# Set Up

## Welcome to Christ Church on this Easter Morning. It’s great to have you here. My name is ??, On behalf of lots of people I want to extend a warm welcome. And that is especially true for those of you who are here against your will. We know that Easter is one of those times where some of you end up showing up just to keep peace on the home front. Someone has made you show up. We get it and we’re glad they did and we’ll pray that you survive the service.

## If you are visiting or you’d like to get on our mailing list, you have a prayer request – any of those things, please fill out the card that is in your bulletin and drop that in the offering in just a bit. And please note that if you are new we have a gift for you after the service. You can pick it up at (Connection center, ???).

## In a few minutes Syler will be talking about the Before and After of Easter. Right now I am going to read a passage out of Luke that reports on the empty tomb. It’s Luke 24:1-12:

### On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” Then they remembered his words.

### When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

## Right now I invite you to …

# Introduction

## For over ten years someone in our congregation, a guy named Dan, organized an event for the bankers, lawyers, and owners of one of the big six accounting firm’s major clients. It was a small but very high-end affair. Few expenses were spared. The speakers and entertainers were household names.

## One year – as a sidelight – they brought in Denny Dent, (a performance artist who actually passed away 10 years ago) who would paint pictures of rock stars on large canvasses while one of their songs was being played: Mick Jagger, Bruce Springsteen, Bono, Carlos Santana and others.

## Well, after a speech by former Secretary of State Colin Powell the program was running late, so Dan said to him, we only have time for 3 of the 4 paintings we agreed on. So Denny painted Jagger, David Bowie and Elton John and brought the house down. He was a huge hit and so as he was taking his bows Dan jumped up and said, “I told Denny we only had time for three, but let’s make time for four.” Everyone cheered, but Denny said no, I’m not sure I have a canvas. Dan said, “of course you do.” The people cheered more. Denny begged off and there was a little stand off before Dan played the trump card. “I paid you for four, we want all four.”

## So Denny nodded and then added, “I am going to do this, but I’m going to do it a little differently than the last three. This time, no brushes, just my hands and four cans of paint. He then donned a white tuxedo jacket and dipped his hands in paint as the Jimi Hendrix song “Purple Haze” started up, and… things began to unwind. However, where before everyone had been fascinated as they watched Mick, David and Elton take shape, this time the picture didn’t come together. At some point it became pretty obvious that it wasn’t working and the energy began to fade. The painting was awful, it was ugly, and in the room, it just got really weird and uncomfortable. And at that point Denny stopped – and the music stopped – and he turned to Dan and said, “This was a bad idea. I should never have agreed to this and walked off the stage.” The place went silent.

## Dan said, “Before he started painting the last picture the energy in the room was a 12 on a scale of 1 to 10. When he stopped it was negative five. Some people were crying. I was stunned. I just sat at my table wondering what I was supposed to do.”

## When after about a minute – which seemed like an hour – Denny casually walked back out, looked over the somber crowd and asked, “What’s the matter, don’t you like my painting?” He then took it, flipped it upside down and in an instant you could see Hendrix. He had been painting him upside down. The music went back on, the crowd went wild and with just a few more splashes of color everything came together. My friend said that in 14 years of hosting those events – all of the speakers and entertainers – there was never a moment to match that one.

## We actually have the painting of Jimi if you’d like to see it. I didn’t think it was right to put him on stage. Not exactly the right vibe for Easter morning. But if you head towards the hallway in the B building you’ll see him there.

## I tell that story because there is a sense in which the resurrection of Jesus is the event that puts life right side up. It makes everything clear. It moves us from Before to After. It validates all of the other aspects of His life, teaching and claims.

# If you’ve been attending recently you know that we’re working our way through the Gospel of Luke.

## There are four Gospels – four accounts of Christ’s life. They are not biographies per se because they do not give us a detailed account of all of Christ’s life. They were written with a specific agenda: to persuade us that He is God (the Savior of the World); that we should follow him (his teaching and example); and that His death changes everything – it shows God’s great love for us and provides a way back to Him.

## Each Gospel tells the same story but from a slightly different angle and for a slightly different audience.

### Matthew – the tax collector who became an apostle – wrote for Jewish readers. In light of this he opens with a genealogy, one that links Jesus back to the Old Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures).

### Mark, which was likely written first and is the shortest – the others expand on what he wrote – was written more for Roman readers.

### John was written last – he was the youngest of the 12 apostles and lived a lot longer than any of the others – and he writes much later and directs his comments at the Greeks.

