

***I am about to create a new heaven and a new earth***

So said the Lord through the Prophet Isaiah

700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ

He cast an extraordinary vision in stunning detail

***No more sounds of weeping in the city, no cries of anguish;***

***No more babies dying in the cradle,***

***or old people who don't enjoy a full lifetime;***

***One-hundredth birthdays will be considered normal***

***anything less will seem like a cheat.***

***They'll build houses and move in.***

***They'll plant fields and eat what they grow.***

***No more building a house that some outsider takes over,***

***No more planting fields that some enemy confiscates,***

And millions of people through the centuries sigh...

***It's too good to be true...***

**But is it?**

An artificial fruit salesman was getting criticized for his products

They just don't look real! Look at that apple...

it's too round, too red, and too big to be real apple.

So the salesman picked it up... took a big bite... and ate it!

***Too good to be true...***

There is great tension...

Between the hope of perfection... and the disappointment of reality

We want to live where

***Wolf and lamb will graze the same meadow...***

***Lion and ox eat straw from the same trough...***

But we are too often disappointed, discouraged and disheartened.  
*It's just too good to be true*

All year long, we listened to story of God, the miracles of Jesus  
How he healed the sick, and the blind and the lame and the deaf  
We heard him call out the hypocrites, overturn tables in the temple,  
and cast out demons.  
We heard him feed 5000 with a couple loafs of bread and a few fish  
We saw him walk on water, then calm great storms

And all of that may seem too good to be true...  
But it happened!  
All of it!

But Easter *really* sounds too good to be true...

Here's the background

God came to earth to live among us...  
And he was called Jesus  
And this Jesus is 100% human *and* 100% God.

He lived as a human being, with all the temptations we do,  
yet never sinned. He was perfect.

He cared for the poor and the lonely, the downtrodden, the suffering.  
So much so...  
That he gave himself  
That's right Jesus gave himself  
To take on all our sins...  
He died on the cross  
Advance payment for every sin of every person... for all time.  
This is amazing and magnificent and too good to be true!

But what if it was true?  
What if Jesus really was the Son of God?  
What if he really did take on the sins of the whole world?

Too good to be true?

Maybe...

Except for Easter!  
Except for Easter...

Because after Jesus died... and was buried... sealed in a tomb...  
Before there was a funeral or a memorial service  
or any of the rituals we associate with death...

Jesus Christ came back from the dead.  
His body was sealed in a stone tomb for three days  
And when the women disciples went to visit his grave...  
They found the greatest of all God's miracles.

The stone... carefully guarded by Roman soldiers...  
had been removed from the tomb's entrance...  
and the body was gone.  
The cloth that wrapped his body was there.  
But Jesus was not.

Had the body been stolen? Who would have taken it?  
His accusers? The Romans? Where was it?

Mary Magdalene ran at once to Peter and John, breathlessly panting,  
***"They took Jesus from the tomb.  
We don't know where they've put him."***

Peter and John raced to the tomb.  
 They ran, neck and neck.  
 John got there first. He stooped and gazed inside.  
 He saw the pieces of linen cloth lying there, but he didn't go in.  
 Peter arrived, entered the tomb,  
 saw the linen cloths and the kerchief used to cover his head...  
 not lying with the linen cloths but separate, neatly folded by itself.  
 Then John went into the tomb, saw the evidence, and believed.  
 No one knew from the Scripture that Jesus would rise from the dead.  
 The disciples then went back home. Alarmed... confused...

Mary Magdalene stood outside the tomb weeping.  
 She knelt to look into the tomb again  
 and saw two angels, dressed in white,  
 one at the head, the other at the foot of where Jesus' body had been.  
 They said to Mary,

***“Woman, why do you weep?”***

***“They took my Master and I don't know where they put him.”***

She turned and saw Jesus, but didn't recognize him.  
 So Jesus spoke,

***“Woman, why do you weep? Who are you looking for?”***

She thought he was the gardener

***“Sir, if you took him, tell me where you put him.***

***I need to care for him.”***

Then Jesus said, ***“Mary.”***

And she turned to face him... and recognized him...

Too good to be true!

That the one who died for us was not dead!

Too good to be true!

But it was true. It is true.

Christ is Alive! Jesus has risen from the grave!

About 400 AD, John Chrysostom Archbishop of Constantinople  
 preached this in his Easter sermon

*Let no one mourn that he has fallen again and again;  
for forgiveness has risen from the grave.*

*Let no one fear death, for the Death of our Savior has set us free.  
He has destroyed it by enduring it.  
He destroyed Hell when He descended into it.  
He put it into an uproar even as it tasted of His flesh.*

*Isaiah foretold this when he said,  
"You, O Hell, have been troubled by encountering Him below."  
Hell was in an uproar because it was done away with.  
It was in an uproar because it is mocked.  
It was in an uproar, for it is destroyed.  
It is in an uproar, for it is annihilated.  
It is in an uproar, for it is now made captive.*

*Hell took a body, and discovered God.  
It took earth, and encountered Heaven.  
It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it did not see.*

*O death, where is thy sting?  
O Hell, where is thy victory?*

*Christ is Risen, and you, o death, are annihilated!  
Christ is Risen, and the evil ones are cast down!  
Christ is Risen, and the angels rejoice!  
Christ is Risen, and life is liberated!*

*Christ is Risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead;  
for Christ having risen from the dead,  
is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

*To Him be Glory and Power forever and ever. Amen!*

*Too good to be true? Too good NOT to be true!*