

The Easter Vigil
(Year C)

<i>First Reading</i>	Genesis 1:1-2:2
<i>Response</i>	Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 104:1-2, 5-6, 10, 12, 13-14, 24, 35
<i>Second Reading</i>	Genesis 22:1-18
<i>Response</i>	You are my inheritance, O Lord.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 16:5, 8, 9-10, 11
<i>Third Reading</i>	Exodus 14:15-15:1
<i>Response</i>	Let us sing to the Lord; he has covered himself in glory.
<i>Psalm</i>	Exodus 15:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 17-18
<i>Fourth Reading</i>	Isaiah 54:5-14
<i>Response</i>	I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13
<i>Fifth Reading</i>	Isaiah 55:1-11
<i>Response</i>	You will draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation.
<i>Psalm</i>	Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6
<i>Sixth Reading</i>	Baruch 3:9-15, 32C4:4
<i>Response</i>	Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11
<i>Seventh Reading</i>	Ezekiel 36:16-17A, 18-28
<i>Response (w/ Baptism)</i>	Like a deer that longs for running streams, my soul longs for you, my God.
<i>Psalm (w/ Baptism)</i>	Psalm 42:3, 5; 43:3, 4
<i>Response (w/o Baptism)</i>	You will draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation.
<i>Psalm (w/o Baptism)</i>	Isaiah 12:2-3, 4BCD, 5-6
<i>Epistle</i>	Romans 6:3-11
<i>Gospel</i>	Luke 24:1-12

Happy Easter everyone! Today is the celebration of the feast of all feasts. It's the greatest day of the liturgical year, and that is the feast of what in Latin is known as *pascha* (or Passover), and in English, which we call Easter. It's the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. Everything that we've been doing through the season of Lent has led up to this moment and so now we're going to open up the scriptures and open up the mysteries of Christ's passion, death and (the climax) his Resurrection. On Easter Sunday there are lots of different options we could take. We could look at some of the readings for the mass of the daytime during Easter Sunday, but the real central liturgy that I'd like to focus on is on the Easter Vigil, and on the readings from the Easter Vigil. And if you've ever been to an Easter Vigil, you know that it is (at least in my opinion) the most powerful, most solemn of all the services, of all the masses of the liturgical year. And one of the most striking things you'll notice about it is just how many readings there are from Sacred Scripture. So ordinarily, we would have one reading from the Old Testament, one Responsorial Psalm, a New Testament reading and then a Gospel. But on the Easter Vigil, the Church actually gives us seven Old Testament readings to choose from (you don't have to all of them, that's up to the discretion of the priest as to whether all seven are done) but, then we also move into (of course) the second reading, where we focus on the Resurrection, and then the Gospel. Now because we're in Year C right now, the gospel is going to be taken from the Gospel of Luke, so the reading will be from the account of the Resurrection in Luke's gospel. But every year, the first seven readings from the Old Testament remain the same. So because in Year A and Year B, I've focused on the sacrifice of Isaac or the creation of the world in the book of Genesis, in this video what I'd like to do is just focus our attention (for reasons of space) on the third reading from the Easter vigil before we then move into the gospel account of the Resurrection. That is the famous account of the crossing of the Red Sea in the book of Exodus, the famous story of the deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh in Egypt. So, I don't know about you, but in the past I've wondered, "what does the crossing of the Red Sea have to do with the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead? Why does the Church choose this reading for the seven special readings of the Easter vigil?" So what we'll do is we're going to read it, we'll look at it, and then I'll answer that question, and we'll make some connections with the living tradition before we turn to the Resurrection and the gospel itself.

So, the third reading (for the series of Old Testament readings for Easter vigil) is from the book of Exodus 14:15 and following, and this is what it says:

The LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. Lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go on dry ground through the sea. And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

Then the angel of God who went before the host of Israel moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness; and the night passed without one coming near the other all night. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

The Egyptians pursued, and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down upon the host of the Egyptians, and discomfited the host of the Egyptians, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel; for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." So Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its wonted flow when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled into it, and the LORD routed the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen and all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not so much as one of them remained. But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. And Israel saw the great work which the LORD did against the Egyptians, and

the people feared the LORD; and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying, "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.¹

