

Easter Day (2026)

The cross is central to the Christian faith. This centrality manifests itself in all sorts of ways.

In Passiontide, crosses are often draped in purple, reminding worshippers of the pain and humiliation our Lord had to bear.

On Easter Day, in many churches, children bring flowers and decorate a cross placed near the pulpit.

Throughout the year Christians of all stripes sing about it. “Lift high the cross” is one of the more recent hymns which exalts what in the ancient world had been an instrument of shame but now has become a sign of victory.

In some traditions, in a service called the Reproaches, the cross is venerated and kissed on Good Friday.

Even outside the church, the cross shows up in all sorts of places, including around people's necks and tattooed on various parts of their body.

I know of a Jewish man who had a cross (along with a star of David and a St. Christopher metal) on the dashboard of his car.

When a friend asked him why all three, he replied, **“I’m not ruling out any possibilities.”**

Over the past few days and weeks, I have spoken often and I hope passionately about the cross from this pulpit.

On Good Friday, I suggested that the reason we call this day ‘Good’ rather than ‘Bad’ was because the cross was the place sin was defeated and victory over death won.

There the seed of woman bruised the serpent's head – that is, wielded the final and

decisive blow against Satan and his minions . . . indeed against all which dwarfs, disfigures and finally destroys God’s crowning creation – human beings.

This victory took place in fulfillment of a prophecy in Genesis 3:15 known as the *Protoevangelium* or the “first Gospel.” It is given this title because it is the first time in scripture that rescue from sin and death is promised to the human race.

All well and good, but if the cross was the end of the story, we would have no way of knowing if what was promised had actually been accomplished. At best, Christianity would be a philosophy and not a religion of history.

What validates the victory of the cross is what we celebrate this morning – the resurrection.

If Jesus did not come out of the tomb on that first Easter morning . . .

If the women who arrived first at the tomb hallucinated . . .

If the record found in the Gospels was fabricated . . .

If Jesus' body was in fact carried off and placed in some unknown grave and decomposed, there would be no Christian faith . . . at least no credible one.

All of which is to say, without the resurrection, the cross seen in churches, hung around people's necks, affixed on car dashboards and preached from pulpits, would be an empty symbol . . . a pious fraud and sham.

Many of you will have heard of Lee Strobel. He was educated at Yale Law School, worked as the legal editor for the *Chicago Tribune* and was an ardent atheist.

In the early '80s, his wife became a Christian, prompting him to set about to 'rescue' her from this insane belief.

He conducted a two-year investigation, which involved meeting with experts and examining historical evidence. In the end, instead of validating his skepticism, his research led him to conclude that **“the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best attested event of the ancient world.”**

In 1981, he came to Christian faith and went on to write an apologetic bestseller, *The Case for Christ*. I'm sure some of you have read it.

Paul comes to the same conclusion as Strobel, not least because he had an encounter with the risen Christ on the Road to Damascus.

Paul, you will remember, was not a part of the original 12 and thus did not experience any of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances.

Jesus manifested Himself to Paul, as it were, out of due season. What followed was Saul the persecutor becoming Paul the Apostle. ‘Apostle’ means ‘one sent out’.

One reason we know the resurrection is real and that Jesus’ battle on the cross was successful is changed lives. Paul is but one example. Like transformations continued to happen.

In the 19th century, John Richard Green went down from Oxford into the wretchedness of East London. There he opened libraries, taught classes, cleaned the streets, improved homes, and fed the hungry. But none of these things seemed to effect a lasting change and improvement in people’s lives.

After 10 years, he threw in the towel and said, “It’s no use. They will go on drinking and gambling to the end of time.” So, he went back to Oxford and wrote his now-famous history of England.

Not long after, another man became concerned about the depraved conditions in East London. His name was William Booth.

Booth and his wife Catherine took a different approach. They preached the cross of Christ, and conditions improved and lives were changed.

As the old saying goes, the proof is in the pudding. What education alone could not do, Christ did.

Okay you say, I believe Jesus rose from the dead and is alive forever more. That's why I am here celebrating this morning.

I believe Jesus' death on the cross was for me and my sins. I died with Christ and rose with him in my baptism.

I believe the preaching of the cross still changes lives and is good news.

But where do I go from here? What do I do after I say, I believe?

Well – Mary Magdaline in today’s Gospel shows us. After arriving at the empty tomb and looking in, she runs and tells Peter and John what she had seen.

In so doing she became what some commentators have called the “apostle to the Apostles.”

This same urgency to go and tell should be a part of the psyche of every follower of Jesus.

Good news is meant to be shared.

It’s like the woman who shouts to her neighbor across the street, “**No cancer. My tests came back negative.**”

Or, the man who calls his best friend and says excitedly, “**I got the promotion at work.**”

Or the child who runs home from school and thrust her report card up to her mother and says, **“I got all A’s.”**

Allow me to close by urging you to be an excited, contagious, going and telling, Easter Christian.

Investigate the evidence, get your facts straight, and then share what you know with others. That’s Evangelism 101.

Easter Day has come and gone for another year, but the mission of Easter exemplified by Mary Magdalene, who went and told what she had seen, continues.

Be a Mary and go and tell someone else – **“Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!”**