closely, gospel is not offered freely. It is peddled for profit.

Like in the church at Galatia, some people were not allowing people to be saved by grace through faith. They wanted them to keep the law and earn their salvation through works. Paul in other places confronted those that demanded circumcision as a necessity to be saved.

What about churches today? Some of them seem to convey that unless you come to our church you cannot be saved; unless you demonstrate a particular spiritual gift, you are not saved; unless you have taken baptism in a particular way, place and person you are not saved. Christian leaders and pastors seem to show partiality to those who are rich and lavish them with gifts. They convey that the fruits of salvation come at a price. Opportunities to minister seem to be given when the pastors and leaders are satisfied with favours. They seem to convey that the joy of serving the Lord is not free but comes at a price. Among leaders, there is no generosity but greed.

If you are saved by the generosity of a loving God, you must extend that salvation and the benefits of such salvation to others freely and generously. The lepers at the gates of Samaria were astonished that the besieging Syrian army had abandoned their camp leaving behind all the food and valuables. They said, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household" (2 Kin. 7:9). Let us not keep the salvation we have received so freely to ourselves but give generously.

As much as we share the Good News freely, without delay and constantly, we must also share the fruits of our salvation – our joy, our peace and our love in every form of expression. Jesus speaking about feeding Him when He was hungry, giving a drink when thirsty, shelter when a stranger, clothing when naked, visiting when sick, and in prison, He said, "As much as you have done it unto the



least of my brethren (poor and needy), you have done it unto me.” We sometimes are generous to the rich and stingy towards the poor. Let us reverse it.

When we recognize that we were utterly helpless and debased, Christ died for us and made us children of God and lavished every kind of gift upon us. Have you tasted that salvation? Do you feel that you are a child of a great God? Then you will have a generous

outlook in life. You will be generous in your appreciation, compliments, gifts, lending, sharing, giving, forgiving, planning, building and sacrificing.

If you are not a generous person, perhaps you must revisit the Gospel of Christ. Let not the sacrifice of Jesus on that Good Friday and the glorious resurrection of Jesus on that Easter morn go in vain.



Grünewald's Masterpiece



The *Isenheim Altarpiece* depicting the crucifixion of Christ was sculpted and painted by the Germans Niclaus and Matthias Grünewald respectively during 1512-1516. It is on display at the Unterlinden Museum at Colmar, Alsace, in France. The museum celebrated the 500th anniversary of the work in 2012. It is Grünewald's largest work, and is regarded as his masterpiece. It was painted for the Monastery of St. Anthony in Isenheim near Colmar, which specialized in hospital work. The Antonine monks of the monastery were noted for their care of plague sufferers as well as their treatment of skin diseases, such as ergotism. The image of the crucified Christ is pitted with plague-type sores, showing patients that Jesus understood and shared their afflictions.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isenheim_Altarpiece

Lent and Easter

Morris Wilson



How can we explain Lent and Easter in simple terms? *Lent* represents convictions of Crucifixion while *Easter* displays convictions of Resurrection. What is conviction? In this context, it means that you are so thoroughly convinced that something is absolutely true that you take a firm stand on it regardless of the consequences.

Lent, as we know, is the period of 40 days from Ash Wednesday to the day before Easter during which Christians traditionally give up some type of food or activity in memory of Christ's suffering on the cross. More importantly, many Christians use Lent as a time for sanctification and reconciliation. This effectively means the cross and Christ's indescribable agony become the centre of our attempts to redeem ourselves and make ourselves holy. As Peter says: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Christ loves us unconditionally; His divine grace makes us alive even when we are dead in transgressions and offers us salvation. Paul reminds the people of Ephesus about the abundance of God's grace: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (Eph. 1:7-8).

Reconciliation accompanies redemption. God demonstrated His boundless love for humanity by letting Christ die for us sinners on the cross thereby providing us the gift of salvation, which is the ineffable link between Lent and Easter. Writing to the Romans, Paul remarks: "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!" (Rom. 5:10) In his letter to the people of Colosse, Paul emphasizes the supremacy of Christ and the opportunity for reconciliation through His blood: "For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross" (Col. 1:19-20).

Have you ever put yourself in the shoes of Christ's disciples? Just imagine giving up your livelihood and leaving home to travel around the country with someone who claimed to be the Son of God—and who backed up that claim with truly impressive miracles and unparalleled authoritative teaching. He was the most inspiring man who ever lived, and you believed He was the long-awaited Messiah who would make everything right. All your hopes and dreams were invested in Him. Yet after giving three years of your life following Him, one day you watched Him die a horrible death on a cross.

