

The Cosmic Significance of Easter

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Translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman

The Greek word *kosmos* refers to both “world” and “creation.” To speak, then, of the *cosmic significance* of something is to say that it has significance for the world and consequences for the creation, the universe.

That is especially true of Easter.

Let us pause first to take note of the Jewish Passover. That was a sacrament for remembering redemption from Egypt, the beginning of the “great pilgrimage.” *Passover* signified a passing over, the passing over by the angel of death. The blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts scared off the angel of death.

The angel of death moving from house to house was the *final* plague. But there had been other plagues. The *cosmos*, the creation, had been involved in all those plagues: the Nile River, frogs, flies, hail, lightning, darkness. We could say that the *cosmos* displayed its dark side for the sake of Israel’s liberation. The *prelude* to Passover consisted of the engagement of the *cosmos*, which cooperated in compelling Pharaoh to surrender his hold on Israel. At subsequent Jewish celebrations of Passover, Israelite children inquired about these things.

After the exodus we see once again the involvement of the creation, the *cosmos*, with Israel, when the waters of the Red Sea and of the Jordan River retreated. Note as well the twelve palm trees at Elim. And the water flowing from the rock, and the quail. It was hardly a non-physical, non-material people – a collection of bare souls – that came out of Egypt, but a people living and formed by creation. At the first Passover the entire creation had cooperated *against* the enemies of the church and *on behalf of* the people of Israel.

After all, the cosmos, the creation had earlier been subjected to vanity on account of sin. The cosmos had been created for man, but *had also fallen along with man*. Creation looks ahead with yearning desire for the redemption of the church.

Therefore, it is nothing less than *prophecy* when the frogs and the flies, the Nile and the thunderstorms, cooperate in bringing the ten plagues upon Egypt. The creation is God's partner unto redemption. Therefore, it is nothing less than *prophecy* also when water comes forth from the rock and when the waters retreat before Israel. The creation is going to share in the redemption glory of the church (Rom. 8).

We could go further

We all know that the creation is involved in the history of the covenant people.

Because of unfaithfulness to the covenant, the plagues came upon *Israel* even as upon Egypt, because adulterous Israel had in fact become Egypt. The creation cooperated to put Israel to death. The cosmos turned *against* the apostate covenant people who were opposing redemption.

On the other hand, faithfulness was accompanied by the blossoming of life and with fertile fields. Covenant obedience had cosmic significance. This comes to expression in those psalms that sing of salvation from the power of death.

We see these two lines throughout all of prophecy. Consider how Jeremiah and Joel complain about the threat of famine. Covenant apostasy had cosmic significance: the grasshoppers held their court session.

Read in the prophets as well, however, how a Messianic future was beginning to glimmer faintly, and how that was expressed in cosmic terms. The Messiah would bestow fertility upon people and animals. Jerusalem would be rebuilt. The cosmos was at the same time related to technology, for the city dweller would flourish.

Often this is cast aside as Old Testamentish. After all, the New Testament is spiritual, isn't it? At this point we encounter the influence of Platonism with a vengeance; at this point the nature/grace dualism is coming to the surface.

Let us look once at the New Testament.

The first miracle of Jesus had a cosmic or creational dimension: water was changed into wine.

This event was parallel to the changing of water into blood in the first plague. Notice that John 2 (this miracle) occurs during the Passover season. At Passover, the Song of Solomon was read publicly. And it was precisely during such a Passover season that the Lamb of God attended a wedding. (Centuries later, the Roman Catholic Church would not permit weddings during the week before Easter.) Jesus connects this Passover and wedding with an initial sign that is placed over against the first exodus plague. The cosmos is involved in redemption. H₂O stands in service to the Messianic exodus.

So it is with all the miracles of Christ. They are "medical," they do their work on tangible, weakened, fragile bodies. With His miracles, Jesus anticipates the Easter glory of the resurrection. The lame begin to walk, and the dead come alive. Isaiah 26:19 sings:

Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.

You who dwell in the dust,

Awake and sing for joy!

For your dew is a dew of light,

and the earth will give birth to the dead.

All of this is now presented in Jesus' ministry in visual form. The plain of Sharon shall blossom like a rose. The lame springs like a deer.

And then came the cross.

