

The Great Vigil of Easter

The Lighting of the Paschal Candle

In the darkness, fire is kindled;

Dear friends in Christ: On this most holy night, in which our Lord Jesus passed over from death to life, the Church invites her members, dispersed throughout the world, to gather in vigil and prayer. For this is the Passover of the Lord, in which, by hearing his Word and celebrating his Sacraments, we share in his victory over death.

The Celebrant may say the following prayer

Let us pray.

O God, through your Son you have bestowed upon your people the brightness of your light: Sanctify this new fire, and grant that in this Paschal feast we may so burn with heavenly desires, that with pure minds we may attain to

the festival of everlasting light; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Paschal Candle is then lighted from the newly kindled fire, and the Deacon (the Celebrant if there is no deacon) bearing the Candle, leads the procession to the chancel, pausing three times and singing or saying

The light of Christ.

People Thanks be to God.

If candles have been distributed to members of the congregation, they are lighted from the Paschal Candle at this time. Other candles and lamps in the church, except for those at the Altar, may also be lighted.

The Paschal Candle placed in its stand.

Then the Deacon, or other person appointed, standing near the Candle, sings or says the Exsultet, as follows (the indicated sections may be omitted)

Rejoice now, heavenly hosts and choirs of angels, and let your trumpets shout Salvation for the victory of our mighty King.

Rejoice and sing now, all the round earth, bright with a glorious splendour, for darkness has been vanquished by our eternal King.

Rejoice and be glad now, Mother Church, and let your holy courts, in radiant light, resound with the praises of your people.

All you who stand near this marvelous and holy flame, pray with me to God the Almighty for the grace to sing the worthy praise of this great light; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Deacon

The Lord be with you.

People

And also with you.

Deacon

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People

It is right to give him thanks and praise.

Deacon

It is truly right and good, always and everywhere, with our whole heart and mind to praise you, the invisible, almighty, and eternal God, and your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; for he is the true Paschal Lamb, who at the feast of the Passover paid for us the debt of Adam's sin, and by his blood delivered your faithful people.

This is the night, when you brought our fathers, the children of Israel, out of bondage in Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea on dry land.

This is the night, when all who believe in Christ are delivered from the gloom of sin, and are restored to grace and holiness of life.

This is the night, when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell, and rose victorious from the grave.

How wonderful and beyond our knowing, O God, is your mercy and loving-kindness to us, that to redeem a slave, you gave a Son.

How holy is this night, when wickedness is put to flight, and sin is washed away. It restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to those who mourn. It casts out pride and hatred, and brings peace and concord.

How blessed is this night, when earth and heaven are joined and man is reconciled to God.

Holy Father, accept our evening sacrifice, the offering of this candle in your honor. May it shine continually to drive away all darkness. May Christ, the Morning Star who knows no setting, find it ever burning—he who gives his light to all creation, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

It is customary that the Paschal Candle burn at all services from Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost.

The Liturgy of the Word

The Celebrant may introduce the Scripture readings in these or similar words

Let us hear the record of God's saving deeds in history, how he saved his people in ages past; and let us pray that our God will bring each of us to the fullness of redemption.

The Great Vigil of Easter

Following the blessing of the new fire, the lighting of the Paschal Candle and the chanting of the Exsultet, members are invited to a reading of Salvation History with responses from Canticles and Psalms followed by the corresponding Collect.

The Liturgy of the Word

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I will read two of the lessons including the requisite lesson from Exodus. On the others, I will provide, a “CliffsNote” abstract of the lesson and the response. I would like for us through Easter to focus on “Receiving an identity,” which culminates in “We are an Easter People and Alleluia is our song.”

Link for all the Vigil Readings:

The story of Creation

Genesis 1:1-2:2

The creation story establishes human identity. We are made in the “image” of God and therefore made to live up to that image. Image=icon. We are God’s icons. In the world of freedom, we are “tricked” by our underdeveloped states into knowing good and evil in the wrong way. We discover that as people alienated from our “image” we can only live as imperfect beings in an imperfect world, but still a very, very God-created good world. Evicted from Eden and alienated from our true identity as God’s children, we look for “salvation,” or a path to return to the original blessing of God’s image upon us.

