

# *I Have Seen the Lord!*

## WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

2<sup>nd</sup> in a five-part series

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*Daniel 12:1–4 (NIV2011)*

“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. <sup>2</sup>Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. <sup>3</sup>Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. <sup>4</sup>But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.”

*John 20:11–18 (NIV2011)*

<sup>11</sup>Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb <sup>12</sup>and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

<sup>13</sup>They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” <sup>14</sup>At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

<sup>15</sup>He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

<sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

<sup>17</sup>Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

<sup>18</sup>Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

*Jesus of Nazareth, the resurrection and the life, has himself been resurrected.  
Everything has changed. Nothing is the same. It never could be.*

*Out of the dust*

Last week, we considered a passage from Isaiah that looked ahead to the day when the dead would rise to new life. Today, we can see much the same claim in Daniel, which was written about 160 years before Jesus. “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will wake up to everlasting life” we are told. The dead, all those who have ever died, will rise to newly embodied life. They will wake up and their righteousness will beam like little suns.

These “resurrection moments” in Isaiah and Daniel are brief glimpses of God’s marvelous restoration and renewal of all creation. Like Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones being knit back together, so resurrection embodies the fulfillment of God’s promise to put things right and restore us all to a right and good relationship with God and with each other.

Mary Magdalene could not know what awaited her at Joseph of Arimathea's tomb, where they had laid Jesus' body. But a breathtaking, soul-shaking encounter with the God of life was about to be hers.

### The Book of Daniel

The book of Daniel is set during the time of the Jewish exile in Babylon, more than 500 years before Jesus. Daniel is in two very distinct sections. The first section, chapters 1-6, tells the story of Daniel and his friends. Living in exile, they are pressured to assimilate into the Babylonian culture and religion. All of the short stories that make up this section tell how God delivered his people from harm because they stayed true. These stories came together in their final form about 200 years before Jesus, when the Jews faced similar pressure from a Syrian despot. The stories have a common moral: stay true to Israel's God and you will be saved.

The second half of Daniel, chapters 7-12, tells a similar story about faithfulness and deliverance, but this time in apocalyptic language and imagery that is very similar to what we find in Revelation. The writing may seem very strange and bizarre to us, but it was quite popular during the period 200 years before and after Jesus.

### *I have seen the Lord!*

Mary Magdalene has made her way to Jesus' tomb early on Sunday morning. *Very* early. It is still dark. She is going to help finish preparing Jesus' body for the year or so it will lie in the tomb,<sup>1</sup> as there hadn't been time to finish the burial preparations before sundown on Friday.

But when Mary arrives, she finds that the large, heavy, round stone blocking the doorway into the tomb has been rolled away.<sup>2</sup> Something is terribly wrong and without even looking in the tomb, she races to find Peter and another disciple. After running back to the tomb, the disciples discover that the tomb is empty. And empty in a weird way. The burial cloths that had been used to wrap Jesus' body are still lying on the stone slab. But they aren't piled haphazardly, as if tossed aside when the body was removed. Instead, they look like they had been wrapped around a balloon that had been deflated.

After the other disciples head home, surely perplexed and frightened, Mary stays behind, standing quietly in the garden just outside the

tomb. She weeps, knowing only that Jesus' body is missing, surely stolen by some of her Lord's opponents.

After a bit, she goes over to the open tomb to look for herself. I suppose most of us would do that. Still crying, Mary peers into the tomb and sees not an empty slab of stone, but two angels. They are dressed in white and sitting right on the slab where Jesus' body had lain.

As best you can, try to put yourself in Mary's place. Jesus' body gone one minute and then . . . and then . . . two angels. How could the mind take in such a thing?

Interestingly, this is one of the few occasions in Scripture when the angels' first words aren't "Be not afraid." Instead, they ask her why she is crying, as if that isn't self-evident. Mary straightforwardly tells the angels that she is weeping because someone has made off with Jesus' body.

Then she glances outside the tomb and sees someone working; it must be the gardener. He has overheard her and asks who she is looking for. Thinking that the gardener may

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<sup>1</sup>Jesus was crucified on Friday afternoon. When Jesus' body is taken down from the cross, there isn't much time left, for no Jew would touch a dead body on the Sabbath, which began at sundown on Friday. The Jews of Jesus' day practiced a two-stage burial. Jesus' body was to lie in the tomb for a year or so, until only the bones were left. Then, his bones would be collected and placed in an ossuary, a bone box, and placed in a tomb alongside other bone boxes.