If you've ever been to a vigil (for example) where these first readings are read in the dark (which some churches will do), this is a very dramatic reading. It's a striking account of the famous crossing of the Red Sea. If you've ever seen Cecil B. DeMille's famous movie, *The Ten Commandments*, the visual depiction of the crossing of the Red Sea is really one of the most unforgettable parts of that movie and it's one of the most unforgettable parts of the Old Testament — this miraculous passage through the Red Sea in which not only the Israelites saved, but the chariots and charioteers of Pharaoh are destroyed, and if you're listening to this reading during the vigil mass, you're going to hear that refrain over and over again. "Pharaoh's chariots and charioteers, chariots and charioteers" - the triumph over and the destruction of the enemies of Israel in the waters of the Red Sea. And so, the question that I raised at the beginning that you might have, "Ok, this is all very dramatic, it's very fascinating, but why are we reading this on the Easter Vigil? What does it have to do with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ?" Well there are two answers to that. First, it's important to remember that throughout the Lenten season (as I've said before), the Old Testament readings are chosen according to the principle of Salvation History. In other words, they're meant to teach you (to remind you, to call to memory) the various moments: creation, the call of Abraham, the sacrifice of Isaac, that punctuate the history of the salvation of Israel in the Old Testament, and then of course as a prefiguration of the salvation of the Church in the New Testament.

So in this case, on the one hand, the seven readings for the Easter Vigil walk us through salvation history once again. So the first reading is the six days of creation (the mystery of creation). The second reading is the call of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, so you've got his role in salvation history as the father of faith. The third one is the exodus from Egypt, so that moves us down a little further into salvation his-

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

tory to the time of Moses. And then you get into the prophecies from the book of Isaiah about the future marriage of Israel and God in this divine wedding between the Lord as the bridegroom and Israel as the bride, all the way down to the book of Ezekiel's prophecy (which is the final reading) of how one day God's going to make a new covenant with his people and sprinkle us with clean water and give us a new heart and a new spirit that he would put within us. So it's a kind of overview of salvation history as well as the beginning of the books of the prophets that are pointing forward to what God is going to accomplish through the new covenant, in the new age of salvation, that will dawn with the coming of Jesus Christ.

Now in this case, the reading of the crossing of the Red Sea has been utilized since ancient times as a prefiguration of the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death that is accomplished in the waters of baptism. So, the second reason (that I mentioned) that these scriptures are chosen for Old Testament readings throughout Lent is the preparation of catechumens for receiving the Sacraments of Initiation into the Church: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. And in this case, the crossing of the Red Sea (since ancient times) has been used as a type of the mystery of baptism. So because Easter Vigil is the premiere night on which converts into the church receive the sacrament of baptism, the Church has seen fit to put this reading, which prefigures baptism, as one of the central readings of the Old Testament for the day. Now you might be thinking, "What does the crossing of the Red Sea have to do with baptism? I mean, I get it, right? Water, and water, there's water in one case, there's water in another case. But what's the typology at work there?" Well, in order to show how the Church has interpreted this passage, I'd like to share with you a reflection from one of my favorite saints. It's St. Cyril of Jerusalem. This is a little book called *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*. St. Cyril was the bishop of Jerusalem in the 4th Century A.D. He was not just a holy man (an orthodox Christian writer), he's also one of the Doctors of the Church (one of the 36 Doctors of the Church). And for me, he's one of my favorite early Church Fathers. If you want to start reading the early Church Fathers but you don't want to get overwhelmed by some of the more philosophical or speculative or difficult writings among them, start with St. Cyril of Jerusalem's book on the sacraments. Because what St. Cyril gave us was a series of lectures that he actually gave to catechumens, to people who were coming into the Church in Jerusalem in the 4th Century A.D., and explaining to them the articles of the creed, as well as each of the sacraments that they were either about to receive or that they had already received (because the catechesis would continue on). This kind of catechesis was called mystagogy. It meant you would lead the person into the mystery of the sacrament

that they had experienced. *Mysterion* in Greek means “mystery”, *Agogue* is from the Greek word “to lead”, so “to lead someone into the mysteries.” And so what they would do (even in the ancient Church) is read from the book of Exodus, and they saw the crossing of the Red Sea as a type of what happens in baptism. So I want you to listen to this ancient Catholic interpretation of this reading for today (with reference to baptism).

