

THE MOTHER OF ALL VIGILS:  
THE USE OF THE ANCIENT EASTER VIGIL IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LUTHERAN CHURCHES

BY  
DOUGLAS R. VAN SICE

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PASTOR AARON CHRISTIE, ADVISOR  
WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY  
MEQUON, WISCONSIN  
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## ABSTRACT

The Great Easter Vigil is certainly the most majestic and beautifully symbolic service in all of Christendom. With roots that trace back to the early second century, the Great Vigil is the most ancient of genuinely Christian celebrations. Its solemnity is unmistakable. Its reverence is undeniable. The service begins in the dark solemnity of Good Friday. It ends in the dawning light of Easter with triumphant shouts of “Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!” For all its historicity and majesty, reverence and symbolism, the Vigil fell into disuse for one thousand years in the Western Church. It was not until the 1950’s that the Great Easter Vigil was rediscovered. From then on, it slowly made its way into Christian churches, including a select few of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). This thesis will examine the history and development of the Great Easter Vigil, give a detailed explanation of the service, and provide ideas to implement this service in a typical parish setting. When celebrated, the Great Easter Vigil will heighten the resurrection celebration in twenty-first century WELS Churches.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b> .....	1
<b><u>WHAT IS A VIGIL?</u></b> .....	3
<b><u>UNDERSTANING HOLY WEEK AND THE TRIDUUM</u></b> .....	4
Holy Thursday.....	6
Good Friday.....	8
<b><u>THE HISTORY OF THE EASTER VIGIL</u></b> .....	13
History and Development Prior to 312 AD .....	13
History and Development from 312 AD–600 AD.....	16
History and Development from 590 AD–1085 AD.....	19
History and Development from 1085 AD–1563 AD.....	20
(Pre)Vatican II Reform and Revival.....	21
<b><u>THE SERVICE OF THE EASTER VIGIL</u></b> .....	23
The Service of Light.....	26
The Service of Lessons.....	30
Service of Holy Baptism .....	32
Logistics for the Service of Holy Communion.....	35
The Service of Holy Communion .....	36
<b><u>IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING AN EASTER VIGIL SERVICE</u></b> .....	38
<b><u>CONCLUSION</u></b> .....	41
<b><u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u></b> .....	44
<b><u>APPENDIX I</u></b> .....	47
Easter Vigil Service Folder .....	47
<b><u>APPENDIX II</u></b> .....	62
Seasons of the Church Year Diagram.....	62



## INTRODUCTION

Grant found it rather odd that his family was going to church for the third day in a row, especially since it was Saturday. He knew there was never a church service on a Saturday. He also knew there was going to be a service on Sunday, making it four days in a row. Grant was not pleased, but along he went. When Grant and his family arrived at the church, he immediately noticed something was different. Everyone was standing outside by the memory garden. Being a young child, Grant could not see over the adults standing there. He could, however, see smoke billowing from a tall object in the back. When he finally reached the memory garden, he was handed a beeswax candle and a service folder and told to wait quietly. Grant was an inquisitive child, always wanting to know what was happening and the reason why. He kept asking questions but no one would give him an answer. There he stood, impatiently waiting for something unknown to begin.

Five minutes later, Grant noticed the pastor and vicar of his congregation walking toward the memory garden. They were dressed in black robes they normally didn't wear. The vicar was carrying a large candle, one that he remembered seeing in church every Sunday. The pastor and vicar walked into the memory garden. Grant followed closely behind. He was enamored by the fire and the candle that was as tall as he was. He could not take his eyes off it. The pastor began speaking. Grant listened as best he could. As the pastor spoke, he traced the cross and some interesting letters on the candle. He placed what looked like nails into the cross on the candle. Then after the pastor lit the candle, the vicar lifted it high in the air and began walking toward the church. This service was something he never remembered seeing!

Once everyone was inside, the vicar stood in the middle of the dimly lit gathering area, as the people gathered around. People walked up and lit their candles. The room began to fill with the light of fire. Finally, it was Grant's turn. He walked up to the large candle, reached as high as he could and lit his candle. He carefully backed away and went to find his parents. With everyone's candles now lit, the vicar walked toward the doors of the sanctuary. Before entering in, he elevated the candle and the pastor said something and the people responded. Then they began marching around the church. Grant proudly held his candle and marched with high knees and tight steps, just like his father in the Army. After marching around the church, Grant took his seat as the vicar and pastor moved toward the front of church. The vicar placed the large candle

into a stand in front and the pastor sang a long song. The whole time, Grant sat there intently watching and anxiously waiting for what was coming next.

The vicar began to read stories from the Bible. While Grant did not know all of them, there were some he recognized from Sunday school: the creation story, the flood, and the fiery furnace. After the last reading, Grant saw the vicar take the huge candle from its stand and walked it to the baptismal font. Grant remembered seeing several babies baptized in that font earlier in the year and he recalled the promises that God made him in baptism. The pastor began to speak again, and as he did, the vicar lowered the larger-than-life candle into the font. Grant thought that was a bit strange, but he shrugged his shoulders and kept listening. The whole time he was wondering why the lights were so dark in the church and why they were there on a Saturday. He got his answers soon enough. After the pastor finished speaking, the vicar took the candle back to the front of church. The people began to sing a hymn as the pastor, and the vicar, walked out. Grant thought this might be the end.

Grant was wrong. All the sudden, as soon as the hymn was finished, the lights were all turned on, and the church bell resounded throughout the building. He stood up and turned around to see a whole line of people entering the church. They were carrying a cross, candle lighters, and a large book. He could barely see the pastor and the vicar, but he noticed they were no longer dressed in black. They were in white, just like normal. The pastor, with his booming voice, cried out, "Christ is Risen!" Grant remembered what to do. At the top of his tiny lungs, he shouted, "He is risen indeed!" Then the whole group of people began to walk down the center aisle of the church.

They stopped near where Grant was sitting. When they stopped, the pastor opened a large book and began to read something. Grant did not know the reference, but he was remembered the story. It was the story of people finding Jesus' empty tomb on Easter. He was excited. That is when it all clicked for him. They were there to celebrate Jesus rising from the dead. For the rest of the service, he could barely contain his joy. After it was all over, Grant excitedly ran out of the church. Not because the service was over, but because of what he just celebrated in church: Jesus' resurrection. From across the parking lot, shouts of "Christ is Risen!" could be heard coming from Grant.

Even though that five-year-old boy did not understand everything that happened at the service, it connected him to Jesus in ways different from other weekly services. The fire, water,

darkness, light, singing, reading, marching—it amazed him. Although this service was long, this fidgety boy sat still and focused for the entire service. Although Grant did not know it, the service he saw and participated in was one of the oldest and most majestic services in all of Christendom: The Great Easter Vigil.

