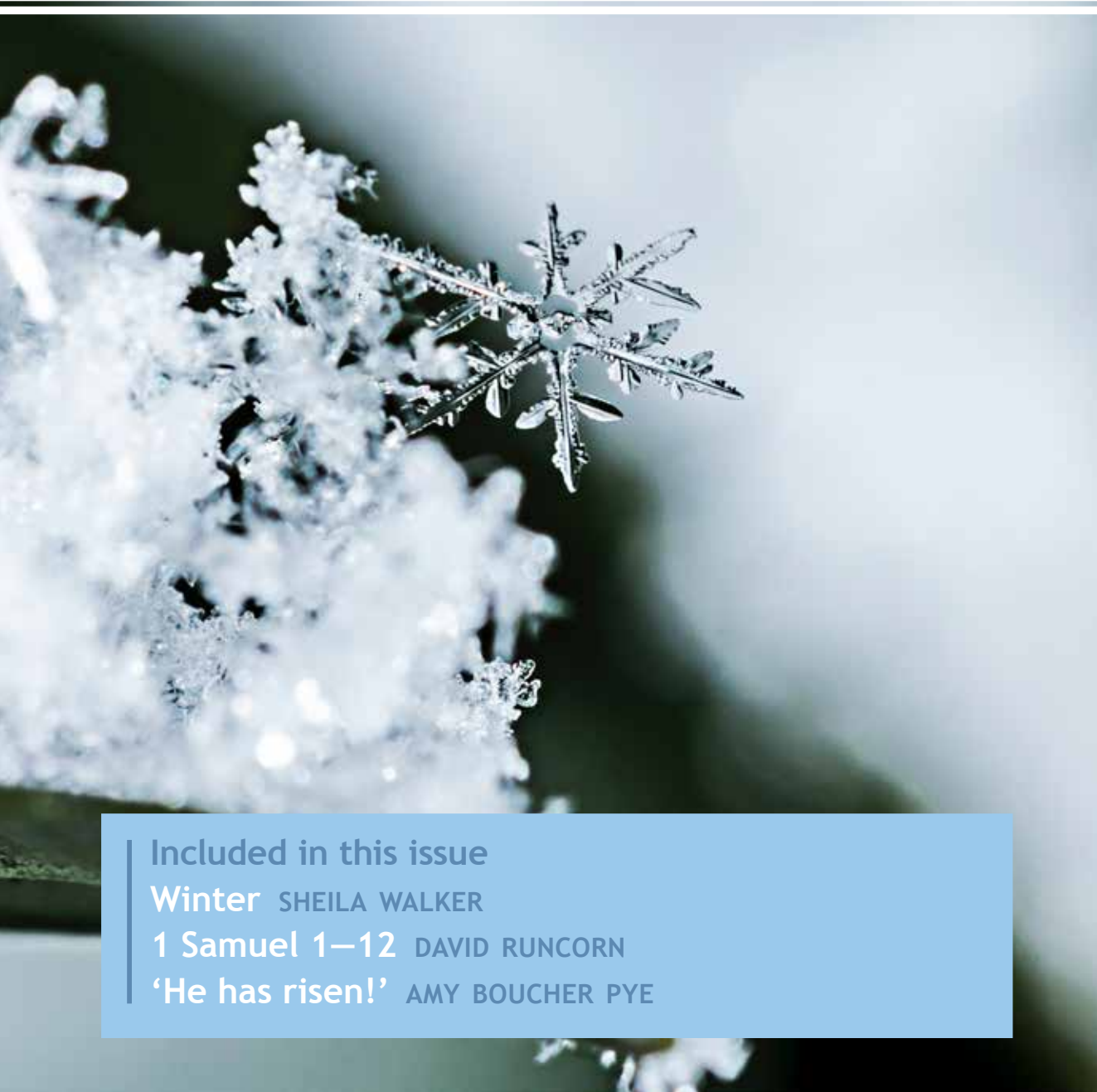


JANUARY-APRIL 2024



New Daylight

Sustaining your daily journey with the Bible



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New Daylight

Edited by **Gordon Giles**

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Gordon Giles writes...



