

THE EASTER STORY

2024

Presented by Karen Wright

It's good to be sharing with you again.
It's incredible that three months have
passed since our Christmas message.

At Christmas, when we talked about the
birth of Jesus, we focused on the word,
“peace.” Do you remember how I tried
to pronounce it in different languages?

I won't try that again today, but think
about the word in your first language.

As I prepared this message, I thought of several friends who have been experiencing very difficult times.

Adult children of two friends have died recently. A longtime friend recently died of cancer. Dear friends in Chile lost their house to a fire. How could these friends experience peace? The events in our world bring to mind everything but peace.

I am sure that many of you have situations in your families that we would not call peaceful, but today we will continue with the theme of peace, believing that the peace that God offers is possible.

Everything that I share today is based on what the Bible teaches. I want to encourage you, as I did at Christmas, to read it for yourself in your own language. There are papers on your table with information about Bible apps for your phone and also the main references for reading the Easter story.

Your table hostess has brought a Bible that she can show you. The Easter story can be read in each of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

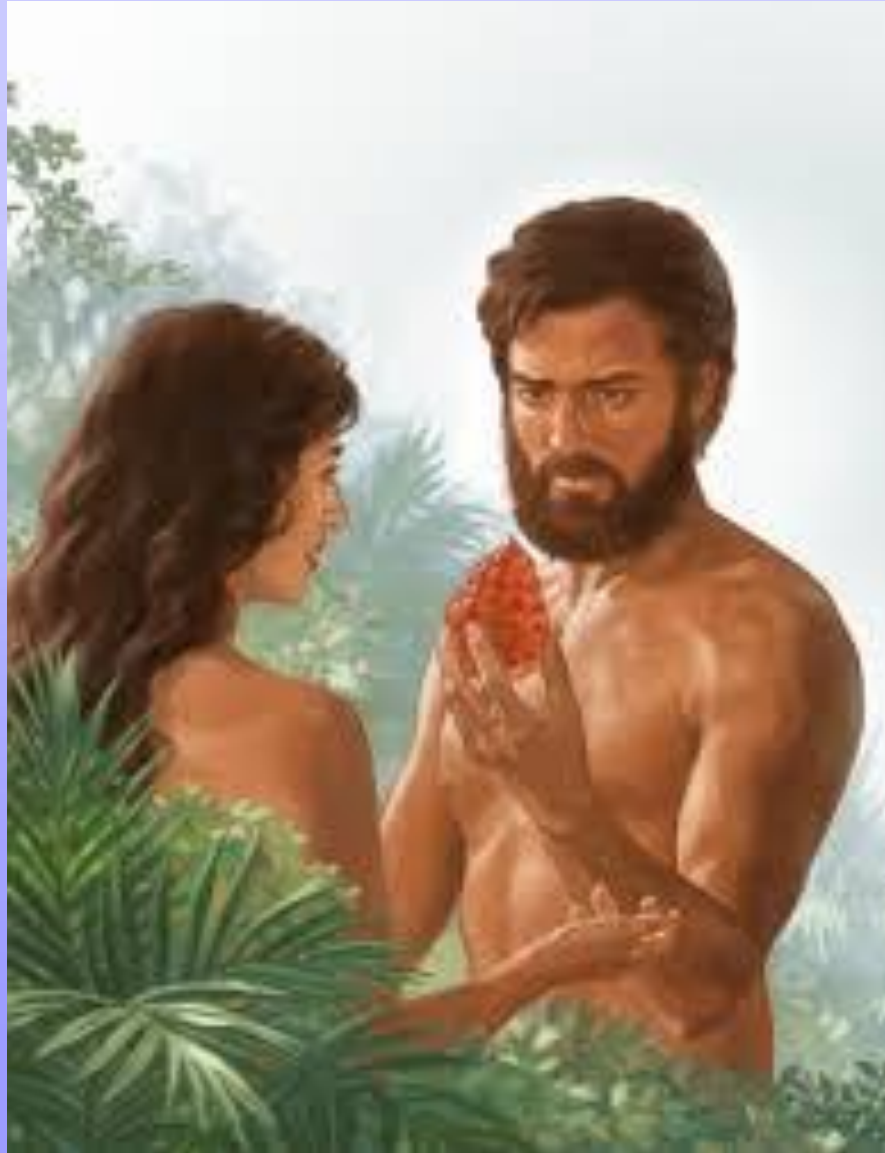
To tell the Easter story, we have to go back even before the Christmas story, all the way back to creation. When God created the world, His plan was for everyone to live in peace and harmony. He created a beautiful world, with everything that we would ever need for happiness.



