



**THE
WONDROUS
CROSS**

*Reflections on Christ's
Sacrifice Drawn from the
Songs and Hymns of Easter*

2022

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

Each of the articles in this resource reflects on a piece of music to explore the meaning of the Cross and the Resurrection.



You can find links to these songs and more at [MoreCT.com/EasterPlaylist](https://www.morect.com/EasterPlaylist). You can also use this scannable Spotify code to listen to the songs.

Every article concludes with a short Scripture reading and questions to guide your prayer and contemplation of God's Word.

Our **Bible Study Guide** (pp. 54–61) contains eight study sessions that you can use on your own or with a small group to dig more deeply into the biblical passages and theological ideas explored in each article.

This devotional guide is designed to be flexible. You can read through the articles at your own pace during Lent or the Easter season, or you could use this as an eight-week Bible study at any time of year.

To use during Lent or Easter, consider one of these suggested schedules:

LENT

8-Week Study Plan

1

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 27 | ASH WEDNESDAY
The Cross Is the Great Revealer

2

WEEK OF MARCH 6
'Tis Mystery All!

3

WEEK OF MARCH 13
Love Unswerving

4

WEEK OF MARCH 20
Our Bloody Plunging

5

WEEK OF MARCH 27
Weighing Our Answers

6

WEEK OF APRIL 3
In Grief, Our Consolation

7

WEEK OF APRIL 10 | HOLY WEEK
Love's Redeeming Work Is Done

8

WEEK OF APRIL 17 | EASTER
The Resurrection to Come

HOLY WEEK

8-Day Study Plan

APRIL 11
The Cross Is the Great Revealer

APRIL 12
'Tis Mystery All!

APRIL 13
Love Unswerving

APRIL 14 | MAUNDY THURSDAY
Our Bloody Plunging

APRIL 15 | GOOD FRIDAY
Weighing Our Answers

APRIL 16 | HOLY SATURDAY
In Grief, Our Consolation

APRIL 17 | EASTER SUNDAY
Love's Redeeming Work Is Done

APRIL 18
The Resurrection to Come

EASTER SEASON

8-Week Study Plan

WEEK OF APRIL 10 | HOLY WEEK
The Cross Is the Great Revealer

WEEK OF APRIL 17 | EASTER SUNDAY
'Tis Mystery All!

WEEK OF APRIL 24
Love Unswerving

WEEK OF MAY 1
Our Bloody Plunging

WEEK OF MAY 8
Weighing Our Answers

WEEK OF MAY 15
In Grief, Our Consolation

WEEK OF MAY 22
Love's Redeeming Work Is Done

WEEK OF MAY 29
The Resurrection to Come

SEE FROM
SORROW HIS HEAD,
AND LOVE

**THE CROSS IS THE
GREAT REVEALER**

JAY Y. KIM

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
by Isaac Watts

HIS HANDS, HIS
FLOW, MINGLED
FEET DOWN.

WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

*Originally called "Crucifixion to the World
by the Death of Christ" | Isaac Watts*

to live more fully into the hopeful, eternal story unfolding in the present and awaiting us in the future.

Reflecting on the death of her father, Flannery O'Connor wrote in her journal, "The reality of death has come upon us and a consciousness of the power of God has broken our complacency like a bullet in the side." This is why Ash Wednesday is so powerful: We're reminded not only of our certain demise but also, maybe more importantly, of what *truly* matters.

We're reminded that all of this—delights and pleasures, life and breath—is ephemeral. It's all *hevel*, in the language of the Ecclesiastical poet—vapor, mist, here and then gone. This is the gift we receive when we survey the Cross—the gift of an impeccable scale by which to measure, with precision and perspective, our values system, to consider what truly matters and what doesn't.

My friend Gerry Breshears has spent decades pouring his life into church leaders as a seminary professor and as a pastor to pastors. This past fall, Gerry was diagnosed with cancer, not his first go around. He updated friends and family on this news with this reminder: "Jesus is in the present, look for Him. . . . He is easy to miss." Though the future can seem chock-full of what ifs, in reality, the Cross has already written and finished the story. We know how this ends.

Gerry's steadiness amid suffering comes from his cross-shaped vision for all of life and eternity—a vision I long to grasp and embody myself. It's a vision acquired only and always through a deep and consistent contemplation of the Cross. It's a vision that reveals to us that the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ is here, now,

with us, guiding us toward a future where there are no more tears, death, mourning, crying, or pain (Rev. 21:4).

In the words of Paul in Romans 14:8–9, "If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living." There is no fear, no anxiety, no doom and gloom. The Cross has erased all of that—this ancient instrument of death that has now become our great emblem of life and life to the full, both now and forever.

The poet George Herbert described how time (and mortality) was once "an executioner" but in light of Christ's coming, "Thou art a gard'ner now." We look upon the cross because it declares that death has been disarmed; it is no longer an executioner, ending our stories, but rather a gardener, tilling the fertile soil from which resurrection life rises. As we survey the wondrous cross, we come to know ever more deeply that "It is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. It is only the end of the beginning." **CT**

READ GALATIANS 6:14.

In your own words, what does it mean to *survey* the Cross? To *boast in* the Cross? How does the Cross put the rest of earthly life into perspective?



LIVES
 IS KING, ALLELUIA!
 DYING NOW, AGAIN
 SAVE, ALL EULIA!
 THY VICTORY NO GRAVE?
 ALL EULIA!
 OUR GLORIOUS
 WHERE O DEATH,
 SING? ALLELUIA!
 HE ALL DO THY

**LOVE'S REDEEMING
 WORK IS DONE**

JEN WILKIN

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today
 by Charles Wesley

In the First United Methodist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, Easter brought no surprises. The liturgy, combined with a music director devoted to replicating the same service year after year, meant that my childhood memories of church on Easter Sunday would look virtually identical to those of my step-mother from 25 years earlier and those of her mother before her. If you craved novelty, you had better find it in your Easter basket. Once you entered the carved doors of the sanctuary, the service would proceed by rote. And gloriously so.

