

Easter Service 2008
Grace Lutheran Church, Denison, Texas
Rev. Michael J. Mattil

Comments at start of service: When's Easter?

"I sure don't remember Easter being this early!" A lot of people said that this year, and they are right, unless they are over 95 years old!

You may or may not know that the date of Easter is based on the lunar calendar that Hebrew people used to identify Passover, which is why it moves around on our calendar. Easter is always the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox (which is March 20). Based on that, the earliest Easter can be is March 22 (one day earlier than it is this year) but that is pretty rare.

- 1) The last time it was on March 23 was 1913. The next time Easter will be on March 23 will be in 220 years, March 23, 2228
- 2) The last time Easter was on March 22 was 1818. The next time it will be on March 22 will be in the year 2285. So, no one alive today has or will see Easter any earlier than it is this year!

That's just a bit of Trivia on the dating of Easter. However, for Christians, every day can and should be a celebration of Easter. After all, what are we celebrating on Easter? Jesus is alive. HE IS RISEN! This is our faith, this is our confidence, this is what gives meaning and certainty to our lives.

Luther's Small Catechism tells us that the Resurrection of Jesus proves some things for us:

- Jesus is the Son of God (Romans 1:4);
- His teachings are true (John 8:28);
- God the Father accepted His sacrifice as full payment for the sins of the world (Rom. 4:25)
- Everyone who believes in Jesus will rise to eternal life with Him (John 14:19).

Now that's something worth celebrating. That is what we celebrate today and every day!

What a Ride!

I heard about a 4-year-old at a wedding ceremony. He was fussin' and fidgetin' and just about to explode. A family member thought perhaps she could calm him down if she gave him something to play with. She reached in her purse and handed him the first thing she could find – **her rosary**. It was the kind that had a crucifix attached to it. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but almost as quickly as he had it in his hands, he stood up on the front pew and swung it over his head like a lasso and shouted, **“Hang on Jesus! You’re going for a ride.”**

Hang on – you’re going for a ride. You’ve probably heard those words before. They are spoken in situations where the circumstances can be thrilling: on a roller coaster, on the back of a horse or a motorcycle, maybe in a Jeep going up a mountain trail.

“Hang on. You’re going for a ride.” Have you ever heard them applied to Jesus? Maybe that little four-year-old was on to something. “Hang on Jesus! You’re going for a ride.”

We talked at the beginning of the service about how early our celebration of Easter is this year. It is so early that it was less than three months ago that we were celebrating the birth of our Savior. And if you think about everything that took place from His incarnation through His death and resurrection, Jesus did go for quite a ride:

- From the glory of heaven into the womb of a virgin named Mary.
- Down the dirt road from Nazareth to Bethlehem *in utero*
- Down the birth canal and into a stable, into the arms of Mary and Joseph, to be laid in a cattle trough.
- Then down the road to Egypt to escape being murdered by a jealous King Herod.

Hang on Jesus, you’re going for a ride.

- Back to Bethlehem and then Nazareth to be raised
- All around the Sea of Galilee, healing and teaching and loving and serving.
- Up a Mount of Transfiguration where His glory would be seen by Peter, James and John
- Into Jerusalem on a donkey, to the hosannas of the crowd;
- To the Upper Room, celebrating Passover with his disciples, one of whom would betray Him;
- Instituting a meal of remembrance and promise;

- In prayer in a Garden, sweat like drops of blood, and then a kiss of betrayal.

Hang on Jesus, you're going for a ride.

- Led to the Jewish courts, where Peter would deny even knowing him
- Led before Pilate to be mocked and whipped and ridiculed
- Led before Herod for more of the same
- Taken before Pilate again and hearing the shouts "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" and then beaten some more
- His disciples all abandoned him. The Savior whose birth had been announced by angels now stands all alone.

Hang on Jesus, you're going for a ride.

- To Calvary, carrying His cross yet bearing my sin, and yours and the sins of all people.
- On a cross, outside Jerusalem, raised up for all to see.
- My God, My God, why have you forsaken me!

Hang on Jesus! Don't come down from the cross. Hang on, pay my debt. Hang on for me!

- And then it was finished.
- Lifeless, taken down from the cross
- Carried by his friends and placed in a tomb that was sealed up for good.

But wait...the ride wasn't over.

- On that third day, what a ride! Bursting out of the tomb, alive, shining with His glory as God.
- Showing Himself to His disciples
- Down the road to Emmaus creating burning hearts,
- Through closed doors, to frightened and doubting disciples. He says, "Peace be to you!"
- After forty days of showing Himself, He goes up the Mount of Ascension, through the clouds to the right hand of the Father:

What a Ride! What a ride! And the disciples were told, "Don't stand there looking up into the sky. He'll be back. He's coming again." What a ride.

Sometimes our "ride" through life seems pretty intense. Think about that as you watch this **Video clip**. Watch especially the expressions of the little girl on the roller coaster.

Our ride through this life can be pretty intense. Sometimes it is exhilarating, the next moment terrifying and devastating. Often times the things that get us into the most trouble and that hurt us the most are things that we have done to ourselves by our own choosing. We make bad decisions, going where we should not go and doing what we should not do. Your ride through this life can be very rough. At times, you may feel as though you cannot hold on, like falling off a motorcycle or a horse or out of an inner tube. Critics will pound on you. Enemies seem to surround and overwhelm you. Life can be brutal. That is when you need to **hang on**. Hang on to Jesus. Hang on to God's promises. Hang on to the one who hung onto that cross for you. Jesus has done everything you need to be forgiven and have the confidence of God being on your side, loving you, saving you, and wanting the best for you now and for all eternity.

Hang on to Jesus. As you hold onto Him, remember that He holds on to you. It is not your own determination that will keep you safe. It is Jesus hanging on to you. He said that to His disciples in John 10:

John 10:27-30 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

Jesus will hang on to you. He went on quite a ride to earn your forgiveness. **All the way from** "For Unto You is born this day a Savior" all the way to "He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!" and beyond that to "He is coming again!" This one is the one who wants to go with you on your ride through this life.

"Hang on – You're going for a ride." Jesus wants you to know that He went through that ride for you. And He will hang on to you and be with you every step of the way in your ride through this life. And what a ride it will be!