

*The Evangelical Lutheran Church  
in Jordan and the Holy Land*



**الكنيسة الإنجيلية اللوثرية  
في الأردن والأراضي المقدسة**

## **EASTER MESSAGE**

**From Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar**

**Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Holy Land**

21 April 2019

Luke 24:10-11

Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

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*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord  
Jesus Christ.*

Easter greetings to all from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, and from Jerusalem, the City of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

I am writing this message from my office at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer on Muristan Road in the Old City of Jerusalem. Our church is just a stone's throw from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, where we believe Jesus was crucified and died, was buried and was raised. Tradition holds that our church sits on the spot where the women observed the crucifixion of Jesus. For as it is written:



*Many women were also there, looking on from a distance;  
they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for  
him. (Matthew 27:55)*

It is a powerful thing to imagine our church today carrying on the witness of the women who witnessed the love of God for this broken world, as revealed through the suffering of Jesus on the cross.

It's also powerful to imagine Redeemer Church as the place from which the women set out on the morning of the Resurrection, bearing the spices they had prepared for Jesus' burial.

That morning, the women-- Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them— expected to anoint Jesus.

They expected to do the work of respectful burial, as they had done with their mothers and grandmothers, sisters and aunts many times before.

They expected to encounter the dead body of Jesus.

They certainly *did not* expect an empty tomb, and a stone already rolled away!

Nor did they expect these words from two angelic creatures, men in dazzling clothes who appeared near them:



*“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”*

None of this was expected by the women on that first Easter morning.

But perhaps what they *did expect* was that when they shared the Resurrection news with others, they would be met with skepticism.

Scripture tells us these women—who had remained there faithfully through the awful crucifixion and were the first ones at the tomb next morning—were not immediately believed. Their story of an empty tomb and Jesus raised from the dead was considered an “idle tale”.

It was heard as nonsense.

It was heard as fiction.

It was heard as merely “women’s chatter.”

This was a sign of the times, and of the culture, that a woman’s story, no matter how credible, was received as gossip and not as breaking news.

But truly, how different is this from our situation today?

Women’s voices and experiences are routinely discounted and dismissed in society, in the media, and sadly even in the



church. In the ELCJHL, we are intentionally working to change that reality through an emphasis on Gender Justice in our ecclesiastical constitution, as well as through our efforts to ordain a Palestinian Lutheran woman pastor in the very near future.

But even if it had been men who had shared the news of the Resurrection—both then and now—this is radical news that would never really be received with open arms and minds. Resurrection from the dead, new beginnings from long dead things, life and liberation springing forth from prisons, from oppressive systemic structures, from decades of military occupation—these all seem like “idle tales” to the world today.

And yet, Easter morning is all about the surprise, about the unexpected, about the new thing God has done in the world.

*“Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” (Isaiah 43:19)*

To a world obsessed with the way things used to be, and making things “great” again, these all seem like idle tales. No one expects news of Resurrection.

Certainly no one expects this news from the mouths of women!



It is unexpected.

It is audacious.

It is uncivil.

But, then, God's saving work is never a message meant for the comfort of authorities, of institutions, or of the civil.

God raised Jesus from the dead for the sake of the poor, the prisoner, the voiceless, the hopeless, the occupied, the forgotten, and the ridiculous.

God raised Jesus from the dead for the sake of sinners like you and me.

For this reason, on this Easter we remember and proclaim that the Resurrection of Jesus is not only a theological position.

It is a statement of hope, of existence, and of resistance.

We Palestinian Christians have been in this land for 2000 years, and we will remain here for 2000 more. We were even mentioned in the Book of Acts in the story of the Pentecost:

*'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?*

*Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene,*



*and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ (Acts 2)*

We are the women, we are the men, we are the faithful disciples, who have been both carrying the cross and proclaiming the resurrection in this land since the time of Jesus. And we wish to remain here.

It has been another difficult year here in Palestine and Israel, in the West Bank and in Gaza. And still, the sorrow of Good Friday will never dampen our ability and passion to celebrate and rejoice in the Resurrection.

This is true because we live in the City of the Resurrection.

We live in the land where the Risen Lord walked with the disciples on their way to Emmaus.

We live in the land where the Risen Lord made breakfast on the beach with his disciples.

We live in the land where the Risen Lord shows up, again and again, to give the faithful strength today—as he does in your land, from Norway to the United States to Tanzania and in every place where two or three are gathered in His name.

On Easter morning, we rise in the confident hope that because Christ is risen, death does not have the last word. We rise in hope that occupation is not never-ending. We rise

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in hope that God's love for the broken will always win out over hatred, over prejudice, over violence, over every power or principality determined to keep the tomb sealed (along with our hopes and rights and lives and futures).

Dear siblings in Christ, sing and shout and live with us the Easter Good News:

**Alleluia, Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia!**

**Al-Masih kam! Hakan kam!**

*Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar*

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