

The Great Vigil of Easter:

A Celebration of our Lord's Resurrection and of our Baptism

March 30th, 2024

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam

The Concept of a Vigil

A vigil is an evening service of Scripture readings and prayers in which believers *vigilantly* and eagerly wait and watch for the celebration of the Savior's deliverance. Old Testament believers waited through the night of the Passover for God to deliver them from the Egyptians (Exodus 12:42). The midnight worship reported in Acts 20:7-12 is another example of late-night waiting and watching. One might say that our Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve services are vigils of sorts. Coming together for a vigil helps believers practice waiting patiently for God to reveal his will in his own good time.

The History of the Easter Vigil

The Easter Vigil is the most well-known and historic of the Church's vigils. In fact, in its general structure, it is one of the most ancient rites of the Christian Church. Early records indicate that it may have been celebrated in Jerusalem already by the second century, and it soon spread to the rest of the church.

From its beginnings, the Easter Vigil was closely connected to Holy Baptism. In the pagan world, a conversion to Christianity meant making a clean break from one's former lifestyle. It also meant facing difficult times, perhaps even death. The instruction of adults was, therefore, intensive and thorough, practical as well as intellectual. The instruction intensified during the season of Lent, as catechumens pondered not only the Savior's battle with evil, but also their own battle with Satan and his forces. The instruction culminated with baptism at the Easter Vigil. The timing was natural, of course:

"All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:3-4).

As the tide of adult conversions waned in Europe and infant baptism became the norm, the purpose and understanding of the Vigil faded. Eventually, virtually all baptisms took place at times other than the Vigil. By the time of the Lutheran Reformation, the Vigil had fallen into disuse, although it continued uninterrupted in the Eastern Orthodox Church and remains a high point of Easter worship to this day.

The Easter Vigil in the 21st Century Church

It is a well-documented phenomenon that, in an age of spacecrafts and supercomputers, more and more Christians are longing to return to the quiet and contemplative worship forms of the early Church. They are sensing a need to come into the presence of God whose love is above and beyond them. They desire worship that communicates God's transcendent majesty rather than trivializing him with folksy familiarity. For this and a number of other reasons, the Easter Vigil is enjoying a comeback in the 21st century Christian Church. With its quiet contemplation, slow-paced movement, and highly-symbolic communication, the Easter Vigil is attractive to many Christians who are seeking a deeper and more thorough spirituality. Especially in churches that follow the Church Year, the Easter Vigil marks the high point of Holy Week and the turning point of the Christian Year.

The Easter Vigil Order of Worship

The Easter Vigil (sometimes called the *Paschal Vigil*) is fundamentally transitional: it celebrates the transition from darkness to light, from Old Testament to New, from death to life, from Good Friday to Easter Sunday – and all along the way, directly connects the power of God's Word and Sacraments in our lives to Christ's death and resurrection (See Romans 6:3-4 above). The Vigil consists of four parts: the Service of Light, the Service of Readings (the actual Vigil), the Service of Holy Baptism, and the Service of Holy Communion. Historically, the Vigil begins after darkness has fallen on Holy Saturday (by Jewish reckoning, the day of resurrection began at sundown on Saturday evening) and lasts through the night, with the baptisms taking place at dawn. For practical reasons, however, an all-night vigil is seldom held today.

The Service of Light focuses the entire Vigil on Christ, the Light of the World (symbolized by the paschal candle) who overcame the darkness of sin and death by his resurrection. The first song of the Vigil, the *Exsultet*, links our paschal feast with the first Passover and with God's deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea. The song introduces the theme of God's saving acts in history, a theme that runs through the Service of Readings.

There are 12 Old Testament readings traditionally appointed for the Easter Vigil. Most congregations use between four and seven, although lessons from Genesis 1-2 and Exodus 14 are invariably read. Unhurried periods of silence for reflection follow each lesson and help to identify the service as a vigil.

When no baptisms take place in the Vigil, the Service of Holy Baptism identifies baptism as one of God's great acts of deliverance that has been applied to each individual Christian, connects baptism with Christ's resurrection, and gives believers an opportunity to publicly confess the faith into which they have been baptized.

