

An Observance of the Easter Vigil for Households During this Time of Pandemic

The Easter Vigil liturgy is rich with symbol and ritual, and the Scripture readings connect us to our ancestors in faith, living the very same hope that we live today. Its genesis is from a time in the ancient church when the People of God kept vigil through the night with those who were about to be baptized. It was at that time, and once again is coming to be treated as the central celebration of the year.

The series of readings from the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) reviewed the stories that those about to be baptized would have encountered over the up to three-year time of their preparation. Between readings were psalms, silence, and prayer. After the vigil readings, the candidates would have been baptized and anointed with oil before sharing for the first time in the Holy Eucharist. Just imagine them emerging from the baptismal waters and the first words they hear are from Romans 6, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death..."

The gathering would have begun in darkness, the first symbol of the Vigil, so the Easter Eucharist would take place at the dawning of the new day.

The rubrics for the Easter Vigil in our Book of Alternative Services clearly state that the celebration is to begin in darkness, for the contrasts between darkness and light are essential. So you are encouraged, if possible, to do so on Saturday evening, or else rise before dawn on Sunday.

As you prepare an area for tonight's prayer, have available a number of candles. If possible, each person might also have their own candle to hold. You will also require at least one Bible, a basin or bowl that can be filled with water, and a pitcher of water. Prepare ahead of time what you need to have a suitable spread of delicious, rich food and drink, or a hearty breakfast (depending on when you have this service), as your dietary requirements allow, that you can share after worship, remembering it is now Easter. If you have a fireplace, you may wish to prepare it to be lit, and then light the first candle from its flame.

THE SERVICE OF LIGHT

In silence, someone lights the (fire and) first candle. Then the person serving as Presider says,

This most holy night is the Passover of the Lord.
It is the night when our Lord Jesus Christ passed from death to life.
Though we cannot gather as church
to celebrate the Easter sacraments of baptism and Eucharist,
the church invites her children throughout the world
to watch and wait in vigil through prayer and the reading of scripture,
and to remember our baptism,
our own sharing in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection.
We are confident that we shall share his victory over death
and live with him for ever in God.

The other candles are lit. Then this "Easter Proclamation" is read. It may be led by the Presider or another participant.

Leader: Rejoice, heavenly choirs of angels!
Rejoice, O earth! Rejoice, O Mother Church!
Christ has conquered; the risen Savior shines upon you.
This is the night:

All: **This is the night.**

Leader: This is the night in which the children of Israel
were led through the sea,
delivered from the power of oppression.
This is the night:

All: **This is the night.**

Leader: This is the night of our passover feast,
when Christ, the true Lamb who was slain,
consecrates this home, and the homes of all believers.
This is the night:

All: **This is the night.**

Leader: The holiness of this night restores joy to those who mourn,
and humbles earthly pride.
Therefore, O God, on this night,
receive our praise for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
May the true Light, the Morning Star that never sets,
rising from the grave, shed his light on all creation,
your Son who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

People: **Amen.**

KEEPING VIGIL

As many of the following Bible passages as desired may be read. If you have a Book of Common Prayer (TEC) or Book of Alternative Services (ACoC), you may wish to also choose passages listed there, and pray the psalm and/or prayer associated with each passage. It is suggested at least two passages be read, the Exodus 14 passage not omitted. Allow a period of silence after each reading.

In households with more than one person, different participants may be assigned to read each Scripture passage in this service.

After each reading and a period of silence, you may wish to invite participants to respond to the following questions:

What word, phrase, or image stands out to you from the reading?

What does this passage tell you about God's love and power to save?

Scripture Passages for the Vigil

Genesis 1.1 - 2.2

About this reading: Especially now, we long for an ordered world. In spite of death and sorrow, the resurrection of Jesus Christ contains the promise of a new creation. Baptized into his death and resurrection, we are made witnesses to God's new creation, and it is very good.

Exodus 14.10 - 15.2

About this reading: We long for freedom from fear and confusion, sin and death. The resurrection of Christ brings us through the sea to new life, and baptism has enacted that exodus.

