

Jesus is in Jerusalem during the 8-day Jewish Feast of the Dedication. We know the Dedication as Hanukkah, a festival of lights held in December. The Jewish feast celebrates the Maccabees' rededication of the altar and re-consecration of the temple in 164 B.C., after their desecration by Antiochus IV Epiphanesⁱ.

The past often casts light on future events. In a prior visit to Jerusalem, Jesus had foretold of his own passion. "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up... He was speaking about the temple of his body" (Jn 2:19,21). Following his death and resurrection, we celebrate the conquering of sin and death with the 8-day Octave of Easter. "The Father sent Jesus into the world, darkened by sin, to be its spiritual light. As the light, Jesus guides us on the way to eternal life with the Father... Those who follow Jesus believe that he illumines the way to the Father, and they live their lives accordingly."ⁱⁱ

In the Easter Vigil, Jesus illumines the way to the Father as we sing of Christ our light. "After the blessing of the Easter fire, the ... deacon processes into the darkened church with the lit Easter candle while singing "Christ, our Light," to signify the risen Christ as the light of the world."ⁱⁱⁱ Those who participate in this awe-inspiring liturgy carry small candles. Each small candle is lit from the large candle representing Christ. A darkened church is thus illuminated by a thousand points of light.

With the singing of the Easter Proclamation, we are reminded of God's light always being present to God's holy people in time of great need. In the dark of night, the Israelites escaped the slavery of Egypt crossing on dry land through the Red Sea. They escaped from slavery. This prefigures the new Passover when Christ descends to the dead and opens the gates for all of those held in darkness to rise to new life with his resurrection from the dead. "This is the night that with a pillar of fire banished the darkness of sin... The sanctifying power of this night dispels wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners, drives out hatred, fosters concord, and brings down the mighty" (Roman Missal, Exsultet).

When the risen Jesus appeared to the Apostles, he enlightened their minds: "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (Lk 24:44-45). Following the Easter Proclamation, our minds our opened to the Scriptures as we here of salvation history from the dawn of creation through the resurrection of Jesus. Saint Paul summarizes it's meaning for us. "We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life" (Rom 6:4).

Following the Liturgy of the Word, Catechumens are called forward to the Baptismal font one by one to the font of rebirth. With a prayer that once again recapitulates salvation history, we invoke the Holy Spirit to sanctify the water so that human nature, created in God's "image may be washed clean through the Sacrament of Baptism from all the squalor of the life of old" (Roman Missal). After rejecting the darkness of sin and proclaiming belief in the light of Christ through an all encompassing profession of faith, new members are added to the church. Each one receives a baptismal candle lit from the Easter Candle. The church once illuminated by a thousand points of light grows brighter with the light of Christ being extended to each new member.

In the Gospel today, Jesus is challenged by non-believers. "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly" (Jn 10:24). Jesus speaks to us eloquently and profoundly through our liturgy and rituals. With Baptism, we receive the promise of eternal life. We are called to walk in the light. We are

called to follow the example of Jesus and lay down our lives for the good of others. At life's end, when our earthly light dims, the just Judge calls us once again. He is the Good Shepherd calling us to follow him. "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish" (10:27-28).

ⁱ Antiochus, a foreign king saw the wealth of the temple in Jerusalem and sent in troops to plunder loot and destroy it. Many were killed, others were taken as slaves. Judaism was outlawed. The Torah was burned. Circumcision was prohibited as was observance of the Sabbath. The temple taken from the Jews was profaned as a shrine for pagans.

ⁱⁱ Martin, Francis; Wright, William M. IV. The Gospel of John. Pg. 154.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. Pg. 155.