Grant's story is rare in the Wisconsin Lutheran Evangelical Synod (WELS). At the time of this writing, there is only a small, but increasing, number of WELS churches that observe the historic *Triduum* which concludes with the Easter Vigil. Instead, many churches hold an Easter dawn service. (How many of the churches who hold an Easter dawn service know that it developed from the Easter Vigil?) Although the Great Vigil is relatively new to twenty-first century Lutheranism, it is by no means a liturgical invention of our day. The Easter Vigil is rooted in antiquity, a gift to us from the early church. Combining overtones from the Passover and the Resurrection, the Easter Vigil celebrated the finished redemptive work of Christ that brings freedom from slavery, light from darkness, and life from death.<sup>1</sup> When a congregation celebrates the Easter Vigil, it will most certainly *magnify* their celebration of the resurrection. This paper hopes to serve as a resource for pastors and churches that are interested in holding an Easter Vigil service. It will provide 1) an explanation of how the Great Vigil fits into Holy Week and the *Triduum*, 2) give an overview of the Vigil's history and a detailed explanation of the service, and 3) supply a possible plan to implement this service in a congregation's worship life.

### WHAT IS A VIGIL?

While many Christians may not realize it, they have almost certainly celebrated a vigil in their lifetime. The reason they do not know they celebrated a vigil is that it is not specifically called that by name. A common vigil held in churches today is Christmas Eve.

With this in mind, what is a vigil? A vigil is an evening service containing Scripture readings and prayers in which believers eagerly wait and watch for the celebration of the Savior's deliverance. Exodus 12 gives an example of what can be considered the first vigil. On the night of the Passover, the Israelites waited and watched as the Angel of the LORD brought his mighty hand down upon the Egyptians and delivered them from the bondage of slavery. In

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<sup>1</sup> Charles L. Cortright, *The Spirit and Ceremony of Lent: Holy Week: The Conclusion of Lent and the Celebration of the Triduum* (Written for the 1995 WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts), 12.



Matthew 26, Jesus told his disciples to watch and pray – essentially to keep vigil.<sup>2</sup> Acts 20:7-12 provides another example of night-time watching and praying.

Of all the vigils celebrated, the Easter Vigil is the greatest and most theologically significant. At the Easter Vigil, the Christian participates in the resurrection of Christ. It enables New Testament Christians to take part in God’s deliverance from sin and death through his Word and Sacrament just like Israel once participated in God’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt through the Passover and Exodus.

### UNDERSTANDING HOLY WEEK AND THE TRIDUUM

Even though the structure of the Easter Vigil is unique, the Easter Vigil does not stand alone. Rather, it is one part of a three-part service called the *Triduum*. To fully grasp the beauty and magnificence of the Easter Vigil, one must first understand the structure of Holy Week and the Triduum. Holy week is the culmination of the preparatory time of Lent. Basil of Selencia said of Holy Week and the Triduum, “In one instant, he destroyed all record of our ancient debt incurred under the law to lead us to heaven where there is no death but only eternal life and righteousness.”<sup>3</sup> Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday<sup>4</sup> and ends at noon on Holy Saturday. “The practice of celebrating throughout this particular week seems to have grown from a three-day event, the Triduum (Latin for “three days”)—Holy (Maundy) Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Eve.”<sup>5</sup> The Triduum, which finds its origins in Jerusalem, actually predates the forty-day Lenten Season.<sup>6</sup> Egeria, a nun from Spain, writes concerning the celebrations of this “Great

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22

<sup>3</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 123.

<sup>4</sup> *The Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book*, 501, suggests an alternative to the traditional Palm Sunday service, Passion Sunday. It says, “The service of Passion Sunday, beginning with the procession of palms, reflects the contrasting attitudes toward Jesus that were on display during the days leading up to His crucifixion. ‘Palm Sunday’ is named after the palms that were spread before Jesus as He entered Jerusalem. The acclamation of the people, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,’ clearly reveals that they hailed Jesus as the messianic king. Yet only days later, our Lord would hear the cry ‘Crucify!’ This contrast is reflected on this day as the joy of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem gives way to the somber remembrance of His passion. The extended reading from the passion narrative sets before the faithful all that our Lord did on our behalf. Thus is the church prepared to enter Holy Week—the most important week of the entire Church Year.”

<sup>5</sup> Timothy H. Maschke, *Gathered Guests: A Guide to Worship in the Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 67.

<sup>6</sup> Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship: Lutheran Liturgy in Its Ecumenical Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 232.

Week” that had developed by AD 385.<sup>7</sup> During this period, Cyril was bishop of the church in Jerusalem. It was under his leadership that the historic sites connected with Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection became locations where stational liturgies were held during the celebration of Holy Week. These stations also served as object lessons for the catechesis which took place during the time leading up to Easter.<sup>8</sup>

While most of Lutheranism holds services only on Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, and Good Friday, that was not always historically the case. As Pfatteicher points out, there were services held every day during Holy Week during the age of orthodoxy. On Monday of Holy Week, John 12:1-11 was read because it says, “6 days before the Passover...” On Tuesday of Holy Week, the Passion account recorded in the Gospel of Mark was read. Wednesday of Holy Week recalled the account of Judas’ betrayal of Jesus and was called, “Spy Wednesday.” These days all served as preparation, leading up to the celebration of the Triduum.<sup>9</sup>

Before delving into the individual services of the Triduum, it is important to understand what makes the Triduum unique compared to the other services or festivals of the church year. St. Augustine calls these three days, “the most holy triduum of the crucified, buried, and risen Lord.”<sup>10</sup> During the fourth century, Christ’s death and resurrection was divided into the three days we now know as the Triduum. “These three days were understood to be the culmination of the entire liturgical year.”<sup>11</sup> What makes the Triduum unique from a normal Sunday service is the fact that *all the services are connected*. “Because the Triduum is one service in three parts, no Benediction is spoken after the Holy Thursday Service (or Good Friday service). The Benediction spoken at the Easter Vigil or the Chief service on Easter Sunday concludes all the services of the Three days.”<sup>12</sup>

The Triduum tells a story. In a precise manner, the three parts, each with their unique facets and emphases, allows the congregation to ponder the height and depth of their Savior’s

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<sup>7</sup> John Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 132-133.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 37-47.

<sup>9</sup> Pfatteicher, 263-68.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *Letter 55.24* (found at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102055.htm>, accessed October 10, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Pfatteicher, 239.