Ezekiel 37.1-14

About this reading: We are the dry bones. The Spirit of God, poured out from Christ's death and resurrection, makes us alive together with him, a whole people standing together in new life, even when we are separated from each other.

Daniel 3.1-29

About this reading: In this difficult time, we are in the fire. But the Crucified and Risen Christ is with us in the fire, and we are saved. And Nebuchadnezzar once again does not get it: no one is to be torn limb from limb! God's mercy is for all.

After the Vigil readings, the Presider offers the following prayer:

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light,
look favourably on your whole Church,
that wonderful and sacred mystery.
By the effectual working of your providence,
carry out in tranquility 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;
who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

THE RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL VOWS

All gather around the bowl or basin. In a household of one, each of the Presider's questions can be modified by changing "Do you" or Will you" to "I believe" or I will."

Presider: Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil
and renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?

People: **I do.**

Presider: Do you believe in God the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth?

People: **I do.**

Presider: Do you believe in Jesus Christ,
his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried,
descended to the dead,
on the third day rose again, ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and that he will come again
to judge the living and the dead.

People: **I do.**

Presider: Do you 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.

People: **I do.**

Presider: Will you continue in the apostles' teaching
and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and
in the prayers?

People: **I will, with God's help.**

Presider: Will you persevere in resisting evil and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People: **I will, with God's help.**

Presider: Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?

People: **I will, with God's help.**

Presider: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?

People: **I will, with God's help.**

Presider: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People: **I will, with God's help.**

Presider: Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God's creation and respect, sustain, and renew the life of the earth?

People: **I will, with God's help.**

Thanksgiving for Baptism

Someone pours the water into the basin or bowl.

Then the Presider says,

Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism,
we are set free from the dominion of evil and death.
Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

Then the Presider gives thanks, saying,

We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water.
Over water the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation.
Through water you led the children of Israel
out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise.

In water your Son Jesus received the baptism of John
and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ,
to lead us, through his death and resurrection,
from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.

We thank you, Father, for the water of baptism.
In it we are buried with Christ in his death.
By it we share in his resurrection.
Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son,
we celebrate our fellowship in him in faith.
We pray that all who have passed through the water of baptism
may continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Saviour.
To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit,
be all honour and glory, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Participants are encouraged to dip their hand in the water and trace the sign of the cross on their forehead or over their body as a remembrance of their baptism. Members of households may choose to trace the cross on the forehead of each other, saying, "Remember your baptism."

After the Thanksgiving for Baptism, you are encouraged to sing the canticle on the next page, or another favourite Easter hymn or song of praise appropriate for Easter.

EASTER LITURGY OF THE WORD

Glory to God

Tune: Diademata

(Same tune as "Crown Him With Many Crowns")

**Glory to God on high
and peace to all on earth;
Lord God, Almighty Father, King,
We praise you for your worth.
Lord Christ, the Lamb of God,
you take our sin away;
Now seated at the Father's side,
have mercy when we pray.**

**You are the Holy One,
Most High, Lord Christ, alone,
You and the Holy Spirit with
the Father on his throne.
Glory to God on high
and peace to all on earth;
Lord God, Almighty Father, King,
We praise you for your worth.**

Collect of the Day

Presider: Eternal Giver of life and light,
this holy night shines with the radiance of the risen Christ.
Renew your Church with the Spirit given to us in baptism,
that we may worship you in sincerity and truth,
and shine as a light in the world;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

People: **Amen.**

Reading*Romans 6.3-11*

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸ But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Gospel Proclamation*Matthew 28.1-10*

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he^[a] lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead,^[b] and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." ⁸ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Reflection

The following may be shared.

Any participant may be assigned to read it.

If any of you are devout and God-loving, take joy in this kind and bright Feast of all Feasts.

If any are wise servants, come rejoicing into your Lord's joy.

You who are worn out by fasting, receive your wages.

You who have worked from sunrise, come now to the party!

You who came at nine o'clock in the morning, rejoice!

You who waited until the noon, celebrate!

You who came at 3 p.m., do not be sad!

