

The Easter Story

About 1960 years ago, Jesus and his friends and followers were in Jerusalem preparing for the special Passover celebrations.

At the same time, the chief priests and other Jewish officials were meeting at the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest, to discuss ways of capturing Jesus quietly, and killing him. They wanted to kill Jesus because they hated how popular he was with the people and thought he might take some of their power away, and also more importantly, they did not believe Jesus's claim that he was the Son of God. "But we can't do it during the Passover celebrations," they agreed, "because the people might riot."

Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus's twelve disciples, went to the chief priests, and asked, "How much will you pay me if I betray Jesus to you?" They gave him thirty silver coins. From then on, Judas watched for a chance to betray Jesus to them.

On the first day of the Passover ceremonies, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where are we going to eat our Passover meal?" Jesus replied, "Go into the city and find a man carrying a water jar and tell him, 'Our Master says, my time has come, and I will eat the Passover meal with my disciples at your house.'" So the disciples did as he told them, and prepared the meal there.



That evening as Jesus sat eating the Passover meal with his disciples, He broke the bread, blessed it and said, "Take this and eat it, for this is my body, which I am giving for you." He then took the cup of wine and gave thanks and said, "Drink this, all of you. This is my blood which is poured out for you." Then he said, "One of you will betray me." The disciples asked

each other who would do that. But Judas knew he was talking about him and slipped out as soon as he could.

Jesus and the rest of the disciples finished the meal and when they had sung a hymn, they went out to a local beauty spot, the Mount of Olives, and Jesus said to them, "This very night all of you will run away and leave me." Peter, one of Jesus's best friends, said to him, "Even if everyone else leaves you, I never will. Even if I have to die with you, I will never let you down. I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "Tonight, before the rooster crows, you will say three times that you don't know me."

Then Jesus took his disciples to a place called Gethsemane and said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray. Pray for strength against temptation." He went a little way from them, knelt down and started to pray. "God, my Father, if it is possible, please take this burden from me. But do what you want, not what I want." Jesus stayed there and prayed for about an hour.



When he returned to the disciples, he found them asleep and asked them, "Why are you sleeping? Couldn't you stay awake for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation, for your spirit is willing, but your body is weak." Then he went away for a second time to pray, "My Father, if it is not possible to take this painful thing from me, and if I must do it, I pray that what you want will happen." Jesus went back to his followers and found that they had fallen asleep again, so he went and prayed a third time. When he came back the last time, they were still asleep so he told them, "Wake up! It is nearly time for the Son of Man to be betrayed by sinners! Here comes my betrayer."

After he left the meal, Judas had gone to the high priests and made arrangements with them and the soldiers about how they would know Jesus. "The one who I kiss is the one to arrest.", he said. When they arrived where Jesus and his disciples were, Judas went up to Jesus and kissed him and said, "Greetings, Teacher." And with that, the soldiers arrested Jesus.

Jesus was taken to the court of Caiaphas (the High Priest), the teachers of the law and the Jewish Elders. Peter followed at a distance into the courtyard. He sat down with the guards to see what would happen. The priests and the Sanhedrin (the name of the Jewish parliament) brought lots of witnesses who told lies about Jesus. But nothing could be proved and Jesus would not say anything to defend himself. Finally the High Priest said to him, "I ask you under oath: Are you the Son of God?" Jesus replied, "You say that I am." Then the High Priest said, "He has spoken against God!! Do we need anymore witnesses?" The other priests replied, "He should die for what he has said!"



Meanwhile, in the courtyard, a servant girl came up to Peter and said, "You were with Jesus of Galilee." Peter said, "I don't know what you're talking about." Then he went out to the gateway where another girl saw him and told the people around her, "This man was with Jesus of Galilee." Peter said, "I swear I don't know him!" After a little while, the people standing around the gate came up to Peter and said, "Surely you were with him, your accent gives you away." (People from Galilee had a different accent to people in Jerusalem.) Now Peter became angry and said, "I don't know the man!!" Immediately a rooster crows. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had told him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." He went outside and cried. He had denied knowing Jesus because he was scared that he might be arrested.

To sentence someone to death, the Jewish leaders had to have the Roman Governor's permission. So even though it was now getting towards dawn (and against Jewish law!) they took Jesus before the Roman governor, Pilate, who asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "Those are your words." The priests and chief elders then began accusing him and still, Jesus did nothing to defend himself (much to the amazement of Pilate). The governor said, "Don't you hear how they're accusing you?" But still, Jesus didn't say anything!