<sup>12</sup> *LSB: Altar Book*, 507.

love on each of the three days. It places the congregation in the upper room with Jesus when he washed his disciple's feet and instituted the Lord's Supper. It carries them off to the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was betrayed and arrested. It places them at the feet of the cross on Good Friday, right next to Mary and John. It is as if they can hear Jesus breathe his last breath and feel the ground shake as the curtain is torn in two. They solemnly mourn Jesus' death with the disciples and those closest to him. Finally, as the account of the empty tomb is read in the midst of the congregation, they see Easter's dawning light break with their own eyes. They shout the words of heaven's messengers, "He is risen indeed. Alleluia!" *The Triduum* is beautiful and contemplative all at once.

### Holy Thursday

The Triduum begins on Holy Thursday and ends Lent proper. "The oldest name of the day seems to have been the *Thursday of the Lord's Supper (in coena domini)*. The name Maundy Thursday comes through the Old French *mande* from the Latin *mandatum novum*, the new commandment of John 13:34."<sup>13</sup> The name *mandatum novum* alludes to Jesus' new command to love one another that he gave after he had washed his disciple's feet. There is evidence of ritual foot washing already in fifth-century liturgies centered in Jerusalem. Because Jerusalem was an early epicenter for pilgrimage from around the known world, this ritual foot washing spread throughout the east and eventually to the west.<sup>14</sup>

Although foot washing on Holy Thursday has both biblical and historical precedence, it has largely fallen out of use in most twentieth and twenty-first-century liturgies. For sacramental church bodies, the focus of Holy Thursday worship is Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper. This sacramental focus is not a new practice. Egeria (fourth century) says,

When all the people have assembled, the prescribed rites were celebrated. On that day the sacrifice is offered at the Martyrium, and the dismissal from there was given around the tenth hour. Before the dismissal is given, however, the archdeacon raises his voice, saying: "At the first hour of the night let us assemble at the church which is on the Eleona, for much toil lies ahead of us on this day's night." Following the dismissal from the Martyrium everyone proceeds behind the Cross, where, after a hymn is sung and a prayer is said, the bishop offers the sacrifice and everyone receives Communion.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Pfatteicher, 239.

<sup>14</sup> Adrian Nocent, *The Liturgical year: The Easter Season* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1977), 31.

<sup>15</sup> George E. Gingras, Ph.D., translator, *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage* (New York: Newman Press, 1970), 107-08.

That is just one of many examples of the historic practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday.

*Christian Worship: Occasional Services (CWOS)* offers a unique structure for the order of service on Holy Thursday. The service begins with a sermon and an explanation of the end of Lent and the beginning of the Triduum. CWOS explains,

This unusual arrangement allows the minister to explain the meaning of the Sacrament and the liturgical actions that are to take place so that they may proceed uninterruptedly and vividly from this evening through Good Friday to the Easter Vigil. The action of ceremonially stripping the altar prepares the chancel and the congregation for Good Friday.<sup>16</sup>

The practice of the stripping of the altar developed about the seventh century. The stripping of the altar was originally done as a matter of practicality because the altar cloth was used only when the Lord's Supper was celebrated. Over the course of time, the stripping of the altar came to be understood symbolically of Jesus being stripped before his crucifixion on Good Friday.<sup>17</sup>

The stripping of the altar should not be done in a haphazardly. During the stripping of the altar, a cantor or choir sings an appointed Psalm.<sup>18</sup> It is intentional that the whole congregation is not involved in the singing of the psalm. It allows the congregation to focus on the actions taking place in the chancel. While the psalm is sung, the presiding minister and/or his assistant systematically remove the altar furnishings. They are removed in this order: communion vessels, altar cross, pulpit and lectern paraments, chancel candles and candle stands, chancel banners, and anything else with liturgical significance.<sup>19</sup> When a vessel is removed from the altar, it is given to a member of the altar guild and stored in a convenient place until the Lord's Supper on the Easter Vigil. After the psalm and stripping of the altar, the service concludes without a

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<sup>16</sup> Commission on Worship of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Christian Worship: Occasional Services* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 183.

<sup>17</sup> Nocent, 32.

<sup>18</sup> *Christian Worship: Occasional Services (CWOS)* suggests using Psalm 88. This psalm is a "Cry out of the depths, the prayer of one on the edge of death, whose whole life has been lived, as it were, in the near vicinity of the grave" (Quote from note on Psalm 88 found in the *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, Concordia Publishing House). *The Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book* suggests using Psalm 22. Their selection of Psalm 22 is natural because it calls to mind what Jesus would suffer at his crucifixion.

<sup>19</sup> *LSB: Altar Book*, 507.

benediction. Why? Holy Thursday is only part one of a three-part service. The congregation exits the sanctuary in silence in preparation for Good Friday.

### Good Friday

Good Friday is the middle service of the Triduum. “The day is called Good Friday in English and Dutch, apparently from ‘God’s Friday.’”<sup>20</sup> The name for this day of the Triduum is a bit of a misnomer, but it fits nonetheless. The punishment Jesus suffered on that day was anything but good. He was sentenced to death, abandoned by all but one of his disciples, scourged, adorned with a crown of thorns, forced to carry a cross to Golgotha, nailed to that very cross, forsaken by his Father, and gave up his spirit into death. No, it was certainly not a good day for Jesus. “But in view of the death of Jesus as a day when the powers of evil were put to flight and dethroned, it was indeed a *good* day.”<sup>21</sup>

In manuscripts that date back to the second century, there is evidence of a feast being celebrated on the Friday of Holy Week. Prior to the third century, the *Pascha*—celebration of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection—was celebrated in a service lasting one day and night. In the third century, the *Pascha* began to split into two parts: the crucifixion *pasch* and the resurrection *pasch*. Toward the end of the third century, Friday’s service was separated from *pasch* and became a commemoration of Christ’s death. That is what is celebrated today in the Triduum.<sup>22</sup>

As the Triduum continued to develop in the fourth century, the close connection between Holy Thursday and Good Friday began to develop as well. The symbolic nature of the services held in Jerusalem from Holy Thursday to Good Friday is quite stunning.

In the early church the worship of Good Friday was always seen as a continuation of the worship begun the evening before and continued through the night. In fourth-century Jerusalem the Christians who had been worshipping all night processed from the Garden of Gethsemane and arrived in Jerusalem as the sun was rising. Here the trial before Pilate was read and prayers were said as the place where it was believed Jesus was scourged.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Pfatteicher, 244.

<sup>21</sup> Webber, 130.

<sup>22</sup> Pfatteicher, 244.