Psalm 33:1-11, or Psalm 36:5-10

Psalm 33 is a Psalm which expresses rejoicing in God as the creator of the world

Psalm 36, is about God's love, righteousness and faithfulness. And since Light was first act of creation, the Psalmist says about God, "In your light, we see light."

In the Collect, we asked to be restored in our intended image and dignity.

Let us pray. (Silence)

O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Flood

Genesis 7:1-5,11-18; 8:8-18; 9:8-13

The Story of Noah's Ark presents the sense of God personally acting in the events of nature. Nature is treated as being in symbiotic relationship with God, except God's can't get humanity to comply because of the willful freedom of humanity to forsake the sacred image upon their lives. The results are disastrous and so God is presented as One who does not give up, but rather, who starts over with a remnant on the Ark. Noah, his family and pairs of animals, are destined to survive a worldwide flood. It ends with a rainbow as a promise that God will not destroy the world with such events. (This can be understood as the wisdom of the writer discerning not to accept the freedom of events of nature as direct "acts of God.") In Christian symbols, the waters of the flood are presented as dying with

Christ in being immersed in the waters of baptism. The rainbow is the promise that the waters of death are not God intended and will not destroy us.

Psalm 46

Psalm 46 is about how God is our refuge (like the Ark) in the storms and tumults of life.

The Collect picks up the baptismal theme. Please note how the Vigil indicates how we have Christianized the Hebrew Scriptures, which have a different presentation in synagogues today.

The “Rainbow” Collect is about it being a sign of God’s covenant not to destroy humanity and how we live under the covenant of water baptism.

Let us pray. (Silence)

Almighty God, you have placed in the skies the sign of your covenant with all living things: Grant that we, who are saved through water and the Spirit, may worthily offer to you our sacrifice of thanksgiving; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac

Genesis 22:1-18

Abraham and Sarah had a marvelous birth of an only son, Isaac, the promised heir to continue the line of Abrahamic people. But God told Abraham in secret to sacrifice his only son away from home in the land of Moriah. (Probably if he had told Sarah, she would have prevented him and thought him crazy). Kierkegaard called the time of the call to Abraham to sacrifice his son, the “teleological suspension of the ethical.” Abraham had to abandon the ethical “thou shalt not kill,” and trust God for another

kind of “telos” or end. Kierkegaard called this suspension, a “leap of faith,” and in that obedient leap he discovered that God provided the ram to sacrifice in place of Isaac. In terms of human anthropology, one could look at this event as wisdom writers understanding that God did not require human sacrifice. The age of human sacrifice was replaced with an age of animal sacrifices, which is diagnostic of how people regarded what God required.

Certainly, Christians, borrowed the sacrifice of only son Isaac, in understanding how God the Father was seen as being in the role of Abraham in offering his only Son to death. And in the case of Jesus, there was no substitute for him being the Perfect Offering. It should be an evolution in human understanding that the God

does not require bloody sacrifices because to assume God needed such would be to diminish divine perfection.

Psalm 33:12-22, or Psalm 16

Psalms 33 including waiting on God for his loving kindness to be known. Abraham waited on the Lord even as he obeyed.

Psalm 16: “For you will not abandon me to the grave, nor let your holy one see the Pit. You will show me the path of life;” This turned out to be true in Isaac’s rescue from death.

Abrahamic Collect

The Paschal Sacrament can be baptism and Eucharist coming to the newly baptized and to all people of the world who are invited to partake.

Let us pray. (Silence)

God and Father of all believers, for the glory of your Name multiply, by the grace of the Paschal sacrament, the number of your children; that your Church may rejoice to see fulfilled your promise to our father Abraham; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea

The Hebrew Scriptures present the selection of the Abrahamic line as being chosen as exemplars in the world to show the rest of the world how God's image on humanity was supposed to be lived out. Israel was to exemplify God's grace of selection. How was this shown? By giving them examples of his power acting on their behalf in very threatening times. God's exemplifying deeds were to give

Israel a reason to believe, and the rest the peoples of the world, a reason to respect the God of Israel.

The escape from the Pharaoh of Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea is a Root Story event in the identity of the people of Israel. In the regular recounting of this event of deliverance, especially at Passover time, the people are renewed in their identity as God's people and renewed in the dynamic remembering of the power of God's deliverance. If God did it then, then we too can access that power as we remember it afresh in our time. The followers of Jesus Christianized the waters of the Red Sea as the baptismal path through probable death, but surviving.