God created humans with free will, the ability to choose to follow Him and His perfect plan, or to follow their own way. People chose to follow their own plan and to rebel against what God had proposed for them. This decision to follow our own way is called sin, and it has been a part of every human life since the beginning of time.

You may remember the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis - the first book of the Bible.

Genesis
Chapter 3



This sin caused us to be separated from God. It has caused all of the pain, suffering, and war which the world has experienced throughout history.

Because God is holy, He cannot tolerate sin, but out of His love for us, He made a plan from the very beginning to bring us back into a relationship with Him.

This would restore our peace.

That's where the Christmas story comes in. After the prophets had told for years about His plan, God sent His son, Jesus, actually God Himself, as a baby to earth.



Do you remember the story from December about Mary and Joseph and the angels who announced His birth to the shepherds? They announced that Jesus would be the Savior of the world. In other words, he would provide a way for sin to be forgiven.



Before we continue, let me share what a couple of the early prophets said about the coming Savior. These prophets lived hundreds of years before Jesus was born.

Isaiah said, “there is no peace for the wicked (sinner)” but the effect of righteousness will be peace.”

Isaiah 57:21 and Isaiah 32:7

Zechariah said, “And he shall speak peace to the nations.” *Zechariah 9:10*



Remember how the angel announced that Savior had come for all peoples of the earth, and how the Wise Men who came from far away recognized that?

This baby grew up and became a man. We don't have much information about the first 30 years of his life, except that he became a carpenter. At the age of 30, he began traveling and telling God's story to people in the Middle East. His message to those who believed in him was a message of peace.

Once he gave a message called the Sermon on the Mount, in which he taught how to live at peace with other. His words of wisdom and teaching about God amazed the people.

Matthew
Chapters 5 - 7



Once he calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee by speaking the words, “Peace! Be still!” The wind ceased.



Matthew 8:23-27

After healing a woman who had a bleeding problem for 12 years, he told her, “Go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”



His power to calm storms and heal was evidence that he was fully God, as well as fully man.

Luke 8: 43 - 48

Even when he knew that his death was coming, Jesus said to his followers, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.”

John 14: 27



The world into which Jesus came was not a peaceful world. The Roman Empire ruled much of the world, including the land where Jesus lived.



Religious leaders did not believe that Jesus was the Savior, or Messiah, whom God had promised through his prophets. They were jealous of his popularity and were afraid that he would cause problems with the Romans. One of his own followers even betrayed him and another openly denied him. All of this resulted in Jesus being taken to trial when he was only 33 years old.

He was tried before the religious leaders and also by the Romans. None of the trials were valid, but they resulted in him being condemned to die.



The Romans had a very cruel and painful way of executing their criminals, called crucifixion. It consisted of hanging the person on a cross, exposed to the elements. Jesus was first beaten, a crown of thorns was placed on his head, and then he was nailed to the cross, beside two thieves who had also been condemned. One of them actually realized that Jesus was not a criminal and believed in him as Savior while on the cross.



The terrible day on which all of this occurred is called Good Friday, which this year is next week.

How could such a day be called good? It's because it is the day that Jesus, in his death, paid the penalty or price for all of the sins of the world, for my sins, for your sins, and for all those who have ever lived.



The Bible records several of Jesus' words before his death. As he was being nailed to the cross, he said, "Father, forgive them because they don't know what they're doing."

