

## The Real Story of Easter for Children

by Joelee Chamberlain

I like holidays, don't you?! It's so much fun to celebrate special times, isn't it! But did you know that 2 of the biggest holidays that are celebrated all over the world are celebrations about something from the Bible? Yes, they are! The first one is Christmas, where we celebrate Jesus' birthday, when the Son of God came to earth as a little human baby. I talked a lot about that with you another time, didn't I? But what is the second holiday we get from the Bible? That's right; it's Easter, the day we especially celebrate that Jesus rose from the dead. Remember, Jesus, the Son of God, loves us so much that He died on the cross for our sins so we could be saved if we just trusted in Him. But He proved this was true, that He could save us from our sins by being resurrected, being alive again, and He is still alive in heaven, isn't He?

So I thought that today I'd tell you the real story of the first Easter. Would you like that? Okay.

But where can I find this story to tell you? Yes, in the Bible, of course! We find this story that we call Easter, about when Jesus rose from the dead, was resurrected, in the New Testament in all four of the books called the "Gospels". In the book of Matthew, the book of Mark, the book of Luke, and the book of John. That's where the most details about it are written, though the apostle Paul also told about the resurrection of Jesus many times in the book of Acts and in his first letter to the Corinthian Christians (which we have in the New Testament).

Now why would the resurrection story be told 4 different times in the Bible? Well, it is just about the most important thing in the whole Bible, isn't it? So when Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each wrote about the life of Jesus, they each told about this very important part of Jesus' life. And they also each one gave us some different details about it.

But why would they sometimes give different details from each other? Well, let's think about that a minute. If you and I and my grandson and my granddaughter all went to the same birthday party at the same time, we might all go back home and tell people some of the same things about the party, but then each of us might tell some different things about that party, too, mightn't we? We might all tell how much fun the games were, but then we might go on and each of us also give different details about the party. I might tell about how pretty the decorations were and that I talked with the birthday person. And you might tell about the presents that were given to the birthday person and the delicious birthday cake. My grandson might tell about all of the good food there and tell about talking with the birthday person and another person as well -- with 2 people. And my granddaughter might tell about the clothes that the people wore and some details about the biggest present. But we would all be telling about the same party, wouldn't we? And what we all said would all be true, too, right? And what all of us said would give people a better idea of the whole party, though it might take some time for someone who was listening to us to fit all the details together.

And that's the way it is in the 4 books of the Bible that were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They all 4 tell about the same very important happening, the resurrection of Jesus, but some

of them give details that the others don't give. And I'm glad they all 4 wrote about it, because that lets us know more about the whole resurrection story, what we call the Easter story. To know it better.

So now let me open my Bible and look at these 4 writings about Easter, about the resurrection of Jesus, and tell you about that wonderful, exciting time. All right.

Of course, in order to tell about Jesus being raised from the dead, we first need to tell that He died, don't we? Now, Jesus was a very good man, a man who never did any sins at all. (Of course, we know that He is God, too, don't we?) So you would think that everyone would like Jesus when He was here on earth, wouldn't you? After all, He not only never did any sins, He also did many good things like heal sick people and teach people how they could be right with God and to love each other. But some of the Jewish leaders didn't like Jesus. They were jealous of Jesus and finally even wanted to kill Him and were planning how they could do this. And then one day one of Jesus' own apostles, Judas Iscariot, went to these leaders who wanted to kill Jesus and said that he would lead them to Jesus if they would give him money. Can you imagine that?! How wicked!

But that is just what Judas Iscariot did. He led an armed crowd of people from the leaders including some soldiers to Jesus one night, and they arrested Jesus and took Him to the Jewish leaders for a trial. Of course, there was nothing bad they could say about Jesus, was there? So they had men tell lies about Jesus! Finally after being taken for trials before the high priest two times and before the big Roman leader Herod and then before the Roman governor Pilate (the Romans ruled Israel then), after those trials, Jesus was condemned by the Roman governor to die and was taken out to a hill called Calvary where they put Him on a cross, that is, they crucified Him, and He died there. And many people saw Jesus die. His friends, both men and women, were there, and His mother was there, and some people who didn't like Him were there, and the bad leaders were there.

And the sun stopped shining in the middle of the day for 3 hours while Jesus was on the cross. And when Jesus died, there was a big earthquake.