<sup>23</sup> Gingas, 238, adds an interesting note about the place where Jesus was scourged. “The Pilgrim of Bordeaux, writing in 333, reported that the pillar at which Christ was scourged was still on the site of Caiaphas’ house on the eastern slope of Mount Sion. The column was later moved to the Church of Sion, and Theodosius, writing in the 6<sup>th</sup>

After the prayers people went home for a brief rest, returning in the late morning for a service venerating the wood of the cross.<sup>24</sup>

Egeria describes, in detail, what took place at the service of the veneration of the cross.

A throne is set up for the bishop on Golgotha behind the Cross, which now stands there. The bishop sits on his throne, a table covered with a linen cloth is set before him, and the deacons stand around the table. The gilded silver casket containing the sacred wood of the cross is brought in and opened. Both the wood of the cross and the inscription are taken out and placed on the table. As soon as they have been placed on the table, the bishop, remaining seated, grips the ends of the sacred wood with his hands, while the deacons, who are standing about, keep watch over it. There is a reason why it is guarded in this manner. It is the practice here for all the people to come forth one by one, the faithful as well as the catechumens, to bow down before the table, kiss the holy wood, and then move on. It is said that someone (I do not know when) took a bite and stole a piece of the holy cross. Therefore, it is now guarded by the deacons standing around, lest there be anyone who would dare do it again. All the people pass through one by one; all of them bow down, touching the cross and the inscription, first with their foreheads, then with their eyes; and, after kissing the cross, they move on. No one, however, puts out his hand to touch the cross.<sup>25</sup>

At noon, people would gather to hear scripture read concerning Jesus' death. The service would end at three with the recounting of Jesus' death. In the evening, people would gather together and hear the reading of Jesus' burial. Some would stay through the entire night, deeply meditating on what Jesus' death meant for them. "For them the recalling of the events of Jesus' life on that day ordered their spiritual pilgrimage into than identification with him in the hour of his death."<sup>26</sup>

The Good Friday services held in churches today developed, at least in part, out of the services found in the early church. While most churches do not hold all three services in a day, many hold at least one, or part of, these ancient services. In Roman Catholicism, there are three parts to their liturgy: "the Liturgy of the Word, the Veneration of the Cross, and Holy Communion."<sup>27</sup> Celebrating the Lord's Supper on Good Friday was not historically the practice.

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century, says that it had been borne there at God's command and that a pilgrim could see the imprint of Christ's hands, arms, and fingers on the column."

<sup>24</sup> Webber, 131.

<sup>25</sup> Gingas, 110-11.

<sup>26</sup> Webber, 131.

<sup>27</sup> Frank C. Senn, *Introduction to Christian Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 133.

However, as Christianity spread, so did the need for more services that offered the Lord's Supper. It was then offered at least three or four times that week, depending on whether or not the vigil of Easter was celebrated.<sup>28</sup>

Lutheran churches, especially WELS, generally follow the historical practice of not offering the Lord's Supper on Good Friday. However, there are some Lutheran churches that do. Reformers, such as Zwingli, added the Lord's Supper to Good Friday. It is only natural, then, that offering the Lord's Supper on Good Friday happens chiefly in places influenced by the Reformed tradition. But, as the *Lutheran Book of Worship: Manual on the Liturgy* points out,

...the service [where the Lord's Supper is offered on Good Friday] often tended to become a kind of funeral service for the Lord casting a pall of gloom over all the celebrations of the Holy Communion throughout the year and taking on a degree of sentimentality by shifting the focus of the service from the Lord and his cross to our grief at his death.<sup>29</sup>

The above quote alludes to another important point about worship on Good Friday: It is not a funeral for Jesus. It is a celebration, albeit austere, of Jesus and his sacrifice. "It is a day for repentance over sin and restrained joy and praise for the redemption Christ won,"<sup>30</sup> by pouring out his lifeblood while hanging on a beam of wood. The altar remains bare of any adornment. The organ or piano music is restricted to accompanying hymns and choir pieces. No matter what liturgy a congregation is using, the congregants and their pastor enter and leave in silence. With those thoughts in mind, there are two different services held in confessional Lutheranism: The Chief Service and/or a *Tenebrae* Service.

First, the Chief Service. *CWOS* gives the title "Service of the Cross of Christ" to the chief service of Good Friday. About this service, it says,

The Service of the Cross consists of two parts: (I) the Word and (II) the Meditation on the Cross. The service is highly meditative in nature and is celebrated simply and not hurried. The Service of the Cross is intended as the primary Good Friday service and historically

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<sup>28</sup> Senn, *Introduction*, 135.

<sup>29</sup> Carlos R. Messerli and Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Lutheran Book of Worship: Manual on the Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979), 320.

<sup>30</sup> The Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, comp., *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 525.

has been observed sometime during the “hours of the cross.” Between noon and three o’clock.<sup>31</sup>

This service contains many historical features to it, the most prominent being the reading of the Passion according to the Gospel of St. John. The reading of this Gospel “was traditional by the time of Egeria’s visit to Jerusalem in the late fourth century...the old Armenian lectionary gives further testimony to its use.”<sup>32</sup> Another historical aspect of this service is the bidding prayer. There are forms of these bidding prayers for Good Friday found in the Gelasian sacramentary (eight century), the Gregorian sacramentary (sixth century), and the *Missale Gallicanum vetus* (fifth century).<sup>33</sup> These are prayers are spoken on behalf of many different people throughout the world.

Another element of this service which has deep historical roots is the Reproaches or *Improperia*. “The Reproaches are an ancient element of the service. The Reproaches represent Christ calling his people to repentance for the sin of unbelief.”<sup>34</sup> “The reproach as a rhetorical device is very ancient, employed by parents from antiquity to the present. The language of the Reproaches is traceable to Micah 6:3ff and to 2 Esdras 1:21ff.”<sup>35</sup> There are traces of these ancient sayings already in seventh-century liturgies.<sup>36</sup> The hymnody for these reproaches

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<sup>31</sup> *CWOS*, 183.

<sup>32</sup> Pfatteicher, 247.

<sup>33</sup> Pfatteicher, 247.

<sup>34</sup> *CWOS*, 201.

<sup>35</sup> Pfatteicher, 251.

<sup>36</sup> Pfatteicher, 251. He also mentions that in the York Breviary there is a responsory for the Fourth Sunday in Lent in which “populous meus” (O my people) consists of a recital of benefits conferred upon God’s people without mention of the pains of the passion.



developed in two different stages. The first part<sup>37</sup> in the ninth and tenth centuries and the second part<sup>38</sup> in the eleventh century.<sup>39</sup>

*CWOS* does not offer all the stanzas of the original reproaches. It contains only three reproaches. Each reproach is sung by the presiding minister. After each reproach, a cantor or choir sings a verse of *Holy Lord God*. The congregation responds with a stanza of *Lamb of God, Pure and Holy*.<sup>40</sup> These reproaches are filled with emotion and strike people to the very core. With the cross at the center of the chancel and these powerful words spoken and sung, this service is very memorable for those who attend.

