

April 1: Easter Sunday – Recognising God’s Presence

By [Andy Hamilton SJ](#)



The events of Easter and Christmas are shrouded in mystery. It takes faith to see God as present in Jesus.

The stories of Easter are like the stories of Jesus’ birth. Both focus on a small place: a manger and a tomb. They are also full of extraordinary events: the guiding star, the stone mysteriously rolled away from the tomb, and Jesus’ habit of passing through locked doors. Both stories, too, are richly peopled by angels busily delivering messages to the chief players.

The heart of both stories, however, is wrapped in mystery. We are told that the Holy Spirit overshadows Mary in Jesus’ conception, but do not know how. We are told also that Jesus rises from the dead, but we are not told how. All we have is a birth in a field and an empty tomb together with mysterious appearances. In both stories, of course, there are angels, but their role is to shroud the events in mystery.

In fact, different observers will see in Christmas and Easter evidence for the absence of God as well as the presence of God. It takes faith to see God as present in Jesus. For Mary, whom the angel had promised the birth of the Messiah as the climax of God’s plan for us, the process leading to the birth was of one forced absence after another – absence from family and home when travelling heavily pregnant to Bethlehem, absence of the relative comfort of a roof over her head in an inn, of a birthing place not worthy of God in a feeding place trodden by animals, and absence of the company of angels among disreputable shepherds. It would take faith to see in all this God’s presence and not God’s absence.

Similarly, at Easter the disciples have to grapple with an absence: a tomb that is empty, and a Jesus who comes and goes, who is seen by some and not by others. It takes faith to see this as a sign of God’s presence rather than a sign that someone has taken away the body or that people were seeing things that were not real. Above all, too, the disciples had to grapple with the absence of hope that they had experienced in Jesus’ death. They had hoped that he would set Israel free, but had seen him taken, tortured, dead and buried. It was natural that they, like Thomas, should see only absence when told of visions of his presence.

Yet they found Christ present when he appeared to them, when they heard the stories, and when they saw the effect that Jesus’ rising had on those drawn into it. They recognised that God’s presence and love were found even in the hardest events and the places that seemed derelict – in fields and tombs, the places of no hope. Angels could appear in the most desperate of places. And so it is in our lives.

We all need to deal with the apparent absence of God in the events of our own lives or of those of others, near and far. We need the strength to keep hoping in the face of despair and cruelty. We need Easter.

Fr Andy Hamilton SJ is editorial consultant at Jesuit Communications