Then when Jesus was dead, two men who believed in Him, Joseph of Arimethia and Nicodemus, went to Pilate, the Roman governor, and asked if they could take His body down off of the cross and bury it. Pilate said they could, so they took Jesus' dead body over to a sort of garden place where there were caves, and they put Jesus' body in a cave-tomb near there. This was a new cave-tomb that belonged to Joseph of Arimethia. No body had ever been put in it before. People often used to bury dead people in caves. These caves had short doorways, so that you'd have to stoop down to go in or out of them. Anyway, Joseph of Arimethia and Nicodemus put Jesus' body in this new tomb, and they put a lot of expensive spices on his body and wrapped it in lots of strips of cloth. (That's the way they used to bury dead people then.)

And two of the women who used to help Jesus had followed these two men, and the women sat down across from the cave to see where Jesus would be buried. One of the women was Mary Magdelene. And when Joseph of Arimethia and Nicodemus were finished taking care of Jesus' body, they rolled a big heavy stone over the doorway of the cave to close it up, and then Mary Magdelene and the other woman went home.

Well. Before Jesus had died, He had taught his friends that He would die but then that He would rise from the dead after 3 days. But they didn't understand that and sort of forgot it. But even though Jesus' friends had forgotten what Jesus had told them, some of the bad leaders remembered it -- though they didn't believe it. And they got worried! They said to each other, "Jesus had said that He would be alive again after being dead for 3 days. Now, what if Jesus' followers, his disciples, come and take His body away and then say He has come alive again? That would be very bad for us!" So they went again to the Roman governor Pilate and asked that the cave be sealed up and guards posted there to make sure no one would try to take Jesus' body away. And Pilate said that was all right to do. So they put a seal on the cave door (marked it in a way which would show if anyone tried to open it), and soldiers guarded the cave.

And all of Jesus' friends were very, very sad. They were sad for two reasons. One reason, of course, is because Jesus was their dear friend and this terrible thing had happened to Him. But the other reason was because they had thought that Jesus was the Messiah, the One would give the kingdom back to Israel -- but now He was dead! They just didn't know what to think!

But what no one realized yet was that this was all part of God's plan! Yes, God had already come up with a plan so that people (who all do sins) could someday be with God forever. You see, sins have to be punished, and since we all do sins, and God can't have sins around Him, we would have the punishment of not being able to be with God someday, wouldn't we? And that would be terrible, wouldn't it? But Jesus, who is both God and man never did any sins, so He didn't have to be punished. Right?

Well, but God loves us so much that God the Father had God the Son (Jesus) come to earth as a human and die for us, to take our punishment for us. And then if we only believe in Jesus and trust Him to take our punishment for us, then someday we can be with God forever! (Won't that be wonderful?!) And all of this had been prophesied in the Old Testament hundreds of years earlier! But the wicked people who were killing Jesus didn't realize that they were actually carrying out God's plan!

But now let's go on with the actual story of Easter, the story of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, after Jesus had died and was buried, 3 days later, very early on that next Sunday morning there was another earthquake -- this time because an angel had come down from heaven and gone up to the tomb where Jesus' body had been put and had rolled back the big, heavy stone that covered the doorway! And then the angel sat on the stone!! Wow! The angel was all shiny and had on very white clothes.

But what about the guards who were standing there?! Did the soldiers see all of this?! Yes, they did! And they were so scared that they just started shaking, and then they couldn't do anything at all for a while!! And it took a lot to scare those soldiers!!

And then the guards were so scared that they just left and went into the city of Jerusalem to

report to the Jewish leaders there who had told them to guard the tomb. And they told them what had happened. And these leaders got together with the other leaders, and then they came up with a plan. They gave the soldiers a whole lot of money and told them, "You just say that you fell asleep, and that Jesus' disciples came and stole His body away while you were sleeping."

Well, the soldiers knew that they could be in big trouble if the Roman governor heard about them saying they'd fallen asleep while they were supposed to be guarding. So the leaders said, "If the governor hears about this, we will make it all right with him and keep you out of trouble." So that's what the soldiers did. They took the money, and then they went out and told lies, telling people that Jesus' disciples had stolen His body out of the cave while they were sleeping. But let's think about it. If the soldiers had really been asleep, how could they have known that the disciples stole the body?! They would have been asleep! That was a silly lie! But later lots of people actually believed these lies. But we know better, don't we?!

