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John 20:1,2,11-18¹
Jesus' Names of Wondrous Love –
The Light – Jesus appears to
Mary Magdalene
Easter Sunday
Northwestern Publishing House resources for
the 2013 Lenten season, adapted

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Grace WELS Durand MI
10:00 a.m., Sunday
March 31, 2013
Easter Sunday,
Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

^{20:1} Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed² from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved [the Apostle John], and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have put him!"

.....
¹¹ ... Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"
"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I do not know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? For whom are looking?"
Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."
She turned toward him and cried out in Hebrew (or Aramaic), "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not go on holding on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the LORD!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

JESUS' NAMES OF WONDROUS LOVE – THE LIGHT
JESUS IS THE LIGHT
I. THE LIGHT THAT DISPELS DARKNESS
II. THE LIGHT THAT PROVIDES COMFORT
III. THE LIGHT THAT GIVES GUIDANCE

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

² The Greek word *hḡrmevnon*, a perfect passive participle, masculine, singular accusative from *aí [rw]*, suggests the lifting up or taking up of the stone from its place. The other Gospels use the term for rolling away the stone.

In the Name of our Savior Jesus – crucified, dead, buried and risen – Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

When I was a boy, my parents did not take too many vacations. There was one, however, that I do remember, although I do not remember all of the details. On this particular vacation, we toured a cave. It was cold, dark, damp and dank. I remember hearing water drip. The path or walkway in this cave was lit by electric lights that had been strung from the ceiling. The tour guide said, “Now I want you to experience the darkness of this cave. Stay where you are; I’m going to turn off the lights.” When the tour guide turned off the lights, I remember the feeling of how dark it was. It was so dark that, literally, I could not see my hand in front of my face. It was not just spooky; it was frightening and terrifying. That must have been what Mary of Magdala was feeling when she came to the empty tomb and found that Jesus was gone.

Mary of Magadala was in darkness. She was in the darkness regarding Jesus’ horrible death by crucifixion. Mary was in the darkness regarding Jesus having been buried and his body no longer in the tomb. She was in darkness until Jesus, the Light, showed himself to her and proved to her that he had risen from the dead and was alive.

This Easter Sunday, we examine the final Name of Jesus’ Wondrous Love – The Light. JESUS’ NAMES OF WONDROUS LOVE – THE LIGHT. JESUS IS THE LIGHT. I. THE LIGHT THAT DISPELS DARKNESS; II. THE LIGHT THAT PROVIDES COMFORT; and III. THE LIGHT THAT GIVES GUIDANCE.

JESUS’ NAMES OF WONDROUS LOVE – THE LIGHT
JESUS IS THE LIGHT
I. THE LIGHT THAT DISPELS DARKNESS

Our text states, “Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance” (20:1). Mark’s Gospel Chapter Sixteen and Luke’s Gospel Chapter Twenty-four, indicate that Mary of Magdala was among a group of women who went to the tomb of Jesus early on Easter morning, while it was still dark. They came to finish the burial procedures for Jesus, which Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had begun on Good Friday, when they had taken Jesus’ body down from the cross. Taking down Jesus’ body from the cross took place sometime after 3:00 p.m., and the Sabbath began at sunset. That meant that in accordance with Old Testament Law, they had to cease working and so postpone caring for Jesus’ body.

When the women got to the tomb on Easter Sunday morning, they found that the stone, which was very large and had been placed in front of the entrance, had been rolled away – tossed aside. Matthew records, that “there was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the LORD came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow” (Matthew

28:2,3). So, when the women, including Mary Magdalene, arrived at the tomb, they found that the stone was rolled away. That was enough for Mary Magdalene to take action.

The other women remained at the tomb and heard the angel announcement that Jesus had risen from the dead. Mary Magdalene did not. Instead, precipitously, in a rush and without thought, Mary Magdalene ran back to where Peter and John were and told them "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have put him!" (20:2). Mary Magdalene was still in darkness.

Peter and John ran to the tomb and found that it was empty. They, along with Mary Magdalene, were in darkness (cf. 20:3-9).

Later, Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb in tears, darkness and despair.

¹¹ ... Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I do not know where they have put him" (20:11-13).

This strange meeting does not influence Mary. Here there are two angels dressed in shining white garments, and she does not seem to take notice. Mary Magdalene is so caught up in her grief, weeping and despair, that she does not notice the appearance of these angels dressed in white. In addition, Mary's answer to the angels reveals the overwhelming darkness in which she existed. "They have taken my Lord away ... and I do not know where they have put him." Her darkness and despair continues for a few more moments.

