

Standing at this tomb of water . . .

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It is Holy Saturday—a day of waiting and expectancy, poised between the anguish of Good Friday and the exultant, full-throated joy of Easter. As part of my Lenten discipline, I have been learning to pray the Rosary. On Friday, then, I was meditating on the Sorrowful Mysteries of Jesus’ suffering and death—a meditation driven home powerfully and poignantly by the readings and music of Good Friday worship.

The meditations set for Saturdays are the Joyful Mysteries—Gabriel announcing Jesus’ birth to Mary, her visit to Elizabeth, the birth of Jesus, his presentation at the temple as a baby, and Mary and Joseph finding Jesus, now a young boy, in the temple asking questions (see Luke 1:26—2:52). As I was praying, it suddenly hit me: the womb and the tomb and Jesus coming forth, from each, to new life!

When you go to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, you discover that the spot traditionally recognized as Jesus’ birthplace is in a cave. The limestone hills of the region are honeycombed with caves, which were used in Jesus’ day for storage, as stables, and as homes, so it may well be that this is indeed the spot.



Startling to think on that today, as I reflect on the broken, abused body of Jesus, taken from the cross and laid in another cave: the rock-hewn tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50-56), sealed shut like the one pictured here.

The womb and tomb connections were driven home to me particularly by a song—a contemporary setting of an old hymn—that has been in my head since I heard and joined in singing it several days ago. (Below I have given the original words—those of the old hymn.) A line in the contemporary version, “Standing at this tomb of water,” has stayed

with me, and meditating on the waters of Mary's womb has given them a new resonance. Water of life, water of death; beginning and ending and beginning again.

The power of this image—its depth and richness—is that it is not just a story about long ago and far away. Jesus defeated death, not just for himself, but for us all. His triumph over sin, death, hell, and the grave is our triumph, too! Remember this, friends, when this day of waiting is over, and Easter morning dawns. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! And with him, so are we.



Hast thou said, exalted Jesus?

Hast thou said, exalted Jesus,
Take thy cross and follow Me?
Shall the word with terror seize us?
Shall we from the burden flee?
Lord, I'll take it, Lord, I'll take it,
And rejoicing, follow Thee.

Sweet the sign that thus reminds me,
Savior, of Thy love to me;
Sweeter still the love that binds me
In its deathless bond to Thee.
Oh, what pleasure, oh, what pleasure,
Buried with my Lord to be!

While this liquid tomb surveying,
Can I run from mercy's wave?
Shall I shun its brink, betraying
Feelings worthy of a slave?
No! I'll enter, No! I'll enter;
Jesus enter'd Jordan's wave.

Should it rend some fond connection,
Should I suffer shame or loss,
Yet the fragrant, blest reflection:
I have been where Jesus was,
Will revive me, will revive me,
When I faint beneath the cross.

Then baptized in love and glory,
Lamb of God, Thy praise I'll sing,
Loudly with the immortal story
All the harps of heaven shall ring.
Saints and seraphs, Saints and seraphs
Love and worship then will bring!

John Eustace Giles, 1830