



Reflections on the
PASSION
OF CHRIST

2019 Easter Devotional Guide

Introduction

by Megan Wilson

If one were to write a story about a god come to earth, its storyline might be littered with gold, fine dress, and physical beauty. Perhaps it would be a benevolent god who would dictate a good life to the masses, or perhaps the god would rule with oppression and tyranny.

The life and story of our Judeo-Christian God is not a fleeting best seller. It is the truest story ever told. It is filled with paradoxes. Jesus Christ was royalty born to a virgin in a barn. He wasn't a god. He was Our Savior who chose death to offer life even to those whose hands took it from Him.

In reading over *The Passion* libretto,* I find my heart breaking and rejoicing at the same moment. We are unworthy of such grace, yet He is willing to pour it over us, to anoint us with justification if we will choose Him. Sitting with these thoughts in the stillness of His presence, I become overwhelmed with His holiness that resides in the temple He made in me.

As you journey through these following meditations, imagine a grand cathedral existing within you in which to pointedly seek His face. As He spoke to those He loved on earth, let Him speak to you. Only come before Him with your willingness and He will meet you.

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

* "Reflections on *The Passion*," the 2019 Nashville First Baptist Church Easter Devotional Guide, is based on *The Passion*, a modern oratorio based on biblical texts, composed by Greg Nelson and orchestrated by David Hamilton. **See NashvilleFirst.org/Passion**

Palm Sunday

April 14

by Ben Rogers

And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9)

Years ago, I had the opportunity to serve malnourished and diseased children at a clinic in Haiti. One child in particular caught my attention, and it quickly became clear that his life would come to an end during my time there. I spent hours alone and on edge, mentally preparing myself for his passing. When the time came and the child passed away, I was emotionally broken.

On Palm Sunday, it was clear to Jesus that His life would soon come to an end. However, instead of entering Jerusalem cautiously, with hesitation, and in fear of a certain evil, he victoriously entered on a humble colt to shouts of praise from an elated crowd.

In learning from this triumphal entry, I realize the futility of my preparation for certain suffering and the missed opportunity I had to celebrate a life before it passed. Suffering is certain yet surprising, but on that Sunday, Jesus showed us that celebration of the day outshines any anticipation of the night.

My hope for us this Easter season is that we may no longer burden ourselves with preparation for trials ahead, but that we may instead praise the day with which we have been gifted.

The Lord's Supper

April 15

by Harold Bergen

“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” (John 12:27-28)

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Jesus sent His disciples to find the upstairs room, furnished and ready, where they would prepare and eat the Passover meal together.

As they reclined at the table, Jesus said that one of them would betray Him, and Judas left the room. Jesus also foretold that Peter would deny Him, but Peter confidently contradicted Him, saying, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!”

Had I been there, I would have wondered what He meant when He said, “This bread is My body that I give to you”? Or when He took the cup and said, “Drink from it all of you. This is the blood of the covenant”?

But we can now look back and see how it all made sense. Jesus knew what lay ahead. He was preparing His disciples for the days to come when He said, “When I am lifted up I will draw all men to me.”

For 2,000 years, believers continue to eat the bread and drink from the cup as He instructed us. We are remembering the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with reverence and hope *until He returns*.

The Garden of Gethsemane

April 16

by Macon Fields

Then He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.” And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.” (Matthew 26:38-39)

Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would be acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). But how can we grasp that Christ could be fully divine and yet deeply grieved? God Himself can be grieved. (Genesis 6:6.) We humans are created in His image; and we certainly know that we, too, can be grieved.

Limited humans though we are, we can relate to some of Jesus' grief. Imagine being in Gethsemane, knowing the fullness of time was near when He, fully human, would face physical pain. How long might He have foreseen such pain?

And Jesus, who knew no sin, would become sin. God His Father could not look on Him. He would be forsaken, rejected by His Father, and grieved by a level of loneliness we cannot begin to grasp. Unlike Jesus, we have never been so alone that God has rejected us.

The divine Christ would deeply experience this cup of God's wrath against sin. At Gethsemane, He prayed for the cup to pass from Him, but there was no other way to redeem the world. He asked His friends to watch with Him, but they slept, ignoring him. He faced suffering, and He faced it alone.

