The tomb was empty. John, Peter and Mary Magdalene all came to check out that empty tomb. Each responded a little differently to that experience as they began to grasp its meaning. The tomb is empty still today and we also respond in our own unique way as we grasp the miracle of that empty tomb. Jesus died and rose for all of us – for all those responses. He rose for all of us.

As Mary sees that empty tomb she is confused and fears that someone has stolen his body. She runs to the place where the disciples have hidden and John and Peter come to check out her story. John, being younger, arrives at the tomb first but perhaps out of reverence for the older Peter or perhaps just out of his own hesitation waits and doesn’t enter. Peter comes rushing in, sees the linen cloths folded just as anyone would fold their clothes when taking them off and changing into new clothes. John later enters and sees the same thing. Grave stealers wouldn’t have taken the time to do that; the only explanation is that Jesus did that himself. Using what they’ve seen with their own eyes, remembering what Jesus said, and using logic with a little faith, these two men believe.

Mary is still confused. The Lord she loved so much was crucified and now his body is missing. She can’t even spend the time with the body that would have given her comfort. She is so grief stricken that none of her logic works. Jesus, who perhaps had been watching the whole drama unfurl, chooses to make his first post-resurrection appearance to Mary even though he’s not really ready yet to make that appearance because of his compassion for this weeping woman whose grief is preventing her from experiencing the joy of the resurrection. Finally, he speaks her name. And when Jesus calls her name, Mary realizes that He is alive – that He has risen. Once she understands, Mary rushes to tell others.

Perhaps some of us can put ourselves in the shoes of the young John, who comes to check out Mary’s story that Jesus’s body was stolen -- one whose head and memory joins with his faith to accept the resurrection, but one who lags back a little to let others check things out first. Perhaps some of us can put ourselves in the shoes of the older Peter who rushes with eagerness to discover the Risen Lord. Or perhaps we identify more with Mary who is so despondent that she needs a special word from Jesus. In fact, I suspect many of us have responded differently to the Risen Christ at different times in our lives. Sometimes, we’ve let our head and memory do most of the work. Sometimes we’ve lagged behind to see what others will do with Jesus. Sometimes we’ve rushed in without thinking to see evidence of the Risen Christ. Sometimes we’ve been so despondent that we need a special word from Jesus to know the joy of the Resurrection. No matter how we come to know the Resurrected Christ, Jesus is there for us. Jesus died and rose for those whose reason works with their faith. He died and rose for those who lag back and for those who move forward where fools fear to tread. He died and rose for those who are in so much pain they have trouble seeing His Face.

There is a wonderful Easter story of an 8 year old boy named Philip circulating on the Internet. Philip was born with Downs Syndrome. Philip went to Sunday School every week with other 8 year olds, although Philip, being a little different wasn’t always well accepted in the class.

On the Sunday after Easter Sunday, the teacher gave an assignment. She had brought several of those eggs that pantyhose come in and gave one to each child. She assigned each child to go outside and find a sign of new life and put it in the egg and bring it back to class. The children did their assignment and soon all the eggs lay on the table of the classroom. The teacher opened the first egg, which contained a flower. And all the children oohed and ahhed. She opened the second egg, which contained a butterfly and all the children oohed and ahhed. Then she opened the third egg and there was nothing there. The children all said, “That’s not fair. That’s stupid. Somebody didn’t do it right.”

Then Philip tugged on the teacher’s shirt and said, “Teacher, that’s mine.”

“You don’t ever do anything right,” said all the other kids.

“I did do it right,” said Philip. “The tomb is empty.”

There was silence. Then something happened. From that time on, Philip was accepted as part of the class. The empty tomb – the resurrected Christ – had set him free from differentness.

Philip had responded to the Risen Christ with faith as simple and as powerful as that of an unquestioning child. His friends, once they finally understood, had responded with acceptance.

The word on the Internet is that Philip did not live long after that, but died from an infection that most kids would have easily recovered from. His Sunday School friends and teachers marched right up the center aisle at his funeral not bearing flowers, but, instead, bearing empty pantyhose eggs. The tomb is empty. The Resurrected Christ had appeared to Philip and taken him home. And through Philip’s faith, the Resurrected Christ became more a part of the lives of his Sunday School mates.

Jesus is alive and lives with each of us. We each seek and find Jesus in our own way. We each respond differently as we understand and comprehend the joy of this resurrection. But no matter how we come to know Him, Jesus is here for all of us.

The tomb is empty! Christ is alive.

Alleluia. Alleluia