

John 20:1-2,11-18

March 30, 2013 – EASTER SUNDAY (NPH ¹)

The Light

✦ **Dark night**

✦ **Gray dawn**

✦ **Glorious light**

Dear heirs of God's wondrous love, brothers and sisters of our risen Lord Jesus Christ:

Have you ever traveled through mountain tunnels? My wife Cindy and I were blessed by a God through a dear brother to drive in the Italian Alps along the east side of Lake Como. We were supposed to find a landing along the shore with a ferry, but I was not looking forward to driving our rental car onto a boat. In the end I didn't have to because the tunnels were too long. They seemed to go on forever as if we'd never get out. When finally the light, suddenly another tunnel – it's like life sometimes.

The Lenten season from Ash Wednesday to Easter is like a tunnel. It's a time of somber, solemn, serious hours. We've explored the *Names of Wondrous Love* God uses for Jesus our Savior. But we have also been reminded of our sins, of God's anger, of God's death to pay our debt of guilt. We have traveled in darkness to see the punishment we deserved, what Christ had to suffer in our place

But today is different. Today we come out into the Easter sunshine of God's love. For joy, comfort and praise, we follow with Mary Magdalene from **Dark night**, to **Gray Dawn** into **Glorious Light**.

✦ **Dark night**

"While it was still dark...." describes Mary's heart too. Who can image Mary's darkness? She had traveled with Jesus and His disciples from Galilee along with several other women whom Jesus *"had been cured of evil spirits and diseases."* But from Mary Magdalene, Jesus had driven *"seven demons.... These women were helping to support them out of their own means."* (Luke 8:2f NIV84) Mary had a genuine heart of love for her Lord. But then to see Him treated so shamefully, tried, condemned, tortured and crucified? The pitch black of Calvary's cross settled on her soul. Her heart was as dark as the grave where they laid Him. When they buried Jesus, they buried all her hopes in him as her promised Savior.

This was one **Dark night** of blackest despair for Mary Magdalene. But her dark tunnel was about to get longer with no light in sight and no exit. Her Savior was dead. That was bad enough. But now she also thought His body had been stolen. Her one last act of love to embalm Him was denied.

Did you ever think something could not get any worse, but then it did? We've all suffered through some **Dark night** when there seemed to be no light at the end of the tunnel, no exit anywhere. A freshly filled grave where you returned to weep again and again. The daily struggles of life that seem to go on and on. Health concerns that don't respond to medication. Your sins that keep coming back. Temptation and doubt oppressing. Dear friends, look up. Let's follow with Mary Magdalene from **dark night** into...

✦ **Gray dawn**

How true it is. "The night is often darkest just before the dawn." Darkness must yield. Dawn must come. It happens every day. *"Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."* (Psalm 30:5) First there's a little glimmer of gray. For Mary Magdalene the first **Gray of dawn** was actually the stone rolled away. But through her tears she could not see that light.

¹ Adapted from 2013 NPH Series: *Names of Wondrous Love*, Rev. Richard E. Lauersdorf.

Sometimes our hearts will not let us think clearly. Otherwise, Mary could have thought about the disciples, how they had nothing to gain by spreading a lie. A dead savior is no savior at all. The disciples were too paralyzed by fear to plan a hoax, much less take on a squad of soldiers guarding the grave.

Jesus enemies would not have opened the grave. They tried to prevent anyone from getting inside. They insisted Pilate supply guards and seal the grave. Now they just wanted Jesus' memory to die, to disappear like a speck in the rearview mirror. They wanted life back to normal again without Jesus.

There were a few other darkened souls for whom **Gray dawn** was just beginning. Other women had come earlier with Mary Magdalene. They continued to the grave and heard the message of the angels that Jesus was risen. Meanwhile Mary Magdalene ran back to tell Peter and John that Jesus' body had been stolen. They ran out to investigate but still did not know the Scripture that said the Messiah would rise. Before long the Emmaus disciples would be reporting they had seen Him too. Still **Gray dawn**.

Has anyone here not had this experience? God comforts your soul with the sweet, sweet Gospel of forgiveness from Jesus' lips. But then when you go back to life as usual, how quickly this cruel world can dim your joy. In Sunday School and VBS we learn to sing, "I know that my Redeemer lives!" but then you wonder when it's your loved one buried or your own grave creeping up on you. Life's pain and problems, loss and doubts can settle in like dense fog that leaves life overcast in **Gray dawn**. Dear friends, don't despair. Follow with Mary from **gray dawn** into morning's most....

✦ **Glorious light**

Dawn does not last long. It seems like an eternity when we're seeking answers. But suddenly the SON of God appears in **Glorious light**. God's truth floods your soul with joy. If we can make it through the **Dark night** and hold on through **Gray Dawn**, **Glorious light** will shine.

Mary had seen the stone rolled away. She ran with hopeless news of a grave robbery. She returned to weep for a tragedy no one could fix. She "*saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.*" "*Woman, why are you crying?*" "*They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put him.*" Now the gardener behind her was asking, "*Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?*" How happy she would be if he could only help! "*Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.*"

How often don't we think we have a solution to our problem that will make us happy? How often our plans are still shrouded in the darkness of doubt and fear. We think it may take forever for this grief and sadness to go away. But we don't realize how quickly God can turn on His **Glorious light**

It took just a word from the lips of the risen Word. He said, "*Mary.*" With that she recognized His voice, turned and now she could see Jesus in the **Glorious light** of God's truth. In her native Aramaic dialect she cried out, "*Rabboni!*" which means, "My Teacher!" or "My Master!" She wanted to hold on and never let Jesus go again. She did not realize all He had done and would still do for her.

With one word Jesus can dry our tears and lift the weight of guilt from us. No more dark tunnel in the bright light of Easter victory. Easter morning Jesus had already descended into hell to preach, to proclaim His victory over Satan. Rising again, He slaughtered death by His powerful life. As I told my bank teller yesterday, "Your debt is paid. That's what Easter means. 100% your debt to God is paid." The **Glorious light** of God's love lifts us up and puts a spring in our step even on the darkest day, a smile of faith even in death, light that cannot be extinguished even in our grave. For our risen Savior has said, "*I AM the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*" (John 8:12) Easter proves God keeps His Word. Come out of the **Dark night**. Don't stay in the **Gray dawn** of doubt. See the **Glorious light** of Easter. And look forward to the dawning of that eternal Day when we will join Mary and all the others singing the praises of God's wondrous love. Amen.

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