

John 20:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

Analysis

And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Mary Magdalene's encounter with two angels at the empty tomb reveals profound theological truth. The Greek word theōrei (θεωρεῖ, "seeth") indicates careful, contemplative observation—not a fleeting glance but sustained attention. These celestial messengers positioned at head and foot mark where Christ's body had lain, forming a sacred tableau.

The positioning recalls the cherubim on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18-22), where God's presence dwelt between the angels. Jesus' burial place becomes the new mercy seat—the meeting point between heaven and earth. The white garments (leukois, λευκοῖς) symbolize purity, holiness, and divine glory, consistently associated with heavenly beings throughout Scripture.

This scene confirms the resurrection while pointing to Christ's priestly work. Where death once reigned, angels now testify to victory. The empty space between them declares that death could not hold the Son of God. Mary's vision previews the gospel message the angels will soon proclaim: "He is not here; He is risen." The tomb transformed from death's domain into a throne room where heaven meets earth in resurrection triumph.

Historical Context

This encounter occurs early Sunday morning, approximately AD 30-33, in Joseph of Arimathea's garden tomb near Jerusalem. The presence of angels at Jesus' tomb stands in stark contrast to typical Jewish burial customs, where bodies remained undisturbed for a year before bones were collected into ossuaries.

Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus had cast seven demons (Luke 8:2), demonstrates extraordinary devotion by arriving at the tomb while still dark. Her determination to properly anoint Jesus' body reflects Jewish burial practices, though the initial anointing had been interrupted by the Sabbath. The spices and ointments were expensive, indicating significant sacrifice.

The Roman seal and guard (Matthew 27:65-66) had been overcome, not by human force but by divine power. The positioning of angels echoes the cherubim in the Holy of Holies, suggesting that Christ's resurrection makes Him the ultimate meeting place between God and humanity. First-century readers would recognize this imagery from temple worship, understanding that Jesus fulfills what the Ark symbolized—God's presence and atonement for sin.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does the positioning of angels at head and foot of Jesus' burial place connect to Old Testament imagery of God's presence?
2. What does Mary's persistent devotion despite overwhelming grief teach us about faithful discipleship?
3. How does this empty tomb scene transform our understanding of death and what it means for Christian hope?

4. In what ways does the angels' white clothing and positioning testify to the significance of Christ's resurrection?
5. How should the reality that angels witness and proclaim Christ's resurrection affect our own witness to others?

Interlinear Text

καὶ θεωρεῖ δύο ἄγγέλους ἐν λευκοῖς καθεζομένους

And seeth two angels in white sitting

G2532 G2334 G1417 G32 G1722 G3022 G2516

ἐνα πρὸς τῇ κεφαλῇ καὶ ἐνα πρὸς τοῖς ποσίν

the one at the head And the one at the feet

G1520 G4314 G3588 G2776 G2532 G1520 G4314 G3588 G4228

ὅπου ἔκειτο τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ

where had lain the body of Jesus

G3699 G2749 G3588 G4983 G3588 G2424

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 3:4 (Parallel theme): Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

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