



## **Easter Day**

# **THE NEW SHOFAR**

Lord, make us instruments of Your Peace; where there is hatred empower us to sow love, injury pardon, doubt faith, despair hope and death – life.

### ***What a shame Easter has not delivered all it promised to us!***

The Orthodox Church's Easter will be celebrated on April 16<sup>th</sup> this year and what a celebration of the victory of Christ over death that should be for those on the frontline of the war in Ukraine! Surely many will be asking what a difference the Resurrection truly makes to the world, their part of it at least where the bombs keep falling and the young and the innocent keep dying. Where is the change Easter has so readily and abundantly promised? Has the death of the Son of God changed nothing substantially in our violence and arrogance studded human history?

According to a study in the New York Times, you could be forgiven for wondering if the world ever has known peace. Of the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for 268 of them, or just 8 percent of recorded history. And in the twentieth century alone, at least 108 million people have been killed in wars. What does that say about the biblical teachings about the peace brought to us by Jesus – *peace leave with you, my peace I give to you...*? It is no wonder that so many people in the West today struggle to place their faith and hope in God. Their observations and experiences suggest to them that if God really does exist, He is not really all that good in the God-business.

### ***Easter faith is an invitation to live by faith in hope***

But God is not a magician. He does not work magical tricks. God loved us so much that we were created with free will, a will that enabled us to turn our backs on our creator and to live as though we were gods of equal divinity with the Almighty. The story of human rebellion and rejection of God goes back to the very beginnings, to Adam and Eve, Cain, the people of Babel. God's own people Israel wandered from covenant faithfulness to follow the ways of the gods of the land of Canaan. Judas, one of the Twelve betrayed the Messiah and Christians have been among the staunchest among sinners ever since.

The real issue then is not whether or not God has failed, or that the promises God made have not reached fruition. The real question is why men and women continue to turn our backs on the promise God has made and continues to make to us and for us. God has unfailingly provided an abundance of grace and opportunity, beginning at Creation and reaching a high point in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. For those accepting those graces, life has been transformed and they know the power of divine peace in their lives, *a peace the world cannot give*. That peace is transformative even in the midst of war, violence, darkness, sickness, suffering and death. It continues when we reach rock bottom as well as when we are on the highest of human highs. Nothing can stop that peace from reigning in our lives, and in the world in which we live, if and when we live in Christ and only inasmuch as we allow Christ to live in us.

Here is the point. God has done and continues to do His bit. The way that transforms the world into a reconstituted Garden of Eden depends on how willingly we collaborate with Him. We are invited to live in Peace. God does not impose Peace on the world.

### **War and violence is a human creation – nothing to do with God**

Russia's invasion of Ukraine started in February 2022 and continues unabated. The longer it goes, the more the world sees the capacity for evil that has been hiding behind fiction of a global village where all are one. Thousands of people have already died, millions have become refugees, and tensions are rising between the world's most powerful militaries. The impact of the war here in Australia just adds to our daily strains and problems. When taken together, you might even feel like hope is nearly lost. *So, are we not glad it's Easter?*

Our Christian faith is grounded in Easter, a divine action reminding us that God is in charge, and that His power is greater than any stress or conflict we might experience in this life. So as the world seems to be imploding, there is no better time than now to celebrate Easter. Why is that you may ask? Well, here are five key Easter messages:

### **Easter reminds us that war is a result of our sinful condition.**

War and killing is a result of sin (Gen. 4:8). The reason a nation needs a military is because we are sinners. As God's people we are called to be peacemakers (Matt. 5:9), but sometimes wars are going to happen because they appear to be the only way to curtail the advance of sin in this world (Rom. 13:4). As Solomon writes, (sadly) *There is . . . a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace*" (Eccl. 3:8).

Easter celebrates the reality that Jesus was crucified for the forgiveness of our sins, and by His crucifixion and resurrection He claimed victory over Satan and the dominion of darkness (1 John 3:8). The resurrection of Christ is His victory in a war He fought and won for us, a war against sin and death (Rom. 4:25, 6:8-11). The resurrection confirms that we can be victorious in our battle against sin in this life, and ultimately in the life to come (Phil. 3:10, 1 Cor. 15:57). But it is a victory we only share by living in Christ.

### **Easter reminds us that every war confirms spiritual warfare:**

*Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death* (Heb. 2:14-15).

The Bible reminds us that it is Satan who instigates war and violence in the hearts and minds of arrogant men. Such people thrive on death and destruction, and will stop at nothing to get it (John 8:44). Satan motivates tyrants and dictators to take what does not belong to them, to lie to their own people, and to slaughter innocent civilians to get what they want (Matt. 2:16-18). **Remember** that an unseen war is being waged around us all the time (Eph. 6:12, 2 Cor. 10:4). The wars that we see confirm the war we do not see.

But the crucifixion of Christ defeated Satan, and he knows it (Col. 2:14-15, Rom. 16:20). The resurrection of Christ is the victory flag waved in the face of history's worst tyrant, announcing his ultimate defeat. And so, every time we celebrate the resurrection of Christ, we remind Satan of his defeat. The victory of God's grace and peace will once and for all consign the serpent to his fate, just as God promised (Gen. 3:15, Rev. 12:9).

### **Easter reminds us that God is more powerful than anything we face in this life.**

*I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world* (John 16:33). How could Jesus make this promise unless He knew that He would live again? We already have an abundance of stress and struggles in our lives, and it does not help that the war in Ukraine is reverberating around the world and into our lounge rooms and wallets. This is why Jesus reminds us to celebrate the power of the resurrection to overcome all evil, heartache, despair, and stress. Christ has already defeated any problem we might face (Rom. 8:31, 37). There is no human army stronger than the power of God (Zech. 4:6).

### **Easter reminds us that we can overcome sin in our lives today.**

*Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us* (Rom. 8:34, 37). Human life is full of danger, temptation, trial, squabbles, crises, and calamity. And for Christians, we can add persecution (Rom. 8:35). **But** in all these things, Paul says, *we are more than conquerors*, a phrase that means something like “mega-conquerors.” Christians enjoy a triumph over sin and death that outshines the victories of even the greatest earthly armies.

Why? Two reasons. **Because** Jesus is alive, having “been raised” from the dead by the Father, **and because**, since He is alive, He is interceding for us (Heb. 7:25). This is why we should not forget how we can find ourselves striving in a battle He has already won.

The resurrection of Christ proves that through the power of God we can overcome evil in our own lives. We can defeat temptation and sin, and we are free of sin and death. Jesus already won that war for us, and those who trust Christ enjoy freedom from sin and death (Rom. 6:4, Gal. 5:16).

### **Easter reminds us that one day all wars will end**

Because Jesus is alive, and He has already defeated Satan, sin, and death, one day all war will end, and a new creation will be ushered in. That day is already on its way. It is made more and more real whenever men and women commit themselves unreservedly to Christ, to living in imitation of Him. While That Day began on Easter Sunday morning, and will be brought to its fullness at The End, it is made an even more vibrant reality for us today when we choose Christ. When we are forgiven and forgive; when we allow God's love to govern our ways and we share that love with others; when God lives in us and through us.

This is one of the great promises of the Bible: *He will settle disputes among the nations and provide arbitration for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plows and their spears into pruning knives. Nation will not take up the sword against nation, and they will never again train for war* (Is. 2:4). Peace is something God is doing for us today but enduring and just peace only becomes a reality when we imitate Christ and die to ourselves that we may be raised up to a new, a transfigured, a revitalized son and daughter of God.

How do we know that? Because we know that our living Lord is coming back. The return of Christ hinges on the resurrection of Christ. The first time around, He won the battle against sin and death. The second time, He will come *to save those who eagerly* wait for Him (Heb. 9:28).

And so, this year, as we celebrate Easter, we are invited to celebrate God's reminder that though this world is a mess and though war rages on, God has already won the biggest war. He has defeated sin and death. As we celebrate Easter, we are invited to remember that God knows every battle we face, and He has already defeated every enemy we fear.

### **But wait, there is more: failures in faithfulness do not negate Easter for us**

If we never failed God, Easter is not for us. But, if we have ever promised God something, and not done it; if we have ever resolved to overcome some persistent sin, only to fail repeatedly; if we are plagued with guilt over sins that have defeated us; *then* it is Easter offers us genuine and revitalizing hope from God. It is all there in the Gospel for us.

Mark's record of the Resurrection inserts two easily missed short words offering hope to all who have failed God: *and Peter* (Mark 16:7). The angel at the empty tomb tells the women, *But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ...* Why did the angel add, *and Peter*? The words are addressing the very same Peter who had denied Jesus! Peter, who had boasted of his allegiance to Christ, but had failed worse than any of the other disciples had failed!

*And Peter*—How those words must have echoed rang in Peter's ears! The women had reported to the disciples the news of the resurrection. There in that room was Peter, more than likely slumped in the corner deeply depressed. But at the words, *and Peter*, he would perked up. "What did you say? Are you sure that the angel said, *and Peter*? Tell me again! Were those his exact words?" He could never have imagined such healing love.

Those two short words say to us this Easter morning: *Yes, my Easter peace I give to you, my Easter Peace I leave with you. It is a Peace the world can never achieve – apart from me.* We most assuredly have failed in ways not all that different to the failure of Peter and have failed in our duty to be peace-makers. And yet those same two words echo down through the ages to each and every one of us – *and Michael, Maria, Agness, James, Adam...*

### ***Easter is the guarantee that Peace on earth is already a reality***

The risen Saviour offers hope to all who have failed God. Indeed, God is the only true source of hope for a world so hopelessly addicted to war and violence, hedonism, selfishness, greed and hatred. In a world seduced by the satanic temptations to power and wealth, fame and licentiousness, the God who has already defeated Satan through His Son, is the only hope we have for a better world, for a lasting and enduring Peace that grows out of justice. Is this not the reason why *we should be glad it's Easter?*