The thrill and excitement of such a close association with the Messiah suddenly turned to shock, grief, and utter despair. However,



before you could even recover from this dreadful experience, more astounding news came to you from some women who returned from the tomb. They claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead. “The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay’” (Matt. 28:5-6).

What a roller coaster of emotions—from anticipation, to grief, to exhilaration—all in a few days!

Sometimes our Easter celebrations seem far removed from the event. When I was growing up, I didn’t hear much about the cross or the empty tomb. Instead, people talked about new clothes, Easter eggs, going to church, and family gatherings. The traditions had somehow drowned out the most important message of Easter—the death of Christ and His victory over the grave. This year, I would like to reiterate the real reasons we have for celebrating and rejoicing at Easter.

Firstly, Jesus is alive having conquered death. After His resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven to sit at His Father’s right hand. From there He intercedes on our behalf with the Father and awaits the time when He will return for us. **A second reason for rejoicing is that Jesus promised to prepare a place for us in heaven.** Before His crucifixion, He comforted his disciples, saying, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:3). **A third reason for rejoicing is Christ’s promise of our bodily resurrection.** Jesus’ victory over death is our guarantee that we too will be raised from the dead. When Martha was grieving over Lazarus’ death, Jesus told her, “Your brother

will rise again” (John 11:23). Then He added, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live even though he dies” (v. 25). The bodies we have now are burdened with sin and its damning consequences. But at the Second Coming, we will be given new bodies that are imperishable, glorious, and powerful (1 Cor. 15:42-44). **And that is why we have another reason to rejoice—we will see our beloved ones again!** Paul said that we do not have to grieve like those who have no hope. One day there will be a glorious family reunion, and we will never be separated again (1 Thess. 4:13-14).

Easter is truly an occasion for celebration because Christ’s resurrection constantly reminds us that He is our eternal hope. If we set our hearts on only the things of this world, we will be on an emotional roller coaster—up one minute and down the next. But if we remind ourselves of the empty tomb, our faith in a glorious life will be preserved for posterity.

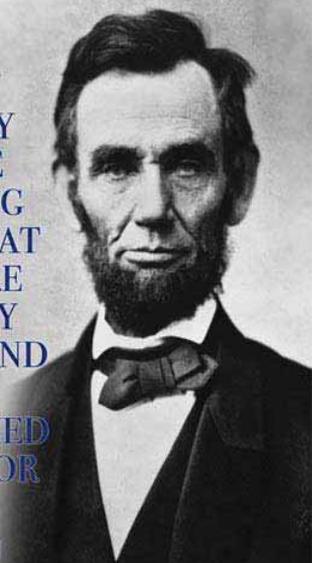


The Power of Prayer

I HAVE BEEN
DRIVEN MANY
TIMES UPON MY
KNEES BY THE
OVERWHELMING
CONVICTION THAT
I HAD NOWHERE
ELSE TO GO. MY
OWN WISDOM, AND
THAT OF ALL
ABOUT ME, SEEMED
INSUFFICIENT FOR
THE DAY.

-ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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Betrayal: Then and Now

M Anthony David



Along with the handpicked men, he sauntered in. The Master did not seem to mind. He walked through the dusty streets of Judea and Galilee along with his eleven colleagues. Listening just like them to the most gracious and authoritative words ever expressed, the words of their Master.

Men and women, of all sorts came to see the Master. Some were healed. Some were comforted. But all were transformed by His love. A word, a touch, a pat from the Master metamorphosed most people. He observed all this. Every day of the three and a half years of the Master's Ministry, he was with Him, watching.

Yet strangely he was totally unmoved by all this. He had his own petty agenda hidden from others, his brothers. He volunteered to keep the accounts of the group. He kept the moneybag, mostly filled by the faithful ministering women of the wandering band. Deceptively he dipped into this amount from time to time. Filling his own coffer was his hidden agenda! Was he madly in love with the glint of silver?

Somehow, the most graceful words, the forgiving love and the life-transforming grace of the Master did not affect this one man. Not in his heart of hearts. He continued to simmer in his own evil egocentric desires. When a woman spent a fortune to buy spikenard and poured it out to anoint the Master, he was aghast. He kept calculating how much he could have stolen from their treasury had she given the money to the Master. He continued to stay with the others, camouflaged as it were.

Till at last an evil hour dawned. Or should we say the darkness became complete? He

plotted with the enemies to betray, yes betray, his own Master. For just a paltry sum: thirty pieces of silver. What an imbalanced barter! The most holy life of all time and space, a sinless life of the Son of God, deemed to be equal to thirty pieces of silver!