A second option for a Good Friday service is a *Tenebrae* Service. The Latin word *Tenebrae* means darkness.<sup>41</sup> There are many different variations of this ancient rite of the church. Perhaps one of the most popular adaptations of the *Tenebrae* Service is the *Service of Seven Words*. Like the Service of the Cross of Christ, the congregation enters the sanctuary in silence. There are seven candles placed in front of the altar, either on a table or a candelabra. Prior to the minister entering the sanctuary, the seven candles are lit. The service begins with a reading from

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<sup>37</sup> *The Sacramentary*, 225-229, offers the following translation of the first part of the Reproaches from the *Antiphonale Sylvanectense* (ca. 880 AD) and the *Pontificale Romano-Germanicum* (ca. 950 AD): My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me! I led you out of Egypt, from slavery to freedom, but you led your Savior to the cross. My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me! Holy is God! Holy and strong! Holy immortal One, have mercy on us! For forty years I led you safely through the desert. I fed you with manna from heaven and brought you to a land of plenty; abut you led your Savior to the cross. Holy is God! Holy and strong! Holy immortal One, have mercy on us! What more could I have done for you? I planted you as my fairest vine, but you yielded only bitterness: when I was thirsty you gave me vinegar to drink, and you pierced your Savior with a lance. Holy is God! Holy and strong! Holy immortal One, have mercy on us!

<sup>38</sup> Pfatteicher, 252, offers a translation of the second part of the hymn. He says there are nine verses and each begin with *Ego* ("I"). "For your sake I scourged your captors and their firstborn sons, but you brought your scourges down on me. Refrain—My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me! I led you from slavery to freedom and drowned your captors in the sea, but you handed me over to your high priests. [refrain] I opened the sea before you, but you opened my side with a spear. [refrain] I led you on your way in a pillar of cloud, but you led me to Pilate's court. [refrain] I bore you up with manna in the desert, but you struck me down and scourged me. [refrain] I gave you saving water from the rock, but you gave me gall and vinegar to drink. [refrain] For you I struck down the kings of Canaan, but you struck my head with a reed. [refrain] I gave you a royal scepter, but you gave me a crown of thorns. [refrain] I raised you to the height of majesty, but you have raised me high on a cross. [refrain]"

<sup>39</sup> Pfatteicher, 252.

<sup>40</sup> *CWOS*, 196-200.

<sup>41</sup> *LSB Altar Book*, 525.

the gospel according to St. John, confession, and absolution. This opening rite is followed by seven devotions or readings based on Jesus' seven words from the cross.<sup>42</sup>

As the service progresses, the church lights are gradually dimmed. After each of the first six words are read, a candle is extinguished. There is a time for silence and meditation after each of the words. Then a hymn or portion of one is sung. This cycle continues until the final word. After the final word is read, the last candle is not extinguished. It is carried from the chancel, out of the sanctuary. There is a prayer and then the *strepitus*. "The *strepitus* consists of a loud noise that is made by banging on a pew or slamming shut a large book. This action has a variety of interpretations, including the scourging by the soldiers, the earthquake at the moment of Christ's death, or the closing of the tomb."<sup>43</sup> The seventh candle is returned to the chancel and a closing canticle is sung. Since the congregation is now sitting in near complete darkness, this closing canticle is normally sung by a choir or cantor. The choir's selection allows the congregation to contemplate what their Savior did for them on this day.<sup>44</sup> Like Holy Thursday, this service does not conclude with a benediction. After the minister exits the sanctuary, the congregation leaves God's house in silence. They will return on Saturday evening, for the Easter Vigil, the final day of the Triduum.

### THE HISTORY EASTER VIGIL

The historical development of the Easter Vigil spans many centuries. The Vigil's history went through five distinct periods: 1) Prior to 312 AD; 2) 312 AD to 590 AD; 3) 590 AD to 1085 AD; 4) 1085 AD to 1563 AD; 5) (Pre) Vatican II Renewal and Reform.

#### History and Development Prior to 312 AD

The Vigil of Easter is one of the most ancient services still observed today in the Christian Church. "The Vigil has its roots in the third century when a strict fast lasting one, two, or more days and followed by a nocturnal assembly for prayer, which closes with the Eucharist

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<sup>42</sup> The seven words are found in the following gospels, listed in order of speaking: Luke 23:26-34, Luke 23:38-43, John 19:25-37, Matthew 27:45-49, John 19:28-29, John 19:30, Luke 23:33-46.

<sup>43</sup> *LSB: Altar Book*, 525.

<sup>44</sup> For other adaptations of Good Friday services, see Adam, *The Liturgical Year*, 69-75; *Christian Worship: Occasional Services*, 193-227; *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book*, 511-528; Maschke, *Gathered Guests*, 305-309; Pfatteicher, *Commentary*, 243-256; and Messerli and Pfatteicher, *Manual*, 321-327. This list is not exhaustive but serves a good starting point.

was observed to begin the 50 days of Easter Celebration.”<sup>45</sup> However, even before the third century, there is evidence that portions of the vigil were already celebrated. Eusebius of Caesarea notes that the celebration of Easter had begun in the early second century.<sup>46</sup> That does not mean that the early church never celebrated Easter, quite the opposite. In the earliest days of the church, each Sunday was a celebration of Christ’s death and resurrection. It was not until the end of the second century that Pope Victor I<sup>47</sup> selected a stationary day for the celebration of Easter: the Sunday after the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan.<sup>48</sup> The ancients took the matter of Easter’s date with utmost seriousness.<sup>49</sup>

The selection of this day naturally led into a celebration of a service on the day before Easter. The selection of the Sunday following the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan for the celebration of Easter is significant. The selection of that day bears a close connection to the Jewish celebration of the Passover. While the events commemorated at the Passover and of the Paschal Vigil are different, the thoughts behind both the services are similar. The Passover is celebrated to remember God’s angel of death passing over Israel, delivering them from the bondage of slavery out of Egypt, and the entrance into the land of promise. “Combining accents from the Passover and the Resurrection, the Vigil underscores the finished redemptive work of Christ that brings freedom from slavery, light from darkness, life from death.”<sup>50</sup>

In the early church, before 312 AD, Holy Saturday, sometimes referred to as the *Great Sabbath*, had no liturgy of its own.<sup>51</sup> That is not to say there was no structure to this day. However, it was markedly different from modern day vigils. For early Christians, the day of Christ’s repose in the tomb was one of importance. “It was a day of meditation, fasting, and

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<sup>45</sup> Cortright, 12.

