

The Apostles' Creed Week 4 – The Resurrection

4) He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead:

a) He descended into hell . . . : The word “hell” in this phrase refers to “the place of departed spirits” and not the fiery place of judgement. You will notice that this phrase does not occur in the Old Roman Creed. It has been questioned and disputed down the years by many theologians. The words of Jesus to the dying thief on the cross are explicit *“Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”* (Luke 23, verse 43). What is certain is that Jesus in dying cried *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”* Luke 23, verse 46.

A straight forward reading of 1 Peter 3, verses 18 to 20 (read) suggests that Our Lord Jesus Christ went and preached to the spirits of the departed from the time of Noah who were *“in prison”*. 1 Peter 4, verse 6 *“He (that is Christ) was preached to the dead . . .”*. One thing is for sure, if we belong to Christ there is nowhere that we can go from his presence (Psalm 139, verses 7 - 12). His promise is that *“they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.”* (John 10, verse 28).

Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria 328 -373 A.D. (He of the Athanasian Creed in the Book of Common Prayer 1662) is on record as saying *“Christ’s body was laid in the sepulchre when He went to preach to the spirits who were in bondage as Peter said”* (Epistula ad Epictetum c. 370 A.D.).

Our brethren in the Orthodox Church say that *“Hell is a battlefield where Christ fought and won the battle against death”*. (Hosea 13, verse 14; Zechariah 9, verse 11; Colossians 2, verse 15 and 1 Corinthians 15, verses 20 - 26)

b) the third day He rose again from the dead: As we noted last week, the preaching recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and the Early Church always linked the Crucifixion and the Resurrection: see Acts 2, verses 22 – 36 (preaching of Peter): Acts 7, verses 51 – 56 (the testimony of Stephen) and Acts 13, verses 26 – 41 (preaching of Paul).

The Apostle John writes as an eye-witness to the events of that first Easter Morning. Read John 20, verses 1 – 10. A vivid description of Peter and John running to the tomb after receiving Mary’s news. John, being younger (and fitter?) gets there first. He stoops to look in and catches a glimpse of the grave clothes lying there. Peter, following him and being the impetuous Peter, charges straight in! He regarded the grave clothes and wondered what it meant. John, following Peter into the tomb, saw the grave clothes and believed! He saw the reality of what had happened. In this passage the word “saw” translates three different Greek words.

Verse 5 - *“he saw the strips of linen lying there”* is *“blepei”* - literally “to have sight of”.

Verse 6 - *“he saw the strips of linen lying there”* uses *“theorei”* - meaning “to perceive / discern”.

Peter was working it out like a theorem!

Verse 8 – *“Then the other disciple (John) who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.”* Here the word “saw” is translated from the Greek root *“horao”* meaning “to see with the mind”.

This eyewitness account should encourage us to read more of John’s account of that first Easter Day. Our Lord Jesus appearing to Mary in the garden. The appearance of Jesus through the locked and barred doors of the upper room, and His words of peace and commissioning.

The Resurrection is a central belief of the Christian Church; attested in all four Gospels and in the book of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles.

“Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him”
(Romans 6, verse 9)

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed, Alleluia!