

INTRODUCTION

Jesus' statements that he would rise from the dead had no effect on his disciples. They did not understand or believe him. After he was buried his disciples kept together but without hope. The women prepared spices to anoint the body. The gospels take the story from there.

THE WOMEN

- The women showed more devotion to Jesus than his apostles did. That is what the risen Christ focused on rather than their unbelief. Their attempt to anoint him was of no practical value, it was just an act of devotion.
- On their way to the tomb they discussed the problem they face - "Who will roll the stone away?" Love for God will prompt us to act even though the difficulties seem insuperable.
- On arrival at the tomb they faced a second problem - the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty. Refusing to believe Christ always leads us into difficulty but his mercy overcomes all.

THE GUARDS

- The gospel writer takes us back in time and tells what happened just before they arrived. The stone was sealed, and guards had been posted.
- Heaven involved itself. There was an earthquake and an appeared, rolling away the stone and sitting on it. Although the women were afraid it was nothing to the terror that took hold of the guards. There was no "Fear not" spoken to them. They belonged to Christ's defeated enemy and there was no place for them. They were struck down with terror and fled once they recovered. It is a picture of what will happen when Christ returns in his Father's glory and with the holy angels.

FIRST MESSAGE

- To begin with the women failed to recognise resurrection glory, they only dawn an empty tomb. And when God's messenger appeared they were afraid. That often happens when God works in a person's life.
- The angel began by reassuring them. They were followers of Jesus so they had nothing to fear.
- The angel challenged them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" It was a rebuke to their unbelief and it emphasised that life belongs to Christ. He reminded them of Christ's words and invited to consider the emptiness of the tomb. That reminds us that we have Christ's words even if we do not have his comforting presence. And it suggests we should contemplate the weakness of death - it could not hold him so it cannot hold those who belong to him.
- This was a message of comfort from the Father to Christ's followers. He overlooked his children's failings and dealt tenderly with them. Our comfort comes from believing the Christ is risen and all the implications of that.
- While Mary Magdalene was away telling the apostles Jesus appeared to them. He told them to rejoice and repeated the angel's message making special mention of Simon Peter.

SECOND MESSAGE

- The presence of a heavenly messenger gave glory to the scene and authority to the message. The angel was also honoured by being chosen for this task.
- The angel gave the women a message to take to the apostles. They were to "go and tell". Christian faith is the result of evidence and is supported by experience.
- Jesus is risen from the dead. He is alive for evermore. The sin he bore on the cross is gone and it can never kill again.
- God is at work. He has not left humanity to perish. He has overcome death and has given us a living Saviour.
- Jesus is the Son of God. The Father has vindicated his claims. Now we look forward to the rest of his work being completed - God's kingdom, the resurrection, Judgement Day, and heaven and hell.
- Because he has put sin away forgiveness can be obtained through him.
- The proper and sensible response is to receive him, turn away from what is sinful, and serve him in faith and love.

MARY MAGDALENE

- Mary Magdalene was an outstanding example of those women. Motivated by the love of God but hindered by unbelief she ran to the apostles with a false message before the angel appeared to the others.
- That brought Peter and John but they only saw the grave clothes and left. She seemed so distressed the appearance of angels did not seem to trouble her. We must bear with many faults in a person who is distressed.
- The messengers fell silent for Jesus was about to speak. He asked her why she was weeping? She did not recognise him but told him of her loss. That was enough to make Jesus identify himself to her.
- He told her not to cling to him for he must go bodily into heaven. She was given the message about his impending ascension.
- Christ overlooked her mistakes and showed her his grace.