Well, let's see what else happened early on that special Sunday morning, on that day we call Easter. As I said earlier, when Jesus' body had been taken down from the cross, two women had followed Joseph of Arimethia and Nicodemus and had seen the cave where they had buried Jesus. And then the women waited until the first day of the week, on Sunday, and very early that Sunday morning just after sunrise but while it was still dark, they and some other women started off to the cave. There were at least 5 women. We are given the names of 4 of them: Mary Magdalene, another woman named Mary, Salome, and Joanna, but the Bible also says "and others". Anyway, these women had gotten some more spices together, and they wanted to put these spices on Jesus' dead body. But as they walked along toward the tomb, they began asking each other, "Who will roll that big stone away from the doorway of the cave for us?!"

Well, the women got to the cave -- and there they saw that the stone was already rolled away!! The cave was open!

Now at this point the story gets a little confusing, because Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell about all of the women, but John only tells about Mary Magdalene, giving extra details just about her. From reading it all very carefully, though, it seems to me that the women all went to the cave together. But then when they all got there and saw that the big stone was already rolled away from the cave door, that it was already open, that then Mary Magdalene didn't stay there at all. She just turned right around and started running back to tell the apostles. But the other women stayed there and went into the cave and saw that the body of Jesus was gone, and they were looking around and wondering what had happened. And suddenly two men in shiny white clothes stood beside them. These were angels. And the women were so scared that they bowed down to the ground.

But the angels said to the women, "Don't be afraid. We know that you are looking for Jesus who had died on the cross. But why do you look for someone who is alive here, where dead people are buried?! Jesus isn't here; He's alive!! He is risen from the dead -- just like He had said would happen! It had to happen that bad men would put Him on a cross, but that on the third day He would be alive again. See, here is the place where they had put His body."

Then the angels said, "Now go quickly and tell His disciples that Jesus has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you up to Galilee. And you will see Him there."

Well, the women were still sort of afraid and really confused, but they were also very happy, so they turned around and began to run back to tell the disciples. And suddenly, Who do you think met them? Why Jesus suddenly met the women! And they went up to Him and worshipped Him. And then Jesus said to the women, "Don't be afraid. Go and tell my brothers, my disciples, that they are to go up to Galilee, and they will see me there." So the women started on their way again.

But in the meantime, what about poor Mary Magdalene? Remember, she had left as soon as she saw the tomb was open, hadn't she? She hadn't seen the angels nor heard what they had said. Well, while the other women were listening to the angels and then starting back to tell their friends, Mary Magdalene had already gotten to where Peter and John were, and she cried out, "They've taken the body of the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where it is!!"

Well, Peter and John didn't know what to think. So they got up and started running to where the cave was. John got there first, but he didn't go in. John just leaned over and looked into the cave and saw just the strips of cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' body. By then, though, Peter had caught up with John. And Peter just went right into the cave-tomb. Peter saw the strips of cloth, too, and he also saw the cloth that had been put around Jesus' head, and it was folded up apart from the strips of cloth. Finally John went inside the cave, too. And John saw that just the cloths were there. And though they didn't yet understand from the Old Testament prophecies that Jesus had to be resurrected, to be alive again, John believed when he saw just the cloths and not the body of Jesus.

Now, I think these different people must have taken different paths from Jerusalem to the cave-tomb on this exciting morning, because Peter and John didn't see the women who were running to tell the angels' good news that Jesus was alive again. At any rate, after seeing the empty tomb, Peter and John went back to their homes.

But Mary Magdalene had evidently followed Peter and John back to the tomb. And poor Mary Magdalene just stayed there by herself outside the tomb crying. She was so unhappy! And as she was crying, she leaned over and looked into the tomb. And what do you think she saw?! Why, she saw two angels all in white! They were sitting where Jesus' body had been! One was sitting at the head of the place and the other at the foot of it! (I'm not sure, but I think there may have been sort of like a bench inside the tomb that was used to put the body on so it wouldn't just be on the ground.) At any rate, the two angels were sitting there. Remember, two angels had been seen by the other women, too, hadn't they? But Peter and John hadn't seen any angels.

But these angels now asked Mary Magdalene, "Woman, why are you crying?"

And Mary Magdalene answered, "They have taken the body of my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put Him."

Then she turned around, and someone was standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't realize it!

I don't know if she was crying so hard she couldn't see clearly, or if she just sort of turned and saw someone was there but didn't look closely, or if the sun was in her eyes, or just what. But she didn't know it was Jesus -- she thought it was the gardener!

Jesus asked Mary Magdalene again, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you're looking for?"

