

**EASTER VIGIL 2022**  
**ST CHAD'S CATHEDRAL, BIRMINGHAM**

***Why look among the dead for someone who is alive?***

As soon as the Sabbath had ended, with its restrictions on work and travel, a group of women, including Mary of Magdala, Joanna and Mary the mother of James, went to anoint the body of Jesus. They left *at the very first sign of dawn*. We can imagine the heaviness in their hearts as their eyes adjusted to the growing light of day, making their way to the burial place, not sure what they would see when they arrived.

Their journey is like ours. We have passed through the gloom of Lent, with its welcome moments of illumination and fresh understanding. We have witnessed the darkness that covered the land at our Lord's crucifixion. We have made our way to the tomb to look for him there.

In the midst of the darkness the People of Israel kept vigil awaiting the coming of the Messiah. We have accompanied them in our sequence of scripture readings as we listened to the account of their longing. Their long journey of faith, still searching for the promised land where the Lord's anointed will reign, echoes our own pilgrimage of faith as we continue to search with longing eyes for Christ through the shadows of uncertainty and doubt.

We have identified ourselves with the people who first learnt to look with longing eyes for the coming of the Lord, by recounting the history of salvation from the story of creation, through the Exodus of their deliverance from Egypt to the establishment of their covenant with God. In yesterday's intercessions we prayed *for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God...that the people you first made your own may arrive at the fullness of redemption*.

In the darkness of night our eyes become sensitive to the smallest glimmers of light. As we listened with humility to the readings from the Old Testament, we recognised the light of Christ that had already begun to shine through the events of Israel's history and in the insights of the prophets and seers.

We have been created with the ability to see the goodness in all that God has made. Yesterday we looked upon Christ crucified and, lowering our eyes, we kissed the wood of his cross. We saw the suffering and the love that enabled our Lord to endure an agonising death for our sake. Eyes that have witnessed great suffering acquire a depth and a compassion that longs to bring healing and comfort to others. Eyes saddened by inhumanity long to seek compassion. Eyes that have witnessed death are searching for signs of life.

St Luke's Gospel is imbued with this sense of longing and wonder. We are drawn into the restlessness and longing that have kept Mary of Magdala, Joanna and Mary the mother of James awake and waiting with eyes searching for the first light of dawn. Nature's gift of dawn is only a pale reflection of the rising that they will witness.

The darkness of fear and sadness clouded their vision, and *they stood there not knowing what to think*. And in the gathering light of dawn *two men in brilliant clothes suddenly appeared at their side*. *Terrified, the women lowered their eyes*. We can sympathise with the three women – what they saw dazzled them and they needed time to absorb its meaning. They were perplexed on seeing *that the stone had been rolled away and that the body of the Lord Jesus was not there*. Longing eyes are not always ready for what they see and need time to discern its meaning.

Tonight I greet those who have come to see Christ in a new light and are now ready to be received into the Church and confirmed. Dear friends, you have already entered the waters of baptism so that dying with Christ you may rise to new life with him. Your faith will be strengthened through the anointing of Confirmation, as our Lord gives each of you a re-kindled lamp for your feet and a light for your path along your pilgrimage of faith. Please pray for us, your fellow pilgrims.

This Easter Triduum our eyes have looked on the wood of the cross, at the Easter fire and at the light of the Paschal candle. But it is from within us that Christ's light will shine at its brightest across our darkened world. It is a light that will shine forever, beyond our fears and disappointments, beyond our sufferings and sadness and infinitely beyond the shadow of the grave. May the light of the risen Christ continue to burn brightly within us these coming fifty days of Easter and well beyond.