



# **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**We are an Easter people**

**If we die with Christ, we will live with him too**

**Alleluia!**

***Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!  
Because of his great mercy he gave us new life by raising Jesus  
Christ from death. This fills us with a living hope... 1 Peter 1:3***

I cannot think of a better commentary on the Resurrection of Jesus than this short verse from **1 Peter**. It acknowledges the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus through the divine intervention of God our Father. The whole meaning of Holy Week is summed up beautifully here – it has all been about heavenly mercy poured out on sinners. In the cross and the resurrection there is a transformed way of being human. That transformation invites us into a Jesus-modelled way of living. That life is freely given to all who join their lives with that of the Risen Lord. Therein lies our hope. There is a requirement of personal sacrifice. We are to live in the world as Jesus lived in the world – lives permeated with love, service, mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation for others.

**Chrysologus** (380–450) observes...*The order of things is changed: the Tomb devours death and not the dead; the house of death becomes the mansion of life.* We do indeed live in a very new world – if we choose to accept the invitation. The newness is something brought about by God and not through our own efforts. The Church is clear on this...if we die. Paul says it well to the Corinthian Churches... *But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.* He is but the first to be raised up by the Father, the firstfruits of divine compassion and love. This means there will be more – second fruits, third fruits, on and on until the end. But the condition is clear. Only by taking on the fullness of Good Friday – taking our daily living to the cross of Jesus – can we enter a new life.

## **We live in a very different world if we live under God**

The major focus of Matthew's Easter narrative is the way the death and resurrection of Jesus brought about an end to the world as we have known it. He sees world-shattering consequences of what God has been doing. From a Jewish perspective, the darkening of the heavens, the shaking of the earth, and the resurrection of the dead would have been clear signs that the present age was ending, and the new era has begun.

## **God has done His bit, the rest depends on our response**

One thing is clear. God is never going to ram salvation down our throats. God invites, we respond. We have the freedom to reject the invitation to live in a renewed world, a transformed humanity, or we can go with the world as men and women shape it.

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What is significant is the way Matthew has Jesus the Christ rising from the grave and then immediately goes into the commissioning the disciples, sending them out into the world...<sup>28:18</sup> *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...* <sup>28:19</sup> *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...* The resurrection and the commissioning go together. The full impact on the world of the resurrection of Jesus is revealed in the missionary work of Christians. It is not all about standing on street corners preaching. It is all about *the way we live* with others in the world. The Christ in us brings about that transformation. There is no magical clicking of the divine fingers so that everything changes immediately. As God invites us into this new life through the witness and ministry of Jesus, so too we invite non-believers into this renewed, transformed world through our witness and ministry. Now the new situation is clear: God will continue the divine engagement with His creation, with the saving works he began in Abram. The new part is the way we become *co-creators in Christ, collaborators* in those saving works.

**And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**

Is there any proof of the resurrection? There was no one there to witness Christ rising. The tomb was empty when the women and apostles arrived. So, can we be sure? Yes! We can and we are certain. The proof of the resurrection is found in these final words of Jesus, the promise of the ongoing presence of Christ in our day to day living. Remember earlier in this Gospel Jesus promised Peter that the *gates of hell will never be able to prevail* against the Gospel truly and fully lived. When we **live** the Gospel; as we imitate the way of Christ in the world; as we live, love, forgive and reach out in charity and with mercy to others, we bring the Risen Christ alive to those people. We know Christ *is* risen because we find him with us when we are in need and are searching for the fruits of the resurrection in our lives.

**He descended into hell...**

We confess in our Creed how Jesus *descended into hell* between his death on the cross and his resurrection. This is not about him going down into flames and boiling lava. It is a fulfilling of the biblical expectations that the souls in *hades – sheol – hell* (all variations on the same belief) be set free from the darkness of death. It was the place to which all who died descended awaiting their liberation. By *descending into hell*, Jesus the Saviour broke the chains of death, ended the domination of death over men and women. In Christ, Sheol, the place of darkness beyond the grave, has no more power to imprison souls. The Book of Revelation puts it succinctly - *and I Jesus have control of the keys of Death and of Hades.*

That descent into hell means it is no longer Satan's domain, for Christ has invaded Hell and taken death captive. Death is not ended (it remains unto the End) but is placed death under Christ. We need not fear death, for Christ our Liberator has gone before us leading the way to heaven. Ambrose (339-397): *He is free, then, because the chains of death had no hold upon Him. He descended into the darkness of Hell but he was not made prisoner by the powers of darkness. It is He Who exerted power amongst them.* Therein we find the hope offered to us in the Risen Christ. All death, dying and darkness remain under the dominion of the Risen and Reigning Christ. So fear not! Live in joy and die in peace. Alleluia!

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The Risen Christ holds "the keys of Death and Hades (Hell)" so that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Rev 1:18; Phil 2:10).

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