

“Nativity/Resurrection”  
Selected

He is risen! [He is risen indeed!]

## I. A SHORT HISTORY OF THE EASTER HOLIDAY

The word *Easter* appears only once in the NT. This is in the KJV of 1611 at Acts 12: 4 which says: "And when he [King Herod Agrippa I] had apprehended him [Peter], he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions [4 x4 = 16] of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people." (Acts 12:4, KJV) As far as I know, all modern translations have the word *Passover* instead of the word *Easter*.

The translators in 1611 felt this was a good translation because it was in Tyndale's version in 1525, and the Great Bible of 1539, as well as the Bishops' Bible of 1568. The Geneva Bible in 1560, however, used the word *Passover* and then the Rheims Bible of 1582 actually brought the Greek word straight into the English as *Pashe*. Most versions since then have used the word *Passover*.<sup>1</sup> This same word sometimes refers to the Paschal Lamb, as in Luke 22:7 ["Then came the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed." (NASB95)] Paul uses this word to describe Jesus in 1 Cor 5:7,8 when he writes: "...For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (NASB95) Paul is referring to the Passover.] The time for this celebration varies between March 21 and April 25. As far as I know the early church never called the day of our Lord's resurrection Easter. But we do know they celebrated the resurrection of Jesus on the first day of every week.

By the year 300, the resurrection was almost universally observed throughout Christianity at the Spring Equinox. It was called "the Day alone Great", "The Most Royal Day of Days", or "The Festival of Festivals". Easter became the most joyous occasion of the whole year for Christians. An early Christian historian wrote: "All labor ceased, all trades were suspended, the husbandman threw down his spade and plow and put on his holiday attire. The roads were empty of travelers, the sea of sailors. The mother came to church with the whole band of her children and the domestics, the husband and the whole family rejoicing with her. The poor man dressed like the rich, and the rich wore his gayest attire; those who had none of their own borrowed of their neighbors." (Smith, p. 15)

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Wilbur, ed. *Great Sermons on the Birth, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, Vol. 3, Jesus' Resurrection*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991 edition, p. 11. The idea and much of this sermon taken from this source.

## II. A COMPARISON OF CHRISTMAS AND EASTER.

When you read an obituary or visit a cemetery you will notice right under the person's name are two dates with a dash between them. The "dash" represents the life of the person; all that he/she did, the places visited, the areas traveled, the accomplishments attained, the problems encountered; the burdens carried; the joys celebrated, and all the other things experienced in living. The date on the right side of that dash marks the year born; the date on the left side is the year of death. It is usually interesting and sometimes instructive to compare and contrast the world at the time of one's birth and at the time of one's death.

This comparing the beginning with the end is also a good Bible study tool, especially the OT books. When you compare the beginning with the end you get a good sense of the movement of history or the story that is being told.

You may have heard me say, on more than one occasion, that Christmas and Easter are tied together. Of course, without the Christmas event the Easter event would never have occurred. The "dash" between Christmas-Easter is the life of Christ. For interest and instruction this morning I want to compare these two events, Christmas and Easter, or we may call them the Nativity and the Resurrection. Notice....

**1. The number of verses involved.** It is interesting that "Christmas sermons" often start right after Thanksgiving, while sermons on the resurrection are usually only preached on Easter Sunday morning. There are about 2 ¾ chapters given to the birth narrative. This is 58 verses. There are almost six chapters comprising 131 verses in the four gospels devoted to the events between the visit of the women to the empty tomb and Christ's ascension, and there are some 160 additional verses dealing with these themes in the rest of the NT. The actual birth of Jesus is referred to twice in the NT epistles; the subject of Jesus' resurrection is referred to by the Apostle Paul alone 22 times. (Smith, 7)

**2. The city and building involved.** Jerusalem and the Temple appear in both episodes. The wise men came to Jerusalem asking about the "King of the Jews" [Mt. 2:1]. Zacharias was ministering in the Temple when the angel announced [Lk 1:8ff] that he would be blessed with a son in his old age who would be the "announcer of the Messiah". And then, Joseph and Mary took baby Jesus to the Temple to be dedicated [Lk 2:22-39]. The garden tomb was just outside the wall around Jerusalem. At the end of the first resurrection day, Jesus appeared to the huddled group in the city of Jerusalem while the chief priest and others were huddling in the Temple trying to figure out what to do about the disappearance of the body.

**3. The opposition involved.** The birth of Jesus was feared and opposed by Herod. It was ignored by the chief priest and scribes though it was prophesied centuries earlier that such a person would be born in Bethlehem [Mt. 2:1-10; 16-18]. Even after they told the Magi they did not have enough interest to find out for themselves. At the end of his gospel Matthew tells us that it was this same group who bribed the soldiers to falsify the cause for the disappearance of Jesus' body from Joseph's tomb. I wonder if some of them were the same men who quoted the Messianic prophecy from Micah to Herod were now the very ones who were bewildered and concocted the theft theory.

**4. Notice...The angels involved.** In these two narratives, we have the greatest concentration of angelic ministry to be found in the NT. Matthew records an angel speaking to Joseph at least three times. Luke records the angel Gabriel was sent to Zacharias and Mary with messages about baby boys. Then an angel announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. Suddenly a whole choir of angels sang a welcoming song to the new arrival. The angels involved in the resurrection are mentioned in all four gospels [Mt. 28:2, 5-7; Mk 16:5-7; Luke 24: 4-7; Jn 20:12,13]. One moved the stone so people could see into the tomb and the others announced the resurrection to the various visitors who came to the tomb. There was lots of angel activity at both events.

