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April 25th: Acts 12:11-25 & Mark 15

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Peter's appearance to the disciples after his deliverance from prison and the death of Herod. The crucifixion and burial of Christ.

Some passages referenced:

Colossians 4:10 (Mark the cousin of Barnabas); Luke 24:10-11 (failing to believe the women's testimony); Luke 24:37 (believing the appearance was a ghost); Acts 10:25-26 (Peter refusing worship); Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 19 (Herod's death); Acts 15:37-40 (falling out with Barnabas over John Mark).

Isaiah 53:7 (the silent lamb); Psalm 22:18 (divided garments); Isaiah 53:12 (numbered with the transgressors); Psalm 22:7, Lamentations 2:15 (passers-by wagging their heads); Zephaniah 1:15, Amos 8:9-10 (the darkness of the Day of the Lord); Psalm 22:1 ('My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'); Psalm 69:21 (sour wine); Psalm 22:27-28 (the Gentiles turning to the Lord); Luke 8:1-3 (women ministering to Jesus' needs); Isaiah 53:9 (the grave of a rich man); Isaiah 51:1 (stone dug from the quarry).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Acts 12.11-25 When Peter came to himself, he said, Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel, and rescued me from the hand of Herod, and from all that the Jewish people were expecting. When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. When he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer.

Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, You are out of your mind. But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, It is his angel.

But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Tell these things to James and to the brothers.

Then he departed and went to another place. Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter, and after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food. On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, The voice of a god, and not of a man.

Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. But the word of God increased and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

Acts 12 tells the story of Peter being arrested by Herod at the time of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, being placed in prison under armed guard, the intention being to keep him there for the duration of the feast, after which he would be put to death. Peter was delivered by an angel, and led out through the prison and into the city, and he goes to a house where a number of the Christians have been praying for him. Considering the fact that there is a servant girl there, and it also has a gate, it's likely the house of some well-to-do people.

Mary, who owned the house, was likely a widow, and one of the hosts of the early church meetings within the city of Jerusalem. We're told that this Mary is the mother of John Mark, and it's presumed that we know who this John Mark is. Both the name John, of

Jewish origin, and the name Mark, of Latin origin, are common names, and so there would be many people with these names around.

Identifying who this John Mark is, is not easy, but many have seen him as the same Mark as wrote the Gospel of Mark. In Colossians chapter 4 verse 10 we read, Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you, and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions. If he comes to you, welcome him.

An association between Mark and Barnabas would make sense. Mark is taken along with them by Barnabas, and the association between the two would make a lot more sense if John Mark was Barnabas' cousin. This would also raise the possibility that John Mark was a Levite, as Barnabas was a Levite.

Mark was a Latin personal name, and it's most commonly encountered in people with Roman citizenship. That Peter went to the house of John Mark's mother suggests that this was a common meeting place, and a prominent meeting place within the early church in Jerusalem. It also suggests an association between Peter and John Mark.

It is commonly argued that Peter was the primary source for Mark's Gospel, and so the sort of familiarity between the two that would be created by a regular meeting at the house of John Mark's mother would help to make sense of why John Mark would write a Gospel using the witness of Peter. In the early church's life, meeting from house to house seems to have been one of the most basic forms of institutional structure, or something that is pre-institutional in many respects. They would meet in private houses for prayer, worship and study of the Scriptures, and this seems to have been the earliest stage of the church's life.

These private associations, meeting in domestic contexts, without necessarily the same formal institutional and leadership structures, those emerged later on over time, and such house churches would usually be very small. Craig Keener suggests that the sort of number we would expect to have been in this meeting in the house of John Mark's mother would have been more than 12, but less than 50. Rhoda, the servant girl, hears Peter's voice and recognises it, and runs to tell the people who are praying, but they don't believe her.

And this appearance to the woman, and the woman bringing the news to the disciples and then failing to believe it, is something that we've seen before. Peter is playing out a similar pattern to the story of Christ's resurrection in Luke 24 10-11. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

They even think it might be Peter's ghost, again reminiscent of the events after the resurrection in Luke 24 37, but they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a

spirit. We should see the humour in this situation, not just the way that Peter is replaying the events of Christ's resurrection, but also the way in which the disciples simply aren't prepared for God's work. God is working faster and in ways that they cannot expect.