### Luke was writing for Gentiles, that is, for non-Jews. Luke, a medical doctor, amateur historian and travel companion to the Apostle Paul, tells us that he has written a chronological account for a man named Theophilus, who we believe was a Greek official in the Roman Empire, and who was a new Christian eager to learn all he can about Jesus, and the 1 funding Luke’s travels to visit all of the sites and interview as many of the eye witnesses as he could.

## As a church we’re working our way through the book of Luke. And as we go, we get a better idea – a clearer picture – of who Jesus is and why He matters. Today I want to show how his death and resurrection are the events that tie everything together. They effectively turn the picture upside down so that suddenly everyone can see what’s going on. And then talk about why that matters to us.

# We’ve jumped ahead to Luke 24.

## By the time we get Luke 24, we’re not exactly working with a blank canvas. A whole lot of the story has played out – the five-sixths of the Bible that comes before Luke 24 has given us a lot of context. And it’s context we have to have to understand who Jesus is.

## Trying to understand Jesus by starting with the New Testament – to say nothing of starting most of the way through one of the Gospels – is like watching the last ten minutes of a two hour movie. You might figure out a few things, but not much.

## And that’s not a perfect illustration, because there is a lot more going on in the Bible than can ever be layered into a movie. You can read the Bible over and over your entire life and keep seeing new things. In fact, you have to read it over and over before the storyline falls into place.

## The Bible is the best-selling book of all time, but it’s not the best understood. In fact it might be one of the most *mis*understood books of all time. It takes some effort to see the plot clearly. After all, it’s not one book, it’s really a collection of 66 books written by forty different authors over 1,600 years in three different languages and on three different continents.

## Many people mistakenly see it as a collection of rules and inspirational stories. It’s not. It is the story of how a loving God has continually showed his faithfulness to his people, and how he lovingly transforms their hearts to be in relationship with Him.

## The simplest way I know how to explain it is by describing it as a two act play. Act One is the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) and Act Two is the New Testament.

## If you went to the Chicago Theater to watch a performance of The Bible, you’d hopefully arrive in enough time to page through the Playbill, the program that would list all of the actors and says, “the part of Moses tonight will be played by…. No flash photography. There will be a 20 minute intermission,” etc. etc. It would also contain a brief summary of everything that happened leading up to Act One / Scene One.

## In the Bible’s case, that’s Genesis 1 – 11. And the big takeaways are that:

### There is a loving, all-powerful God who created everything.

### That as a final act of creation He made us in his own likeness and for his glory (we exist for him, not the other way around) and that He left us in charge.

### Sin enters the world through a simple act of selfishness and disobedience. The result of this is that we are cut off from God. Cursed. Spiritually dead.

### But as soon as this happens – Genesis 3 – God makes a promise to send help. He says that he will send someone to defeat evil.

### Now a few other things happen here. I am shortening the story just a bit. But the big question you are left to wonder about is, who is The One who is going to make things right and will he be able to fix things – to defeat evil and restore broken humanity.

### This is what you are thinking about when the curtain rises on Act One, Scene One.

## The beginning of the play corresponds to Genesis 12, and the first person you see is a shepherd named Abraham walking around in Northern Africa when God makes him an offer:

### If Abraham will leave his home and go where God sends him, God will give him land and descendants and bless the world through him. The clear implication is that The One who will defeat evil will come through this man’s bloodline.

### Abraham says yes and in the rest of Act One Scene One we watch as he struggles to have a child and then – after he and his wife finally give birth to a child, Isaac – he is instructed to take the child to a mountain top several days walk and sacrifice him. God intervenes and stops the sacrifice, but it’s a memorable moment we hang on to in Scene One (The Patriarchs).

## The next scenes are the Exodus (2), where the Jews escape from Egyptian captivity and God gives them the law through Moses. Then the eventual re-conquest of the Holy Land in the book of Joshua (3-4) and the Judges’ reign there while the people all end up doing what is right in their own eyes. The next scene (5) is where the 12 tribes are unified under a king—first Saul, then David, then Solomon.

## Things are going very well here, and in fact, God makes a promise to David that His Chosen One will sit on his throne. And Solomon builds a huge temple where God manifests His presence in a unique way.

## Surprisingly, tragically, after Solomon’s death Israel falls apart (6). The nation splits in two and the northern ten tribes head down a path of rebellion that eventually leads to their destruction. And the southern 2 tribes are later overrun by the Babylonians and taken into captivity.

## Exile is the name of scene 7. The Jews live in Babylon for 70 years before they return in scene 8.

## Which is where things are at when the curtain falls and lights come up and we enter a 400 year intermission.

# I’m skipping over quite a bit here.

## We’ve actually only covered the historical books of the Old Testament. This doesn’t include the Wisdom Literature, things like the Psalms and Proverbs. There’s another set of books called the Prophetic Books.