An atmosphere of solemn anticipation and meditation (as well as relative darkness) is maintained until the proclamation, "Alleluia! Christ Is Risen!" marks the beginning of our Easter celebration. The tone for the rest of the service is solemn joy, with which we then come together to the Lord's Table. The Vigil Communion is relatively simple in form and style, since the chief celebration of Easter and its highest festivities and ceremonies are usually reserved for the main Easter morning service.

The Service of Light

*There in the ground his body lay, Light of the world by darkness slain;
Then bursting forth in glorious day Up from the grave he rose again!*

~ "In Christ Alone," v. 3 ~

The congregation assembles in the church in darkness and silence. All are given candles as they arrive. At the invitation of the minister, the congregation stands and turns to face the procession in the back of the church.

M(*inister*): In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C(ongregation): Amen.

M: On this most holy night, in which our Lord Jesus Christ passed over from death to life, we are gathered here in vigil and prayer. This is the commemoration of our Lord's resurrection in which, by hearing his Word and celebrating his sacraments, we share in his victory over death. Let us pray.

O God, you are like a refiner's fire, and your Spirit kindles the hearts of your faithful people with the fire of your love. Bless us as we celebrate this Easter festival that, burning with desire for life with you, we may be found rightly prepared to share in the feast of light which has no end, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

The candle bearer, holding the paschal candle, steps forward. The minister traces the cross and touches the five points on the cross representing the wounds of Christ, saying:

M: Christ Jesus, the same yesterday, today, and forever, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega.

His are time and eternity; his are the glory and dominion now and forever.

By his wounds we are healed now and forever.

May the light of Christ, who is risen in glory from the dead, scatter all the darkness of our hearts and minds. Let us pray.

Almighty and most merciful Father, once we were darkness, but now we are light in Jesus Christ our Lord. Abundantly bless all who joyfully celebrate this night in faith in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Fill us with your heavenly blessing in him, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

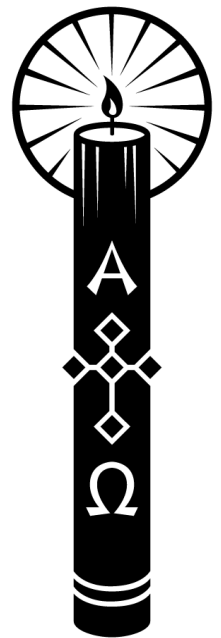
C: Amen.

All light their candles from the flames taken from the paschal candle. Please tip your candle to receive the flame, and hold it upright to pass on the flame.

At the entrance to the nave, the candle bearer pauses and says:

M: The light of Christ.

C: Thanks be to God.



Halfway to the altar, the candle bearer pauses and says:

M: The light of Christ.

C: Thanks be to God.

When the candle bearer arrives before the altar, he faces the congregation and says:

M: The light of Christ.

C: Thanks be to God.

The Easter Proclamation

M: Rejoice now, all you heavenly choirs of angels; rejoice now, all creation; sound forth, trumpet of salvation, and proclaim the triumph of our King.

Rejoice too, all the earth, in the radiance of the light now poured upon you and made brilliant by the brightness of the everlasting King; know that the ancient darkness has been forever banished.

Rejoice, O Church of Christ, clothed in the brightness of this light; let all this house of God ring out with rejoicing, with the praises of all God's faithful people.

♪ **Exsultet Hymn**

The Congregation will sing to the tune of Christian Worship #889, "Jerusalem the Golden."

**1. Exult, O angel armies,
You warriors of light.
Sound forth the golden trumpet
To end the darkest night.
Proclaim with fearless voices
The triumph of our King.
Rejoice, O host of heaven;
A new song to him sing:
"The Lamb, once slain, is living!
To him be strength and praise!
The Lion of salvation
Shall reign for endless days!"**

**2. Exult, O earth, in gladness,
All flooded now with light,
Ablaze with warmth and glory
That puts the gloom to flight.
Be sure, O earthly creatures;
All mortals, learn this well:
The King of all the ages
Has smashed the gates of hell.
From dust he has arisen;
In flesh immortal stands,
With light and life and glory
For all the tribes and lands.**

**3. Exult, O Church, in glory.
O Bride, now see your Groom
Like lightning in the heavens
Has left behind his tomb.
Behold, he now has clothed you
In dazzling splendor bright;
Exchanged your rags of mourning
For royal robes of white.
So thunder now, God's people,
And shake the walls with song.
Your King has conquered darkness,
And righted ev'ry wrong.**

M: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

M: Lift up your hearts.

