

“The Easter Vigil”

In the Bible, the day comes to a close at sundown – and that’s when the new day begins. That’s why the Easter Vigil begins on what we would call “Saturday night” after sundown – but it’s actually the beginning of a new day – the first day of the week – the day of our Lord’s resurrection.

Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb and sees that the stone has been rolled away – that the tomb is empty. With the crucifixion of Jesus – Christ’s work of salvation “it is finished” – and the empty tomb proclaims loud and clear that sin and death have been defeated – that Christ’s redemption brings with it the resurrection of the body.

All of those Old Testament readings from last night [the Creation account, the Flood, the Exodus, Jonah preaching to the Ninevites, and the Fiery Furnace] – they are all brought to completion in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the day when everything the Scriptures teach, reach their fulfillment in Jesus.

This is the first day of the new Creation – when Christ who is the Light of the world shines into the darkness – and there is light. The chaos and disorder that our sin has brought to God’s good, orderly creation is chased away. The light of the world enters the darkness of death’s tomb and drives out death – and in Christ, God once again declares His creation to be “very good.”

You are baptized into Christ Jesus. What does this mean? St. Paul writes: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come.” The light of Christ has driven away your deeds of darkness so that you might walk in the light of His truth.

This is the day of the new creation – scrubbed clean from the wickedness of man that had covered the earth – washed away in the flood of God’s wrath. As He promised at the time of the Flood, never again will He wipe all mankind from the face of the earth. Instead, He pours out His wrath, and the penalty of sin, upon only one man.

Jesus Christ alone endures the wrath of God. He alone dies for sin. And you? You are kept safe in His Ark, the Church. You are baptized into Christ. Your old sinful nature put to death, and the new man carried safely through the flood --- stepping out into a new creation, a new life, the life of faith in Christ Jesus.

This is the day of the Exodus – passing through the Red Sea – Christ Jesus Himself leading the way in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. This passing through the waters of the Red Sea “corresponds in type to Baptism which now saves you” the Apostle Peter writes.

Baptism unites you to Christ in His death and resurrection. In Baptism, you have died with Christ, and been resurrected with Christ. Your old sinful nature is drown with Pharaoh and his army – and your new man in Christ walks through the parted waters on dry ground --- for Christ has redeemed you and set you free!

This is the day of repentance – when God’s Word changes hearts and minds – turning them from their evil ways – to the Lord who has mercy, and spares the sinner.

This is the day of testing in the fiery furnace – when faith commends yourself, your body and soul and all things – into the hands of the Lord. Whether you live or die, you belong to the Lord. And each day, from sundown to sundown – faith teaches you that – “for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Creation, Flood, Exodus, the Repentance of the Ninevites and the Three Men in the Fiery Furnace --- on this first day of the week, the new creation – everything comes together in Jesus Christ. This is a day of feasting – overflowing with the abundance of Christ’s Word, His Baptism, and His Supper.

He who was dead, and now lives eternally – now sets before you His heavenly banquet – paid in full by His Divine Service. The feast is ready. Come, eat and drink, without cost – for the price has been paid with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

On this day, His redeeming blood covers you – His forgiveness resurrects you – His love and mercy attends to all your needs – for you live and reign with Christ your Savior, today, and forevermore. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keeps your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.