And Mary Magdalene, thinking it was the gardener, said, "Oh, sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will get Him!"

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

And then Mary Magdalene turned toward Him and shouted, "Teacher!!" She recognized Jesus! And she must have gone over and grabbed onto him, because then Jesus said to her, "Don't hold onto me. Go tell my brothers (the disciples) that I'm going to God the Father."

Then Mary ran to where the disciples were. Now, the disciples were very sad and were crying, but she told them, "I've seen the Lord!" And she told them what He had said. And what do you think the disciples did? -- Why, they didn't believe her!! And when the other women told them the same thing, they didn't believe the other women either!! They thought it just couldn't be true!

Well, then later, on that same wonderful Easter day, there were 2 men walking away from Jerusalem and heading about 7 miles home to their little town of Emmaus. They were talking about everything that had happened, about Jesus dying and being buried but now His body was gone from the tomb. And who do you think came up and started walking along with them? Why, Jesus did!! But some way God made it so that they didn't recognize Him. They just thought He was another man.

Well, Jesus asked the two men, "What are you talking about with each other as you're walking along?"

They stopped walking, and they looked sad. And one of the men said to Jesus, "Are you just a visitor here in Jerusalem, and you don't know what has been happening?"

Jesus said, "What's been happening?"

They said, "Why, about Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet and very mighty before God and all the people in what He said and in what He did. But our rulers had Him arrested and got Him condemned to die, and they crucified Him. -- But we had hoped that Jesus would be the one who was going to save Israel."

And they said, "And more than that has happened. This is the third day since this happened, and some of our women went to the tomb early this morning, and they didn't find His body there. And they came and told us that they had seen a vision with angels who said that He was alive. Then some of us went to the tomb and found it empty, just as the women had told us."

These men were really confused about things, weren't they?

Well, Jesus started talking to them, and He said, "You are foolish and not thinking well not to believe all the things that the prophets said. The prophets told that the Christ had to suffer and then He would go to His glory." Then Jesus began telling them lots of the prophecies from the Bible in the Old Testament about the Messiah, the Christ. (Messiah and Christ mean the same thing in two different languages. And Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, isn't He?) Yes, Jesus began explaining these prophecies about Himself to them as they walked along. But they still didn't realize that He was Jesus Himself!

By now they had gotten near to the town of Emmaus where the two men were going, and Jesus acted as if He were just going to keep right on walking past, but they began saying to Him, "It's nearly night time. Come stay with us." So He went inside of the house with them.

Well, they were at the table for dinner, and Jesus took the bread, and He gave thanks for the food, and then He broke the bread (it wasn't sliced bread like we have). And Jesus started giving pieces of bread to the men, -- when suddenly God made it so that they recognized that this stranger was actually Jesus!

And then guess what Jesus did? He just disappeared! He wasn't there anymore! They must have really been surprised!

Then they said to each other, "Didn't we feel strange inside of us while He was talking to us as we walked together on the road and He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" ("The Scriptures" is what they called the Old Testament.) Then they got up right away and went right back to Jerusalem to tell the apostles about it. And, remember, that was 7 miles away and it was getting to be toward night time! But this was just too exciting and important to wait to tell!

The men got there, and the apostles were saying, "It's true! The Lord Jesus really has risen from the dead, and He appeared to Peter!" And then the two men told what had happened to them as they had been walking toward Emmaus and how they had finally recognized Jesus when He broke the bread.

And this was all happening on that very same day (what we call Easter) that Jesus rose from the dead, was resurrected. And the disciples were still in the room, but they had the doors locked, because they were afraid of the bad people. And while they were still talking about it and were eating dinner, guess what suddenly happened? Why, suddenly Jesus was standing right there inside the locked room with them! (Jesus could do that with His resurrected body.)

The disciples were scared and didn't know what to think! (Of course, I think I would have been startled, too, wouldn't you?!) In fact, the disciples thought He was a ghost! But Jesus said to them, "Why are you all bothered? Why don't you believe what is happening? Look at my hands and feet!" (The soldiers who had put Jesus on the cross had hurt his hands and feet putting Him there, so He had marks there. Also, He had one on his side. But, of course, though the marks were still there, these

didn't hurt Jesus now because He had a resurrection body.)

Jesus said, "It is really I! Go ahead and touch me! A ghost doesn't have a body! But you can see that I have a real body." And Jesus showed the disciples the marks on His hands and feet and side. And He sort of scolded them for not having believed the people like the women who had told them that He had risen from the dead.