St. Cyril of Jerusalem said this to the converts to the Church in the 4th Century Jerusalem during Easter season:

First you entered into the vestibule of the Baptistery, and there facing towards the West you listened to the command to stretch forth your hand, and as *in the presence of Satan you renounced him*. Now ye must know that *this figure is found in ancient history*. For when Pharaoh, that most bitter and cruel tyrant, was oppressing the free and high-born people of the Hebrews, God sent Moses to bring them out of the evil bondage of the Egyptians... The enemy, however, after their rescue, pursued after them, and saw the sea wondrously parted for them; nevertheless he went on, following close in their footsteps, and was all at once overwhelmed and engulfed in the Red Sea. *Now turn from the old to the new, from the figure to the reality*. There we have Moses sent from God to Egypt; here, Christ, sent forth from His Father into the world: there, that Moses might lead forth an afflicted people out of Egypt; here, that Christ might rescue those who are oppressed in the world under sin... *there, the tyrant was pursuing that ancient people even to the sea; and here the daring and shameless spirit, the author of evil, was following you even to the very streams of salvation. The tyrant of old was drowned in the sea; and this present one disappears in the water of salvation.*²

So notice what Cyril’s doing. What he’s saying is that in the Old Testament, not only do the waters of the Red Sea prefigure the waters of baptism, but the whole story of the deliverance prefigures what happens to you when you enter into the Church. So, just as Israel was set free from physical slavery to Pharaoh (through the exodus from Egypt), so those who are converts are set free from bondage (from spiritual bondage) to sin and to Satan when they are baptized, when they are brought into the Church. And here’s the interesting part, just as pharaoh pursued

² Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 19.2-3; trans. NPNF

the Israelites up to the waters of the Red Sea before he was drowned (in the waters of the Red Sea, before he was conquered by that), so too (Cyril's saying to the candidates for baptism here), "Satan has pursued you up to the very waters of the baptistery. He's tried to tempt you throughout these 40 days of Lent, he's tried to assault you, to stop you from doing what you are about to do. Namely, to plunge yourself into the waters of baptism, and through them to die to sin, to die to the power of Satan, and to rise to new life in Christ. So it's a very powerful image for what's happening in baptism. I think so often in contemporary Christian circles, we often focus on baptism as the sacrament of incorporation into the Church. In other words, it's the sacrament by which I become a member of the body of Christ, or a member of the Church. And that is completely true. That's what baptism does, it makes us a member of the community of Jesus' disciples, of the body of Christ, a member of the institution of the Church. That's all true.

But in ancient Christianity there was often much more emphasis on the spiritual warfare associated with baptism, as well as the renunciation of Satan that took place before baptism. And to this day, you'll probably notice at the Easter Vigil, we will recite and renew our vows of our baptism. And one of them is to renounce Satan and all his evil works and all his empty promises. They've been doing that since the 4th Century A.D. (you heard St. Cyril just say that): "In the presence of Satan you renounced him." It's the exorcistic dimension of the words of baptism. It's the idea that baptism doesn't just make you a member of the body of Christ, it delivers you from being under the power of the devil. It has an exorcistic dimension to it. In fact, exorcism is a part of the rite of baptism. And so the renunciation of Satan in the midst of the baptismal rite is an echo of what happens to Israel by the waters of the Red Sea. They renounce their servitude to Pharaoh, and through the waters, as well as the cloud, notice that by the way, the cloud, the pillar of cloud and fire protects them. That's a type of the Holy Spirit. So through water and the spirit, Israel was delivered from Pharaoh, so too now through baptism through water and the Holy Spirit, every single catechumen, every single person who receives the sacrament of baptism, is delivered from bondage to Satan and to sin and death. And that is good news. That is reason for rejoicing. That's the mystery, the *mystagogy*, the invisible reality of what's going on behind the visible reality of being immersed in the water of baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

So that is a very powerful reading for today's mass, for the Easter vigil: the image of deliverance from Satan and from sin. So that's the Old Testament. And you can

actually see, if you look at the second reading for the Easter vigil, every year it is from Romans 6. It's Paul's famous account of the fact that when we are baptized, we die and rise with Jesus. He says, "Do you not know that as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have been baptized into his death?" You've died and you've risen with him. So that second reading forms a bridge between the typology of baptism in the Old Testament for the Easter vigil, and then of course the event that gives us the power to be delivered from Satan and from sin; namely, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ himself, the actual event of the Resurrection that is described in the gospel for today.

