

Dazzling truth: The terrific story of Easter

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [March 22, 2005](#) issue

"Easter is a terrific story," says Tony Hendra, an actor, satirist and author of the wonderful book *Father Joe: The Man Who Saved My Life*. So it is, and so we rediscover each year as we turn to the familiar narratives. The Gospels' accounts are themselves modest, however. Curiously missing is any note of celebration. There is no shouting, singing, dancing, no trumpets or Hallelujah choruses. Instead, there is surprise, fear and doubt—emotions I can understand.

When you try to put the stories of the four Gospels together in one narrative, it doesn't work very well. There are discrepancies, conflicts, confusions. Was there an earthquake at the resurrection? Were there two white-clad figures or maybe just one announcing that the tomb was empty? Was Mary alone or with other women? Did Peter come alone to the empty tomb or did he run there with John? It's not clear.

I love the confusion, the running back and forth. I love the sense the Gospels give of human beings trying to appropriate something that doesn't fit with what they know about life and death. The best evidence of the authenticity of the biblical accounts is precisely the fact that they are different, contradictory. If the accounts were tidy and consistent you could imagine that someone made it all up. But there the disciples are, human beings like you and me on Easter morning, trying to comprehend something that assaulted their common sense just like it assaults our common sense.

That is the deeper issue on Easter—the matter of truth. Is truth defined and limited by human understanding, intellect, science and common sense? Or is there a truth bigger than human reason, a truth that transcends our ability to understand, a truth that flies in the face of the reality we experience and read about in the newspaper? Is there a reality more real than the harshness and finality of death?

The affirmation we gather in churches to make is yes, there is a reality that transcends our intellects. Yes, there is a God who can make a way where there is no

way. Yes, there is a reality stronger than death, and it is the love of God. We come to church to make this affirmation together because we need one another. This is truth bigger than we can handle alone. The resurrection is the kind of truth Emily Dickinson had in mind when she wrote: "Truth must dazzle gradually, or every man be blind."

In his Easter morning reflection, Hendra writes: "What if the story of the Resurrection was factually true, not just an extra crowd-pleasing narrative twist but a once-in-the-planet's-lifetime occurrence designed to demonstrate that there was hope after death. . . . Then the world and the universe would be totally different places."