At twilight in that gloomy garden, he stealthily led a band of the enemies, the temple police. As the darkness deepened, this group of conspirators entered the Garden of Gethsemane. He led them on till he spied the Master on His knees, pleading with His Father God. The agony and the perspiration of the Lord didn't make any difference to this cruel man. Up he sprang with all the cunning of a fox, only to kiss the dear Master. A sign he had conspired with the enemy band. A kiss, not of love or care, a cruel cold kiss of betrayal!

His name was Judas Iscariot. That was the betrayal of the Lord Jesus Christ, then.

And now?

* * * * *

Dressed in his best clothes, he comes to the Church regularly. He mouths all the prayers and the litany faithfully. He listens half-asleep to the sermon. He greets and meets others after Church service. He is mostly seen with those who are also like him! The so-called mutual admiration clubs as it were! They chat and have a cup of tea. Politics, weather, work woes and traffic hassles form part of their banter. No. They don't ever chat about their spiritual status or how they can extend God's kingdom. Then he goes back and enjoys a sumptuous meal at home.

But then, Monday through Saturday, it is another story. In fact, he is no different from any of his other colleagues. He goes with the



crowd in all his dealings with them. His walk is very different from his Sunday talk. He has a Christian name. And that's how Christian he is. One only in name! The Word of God and the principles in it are not seen in his workplace behavior. Not at all!

His friends wonder about him. "He says he's a Christian. But...how is he different from us?" they muse. "Is being a Christian just a Sunday thing?" There had been no change from inside out in this man's heart. Unfortunately for him, he continued to go to church and through all that routine. But why? Only because it is the 'in thing' to do. He did

not have an internal and personal transformation through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit God has not entered his spirit. As yet. So he remained a Christian on the outside but one who had no metamorphosis.

Week after week, month after month, year after year, he continues to betray the Lord Jesus Christ. Well you know him. He lives just across the road. Doesn't he?

This is betrayal today.

What will you tell him when you meet him at Church tomorrow?



Paintings nonpareil. Some of the World's Famous Paintings depicting 'The Passion Week'

Easter Life: Blot To Beauty

Yashodhra Desappa



We are all born with the 'S' chromosome of sin. Only Cross has the cure for this disease. Christ shed his Blood to blot out our guilt. That is Good Friday's good news. The Cross and the empty tomb, speak of full salvation. Jesus changed our lives from Blot to Beauty.

A lady had a beautiful, valuable handkerchief. But it was ruined by an ink blot. The owner was sad, but took it to a master painter, who made the ugly ink blot the centre of a beautiful design. Yes, we are handkerchiefs, marred by the ink blot of sin. Yet God, by the amazing strategy of Cross, took us ruined sinners and recreated us, to reflect the beauty of Christ's Holiness. Jesus transforms the blot of our sin-stained soul, into a masterpiece of beauty and Grace.

The Resurrection is a multi-layered experience of the presence of Jesus in our lives.

EASTER FAITH: There is a thrill in every story of rescue. Coal miners trapped or a company of soldiers hopelessly outnumbered and rescued. But the most massive rescue was accomplished by none other than God Himself, at the cost of His Son's death. For all who believe on Him the future has changed from death eternal to life everlasting. This is our Easter faith: We have a Saviour (John 3:16).

EASTER HOPE: Christ knows each and everyone of us by name. He cares for us and lays down his life for us. When He returns for us, who are blood-bought and redeemed, it will be a joyous welcome home. In Christ's resurrection we have the ultimate hope. This is our Easter hope: We have a Shepherd (John 10:14).

EASTER JOY: We have a cause for joy as He gives us His joy in our heavenly home. Christ has taken away our sadness and given us joy beyond all gladness. Christ says: "These things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be full." This is our Easter message: We have a Joy-Giver (John 15:11).

EASTER PEACE: We all have our quota of fears, large or small. There is One who calms our fears and reassures us. He could still the wind and heal the sick. Christians do face problems or death but the end will always be a happy and glorious one. True peace comes from a knowledge that all is well between us and God. The Hebrew word 'Shalom' describes the state of being well—whole and complete, lacking nothing. Christ's victory on Easter morning won for us wholeness and completeness as He removed sin that would destroy us. We have security that cannot fail us. When we are bewildered, the resurrected Christ comes and stands beside us, like He did with the disciples and says: "Peace be with you" (John 20:19). Christ assures us: "My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give you" (John 14:27). This is our Easter message: We have a Peace-Giver.