Happy New Year! I hope and pray that Christmas was a blessed time for you. It is easy – tempting even – to behave as though Christmastide ends on Boxing Day, but 26 December is in fact the feast of Stephen, and we begin this year with St Stephen, whose witness to Christ occupies the early chapters of Acts.

Exactly a week after Christmas comes New Year's Day, which few think of as having religious or spiritual significance. Not so! 1 January is the feast of the circumcision of Christ or 'the naming of Jesus', the two phenomena being simultaneous in Jewish tradition. The first is an act with religious and cultural heritage and significance. The second is more spiritual, but has deep impact on the life of the one who is named; what we are called affects how others think of us, and what others think of us affects how we perceive ourselves.

The act of circumcision had practical, precautionary benefit and cultural significance: it is the sign of covenant, dating back to Abraham. Doing it to Jesus *made him a Jew*, cementing that aspect of his identity. His virgin birth cemented his identity as Son of God. It is vital to our understanding of Jesus that he has Jewish heritage, not as a visitor to it, but as a real member born into that faith community. His identity is also glued to his name: it sets him apart, for he is not named after his earthly father, Joseph, but after his heavenly Father, the Lord God Almighty.

The meaning of the name 'Jesus', *Yeshua* (or Joshua), refers to salvation, to crying for help and having one's cries for help heard by almighty God. It is a universal name, sounding similar in almost every known language, whether spelt with a 'J', a 'G' or an 'I' at the beginning. In Aragonese (the region of Spain from which Henry VIII's first wife Katherine hailed), it is spelt *Chesús*. Indeed in some Latin American cultures, Jesus as a man's Christian name is acceptable and quite common, while in many other countries to name a child 'Jesus' would be peculiar.

Our Lord Jesus Christ crosses all these cultures and bears his name of salvation to all the corners of the earth, the sins of which he takes away. In a sense then, there can be no better 'Christian' name than that of Jesus!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gordon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke underneath the name.

'He has risen!' Practising resurrection



The season of Easter, which we've now entered, should be one of joy, feasting and the drinking of a lot of bubbly – so says the theologian Tom Wright. I agree. Many of us have come to observe the season of Lent with fasting and self-examination, but we lose out when we do not enjoy the spiritual practice of celebration. And we have the best news to rejoice over – Jesus lives! He did not stay dead! The resurrection is real! Alleluia!

As we explore the story of the resurrection this week through the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, we see how it is one of contrasts – surprise, shock and disbelief along with wonder, celebration and overflowing joy. For instance, the way the women, when Jesus appears to them, believe straight away differs from the men, who take longer to understand that Jesus really is alive and has a resurrected body. Thus if we hold a lurking feeling that we should react to these stories in a particular way or by a certain timeline, we can find encouragement by the varied responses. God understands that we may come to know and believe in his resurrected life according to our own personality and volition.

During this season and beyond we can, in the words of the poet Wendell Berry, practise resurrection. When we do so daily, we stand against hopelessness and despair. We recognise the glories of our Creator God, who formed us in his image. We acknowledge that the risen Christ may appear in our lives in unexpected and amazing ways. And we collaborate with the indwelling Spirit, who empowers us to love the needy, work for justice, forgive those who repent, extend kindness to the awkward and walk with our God day by day.

This week I invite you to notice how Jesus may break through and surprise you. Perhaps you will receive an act of kindness from a stranger, or enjoy the best night of sleep in a long time, or delight at the smile of a child. When we ask God to show us how he is at work, we will see more and more the evidence of his resurrection power. Not least in how we seek to live each day.

Earth-shattering news

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?'... There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

'Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!' This refrain will echo around the world today as Christians express their joy over the good news of Jesus – he who died yet lives. But as we rejoice, take a few moments to put yourselves in the sandals of the women who discovered the empty tomb.

Weighed down with grief after their friend was killed, they wanted to care for his broken body. But they could not buy the anointing spices until the sabbath was over and the new day dawned. Spices in hand, in a fog of grief, they made their way to the tomb and realised that the stone would be too heavy to move. How shattering that must have felt – they who wanted to pour out their love in the only practical way available were stymied in their quest.

Then consider their great surprise when God intervened with the earth shaking and an angel appearing to do the heavy lifting. This unexpected turn of events, with the blazing-bright appearance of this angel, must have shaken off the weariness of their deep grief. The women stay alert while the guards can't handle the shock, their bodies closing down.

