



## **"The Greatest Story Ever Told"**

Resurrection of Our Lord – Easter Day  
Sunday, April 21, 2019

All Services

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Acts 10:34-43; Luke 24:1-12

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

### **Christ is Risen, He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

The week before Easter in 1965 a movie was released entitled **The Greatest Story Ever Told**, retelling the life of Jesus. The cast was a parade of famous actors and actresses of the day.

Max Von Sidow as Jesus, a good Swedish Jesus just like our Scandinavian, mid-western Lutheran brothers and sisters always imagined Jesus to be.

And Charlton Heston, the same guy who played Moses in the **Ten Commandments**, this time going New Testament, as John the Baptist, "Repent! Repent! Prepare ye the way of the Lord." Wasn't bad, right?

Telly Savalas, bald headed Kojak of the 1970's as Pontius Pilate "Who loves ya, Jesus. Ya beautiful."

And John Wayne in a small role as a Centurion at the foot of the cross. Urban legend has it that director George Stevens told the famous cowboy western actor to say his lines with a sense of "awe." To which the Duke happily obliged giving his line "Awe, truly this man was the son of Gawd."

The story of Jesus, his life, death and resurrection have captivated millions over the centuries. And the Evangelist Luke, who writes both the gospel and the Book of Acts telling us about the history of the early church is a story teller. Actually, he is a story recorder who tells the story as a historian. In his gospels first verses he writes, "Since many have undertaken to set down and orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed." **"So that you may know the truth"**

Luke is not writing fiction, he is writing history, and he makes that clear. He is investigating the incidents and the stories. He's interviewing the eyewitnesses who

participated in those incidences. He is pondering the evidence. And he's drawing a conclusion based on those eyewitnesses and the evidence. And it is an important story for Luke to tell his 1<sup>st</sup> century Christian community as they await Jesus' return, and as they also face an increasingly hostile world to the faith that they proclaimed. Kind of sounds familiar to our own age.

But it does make a great story! Easter after all is filled with drama. It's early dawn when it's dark, a mysterious time of the day when things are just beginning to come into focus with just the least amount of light. There is a building tension, they **found** that the stone was rolled away, but they did not **find** the body. And then there are the men in dazzling clothes, the Greek word there literally means "like lightening", it's the kind of light that you have to shield your eyes from. And the women are terrified, but their fear is met with comfort and an important reminder.

"Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Three times before in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus predicted his passion, his dying and his rising.

And upon receiving the news of Jesus' resurrection, they share it with the apostles. And that is an interesting word choice for Luke, it literally means ambassadors, or one who is sent to carry a message. The women at the tomb "apostle" the apostles, they share the message of Christ's resurrection.

So, what makes this story great? What makes it the greatest story ever told?

Well certainly it has the elements of a great STORY. It's packed with action, it has intriguing characters, interesting settings, thought provoking plot, the conflict between characters and a resolution of that conflict. It is a story the church and the followers of Jesus have been telling for centuries.

Modern author Sue Monk Kidd tells us. Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here."

The Apostle Paul tells us, "If Christ has not been raised then our proclamation is in vain and your faith is in vain."

The Easter story must be told, again and again and again. It informs who we are and why we're here.

Jesus takes away the sins of the world. All of our baggage, all of our regrets, our fears, our mistakes, all of our screw ups are wiped away. His death and resurrection means something and it does something. The darkness that we experience in life gives way to his holy life-giving light.

As the first century bishop of Rome, St. Clement said, "The Lord has turned all our sunsets into sunrise."

Death is defeated. The problems and pains, the sickness and suffering, death and disease will never have the final word in your or my life. Christ is risen! He lives for you and for me forever.

And this Easter story is a message of the undying love of God. Historians tell us by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century there were more than 500,000 Christians. By the end of year 300 the Church grew ten times to 5 million, by year 1000, 70 million. And today there are over 2 billion Christians throughout the world with the largest numbers of new Christians coming from Asia and Africa. Telling the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection led to the church's growth. Your Christian life is defined by **this** story. Theologians even use a special word, *Kerygma*, it's the core of Christian preaching for over 2000 years. And it is quite simple. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

As we live in Christian community, we are shaped by this community story. We become a part of the story, and it becomes a part of us which in turn shapes the community. The story gives us meaning. It shapes our lives and offers us hope and helps us to remember who we are and why we're here. And what you do and say, now you live and serve, how you care and respond to that story matters.

Never settle for disappointment or regret. Never settle for fear or inaction. Never settle for just being good enough or nice enough. Stop looking for the dead rather than the living. Be amazed at this greatest story told by the women at the tomb, recounted by saints and sinners for over 100 generations.

This message was shared and proclaimed from Jerusalem to the farthest ends of the Roman empire. It's been shared from the capitals of the greatest nations to the backwater towns that no one remembers any more. It's spread in times of plenty and scarcity, in freedom and in persecution.

The Christian family called the church shares this faith. This resurrection faith shares the joy of the life that Jesus offers us for all people. Shares all that it proclaims, freedom, forgiveness, healing, grace, mercy, strength, love, joy!

We are part of the greatest story ever told. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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