But they had seen Jesus die and knew He had been buried! And now they were so happy and surprised that they still could hardly believe that Jesus was alive again!

So Jesus said, "Give me something to eat." (After all, a ghost couldn't eat food!)

And they gave him a piece of the cooked fish they had, and He ate it while they watched Him. Then the disciples were just so happy!! The Lord Jesus was really alive again!!

Then Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you. God the Father has sent me, and I'm going to send you." And then Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." (This would give them special power when He had gone back to heaven.)

And that's the real story of that exciting Easter Day. But there's more to tell.

You see, one of the apostles, Thomas, wasn't there that evening when Jesus had come to them. So the other disciples told Thomas, "We have seen the Lord!"

But do you know what?! Thomas didn't believe them! Thomas said, "Unless I see the marks in His hands and put my fingers in them and can put my hand into His side, I won't believe it!"

Well!! -- A week after Easter the disciples were gathered together in the house again, and this time Thomas was with them. And they had the doors locked again. And what do you think happened this time?! Yes, suddenly Jesus was with them again inside of the locked room! And Jesus stood there with them and said, "Peace be with you." Then Jesus said right to Thomas, "See my hands? Put your fingers here. And reach out your hand and put it into my side."

And Jesus said to Thomas, "Stop doubting and believe."

And Thomas said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" He now knew that the Lord Jesus really was alive again.

Then Jesus said to Thomas, "You believe because you have seen Me. Blessed are those who won't see Me but still believe."

And that includes you and me, doesn't it?! We can read in the Bible that the Lord Jesus was resurrected without actually seeing Him, can't we? And we can believe it and trust in Him and be saved, can't we? And that will be a blessing, a great happiness, to us!



Anyway, the Bible tells us that the Lord Jesus stayed here on earth for 40 days after He was resurrected, after that wonderful Easter Sunday, and that many, many people, even hundreds of people, saw Jesus and heard Him talk. And He met with His apostles and taught them many things. Part of that time was in Galilee where He had said they were to go meet Him. And Jesus told them that they were to go all over everywhere and tell people about how He had died for sins and then was alive again, and that they could be with Him forever if they only believed on Him, trusted Him to save them from their sins. And then the apostles were to baptize the people who believed, and they were to teach them to obey everything Jesus had said they should do.

And by the end of the 40 days, Jesus and His disciples were back in Jerusalem, and they went together outside of the city of Jerusalem onto the Mount of Olives. And while the Lord Jesus was blessing them, He suddenly started going up into the sky! And the disciples just stood there and stared up at Him as He going up, up, up into the sky until He was covered by a cloud! And while they were just standing there staring up at the sky, two angels were suddenly with them and said to them, "Why are you staring up into heaven? This same Jesus who went up from you this way will come again the same way!"

The angels were talking about someday when the Lord Jesus will come back from heaven on the clouds, and then He will be King of everything forever! And everyone who ever believed in Him will be with Him forever! Won't that be wonderful?!

And do you want to know something interesting? When the Bible tells us about when Jesus was born, what we call the Christmas story, the Bible doesn't tell us on what day of the week Jesus was born or even in what part of the year that Jesus was born, so we don't really know when to celebrate His birthday, do we, to have what we call Christmas? It's just that a long time ago some people chose a day, and we celebrate it then, have Christmas then. But --

The Bible very carefully tells us when the resurrection was, when that first Easter was. The Bible tells us that Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week (that is, on a Sunday), on the first Sunday after Passover, which is in the Spring time. You see, Jesus died on Passover, which is in the Spring. (This can be looked up on calendars.) And the Bible calls Jesus our Passover Lamb. He's called the Lamb of God, and He died on the cross for our sins on Passover. And then the Lord Jesus rose from the dead, was resurrected, 3 days after Passover on the Jewish Feast of First Fruits, on what we call Easter Sunday.

Oh, and another interesting thing. The Bible also calls Jesus the First Fruits of the Resurrection. Now, if there are first fruits, there should be second fruits, shouldn't there! Well, there are! You see, Jesus was resurrected 2000 years ago; He was the first. But everyone who believes on the Lord Jesus to save them will be resurrected when He comes back as King someday! Won't that be wonderful?!

So that is the real story from the Bible about the celebration all over the world that is called Easter. We are celebrating the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is alive!! As the song says, "Hallelujah!! What a Saviour!"