So because we are in Year C, we're going to read the account of the Resurrection from the Gospel of Luke. This is from Luke 24:1-12. And you'll notice that in several of the gospels (Luke included) there are multiple accounts of appearances of the risen Jesus. However, for the Easter vigil itself, the gospel reading each year will focus on the initial discovery of the empty tomb (the initial discovery of the good news of the Resurrection). And so that's what's going to be the reading for today as well. So in Luke 24:1-12, this is what we read:

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel; and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise." And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Mag'dalene and Jo-an'na and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles; but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home wondering at what had happened.

That is the end of Luke's account. So you'll notice that there a number of interesting aspects of Luke's account here. First, notice what time it happens. It happens on the first day of the week, which, in ancient Jewish reckoning would have been

Sunday. Now I know, that's almost commonplace now to say "Of course it's Easter Sunday", but if you recall, in a Jewish perspective (from a 1st Century Jewish perspective), the language of "first day" isn't just a chronological identification of the date. It's also an echo of the book of Genesis. So in the book of Genesis 1, God makes the world in six days, and those days are enumerated: the first day, the second day, the third day, the fourth day, all the way down to the final day, the seventh day where God rests. And in Jewish reckoning, the seventh day, that Sabbath, is Saturday. So if you count backwards (from an ancient Jewish perspective), the first day of creation, the day on which God makes the world, isn't just the first day of the seven, it's the first day of the week (i.e., it is Sunday). So in other words, the old creation begins in Genesis on Sunday. And so it's fitting that in the beginning of the new creation with Luke 24:1, that the Resurrection would also take place on Sunday, because it isn't just the vindication of Jesus as a prophet, it isn't just his resuscitation from the dead; it is the beginning of the new creation. And so the joy of the Resurrection, the truth of the Resurrection, the mystery of the Resurrection, occurs on the first day of the week.

A second thing that's really crucial to highlight about the Resurrection is the element where the text says, "They went in and did not find *the body*." I cannot stress this enough, when we talk about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have to make absolutely sure that we know what we're speaking about. There's lots of confusion about what we mean by the Resurrection of Jesus. And all of that can be cleared up if we focused on that word, right there: they did not find "the body". The Greek word there is *soma*. And when it's talking about a dead body it means "a corpse". So, when we talk about the Resurrection of Jesus, the discovery of the empty tomb, the fact that there's no corpse in the tomb is a crucial element for understanding what the first Christians would have meant by Resurrection. There are a few false ideas of Resurrection out there that we need to make sure we aren't thinking about when we proclaim this truth. So for example, number 1, in 1st Century Judaism, Resurrection did not mean a simple return to ordinary life. It's not just a "resuscitation" (even a miraculous resuscitation). We see examples of that elsewhere in the Bible: Jesus brings Jairus' daughter back to life; Jesus brings Lazarus back to life. We even see people raised from the dead in the Old Testament, like when the man touches the bones of Eli'sha. But in every one of those cases, although the language of "being raised up" could be used to describe it, there is a fundamental difference between what happened to Jairus' daughter or Lazarus and what happens to Jesus. Because with Jairus' daughter or Lazarus, they've returned to ordinary earthly life, and eventually they're going to die again. You can actually see this with

Jairus' daughter. Jesus brings her...she "wakes up" so-to-speak. And even Lazarus, Lazarus comes out of the tomb in his body, but eventually they even try to kill him – he's going to die again. But with Jesus, something fundamentally different has taken place here. It's not just the reunion of his soul and his body. He's not returning to ordinary life, he's entering into a new mode of existence in which he will never die again. It's not just the immortality of his soul, it's the everlasting life of his risen and glorified body. You can't see that as clearly in Luke's gospel here, but if you look at Matthew's account it's a little clearer. Because in the gospel of Matthew, when they get to the tomb, the stone is still there; and it says that the angel rolls away the tomb for the women. They couldn't have rolled it away for themselves. It would have been very, very heavy. And so when they go into the tomb, there's no corpse there. Now this is fundamentally different than Lazarus because it means that Jesus' new resurrected body passed through the stone. He passed through the tomb. They didn't have to roll the stone away for Jesus to come out. He's in a new mode of existence, just like he will pass through the walls on later occasions when they're in the upper room. So number 1: Resurrection is not just a return to ordinary earthly life.