## The point is, if you read through the Old Testament a few times the story line gets clearer and clearer. You realize:

### Sin is a huge problem. In spite of God’s faithfulness to his people, they turn their backs on him.

### Sin is a capital offense. This is what is behind all of the sacrifices that you read about. When someone has fallen short and caused a break in their relationship with God, something has to die for that offense. So an innocent animal dies instead of you.

### More broadly, though, God is loving, patient and faithful even when people are not.

### And just before the curtain closes on Act 1, we actually get this little cliffhanger. The structure of most plays is that Act 1 ends with a teaser or some sort of conflict, or foreshadowing about what will happen in Act 2. Our version of that is this reference in some of the prophetic books to something “new” that’s coming. In fact, it’s a new covenant.

### It’s from Jeremiah 31:33 and is written while God’s people are in captivity under the Babylonians- “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people.”

### God had established covenants with Noah and with Abraham and with Moses, that’s when the Jews were given the law. And God is saying that a time is soon coming when a new covenant will be established where the laws will be written not on stone but on hearts. And God will be their God in a new way.

### And one more, from the same time period, from Ezekiel 36:26

### Here’s what it says: 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

### There is something brand new coming, a new way that God is choosing to interact with His people. This heart of stone that we seem to have been born with…God will remove it and replace it with a malleable heart.

The Bible indicates what research has actually proven as well, that we are born with a predisposition to selfishness and rebellion. I was listening to a radio show this week where they were interviewing a Yale professor who just wrote a book on development in babies (*Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil*). And the interviewer asked him:   
“When do you think people turn bad?” The assumption being that we’re all sweet and perfect and wonderful when we’re born. I found the guy’s answer incredibly illuminating. He said this:  
“I don’t really think of that as the right question. To a large extent, we start off bad. We start off with these powerful selfish impulses.” ~~And what happens, mostly through enculturation and development, we become good and generous. A lot of the evil in the world is caused by people who for whatever reason missed out on this, the capacity to exercise their self-control.~~ And he says this: “To some extent, the most evil adult in the world is a 2 year old who never grew up, a 2 year old who never managed to get control over his impulses.”

I would say that at the heart of each of us is that selfish 2 year old who never grew up. Left to our own devices, we stay that way. Our hearts are hard. God promises to change that.

### So. Hold onto that thought.

## The curtain has gone down, and there is radio silence for 400 years.

## And that is the way things stand when the lights dim, telling you to get back to your seat, and the curtain goes up on…

# Act Two

## Act Two is written up in the New Testament, and as soon as it opens everything is about Jesus.

### He has a miraculous birth (which you are familiar with), we get a glimpse of his early years of being about his Father’s business.

### Then he is an adult and he retreats to the desert to pray for 40 days, goes toe–to–toe with Satan and wins, and then launches his public ministry. He emerges as a rabbi, but not just any rabbi. Jesus makes it clear that He is different than everyone else by saying and doing a series of amazing things. He claims to be the Messiah and the fulfillment of prophecy. And in a series of miracles he demonstrates His power over sickness, evil, nature and death.

## We just recently finished up an overview of the first major sermon he gave – which has been celebrated for the last 2,000 years as the cornerstone of the most amazing system of ethics we have.

## The book of Luke goes on. In future sermons we’ll look at more miracles and more profound teaching. We’ll watch as the lights go on for the disciples and the tension mounts with the religious leaders.

## This past week – starting last Sunday – we jumped ahead. We skipped to the last week of Christ’s life, which:

### Begins with him parading into Jerusalem as a king

### Includes His claim to be the new Temple – the new place where God and man meet. “Destroy this temple and in 3 days I’ll rebuild it.”

### And also includes His own claim to be the Passover Lamb. So at the Passover meal on the night that he was betrayed Jesus left the thousand year old script for that meal in order to say, “this bread is my body which is broken for you. This cup is my blood which is shed for you.” We see Jesus claiming that all of the events in the Old Testament are pointing forward to Him.

### And remember that event way back in Genesis? That unthinkable request God made to Abraham to tie up his son and offer him as a sacrifice? Even that was about him. It all falls into place when Jesus dies on that same mountain. When God the Father takes the life of God the Son. The command to tie up Isaac was a foreshadowing. It was a set-up to help us see how unthinkable it is to ask a Father to sacrifice a Son. And yet, with the death of Christ that is what happens.

### So the very next day, he is put to death on trumped-up charges, all appears to be lost, but from the passage that was read at the beginning of our service, we see that Jesus does not stay dead. He rises.