The Trial

April 17

by Kathie Harned

At last two [false witnesses] came forward and said, “This man said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.’” (Matthew 26:60-61)

If Jesus were to be sent to the cross, He had to be condemned and tried for a crime. The Jewish legal system was precise in its dealings with justice. A person had to be accused of committing a wrongdoing by two or three collaborating witnesses. The Jewish leaders struggled to find anyone who could name an offense Jesus had committed. Then finally two men incorrectly quoted Jesus and gave the Jewish leaders what they needed. Jesus, the Son of God, the epitome of goodness and righteousness, was falsely accused and experienced trials that were anything but fair.

Our world can come crashing down around us because someone states an untruth about us. Or maybe we have been passed over for a promotion at work. Or perhaps we or family members face medical issues or difficult decisions, or we lose a loved one. We can become so frustrated that we just want to stop and scream, “Life isn’t fair!”

Life is definitely not fair. However, our loving and compassionate God not only understands our suffering, but He also chose to experience it Himself. Because He did, He draws us to Him to comfort us, to give us peace, and to guide us through our every trial.

The Seven Last Words

April 18

by Ellen Price

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. ... Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. ... Woman, behold, your son! Son, behold your mother. ... My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ... I thirst. ... It is finished. ... Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last. (Luke 23:46)

I remember my Grandfather’s last words. As I sat with him in his hospice room, he prayed over the goldfish snack my 18-month-old daughter had shared with him. Cancer had spread to his brain and his words were at best incoherent, but when he prayed this particular prayer, I understood every word. He thanked God for the food and for the hands that had prepared it. In all my years of eating goldfish, I had never thought to thank God for the people who made that delectable snack. Those few, last audible words my Grandfather spoke will be forever ingrained in my memory. Words matter. Last words seem to matter even more so.

Jesus’ last words matter. In fact, it is remarkable that He was able to utter words at all given the amount of suffering He was experiencing. Full of intentionality and purpose, His words from the cross give us permission to cry out when we feel abandoned by God. They also reinforce the importance of Scripture. And they affirm that His relationship with His Father was forefront on His mind.

Preachers preach entire sermons about these words from the cross, so take time this Lenten season to truly listen to what Jesus was saying. It mattered then. It matters even more so today.

The Tomb

April 19

by Alyssa and Steve Goins

Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. (John 19:41)

We're in awe of the stillness we have encountered in such places as among the crowds at the site of the USS Arizona or when we visit the Veterans cemetery where our fathers are buried. Jesus' followers probably sensed the same stillness as they approached His tomb early that third day.

The tomb was not far from where Jesus was crucified, so those sights and sounds were still fresh in their hearts and minds. His disciples had left families and careers to follow this king, but they had expected a very different outcome. What would they do now? Their hopes and dreams had been cruelly nailed to a tree.

When the women arrived at the tomb, they found the stone rolled away and His body gone. They were convinced someone had stolen the body. Then two men in dazzling clothes asked them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen!"

What a declaration of joy for all mankind to celebrate: the King of kings is not lying in a tomb! One day, God's children shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). What joy that we will see our loved ones again, too!

The Call

April 20

by Susan McDonald

"How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings." ... "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Psalm 36:7; Matthew 11:28-29)

Jesus left heaven to do the work His Father had given Him to do. For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame. (Hebrews 12:2) We, too, have been created in Christ Jesus for good works. (Ephesians 2:10)

But some days we may feel the weight of responsibilities such as caregiving, a difficult working situation, poor health, prickly relationships, or a lack of resources. Living in this world at this time in history, bombarded by a 24-hour-a-day news cycle and images in the media that tempt comparisons to your own life, you may ask yourself, "What am I doing, and is it making any difference?" Putting away electronic devices that are only a door to the world and spending time daily in God's Word are good ways to begin finding refuge in His love.

Being unable to "fix" the problems in your orbit is a most frustrating feeling. But God does not expect us to be able to fix anything. When our tanks become empty He has taught us to come to Him to be filled again, to find rest for our souls. Jesus will handle any burden we give over to Him.

The Resurrection

April 21

by Jerry Brown

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:3-5)

