

Dear Friends in Christ,

He is Risen! This month, we'll do a Q & A of questions and topics which relate to Easter that I hear you bring up frequently.

Q: Christ's descent into hell? What's that about?

A: We confess this in the Apostles' Creed, and the Scriptural warrant for it is from 1 Peter 3:18-19. **"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison..."** The spirits in prison means those in hell.

The first thing to say is Christ's descent into hell is a part of His exaltation, not His humiliation. He didn't go to hell to suffer; He went to hell to preach the Gospel. He was preaching victory. He was laughing in Satan's face. They must've been popping the champagne bottles in hell on Good Friday, but the comeback of all comebacks was brewing, and Jesus went to go say, "Hi" before He resurrected.

The second thing to say is that Christ's descent happened bodily. Lutherans actually have a whole article in the Formula of Concord dedicated to Christ's descent (Article IX), and one emphasis of the article is that all of Christ, the entire person, both God and man, descended into hell. Here's what it says for our comfort - "It is sufficient that we know that Christ descended into hell, destroyed hell for all believers, and delivered them from the power of death and of the devil, from eternal condemnation and the jaws of hell. But how this occurred we should [not curiously investigate, but] reserve until the other world, where not only this point [mystery], but also still others will be revealed, which we here simply believe, and cannot comprehend with our blind reason."

Q: So you actually believe that Jesus really came back from the dead?

A: Yes, and I actually believe that God created the world in 6 days, sent a fish to swallow Jonah, and really parted the waters of the Red Sea for the Exodus. Go read 1 Corinthians 15. If there's no resurrection, then we just die and the lights turn off, and none of this matters. If Jesus didn't come back from the dead, then this life is a sham and I demand my money back.

Q: What happens when we die?

A: This is a question concerning what we call the intermediate state. What we know is that when we die, we will be with Jesus. That's heaven, and we see Jesus describe this in the parable he told about Lazarus and the Rich Man. But we also know that this isn't the full expression of heaven -

heaven will be a real, tangible, bodily place. Our bodies will actually be resurrected when Jesus comes back; that's what we're really waiting on. Heaven isn't a place where spirits float around in the clouds. Heaven will have real people with real bodies. And so the resurrection will be marvelous. No more disease, broken bones, or torn muscles. Jesus will still have those nail markings in his hands and feet and that pierced side, but that'll be the most beautiful body we look at for all eternity because that's the place where our eternal life was won.

Q: What does Easter mean?

The word comes from an Old English word, *Ēostre*. It was a month for the English, and corresponded to what we call April. The month was named after a West Germanic spring goddess, and this always fuels people to say that Christians just took pagan things and changed them for their own purposes. (Just see what people say about certain Christmas traditions like the Christmas tree...) To the pagan accusation, we should always reply with the incarnation - God took on human flesh, and by doing so, absorbed all of humanity into Himself. It's not the Christians who borrowed from the pagans, but the pagans who made poor and false copies of Christianity.

Nevertheless, if you'd like to call Easter something else, there is a better option. The early church called the holiday *Pascha*, which is from the Greek word for Passover. In fact, the Eastern church still calls Easter *Pascha*. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Passover. He is the Paschal Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, and He did not stay dead. The Lamb of God is seated on the throne of heaven, receiving all honor, worship, glory, and praise.

Well, that's all we've got space for today. Write-ins are always welcome. Interesting questions will get answered first, followed by letters which have amusing anecdotes or jokes. Send all correspondence to the secretary of the congregation, unless there is a perishable food item. Then the letter can go directly on my desk.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor