

Easter greeting, prayers and message to Baptist churches

Lynn Green – General Secretary of Baptists Together

Christ is risen, hallelujah!

I am the Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary of Baptists Together and I wanted to share with you the greetings of the wider Baptist family on this special day. In the midst of all the Good Friday-ness of life at the moment, it's great that we can get together and proclaim and celebrate our risen Lord Jesus Christ today.

I just wanted to take this opportunity to assure you that many people have been praying for you in recent weeks, and that includes me!

Today as a Church, I want you to know that:

You are unique,
You are beautiful,
God's smile is on you.

It doesn't matter what you are doing or not doing at the moment. What matters is who you are and that God loves and cares for you and holds you, and that you are his.

I pray that today you would rejoice and rest in the Lord our God and I pray that you would know the hope and the love and the life of the resurrection in you and through you in the days to come.

Hilary Taylor – Small Church Enabler London Baptist Association

Welcome to this Easter morning message. I am Hilary Taylor, the Small Church Enabler for the London Baptist Association.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! We celebrate today with people across the country in our smaller churches. We have much to celebrate despite the current strange and unusual circumstances. Jesus died, he was buried and he was raised from the dead by the power of God. He is alive! Hallelujah!

Let us pray together:

Almighty God,

When everything was dark and it seemed that the sun would never shine again,
Your love broke through.

Your love was too strong, too wide, too deep for death to hold.

Gracious God,
We praise you for the light of new life made possible through Jesus.

We praise you for the light of new life that shone on the first witnesses of resurrection.
We praise you for the light of new life that continues to shine in our hearts today.

We pray that the Easter light of life, hope and joy, will live in us each day;
and that we will be bearers of that light into the lives of others.
Amen.

I am delighted that Ken Benjamin, the President of Baptists Together, has recorded an Easter message for us. The transcript will be available to download so you can print a copy to send to your church members who are not able to connect with us today.

John 20 v 1-18 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

The Empty Tomb

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped round Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?'

'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?'

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'

Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'

She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher').

Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' "

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Ken Benjamin – Baptists Together President

Happy Easter everyone – I hope and pray this message finds you well.

One of the headlines I have seen and one of the comments I have heard in this Coronavirus lockdown season is that 'Everything has changed' – I can understand that comment in the light of the coronavirus pandemic.

So much *has* changed:

1. Level of certainty about so many things for so many people have changed
2. A lot of future plans have changed or are on hold
3. Mobility – freedoms – travelling outside the UK has changed Things we took for granted has changed
4. Income has changed for so many
5. Health and wellbeing concerns have changed and more

A lot has changed and *changing so fast* that I don't know where we will be at by Easter Sunday, in terms of our news when you read this. At the time of recording, our Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, is in intensive care and we should pray for him and all our Government, as we are called to pray for those in leadership and those who are unwell and Boris Johnson is currently both of these things.

It's easy to think that everything has changed, but I want to ask, 'Has *everything* changed?' I don't think so. A lot has changed but not everything.

You haven't changed

Your loved ones and those close to you haven't changed

The values you hold dear haven't changed.

The qualities that we prize like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (The fruits of the Spirit), haven't changed. When I hear that list, I think we need these qualities even more in this season.

These things haven't changed.

I would want to affirm and remind ourselves that God hasn't changed.

In fact, if there was a time when everything changed, it wasn't 2020 and it wasn't through coronavirus. It was the first Easter. The message of life and death and the opportunity to reach out to God changed radically.

Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. A sign of change when Jesus changed the rules of life and death.

When everything changed.

The stone was rolled away. What that points to is, death has been defeated – *that's real change.*

When I read that account of the stone having been rolled away, my heart leaps and my head is encouraged. My heart leaps because it points to the risen Jesus. My head is encouraged as I've been through the various options for the stone being rolled away and I can find no logical conclusion other than it's the power of God and the risen Jesus!

From a head knowledge, intellectual confidence point of view (I love the honesty in this account), if you are going to make up a story, you don't deliberately add your own misunderstandings and mistakes! It doesn't help your case so the only reason to add this, is if it is real.

Mary and the disciples keep getting things wrong and yet they note it down

V2 'and we don't know where they have put him!'

9 'They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead'...Why would you add that if it is not true?

11 'Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb' She still is not understanding what is going on...

14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

15 Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'

Mary is looking in the wrong direction. She is looking at the tomb where Jesus *has* been, but it is only when she turns and faces Jesus, that hope and help come.

You don't make that stuff up. That makes it a so much more trustworthy testimony.

This is a season, amidst the turmoil, amidst the change, when people are looking for something or someone to trust.

People are placing their trust in:

Government ministers, Medical advisers, Scientists, NHS leaders. They are all doing key jobs and serving well as far as I can see. We need to pray for them all.

I choose to trust the one who creates and sustains life and on Easter Sunday changed the rules of life and death.

In our reading, Jesus meets Mary Magdalene. It was the custom in Palestine to visit the grave 3 days or thereabouts after a death. That phrase 'early morning' really was early morning, maybe 3am to 6am. They discover the risen Jesus, but not straightaway. Confusion and desperation melt away when he calls Mary's name.

In our time of confusion and when people are at their lowest ebb, the presence of the risen Jesus changes everything. To Mary belongs the honour of being the first to recognise the risen Jesus but it isn't a race. We can all acknowledge and recognise Him today.

Our God changes things from bad to good. He does that through the Easter story. Not that he creates the bad, but that he turns it around for good.

My friend Phil Knox has produced a spoken word poem recently that takes us from the bad of Good Friday to the good of Easter Sunday.