EASTER LIFE: Whether in sorrow, want or loneliness, Jesus is our life. Jesus said, "I am the Resurrection and the life; He who believes in Me, though he may die, yet shall He live" (John 11:25). There is no pain, so sharp as that experienced when we lose a loved one. But, when we lose a loved one in Christ, we know that as Christ conquered death, it will be the victory for our loved one too. The empty chair at the table remains empty, but Easter makes the difference, as we will never



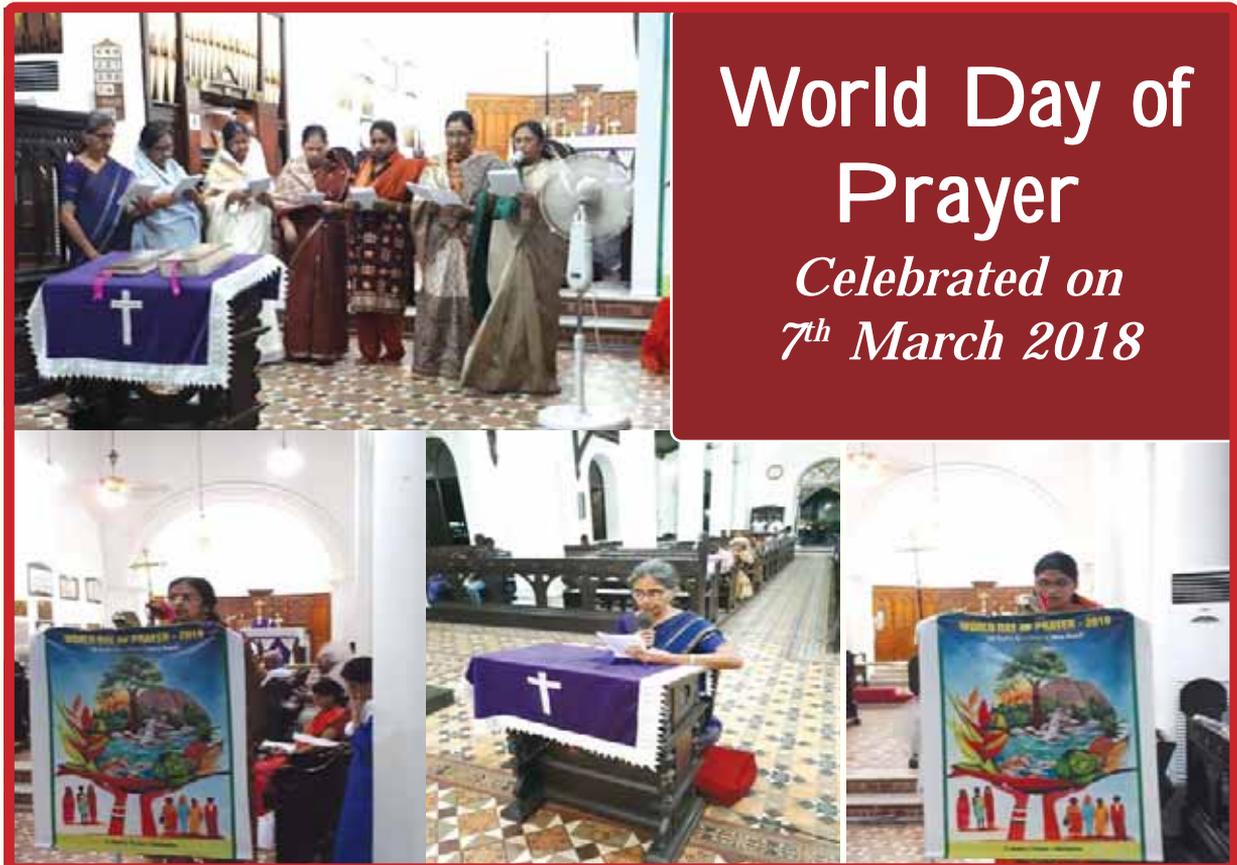
be separated in God's eternal heaven. Likewise, our heavenly father says: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). The people in hell will have a hunger and thirst that will not for all eternity be satisfied. Without Christ, our physical belly may be full but spiritually we will hunger indeed. Besides, our Lord will never forsake us. He assures us in John 14:18: "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you." Loneliness can come in many forms. Yet, when we cling to Christ, our Saviour, we are never alone. If we open our hearts to His gentle knocking, He will never fail us nor forsake us. Our Easter life will be full of His presence. Friends can come and go. Even our loved ones can let us down and turn against us. But nothing in our life can separate us from

the love of Christ Jesus our Saviour, whose Blood cleanses us of all sin. This is our Easter message: He is the Life-Giver (1 John 1-7).

