

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today; Alleluia

Lutheran Service Book 463 | study by Richard J. Serina Jr.

Introduction

“Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!”

This is the way many of our congregations open the Easter season. As the pastor begins the service, he announces that Christ is risen, and the congregation responds with joy that He is indeed risen. But what difference does it make?

In the Hymn of the Day for use on either Easter Evening or Easter Monday, we sing of the significance surrounding

our Lord’s resurrection, and precisely why it should bring us a joy that even death cannot destroy.

- What are the first images that come to mind when you think about Easter morning?
- How do those images relate to what we celebrate in the Easter season?

Exploring the Scriptures

The first Lutheran churches of the 16th century would celebrate Easter for as many as three and a half days: Easter Sunday, Easter Monday, Easter Tuesday and Easter Wednesday. The Gospel lesson for Easter Monday, when this hymn is appointed, is “The Road to Emmaus” (Luke 24:13–35).

The setting of this lesson is the day of the resurrection, and some of the Lord’s followers are on their way to a near-by town called Emmaus.

- According to verses 1 and 13, on what day of the week are the followers walking to Emmaus? What has just happened in Jerusalem?
- What were the followers talking about along the way? How does Jesus correct them in verses 25–26?

While they are walking, Jesus joins them, but they cannot recognize Him until their arrival in Emmaus. Then, a miraculous set of events unfolds.

- Why can’t the followers of Jesus recognize Him on the way to Emmaus?
- What event leads to the followers recognizing Him (vv. 30–31)? When is it in our worship that we see the Lord clearly, as those followers did when they recognized Him?
- As these followers looked back on the part of their journey when they did not recognize Jesus in verse 32, how did they realize their Jesus had been present with them?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Though no one knows with certainty the author of “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today; Alleluia,” we do know that it was sung with regularity as part of the Church’s Easter worship during the days surrounding the Reformation.

The hymn was actually used as part of Morning Prayer prior to the chief Easter Communion service. Though it sounds odd to our ears, the singing of the hymn ordinarily included two acolytes, representing the angels at the tomb, and three deacons, representing the three women that found the empty tomb. They would alternately sing the stanzas of the hymn, with the choir joining in the refrain of “Alleluia.”

Imagine the joy of an early Easter dawn: As the sun was starting to emerge from the dark outside the church, people huddled inside for warmth, when out of the darkness acolytes and deacons around the altar began singing about

the resurrection of Christ. Then, the pastor would join and begin the singing of the Te Deum.

- Why do we gather on Easter morning for a sunrise service before the light of day?
- What does this contrast between darkness and light have to do with Easter?
- How does Jesus overcome darkness in His resurrection?

This hymn captures all the joy of Easter morning, but the joy does not end on that Sunday. There is a reason the Church’s Easter season, and with it the proclamation of Christ’s resurrection, continues for 50 days until Pentecost. Easter is celebrated every Sunday, as a matter of fact, whenever we gather around Word and Sacrament. In our Sunday worship, we commemorate the resurrection of our Lord by coming together on the day of the week when He was raised

from the dead. In our worship, we make Christ's victory over death and the grave known to the whole world. Singing this hymn on Easter Evening or Easter Monday is simply a way of retelling that Easter story.

- What themes distinguish Easter hymns from other hymns? At what other services of the Church are Easter hymns appropriate?

Text

The first stanza of the hymn begins with an announcement of the Lord's resurrection; then it calls us to "hasten on [our] way" and to "offer praise with love replete." We lay our gifts at the feet of the "paschal victim." The word "paschal" refers to the Passover, and we believe that the Passover lamb was Jesus Christ Himself.

- Where are we hastening "on [our] way" when we sing this hymn: to the empty tomb, to worship or both?
- Who is the "paschal victim," and what makes Him a victim? Where do we find this paschal victim when we gather?

In stanza 2, we sing of what that Passover lamb has done on our behalf. Jesus is the Lamb who bled for us, His sheep. Jesus is the Sinless One who died in the stead of sinners. Now, the Jesus who subjected Himself to death has risen to life, never to die again. There is a great connection here again between the Passover lamb, whose blood was shed to protect the people of Israel from the angel of death, and the

Making the Connection

On Easter Sunday morning, we gather to proclaim the glory of the one who has suffered and died for our sins and who has risen from the dead, never to die again. What this means for us is that all those who were baptized into the death of Jesus Christ, as St. Paul says in Romans 6, will be raised with Him to everlasting life. This hymn is but an extension of our Easter joy that we share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and will live forever with Him.

In Closing

We open the Easter season with the cry, "Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!" This proclamation of Easter joy remains with you because it is your only confidence in the face of death. You cling to this crucified and risen Lord, you trust all His promises, and you know that He will raise you again from the grave just as He has conquered death in His own resurrection.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 463.

Lamb of God Himself, whose blood was shed upon the cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

- What did the Israelites do with the Passover lamb in Exodus 12? How is Jesus our Passover lamb?
- Where is the blood of Jesus applied to us?
- How is the angel of death disarmed against us?
- Where is it that Christians celebrate their Passover feast?

The imagery of stanza 3 gives us the same picture of a Lord who has done battle with death and emerged victorious. Jesus is the "victim undefiled" who has reconciled sinners to God through His death. How did He do so? Through a "strange and awesome strife" that occurred when Jesus brought "death and life" into contention with each other.

- Where did Jesus bring death and life into contention with each other?
- Why did Jesus not deserve death? Why did Jesus endure death anyway?
- What has the death of Jesus accomplished? What does His resurrection mean for our future beyond the grave?

Stanza 4 draws our attention back to the worship of Easter Sunday. We gather to sing the praises of Him who died for the salvation of the world. He has risen from the dead and now demands our "grateful homage." The one who suffered death for the forgiveness of our sins has risen from the dead, never to face death again.

- We face death every year between Easters. How does the resurrection of Jesus Christ strengthen you when death happens to your loved ones?
- Where do we find the paschal victim, the Lamb of God, the Sinless One who dies for sinners, when we gather together? How is our feast at the table a celebration of Christ's resurrection?

Prayer

O God, in the paschal feast You restore all creation. Continue to send Your heavenly gifts upon Your people that they may walk in perfect freedom and receive eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Easter Evening/Easter Monday).

Christ the Lord Is
Risen Today; Alleluia

1 Christ the Lord is ris'n to - day;
2 For the sheep the Lamb has bled, Al - le - lu - ia!
3 Hail, the vic - tim un - de - filed,
4 Chris - tians, on this ho - ly day,

Chris - tians, has - ten on your way;
Sin - less in the sin - ner's stead. Al - le - lu - ia!
God and sin - ners rec - on - ciled,
All your grate - ful hom - age pay:

Of - fer praise with love re - plete,
Christ the Lord is ris'n on high; Al - le - lu - ia!
When con - tend - ing death and life,
Christ the Lord is ris'n on high;

At the pas - chal vic - tim's feet,
Now He lives, no more to die, Al - le - lu - ia!
Met in strange and awe - some strife,
Now He lives, no more to die.