



# THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

March 2021

## Christ's Suffering Atoned for Sin

Why does Christ suffer? He is a fine, good, fruitful Tree and has not deserved so stern a sentence; but He suffers it for our sake. He is now undertaking this journey in order to carry out His office as Priest; and He intends not only to pray for sinners but also to sacrifice His body and life on the altar of the cross so that God will be appeased through this sacrifice and poor sinners will be freed from the wrath of God and be heirs of eternal life. This is why it hurts the Lord to see that we weep at the sight of His suffering. He wants us to be glad, praise God, thank His grace, extol, glorify, and confess Him; for through this journey we come into the possession of the grace of God. By it we have been freed from sins and death and have become God's dear children.

*Martin Luther*

## Nothing Trivial about Easter

Easter has a number. Actually, it has several numbers. Easter is the third day. Jesus promised that He would rise from the grave on the third day. *"<sup>31</sup> Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them: "Look! We are going up to Jerusalem, and all the things that have been written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. <sup>32</sup> For He will be handed over to the Gentiles and will be mocked, insulted and spat on. <sup>33</sup> They will scourge Him and kill Him, and on the third day He will rise again"* (Luke 18:31-33).

Of course, Easter is the first day of the week. *"On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, some women went to the tomb, carrying the spices that they had prepared"* (Luke 24:1).

Easter is also called the eighth day, although I cannot quote a Scripture about that. That identification is with the theologians who speak about the eighth day as the day of eternity because the seven days are of the creation - six days being used to create and the seventh day being the day of rest. Naturally, or so they say, the eighth day is the day of eternity.

Easter never ends. Really? Then why is Easter just one day a year? This year it is April 4. I remind you that we worship on Sundays because Jesus rose from the tomb on Sunday, and so every Sunday service is an Easter service! It doesn't really matter that we worship on Sunday, though, because we worship because Jesus rose from the dead.

You may wonder about that. Many churches worship because they think God wants them to, and this is part of their part in the bargain of salvation. Lutherans understand that salvation is not a bargain – not an agreement between God and man for God to do His part if we do our part, nor a bargain in that it is inexpensive. After all, our salvation cost the life and death of the very Son of God, and that is no bargain, but a ransom beyond imagining.

As for being God's part of some agreement once we do our part, that is so wrong. Salvation is a gift (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Far from being a contract or agreement with God, an idea shared by far too many who call themselves Christian, salvation is an undeserved kindness from God, poured out upon all so that all who take God at His Word and trust Him to be who He said He is and do what He has promised to do will be saved. The works that people think are their part of the trade are a response to the gift, not a thing done to earn, merit, or achieve salvation. Even at that, the Apostle Paul reminds us that our good works are God's works, prepared by Him and laid out in our path that we should walk in them. He plans them! He makes them possible! He sets them before us and then enables us to accomplish them. It is like we are doing something, but it is God at work in and through us making us do those things to His glory and then God rewards us for them as though we had done something by our "free" will.

Back to what I was saying, we worship because Jesus rose from the dead. Other holidays are important too, but they are important because of Easter. Christmas, for example, is the celebration of the Incarnation of our Lord. God became one of us. He took on human flesh and blood and human nature and was born like any one of us, so that He might carry the burden of the Law, and having done it without sin, to die for us and rise again.

God being human is nothing to marvel at without the resurrection, really. Other religions have their gods taking on human form, but without the cosmic effect of the redemption of all men. If God merely became human, but it had no salvation in it for us, it would be unique and wonderful, but not Gospel because there would be nothing in it for me or for you.

If Jesus died on the cross (which He did) but did not rise from the dead, then we would have no knowledge or comfort in His death on our behalf because all it seemed to accomplish was His death. Paul wrote, *"He*

*was handed over because of our offences and was raised for the sake of our justification” (Romans 4:25).*

His death was for our sins, but His resurrection was on account of our justification. His resurrection declares in the most undeniable way that His plan worked! He has paid the debt! He has effectively bore the burden, satisfied the justice of God and now has life eternal to give because He earned life by His righteous life and swallowed up death for us by dying in our place and paying the entire burden of sin for us.