Number 2: Resurrection is not just the immortality of Jesus' soul. Please, please, please make this clear. There are lots of people out there who think, or even who even claim, that when Christians say that Jesus was raised from the dead, what we mean is that "his spirit lives on". "His soul went on to be with God", "He's immortal" or "he lives in the hearts of men" or something like that. No, no. The Greeks have a word for that. It's *Athanasia* – immortality. And to be sure, Jesus' soul is going to live forever, but that's not what the early Christians were proclaiming when they talked about the Resurrection. When they talked about the Resurrection they were proclaiming that something had happened to his *soma*, something happened to his body, something happened to his corpse. The foundational truth of Christianity involves a corpse being transfigured and resurrected, entering into a new state in which that body would never die again. So it isn't just the immortality of Jesus' soul. And again, what's the clue to this? It's the empty tomb. It's a fundamental sign that shows us that the truth of the Resurrection isn't about "Jesus' spirit appearing to someone in a dream after he's died and consoling them". It's about something happening to his body. He is now alive again in his body. A third error that's less common (but you should at least know about it) is sometimes contemporary skeptics or scholars will say, "Well, when they talk about the Resurrection, what they mean is Jesus' spirit going up into Heaven; a kind of ascension, exaltation. The ascension of Jesus and the Resurrection are kind of two ways of saying

the same thing.” No. The ascension of Jesus (in the Gospel of Luke and John) is a different event. It takes place 40 days later from the Resurrection. The Resurrection is about the reunification of Jesus’ soul and his body in a new glorified state in which he will never die again. That’s the good news of the Resurrection. That’s what we’re proclaiming on Easter Sunday.

With that in mind...well, hold on. Before we move on, let me just say why I’m emphasizing this so strongly. A few years back I remember seeing an interview. There was a panel being interviewed about the Resurrection (it was right around Easter time), and on that panel was a Catholic priest. And at the time they were talking about this mysterious bone box that had been discovered which was reported to have contained the bones of James, the brother of Jesus. You might remember some of this from the news in the 2000’s. There was lots of speculation about this bone box that said “James, the brother of Jesus”. It raised questions about whether Jesus had actually been raised from the dead and also whether he had brothers. So it was meant to call in to question two events: the perpetual virginity of Mary and then the bodily Resurrection of Jesus. Although, I don’t know why it would call into question the Resurrection of Jesus, since it wasn’t his bone box; it’s not like his bones, or even the box where his bones was found, but you know, the contemporary secular media like to run away with these kind of stories, especially around Easter time. Anyway, there was a panel and they were asking different representatives of religious faiths, and one of them was a priest and the priest was asked, “Well, what do you think about the discovery of the bone box of James?” And the priest said, “If they discovered Jesus’ bones today, it would not affect my faith.”

Now I remember being shocked by this, like scandalized. Because, here we had a Catholic priest saying that if the bones of Jesus were discovered it wouldn’t affect his faith. And, my reaction was, “Well, with all due respect Father, it might not affect your faith but it would affect The Faith.” Because the Christian Faith (go back to the Apostolic Creed or to Scripture) is based on the truth of Jesus’ bodily Resurrection. So the priest went on to basically describe an idea of Resurrection in which the spirit of Jesus is alive with God and he’s alive in the hearts of his believers. And of course, that’s true. Jesus’ soul is alive with God and his spirit does live in the hearts of the believers., but that’s not what Christians were talking about when they talked about the Resurrection. That’s only half of the truth, because the other half of the truth is that his body is alive, and that his body was brought back into union with his soul and entered into a new and glorious state. That’s what the Resurrection’s about. So if the bones of Jesus were discovered, it would pull the rug

out from under Christianity, because this is the foundation of the Christian faith. St. Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 15. If Christ is not raised, then we are of all men to be most pitied; because we're fools, because all of Christianity is a sham if Jesus was not raised from the dead, not just in spirit but in his body. End of soap box. So I just want to clarify that. I think it's really important. Over the years of teaching I used to assume that everyone meant the same thing when they said the word "Resurrection", and that everyone knew what we were celebrating when we celebrated the Resurrection. But it's dawned on me after years of teaching, that there's actually lots of confusion about exactly what we mean when we profess that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.

