

Easter's Untold Stories

Marvelous Easter Event Brought Faith for Soldier

EDITOR'S NOTE: Drawn in part from books outside the Christian canon, this is the story of the Resurrection told from the viewpoint of the Roman sergeant assigned as guard of the tomb. It is the last in a series on minor actors in the great Easter drama.

By GEORGE CORNELL
Associated Press Religion Writer

It grew chilly as the night wore on. The Roman sergeant tossed more sticks on the campfire and stood warming his hands. Another soldier sat cross-legged, a sheepskin over his shoulders, munching a slab of cheese.

Their spears leaned against a square-shaped tent, pitched in a private grove outside Jerusalem. Where the crucified Nazarene had been entombed.

With the toe of his boot, the sergeant listlessly nudged some scattered coals back into the fire. He yawned, stretched his arms. In an isolated spot like this, guard duty was particularly monotonous.

Watch Malnained
The watch had been maintained since late on the sixth day of last week. With the provincial Sabbath over at sunset, it now was near midnight in the new week's first day.

To begin with, there had been quite a stir about the assignment. The sergeant had been on post at the procurator's quarters when the Sadducean priests came to Pilate about it.

"Sir," they fretted, "we remember how that impostor said while He was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore order the sepulchre made secure until the third day."

Guard Posted

As the worried politicians put it, the Nazarene's followers might come and steal His body and then spread reports He had risen from the dead. "The last fraud will be worse than the first," the priests insisted.

"Go make it as secure as you can," Pilate consented peevishly.

For the first night, and through most of the Sabbath, he supplied nearly a whole platoon—30 men under a centurion. About 1,000 people—mostly idlers—had wandered out yesterday to stare and make jests. But by late afternoon the place was deserted, and with public curiosity waning, the guard had been reduced to a regular two-man detail.

Weird Business

The sergeant pulled his hooded pashm closer about his neck, and slumped against a tree. What a weird business this was—guarding a corpse!

He glanced at the face of the tomb. It was dug into a 14-foot bluff, gray and cold-looking in the gloom. A huge, circular stone, about five feet in diameter, completely covered the opening.

With a great hoisting and heaving, it had been rolled into a groove cut at the base of the opening, and sealed there with seven pegs.

Before the sealing, the sergeant had watched the two rich Jewish notables, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, wrapping the body in linens rubbed with gummy, brown myrrh and aloe preservatives.

To the sergeant, the extraordinary activity about the case—all this ado over a dead man—seemed ridiculous. And that babble about rising to life again! Great Caesar's ghost! He picked up a stone and flung it at the face of the tomb. It banged against the rock wall, and clattered down into the blackness of the ground.

Sudden Quiet

Then, all at once, everything became quiet. Silence reigned, totally.

He felt an obscure uneasiness. He thought of moving about, scuffling his feet, to break the spell, but stood as if rooted. All life, himself too, seemed momentarily suspended, halted, pausing on the verge of . . . he knew not what.

The stars still shone brightly, though, in fact they seemed brighter than before. They were brighter. They were a great deal brighter. What was happening? What was wrong with his eyes? That light . . . that light in the sky!

It appeared as if a fissure was forming on the roof of the world, with a white brilliance pouring through, a celestial door opening. Its blinding purity flashed downward, shimmering, cascading in a flood.

The sergeant flung his arm over his eyes, a strangled cry in his throat.

A shattering blast rent his eardrums, although he was not sure it was a sound at all, but as if lightning had burst in his own head. A violent shaking seized the earth, and he felt himself falling.

Thunderous Roar

There was another thunderous roar, a laughing roar, like a whole army shouting a triumph.

He had no sensation at all of hitting the ground, but he realized he was there, flat on his belly, his face twisted to one side in the dirt, his eyes registering the gaping mouth of the tomb.

The place shone like dazzling snow. The outlines of two figures took shape, like men but not like men, radiant, glowing heights of perfect light, and another appeared between them, taller, more resplendent still.

Then he could see no more. He didn't know how long he lay there. An instant, an hour . . . or had he lain there at all? All he knew was that he suddenly found himself standing again, his arms still folded at his chest, staring blankly



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into the flickering flames of the campfire.

Everything was just as it had been before. Except . . . he shook his head dazedly. Over there in a garden path stood some women,

and a man, or someone, talking to them, and the sergeant heard what sounded like, "Be not afraid."