C: We lift them up to the Lord.

M: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C: It is right to give him thanks and praise.

M: It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places, with all our hearts and minds and voices, praise you, O Lord, Holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, and your one and only Son, Jesus Christ. For he is the true Paschal Lamb, who offered himself for the sin of the world, who has cleansed us by the shedding of his precious blood.

This is the night when you brought our ancestors, the children of Israel, out of bondage in Egypt and led them through the Red Sea on dry ground. This is the night when all who believe in Christ are delivered from bondage to sin and are restored to life and immortality. This is the night when Christ, the Life, arose from the dead. The seal of the tomb is broken and the morning of the new creation breaks forth out of night. Oh, how wonderful and boundless is your mercy toward us, O God, that to redeem a slave you gave your Son.

How holy is this night when all wickedness is put to flight and sin is washed away. How holy is this night when innocence is restored to the fallen and joy is given to the downcast. How blessed is this night when mankind is reconciled to God in Christ.

Holy Father, accept now the evening sacrifices of our thanksgiving and praise. Let Christ, the true Light and Morning Star, shine in our hearts, he who gives light to all creation, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Please extinguish your candles and be seated.

The Service of Readings

"I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

~ Acts 26:22-23 ~

M: On this most holy night, our Savior Christ the Lord broke the power of death and by his resurrection brought life and salvation to all creation. Let us praise the Lord, for he truly keeps his word. The sun of righteousness has dawned on those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Four Old Testament Lessons are read. The first lesson reminds us of the perfect existence that will be restored to us at the resurrection to eternal life. The other lessons tell of God's great acts of deliverance in history, each prefiguring God's greatest act of deliverance in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, with which we participate through the power of His Word and Sacraments. A period of silence for meditation and prayer follows each of the lessons.

The First Reading: Genesis 1:1–2:3

Creation

^{1:1} In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

⁶ And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” ⁷ So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so.

⁸ God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

⁹ And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

¹¹ Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. ¹² The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars.

¹⁷ God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” ²¹ So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

²⁹ Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

^{2:1} Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

M: The Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Silence for meditation.

M: Let us pray.

Almighty God, you wonderfully created human nature and more wonderfully redeemed it. By your mercy renew us in the image of him who came to share our humanity, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen.

The Second Reading: Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18; 8:6-18; 9:8-13

The Flood

^{7:1} The LORD then said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. ² Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, ³ and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. ⁴ Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.”

⁵ And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him.

¹¹ In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. ¹² And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.

¹³ On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. ¹⁴ They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings. ¹⁵ Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark. ¹⁶ The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD shut him in.

¹⁷ For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. ¹⁸ The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water.

^{8:6} After forty days Noah opened a window he had made in the ark ⁷ and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. ⁸ Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. ⁹ But the dove could find nowhere to perch because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. ¹⁰ He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. ¹¹ When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. ¹² He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.

¹³ By the first day of the first month of Noah’s six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. ¹⁴ By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

¹⁵ Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶ “Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. ¹⁷ Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it.”

¹⁸ So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives.

^{9:8} Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹ “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰ and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

¹² And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

M: The Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Silence for meditation.

M: Let us pray.

O Lord, whose wrath burned against the evil of humanity, you brought the flood on a wicked and perverse generation and yet saved faithful Noah and his family. Gather your people into your Church, and so complete your work of mercy, that the ends of the earth may know your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen.

♪ Hymn: #325, My Soul in Stillness Waits



For you, O Lord, my soul in still-ness waits; tru-ly my hope is in you.



1 O Lord of Light, our on - ly hope of glo - ry,
2 O Spring of Joy, rain down up - on our spir - its;
3 O Root of Life, im - plant your seed with - in us,



your ra-diance shines in all who look to you; come, light the
our thirst-y hearts are yearn-ing for your Word; come, make us
and in your ad - vent draw us all to you, our hope re-



hearts of all in dark and shad-ow.
whole, be com-fort to our hearts.
born in dy - ing and in ris - ing.

The Third Reading: Exodus 14:10-15:1

Israel's Deliverance at the Red Sea

^{14:10} As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

¹³ Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. ¹⁶ Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷ I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. ¹⁸ The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.”

¹⁹ Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, ²⁰ coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, ²² and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

²³ The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. ²⁴ During the last watch of the night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. ²⁵ He jammed the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, “Let’s get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.”