We don't worship just because God became man in Jesus Christ. We don't worship just because He died. We worship because He rose from the dead, just as He promised He would, and shared that victory with us - Because I live, He said, You shall also live!

Have a Happy Easter celebration on April 4, and every Sunday after that, and every day between the Sundays too.

### **Ghost Stories**

*“Pastor, are there such things as ghosts?”*

This is a question I get asked occasionally by some of our younger members in church. Hollywood seems to be obsessed with ghosts. In fact, the materialistic worldview of Hollywood, if it were consistent, would teach that death is the end, and we cease to exist when we stop breathing. But becoming a ghost when we die seems to be the preferred narrative.

Many people have their own ghost stories. Ghosts, though, are certainly not a modern phenomenon. Hamlet was haunted by the ghost of his father. Martin Luther talked about ghosts, and the topic of ghosts even comes up in both the Old and New Testaments.

A ghost is the disembodied soul of a person, normally hanging around to cause some sort of trouble. We do believe that when we die our bodies are unnaturally separated from our souls, but our souls do not linger. The souls of the Christians go to heaven, as Paul teaches, *“We are confident and even prefer to move out of the body and to be at home with the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 5:8). The souls of the unbeliever go to hell (Luke 16:23). The idea of the soul of a departed hanging around is distinctly unbiblical.

There are a few places in the Bible where people think they see a ghost, and the results are never good.

For example, in Job chapter four Eliphaz, one of Job's "friends", opens his mouth to report his vision of a ghost. Job had lost just about everything, his family, his livelihood, his health, and his friends had sat with him in a pile of ashes for a week. The silence is broken by Eliphaz.

This is a strange text.

*“A word is brought to me secretly. My ear has received a whisper about it. <sup>13</sup> Among troubled thoughts from visions during the night, when deep sleep falls on men, <sup>14</sup> fear and trembling have come over me and have made all my bones shake. <sup>15</sup> A spirit used to pass over my face. It used to make the hair on my body stand on end. <sup>16</sup> It used to stand still, but I could not discern what it looked like. A form was before my eyes. There was a whisper, and I used to hear a voice: <sup>17</sup> ‘Can any human being be righteous before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?’” (Job 4:12–17).*

Eliphaz gets his theology from this spirit, and the theology is bad. He is rebuking Job for claiming righteous before the Lord. Now, it is true that no one is righteous by their works, but Job never claimed (at least until the end) this kind of righteousness. Job claimed the righteousness of faith, the righteousness revealed in the sacrifice. This spirit is opposing the Gospel and the comfort that Job had in the Lord's Word. This spirit's teaching to Eliphaz is a doctrine of despair.

1 Samuel 28 is another strange text. The prophet Samuel has died (1 Samuel 25:1). David has been anointed king, but has not taken the throne. Saul is still the acting king of Israel, and his attention is split between assaulting David and fighting the Philistines.

The Philistines have mustered an army, and Saul has called all Israel together to fight. Normally Saul would ask Saul if the Lord would have mercy on them and give them the victory, but Samuel is gone. Saul prays, but there is no answer. He consulted the other prophets, paid attention to his dreams, but there was no answer, and Saul was terrified (1 Samuel 25:5-6).

Saul, then, puts on a disguise and goes to Endor where there was a witch who had not been exiled. Saul asks her to call up Samuel from the dead. Here's the conversation:

*Then Samuel asked Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?”*

*Saul answered: “I am in great distress. The Philistines are making war against me. God has also turned away from me and has not been answering me any longer, either through prophets or by dreams. So, I have called on you to inform me what I shall do.”*

<sup>16</sup> *Samuel said: “Why, then, do you ask me, since the LORD has turned from you and has become your Enemy?*

<sup>17</sup> *The LORD has done to you what He told you through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to your neighbour, David. <sup>18</sup> Because you did not listen to what the LORD had said and did not carry out His fierce wrath against Amalek, the LORD has done*

*this to you this day.* <sup>19</sup> *The LORD will also give both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also deliver the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines.*” (1 Samuel 28:15–19).