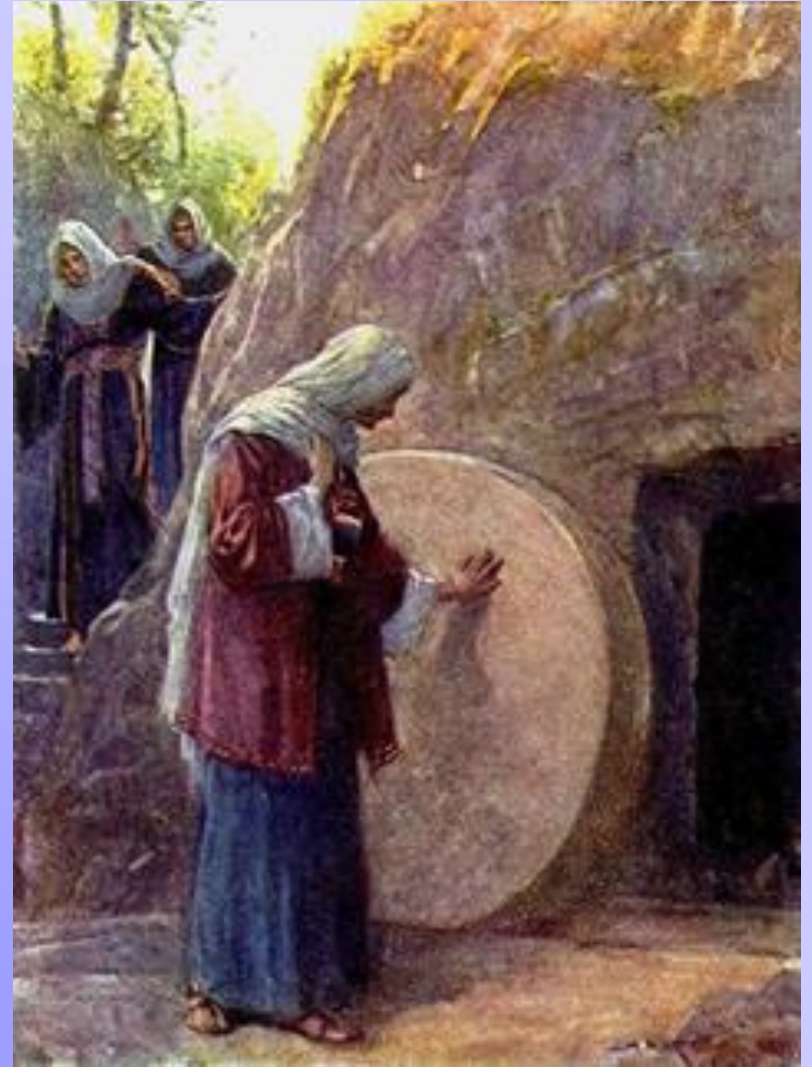
Although we can't understand how God could love us so much to allow Jesus to die, that is how much He loved us. Because Jesus was at the same time God and man, he never sinned, so he didn't need to pay for his own sins.

He could pay for ours.

After Jesus' death, his body was removed from the cross and placed in a borrowed tomb, a small cave with a stone rolled in front.

Indeed, Good Friday would need to be called Terrible, Horrible Friday if the story had ended there, but it didn't.

On Sunday morning, some of the women who had followed Jesus went to the tomb to place aromatic spices on the body, as was their custom. As they walked, they wondered how they were going to remove the large stone. They arrived at daybreak, and to their surprise, the stone was rolled away.



Angels told them that he had come back to life (risen) and that he would see them soon. They ran back to tell Jesus' other followers the astonishing news.



The Bible tells us that Jesus appeared to his followers various times and was on the earth for 40 days before he returned to heaven.



Jesus did not leave his followers alone. He promised that his spirit, called the Holy Spirit, would be with them, teaching them, guiding them and comforting them. That is the presence of God which we experience in our lives today.

So who experiences this peace today?

Whose sins are forgiven?

By now, it's obvious that we aren't just talking about peace between nations and the absence of war. We're talking about the kind of peace that makes us calm, even when the circumstances around us are frightening.

It's the kind of peace that when a loved one dies, assures us of the hope of eternal life with God and our loved ones in heaven. It's the kind of peace that removes guilt from our minds and hearts, from things that we know we've done wrong.

When Jesus died and rose again, he didn't just automatically forgive everyone's sins.

Remember that God created us with free will, the ability to choose. That means that we have the ability to choose whether or not to accept what Jesus did for us and whether or not to accept his forgiveness.

There is nothing we can do to earn that forgiveness.

We can't work for it.

All we can do is accept it and realize that God has forgiven our sins.

We choose to follow Jesus and the way of life that he gives us.

That's why Easter is celebrated by Christians all over the world. Since Jesus rose from the grave on a Sunday morning, we celebrate Easter once a year and also gather to worship every week on Sunday.



For those of us who live in the northern hemisphere, we celebrate Easter in the spring. The flowers, the bunnies, and pretty clothes remind us of the life that Jesus gives us. **What is most important, however, is what Jesus does for our inner life.**



Christians use the cross as a symbol of their faith. It reminds us what Jesus did in sacrificing his life on a cruel day in order for our sins to be forgiven. But most important - he came back to life to give us eternal life.



You may see images of
Jesus on the cross.



But the empty cross
reminds us that
Jesus is alive.

If your children receive plastic Easter eggs this year with candy, after they've removed the candy, remember that the most important event in history can be remembered by the empty Easter egg. The tomb was empty on Easter morning. Jesus is not dead! He is alive!



The Bible says that “God proves His own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Jesus died for us...we were reconciled to God through the death of His son.” (*Romans 5: 8 and 10*).

It also says, “...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I pray that each of you would experience this peace.

Happy Easter!