Perhaps they were hoping that Peter would be released in the morning when Herod thought better of what he had done and God changed his mind, but the idea of a prison break affected by an angel at night was simply not on their radar. But that's what God brought about. Peter reports the miracle that occurred, instructing them to pass the news on to James and the brothers.

These are the leaders of the Jerusalem church, James the brother of Jesus. And then he has to go to another place. Presumably this is a large house and it's being associated with the disciples would mean that the authorities would search it first when they found that Peter was missing from prison.

And so he has to go elsewhere to hide. And later on we see Herod searching for him and not finding him. Peter's experience then is similar to that of Christ.

He's released from prison during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The grave is seen as a prison in the Gospels and Christ is delivered from the grave, from that prison. Peter appears to a woman whose report is not believed.

Then he appears to the disciples and then he disappears from the scene. This is the same pattern playing out again. It's the pattern of Christ's resurrection and it's the pattern playing out in Peter's life.

What we can see here among other things is the way that the disciples of Christ bear the marks of their master upon their lives. There are similar features of Christ's story playing out in the story of the disciples, in the story of Stephen, the first martyr, or at various points in the story of the Apostle Paul. There aren't just similarities between Peter and Jesus that are being explored here though.

There's also a contrast between Herod and Peter. In the previous chapters, Peter has gone from Caesarea to Judea and now Herod goes from Judea to Caesarea. There's a reversal of that pattern.

Peter has gone to the Gentiles and has eaten with them. But Herod is marked by hostility to Gentiles and refusal to share food with them. Peter refuses worship in Caesarea in Acts 10 25-26.

When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. But Peter lifted him up saying, Stand up, I too am a man. But Herod accepts worship in Caesarea.

Peter, when he's in prison, is struck by the angel to wake him up. Herod is struck by an

angel to strike him down, to bring him down in judgment. And so there's a similarity but a contrast within that.

And as we see Peter as the leader of the early church and Herod as a king of the people, we're seeing two different kingdoms at war with each other. The servants of Christ are being delivered by the true king, whereas Herod is being struck down. The fact that all of this occurs at the time of Passover might invite us to think of the relationship between the Egyptians and the Israelites.

The way in which the deliverance of one is the same way in which the others are brought down. Peter is led through a narrow passage, through the city, and in the same way the people are led through the Red Sea. And then there's the defeat of Pharaoh at the Red Sea.

Herod in the Gospels often plays the part of a Pharaoh-type figure. And here we see the Pharaoh figure being defeated in the same action that lifted up the people of God. The death of Herod is also recorded in the work of Josephus.

In the Antiquities of the Jews, Book 19, he writes, Now when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city Caesarea, which was formerly called Stratos Tower, and there he exhibited shows in honour of Caesar, upon his being informed that there was a certain festival celebrated to make vows for his safety, at which festival a great multitude was gathered together, of the principal persons, and such as were of dignity throughout his province. On the second day of which shows he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning, at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread in horror over those that looked intently upon him. And presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place and another from another, though not for his good, that he was a god.

And they added, Be thou merciful to us, for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature. Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery. But as he presently afterward looked up, he saw an owl, sitting on a certain rope above his head, and immediately understood that this bird was the messenger of ill tidings, as it had once been the messenger of good tidings to him, and fell into the deepest sorrow.

A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life. In contrast to the grisly death of Herod, we are told that the word of God increased and multiplied.

This is the language of fruitfulness and multiplication, of the blessing that God gave to

humanity at the very beginning, that applied to the word of God, the word of the kingdom is prospering at this time, it's the language of growth. It's also the sort of language that we have at the beginning of the book of 1 Samuel, in reference to Samuel as he's a boy and growing up, and then also used of the young Jesus and John the Baptist in Luke's gospel. This is a chapter of transitions.

There's the movement of the central gravity of the church away from Jerusalem. It ends with Paul and Barnabas going back to Antioch, and they had come from Antioch at the end of chapter 11. The fact that the whole chapter is bookended by Paul and Barnabas and their journey to Jerusalem, but we don't hear anything about them during their time in Jerusalem, is an interesting feature of the text.

And it suggests that there is part of a greater shift taking place here. The story begins to follow Paul and Barnabas and the other missionaries as they're moving around. It's no longer focused in Jerusalem in the same way.

Again, it's no longer focused upon Peter, James and John. James has been killed and Peter has now been released from prison, but he never appears on the scene to quite the same degree again. We see him again in chapter 15, but apart from that, we don't see that much of him.