The cosmic significance of the cross could not have come to expression any more strongly than when the land of Palestine was cast into darkness. This occurrence is associated with the ninth plague upon Egypt, now when God's only-begotten Son and Mary's firstborn Child is dying.

The creation is involved here in this event. Condemnation hangs threateningly over Jerusalem, who kills the prophets. The thunderstorm was unleashed in the year A.D. 70.

But as Passover Lamb, Christ is also the Firstborn among many brothers.

He rises in the Spring.

He rises as the full moon of Passover is setting once more.

He rises as the sparkling Morning Star before the break of day.

He rises in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea.

He rises and Mary Magdalene supposes He is the gardener.

He rises and Revelation 5 shows how every creature brings honor to the Lamb that had evidently been slain.

He rises to bring forth the fruition of Golgotha, the reconciliation of all things in heaven and on earth. The fact that after His resurrection the sunlight appears once more is not accidental. It had been night, the night of Golgotha and of the burial; but now it is morning, just like a day of creation. Yes, Easter is a day of re-creation, and the cosmic significance is visible everywhere. Jesus Christ possesses a new body, He is our flesh and blood. He will take that new body along into heaven.

The entire New Testament was written from this Easter consciousness. The last Adam brings about Paradise restoration. We are candidates for royalty – it is the Father’s good pleasure to grant us royal kingship. Bread and wine – elements of the *cosmos* – seal unto us the far-reaching significance of a salvation shared by the entire cosmos. These signs are no mere symbols, but they are guarantees, down-payments, certificates of authenticity of the glory that has broken through.

We live in an age that displays the theatre of a cosmos apparently divided against itself. But with all of this, do not forget one thing. We are privileged to see beyond these phenomena. *The cosmos stands on the side of Jesus Christ and His church.*

When the smoke of warfare will have lifted, before us will lay not a scorched earth, but *Paradise regained.*

All of this benefits and comforts us. Let us not take flight out of the world. Let us not withdraw from this our time and our history. Rather, let us proclaim in this time and history that Christ is VICTOR, Conqueror over Satan and death, over all the powers threateningly arrayed before us.

It is remarkable that whereas Christmas has gained prominence in the Western world, in the Eastern world (Greece, the Near East) and in Africa among the black population, the season of Easter is very popular. What explains this?

In the first place, of course, there is tradition. In the ancient church, Easter was the only festival – the church year, the *annus liturgicus*, was a later invention.

In the second place, however, especially in the East and in Africa, the contrast between life and death plays such a central and fundamental role. Don’t forget that in the days of Paul the average lifespan was thirty years, and for a slave only seventeen years.

Quite appropriately, the ancient church hymn says that we are surrounded by death in the midst of life.

How can I obtain life in the age to come? That was the great question.

And now, amid this present transitory life, in a cosmos that seems to be heading down to defeat, the *eu-angelion* (good news) appears: Jesus is risen! Why do you seek the Living among the dead? Now the philosopher can put his hand over his mouth, the African witch doctor can put aside his magical incantations. The key of life has been found. This Easter-exodus is an exodus out of the world-that-lies-in-the-midst-of-death. And this Passover-Easter, *transitus*, is also a transition to an indestructible peace, a Paradise peace restoring cosmic life.

What no ear has heard in the myths of mankind, what no eye has seen in any of humanity's witchcraft or techniques, what has risen in the heart of no philosopher – this very thing God has prepared for those who love Him. Bread and wine and H₂O are Easter signs of the cosmic significance of Christ's cross and resurrection. He has cast horse and rider into the sea. He has cast Satan down from heaven. *Hades*, the realm of the dead, was Christ's burial place, but He has torn away the bars securing the gates of the realm of the dead. Both our bodies and our surroundings share in His glory, which appeared already on Christmas night in the fields of Bethlehem. Jesus saves not only a soul, but also a body, a cosmos, a universe.

Denying Jesus Christ indeed signifies cosmic bondage. That is hell.

Faith in Jesus Christ signifies redemption within the context of the cosmos. On Passover the Jews read Genesis 1 aloud. This Jesus Christ is the last Adam. His work signifies re-creation. Through Him everything was created originally. Through the Lamb everything is recreated redemptively.

“And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever’” (Rev. 5:13).

Amen.

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