With that said, there's one last element of Luke's account that I think is really interesting. It's kind of particular to Luke, which is, his focus on the women at the tomb. All the gospels mention the women at the cross, and they mention the women going to the tomb, but if you've read Luke's gospel cover to cover, and you read Acts, you know that Luke has a particular interest in the female disciples of Jesus, as well as the roles of women in the early Church. He pays a lot of attention to women in the life and the ministry of Jesus, and women in the life and the ministry of the early Church. And in this case, Luke is very specific to name the women who discovered the tomb, and to emphasize that whereas the women discovered the tomb and they believed, the Apostles (who are obviously all men, the Twelve Apostles) did not respond with the same faith. They actually disregarded the testimony of the women. And so this is kind of an interesting point. So I just want to highlight this. If you look, Luke makes very clear that it was Mary Mag'dalene, Jo-an'na and Mary, the mother of James, and some other women who discover the tomb. Now, if you're like me, for years as I'd read through those verses, I'd just kind of blow past them. "Ok yeah, Mary Mag'dalene, and some other women who...I don't really know who they are." But it's at least important to pause for a moment and focus on who these women are, because early in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 8:1-3), Luke has told us about these women, and so let me identify them real quick.

First, Mary Mag'dalene: very famous, female follower of Jesus. And although most people think of Mary Mag'dalene as an ex-prostitute, the gospels don't actually say that about her. In fact, according to the gospel (if you look at Luke 8, as I mentioned), Luke tells us that Mary Mag'dalene was actually an ex-demoniac. We read in the New Testament that Jesus had cast out seven demons from Mary Mag'dalene. So she's a woman who used to be possessed not just by one demon, but by

multiple demons. She's a very important figure in the early Church as an example of Christ's power to deliver from the devil and from the demonic. The second woman here is Jo-an'na. And earlier in the gospel, Luke tells us that she was the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward. We don't know exactly who Chuza was, but we do know that the steward of Herod (that post, that position), would have been a person of high rank; a person of elite status. And yet, this woman Jo-an'na, has taken up with Jesus. She's following him around and she's one of the wealthy women who provided for Jesus out of their means (as Luke tells us about in a story). So she's a disciple. And then finally (this is the most interesting for me) is Mary, the mother of James. Now notice how Luke just assumes that you know who James is. He doesn't tell you which James, and there are lots of Jameses running around in the 1st Century, because the Greek name James is basically the Greek version of Jacob, and Jacob was a popular Jewish name. So, who is this "Mary, the mother of James"?

Well, as I show in my book, *Jesus and the Jewish roots of Mary*, I have a whole chapter on the perpetual virginity of Mary. James is one of these men, who are called the brother of Jesus. James, Joses, Simon and Judas are the four that are named. And a lot of times people think of these brothers as being an argument against the perpetual virginity of Mary. That's just not the case. As I show in my book, the word "brother" here in the gospels gets used to describe not just "blood brothers", but also it can be used in a more broad sense for one's cousins or one's relatives. And in this case, that's exactly who James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas are. They are the relatives of Jesus. They are the children of this other woman named Mary, who as we learned from the Gospel of John, was married to a man named Clopas, whom early Church historians, the early Church Fathers, tell us was the brother of Joseph and therefore the uncle of Jesus. So this James, the reason Mary can be identified this way, was very famous both because he was a cousin of Jesus (he was a relative), but also because he went on to become the first bishop of the Church in Jerusalem. And we'll see him mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles as the leader at the Council of Jerusalem. These are both well-known, female followers of Jesus, but they're also well-known women in the Church in Jerusalem. So Luke specifically names them as witnesses to the Resurrection.

Now, with that said, notice how the Apostles react to the women's testimony. What did they think of it? "This seemed to them an idle tale and they did not believe them." And I love this: It says that Peter rose, went to the tomb, he saw the linen clothes by themselves, and he went home wondering, "Huh. I wonder what hap-

pened?” Good old Peter, man. He’s always putting his foot in his mouth and he really does take a little while sometimes to grasp these things. Of course, you know, not that we would have done any better. By the way, notice there it said that he “saw the linen clothes in the tomb”. So that’s another clue to the Resurrection. If someone had stolen the body, they would not have taken the time to unwrap the shroud. They’d just grab the body and the shroud. It’d actually be easier to carry the body and bring it out. But the clothes, the linen cloth, the shroud in which the body was wrapped, was found there in the tomb. And so it’s puzzling here. What has happened? So even though Jesus has predicted his Resurrection to the Apostles on several occasions, Peter still doesn’t grasp the truth of it in the same way that the women did. He’s wondering, “Hm. What happened?” And when the Apostles hear the women’s testimony, they just assume that they’re emotional, or that they’re distraught, and that they’re making things up. “This seemed to them an idle tale.”

