

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

“Do not be afraid.” That’s what the angel at Jesus’ tomb told Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Joseph. That’s what angels usually tell those who encounter them – “Do not be afraid. Fear not.” There must be something terrifying about being in the presence of God’s messenger – because that’s what an angel is, a messenger from God. Unlike our sentimental notion of what an angel is, with a baby’s face and a bit roly-poly flittering around in mid-air, angels in the Bible startle the people they visit and appear abruptly with seriousness of purpose.

At least that was the case of the angel in the Easter Gospel. After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning – actually, as the first day of a new era and a new reality was dawning – Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to see Jesus’ tomb. They don’t go to see Jesus because they have seen him die, they know he’s dead, and they’ve seen a stone rolled in front of his tomb to seal it. Suddenly, as they approach the tomb, there’s an earthquake, an angel descends from heaven, rolls the stone away from the tomb, and sits on it. The angel’s appearance is like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. How’s that for an entrance? “Do not be afraid.” That’s good advice. Too bad the Roman soldiers guarding Jesus’ tomb don’t hear it. Out of fear of the angel, they tremble and become like dead men.

The women hear the angels’ advice, “Do not be afraid,” but they don’t take it to heart. The angel tells them that the crucified Jesus they’re looking for has been raised from the dead. He invites them to see where Jesus had lain, and then tells them to tell

the disciples that the risen Jesus will catch up with them. The women quickly leave the tomb, still afraid, but now also with great joy. And suddenly, they meet the risen Jesus, who also says, "Do not be afraid." They take hold of Jesus to make sure he is real, and they worship him. Their fear evaporates and their joy is made complete.

"Do not be afraid." That isn't only good advice for the women who come to Jesus' tomb on that first Easter, it's good advice for us here this Easter. The women on that first Easter come to see the tomb and instead they see Jesus! How many times are we looking for the tomb, instead of looking for Jesus? How many times are we looking for the tomb, and through our tears and our fears we don't even see Jesus – the Jesus who tells us, "Do not be afraid."? We look for the tomb each time we lose hope when there is still hope to be had. We look for the tomb each time we sacrifice dreams when there are still dreams to be dreamt. We look for the tomb each time we sell others short when there is so much potential in them. We look for the tomb each time we turn our head and pretend we don't see the suffering in the world, when we know that we can do something to make the world better.

How many times are we looking for the tomb, and we don't see the messenger God has set right in front of us? Not every messenger from God arrives with an earthquake, rolls away the stone from the tomb, and sits on it. The angel that first Easter was just setting the world aright, ushering in the new era and the new reality, after Jesus' death on the cross when the earth shook and rocks were split. But there are many angels in our lives if we look for them – messengers whom God sends to us, who roll away the stones from our self-constructed tombs, who tell us, "Do not be afraid."

And what are we to be afraid of? What are we to fear? God has raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus has conquered sin and death on our behalf. God will not abandon us. Jesus will be there for us. All we have to do, like those women on that first Easter, is to see Jesus, take hold of him, worship him, and hear him say, “Do not be afraid.” Then our fear will evaporate and our joy will be made complete.

From that one messenger of God – the angel – Mary Magdalene and the other Mary become messengers themselves. They report to the disciples the good news of the angel, that Jesus has been raised from the dead and he will meet up with them in Galilee. Indeed, the disciples go to Galilee and see the risen Jesus, and they become messengers of the good news of Jesus’ resurrection. The Good News of Jesus – his replacing tombs with hope, his replacing fear with joy, his replacing sin and death with life everlasting – was spread from Galilee to Judea to Jerusalem by his disciples as messengers, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. You and I are now his messengers – we who come to this altar and eat and drink with him risen from the dead, in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. We are called to be God’s messengers – God’s angels to others to help roll away the stones from their self-constructed tombs, to tell them to “Fear not.” We are called to tell of the hope given by Jesus, of the joy given by Jesus, of the everlasting life given by Jesus. Not from Galilee to Judea to Jerusalem, but now from Holy Faith to Santa Fe, to all of New Mexico, to the whole country, and beyond! This is the Good News of Jesus Christ!

“Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified...he has risen [from the dead], as he said.” Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!