He rubbed his chin shakily. Those people—just some more inquisitive townsfolk. He must have dozed, had a wild dream, and they came up while he was having the feverish illusions. His whole body was in a cold sweat.

Distrusting his senses, he turned slowly and looked at his companion. The soldier still sat there wrapped in his sheepskin. "Did you . . ." The soldier sat immobile as a dead man—his face waxen white.

Raced to Jerusalem

Fearfully then, the sergeant raised his head and looked at the tomb. With a cry, he bolted.

And so it happened that in the gray dawn of that long-ago morning, there were two soldiers racing, indeed, they seemed flying, out of the grove of Joseph of Arimathea and along the road to Jerusalem.

When they had calmed sufficiently to be coherent, they told their story to their superiors, in-

cluding Pilate, and also the ruling Sadducees, who paid them a large sum to conceal it, and to claim they had conceded, that the Nazarene's apostles must have stolen his body.

To fall asleep on guard duty was a capital offense—but Pilate and the Sadducees had to ignore this technically to protect the tranquility of the state—namely their own authority. The soldiers, if they valued their necks, dared not talk in public.

But there was this conversation related in the ancient but non-doctrinal gospel of Nicodemus between the priests and the sergeant.

"We Were Afraid"

"We were very much afraid, and lay like dead men," he said haltingly. "Afterward we heard the voice of the angel saying to the women at the tomb, 'Be not afraid.'"

"The priests demanded: 'To what women did he speak?'"

The sergeant: "We do not know who they were."

The priest: "At what time was this?"

The sergeant: "At midnight." The priests: "And wherefore did you not lay hold of them?"

The sergeant: "We were like dead men from fear, not expecting to see the light of day again, and how could we lay hold on them?"

The priest: "As the Lord liveth, we do not believe you."

The sergeant: "Assuredly you have done well to swear that the Lord liveth, for indeed He does." The sergeant paused, his expression stubborn. He added quietly: "And Jesus is risen."

STAR GAZER

By CLAY B. FOLLAN

Your Daily Activity Guide According to the Stars

To develop message for Friday, read words corresponding to numbers of your Zodiac birth sign.

1 You're	31 Will	61 Merry
2 You'll	32 Ever	62 Careful
3 You	33 Short	63 To
4 There's	34 Of	64 Social
5 Good	35 To	65 People
6 Be	36 Not	66 Groups
7 May	37 Worth	67 Is
8 The	38 By	68 In
9 Promise	39 Of	69 Within
10 Rainbow's	40 Contacts	70 Your
11 You	41 Top	71 Results
12 Feel	42 Diplomatic	72 Associations
13 Beneficial	43 Today	73 Buying
14 Of	44 You	74 Clubs
15 Keep	45 Imagination	75 Interests
16 A	46 Spending	76 Problems
17 Regular	47 Don't	77 Now
18 Your	48 In	78 Bounds
19 Weighed	49 Let	79 And
20 Powers	50 Good	80 A
21 Day	51 Success	81 Be
22 Happy	52 With	82 Head
23 Be	53 Be	83 Circle
24 Postpone	54 Social	84 Considering
25 Judgment	55 Personal	85 Or
26 In	56 You	86 Financially
27 A	57 Romantic	87 Myth
28 Extra	58 Gold	88 Today
29 Your	59 Progress	89 Finances
30 Down	60 May	90 Selling

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Eugene Building Permits Increase

EUGENE (AP) — Building permits issued for new structures in Lane County had a value of \$1,153,000 last month, a rise of more than \$200,000 from March of 1957. Building permits in Eugene alone totaled \$465,000 in value.

Economist Expects More Oregon Wheat

CORVALLIS (AP) — Eight per cent more Oregon farm land will be planted in wheat this year despite a predicted 18 per cent drop from last year in spring wheat planting. Mrs. Elvera Horell, extension agriculture economist at Oregon State College, made this forecast Wednesday based on results of

Oregon Farm Crops Off to Good Start

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
Oregon farm crops are off to a good start despite scattered rain and snow that last week hindered planting and field work in some areas, the Oregon Crop and Livestock Reporting Service said Wednesday.

Warm days in the Willamette Valley aided the development of strawberries and caneberries and grain crops in general were reported in good shape.