Exodus 14:10-15:1

As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers."

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At the

morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the

sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them:

"Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;

horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."

Interesting that the ecstatic song of Miriam gets entitled the "Song of Moses."

Canticle 8, The Song of Moses

Cantemus Domino

Exodus 15:1-6, 11-13, 17-18

Especially suitable for use in Easter Season

I will sing to the Lord, for he is lofty and
uplifted; * the horse and its rider has he hurled
into the sea.

The Lord is my strength and my refuge; *

the Lord has become my Savior.

This is my God and I will praise him, *

the God of my people and I will exalt him.

The Lord is a mighty warrior; * Yahweh is his
Name.

The chariots of Pharaoh and his army has he
hurled into the sea; * the finest of those who
bear armor have been drowned in the Red Sea.

The fathomless deep has overwhelmed them; *
they sank into the depths like a stone.

Your right hand, O Lord, is glorious in might; *
your right hand, O Lord, has overthrown the
enemy.

Who can be compared with you, O Lord, among
the gods? * who is like you, glorious in holiness,
awesome in renown, and worker of wonders?

You stretched forth your right hand; * the earth
swallowed them up.

With your constant love you led the people you
redeemed; * with your might you brought them
in safety to your holy dwelling.

You will bring them in and plant them *

on the mount of your possession,

The resting-place you have made for yourself, O
Lord, * the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hand
has established.

The Lord shall reign * for ever and for ever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: * as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

The Red Sea Collect, Christianizes the Red Sea Waters as a Sign of Baptism. Remember one of the key events of the Vigil is Baptism, so the baptismal theme is pronounced in all of the lessons and teaching.

Let us pray. (Silence)

O God, whose wonderful deeds of old shine forth even to our own day, you once delivered

by the power of your mighty arm your chosen people from slavery under Pharaoh, to be a sign for us of the salvation of all nations by the water of Baptism: Grant that all the peoples of the earth may be numbered among the offspring of Abraham, and rejoice in the inheritance of Israel; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God's Presence in a renewed Israel

The prophet Isaiah is a Utopian, envisioning ideal worlds, especially for the people of Israel who have known continuously bad times with the division into two kingdoms and threats from invading conquerors. The vision of renewal was obviously an analgesic to people in

suffering and pain. The utopian vision, “though it means “no such place,” gives the ideal direction in a world of freedom where good and evil happening co-exist. The image of God upon our lives include hope, not to taunt us, but to witness to the direction of perfection. Don’t mock utopian vision or hope. Hope provides the positive direction of our lives.

Isaiah 4:2-6

Psalms 122

Psalm 122 presents Jerusalem as the ideal city of peace where unity resides. We are to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, not because God doesn't love the other cities on the earth, but Jerusalem stands as the ideal city of humanity all living in peace. This Psalm is coupled with the utopian vision of the prophet Isaiah.

Cloud and Pillar Collect

The cloud and pillar were “markers” of God's apparent presence to God's people. We live toward moments when God's Presence is apparent and the utopian visions are visions of

that hope for the totally Apparency of God,
when indeed tears will be wiped away.

Let us pray. (Silence)

O God, you led your ancient people by a pillar
of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night:
Grant that we, who serve you now on earth,
may come to the joy of that heavenly
Jerusalem, where all tears are wiped away and
where your saints for ever sing your praise;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Salvation offered freely to all

Christian faith was born from understanding of universal or catholic salvation offered to everyone. This means beyond those who were adherents of Judaism and inhabitants of Israel. Israel as God's people were to be the "leavening agent" of salvation for all of the people of the world, but in the reality of conflict and the fear of assimilating into the practices of their neighbor or of being assimilated by them, it was difficult for Israel or any people to fulfill that role of being the leavening agent of salvation offered to everyone. Early Christian readers of the Hebrew Scriptures jumped on the themes of "universal" salvation that they found in the prophets.

Isaiah 55:1-11

Canticle 9, The First Song of Isaiah, or

In this Canticle from Isaiah the universal theme is expressed directly: Make his deeds known among the peoples; see that they remember that his Name is exalted. (peoples would mean more than Israel).