HOW CAN I BE SAVED? All we need is to Accept that we are sinners, Believe He died for us and Confess it with our mouth (Rom. 8-10). This Easter let us invite this Friend and Redeemer Jesus into our lives and be filled and satisfied. Those who die in the Lord having accepted Him as Saviour are found in His presence.

Our Easter faith will sustain us through life, through death and into eternity.

PRAYER: May our ears hear the Resurrected Lord, may our eyes see the Resurrected Lord and our tongue speak the Resurrection Message. In Jesus' name. Amen.



World Day of Prayer

*Celebrated on
7th March 2018*

He Was, Is And Will Be With Me!

Keerthana Lydia



The heart wants what it wants!
The soul screams for what it has been shunned!
The mind wanders in search of blood!
Where are You, Thou who has created me?
He said: Ask and it shall be given...
He said: Talk to Me, you will be My priority and will give you all My time...
When you are sad, happy, lonely, popular, blank with no thoughts, mind full of ideas,
hated, loved—whenever you think is perfect, talk to Me, please talk to Me!
He said: I will do anything for you.

And then;

He died **FOR ME**

He was insulted **FOR ME**

He was hurt **FOR ME**

On the Cross—just for me!

Then I asked Him:

Will You remember my past?

Will You haunt me with fears?

Will You forgive me?

Will You corner me for my mistakes?

Will You bare my drama and mood swings?

Will You remove my pain?

He said again: You promise to never leave Me and I will give you more than you DREAM,
more than you WANT and more than you DESIRE.

And now,

Oh how I love His presence!

How I enjoy His care!

How I float in His love!

I and He, we were one for each other.

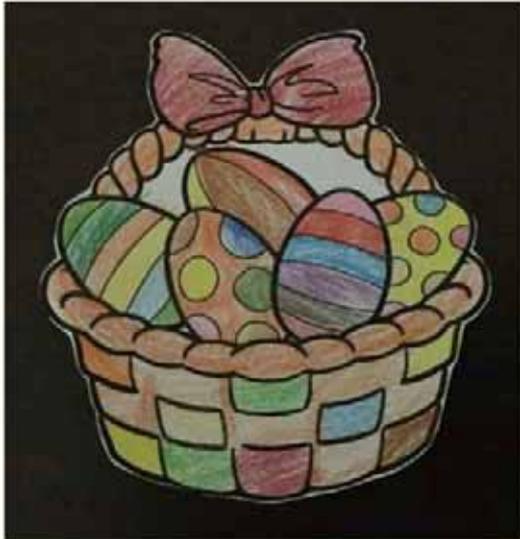
He kept all His promises, like He said, on the third day He was raised
And you know what, we still talk to each other, we bless each other, we pray together for others.
He did not get vanished but He is here among us, even while I was writing this and while
you are reading this!

Do me a favor, will you? Thank Him for keeping secrets, forgiving, loving, caring and yet
keeping all His promises word by word and forever.

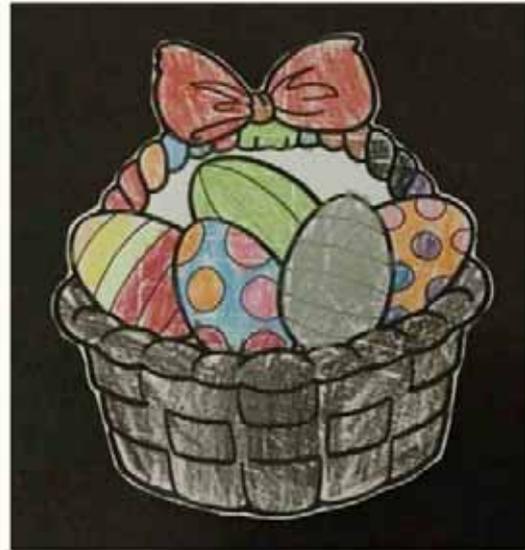


Little Voices...