It's called '**The Comeback**'

[Video here](#)

The Comeback

It's finished.

It's over.

There's more of them than us and they look a lot bigger

The villain's got the girl and his finger on the trigger

Voldemort, Sauron, and Vader reign

It's gone to penalties against the Germans again

It's a terrible feeling when hope is erased

Faith misplaced

Virtue defaced

Gloom embraced

Reputation replaced with the taste of disgrace

When you've pushed every door and it's been slammed back in your face

When you realise you're third in a two horse race

So come and sit with me on Golgotha's slopes

See human history at its lowest ebb

See the forces of goodness and grace on the ropes

Evil had spoken, last rites read

*In a phoney gown and thorny crown he's mocked and knocked and shamed
As he staggers down through an angry town, they spit and hit and hate
Hands that forged galaxies and flung starry trails
Are pierced and punctured by merciless nails
His body succumbing to brutal infliction
These are the horrors of crucifixion
And as dice are tossed, hope is lost, desolate disciples count the cost
'King of the Jews' his head rest embossed
A criminal's killing on Calvary's cross*

*And as last words cut through foul-smelling air
The whole of the cosmos cries out in despair*

*It is finished.
It's over.*

*But then dawn wakes on Easter day
Darkness quakes as shadows give way to
The light.*

*See resurrection's the plan. It's why God sent him
And the comeback's on, there's a change of momentum
The powers of damnation in previous jubilation
Have been hushed and crushed by the Lord of creation*

*He takes the hit, stands where we should have stood
That's why we call Friday 'good'
And he's back with life, with us and blessed
And that's why we can know it as 'Sunday best'*

*To the 4-0 down, to the backs against the wall
Listen for his rallying, resurgent call
To those who think it's all over, those in brokenness and pain
Easter's story roars, 'We go again'*

*So, thine be the glory, death's lost its sting
Here's to Jesus, the comeback king.*

I love that piece where Phil stands on a mountain top and says one simple word...**But**.
Here's to Jesus, the comeback King.

We are being asked to limit ourselves at the moment aren't we, for the sake of saving lives and that's a good thing, the stay at home message is needed.

We should remember that the Son of God limited himself first by coming to earth and then limited himself again in the sacrifice he paid for each one of us.

Easter was the time everything changed.

Access to God has changed. He is now reachable for each one of us.

Eternal hope has changed because Jesus has paved the way for us.

Maybe you know or remember the song 'Because He lives'. Not particularly trendy but the lyrics resonate for me today

*But greater still the calm assurance
This child can face uncertain days, because He lives
Because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone*

The 'uncertain days' bit is right – isn't it?

Praying 'all fear is gone' is a progressive truth. Don't feel guilty if you don't know all fear gone yet, it's a progressive truth. Pray that you may know great peace because God is in your life.

And it makes a difference to an individual. Mary had the honour of being the first to meet the risen Jesus, not the last. Each one of us can experience that for ourselves.

And she 'Goes again' like the video said

18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her.

The coronavirus changes a lot of things but it doesn't change everything

Easter makes all the difference in the world, when everything that mattered changed.

It changes the way we live now, changes the hope we have for tomorrow changes our hope for eternity.

Prayers led by Diane Watts – Faith and Society Interim Team Leader

Lord Jesus Christ you are alive! Hallelujah!

On this day, this Easter Day, we say that Jesus was not abandoned to the grave for God has raised him to life. So Lord, we rejoice because today you are exalted to God's right hand, you have triumphed over death. Because of your love for us you have won the victory and we say Hallelujah!

Come and let's pray together:

Lord Jesus, risen king Jesus, thank you that today you walk with us along the dusty road, in the hard places we find ourselves this Easter Sunday.

Lord in the same way you were not abandoned to the grave, neither have you abandoned us. Lord Jesus we know in the days after you rose again you sat, broke bread, cooked fish and ate with your friends; would you come and eat with us now. Feed us and have mercy on us, Lord.

In your mercy, come and walk alongside us.

Lord Jesus, you invited your friends to tell you all that was concerning them, you asked them to tell you everything they were discussing as they trudged along the road. And so we come to you, to tell you all that is on our hearts and all about what concerns us, what we hold in our minds today.

In a moment of silence, we bring our prayers to God who accompanies us, sharing all that we hold in our hearts, our mind and our souls, both the pain and the joy.

Moment of Silence to bring these things to the risen Jesus

"May the eyes of our hearts be enlightened in order that we may know the hope to which he has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparable great power for us who believe". Ephesians 1:18-19

Lord you are the hope bringer. We pray today for our friends, family and neighbours who need to know something of your hope now. Lets us name them in a moment of silence.

Silence

Lord, bringer of light and hope, we pray for others now, particularly those who are working in the NHS today. Maybe there are workers that you know, think of faces and names of those you know but also faces and names who are known to God. Bring all those now in a moment of silence to the Lord.

Silence

Thank you risen Lord for your Holy Spirit, poured out on us so that we can be witnesses to the life of Jesus in our world today.

Lord we know, we proclaim today that you are alive and active in our world, even in the hidden place of our world.

May we be hope bringers where we live. May we be witnesses to your power, witnesses to our neighbours and to our communities right where we live today. Lord we pray for your peace and your resurrection power to be known in the homes that surround us.

And as we are witnesses today of your resurrection, as we cry out that Jesus is Lord and testify to His incomparable love, may all hear and know that you, Jesus Christ are Lord, in heaven and on earth and under the earth; may every tongue confess that you are Lord. To the glory of God our Father.

Amen

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