### And in the days and months following His resurrection, it is finally clear what is happening. This long story that has been written, one where we have been waiting to see who would be the one to defeat death, and the cliffhanger that we hear about at the end of Act one…all of that is culminating in Christ.

### All of the deaths of innocent animals have been pointing ahead to *his* death. The new covenant that Jeremiah spoke about has now come into effect.

### And when we place our faith in Him, we have our sins taken away from us—God no longer counts our sins against us. AND we enter into this new covenant, and we have our heart of stone taken out, and it is replaced with a heart of flesh. Perhaps most importantly, the Spirit of God takes up residence in our hearts, and all of those ways that we thought we could never change, it is now possible.

## This is not a pipe dream. This is not make-believe. This is real. Christianity is not primarily a moral code. It is the story of a God who changes lives, who transforms hearts, who sees who we are before, and because of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, and the pouring out of His Spirit, everything after is different.

# So there is actually more to Act 2. There is a period after Jesus’ ascension, much of it is captured in the book of Acts, which has the apostle Paul as a prominent player. And what we see in this person Paul is a dramatic playing-out of this very thing. He is perhaps the most dramatic before-and-after story in history.

## Most of you know this guy’s story, but for those that don’t, here’s a guy who was raised as a good God-fearing Jewish man. He was a Jewish leader who desired nothing more than to please God. And as far as he could tell, serving God meant fighting against whichever new pseudo-Jewish cult group would pop up. One of those groups was the followers of this man Jesus of Nazareth.

## So Saul (as he was known then) did what any good religious leader would do. He went around putting to death anyone who might be opposing the one true God. And he was good at it. What he did not bargain for was that He was completely wrong about this Jesus.

## As he’s on his way from one anti-Christian rally to the next, he is met by a voice from heaven, asking Him: Why are you persecuting me? He’s hoping it’s anyone but Jesus. Turns out, it’s Jesus. And what happens to Paul? He goes from being the biggest opponent to Christianity to the greatest proponent.

## The transformation that happens in his heart, from hatred of Christians to defender of Christians, is nothing short of miraculous. It would be the same thing as having the Grand Dragon of the KKK becoming the greatest civil right proponent in history. It is one of the most powerful stories of transformation I know about. It’s a story that actually has encouraged me in times when I’ve doubted that this whole thing is real. I’ve said: if it’s NOT real, then what was the deal with Paul? What else could have made this guy change so radically?

## There is only one plausible explanation for that.

## God is real. God loved this man who went around killing Christians. And God loves you and your little rebellious 2 year old self, and he loves me and my little 2 year old rebellious self. God desires you to have your sins paid for through the sacrifice of Jesus. And he invites you into Act Three.

## See, there’s actually a third act in this play. It’s the part of the play that we find ourselves in now.

## You and I are invited into the story. Many of you here this morning have been walking with God for a while, but some of you might be hearing all of this for the first time. And the invitation is to you. God is saying: I invite you into this story. Give me your heart of stone, your insecurities and your failures and your addictions and your brokenness and maybe even your successes that haven’t been enough. Give that all to me, and I will give you a new heart. Give me your “before” and I will change your “after” into something you never thought possible. These befores and afters have been happening ever since Jesus was raised from the dead. Some of the greatest privileges of my life have been watching people, especially young people, give their lives to God and watch Him radically transform them. This is possible for you too.

## As our service ends I want to give you a chance to see the ongoing power of Jesus to change lives. On previous Easters we’ve asked someone to share their story. Today we have 25 mini-stories. Watch this.

## Cardboard Testimonies

# Closing Comments

## Men and women, there is no one like Jesus. No one even close. He is God’s Son sent to show us how to live and to die in our place. His resurrection changed everything. It turned everything right side up. It confirmed all that He taught and claimed. And He can turn your life right side up. We invite you to follow Jesus. Make a commitment. Put your weight down. Who else can offer you what He did – reconciliation with God, eternal life, an example to follow? Who is better than He is? No one, so follow Christ. If you would like to talk with anyone about that, or be prayed for today, there will be people up front who welcome that opportunity.

## Next week we start a new series called *Faith, Doubt and Everything in Between*. And I am going to be speaking on faith - what it is and what it’s not. It’s an important message. Don’t miss it.

## If you are new to Christ Church, please turn in your card and pick up a gift bag in the lobby. Among other things it contains a copy of the book I wrote two years ago on *The Life of Jesus Christ*. It gives a lot more detail to what I mapped out in the sermon today.

## There are lots of ways to get involved. Take a next step. We want to see you before Christmas.

## I invite you to stand for the benediction.