

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

Matthew 28:1-20

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Year A - Easter Day Service, Text: Matthew 28:1-10
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Matthew's final chapter contains three sections. The first (verses 1–10) describes events at the open tomb on Easter Sunday morning. The second (verses 11–15) concludes Matthews' unique report about those who were guarding the tomb; see also 27:62–66. The third (verses 16–20) serves as the grand finale to Matthew's entire narrative. In these five closing verses, Jesus meets with the disciples on a mountain in Galilee, tells them that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him, gives them the Great Commission (not the Great Suggestion), and assures them that He will remain with them until the close of the age.

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus fulfills the message embedded in His name, which is Immanuel, meaning "God with us" (Matt. 1:22). He will remain in their midst as forgiving Savior, servant Lord, and divine Teacher. Jesus' death and resurrection are not merely the climax of Matthew's narrative; they constitute a new beginning to world history.

Verse 28:1: Although Mark 16:1 states that women went to the tomb early on Sunday morning to anoint Jesus' body, Matthew states that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to see Jesus' tomb as the day was dawning. They would not have been permitted to go close to the tomb by the soldiers who were guarding it.

Verse 28:2: As they draw near to the tomb, an earthquake occurs. An angel previously descended from heaven has rolled back the stone that had been sealing the entrance and is sitting on it (see Exodus 3:2–6; Acts 7:30). The great earthquake denotes the presence and action of God as at the Exodus and Sinai events. Remarkable signs took place in the heavens above at Jesus' birth; signs in the earth beneath take place at Jesus' resurrection.

When Satan tempted Jesus (4:1–11), he suggested that He win a following by performing stunts, for example, by throwing Himself from the pinnacle of the Temple

and expecting His Father to rescue Him before He struck the stone slabs below. However, Jesus refused to use divine power to avoid the way of the cross and righteousness and service. But now Jesus' Father uses an angel to reveal the wonder of an event in which He vindicates His Son's ministry!

Verse 28:3: The appearance of the angelic being is described. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The angel's appearance reflects the glowing presence of Jesus in the Transfiguration event (Matthew 17:1–8).

In Mark's narrative (16:1–8), the "young man" serves primarily as a proclaimer of a profound truth, sitting on the right hand within the tomb, and making known the Good News of the First Easter. Matthew portrays the angel more as an apocalyptic figure with a shattering presence who hurls the tomb's stone door aside and declares the beginning of a New Age in cosmic history!

Verse 28:4: Those guarding the tomb are terrified. They collapse like dead men! Hence, the dead and defenseless One comes to life and brings new life to His people while the supposedly mighty of the earth collapse as if lifeless!

Verses 28:5-7: The angel speaks to the women just as an angel of the Lord had spoken to Joseph after Mary conceived (Matthew 1:20–25). They have come to see a tomb, a house of death, to pay their last respects to a dead friend — perhaps to keep a vigil and chant a dirge. However, the angel proclaims to them a message about new life: "I know that you were looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He has been raised, as He said" (see Matthew 12:40; 16:21; 17:23; 20:19).

Jesus was crucified by powerful enemies who were shocked and frightened by His claim that He had heard His Father's voice calling Him to a radical way of life as Servant Messiah — calling Him to identify with

outcasts and to share the burdens of the oppressed. He was crucified by religious and political leaders, who mocked Him when He displayed silence and seeming weakness.

God did not desert His son; He delivered the ultimate divine verdict by raising Him from the dead! The angel tells the women to share the Good News of Jesus' resurrection with His disciples and instruct them to go to Galilee where they will see Him. Indeed, the Good Shepherd is to begin gathering His flock!

Verse 28:8: The women leave the vicinity of the open tomb with fear and great joy — and begin running to the disciples to tell them what they have experienced and been told.

Verse 28:9: The risen Jesus meets some women near the tomb, and greets them. They come to Him, grasp His feet, and worship Him. They have experienced the presence of the Risen Lord and heard His words!

Verse 28:10: Jesus tells the women not to be afraid. They are to go and tell Jesus' "brothers" (the disciples!) to go to Galilee, where they will see Jesus! Their spiritual eyes will finally be opened when they meet with the Risen Lord face to face!

Verses 28:11-15: The "problem" of the empty tomb is reported to the Jewish leaders, who in turn try to keep the matter quiet by resorting to bribery. They concoct a false story instead of believing in Jesus' triumph over death (Matthew 28:11–15). The tomb is certainly empty! According to those guarding the tomb, Jesus' body has been stolen; according to Jesus' brothers and sisters, Jesus has risen from the dead.

Verses 28:16- 20: Jesus meets His disciples (brothers) in Galilee. Although some worship Him, others have doubts about Him (28:16–17). Jesus points to His kingly authority and sends His disciples forth to draw people from around the world into His community. His disciples are to teach all nations and to baptize them "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." They are to teach His new followers to observe (not just believe) all that He has commanded them (28:16–20).

In Matthew's opening narrative, Jesus is referred to as Emmanuel, "God with us" (1:23). In Matthew's closing narrative, Jesus assures His disciples that He will be with them to the close of the age (28:20).