Pilate didn't know what to do with Jesus. Because he didn't think he had done anything wrong, he sent him to the Jewish King Herod. Herod was pleased that Jesus had been arrested and questioned him, but again, Jesus said nothing. So Herod made fun of him and Herod's soldiers beat Jesus up. Then Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate as he didn't know what to do with Jesus either!

It was the custom, at the time of Passover, for the Roman governor to release one Jewish prisoner chosen by the ordinary people. At that time, they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. When Pilate asked the crowd who they wanted released. The Priests stirred up the crowd so they called for Barabbas. Pilate asked them, "What do you want me to do with Jesus, who is called King of the Jews?" They answered back, let by the Priests, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"



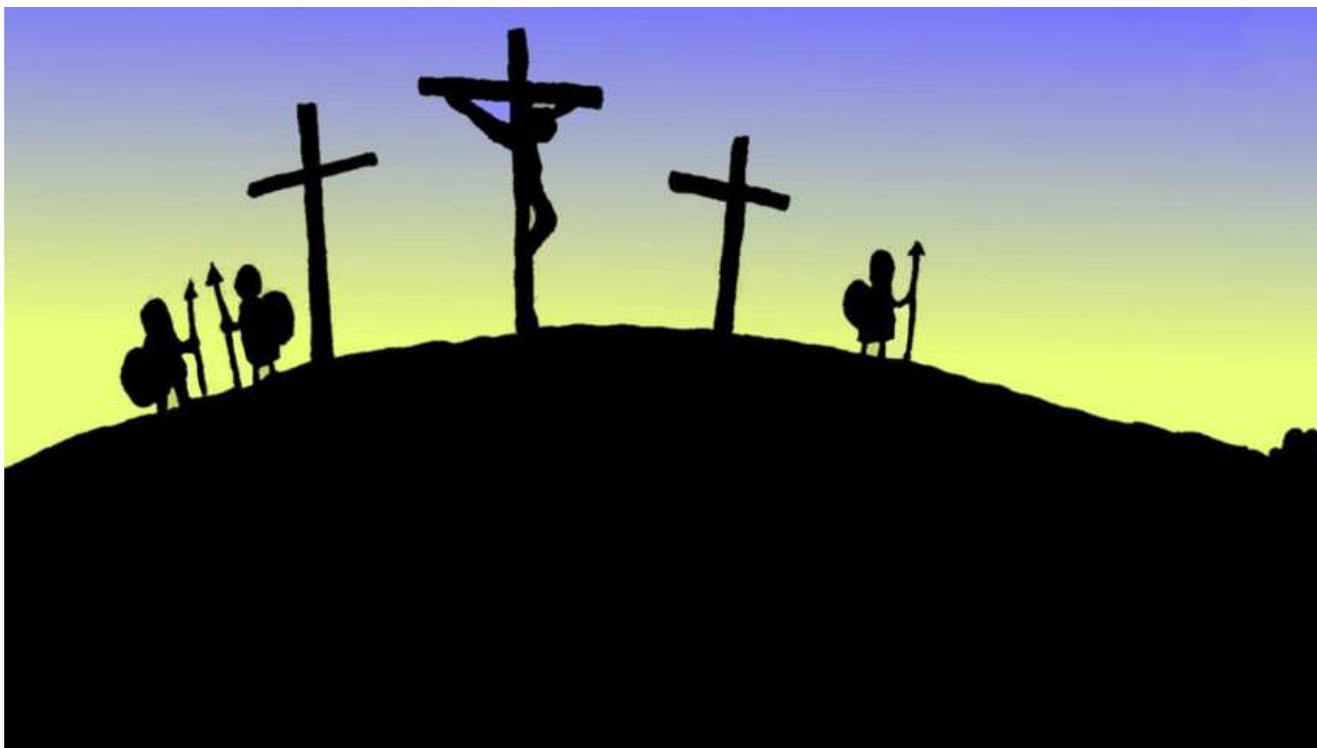
Pilate asked them, "Why? What crime has he committed?" But, they shouted even louder, "CRUCIFY HIM!! CRUCIFY HIM!!!" When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, he took some water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. (This is where we get the phrase 'washing our hands of something' when we want to show that we don't want the blame if

something goes wrong!) Then Pilate released Barabbas. Jesus was flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

The governor's soldiers took Jesus into the governor's palace and gathered around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him and then twisted together a crown of thorns and rammed it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had beaten him up, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

As the soldiers led him away, they grabbed a man named Simon, (who was from Cyrene and on his way in from the country) from the watching crowd and made him carry the cross because Jesus had been beaten so badly, he was too weak to do so.