<sup>46</sup> Nocent, 99.

<sup>47</sup> Dates for Pope Victor I are ca. 189-198 AD.

<sup>48</sup> Nocent, 100.

<sup>49</sup> Pope Victor I actually excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople for not going along with his newly selected day for the celebration of Easter.

<sup>50</sup> Cortright, 12.

<sup>51</sup> Adolf Adam, *The Liturgical Year: Its History and Its Meaning after the Reform of the Liturgy* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1981), 75.

reflection in preparation for Easter.”<sup>52</sup> The preparation in the form of meditation and fasting for Easter did not begin with the vigil. “There was strict fasting before the vigil for one or two days, forty hours (time of Christ’s death to his Sunday dawn resurrection), or even a week.”<sup>53</sup> Josef A. Jungmann, in his book *The Early Liturgy: To the Time of Gregory the Great*, says, “It became customary to keep Holy Week as an uninterrupted series of fast-days. Even earlier it became the custom to spend the last days of Holy Week in strict fasting...namely during which our Lord had been in the power of death.”<sup>54</sup> After the many hours and days of fasting, the Christians of a community would gather and hear Scripture read. “Certainly Exodus 12 was read and commented upon. Perhaps there was also reading from Genesis 22, Isaiah 53, and selections of the passion from the gospels. Toward morning the vigil was concluded with the celebration of the meal of the Lord.”<sup>55</sup>

During this period, baptism was also part of the Vigil. Tertullian (b. 160 AD–d. 220 AD) and Hippolytus (b. 170 AD–d. 235 AD) both speak of baptism on this night. However, this was not *the* night for baptism.<sup>56</sup> It was not until Cyril of Jerusalem that the Easter Vigil became the primary baptismal service. (In the early church, baptism was the final step of initiation for the catechuminate.) Tertullian began the catechuminate before a fixed date, which was Easter.<sup>57</sup> During Holy Week, the catechumens were to prepare themselves for the baptismal ceremony by spending Friday and Saturday in a strict fast. On Holy Saturday, the catechumens would listen to scripture expounded, something they were not previously allowed to do. Hippolytus gives us very specific instructions on how baptism would work at the vigil:

And at the hour when the cock crows they shall first pray over the water. When they come to the water let the water be pure and flowing. And they shall put off their clothes. And they shall baptize the little children first. And if they can answer for themselves, let them answer. But if they cannot, let their parents answer or someone from their family.

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<sup>52</sup> Cortright, 12.

<sup>53</sup> Herman Wegman, *Christian Worship in the East and the West: A Study Guide to Liturgical History* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1985), 33.

<sup>54</sup> Josef A. Jungman, *The Early Liturgy: To the Time of Gregory the Great* (Norte Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), 28.

<sup>55</sup> Wegman, 33.

<sup>56</sup> Wegman, 33-34.

<sup>57</sup> Jungman, 78.

And next they shall baptize the grown men; and last the women, who shall have loosed their hair and laid aside the gold ornaments.<sup>58</sup>

Because of the persecution Christians were facing during this time, the Vigil, including baptism, was done mostly in secret.

#### History and Development from 312 AD–600 AD

It was not until Constantine the Great that this changed. Frank Senn, in his magnum opus *Christian Liturgy*, says, “In 313, after a decade of the fiercest persecution of Christians and the suppression of the church under the Emperor Diocletian, his successor, the Emperor Constantine, promulgated the Edict of Milan by which he secured for the church the privileges of a *religio licita* (licensed cult) in the Roman Empire.”<sup>59</sup> Because of Constantine’s actions, Christianity was no longer a religion that was practiced in secret. Constantine even favored Christianity. “Especially because of his favoritism, many sought membership in the church.”<sup>60</sup> Now that Christianity became a legal religion, there was need for both development and standardization. It was during this time of religious peace that liturgical rites developed, and this mostly out of necessity. Senn says of these liturgical developments, “The changes that occurred in the Christian liturgy during this period were so profound and lasting, as they fed into the cultural entity known as Christendom, that it has not been truly possible until the secular breakdown of Christendom in the twentieth century to finally get behind the fourth century to an earlier Christian piety.”<sup>61</sup>

During this time of religious peace and liturgical prosperity, the Easter Vigil began to more fully develop. The Easter Vigil became the chief day for adult baptisms after forty days of intensified catechesis during Lent.<sup>62</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem played a big role in baptism becoming part of the Vigil service. It is the opinion of this author, that Cyril’s catechumenate with its culmination at the Vigil of Easter, is the reason why the Easter Vigil became such a celebrated service in both in the east and west. A second factor in the Vigil’s growing popularity was that Jerusalem was a center for pilgrimage. On the heels of the Edict of Milan, Cyril was able to

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<sup>58</sup> Jungman, 79.

<sup>59</sup> Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) 109.

<sup>60</sup> Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 110.

<sup>61</sup> Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 111.

<sup>62</sup> Cortright, 13.

usher in a period of liturgical creativity that had never been seen. “By the end of his episcopate in 387 a colorful and moving liturgy had developed in Jerusalem. . .his sermons show that he knew how to exploit to the full the liturgical possibilities of the most sacred sit in Christendom.”<sup>63</sup>

The liturgical developments that took place under the leadership of Cyril had an impact on the global church during this time. Jerusalem was the epicenter for worship from about 312 AD to 600 AD because of its close connection to Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Pilgrims, such as Egeria, would come to Jerusalem, year after year, to observe Holy Week. People like Egeria would record what they saw and bring it back to their respective churches. Those churches would then start to observe festivals celebrated in Jerusalem, among them were Good Friday and the Easter Vigil.

Following the example of Tertullian and Hippolytus, Cyril held the final stage of the catechuminate on Holy Saturday’s vigil. Wegman says,

After the traditional reading of the memorable night, the candidates went to the baptistery, undressed (putting off the old man), were anointed from head to foot with oil as a participation in the good olive tree and the abundance of Christ. . .descended into the font filled with consecrated water, made the saving confession, and were immersed or had water poured over them three times.<sup>64</sup>

The leaders of the Vigil service would plan this part of the service so that it would end before Easter dawn. The service would then transition into a celebration of the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper was celebrated as the sun rose on Easter morning. This was the first time the catechumens could partake in the Lord’s Supper. The symbolism of this service would have been very moving for them.