The Easter Egg Basket (Beginners' Class)

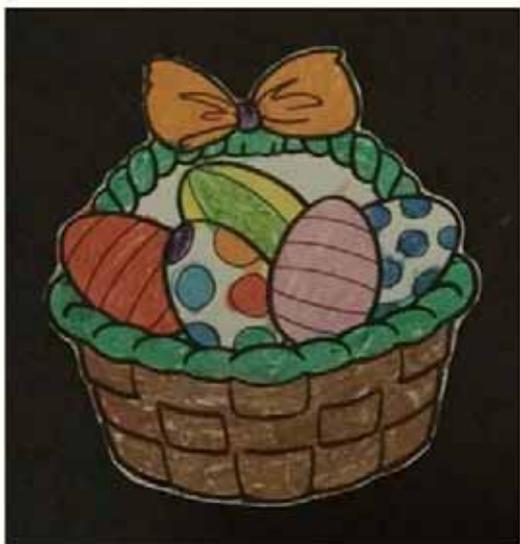


**Aniah-5 yrs
I prize**



**Anya -5 yrs
II prize**

In many cultures around the world, egg is a symbol of new life. For Christians, the Easter egg is symbolic of the resurrection of Christ. The beginners' group (aged 2-5) was given the task of coloring an Easter egg basket. It was indeed 'egg-citing' for the kids!



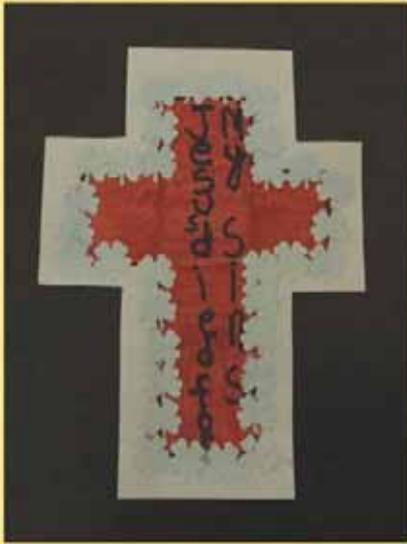
**Shourya-5 yrs
III prize**



**Ashton -5 yrs
Consolation prize**

The Cross

(Primary Class)



Jeffrey Matthew-8yrs
I Prize



Vivian-8yrs
II Prize

The Cross, an instrument used for the crucifixion of Christ, is the best known symbol of christianity. The primary children (aged 6-9) were given the task of decorating the Cross. The children took up their 'Cross' and carried through!