The Greek indicates that Mary must have heard a sound, perhaps a rustling, behind her ...

¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? For whom are looking?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him" (20:14,15).

Mary does not recognize Jesus; she is still in darkness. Was it that Jesus' appearance had changed from when she last saw him? Undoubtedly. Mary Magdalene was among those who had seen Jesus on the cross; she had gone along with Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, when they placed Jesus in Joseph's new tomb (cf. Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:41.) Mary had seen Jesus' tortured and mangled body. At the same time, the darkness of despair that Mary was feeling and her overwhelming tears and weeping, prevented her from seeing clearly. Mary reveals her spiritual darkness in another way.

Supposing that Jesus was the gardener, Mary said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him” (20:15b). Mary probably did not have the strength to retrieve Jesus’ body if it had been hidden somewhere – recall that it took both Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea to remove Jesus’ body from the cross and carry him to Joseph’s new tomb. But, there is something else. Mary is thinking that she has to do something for Jesus.

Mary is in spiritual darkness and despair. She thinks she has to do something for Jesus, while, in truth, Jesus has done everything for her. Jesus was her Light, but Mary was not seeing.

APPROPRIATION

Oh how often does your grief, sorrow, tears, weeping, anxiety, depression and panic, get in the way of your seeing true reality. No, reality is not of this world; in this world, things go from bad to worse (cf. 2 Timothy 3:13). But what is reality is when you see Jesus, your risen Savior. That is when you see Jesus, your Light.

Jesus says to you and me: “Why are you weeping? Why are you carrying on? Why are you in the darkness of despair as if you are going down into the grave, and as if there is no hope for you?” Jesus says, “Why are you continuing in darkness, when I, your Light, am with you?”

Jesus is our crucified and risen Savior. Jesus’ blood has cleansed us from all of our sins (cf. 1 John 1:7b). Jesus has given eternal life to us. This is the comfort we need. This is the comfort we have from Jesus our Light and our Savior.

That is the comfort that Mary Magdalene needed. That is the comfort that Mary Magdalene received.

JESUS’ NAMES OF WONDROUS LOVE – THE LIGHT

JESUS IS THE LIGHT

II. THE LIGHT THAT PROVIDES COMFORT

Jesus asks Mary a question, “Woman,” he said, “why are you crying? For whom are looking?” (20:15a). Mary is in darkness and despair. “Thinking he was the gardener, [Mary] said, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him’” (20:15b). In her spiritual darkness, Mary thinks she has to do something. Jesus, however, who has done everything for Mary, gives comfort to Mary.

Jesus gives comfort to Mary with one word – her name. “Mary,” Jesus says (cf. 20:16a). Now Mary Magdalene recognizes her Savior, her LORD and her Light. “[Mary turned toward [Jesus] and cried out in Hebrew (or Aramaic), ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher)” (20:16b). Mary has been weighed down in darkness, despair, tears and weeping, but

Jesus has been there for her all the time! Jesus is the Light who provides comfort. Mary turns and grasps Jesus' feet.

"Jesus said, 'Do not go on holding on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father'" (20:17a). [Those of us who grew up with the King James Version translation of the Bible, might remember how Jesus' words were rendered: "Touch me not!" The New King James Version translation comes a little closer to the Greek, "Do not cling to me." The Greek grammar describes an action that is taking place and that Jesus wants to cease.] "Do not go on holding on to me or clinging to me," Jesus says. It was not the case, however, that Mary was being prevented from touching Jesus at all.

This is in line with what happens when the other women saw Jesus and "clasped his feet and worshiped him" (Matthew 28:9b); it is also in line with Jesus' invitation to all of the disciples when, in the evening of this same Easter, he appeared before them behind closed doors and invited them to touch him (cf. Luke 24:36-43); and, it is in line with what Jesus says to Thomas – "doubting Thomas" – a week later, when he invites Thomas to "put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side" (20:27).

Mary Magdalene does not need to continue to grasp Jesus physically and cling to Jesus. Mary's Savior, Redeemer and Light, is with her always; he will never leave her or forsake her (cf. Matthew 28:20b; Hebrews 13:5b). The comfort, which Jesus gave to Mary, would be with her always. Jesus was the Light that provided Mary with comfort.

APPROPRIATION

Again, I can remember when I was a boy that I wanted a night light on in my bedroom all night long. I suppose that is the case for most youngsters. Having that night light was a comfort. Mary Magdalene needed the comfort of knowing that Jesus her Light and her Savior had risen and was alive and was with her. You need that comfort too, and you have that comfort.