²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.” ²⁷ Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. ²⁸ The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

²⁹ But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. ³⁰ That day the LORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. ³¹ And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

^{15:1} Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

“I will sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.
Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea.”

M: The Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Silence for meditation.

M: Let us pray.

O God, you once delivered your people Israel from slavery under Pharaoh and led them safely through the Red Sea. By this you gave us a picture of Baptism. Lead us always to rejoice in your baptismal promise, that we may live in its grace and declare to all people your desire to save them and bring them to a knowledge of your truth, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen.

The Fourth Reading: Daniel 3:1–29

The Fiery Furnace

¹ King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ² He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. ³ So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

⁴ Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: ⁵ As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

⁷ Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

⁸ At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “May the king live forever! ¹⁰ Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, ¹¹ and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹² But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

¹³ Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, ¹⁴ and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? ¹⁵ Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰ and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹ So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²² The king’s command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?”

They replied, “Certainly, Your Majesty.”

²⁵ He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.”

²⁶ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!”

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, ²⁷ and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

²⁸ Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. ²⁹ Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.”

M: The Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Silence for meditation.

M: Let us pray.

O God, your Son protected faithful Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace of the king. Protect us in our time of testing that we boldly confess your name, reject all false worship, and live and die in confidence, knowing that we are safe in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen.

The Service of Holy Baptism

“This floodwater symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

~ 1 Peter 3:21 ~

M: On this most holy night, the whole Church of our Lord Jesus Christ recalls his death and burial, rejoicing in the gospel of his glorious resurrection from the dead. Holy Baptism is the priceless means of grace by which our Father in heaven connects us with Christ in his life, death, and resurrection.

The paschal candle is dipped in the water of the baptismal font and the sign of the cross is made as a symbol that it is Christ’s death and resurrection that give baptism its power.

M: The apostle Paul wrote: “All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Again Paul wrote: “All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

♪ **Hymn: #685, Through Simple Water, Drawn and Poured**

1 Through simple wa - ter, drawn and poured, u - nit - ed
2 There at the font with prom - ise true God brings his
3 My sin - ful self was cru - ci - fied with Christ, as
with his pow'r - ful Word, in bap - tism Je - sus sets us
sav - ing grace a - new— the sin - in - fect - ed soul he
if I, too, had died; and as he rose, I al - so
free from sin's dread pow'r and slav - er - y.
heals and all his par - d'ning love re - veals!
rise to live with strength that he sup - plies.

The Confession of Faith

Please stand.

M: In Holy Baptism, God takes away our sins and us gives new life. We reject the devil and confess that we believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I ask you: Do you reject the devil along with all his lies and empty promises?

C: Yes, and I ask God to help me.

M: Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?

C: Yes, I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

M: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son?

C: Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

M: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

C: Yes, I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

M: Is it your sincere prayer and desire to remain faithful to your Lord Jesus, to value the Word and sacraments, and to live a life that pleases God?

C: Yes, and I ask God to help me.

M: May the eternal God, who saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, bless you and keep you until life's end.

C: Amen.

The Service of Holy Communion

“Christ did not reveal his majesty at all times but only when it pleased him, until he completely laid aside the form of a servant after his resurrection... Therefore, he is able – it is very easy for him – to share his true body and blood, present in the Holy Supper.”

~ Formula of Concord, Epitome, 8:16-17 ~

The altar candles are now lit from the paschal candle. The lights of the church are fully lit, bells are rung, and the minister proclaims:

M: Alleluia! Christ is risen!

C: He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

♪ Hymn of Praise: #938, v. 1, 3, 5, This Is the Feast

Refrain



This is the feast of vic - to - ry for our God.



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!

1 † Wor - thy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose
3 Sing with all the peo - ple of God, and
5 For the Lamb _____ who was slain has be -



blood set us free _____ to be peo - ple of God. *Refrain*
join in the hymn of all cre - a - tion: v. 5
gun his _____ reign. — Al - le - lu - ia! *Final Refrain*

Final Refrain



This is the feast of vic - to - ry for our God.



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!

The Prayer of the Day

M: O God, who made this most holy night to shine with the glory of the resurrection of our Lord, preserve in all your people the Spirit of adoption which you have given, that they may serve you in faith and joy, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Following the prayer, the paschal candle leads a Gospel procession to the center of the nave where the Gospel is read in the midst of the people, just as Christ dwells in the midst of his people through faith in his Word (Matthew 18:20, John 15:4-7). Please turn toward the procession as the Gospel is read.