The same Easter lily procession, the same redolent scent of those white blooms, the same vestments and banners, the same congregational greeting and response (“He is risen!” “He is risen, indeed!”), the same sermon text, the same doxology and benediction. And the same hymns.

I have not worshiped in a liturgical church nigh on these 35 years. Novelty

is the norm in my Easter gatherings, but each Easter my heart still wakes with the notes of Charles Wesley’s “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” surging through my memory.

Hymn No. 302 in the *United Methodist Hymnal* is as much a sermon as a song, a poetic exposition of the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians. Though the version I grew up singing had only six verses, the original contained a full 11. Eleven verses to extol the risen Christ, now ascended to the right hand of God.

It is often noted that Charles Wesley wrote over 6,500 hymns in his lifetime, but he also preached extensively. His was a mind and heart saturated in the truth of the Scriptures. Typical to form, his best-known Easter hymn is not merely musical; it is deeply theological. It preaches not just the Resurrection but also the doctrines of original sin, atonement, union with Christ, justification, sanctification, and glorification. And it does so with elegant rhyme, meter, and melody.

Of all its stanzas, the words that arrest me most are these:

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting?
Alleluia!

Dying once he all doth save, Alleluia!
Where’s thy victory, O grave? Alleluia!

The third verse. The one where the thrum and clarion of the organ fall silent, and the unadorned voices of the congregation swell into the rafters. Wesley skillfully paraphrases 1 Corinthians 15:55, layering in a truth from Romans 6:10: “The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.” One efficacious death for all sin. One cruel death to remove the sting of death. One victorious death to end the victorious reign of death over humanity. One death to crush once for all Eden’s lisping lie of *You will not surely die*.

An ancient liturgy, repeated century after century, was at last culminating in its glorious fulfillment.

Where thy victory, O grave? Where thy sting, O death? The words Paul quotes from the prophet Hosea speak to the hope of the good news of Easter. But we sing them in a world that indeed reels under the sting of death, and in which, by all appearances, the grave still triumphs. Through tears, tight-chested, we bury those old and full of years, those born without breath, and those with years cut short by illness or violence, by accident or natural disaster, or even—God help us—by hopelessness itself.

When Wesley penned his great hymn in 1739, it was no different. If anything, daily awareness of death’s dominion was even greater. Wesley himself was born the 18th of 19 children, 10 of whom did not survive to adulthood. He buried five of his own eight children in infancy. He lived during a time in which the average life expectancy was a mere 37 years. The prevalence of poor nutrition and infectious disease meant those who lived past adolescence would likely experience the loss of young loved ones multiple times over.

And when loved ones died, they died at home. Only fairly recently in human history has death and its physical aftermath become a process that occurs elsewhere, relatively out of sight. Home was both the setting for death and the setting for burial customs. The “laying-out” of the body took place in the home, as did the wake. Long after the funeral procession to the churchyard, the sting of death would have lingered, readily associated with the very rooms in which daily life took place.

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Use these questions on your own for personal study and prayer or as a guide for group discussion.

STUDY 1

THE CROSS IS THE GREAT REVEALER

pp. 6–11

- Which phrase or line in “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” most draws your attention? Why?
- “Crucifixion to the World by the Death of Christ” was the original title Isaac Watts gave his hymn. How do you see that theme running throughout the lyrics?
- Read **Galatians 2:20** and **6:14**. What do you think Paul meant here? How do these verses challenge you personally?
- In preparation for Easter, many Christians reflect on their own mortality. Read **Psalms 90:12** and **Romans 14:8–9**. Jay Y. Kim writes that Psalm 90:12 is “a call to reckon with our own limitations and the finitude of this life.” Why is learning to “number our days” an important Christian practice? How can it aid in discipleship?
- Kim says, “This is the gift we receive when we survey the Cross—the gift of an impeccable scale by which to measure . . . our values system, to consider what truly matters and what doesn’t.” How does contemplating the Cross challenge your current priorities?
- Read **Romans 5:6–8**. Watts’s hymn declares, “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.” How do you desire to respond to Jesus?

STUDY 2

’TIS MYSTERY ALL!

pp. 12–17

Consider listening to or singing the songs as part of your prayerful reflection and worship. You can find links to the songs and more at [MoreCT.com/EasterPlaylist](https://www.morect.com/EasterPlaylist).

- J. Todd Billings points out that the refrain of “And Can It Be” is often “so familiar that we may struggle to see how utterly shocking it is.” How would you summarize what’s so shocking about it in your own words?
- Read **Colossians 1:15–23** and **Hebrews 1:1–3; 2:9–10, 14–17**. How do you see the mystery Charles Wesley points to expressed in these passages? Specifically, what do they say about Christ’s deity and power? About his humanity and death?
- How do these passages enrich your personal contemplation of the Cross?
- Read **Mark 10:35–45**. While James and John were focused on attaining glory, Billings writes, Jesus “countered by telling them how his whole life, as the true Messiah and King, is shaped by a cross-formed love.” What do you imagine Jesus’ followers thought when they first heard this? What’s your response as you ponder this statement today?
- Beyond the theological mystery Wesley’s song explores, there’s also a strong note of personal wonder: “Amazing love!” that God would die “for me!” What is amazing about God’s love for you?
- What’s one phrase or line from the song that stands out to you most as you consider your response to the amazing, mysterious love of God? Why?

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