

The Easter Vigil

Introduction

There is a long-standing tradition in the church that Christians should "*make Vigil*" the night before Easter. Having gone through Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, the church has become a dark and depressing place. On Ash Wednesday, the Pascal Candle that symbolizes Christ's sacrifice is extinguished, and it remains, unlit, on the platform at the front of the sanctuary throughout Lent.

We gather with students and adults on Holy Saturday at 10 p.m. by the fireplace outside the sanctuary. Taking a flame from the hearth, we relight the paschal candle and follow it into the totally dark sanctuary. People are invited to take the flame from the paschal candle and light all of the other candles in the sanctuary.

The following liturgy reflects the ancient practice of focusing on many of the biblical passages about light and dark and about water, all leading to Easter morning—the light of Christ and the saving waters of baptism.

The Service of Light

Welcome

Opening prayer

Liturgy of the light

Leader: It is truly right and good, always and everywhere, with our whole heart and mind and voice, 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.

Students: 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.

Leader: 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.

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

Leader: 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.

Students: 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.

Leader: How blessed is this night, when earth and heaven are joined and men and women are reconciled to God.

All: 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.

Procession of the light into the sanctuary

Responsive greeting

Leader: Jesus Christ is the light of the world,
Students: the light no darkness can overcome.

Leader: Stay with us, Lord, for it is evening
Students: and the day is almost over.

Leader: Let your light scatter the darkness
Students: and illumine your church.

Hymn: "O Gracious Light, Lord Jesus Christ"
The Phos Hilarion is an ancient hymn of light, found in most hymnals.

The Service of Lessons

First lesson: The Story of Creation *Genesis 1:1-2:4a*

Silence
Prayer

Second lesson: The Flood *Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18; 8:13-18; 9:8-13*

Silence

Third lesson: Israel's Deliverance *Exodus 14:21-15:1a*

Song of Moses and Miriam (*responsively*)

Leader: I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and its rider he has thrown into the sea.

Students: The Lord is my strength and my song; he has been my Savior.

Leader: This is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

Students: Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.

Leader: Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders?

Students: In your mercy you led forth the people you set free; you guided them in your strength to your holy habitation.

Leader: You will bring them in and plant them on the mount that is your possession,

Students: The place, O Lord, you have made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have prepared.

All: The Lord shall reign forever and ever.

Silence

Song: "Jesus, I Surrender"

Jesus, I surrender, all my life I give.

I'm sick of only dying, I want to really live.

You're the only one who can bring peace to my life,

so you can have me, Jesus, I yield you all my rights.

Lord, I'm yours. I surrender, I am yours. (*Repeat line.*) (*Repeat all.*)

Fourth lesson: Salvation Offered Freely to All *Isaiah 55:6-11*

Silence

Prayer

Fifth lesson: A New Heart and New Spirit *Jeremiah 31:31-34*

All (in unison): The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt--a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Sixth lesson: Dying and Rising with Christ *Romans 6:3-11*

Silence

Seventh lesson: Sealing the Tomb *Matthew 27:57-66*

Affirmation of faith

Apostles' Creed

All (in unison): I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Closing song: "All in All"