The Gospel Reading: John 20:1-18

The Resurrection

¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

M: The Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise be to you, O Christ!

The paschal candle is returned to its stand.

Hymn Response: #449, v. 1, This Joyful Eastertide

1 This joy - ful Eas - ter - tide a - way with sin and
sor - row! My love, the Cru - ci - fied,
has sprung to life this mor - row.
Had Christ, who once was slain, not burst his three-day pris - on,
our faith had been in vain: but now has Christ a - ris - en, a -
ris - en, a - ris - en; but now has Christ a - ris - en!

The Celebration of the Sacrament

M: On this most holy night, the whole Church of our Lord Jesus Christ joyfully celebrates his resurrection from the dead. Our Lord has won our forgiveness, life, and salvation by his death and resurrection. He now comes to us in the Sacrament of the Altar to personally bless us with these gifts. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Holy, Holy, Holy ~ Sanctus

Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord God of heav - en - ly hosts:
heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho - san - na, ho -
san - na, ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he,
bless - ed is he, bless - ed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Ho - san - na, ho - san - na, ho - san - na in the high - est.

The Lord's Prayer

C: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

The Words of Institution

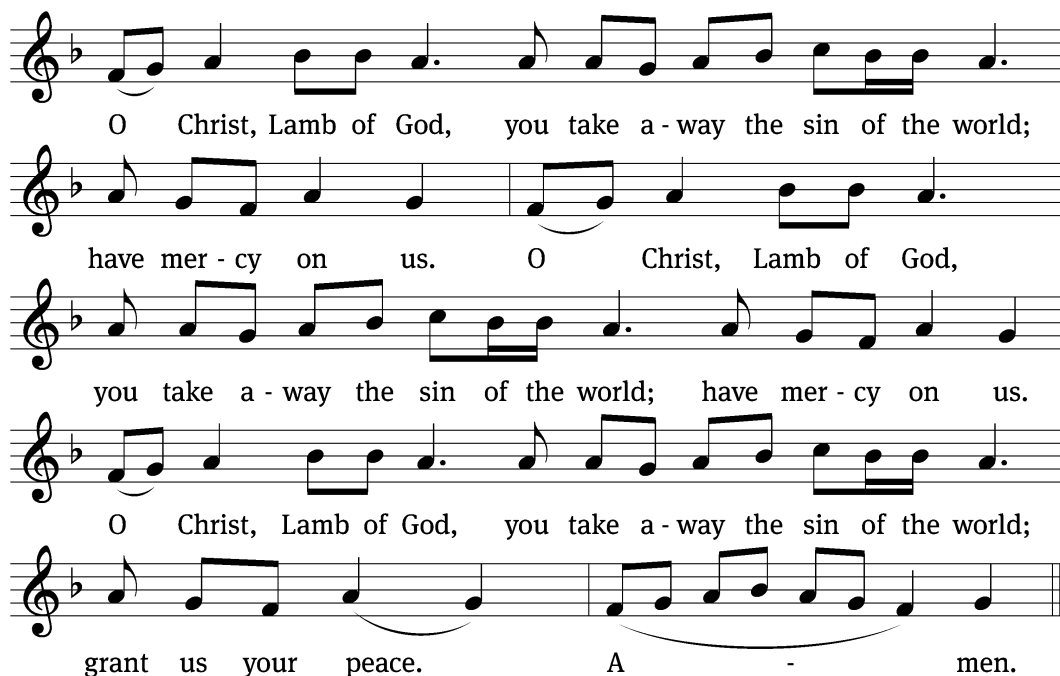
M: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: Amen.

O Christ, Lamb of God ~ *Agnus Dei*



O Christ, Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world;
have mer-cy on us. O Christ, Lamb of God,
you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on us.
O Christ, Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world;
grant us your peace. A - men.

Please be seated.

The Distribution

In order to preserve our spiritual unity (1 Corinthians 10:17) and protect against anyone's spiritual harm (1 Corinthians 11:27-29), our congregation and synod follow the historic Christian practice of Close Communion. Confirmed members of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod are invited to celebrate the Lord's Supper with us.