**5. The combination of fear and great joy involved.** Both of these great events have a unique blend of fear and great joy. Mary, we are told, “was greatly troubled” at the first greeting of the angel Gabriel [Lk 1:29]. The shepherds “were sore afraid” [Lk 2:9] when the glory of the Lord shone around them. At the resurrection the soldiers “shook for fear and fell down like dead men” [Mt. 28:4]. The angel told the women “do not be afraid” [Mt. 28:5,10]. Likewise, running through both events are words expressing great joy. The angel told Zacharias that he would have “joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his son’s birth” [Lk. 1:14]. To the shepherds some months later, the angelic word was “I bring you good tidings of great joy” [Lk 2:10]. After the resurrection it took a little while before the joy was experienced. Luke tells us that while they were still in unbelief about the truth of the resurrection they were filled with the joy of hope at the reports they were receiving [Lk 24:41]. John tells us that after Jesus appeared to them, the disciples were glad and rejoiced [20:20]. Forty days later after they had watched Him ascend into heaven, they returned to Jerusalem “with great joy” [Lk. 24:52].

**6. The blessing of peace involved.** The night of Jesus’ birth was the angels’ night to bless the world with the familiar refrain “**Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.**” (Luke 2:14, NASB95) After standing in the room with the disciples to convince them that He was alive, the risen Savior ended the evening with “**peace be unto you**” [Lk. 24:36; Jn 20:21].

**7. Notice, the Holy Spirit is involved.** The presence of the Holy Spirit is emphasized in both these events. Luke carefully mentions those who were filled with the Holy Spirit at the time of the Lord’s advent. The list includes John the Baptizer while he was still in the womb, his mother Elizabeth, his father Zacharias, Mary, and an old man named Simeon. [1:15,35, 41, 67; 2:25-27]. At the close of that first Easter evening, Jesus blessed them with peace and then said, “**Receive the Holy Spirit**” [Jn. 20:22]. Matthew closes his book with the co-equal, Trinitarian baptismal formula “**in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...**” [Mt. 28:19].

**8. The worship involved.** At the birth and the resurrection, we have acts of worship recorded. The Magi upon arriving in Jerusalem declared they came to worship the King of the Jews [Mt. 2:2] and when they finally arrived at the house where He was, they entered, “fell down and worshipped Him” [Mt. 2:11]. Then it was Baby Jesus, the Son-of-God, newborn that was worshipped. Thirty-three years later, it is the Son of God, crucified and risen, who is worshipped. The Centurion said, “surely this was the Son of God” [Mt. 27:54]. Mary, at the tomb, grasped His feet and worshipped [Jn. 20: 16]. When the men went fishing at the Sea of Galilee and discovered the Risen Savior, they worshipped Him [Mt. 28:9, 17]. How natural then, to read in Luke’s account of the ascension that they “worshipped Him” [Lk. 24:51,52].

**9. Notice, the Scripture involved.** In the record of both events it is often stated that these things happen to fulfill the predictions of the OT Scriptures. Matthew and John emphasize this point. The fact that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit was predicted by Isaiah [7:14], fulfilled in Mt. 1:22-23. Bethlehem was predicted to be the birthplace of the Messiah [Micah 5:2; Mt. 2:5,6]. The family's flight into Egypt and back was predicted by Hosea [11:1]. The death of the babies in Jerusalem was foretold by Jeremiah [31:15]. The fact that the birth of Jesus would fulfill some of the covenant God made with David [2 Samuel 7:11-16] was stated to Mary [Lk. 1:32,33], just to name a few. After the resurrection, it was Jesus Himself, who gave the two on the Emmaus Road [Lk. 24:25-27] and then the eleven in the upper room a Bible study on "... **all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.**" **Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem."** (Luke 24:44-47, NASB95)

**10. Notice, the urgency to proclaim the good news involved.** Both at the time of the Lord's birth and after the resurrection, there was a strange urgency to proclaim what had taken place. The simple shepherds left the baby Jesus and "**When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.**" (Luke 2:17, NASB95). It is really surprising how often the angels and the risen Jesus urged the women and men to "go quickly and tell He is risen from the dead" [Mt. 28:8-10]. And of course, Matthew ends with the great commission to "make disciples as you go..." Luke ends with "you are witnesses of these things...in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." [Lk 24:48; Acts 1:8]. Even to Mary Magdalene the command was "go tell my brethren..." [Jn 20:17-18]. She obeyed.

From these ten comparisons, we can leave with three words:

**1. Conviction.** A conviction is a "strong belief". It is something we will not give up when challenged or commanded to do so. Here are a couple of events we can believe in and hold so strongly that we can call them convictions. The resurrection is the most important and greatest of all the miracles. It is also the most abundantly and variously attested. We can have all the confidence in the world in the truth of these events as recorded.

**2. Celebration.** We can believe the facts as presented and then allow them to stir our hearts in joy and praise. "He is risen!" was an exclamation of joy that meant His kingdom shall embrace all nations; our faith shall overcome the world; death is conquered; eternal life is the heritage of all believers. His resurrection made us new creatures filled with life and hope. Peter puts it: "**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,**" (1 Peter 1:3,4 NASB95).

**3. Commission.** We have been given a commission to be on a mission of telling others about Jesus as often as we can and in every way we can. "Preach the gospel everywhere and when necessary use words". We need to be obedient. Go and tell!

He is risen. [He is risen, indeed!]