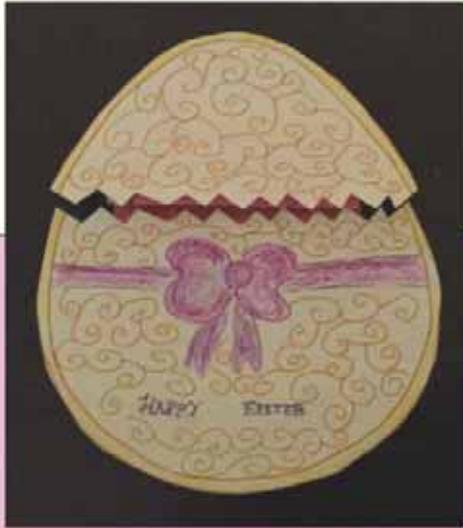
Jane Andrew-9 yrs
III Prize



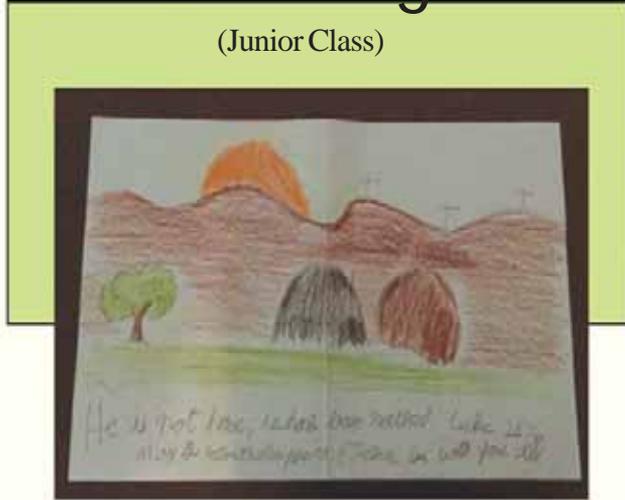
Joanna Siriki-6 yrs
Consolation Prize



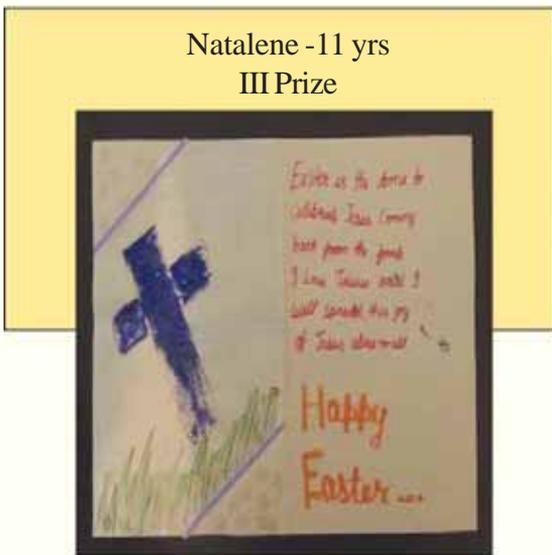
Easter Greeting Cards



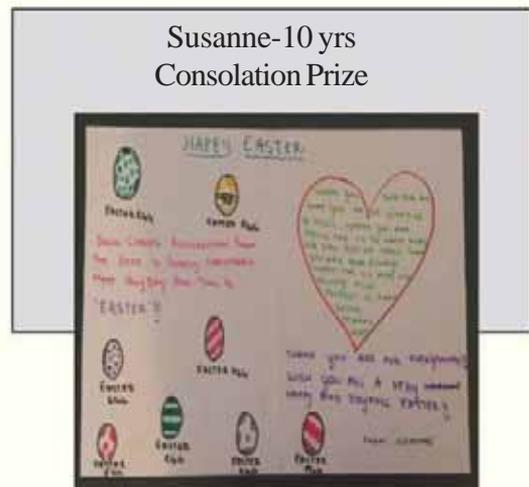
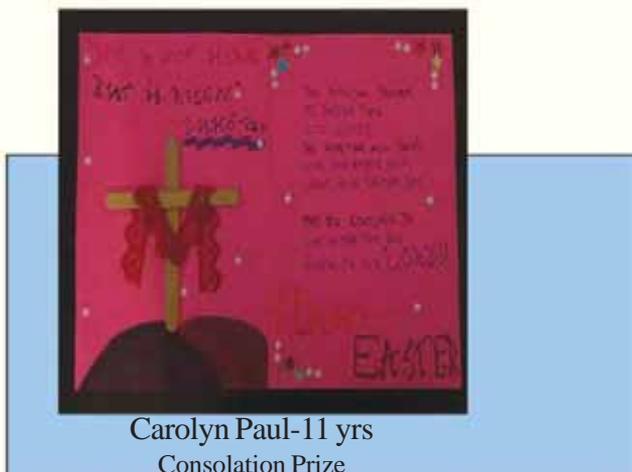
Rhea Abraham-12yrs
I Prize



Immanuel-11yrs
II Prize

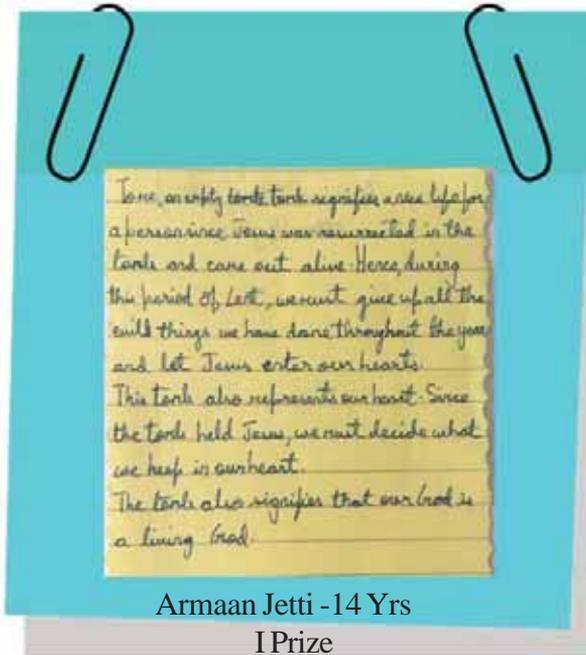


Easter is truly a time of celebration. Juniors (aged 10-12) were asked to make greeting cards celebrating Easter. Who knows these cards may revive the good old tradition of exchanging greeting cards!