Also, the leadership of the Jerusalem church seems to be focused much more upon James, the brother of Jesus, and others. Saul and Barnabas leave with John Mark. John Mark's association with Paul seems to be short-lived at this point.

He ends up going back to Jerusalem and there's a quarrel concerning him at the end of Acts 15, verses 37-40. Now, Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark, but Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement so that they separated from each other.

Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. Nevertheless, the reference to Mark in Colossians 4, verse 10 suggests that relationship between Paul and Mark was healed by that point. A question to consider.

In the early church, there was a lot of movement around and to and fro between different churches and many associations between various people. Reading this chapter, consider some of the associations between key figures in the early church that can already be discerned within it. Also, where else in the New Testament might we find a reference to meetings between key people during the period covered by this chapter? Now at the feast, he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked, and among the rebels in prison who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas.

And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them, and he answered them saying, for he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead, and Pilate again said to them, and they cried out again, and Pilate said to them, But they shouted all the more, So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. And the soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is, the governor's headquarters, and they called together the whole battalion, And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him, and they began to salute him, head of the Jews, and they were striking him with a reed and spitting on him, and kneeling down in homage to him, and when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him, and they led him out to crucify him.

And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross, and they brought him to the place called Golgotha, which means place of a skull, and they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it, and they crucified him, and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take, and it was the third hour when they crucified him, and the inscription of the charge against him read, And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right, and one on his left, and those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, Aha, you who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross. So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, He saved others, he cannot save himself, let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe. Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, and at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And some of the bystanders hearing it said, Behold, he is calling Elijah. And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink, saying, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down. And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God. There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger, and of Joses and Salome.

When he was in Galilee they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem. And when evening had come, since it was the day of preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of

Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died, and summoning the centurion he asked him whether he was already dead.

And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid. Mark chapter 15 begins with a consultation between the chief priests, the elders, the scribes and the entire Sanhedrin. They then deliver Jesus over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor.

Pilate questions Jesus concerning the charges against him. The charge that he claims that he is the king of the Jews is the messianic claim, as seen from a gentile perspective. Some have suggested that Pilate's question should be read in a sarcastic tone.

You are the king of the Jews? Joel Marcus then suggests that Jesus' response to this question is the edgy one. You are saying it? Such an answer might antagonise him. It presents Pilate himself as bearing witness to Jesus being the king of the Jews.

But beyond this, Jesus doesn't give any more responses to Pilate. Pilate presses him to answer the charges made against him, but Jesus makes no further response. Once again, this is reminiscent of Isaiah chapter 53 verse 7. The lamb who is led to the slaughter who is silent before its shearers.

This is the silence of one who's facing the threat of death, and for that reason it's remarkable. And Pilate is amazed. One would expect a person in Jesus' position to be doing anything and everything to defend himself.

But Jesus is silent. Pilate gives the people the choice between Barabbas and Jesus as the one to be released to them. Pilate seems to be searching for a means of escape here.

He recognises that the chief priests have delivered Jesus up through envy. However, he needs to keep the chief priests, the elders and the Sanhedrin on his side. So he needs to condemn Jesus.

He also wants to satisfy the crowd. Like the Jewish leaders, he fears the crowd and doesn't want to go against it. A customary release of a prisoner seems to offer him an opportunity to get Jesus off without taking responsibility that would render him unpopular.

The practice of releasing a prisoner seems to be a strange one, and presumably it's not a commitment on the part of the Roman governor, so much as an occasional Passover

time crowd-pleasing gesture that's snatched at now as a way out of a difficult position. What it does do is it sets up Barabbas and Jesus as two ways that the people can choose. The choice between Barabbas and Jesus seems to be a choice that shouldn't be a choice at all.

Why would they prefer an insurrectionist and a murderer over Jesus who healed the sick and raised the dead? Yet as the chief priests stir up the crowd, this is exactly the way that they choose. Mark makes certain that we have an idea about what sort of man Barabbas is. Barabbas means son of the father, which again invites comparison and contrast with Christ himself as the true son of the father.

In choosing Barabbas, the people choose the violent revolutionary over the true Messiah, and this is a choice that over time would eventually seal their fate in AD 70. The crowd cry out for Jesus' crucifixion, not just for his condemnation but that he should be put to death in the most grisly way possible. The actions and the description of the crowd here is similar to the way that we find demon-possessed persons described elsewhere in Mark.

