



WHAT DOES THIS DAY MEAN? HANDOUT FOR THE GREAT VIGIL OF EASTER AT HOME MARCH 7, 2021

Introduction

The Great Vigil of Easter follows the ancient practice of celebrating the Easter Feast at sunset on Easter Eve. The Easter Vigil begins in darkness, recalling the darkness before Creation and the darkness of the tomb. The liturgy consists of four parts: **The Light** (kindling of new fire and lighting the Paschal candle to represent the dawning of Creation and the new light of Easter Morning); **The Lessons** (key readings and psalms from Scripture); **Baptism or the Renewal of Baptism** (committing or recommitting to our life with Christ); and the **Holy Eucharist**. In some traditions, the Vigil readings are offered with drama or humor, sometimes with costumes and props. The Easter Vigil is a time of remembering, re-telling, and living into the fullness of our relationship with and experiences of God from the beginning of time through the present.

Read

Exodus 14:10-30:

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.

Wonder

At the Easter Vigil, we remember our Sacred Stories of faith. In addition to the Exodus story consider reading the other appointed readings for the Great Vigil of Easter. Which speak most deeply to you? Share one of these, or another of your favorite faith stories with someone else. Invite them to share one of their favorites with you. It can be a story from the Bible, from your family history, or from your own life. Share how it has shaped your faith and inspires you. Read from a book, act it out, call a friend, write a letter, or post on social media.

Appointed Vigil Readings

Genesis 1:1-2:24a (Creation);
Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18; 8:6-18; 9:8-13 (the Flood);
Genesis 22:1-18 (the binding of Isaac);
Exodus 14:10-31;15:20-21 (crossing of the Red Sea);
Baruch 3:9-15, 32- 4:4 or Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6 (God's presence in a renewed Israel);
Isaiah 55:1-11 (salvation offered freely to all);
Ezekiel 36:24-28 (a new heart and new spirit);
Ezekiel 37:1-14 (the valley of dry bones);
Zephaniah 3:14-20 (the gathering of God's people)

Pray

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 splendor, 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.

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

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 humanity is reconciled to God.

SOURCE: Excerpt from *The Exsultet: The Book of Common Prayer*, Church Publishing, 1979, p. 286-7.