♪ **Distribution Hymn: #675, At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing**



1 At the Lamb's high feast we sing praise to
2 Praise we him whose love di - vine gives his
3 Where the pas - chal blood is poured, death's dread
4 Praise we Christ, whose blood was shed, pas - chal



our vic - to - rious King, who has washed us in the tide
sa - cred blood for wine, gives his bod - y for the feast—
an - gel sheathes the sword; Is - rael's hosts tri - um - phant go
vic - tim, pas - chal bread; with sin - cer - i - ty and love



flow - ing from his pierc - ed side. Al - le - lu - ia!
Christ the vic - tim, Christ the priest. Al - le - lu - ia!
thro' the wave that drowns the foe. Al - le - lu - ia!
eat we man - na from a - bove. Al - le - lu - ia!

5 Mighty Victim from the sky,
hell's fierce pow'rs beneath you lie.
You have conquered in the fight,
you have brought us life and light.
Alleluia!

6 Now no more can death appall,
now no more the grave enthrall;
you have opened paradise,
and your saints in you shall rise.
Alleluia!

7 Easter triumph, Easter joy!
This alone can sin destroy;
from sin's pow'r, Lord, set us free,
newborn souls in you to be.
Alleluia!

8 Father, who the crown shall give,
Savior, by whose death we live,
Spirit, guide through all our days,
Three in One, your name we praise.
Alleluia!

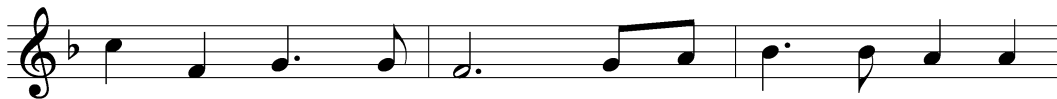
♩ Distribution Hymn: #470, Like the Golden Sun Ascending



1 Like the gold - en sun as - cend - ing, break - ing through the
 2 Thanks to you, O Christ vic - to - rious! Thanks to you, O
 3 You have died for my trans - gres - sion, all my sins on
 4 For the joy your ad - vent gave me, for your gos - pel's



gloom of night, on the earth its glo - ry spend - ing so that
 Lord of life! Death has now no pow - er o'er us, you have
 you were laid. You have won for me sal - va - tion, on the
 great re - ward, for your bap - tism which has saved me, for your



dark - ness takes to flight, thus my Je - sus from the
 con - quered in the strife. Thanks be - cause you did a -
 cross my debt was paid. From the grave I shall a -
 sup - per and your Word; for your death, the bit - ter



grave and death's dis - mal, dread - ful cave rose tri -
 rise and have o - pened par - a - dise! None can
 rise and shall meet you in the skies. Death it -
 scorn, for your res - ur - rec - tion morn: Lord, I



um - phant Eas - ter morn - ing at the ear - ly pur - ple dawn - ing.
 ful - ly sing the glo - ry of the res - ur - rec - tion sto - ry.
 self is tran - si - to - ry; I shall lift my head in glo - ry.
 thank you and ex - tol you, and in heav'n I shall be - hold you.

Please stand.

M: Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

C: his mercy endures forever.

M: Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,

C: we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

M: Let us pray.

We thank you, Lord, that you have nourished us with your Easter sacraments. Fill us with your Spirit, the Spirit of your love, that those whom you have satisfied with one heavenly bread may be united in one holy will, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

M: Almighty God, you give us the joy of celebrating our Lord's resurrection. Give us also the joys of life in your service and bring us at last to the full joy of life eternal, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

The Lord's Blessing

M: The almighty and merciful Lord—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—bless us and keep us.

C: Amen.



Please be seated.

The Closing Hymn: #450, The Day of Resurrection



1 The day of res - ur - rec - tion! Earth, tell it out a - broad,
2 Our hearts be pure from e - vil that we may see a - right
3 Now let the heav'ns be joy - ful, let earth her song be - gin,



the pass - o - ver of glad - ness, the pass - o - ver of God.
the Lord in rays e - ter - nal of res - ur - rec - tion light
let all the world keep tri - umph and all that is there - in.



From death to life e - ter - nal, from earth un - to the sky,
and, lis - t'ning to his ac - cents, may hear, so calm and plain,
Let all things, seen and un - seen, their notes of glad-ness blend,



our Christ has brought us o - ver with hymns of vic - to - ry.
his own "All hail!" and, hear - ing, may raise the vic - tor strain.
for Christ the Lord has ris - en, our joy that has no end.



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