What a joy for us that God continues to burst on to the scene. If we feel weighed down in an impenetrable fog, we can trust that he can send the light of his Spirit to dispel the clouds. Jesus is alive!

Risen Christ, you weren't contained by the tomb! You are risen! Alleluia!

Divine passive

In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: “The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.”’ Then they remembered his words.

Because of its vitality, I love using the active tense when writing. But I also love what is known as the ‘divine passive’, and that is what we see in this passage. It appears just after the angel asks the women why they are looking for the living in a grave; as they say, ‘He is not here; he has risen!’ In the Greek, the latter part of that sentence is more accurately translated ‘He has been raised!’ The angel delivers this stunning news, and the grammar points to God as the one who made it happen.

The women hardly have time to ponder what this means when the angel reminds them what Jesus said previously – that after being killed he would be raised again to life.

It is easy to overlook the wonder of God sharing this miracle with *women* first. Many rabbis would not trust women to be witnesses. Women received no education and were not allowed to read the Torah, the scriptures, or even touch them. All of their learning would have been done via their fathers, husbands or rabbis. Yet God revealed that his Son was alive to those from this less-valued segment of society, going against the expectations of that culture. For God is not limited by what humans create.

On this Easter Monday, why not take some time to ponder the upside-down kingdom of Jesus, including that he died but did not stay dead, that lowly women, not rulers and kings, heard the news first, and the many other wonders that God brings about, including in our own lives.

Saving God, thank you for how you break into our hearts and minds. Open me to receive from you in whatever form you choose. Amen.

On a mission

‘Then go quickly and tell his disciples: “He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.” Now I have told you.’ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’

What a whirlwind for the women. Tasked with sharing the shocking news that their friend was not dead but alive, they reverberated with not only joy but trepidation. They would have felt that stomach-churning anticipation of sharing a big announcement when one does not know how everything will turn out. The closest I can imagine was sharing the news that my husband and I were expecting a baby.

The women’s emotions would have been rocked even more when none other than Jesus himself appeared to them! Note how they fell down immediately to worship, grabbing on to his feet – that detail would have lodged in the minds of the original audience, indicating that this was not a spirit-only resurrection. After all, Jesus had feet that they could clasp.

The place mentioned by the angel and Jesus is important too – Galilee. This was the main space for Jesus’ ministry; his friends, whom he calls his brothers, would know where to meet him. Also, that he does not specify Jerusalem as the meeting place underscores that he comes not only for Jewish people but Gentiles too.

Jesus loves these women and treats them with respect. He tasks them with sharing the extraordinary news of him being alive, all the while giving them reassurance and telling them not to fear. The risen Christ continues to love and affirm us, and also gives us the mission of sharing his good news. Perhaps today you will sense a nudge with his loving invitation to partner with him.

Living Lord, help me to receive your presence. Thank you for entrusting me with collaborating with you. Equip me to do your will, with love. Amen.

Invitation to believe

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Jesus appeared in bodily form, but the men did not believe it. Their reaction, in fact, was not only disbelief; they also thought the women spoke nonsense. How difficult for these faithful female disciples, those who went to anoint Jesus' body and ended up witnessing a miracle. Now the men questioned their words.

Notice Peter, however. He had been humbled by his denial of Jesus, which Jesus had foretold. Perhaps his heart became tender as he realised that he did not always grasp the full story. Going on his own search of the tomb, he saw no body but glimpsed the strips of linen that Jesus was buried in. And he wondered what this all meant. Many scholars read this negatively, assuming that he still doubted, but some see this as an opening to faith and belief. That reading of the text seems more likely to me, too. I prefer to think that Peter learned from betraying Jesus, and he pondered with hope the mystery of Jesus actually being alive.

Belief can come in a flash, but it can be a journey too. When first the angel and then Jesus visited the women, they had instant opportunities to believe. Peter, in contrast, had longer to process, which perhaps is what he needed as he restored his hope in the Saviour.

As those who follow Christ, we are called to believe. Sometimes this feels the hardest thing to do – to extend our faith when people, circumstances and institutions all seem to work against us. At these times we can remember the women and Peter and how they came to believe, knowing that God can change our hearts too.