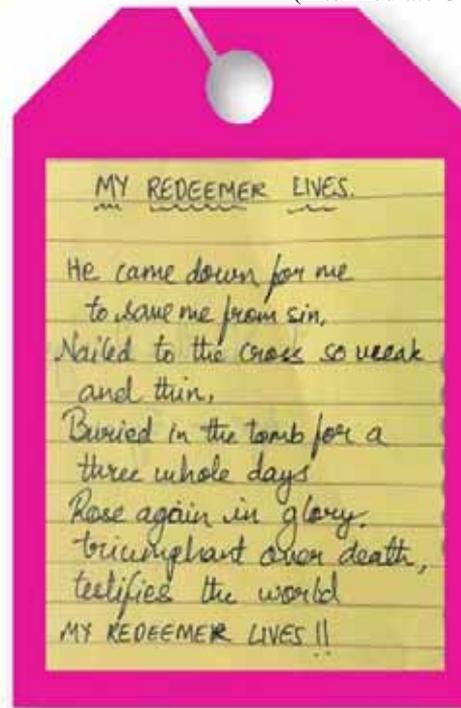


The Empty Tomb

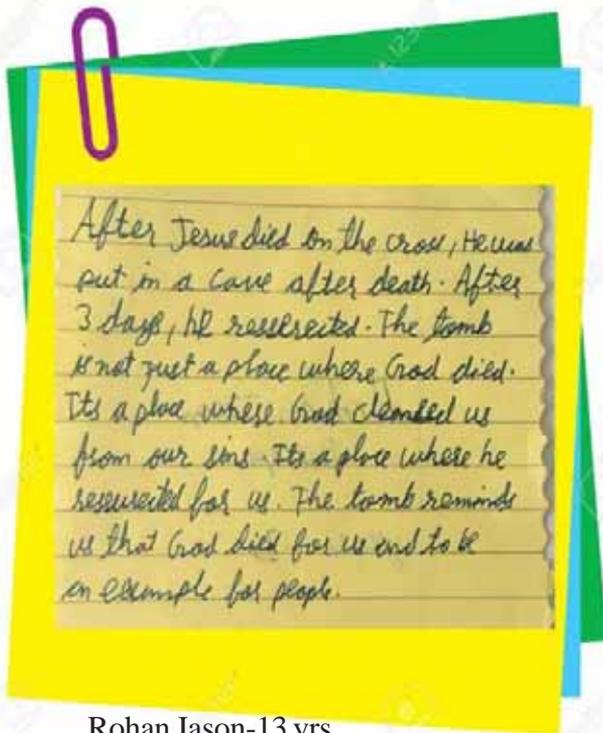
(Intermediate Class)



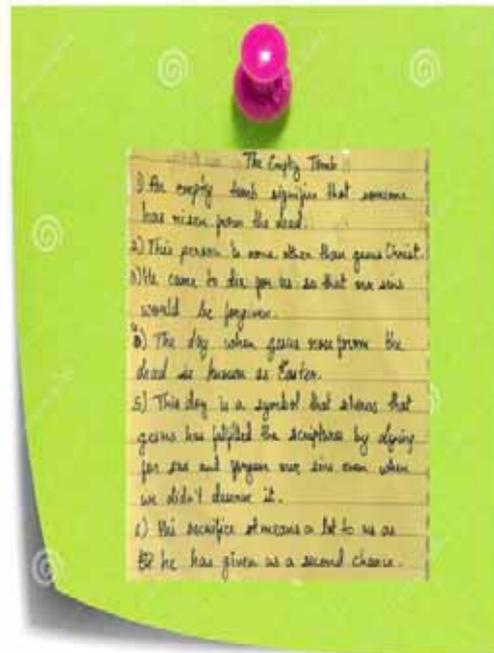
Armaan Jetty - 14 Yrs
I Prize



Nikitha Sherlyn-15yrs
II Prize



Rohan Jason-13 yrs
III Prize



Leonard Jay Reddy-12 yrs
Consolation Prize

The empty tomb is symbolic of Christ's victory over death. The Intermediate children (aged 13-15) were shown the picture of an empty tomb and asked to briefly write what it signifies. Their thoughts on the empty tomb appear to reflect the fullness of their young minds!



Up from the Grave He Arose

(Prize - Winning Essay)

'Up from the grave he arose' Jennifer Hadassah
Senior
He rolled the stone away from the tomb - ^{16 years}
Matthew 28:2

The first thing that comes to my mind when I read the title is that of the song 'Christ arose' which was written by Robert Lowry.

As a child, every Easter morning, I would minimize the song as it was sung in church. The tomb got rolled away and Jesus rose with a mighty triumph. What is the resurrection of Christ? I think we all know the answer to that when Jesus rose from the dead physically, something so great and marvelous, something that history has never seen before. It is the greatest miracle of all time. God sent his only son Jesus Christ, who came down to earth, to die on the cross for us, for all our sins. He conquered sin, death and evil, and he always knew his purpose of being born in this world as the gospel of Luke 24:46 says, he told them, 'The Christ will suffer and rise from the death on the third day'. On the third day we witness the wonder of the tomb being broken open and that the word, our salvation is risen indeed! The word has saved us! But wait, it still depends on us whether we believe in him for then we are truly resurrected in Christ. John 11:25-26 says 'Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"'

Jennifer Hadassah - 16 yrs
Senior Class



*Wish You
A Blessed Easter*



Church of St John the Baptist

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