This, again, is a teaching of despair, despair of God’s mercy, a sermon with no hope. Saul listened to the preaching of the ghost and ended up falling on his own sword in despair (1 Samuel 31:1-7).

What is going on here? Did the ghost of Samuel really come back from the grave to preach despair to Saul? Or is this ghost of Saul something else, a spirit taking the form of Samuel to deliver false doctrine? This, in fact, is what appears to be a demon disguised as Samuel to bring destruction.

There are two passages in the New Testament where ghosts are mentioned. The first is when Jesus is walking across the water as the disciples were fighting the wind to cross the sea.

*When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified. They said, “It is a ghost!” and cried out in fear.* <sup>27</sup> *Immediately Jesus spoke to them. “Take courage! It is I. Stop being afraid!”* (Matthew 14:26–27).

They thought it was a ghost but were wrong. The same thing happens after the resurrection.

<sup>36</sup> *While they were talking about what had happened, Jesus stood among them. He said to them, “Peace to you!”*

<sup>37</sup> *They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost.* <sup>38</sup> *He asked them, “Why are you troubled? Why do doubts come into your minds?”* <sup>39</sup> *Look at My hands and My feet! It is I Myself. Feel Me and see! A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see Me have.”*

<sup>40</sup> *After He said this, He showed them His hands and His feet* (Luke 24:36–40).

Again the disciples thought Jesus was a ghost, and again they were wrong. Jesus has His body; He is raised.

Another dealing with ghosts is the art of necromancy. Necromancy is the act of trying to communicate with the dead, and it is strictly forbidden in the Scriptures. It is included in the prohibition of witchcraft and satanic arts in the Second Commandment.

*“Do not turn to mediums or to soothsayers! Do not search for them to become unclean through them! I am the LORD, your God”* (Leviticus 19:31, see also Leviticus 20:6, 27, Deuteronomy 18:11, 2 Kings 23:24, 2 Chronicles 33:6, Isaiah 8:19, 19:3).

The Bible puts the voice of the dead, the teaching of Ghosts, in opposition to the voice to the Lord. One delivers death, the other delivers life. It is only in the

Lord’s teaching that we have life and hope and God’s good pleasure.

There is, then, a ghost theology, a teaching that comes when we believe that the souls of the dead linger around us and interact with us.

Luther called out the ghosts for what they were: demons disguised as the souls of the departed to deliver false teaching about life after death.

*“From this it has followed that evil spirits have perpetrated much knavery [exercised their malice] by appearing as the souls of the departed, and with unspeakable [horrible] lies and tricks demanded masses, vigils, pilgrimages, and other alms. All of which we had to receive as articles of faith, and to live accordingly; and the Pope confirmed these things, as also the Mass and all other abominations. Here, too, there is no [cannot and must not be any] yielding or surrendering”* (Smalcald Articles II.16-17)

Who the ghosts really are is proven by their teaching. The ghosts of the middle ages taught purgatory, proving that they were the demons.

Our ghosts today don’t teach purgatory, but works righteousness. Consider this: the ghosts are trapped here, and unable to go to the light and rest because there is some wrong that needs to be righted. There is a sin that needs atoning, a work that needs doing, reconciliation that needs to be accomplished, and when the work is done the ghost is free to go to its rest. The ghost is stuck because there is a work to do.

This theology completely contradicts with the Scripture, with the good news of the Gospel. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God”* (Ephesians 2:8), but not for the ghost. They are saved by their works, no Jesus necessary.

The “Ghost Worldview” also denies judgment, have an afterlife without Jesus, and denies the resurrection of all flesh.