<sup>2</sup>Because families needed regular access to first-century tombs, the doors were often blocked with a round stone that could be rolled away if needed but would otherwise keep animals out of the tomb.

have helped to carry off Jesus' body, Mary asks only to know where the body has been taken.

And then the reality of the post-Easter world falls full square on this Galilean woman. The gardener turns to her and calls her name. She has been talking to Jesus.

Could we possibly pretend to know everything running through her mind at that moment? Could John, the writer of this story? Of course not. I doubt that Mary could articulate it herself. N. T. Wright offers us a few reflections on this poignant moment:

Mary's intuitive guess, that he must be the gardener, was wrong at one level and right, deeply right, at another. This is the new creation. Jesus is the beginning of it. Remember Pilate: 'Here's the man!' Here he is: the new Adam, the gardener, charged with bringing the chaos of God's creation into new order, into flower, into fruitfulness. He has come to uproot the thorns and thistles and replace them with blossoms and harvests. As we stand there and listen, overhearing Mary's conversation (a typical sequence, for John, of people getting the wrong idea), let the pain of the people you're with speak itself to Jesus, whether or not they know who he is.

Then listen for the name. It is greeting, consolation, gentle rebuke ('Come on! Don't you know me?') and invitation, all rolled into one. Of course we know him. Of course we don't know him. He is the same. He is different. He is alive, with a new sort of life, the like of which we'd never seen before. Let Jesus call your own name, and the name of whoever you've brought with you, whoever needs his love and healing today. And then take it from there. Let the prayer flow on into whatever new conversation is appropriate.<sup>3</sup>

Mary starts to embrace Jesus, but things are not as they had been before. Jesus tells her that she is not to cling to him. Jesus will not stay with her and the other disciples, he must yet return to the Father. So Mary rushes to tell the other disciples that Jesus' body was not stolen. God had resurrected Jesus. "I have seen the Lord," she exclaims when she finds them. He lives!

#### *The resurrection and the life*

Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, has now been resurrected himself. As Paul would put it a couple of decades later, Jesus is "the first fruits of those who have died" (1 Corinthians 15:20). Everything has changed; nothing is the same.

We live in a post-Easter world, a world that has been, is being, and shall be remade by God. We are called to faith, to place our trust in God as revealed fully in Jesus Christ – and nowhere else. In each of the seven "I am . . ." statements in his gospel, John has led us deeper and deeper into the truth that is Jesus Christ. He is "the way, the truth, and the life (14:6) . . . the resurrection and the life (11:25)." We are invited to experience the love that defeats death, the power that sustains eternal life. Our acceptance of this invitation is our assent to the truth of Jesus' claims and our trust in him; i.e., our faith in Jesus Christ.

Such faith is nurtured by the church. It is here, among diverse people who are all on their own journey that we learn what it means to be a follower of Jesus. But we can't expect to discover God's gifts if our post-Easter plans include only an occasional encounter with the people of God. It is like imagining we can learn to play the piano with a couple of lessons each year. The world clamors for our attention. It demands our priorities. Thus, we must make a conscious and deliberate decision to ground our life in God and live it among disciples of Jesus Christ. Each week offers us a new Easter, a new opportunity to embrace life with a passion that can only be found in the truth, the love, and the life of our Lord.

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<sup>3</sup> Wright, T. (2004). *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21* (146). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

## Angels

The following is adapted from the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*.

From the Garden of Eden to the renewed heaven and earth, angels are found repeatedly throughout the Bible. These beings are also spoken of as spirits, cherubim, seraphim, sons of God, the heavenly host, or in a few instances, even referred to by their proper names, such as Michael and Gabriel.