From the years of 312 AD–600 AD, there were two major traditions that developed around the celebration of Easter. In Asia Minor, “Easter began to be celebrated as at Jerusalem, with great attention given to the course of events in Jesus’ life, especially the memorial of his resurrection. The key to Easter was to observe the resurrection, to commemorate the risen Son of

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<sup>63</sup> Edward Yarnhold, *Cyril of Jerusalem* (London: Routledge, 2000), 33.

<sup>64</sup> Wegman, 81.

God, consubstantial with the Father. Less attention was given to his suffering and dying.”<sup>65</sup> In the Latin Church, there was more of a focus on the memorial of Christ’s Passion.

Ambrose evidences some influence by Origen, with a tendency to give baptism more emphasis than the death of the Passover lamb and the Eucharist, but this was not finally determinative. It was the genius of Augustine that added a dimension to the feast by reference to John 13:31—the *transitus* of Jesus out of the world to the Father. “Christ passed through suffering from death to life and has set out the way toward his resurrection for us who believe, that we too may pass over from death to life.”<sup>66</sup>

Under the influence of the Jerusalem Liturgy, the Triduum was developed, which included the Easter Vigil. It became known as the *festas paschalia*. “Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday were all celebrated each with its own accent, and the last as the Greatest Day. So, there came to be a triduum for the commemoration of the suffering, burial, and resurrection of the Lord.”<sup>67</sup>

During this period, the Vigil was the principle celebration of *festas paschalia*. The central focus of the Vigil were selected readings of Scripture. There were twelve lessons read in all. Jungmann says,

The mystery of the day was given its most forceful expression in the twelve lessons. All of them revolve around the same subject: newness of life through the resurrection. Each prophetic type depicts a new aspect of this wondrous mystery. Here is a new creation; here is rescue from the great deluge; here is a promise of sonship greater than that of the children of Abraham; here is deliverance from the bondage of Egypt and passage through the Red Sea; here is life for death-doomed mankind; here is resuscitation of limbs dead to grace; here, the Land of Promise. Christ’s resurrection—our Baptism: these were the thoughts that give this night its special character.<sup>68</sup>

“The solemnity closed with the celebration of Holy Mass, the true *memoria passionis et resurrectionis*.”<sup>69</sup> Between the reading of the lessons and the celebration of Holy Mass, the sacraments were administered, with particular attention to baptism. “On this night the neophytes

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<sup>65</sup> Wegman, 99.

<sup>66</sup> Wegman, 100.

<sup>67</sup> Wegman, 100.

<sup>68</sup> Jungmann, 263.

<sup>69</sup> Jungmann, 263.

were to rise together with Christ. They were also confirmed and received their First Holy Communion.”<sup>70</sup>

A special service of light was also held at the Vigil. Since the vigil took place at night, lamps were needed to light the place of worship. This was not done arbitrarily. It was done with ceremony and blessing. While the lighting of lamps was common at every vigil, the service that took place at the vigil was special. Jungmann says, “But on this night [Vigil] the ceremony had special significance and was carried out with special solemnity. For in the light we have an apt symbol of the risen Christ, the light of the world, from whom we in turn are to receive enlightenment, by whom we are to be illumined.”<sup>71</sup> During the lighting of the lamps or candles, the deacon would chant the *Exsultet*. Traces of the *Exsultet*, which is still used in modern Vigil services, can already be found in Jerome’s writings.<sup>72</sup>

#### History and Development from 590 AD–1085 AD

From 590 AD–1085 AD, the Roman-Frankish-Germanic Liturgy developed in the west. During this period, shifts happened in the structure and focus of Lent and Holy Week. Lent was extended to include Holy Saturday. Unlike Jerusalem, the west considered Easter Sunday the principle celebration of the Triduum. An unfortunate disjuncture of the Triduum arose during this time, with each of the three days having their own independent character. “The spirit of the time was expressed clearly in the dramatic presentation of the passion and resurrection of the Lord in the Passion and Easter plays. The people loved the expressive rites of Holy Week because of their apotropaic power.”<sup>73</sup>

This period also saw the creation of the *Ordines Romani*. It is thought to have been gathered ca. 750 AD. The earliest extant copy is from ca. 800 AD. This book is a rich resource of details concerning the Holy Week services, especially that of the Triduum. From details found in the *Ordines Romani*, Wegman says,

The vigil of this period of time consisted of a number of readings (as had been customary for centuries) in which the saving deeds of God for his people were proclaimed. Then

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<sup>70</sup> Jungmann, 263.

<sup>71</sup> Jungmann, 264.

<sup>72</sup> Jungmann, 264.

<sup>73</sup> Apotropaic means having power to avert evil influences. Symbols during Holy Week thought to carry apotropaic power were the fire, the candle, the water, the palm branch, Easter bread, etc. See Wegman, 174.



followed baptism. The celebration of baptism provided the transition to the Eucharist—thus was one completely initiated. Because the rest of the faithful also took part in the Eucharist, a special word service was provided for it.<sup>74</sup>

In other words, much of what took place in the Vigil in centuries past was still taking place during this time. The Vigil provided the first celebration of Easter joy that had not been seen during the period of Lent.

Unfortunately, not all the developments during the Middle Ages were good. The time for the celebration of the Vigil was slowly moved back earlier and earlier. This caused the Vigil to lose the force of the darkness and the stunning sight of the newly kindled light. Churches would begin to celebrate the Vigil as early as the morning, mostly for the sake of convenience. Baptism also disappeared from the Vigil and began to be celebrated on Easter Sunday, at Easter Matins, which was an adaptation of the vigil for more practical usage. The reason for baptism disappearing was the growing practice of infant baptism. The vigil always served as the night when catechumens were welcomed into the church through baptism. The growing number of infant baptisms was a natural result of Christianity becoming a legalized religion ending in so-called Christendom. With the increased number of infants being brought forth for baptism, the church began to celebrate these baptisms at Easter Matins. “This all signified a continuing disintegration of the Easter Vigil that continued in the Roman Liturgy until 1955.”<sup>75</sup>

#### History and Development from 1085 AD–1563 AD

During these 500 years, there was a push toward unification of the Roman Liturgy. Each church or group of churches had developed their own version of liturgical rites. While they were not strikingly different, they were different enough to necessitate efforts at unification. Unfortunately, the services and rites that took the greatest damage were that of Holy Week. Wegman says, “During this period of time, there was no fruitful development in regards to festivals and celebrations. In fact, they were the opposite of fruitful.”<sup>76</sup> One of the greatest tragedies that the church fell into this period was the cult of the saints. There seems to have been slow, but steady, growth in the focus of veneration of Mary and the saints. People began to look to Mary and saints as a source of help and, sadly, of salvation. These developments, maybe better

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<sup>74</sup> Wegman, 174-75.