When they came to the place where they executed people, called Golgotha or 'The Place of the Skull', they offered Jesus cheap wine to drink to help stop the pain, but after he tasted it, he refused to drink it. When they had nailed Jesus up on to the Cross, the Jewish rulers among the crowd sneered at Jesus, saying, "If you are so wonderful and the King of the Jews, save yourself." An inscription, in Greek, Latin and Hebrew, was written on a bit of wood and put over Jesus' head on the cross. It read, "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS." Jesus prayed to God, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

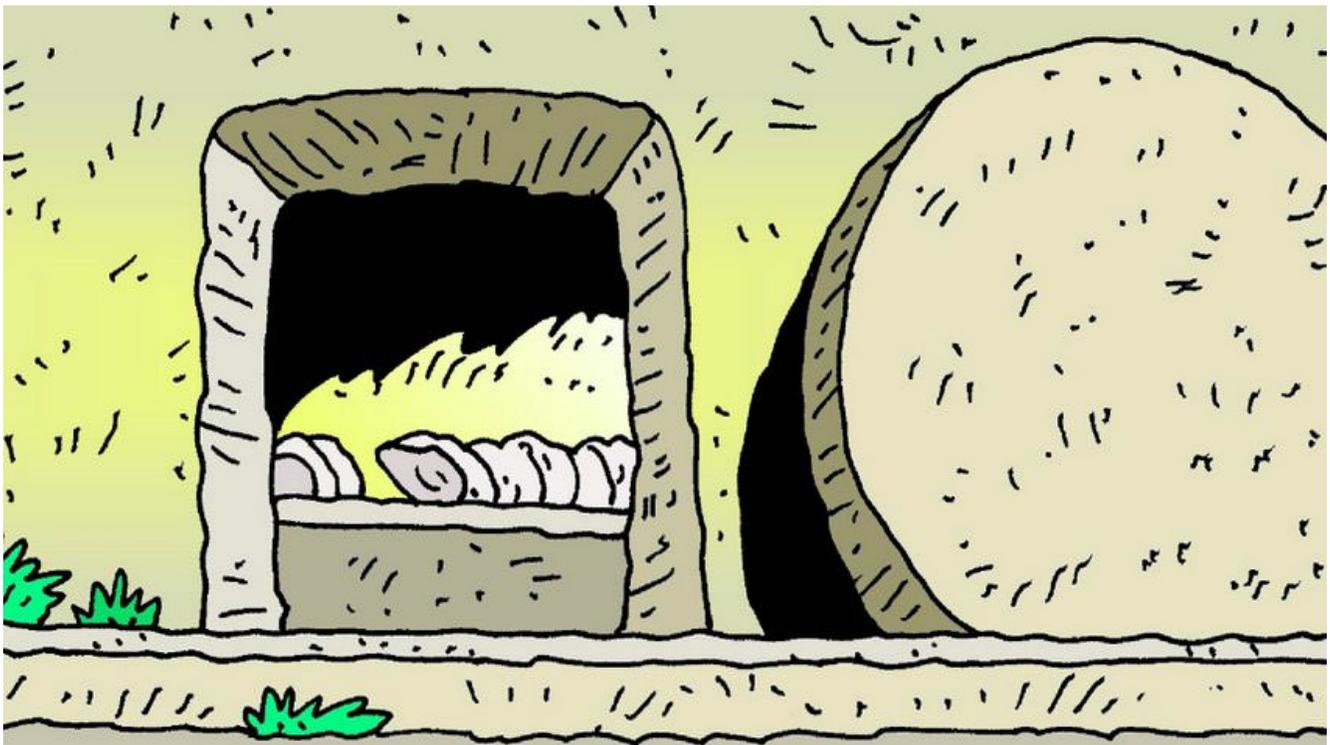


Two thieves were being crucified at the same time as Jesus, one on the right and one on the left. One of the criminals who hung next to Jesus hurled insults at him, "Aren't you the Christ? Why don't you save yourself and us, too!!" But the other thief disagreed with him and said,

"Aren't you afraid of God since you are under the same sentence? We are being punished because we did wrong things. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your Kingdom." Jesus told him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in heaven."

This happened about 12noon, and from then until 3pm it was dark because the sun did not shine! At 3 o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "My God, My God, why have you left me?" Then Jesus cried out in a loud voice again, "It is finished!" And he died. A Roman centurion, was standing in front of Jesus and heard his cry and saw how he died. He said, "Surely, this man was the Son of God!"

Because the next day was the Sabbath (Saturday, the Jewish Holy Day), the Jews didn't want the bodies left on the crosses. Later, an important Jewish council member called Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus's body. Pilate gave his permission for Joseph to remove his body. He and Nicodemus (another council member) took Jesus' body and wrapped it in strips of cloth (which was the Jewish burial custom). Near the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden that Joseph owned and in the garden was a tomb that no one else had ever used. So they buried Jesus in this tomb. The Romans put their best guards at the tomb and the Jewish Leaders had a massive stone rolled in front of it to stop Jesus's followers stealing the body and saying that he had come back to life.



