

THE EASTER STORY IN A BOX

The 7 items were in a box; each one helps to tell a part of the story of Easter Sunday.

A Headscarf: Who would wear one of these? (A woman.) The first people to know that Jesus was alive again were three women: Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of one of Jesus' disciples, and Salome. This was quite revolutionary, since women were not regarded as reliable witnesses in that culture.

Spices: in the time of Jesus, it was the custom to put sweet-smelling spices on a body when it was dead. The women brought their spices to place where they knew Jesus' body had been put on Friday night.

Black card: why did the women go out so early? They were just waiting until the Sabbath was over on midnight Saturday, so it was probably still dark when Mary went to the tomb; things are always more confusing in the dark!

A Pebble: Why might the stone be a problem? It had been put there by the authorities; who would move it, it was so big? How would they be able to get into the tomb? It would be a lot bigger than this stone; but when they got there they discovered that it had already been moved!

White cloth: what do you think the women were expecting to see in the tomb? A body wrapped in a white cloth and lying in a cave, just as they left things on Friday and then they would apply their spices and perfumes.

A Question mark: the other gospels tell us that an angel was there and told the women "He is not here; He has risen." What did the women think when they heard what the young man told them? They didn't know what to think. No wonder the women were frightened and confused; no wonder Mary is crying! Peter and John come to look, but they don't understand any better!

Party poppers: There are all kinds of stories of these people then meeting Jesus; we're going to read one in a minute about Mary whose tears changed to great joy when she realised that Jesus is alive. They didn't actually have a party, but they must have felt like it. Two people ran seven miles back to Jerusalem just to tell their friends that they had seen Jesus and that He is alive.

That is the Easter story in a box! The box held a story, but even the box is now empty. The tomb held Jesus' body, but on Easter morning it was now empty!

JESUS, YOU ARE MY RISEN KING

Mary discovered that Jesus is alive; the Church has told this story for nearly 2000 years and has come to see that because He is alive, Jesus is our risen King. The next part of the service is a way of us telling one another that Jesus is our risen king. I'm going to read five sentences and your reply is "Jesus you are my risen king"; the words are on the screen. Join in if you like!

You died on a cross. *Jesus, you are my risen king.*

You took the punishment for the bad things I do. *Jesus, you are my risen king.*

You always forgive me. *Jesus, you are my risen king.*

You show me I can be a friend of God. *Jesus, you are my risen king.*

Please help me to follow you. *Jesus, you are my risen king.*

BAD NEWS! GOOD NEWS!

Which is which? Some are made up! Scotland's rugby team lost all their games; there's going to be an extra week's school holiday; it is going to rain in England for the next month; here's certainly a made up one: 'The local ice cream factory has closed down'; followed by 'There are free ice creams for everyone!' See what happens with that story: what starts off as bad news (the ice cream factory is closing) then becomes good news because now there is free ice cream for everybody! Even the rain story would be like that: bad news – it is going to rain for a whole month – might be good news because England needs water!

“Jesus’ tomb is empty” – the people who discovered that first thought it was bad news: “where has Jesus’ body gone? Oh no! something bad has happened” and they thought it was a terrible thing! They were frightened and confused; they didn't know what to think; they didn't know what was going on; they only knew that it seemed to be bad news. But then, the angel told them that Jesus is risen and they began to meet Jesus, alive; they could talk to Him, and have breakfast with Him and they began to realise that what they had thought as bad news, now was the best good news they had ever heard. Jesus, who died on Friday, is now alive and they've seen Him; their friend, their Lord, has done just as He said He would, He would die and then rise again and they began to understand what this would mean – He is their Saviour, One who would save His people from our sins, One who would bring us to God, One who would love us forever. They didn't see that all of that at once, but they began to understand and so Easter is good news for us and for the world.

“Peter denied Jesus” – this is clearly bad news! Peter felt awful; he had let Jesus down just when his friend needed him most. Three times he had been quizzed by the servants at the High Priest's house – “you were Jesus' friend!” – and three times Peter said “no!” This was seriously bad news for Peter, so much so that even after the resurrection, he's not sure what to do next. Will Jesus still want him as His friend? Will Peter still have a place amongst the disciples? He goes fishing and while he is out fishing, Jesus comes to stand on the beach; He tells Peter where to catch fish and cooks breakfast for them. After breakfast, Jesus said to Peter: “*Simon, son...*” (21:15) Peter had been expecting something, though I'm not sure it was this. But he replies honestly: “*Yes, Lord...*” Jesus asks the same question three times & three times Peter affirms his faith and love for Jesus. Peter is forgiven, reconciled, restored; it is good news! I suspect that all of this made Peter an even better leader for the Church.

We live in world of bad news and good news. You don't need me to tell you what that bad news is; it is different for all of us. Easter doesn't take away the bad news; indeed Easter has bad news at its heart – Jesus is crucified. But Easter offers us a new way of looking at bad news. The good news of Easter is that Jesus is Lord of everything; Jesus

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has everything in His hands; Jesus' love for us goes on and on; Jesus' risen power is at work in us to sustain, strengthen and help us; Jesus lives for ever and offers us the hope of glory. That good news can help us overcome the bad news in life, and even change it! Easter is the best good news for the world. It didn't start that way: it started off looking bad, but then it changed: "the body is gone" became "Jesus is alive"; Peter downcast became Peter forgiven; in this midst of our bad news, we need to see and remember that Jesus is alive and loves us forever.