

## ***“Sustained by the Word”***

The Easter Vigil historically has been a vigil through the night, waiting for the break of dawn to celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord by eating and drinking with Him at His Table – receiving His resurrected, and everlasting life.

Our vigil, which began last night – began with the Service of Light. Christ is the Light of the world – and the light of the candles remind us that He is present in the midst of us – to scatter the darkness.

Next comes the Service of Readings – where the Word of God is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Faith comes by hearing, the Apostle Paul says – and we heard God’s Word concerning the Creation, the Flood, the Rescue of Israel at the Red Sea, the Valley of Dry Bones, Job confessing the Redeemer, Jonah preaching to Nineveh – and the Gathering of God’s People.

Then followed the Service of Holy Baptism – reminding us that we live daily in our baptism. Through Holy Baptism, Jesus unites us to Himself, and dwells with us. As we, the baptized children of God, continue our vigil – the Word made flesh Jesus, continues to lighten our path.

The Creation account from Genesis enlightens us in many ways. Not only has the Lord created ALL things in heaven and on earth – but all that He has created is “very good.” It is perfect. In perfect harmony. Arranged in such a way that all of creation lives in perfect communion. This is important for us to hear – since all who are baptized into Christ are a “new creation.”

What was created “very good” has been totally corrupted by man’s Fall into Sin. The sin of Adam not only brought death to all creation – it threw a wrench into all that was created “very good.” By the time we get to Noah, we see the chaos of man’s wickedness – as mankind did only evil all the time.

In the Flood, God's grace pierces the wickedness of the world. All have sinned, all are deserving of death – yet God is the God of life, He has created us to live, not die – and so He goes to work, to save, to give life.

He sends Noah to preach repentance and salvation through the means that God provides, the Ark. In the flood, God kills and makes alive – He drowns the unbelieving sinners – and rescues the sinners who look to Him and His Ark of salvation.

And so it is today, that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God – our wickedness deserving only death. But our gracious Lord provides us with the Ark of Holy Baptism – as through water and His Word – He kills our Old Adam and makes alive a new man – resurrected by Christ's forgiveness, to live as a new creation, as God desires us to live.

Again, at the Red Sea, the Word of God reveals how God is at work through water to kill and make alive. Through the blood of the Passover Lamb, Israel is brought out of slavery – only to find themselves in a deadly pinch, with Pharaoh's armies hot on their heels – but the Lord is with them. He saves them through water – and by that same water, destroys their enemies.

In the waters of Holy Baptism, the Lord, by His Word – kills and makes alive. He washes you in the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ – redeeming you from captivity, setting you free, leading you out of bondage. He drowns your sinful nature with all its sinful desires – and brings the new man safely through the waters to a new life.

The reading from Ezekiel 37 of the Valley of Dry Bones is a fascinating scene – in which the Lord reveals, once again, how He is at work to bring forth life from death. A valley full of dead, dry bones – depicting Israel, dead in their trespasses and sins, cut off from the Lord of life.

The Lord preaches to them through His prophet Ezekiel – and the bones come together, bone to bone – then sinews, flesh and skin – but they had no breath in them. So, the Lord breathes into them the breath of life – and they lived and stood on their feet.

In Holy Baptism the Holy Spirit breathes life into you – resurrecting you from your graves so that you may live. Through this washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit – you are justified by God’s grace, and made to be heirs having the hope of eternal life.

When you think of Job, you might think of suffering. Incredible suffering – and to add to it – his friends were of no help – and God doesn’t come to his immediate aid. Yet Job is a believer, one who trusts the Lord – even in the midst of such misery.

Job trusts that the Lord is gracious – even if his life looks otherwise. He believes that his life is in the Lord’s hands – and that even if he dies, he will be resurrected to new life. “Yet in my flesh,” he confesses, “I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”

That too is your hope, your confession – for you have been baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection – and just as Christ was raised from the dead – so you, and Job, and all who believe in Christ – shall be raised from death to life. That is your Easter hope, and joy.

When Christ was raised, He sent His apostles to preach the Gospel to all nations, baptizing and teaching them. Well, back in Jonah’s day – the Lord called him to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh – but Jonah wasn’t having any of it. *If I preach to them, they may repent, and the Lord will forgive them.* That’s the last thing he wanted. And so he ran away – in the opposite direction of Nineveh.

The Lord stopped Jonah dead in his tracks. He’s thrown overboard and sinks to the watery depths – as good as dead. In His repenting work, the Lord also saves Jonah by means of a great fish – his ark of salvation through the waters.

Jesus connects this OT water story with His own life, when He says in St. Matthew’s Gospel – “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (12:40) Just as Jonah and Jesus are resurrected from death – so you also, who are baptized into Christ – shall be bodily raised from death to life on the Last Day.

The last reading from Zephaniah prophesies the gathering of all God's people – not just Israel being gathered from exile – but believers from all nations. As God's Word says regarding His Church – “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Eph. 4:4-5)

The Lord has gathered you here this day. You have received the gift of His Name in Holy Baptism, and so you gather to call upon His Name. You hear His Word, which lightens the way that leads to everlasting life. You are gathered to His Table – to eat His Body and drink His Blood – a foretaste of the feast to come.

When the Last Day comes, our Easter Vigil will be over – as the whole congregation of believers are gathered to Christ in heaven – to celebrate eternally the Resurrection of Our Lord, and our resurrection – with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ is risen, He is risen indeed. Alleluia!