

The Garden Tomb
Dr. Adam Francisco
Concordia University Chicago
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Taking it down, he wrapped it in fine linen and placed it in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever been placed. Luke 23:53

After Jesus' body was taken down from the cross late on Good Friday, preparations for his burial began in haste. This meant placing it in a tomb until the flesh, organs, and other tissue rotted away, where eventually the bones could be collected and placed in an ossuary. The smell of a body just a few days after death is enough to turn anyone's stomach.

The stench of a rotting human corpse would not fill the garden tomb of Joseph of Arimathea though. Three days after Jesus' body was placed in it, some of his closest friends came early in the morning to anoint it with aromatic spices. Much to their dismay, however, they discovered the tomb to be empty. When Peter and another disciple inspected it, they found only the linens used to wrap Jesus' body and cover his face. They assumed he had just been moved, and so they went home.

Mary Magdalene, however, stayed behind. She was a weepy mess, but she had to take a second, closer look. What she saw was miraculous. Inside the tomb were two angels. They spoke to her, asking, "Woman, why are you weeping?" Explaining, she backed out of the tomb (probably out of fear) and then turned and ran into what appeared to be a gardener. He asked her the same question. "Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Answering with blurry, tear-filled eyes, Jesus interrupted her and called out her name, "Mary." She must have dissolved into even more tears, only this time they were tears of joy. This was no gardener. It was her Lord whom she had seen crucified and dead just a few nights before.

"I have seen the Lord," she soon told the disciples and for forty days thereafter Jesus "presented himself alive" to the disciples "by many proofs." And the rest is history, for in "complete certainty caused by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ," according to Clement of Rome (c. 30-99), the disciples "went with the Holy Spirit's certainty, preaching the good news that the kingdom of God is about to come." They turned the Greco-Roman world upside down with the message of the forgiveness of sins. And now, nearly 2000 years later, we too are certain of it because of the events that took place in the garden tomb.

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we thank you for our salvation won by the death and resurrection of your son. We ask that you strengthen our faith and our witness so that we might be as bold as Mary and as certain as the disciples, always speaking the good news the people you have put in our lives. Amen