Early on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus's followers, and some other women went to the tomb to put spices onto the body to stop it smelling. When they got to the tomb, they discovered that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. They wondered what had happened! Suddenly two men dressed in white robes that glowed appeared in the tomb.

The women were very frightened, but the men said "He is not here! He has risen just as he said." Then the women remembered what Jesus had said.

The women left the tomb and went to tell the other disciples about what had happened. The others did not believe the women because it sounded like rubbish! But Peter and John got up and ran to the tomb and found it empty with only strips of cloth lying in it. When they saw the empty grave, they believed that Jesus had risen. Then the disciples went home.

Mary stayed at the tomb and was very sad and crying. She turned away from the tomb and saw Jesus there, but she didn't know it was Jesus. "Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" Jesus asked her. She thought it was the gardener so said to him, "If you took Jesus's body away, please tell me where he is so I can go and see him." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned to look at the man properly and saw that it was Jesus. Said said to him, "Rabboni!" (this means 'teacher' in Hebrew) She when to hug Jesus, but he said, "Don't hold on to me, because I have not gone back to heaven yet. But go and tell my disciples that I am going back to heaven." So Mary went back and told the disciples all about what had happened and that she had seen Jesus alive!

Jesus Appears to the Disciples



Later on the same day, two of Jesus's followers were walking from Jerusalem to a town called Emmaus (about 11 kilometres or 7 miles). They were talking about what had happened over the last few days. They were joined by a stranger on the road and started walking with him. It was Jesus but they didn't recognise him. Jesus asked them "What are you talking about?" They told Jesus all that had happened and about the women going to the tomb, the Angels

telling them that Jesus was Alive and the other disciples finding the tomb empty. Jesus then explained to them about what the old Jewish prophets had said about Jesus coming back to life (although they still didn't recognise him!) When they had finished talking, they were near Emmaus. It was getting late, so the two men asked Jesus to stay the night with them.

They sat down to dinner and Jesus said grace. As he broke the bread to eat, the disciple realised it was Jesus. (They might have seen the holes in Jesus's hands where the nails had been.) They were amazed and ran all the way back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples in Jerusalem what had happened!

They found the other disciples in a locked room because they were scared of being found by the Jewish leaders. While the two disciples were saying what had happened, Jesus appeared in the room and said "Peace be with you!" They were scared and thought Jesus was a ghost. But Jesus said "Look at my hands and feet, it is me. Touch my hands where the nails went in. A ghost doesn't have a body!"

He showed them his pierced hands where the nails had gone in and they believed it was him, Alive! Jesus ate some fish with them and explained why he had died and that he would soon go back to heaven. He also explained that he would send a helper, the Holy Spirit, to live in and help all of Jesus's followers. He told them not to leave Jerusalem until the Helper had come. He also told them to go and tell other people about him and that he loves everyone so much he died for them.

But there was one disciple who wasn't there when Jesus first appeared, his name was Thomas and he doubted that Jesus really was alive. He said that unless he saw the holes in Jesus hands, he wouldn't believe that he was raised from the dead.

The next week, the disciples were in the room again. This time Thomas was with them. Even though the room was locked, Jesus still appeared to them. He showed Thomas his hands. Thomas touched him and said, "My Lord and My God!" And believed that Jesus was alive.

Jesus Goes Back to Heaven

40 days after Jesus rose from the dead, he got his followers together and took them out to Bethany. He prayed for them and while he was doing so, he was carried back up into Heaven. A shining cloud covered Jesus, but suddenly two men dressed in white shining clothes stood next to Jesus and said "Why are you looking into the sky? Jesus who you saw going into heaven will return the same way!"



The disciples went back to Jerusalem as Jesus had told them to do. A while later, the disciples were in a house waiting to celebrate Pentecost (the Jewish harvest festival). Suddenly there was a sound like a strong blowing wind in the house. They saw things like flames of fire that came and rested on each of the disciples. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, the helper just as Jesus had promised.

They went outside and to tell people about Jesus and found that people from lots of different countries could understand what they were saying. (People from different countries were staying in Jerusalem then for the Pentecost festival.) The people didn't understand this was possible, some people thought they were all drunk! But Peter said "How can we be drunk? It's nine o'clock in the morning!"

The disciples found that by the power of the Holy Spirit, they could speak lots of different languages. They told all the people about Jesus and what he did for everyone. Over 3000 people became Christians that day!

People have been telling others about Jesus all over the world ever since.