Living Jesus, I believe; help my unbelief. Amen.

AMY BOUCHER PYE

Journeying with Jesus

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus... Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognising him. He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?'... 'About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel... In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive.'

Two disciples walked along a road, dejected. Jesus had disappointed them and had not ushered in a new era of political influence. When he hung on the cross, their hopes were dashed. As Cleopas and his friend (who could have been his wife) debriefed all that they had seen and heard, they tried to make sense of it. But no sense could be found as they circled around the 'what ifs' and the 'why not's'.

Yet God broke through, just as earlier when Jesus appeared to the women by the tomb. Interestingly, God did not allow these travellers to know right away that they were in the presence of the resurrected Christ. Perhaps he wanted them to be able to share with him who they thought he was (note – a prophet, not the Messiah) and how desperate they felt over his death. Their perplexed questions reveal their feelings and thoughts: dejection, pain and confused amazement at what the women said. They simply could not work it all out.

Perhaps we too circle round with our questions, doubts and concerns. But Jesus does not leave us alone on our journeys of faith. He comes alongside us and allows us to express everything that baffles us, showing up perhaps when we least expect it. He lives in and among us.

Living Lord, open my eyes to see you. Help me to be aware of your presence and give me your peace. Amen.

It is true!

He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself... They urged him strongly, ‘Stay with us’... When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight... They found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.’

What a Bible study that must have been, when Jesus led his friends through the scriptures, starting with Moses and moving through the Old Testament promises of the coming Messiah. But he first exhorted them over their disbelief. Although he hoped they would have figured out his true identity after all the time they had spent with him, he did not withhold from them the glorious message of how Jesus fulfilled the promises of God. Through this discussion, they still did not realise that he was speaking about himself. Only later when they were gathered in the setting of a meal, breaking bread together, were their eyes opened.

Notice the main message of Jesus, how he had to suffer before entering glory. God’s redemption plan for humanity involved this sequence of events; the suffering of the chosen one was required. Remembering that Jesus did not shirk from the ultimate sacrifice can help us when we balk over the challenging things we face. We can also seek from him the strength and hope to endure.

After the disciples understood that it really was Jesus, their weight of grief evaporated and they turned right around and headed back the seven miles to Jerusalem to share their joy with the others. Because Jesus appeared to them, they too believed. He appears to us too, and we also can believe and rejoice.

Living Jesus, I welcome your presence in my life. Help me to discern how in you I live and move and have my being.

Power from on high

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled...? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have’... He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures... You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’

The unfolding of the resurrection continued when Jesus appeared to the disciples who had just welcomed back Cleopas and his companion. Instead of hearing the witness of these two travellers only, the gathered group found themselves meeting the resurrected Lord himself. But they did not let themselves believe it was him until he ate broiled fish in their presence – then they understood that he wasn’t some kind of wispy spirit, but that he had a real resurrected body. Again Jesus opened the scriptures, highlighting the golden threads in their sacred texts that revealed him as the promised Saviour, the Messiah.

Jesus knew that they needed the Spirit to help them share the good news of his life, death and resurrection. Thus he instructed them to stay in Jerusalem until they received their new set of clothes, those infused with the power from on high.

Jesus does not have to curtail us as he did those gathered and ask us to wait; living after Pentecost, we receive the Spirit when we believe in Jesus. We can now embrace a resurrected life, one filled with God’s gracious presence through the Spirit of Jesus who dwells within. In doing so we collaborate with God in the spreading of his kingdom through our loving words and actions.

Father, Son and Spirit, I praise you for this resurrection story. Help me to live out its wonderful promises each day. Amen.



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‘Thank you for all you do to make every issue so readable and enlightening, giving us the opportunity to get closer to God.’

‘Thank you to all the wonderful writers who bring scriptures to life and make them relevant for us in the here and now.’

‘I just wanted to say how much I appreciate the notes for helping to keep me going with reading the Bible and shedding light on demanding passages.’

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New Daylight is edited by Gordon Giles, Canon Chancellor of Rochester Cathedral.

In this issue

Elizabeth Rundle	Emma Pennington
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David Runcorn	Gordon Giles
Sally Welch	

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