Now, why does that matter? Well, there are two reasons, and I’d like to close with these. First, a number of Christian apologists throughout the centuries have pointed this out: That, if the accounts of Jesus’ Resurrection and the discovery of the empty tomb were made up (in other words, if these were fabricated stories), then the people who made them up would not have had the first witnesses to the tomb be women. And one of the reasons for that is because in a 1st Century context, the public testimony of women was not actually admissible in a court of law. It was actually not regarded highly in 1st Century society. So for example, Josephus, the 1st Century historian actually says this, in his book *Antiquities*, book 4, paragraph 219. He’s speaking about the context of a court of law and he says, “Put not trust in a single witness, but let there be three or at least two... From women let no evidence be accepted, because of the levity and temerity of their sex...” So he goes on to basically say that in a court of law, not only do you need to have multiple witnesses if you want to establish something, but that the testimony of a woman (and he also says the testimony of a slave) would not be admissible in a court. So it was regarded less highly than the testimony of men. Now, there’s all kinds of things we could talk about with regard to that, but for our purposes here, I think it’s really significant to point out then that if the Church were making up the stories of the discovery of the empty tomb, they would have had the tomb discovered by some highly esteemed Jewish man, like one of the Sanhedrin, or one of the Elders, or Rabbi Gamaliel, or someone who was widely respected in that time and in that culture, so that no one would question the testimony of the empty tomb. Instead, what do we have? We have not just three women, but one of them is a former demoniac.

She used to be possessed by demons. Now, put yourself in their shoes. If a woman that you know that used to be possessed by demons comes to you and says, “Oh, the Lord is alive. The tomb is empty.” You might forgive the Apostles there for not being too credulous about it (of course except that Jesus had already told them that it would happen). But you can see here that if the early Church was making these things up, it’s very unlikely that they would have attributed the discovery of the tomb to three women (and one of them, a former demoniac). So, it lends credibility to the veracity of these accounts. That the reason the gospels say it was the women who discovered the tomb first, is because that’s what actually happened.

On the other hand, on a spiritual level, since ancient times, since the time of Augustine, since the 4th and 5th Centuries A.D., the Church has always seen in the discovery of the tomb by the women a deeper significance. And I want to quote to you from St. John Paul II, in his beautiful letter *On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*. And I’ll end with this quote. He actually talks about the fact that the women discovering the tomb shows the special role of women in salvation history. These are his words:

From the beginning of Christ's mission, women show to him and to his mystery a special *sensitivity which is characteristic* of their *femininity*. It must also be said that this is especially confirmed in the Paschal Mystery, not only at the Cross but also at the dawn of the Resurrection. The women *are the first at the tomb*. They are the first to find it empty. They are the first to hear: "He is not here. *He has risen*, as he said" (*Mt 28:6*). They are the first to embrace his feet (cf. *Mt 28:9*). They are also the first to be called to announce this truth to the Apostles (cf. *Mt 28:1-10; Lk 24:8-11*). The Gospel of John (cf. also *Mk 16: 9*) emphasizes *the special role of Mary Magdalene*. She is the first to meet the Risen Christ... Hence she came to be called "the apostle of the Apostles" (Latin *apostolorum apostola*).

Now here, John Paul II’s actually quoting St. Thomas Aquinas. His commentary on John, he calls Mary Magdalene “The apostle to the Apostles”. Why?

Mary Magdalene was the first eyewitness of the Risen Christ, and for this reason she was also *the first to bear witness to him before the Apostles*.³

³ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* no. 16, citing St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 20.3, 2519

So, I just end with that quote because it's a beautiful testimony to the special role that the women played. In other words, that we see a particular sensitivity to the truth of the Resurrection in the hearts of the women. They're more open to that truth than the Apostles are. And in his commentary, St. Augustine said (I'm not going to quote it), but he basically says "Just as death was brought into the world through the word of the first woman (Eve, when she enticed Adam to sin), so too it's fitting that when God brings the life of the Resurrection into the world, that it would be the words of a woman who would announce the good news of the Resurrection. And above all that comes to us through Mary Magdalene, the apostle to the Apostles. Bringing the good news, not just of deliverance from sin and Satan, but of everlasting life, the resurrection of the body.