Psalms 42:1-7

In this Psalm: The image of God on each person means that the soul is athirst for the living God. "As the deer pants for the water, my soul longs after Thee."

Collect of Renewal

In this Collect both water and Spirit are used in a way that is explicit in the discourse of Jesus with woman at the well, in John 4.

Let us pray. (Silence)

O God, you have created all things by the power of your Word, and you renew the earth by your Spirit: Give now the water of life to those who thirst for you, that they may bring forth abundant fruit in your glorious kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A new heart and a new spirit

In Ezekiel, the prophet sees a time when God become accessible to everyone. Obviously with the destruction of the Temple and people carried into exile, how could “God identity” and

“Torah identity” be maintained when not in one’s land or having a Temple to go to? God was to be portable into the human temple. I will give you a new heart and a new spirit.

Certainly, the post-Pentecost church relied upon this understand of what was happening in the experience of the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel 36:24-28

Psalm 42:1-7, or Canticle 9, The First Song of Isaiah (see above)

Let us pray. (Silence)

Reconciliation Collect

In this collect, there is a petition for us to live lives congruent with the faith we confess, because we have been given access to this new covenant which provided us with a new heart and new spirit.

Let us pray. (Silence)

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who are reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The valley of dry bones

This is the portion about “dem dry bones” of Ezekiel. A question during the time of Jesus among religious parties was about the resurrection from the dead. The Pharisees believed in it; the Sadducees did not because they did not think they could find reference to

such in the Torah. The Pharisees and others believed that beliefs could be established with reference to the other Hebrew Scripture writings and not just limited to the Torah. The dry bones passage of Ezekiel is one such “resurrection” passage from the Hebrew Scriptures. Obviously hope dwells in people who experience great disappointment and great injustice. How can a just God be believed in when the hope of justice is not realized? Well, God has a way of putting flesh back on the bones, a sort of reverse aging, but you get to keep all the wisdom gained from aging. The Spirit is able to breathe new life and reconstitute a person and a people so that they can know their own continuity into the future in some way. St. Paul referred to the Holy Spirit as the assurance or down payment of the resurrection.

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you

shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act," says the Lord.

Psalm 30, or Psalm 143

In Psalm 30, the Psalmist says, “You brought me up, O LORD, from the dead; you restored my life as I was going down to the grave.” One can see how these words were appropriated by Christian resurrectionists.

Psalm 143 includes a request for personal revival: "Revive me, O LORD, for your Name's sake; for your righteousness' sake, bring me out of trouble."

Sealed by Spirit Collect

This collect refers to the “Passover” of Jesus from death to life, and in the waters of baptism we ritually go into the water of death and are raised from the water by resurrection in identity with the “Passover” of Christ. And we received our Christian Brand on our forehead: “You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever.”

Let us pray. (Silence)

Almighty God, by the Passover of your Son you have brought us out of sin into righteousness and out of death into life: Grant to those who are sealed by your Holy Spirit the will and the

power to proclaim you to all the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The gathering of God's people

The prophet Zephaniah is like Isaiah, a utopian, and envisions a rescue and a return of all the people of God to their homes. When the people of Israel could not have their own freedom in their own land, they still had the identity of hope. And the prophet Zephaniah feeds the reality of hope with a narrative utopian vision. Obvious, everyone wants to be “home;” home as the very best place to be, a

place of familiarity, safety and comfort. St. Paul, was not sure about comfort in earthly places or home, and he as a utopian said that we were citizens of heaven. This is true even as we ask that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Zephaniah 3:12-20

Psalm 98, or Psalm 126

In Psalm 98, the poet anthropomorphizes nature and has nature shouting and praising God for what he has done for his people.

Psalm 126 is about restoring the fortunes of Zion and seems to be written in the captivity of exile away from home. But in exile, the identity with the home place of Zion formed the identity of many people who never did see Jerusalem. Zion and the Hope of Zion seem to be the same for the Psalmist poet.

The Plan of Salvation Collect

In this prayer we understand the church as God's providence in furthering a plan of salvation for the whole world to see. It is a collect of admitting that we are not yet finished in the quest of perfection.

Let us pray. (Silence)

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquillity the plan of salvation: let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Vigil ends here. We will begin our Easter liturgy with the Renewal of our Baptismal Vows and complete our Vigil with our Easter Eucharistic liturgy.