

Sunday 17th April, 2022
Year C - Easter Day 9.30am with Baptism of Rafael Steptoe

Acts 10:34-43
Hymn to the Risen Christ
1 Corinthians 15:19-26
Luke 24:1-12

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

This great celebration of Easter is all about story. And we Christians are a people of story. Last night we gathered outside this church as we recalled the story of the light of Christ coming into the world. We lit the first fire of Easter and processed the Paschal candle into the Church; the story of the light of Christ coming into a dark and hurting world. Our world.

We held our own candles as a symbol of the ways each of us has had our own story set afire by the story of Jesus Christ. We sat and pondered stories-- the creation, the flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, the story of the people of God. Our story. And this morning we continue the Easter story as Rafael is baptized. Baptized into the Church of God. Officially welcomed as a child of God here in this parish church of St. Andrew's where his parents were themselves married.

As with all of us, Rafael will, in his own time, create his own life story, but this morning his story alters. Promises will be made to God on his behalf. He will be baptized by water and anointed with oil. This morning Rafael is marked as Christ's own for ever.

And on this most Holy morning all our stories are woven together as God's people—past, present and future. We have made it through the 40 days of Lent and Holy Week. We have arrived at the threshold—Easter. Resurrection. New life.

Easter, however, is not about a one day event. Easter is about how we choose to live our lives. Easter is about living as transformed people of Christ. Easter is, as we will shortly enact, about remembering our own baptism, and the movement of God in our lives.

Easter is opening our eyes to resurrection moments that confront us every day. It is about asking the question, how do we live in this broken, battered world as Easter people?

The answer? It is with God's help. With God's love. A love made visible to us every single day when we love one another. Easter is our story, our way of life. Remember, friends! We are Easter people! We are Easter people.

Indeed. But this does not mean that we live protected sheltered happy go lucky lives. Like everyone else in the world our lives harbor edges, if not deep pools, of sadness and suffering. But what it does mean is that regardless of whether we live or die, we are God's beloved children—always.

Being Easter people means we live our lives knowing that life is stronger than death, hope is always stronger than fear, and nothing is stronger than the love of God.

These past few weeks I, like you I'm sure, have been left heartbroken as I have seen the terrible images coming from Ukraine, with once bustling cities reduced to ashes, and millions of people having to flee their homes, trying to seek safety and refuge in countries around them, and much further afield.

And I wondered - will there be anything left for them to return to? How will these people, many of whom will be of the orthodox faith, make sense of God's love and faithfulness? What will Easter mean to them?

I was reminded of the words of the great British author and theologian, G.K. Chesterton, who observed - "Christianity has died many times and risen again, for it has a God who knew the way out of the grave".

The faithful people of Ukraine will also gather again - their observance of Orthodox Easter next week will be as strong and as powerful as ever. Perhaps more so. Because in their celebration of Easter they will also remember that same mystery which we gather to explore this morning - this most amazing story of God overcoming evil and death, in the resurrection we proclaim. That is our story.

The story of God's people goes on.

We gather to remember an outspoken man, a man whose heart belonged to the poor and the suffering and those pushed to the edges of society. A man named Jesus who was crucified, assassinated, almost 2000 years ago.

But we also gather to proclaim that Jesus lives. Now. Christ is risen in us so that we might live as Easter people. People of hope and purpose and love. People who can offer hope and purpose and love to others. We are Easter people. We, like Rafael, are marked as Christ's own for ever.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

In the name of God. Amen