The crowd are whipped up in a sort of demonic frenzy, with the chief priest being involved but behind them I think we can see Satan himself. Pilate releases Barabbas to the crowd, scourges Jesus and then delivers Jesus up to be crucified. There's a parodic coronation and enthronement that follows.

Gentile soldiers, the whole battalion, ridiculing the king of the Jews, gathering as an audience before him, dressing him up with a crown and a scarlet robe. Now this is appropriate because soldiers recognise kings. Soldiers are the ones that surround kings and express the glory of the rulers of this world.

And now in a parody of a coronation, we're seeing something of the truth of what's taking place. Jesus is the true king and this is his exaltation that's going to happen. He's going to be lifted up on the cross and then raised to God's right hand.

We might also reflect upon the fact that all the other people in this situation, none of them seem to be in control. The chief priests and the scribes are envious of Christ and his influence driven by their passions. They're also fearful of the crowd, as is Pilate, who is concerned to pacify them.

Pilate also needs to keep the chief priests and the scribes on his side. The crowd is caught up in a satanic frenzy. And paradoxically, Jesus, the one who is condemned to crucifixion, seems to be the only one who isn't operating out of his fear and passions.

A passerby called Simon of Cyrene is compelled to carry the cross for Christ. Simon is a Gentile who carries Christ's cross, the very mark of true discipleship. Yet Simon Peter, the chief of the disciples Jesus called, and the one who had been given the charge to

carry the cross and follow Christ, is nowhere to be found.

Once again, we're having a juxtaposition here. We've seen juxtapositions between Christ and Peter, between Jesus and Barabbas, and now we're seeing one between Simon of Cyrene and also Peter, Simon Peter. The division of Christ's garments and the casting lots for them again looks back to Psalm 22, verse 18.

They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. The voice of scripture is behind the text at many points here, and we can hear its voice as the voice of fulfilled prophecy. This is the voice of the Davidic suffering king.

It gives the reader or the hearer a sense of what is taking place in the death of Christ. They crucify him in the third hour, around 9am. He's offered myrrh and wine, drugged wine, to dull his awareness of the pain, which he refuses.

His refusal of the drugged wine draws our mind back to his statement that he would not drink the fruit of the vine until he drank it new in the kingdom, a sort of Nazarite vow that Christ takes as he goes out to do battle with the evil one. It is also a commitment consciously to bear the pain of the cross, not to shrink away from it in insensibility, but to face up to it fully. Finally, perhaps we're supposed to see a relationship between Christ not drinking wine and the fact that the priests were not supposed to drink wine while they were on duty in the temple.

Jesus is performing a sacrificial work here, and it's important that he does so in his full and right mind. The charge for which he's being crucified is placed above him, that he is the king of the Jews, and there are robbers placed on either side of him, like people would be on either side of an enthroned king. There's a fulfilment of Isaiah 53, verse 12 here, that he was numbered with the transgressors.

There's also a continuation of the theme of a parodic enthronement. As people pass by, they mock and they wag their heads. Again, this looks back to the words of scripture in the past.

Psalm 22, verse 7. Once again, Psalm 22. All who see me mock me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads. Lamentations, chapter 2, verse 15.

All who pass along the way clap their hands at you, they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem. Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth? Jesus is ridiculed as the one who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days by the passers-by. He's ridiculed by the chief priests, by the scribes and the elders, as the one who, though he saved others, cannot save himself.

He is the supposed king of Israel and claims to trust in God, but God is not coming to his aid. There's darkness over the land from noon to three o'clock and this progression through hours, the third hour, the sixth hour and the ninth hour, perhaps invites us to

see some deeper order in what's taking place and the divine superintention of the crucifixion. Perhaps we could even see it as something akin to trimesters leading to the birth of a new world.

Darkness over the land from noon to three o'clock recalls the final of the cycle of plagues before the death of the firstborn, which itself occurred at the darkness of midnight. Once again there's darkness over the land, darkness that reminds us of the exodus and associates Israel with Egypt as it was judged in the plagues. And now we have another death of the firstborn, the true firstborn that dies for the people.

And they were substituted by lambs, but this is the true lamb of God. And we should be alert to the Passover connotations here because the Passover lamb would be killed around this sort of time. Christ is the true Passover lamb.

He's the true firstborn son. He's the one that dies so that the people can be released from slavery, that a new exodus can take place. Mark has been working with themes of Isaiah and of Isaiah's new exodus throughout and now we maybe see these coming to their full head, that this is the time when the exodus is taking place.