You have the comfort of knowing that Jesus, your Light and your Savior, has risen from the dead for you. If Jesus had not risen, then you would have no light, no comfort, and you would remain in the darkness and despair of damnation. Is that not the way some people go through life today?

Some people reject the Light of Jesus as their risen LORD and Savior. They do not know or they reject the idea that Jesus has taken away all of their sins and that, through him alone, they have comfort, forgiveness, and eternal life. Some people do not know, or they reject the truth, that Jesus arose from the dead, which is the public proclamation to the world that the sins of the world have been taken away. They do not have Jesus as their Light. They do not have Jesus as their comfort. So what is left for them?

For those who do not have Jesus as their Light, their comfort and their Savior, there maybe an unfounded and uncertain hope that if there is a god somewhere, he will be nice, while they live and when they die. There might be that uncertain feeling and groundless hope

that when they die, they will fade away into oblivion – a non-existence – in which there is no pain but also no gain.

Or, for those who do not have Jesus as their Light and their Savior and their comfort, there may be the unfounded hope and feeling that there is no hell; and, if there is, they surely will not be there, because, in their minds, they are really not bad people. In all of these scenarios, there is no comfort in Jesus the Light and Savior of all.

But ... but Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed! All sins have been forgiven. All are justified. All are declared righteous. All are acquitted of their sins. This is grasped by faith. And that saving faith in Jesus, the Light and the Savior of all, is generated and created by the Good News of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. This Good News, this Gospel, gives us comfort now; and, it is also our comfort especially as the end of our lives comes near. Moreover, this comfort is a comfort to be shared with others.

JESUS' NAMES OF WONDROUS LOVE – THE LIGHT JESUS IS THE LIGHT III. THE LIGHT THAT GIVES GUIDANCE

Jesus tells Mary Magdalene, “Do not go on holding on to me.... Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (20:17b). Mary does not hesitate. “Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: ‘I have seen the LORD!’ And she told them that he had said these things to her” (20:18).

Jesus the Light, who has comforted Mary Magdalene, gives Mary a task to do. She is to tell Jesus' brothers and sisters – all of those who had followed Jesus, that he was alive. The message that she is to carry to them is that Jesus had arisen and was “returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” Those who believed in Jesus could now call God their Father, because, through his cross and suffering, Jesus had removed the barrier of sin that had separated God and mankind. This was the message of comfort that was to be brought to believers in their tears, sorrows and woes. It was the message of comfort that was to be brought to those who did not yet know that Jesus was their Light and their Savior. Jesus was the Light that gave guidance to Mary Magdalene to carry the Gospel message to others.

APPLICATION

Jesus, our Light and our Savior, gives you and me the same guidance from his Word. You and I are to carry the message of Jesus' comfort to our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus – to our fellow believers.

Oh, how important and necessary it is for you and me to bring the comfort of our Savior and Light, Jesus, to our fellow believers. All of us have ups and downs. Our faith-life is not a steady upward climb. It is more like a roller-coaster – sometimes up and sometimes down. We are to seize the opportunities that God gives us, and the guidance that Jesus gives us in his Word, to bring the message of Jesus, our Light and our Savior, to our

brothers and sisters in Christ as they experience sorrows and tears, woes and weeping. The Apostle Paul gives us this guidance from God's Word, when he says, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). Did you notice that St. Paul said, "especially to those who belong to the family of believers"? But then, St. Paul also said, "let us do good to all people"

We do not know if Mary Magdalene ever told the Good News about Jesus the Light and Savior of all – we do not know if she told that Good News to those who did not yet believe in Jesus. She probably did. You and I are to bring that Good News to others, and in this way "do good to all people." Jesus, our Light and our Savior, guides us in this task when he says, "Go into all the world and preach (or, proclaim, tell) the Good News to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Thus, it is that Jesus, our Light, gives us guidance through his Word to carry his Word, his message, his Gospel, to others.

CONCLUSION

I remember that dark, dank and damp cave. I remember the overwhelming darkness – so dark, I could not see my hand in front of my face. There is darkness and despair awaiting us ... unless we have Jesus as our Light and our Savior. And, we do!

Jesus is with us always. Jesus is our Light. There will be sorrows, tears and weeping in this life, but we see Jesus our Light and our Savior through all of that distress. Jesus, our Light, has taken away our darkness and despair and given us the comfort of the forgiveness of sins, which he earned for us on the cross. Jesus, our Light, now guides us through his Word to share the comfort we have, the Good News we have been given – to share that Gospel with others – both our fellow-believers and with those who do not yet know their Savior and Light: Jesus Christ. Amen.