These false teachings prove the source. There is a spirit interested in this perversion of the Gospel. Luther’s diagnosis is as correct today as it was then, the demons deceive many in the guise of the ghosts.

The Christian doesn’t need to hear the voice of the dead, but the living voice of the living God, the voice of mercy and truth in Christ, which is our confidence in life and in death.

**Devastating: QLD Abortion Rate Increases by  
58% since 2018 Law Change**  
(Reported by Cherish Life, Qld)

**The Queensland Health Minister Yvette D'Ath misled Parliament in Question Time on Tuesday [10/3] by claiming that the number of abortions had not risen since the passing of the Termination of Pregnancy Act in 2018.**

Using just figures for surgical abortions, Ms D'Ath told Parliament: "That shows that the passing of this legislation has not led to an increase in the number of terminations." (page 420 of Hansard on 10 March)

But the fact is the total number of abortions in Queensland including "medical" abortions caused by prescribed drugs has increased by 58% between 2018 and 2019.

In addition, almost 60% of all medical abortions in Australia in 2019 (the first year after the law change) were performed in Queensland, which has only 20% of Australia's population.

The passing of Labor's extreme abortion-to-birth laws in fact has led to an abortion blow-out. This is deeply distressing and needs urgent attention.

2018 - abortions in Queensland

9,297 Surgical abortions proof - Question on Notice #685 from Dr Mark Robinson MP

7,446 Medical abortions proof - 2018 PBS data on the abortion drug (item number 10211K [MIFEPRISTONE (& MISOPROSTOL abortion drug]) obtained from Medicare, Queensland Health only records surgical abortions

2018 total: **16,743**

2019 - abortions in Queensland

9,496 Surgical abortions proof - revealed on 10/3 in Parliament by Health Minister Yvette D'Ath (page 420)

17,087 Medical abortions proof - 2019 PBS data on the abortion drug\* obtained from Medicare, Queensland Health only records surgical abortions

2019 total: **26,583**

Cherish Life has called upon the Opposition Leader, LNP MPs and KAP MPs to urgently hold the Labor Government to account on this most serious issue, as well as taking the Health Minister to task for misleading Parliament.

The figures are so bad. Those poor little babies, and their neglected mothers. Our hearts break. It's hard to find words to explain the sorrow.

In some ways the abortion blowout is not surprising, as the Queensland Labor Government at every turn has effectively incentivised abortion over alternatives such as adoption. It even voted down an amendment to offer counselling to women considering abortion, and there are no informed consent laws for abortion in Queensland.

It's also terrible that Queenslanders had to wait 15 months to get a full data-set for surgical abortion rates for 2019 from Queensland Health. No doubt the Government didn't want the alarming numbers coming out before the October 2020 election.

Disappointingly, The Courier-Mail published this inaccurate report yesterday (11/3), based on the Health Minister's misleading claim. We have asked for an urgent correction.

Despite the heart-break, attacks and set-backs, the fight for life must go on and increase in strength, as some of the worst opponents to life are in powerful places. Thank you for not giving up or tiring. If we don't keep fighting for the unborn, who will be their voice?

**From the Pastor**

The Easter Season quickly approaches!

It has been extremely busy throughout the Season of Lent. In a couple short weeks, we shall enter into those most solemn and glorious of days as we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Please make the time to gather in church over this period. Service times can be found in your weekly bulletins.

On Easter Monday this year we shall be gathering together for a Children's Easter Picnic at Aubigny. The day will begin at 10.00am. Please come along. We had to cancel our children's picnics last year across both parishes, so let's make up for it this year by having a lot of fun and fellowship!

I intend on taking a couple weeks holiday shortly after Easter. I haven't yet settled on the dates, but will let everyone now asap. Once I return, I shall begin to prepare for Bible Studies to be held across the parish.

Remember to let Pastor know if anyone requires a visit.

May you all have a holy and blessed Easter!

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Weekly sermons and bulletins are available at [www.aelc.org.au](http://www.aelc.org.au)