Columbia Basin counties generally had satisfactory weather, although electrical storms brought hail and heavy rains to parts of Sherman County, the reporting service said.

Rains delayed onion planting in Malheur County, but onion growers in the Lake Labish area of Marion County expect to start planting within a week or ten days, the service's weekly report said.

Land preparation and spring seeding were slow in Benton, Linn, Marion and Yamhill counties, but moved along fairly well in Washington County, the report added.

questionnaires sent to farmers by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

A rise in winter wheat plantings last fall accounts for the over-all increase in wheat acreage this year, she said.

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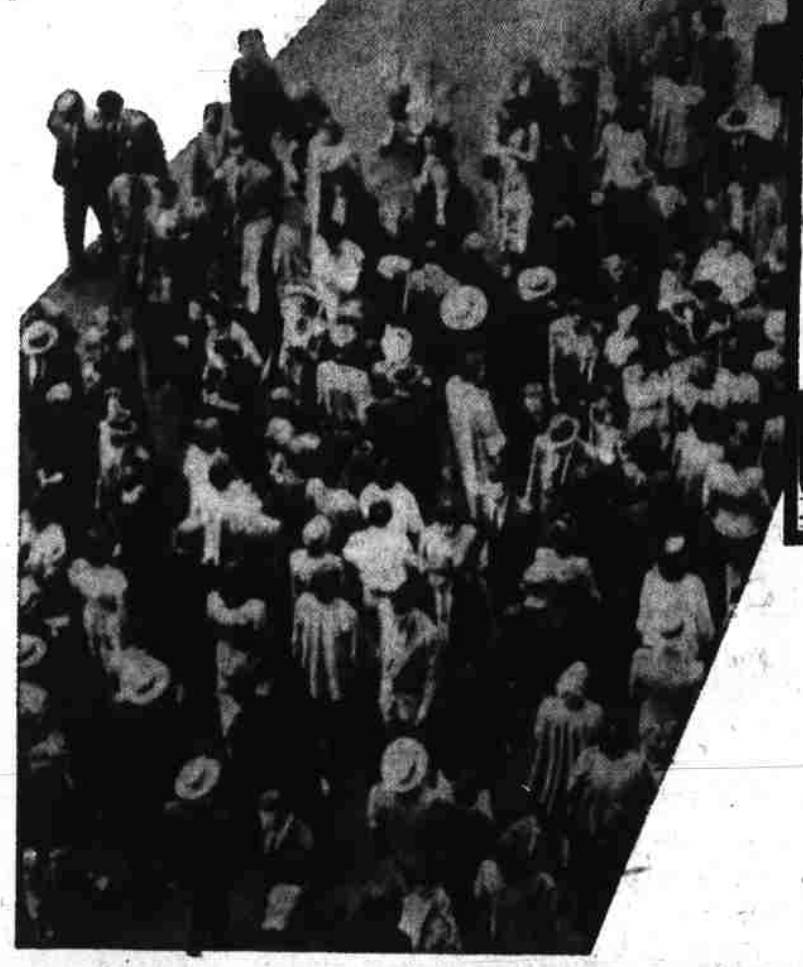


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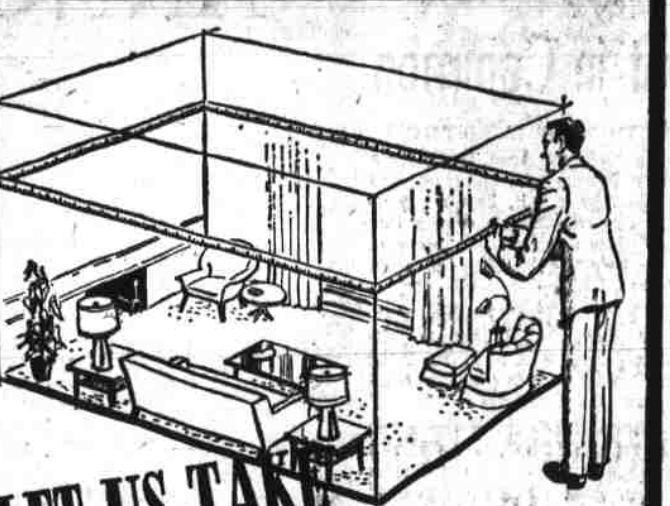
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