Christ prepared for the Passover and now he is the Passover lamb being sacrificed. The darkness here could not have been a solar eclipse, but it may have been an extreme sandstorm as it was in the case of the exodus, or perhaps also it could have been a covering up of the skies with heavy cloud cover. The darkness at his death contrasts with the light of the dawn that will be associated with his resurrection.

And the darkness of the day of the Lord is described in the Old Testament. Zephaniah chapter 1 verse 15. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.

Amos chapter 8 verses 9 to 10. And on that day, declares the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation.

I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head. I will make it like the morning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day. We have a number of the elements here that appear in the crucifixion of Christ.

As in the prophecy of Amos, it's noon when the sun goes down and the earth is darkened. There's also the death of an only son, the firstborn son of the Father. We might also consider the similarities between the description of Jesus' trial, mockery, crucifixion and death and the events described in relation to the events leading up to and in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Jesus is suffering the fate of Jerusalem. He's presenting an alternative for all those who trust in him. At the ninth hour, Jesus cries out with a loud voice, My God, my God, why

have you forsaken me? These are the first words of Psalm 22, a psalm that's been alluded to or cited on a number of occasions already within this account.

It's a psalm of the suffering Davidic king. The bystanders don't recognise that Jesus is quoting scripture. Like Eli in the temple who couldn't recognise the prayer of Hannah, they can't recognise the voice of scripture and the voice of the psalms.

They hear but they do not understand. And perhaps there's another irony here, as the coming of Elijah was associated with the arrival of the great and terrible day of the Lord in Malachi chapter 4. Jesus is offered sour wine at this point, recalling Psalm 69 verse 21, They gave me poison for food and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink. He again cries out with a loud voice and he dies.

And the curtain of the temple, the realm of God's dwelling, the very heart of the religious order is torn from top to bottom. It's a sign of God's action. It's not torn from the bottom to the top, but from the realm of God's dwelling from the top.

Also it's an anticipation of the fulfilment of Christ's words concerning the temple. This is a tearing in judgment. It could also be seen as a tearing in mourning.

The high priest tore his garments as he was not supposed to do earlier on in outrage at Jesus' blasphemy. But God is tearing the clothes of his tabernacle in mourning for his son. It's also an opening up of a realm that has been closed off so that people can come into God's special presence.

There's debate about which part of the temple this curtain is in. Is it the curtain at the entrance to the temple itself? Or is it the curtain that is at the entrance of the Holy of Holies? One way or another, God is opening up a way for people to come in. The response of the centurion seeing all of this is to confess that Jesus is the son of God.

This is a response of a Gentile in faith. Again, we might think of Psalm 22. Psalm 22, 27 to 28.

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations. Along with the centurion, Mark draws our attention to the many women of Jesus' disciples who were present at a distance.

While the male disciples had almost all forsaken him at the end, the women remained present, and they had ministered to him, providing for his needs from Galilee. In Luke 8, verses 1 to 3, this ministry of the women is described. Joseph of Arimathea comes at evening, asking for the body of Jesus.

He is a member of the council, which is surprising considering the part that the council had played in the condemnation of Christ to his death. But there's time pressure here.

It's the day before the Sabbath, and so they need to bury Christ before the Sabbath begins.

As in the other Gospels, the presence of two Josephs and two Marys in the account of the burial of Jesus might make us think about Christ's birth, and the way in which the tomb can function as a new womb, from which Christ will come forth as the firstborn from the dead. The prominence of the women at this point might also add weight to such birth themes. The body is wrapped in a clean linen shroud, like the clothes of the high priest would be made of linen on the day of atonement.

It's also a fulfillment of Isaiah 53, verse 9. His grave is made with a rich man at his death. The tomb is cut into the rock, like stones taken from the quarry. In Isaiah chapter 51, verse 1, Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord, look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.

Christ is the great stone that will become the chief cornerstone of the new temple, so it seems appropriate that in his resurrection, he will come from a tomb that has been cut into the rock. The women witness where the burial takes place, and so they know where to go on the first day of the week. As in the other gospels, the prominence of the women at this point invites us to reflect upon their model of faith, the way that they remain faithful to Christ and follow him even when the male disciples fall away and are scattered.

A question to consider, what can we learn from the characters of Simon, the centurion, and Joseph of Arimathea?