You who arrived barely in time for sunset, don't worry about how late you are.

No one will be deprived of heavenly joy. Our generous Lord welcomes those who come last in the same way as those who come first. He shows mercy to the first and rejoices in the last. He comforts those who came at sunset just as if they had worked hard from sunrise. He gives to everyone, both those who worked and those who merely wanted to work. He welcomes with open arms our service and hugs our intentions. He values not just our works, but praises our mere desire to do well also.

All of you enter into the joy of the Lord: First and last, receive the reward!

Rich and poor, one with another, dance for joy!

You who are hard on yourselves, and all you slackers, celebrate this day!

You who have fasted and you who have cheated in the fast, be glad together.

The table is groaning, overloaded with the finest food: eat your fill! Each and every one of you enjoy the rich banquet of faith and God's loving kindness. Do not go off still hungry or offended at something or other. No one should regret their poverty, for God's Reign is now here—for everyone!

No more weeping over our sins—forgiveness for all has burst with light from the grave.

No more fear of death, for Jesus' death has freed us all.

Death grabbed onto him tightly, but He subdued it.

He descended into hell, but took hell captive.

When Death tasted his flesh, it found him bitter on the tongue. Isaiah foretold it: "Hell was overcome, having met You in the underworld!"

Hell had to mourn, for it was undone!

Hell panicked, for it was condemned!

Hell went hungry, for it was put down!

Hell was destroyed, for it was bound!

It thought it was taking in one more corpse, but touched God instead!

It thought it was seeking earth, but met heaven.

It took what was there for the taking, but found itself falling into unexpected oblivion!

Death! Where is your sting? Hell! Where is your victory?

Christ is risen; you are brought down. Christ is risen; the demons have fallen. Christ is risen; the angels rejoice. Christ is risen; life triumphs. Christ is risen; no dead are left in the grave.

Christ is risen from the dead, the first fruits of those who sleep. To Him be glory and power now and forever. Amen

- The Easter sermon of St. John Chrysostom (circa 400 AD)

Then the following or another suitable hymn may be sung.

1. Christ the Lord is ris'n today, Alleluia!
earth and heaven in chorus say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heav'ns, and earth, reply, Alleluia!
2. Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Once He died our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where thy vict'ry, boasting grave? Alleluia!
3. Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids His rise, Alleluia!
Christ hath opened paradise, Alleluia!
4. Soar we now where Christ hath led, Alleluia!
Foll'wing our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!
5. Hail the Lord of earth and heaven, Alleluia!
Praise to Thee by both be given, Alleluia!
Thee we greet triumphant now, Alleluia!
Hail the Resurrection, thou, Alleluia!

Concluding Prayer

The Presider prays,

Giver of all, we long to once again gather as church
and share together in your Easter sacraments.
In our longing, fill us with the Spirit of love, and unite us in faith,
that we may be witnesses to the resurrection
and show your glory to all the world,
in the name of Jesus Christ the risen Lord. **Amen.**

Let the feasting begin!

Some Food Ideas for the Evening Table Festivity

Lamb skewers with mint glaze (or a substitute meat)	
Crusty Bread with spinach or garlic dip, or flavoured butter, or cheese fondue	
Greek Salad Skewers (feta square, olive, cucumber chunk, cherry tomato)	
Meatballs and dip	Various Cheeses and Crackers
Small or bite-sized baked goods	Fruit and dip
Bacon-wrapped Scallops	Pigs in a blanket
Prosciutto-wrapped Asparagus	Shrimp and dip
Champagne or wine (incl. non or low alcohol)	Punch

...the list could go on!

Consider using the following hand-washing ritual prior to setting out the food:

The Presider or another person says,

As we prepare to serve our meal, let us begin by washing, cleansing our hands as we were cleansed in the waters of baptism. We do this not because we are afraid, but because we are commanded to love. So we cleanse our hands as an expression of love for the vulnerable people Jesus loved. May we be instruments of God's care. May the sacrifices we make be for the good of our human family near and far.

Participants then wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water. Once washed, each should help with setting the table, as they are able.

Acknowledgements

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