In the biblical text, angels are real living beings. They are supernatural and nonphysical, but may assume a corporeal appearance for a period of time. Angels are therefore not symbols of another reality. In one sense, however, an angel is an image—an image of the invisible God. Even their names, ending in “-el” (the Hebrew expression for God), as in *Gabriel*, suggests their close connection to the deity. On many occasions God chose to mediate his presence to his people through angels. When he revealed himself to Moses on Mount Sinai, the Lord said, “no one may see me and live” (Ex 33:20 NIV). Thus, in reality, it was the “angel of the LORD” that appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush when God disclosed himself as the “I am,” or YHWH (Ex 3:2).

The ultimate revelation of God was not through an angelic mediator figure, but through his “Word” (the *logos*), the Son of God (Jn 1:1–18). The author of Hebrews makes an eloquent case for the superiority of Jesus to angels by pointing to his sonship, his position at the right hand of the Father, his more excellent name and the fact that he is worthy of the worship and adoration of the angels (Heb 1:1–13). Throughout the history of the church, however, many have interpreted the OT appearances of the “angel of the LORD” as preincarnate manifestations of the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Primarily, then, angels are supernatural beings closely linked with the work of God himself. They are surrounded by an aura of the numinous. A human encounter with an angel is in some sense an encounter with the divine. Angels are known to us not as individualized characters but as agents. Their primary activities are praise and worship of God in his heavenly court, making announcements and carrying messages on behalf of God to humans, intervening with guidance and protection in the lives of people, and dispensing the judgments of God.<sup>1</sup>

1. Ryken, L., Wilhoit, J., Longman, T., Duriez, C., Penney, D., & Reid, D. G. (2000). *Dictionary of biblical imagery* (electronic ed.) (24). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. John’s telling of Mary Magdalene’s encounter with Jesus outside the tomb is one of the most poignant scenes in the New Testament. She is seemingly lost in her grief until the moment when Jesus calls her by name, “Mary” (v. 16). Then she is swept up in her joy, grasping her Lord. But there is something larger here than even the intimacy of Mary’s joy. Notice that Jesus doesn’t tell her to return and say he had risen. Instead, Jesus instructs her to tell the others that he was returning to the Father as he had promised (John 14:28; 16:28). Jesus’ coming ascension would mark the creation of the new believing community, in whom God’s Holy Spirit, the comforter and advocate, would dwell.
  - a. Discuss the ways in which the truth of the resurrection prepares us to be the community of faith.
  - b. Talk about how you understand your own part in the community of faith that we call the Body of Christ. How is that reflected in your life at St. Andrew?
  - c. Why do so many people come to share in the joy of Easter morning, yet do not return to be a part of the community of believers on a regular and frequent basis?
2. The accompanying resurrection text for this week is Daniel 12:1-4. What does this passage tell you about who will be resurrected? How about in this: Rev. 20:11-15?
3. God’s work of new creation goes on still. Paul wrote, “If anyone is in Christ – New Creation! The old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).
  - a. What evidence do you see in our world of God’s work of new creation? Where do you see glimpses of God’s kingdom in the world around us?
  - b. If we are to build for God’s kingdom, to what work has God called you?

## *Daily Bible Readings*

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. We've been studying the Gospel of John for several months now. This week, we'll read a letter from John that is in the New Testament. I've broken it into six readings.

<p><b>Monday, 1 John 1</b> This beginning is similar to John's gospel. What about the claim by some that there is no such thing as sin?</p>	<p><b>Tuesday, 1 John 2:1-17</b> Who is our advocate before God? What is the new commandment? Is it really new? How should we behave toward our fellow believers?</p>
<p><b>Wednesday, 1 John 2:18-3:10</b> What is an antichrist? What do they teach and proclaim? How do we guard against being deceived? Why do you think John has such strong words against sin and those who sin? What could he mean when he says that all who abide in God don't sin? Don't we all sin?</p>	<p><b>Thursday, 1 John 3:11-4:6</b> Why does the world hate believers? What is love? How would you contrast "truth and action" with "word and speech" (3:18). What does it mean to "test the spirits?"</p>
<p><b>Friday, 1 John 4:7 - 5:5</b> Why is the statement "God is love," not merely sentiment? What makes it concrete? What might it have to do with our proclamation of the Trinity?</p>	<p><b>Saturday, 1 John 5:6-21</b> What is eternal life? How might it differ from everlasting life? How can we know that we are God's children?</p>