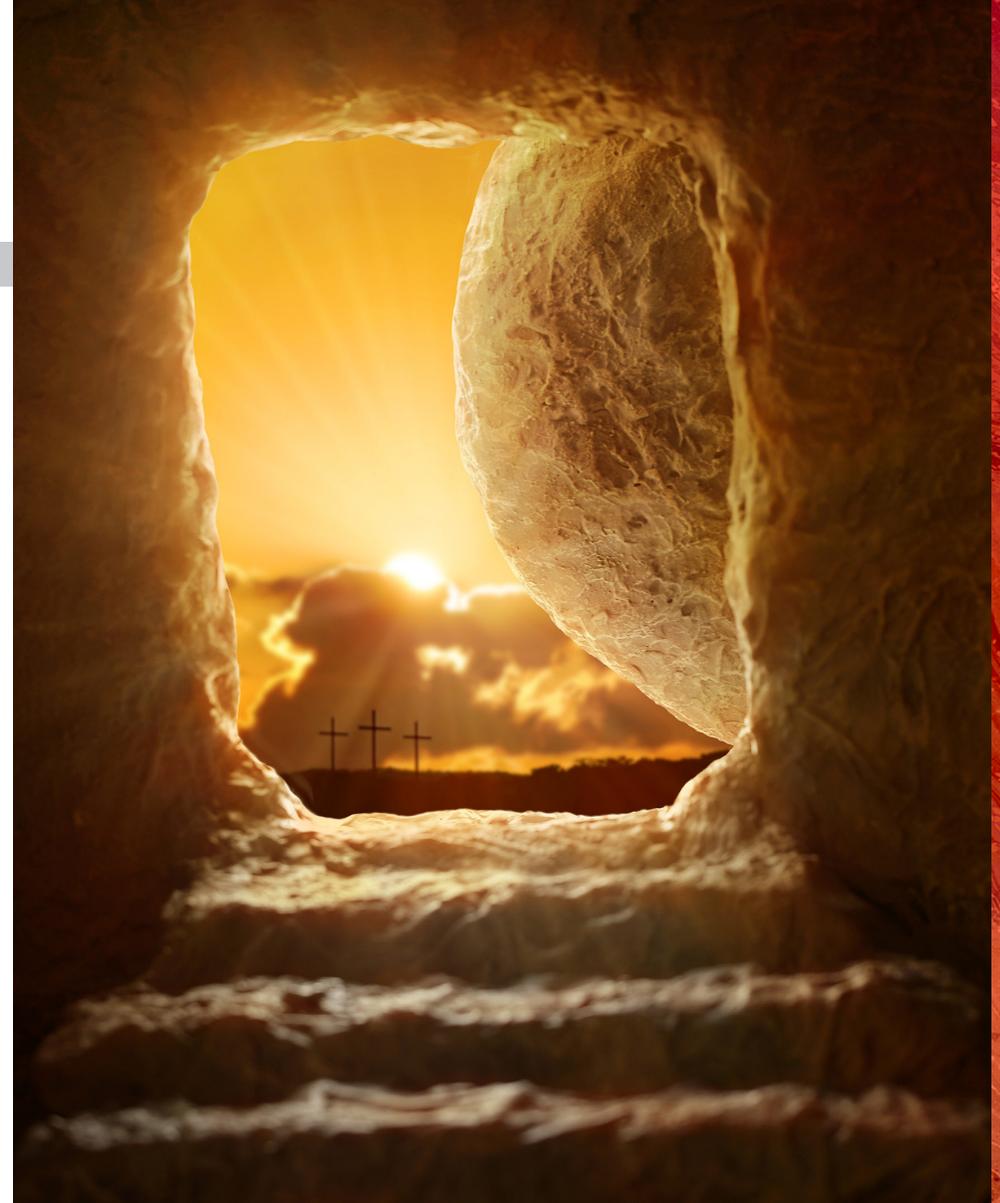
Have you ever thought, *really* thought about the resurrection of Jesus? Can you imagine how Mary Magdalene and the disciples must have felt when they realized that Jesus had been raised from the dead and was actually *alive*?

Mary Magdalene's heart was broken when she found Jesus' tomb empty. But the angel gave her the good news that Jesus had risen from the dead. And then, she actually saw and talked with the risen Christ. From sadness to joy! From mourning to rejoicing! (Read John 20:1-18.)

Jesus was resurrected ... and so will you be! Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me *will never die!*" (John 11:25-26) When we commit our lives to Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, we pass from death to life.

The Easter hymn "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today" expresses the joy of our resurrection:

Soar we now where Christ has led,
Following our exalted Head.
Made like Him, like Him we rise!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies!
(Charles Wesley)



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Note: Printed Scripture passages are taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Earth and heaven join to say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!
Christ has opened Paradise, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O Death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Dying once He all doth save, Alleluia!
Where thy victory, O grave? Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

—Charles Wesley (1739)

The Easter devotionals in this book can also be found on our
FaceBook page or on the website: NashvilleFirst.org/Easterguides

Watch “The Passion” oratorio, from the April 14, 2019, Sunday night service
at NashvilleFirst.org/SundaySermons or on [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com).



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