

## ‘Empty tomb’ narratives

See bottom of table for a summary of elements distinctive to each of the NT accounts. *Mark* is in the first column as the earliest of the gospels, probably written shortly after 70 CE; the synoptics, *Matthew* and *Luke*, are grouped with *Mark*. The translated text of the NT gospels is taken from the NRSV; *Peter* is taken from Ehrman’s translation (*Lost scriptures*, 2003), which is based on M. G. Mara’s edition (1973).

<i>Mark</i> <a href="#">15.42–16.8</a>	<i>Matthew</i> <a href="#">27.55–28.15</a>	<i>Luke</i> <a href="#">23.49–24.12</a>	<i>John</i> <a href="#">19.38–20.18</a>	<i>Peter</i> <a href="#">23–57</a> ed. Mara (chs. 6–13)
42 When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. 45 When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.	55 Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. 57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. 58 He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.	49 But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things. 50 Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, 51 had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. 52 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.	38 After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body.	23 But the Jews were glad and gave his body to Joseph that he might bury him, since he had seen all the good things he did.
			39 Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.	
46 Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where the body was laid.	59 So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.	53 Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. 54 It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. 55 The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. 56 Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.	40 They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. 41 Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. 42 And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.	24 He took the Lord, washed him, wrapped him in a linen cloth, and brought him into his own tomb, called the Garden of Joseph. 25 Then the Jews, the elders, and the priests realized how much evil they had done to themselves and began beating their breasts, saying ‘Woe to us because of our sins. The judgment and the end of Jerusalem are near.’ [26–27. <i>The narrator states that he and his companions went into hiding and mourned.</i> ]
	62 The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63 and said, ‘Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, “After three days I will rise again.” 64 Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, “He has been raised from the dead”, and the last deception would be worse than the first.’ 65 Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.’ 66 So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.			28 The scribes, Pharisees, and elders gathered together and heard all the people murmuring and beating their breasts, saying, ‘If such great signs happened when he died, you can see how righteous he was!’ 29 The elders became fearful and went to Pilate and asked him, 30 ‘Give us some soldiers to guard his crypt for three days to keep his disciples from coming to steal him. Otherwise the people may assume he has been raised from the dead and then harm us.’ 31 So Pilate gave them the centurion Petronius and soldiers to guard the tomb. The elders and scribes came with them to the crypt. 32 Everyone who was there, along with the centurion and the soldiers, rolled a great stone and placed it there before the entrance of the crypt. 33 They smeared it with seven seals, pitched a tent there, and stood guard.

				<p>[34–36. <i>A crowd gathers on the morning after the Sabbath, the skies open, and two men who were ‘very bright’ descend.</i>]</p> <p>37 The stone cast before the entrance rolled away by itself and moved to one side; the tomb was open and both young men entered.</p> <p>[38–42. <i>The soldiers see three men emerge from the tomb, with a cross following behind, and a voice from heaven exchanges words with the cross.</i>]</p> <p>[43–49: <i>see below</i>]</p>
16.1 When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. 2 And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3 They had been saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’	28.1 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.	24.1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.	20.1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb	50 Now Mary Magdalene, a disciple of the Lord, had been afraid of the Jews, since they were inflamed with anger; and so she had not done at the Lord’s crypt the things that women customarily do for loved ones who die. But early in the morning of the Lord’s day 51 she took some of her women friends with her and came to the crypt where he had been buried. [52–54: <i>they discuss what to do if they cannot get inside the tomb, including the line ‘Who will roll away the stone for us?’</i> ]
4 When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.	2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.	2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body.	and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. [20.2–10: <i>see below</i> ] 20.11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;	55 When they arrived they found the tomb opened. And when they came up to it they stooped down to look in,
5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.	3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.	4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground,	12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.	and they saw a beautiful young man dressed in a very bright garment, sitting in the middle of the tomb.
6 But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.’ 8 So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. [END of gospel of Mark]	5 But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, “He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.” This is my message for you.’ 8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.	but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’ 8 Then they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.	13 They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’	He said to them, 56 ‘Why have you come? Whom are you seeking? Not the one who was crucified? He has risen and left. But if you do not believe it, stoop down to look, and see the place where he was laid, that he is not there. For he has risen and left for the place from which he was sent.’ 57 Then the women fled out of fear.
	9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’		14 When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’ 16 Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew,	

			<p>'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.</p>	
	<p>11 While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. 12 After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13 telling them, 'You must say, "His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep."' 14 If this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' 15 So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day.</p>			<p>[43–49 moved here as parallel to Matthew]</p> <p>43 They then decided among themselves to go off to disclose what had happened to Pilate. 44 While they were still making their plans, the skies were again seen to open, and a person descended and entered the crypt. 45 Those who were with the centurion saw these things and hurried to Pilate at night, abandoning the tomb they had been guarding, and explained everything they had seen. Greatly agitated, they said, 'He actually was the Son of God.' 46 Pilate replied, 'I am clean of the blood of the Son of God; you decided to do this.' 47 Then everyone approached him to ask and urge him to order the centurion and the soldiers to say nothing about what they had seen. 48 'For it is better,' they said, "for us to incur a great sin before God than to fall into the hands of the Jewish people and be stoned." 49 And so Pilate ordered the centurion and the soldiers not to say a word.</p>
		<p>10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.</p>	<p>[20.2–10 moved here as parallel to Luke]</p> <p>20.2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' 3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples returned to their homes.</p>	

Elements distinctive to Mark:	Elements distinctive to Matthew:	Elements distinctive to Luke:	Elements distinctive to John:
Joseph is a member of the council Pilate ascertains that Jesus is dead Tomb hewn out of rock	Tomb newly hewn out of rock by Joseph Guard set on tomb to prevent stealing the body	Rock-hewn tomb, never used	Nicodemus goes with Joseph
Tomb visited by Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and Salome	Tomb visited by Mary Magdalene and the other Mary	Tomb visited by Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James, 'and the other women with them'	A garden with a new tomb, never used
Apparition of young man in a white robe, sitting inside the tomb on the right-hand side	Apparition of angel outside the tomb with clothes white as snow; earthquake; the Marys see the stone being removed Jesus meets the Marys on their way home	Apparition of two men in dazzling clothes	Tomb visited by Mary Magdalene alone, twice
End of burial episode is also end of gospel (setting aside the spurious endings to Mark)	Guards report events to the chief priests; origin given for the 'his disciples stole him by night' story, which 'is still told'	Peter runs to the tomb and sees the linen cloths (at end of story)	Apparition of two men in white clothes, followed by Jesus himself at tomb  Peter and 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' run to the tomb and see the linen cloths (set between Mary's two visits)