<sup>75</sup> Wegman, 175-76.

<sup>76</sup> Wegman, 225.

here, digressions, led to a detraction from Christ and his salvific work, especially in regards to Holy Week. Consider the following quote from Wegman:

The celebration of the *Mysteri Christi* was buried under details that disgraced attention from the essential. Consider the stress on the historical details of Jesus' life or the extreme attention paid to Mary and to the numerous saints. It was evident that during the Middle Ages a disintegration was taking place in the attention that had been focused on Sunday, on the paschal mystery, and on the salvation in saints no longer were centered in the Christ mystery but were growing independently.<sup>77</sup>

The disintegration of the Easter Vigil that began in the early Middle Ages had now reached its conclusion: the Vigil was rarely even celebrated. This is sad since the church fathers held this service in such high regard. For them, it was the high point of the entire Christian year. For the congregants, both the newly-welcomed catechumens and long-standing members alike, this was a service that touched their will and emotions in a most profound way. The symbolism, the sacraments, and the unity of the service was striking to say the least. However, leading up to the Council of Trent and in the centuries that followed after, the Vigil all but disappeared. The Vigil's resurrection would have to wait for the liturgical renewal that was Vatican II.

#### (Pre)Vatican II Reform and Revival

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Roman Catholic Church recognized the need for change, especially in regards to the liturgy. For nearly four centuries, most of the Catholic Church celebrated a liturgy that was almost universally the same.<sup>78</sup> This control system was put in place in 1588 at the Council of Trent when the church established the Sacred Congregation of Rites.<sup>79</sup> While there is something to be said for stability and structure in liturgics, the Catholic Church knew there were liturgical elements that needed reworking. For instance, Latin was still used in most services. The only people who understood Latin were the clergy. The individuals in the pews were left wondering what was being chanted and spoken. Significantly, Vatican II allowed worship to take place in the vernacular – 400 years after Luther's reform of worship. In 1903,

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<sup>77</sup> Wegman, 225.

<sup>78</sup> There were at least two exceptions to the uniformity—Milan and Toledo.

<sup>79</sup> James J. Megivern, *Official Catholic Teachings: Worship and Liturgy* (Wilmington: McGrath Publishing Company, 1978), XIII.

Pope Pius X initiated a movement toward liturgical renewal with his *Motu Proprio*<sup>80</sup> paper *Tra Le Sollecitudini*.<sup>81</sup>

Over the next fifty-nine years, the Popes, as well as the councils they convened, produced documents that recognized the need for change. On February 9, 1951, the Sacred Congregation of Rites published a paper entitled *Decree Restoring Easter Vigil*.<sup>82</sup> This decree recognized the historicity of the Easter Vigil and its importance in the Christian year. They also recognized that the modifications made over the centuries were detrimental to the Vigil. The goal of the Sacred Congregation of Rites was to restore the greatest vigil of Christianity to its former glory and see it used on a broader scale.

The Easter Vigil was not the only service that the Sacred Congregation of Rites set out to renew. The Sacred Congregation of Rites reformed the rites for the entirety of Holy Week and reintroduced them on an experimental basis. Like the Vigil, the services of Holy Thursday and Good Friday had gradually moved to an earlier time. The Sacred Congregation of Rites held the opinion that movement of service to an earlier time of day detracted from the meaning and symbolism these services were meant to convey. Another issue with earlier service times was the number of people who could attend. Fewer and fewer people could attend services because of secular obligations.

On November 16, 1955, The Sacred Congregation of Rites published *Decree on the Restoration of the Holy Week Order*. This decree mentions Pope Pius XII's restoration of the Easter Vigil liturgy and the reaction to it. It says, "This experiment was highly successful everywhere, as many ordinaries reported to the Holy See."<sup>83</sup> In July 1955, the Cardinals of the

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<sup>80</sup> Meaning, "on his own impulse."

<sup>81</sup> Megivern, XIV.

<sup>82</sup> Megivern, 128, has the following excerpt from the decree: "Since early times the Church solemnly celebrates the Easter Vigil, which St. Augustine calls 'the mother of all the holy vigils.' This vigil was celebrated during the early hours of the morning preceding the Resurrection of Our Lord. But in the course of centuries and for various reasons, the celebration was put ahead, first to the early evening, then to the afternoon, and finally to the morning of Holy Saturday; at the same time some modifications were introduced to the detriment of the primitive symbolism.

However, in our times, which are distinguished for development in researches on ancient liturgy, has witnessed the fulfillment of the ardent desire of bringing back the Easter Vigil to its primitive splendor and of assigning to it the time observed in the beginning, that is, the early hours of the night preceding Resurrection Sunday. In favor of such a return there is added a special motive of pastoral order: that of facilitating the presence of numerous faithful. In fact, as Holy Saturday is no longer a holyday, as it once was, the greater part of the faithful cannot assist at the sacred rite, if it takes place in the morning."

<sup>83</sup> Megivern, 140.

Sacred Congregation of Rites convened at the request of Pope Pius XII to examine the results of this liturgical experiment. On July 19, 1955, this council officially signed its approval to the rites of Holy Week – including the rite of the Easter Vigil.

These findings led to a revision of the Roman Missal by decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.<sup>84</sup> The restoration of the Easter Vigil liturgy, the Holy Week orders, and the revision of the Roman Missal all led to a renewed interest in worship. Soon, this renewed interest in worship and the services of Holy Week took root in other church bodies. It first spread to Protestantism and then, very slowly, to Lutheranism. Cortright says, “Liturgical renewal begun in the Roman church in the 1950’s has reached beyond Roman Catholic parishes to other liturgically-minded traditions. Lutheran churches in America have felt this influence and have increasingly embraced evangelically-consonant versions of such things as the Great Vigil of Easter because of the richness of Word and sacrament found in them.”<sup>85</sup>

#### THE SERVICE OF THE EASTER VIGIL

Quite simply, the Easter Vigil is a complex service with many moving parts. However, more than any other service in Christendom, the Easter Vigil contains rich and moving symbolism. The symbolism of this service is deeply sensual, affecting the whole human creature in a way no other single service does. Pfatteicher explains the trans-historical nature of this service when he says, “The Passover and Resurrection and the church’s celebration of Easter all merge and become contemporary events on this night.”<sup>86</sup> The Vigil actually has four different services, each service develops a theme closely connected to the resurrection Gospel: “Freedom out of slavery, life out of death, light out of darkness, and speech out of silence.”<sup>87</sup> The four services of the Vigil are the Service of Light, the Service of the Word, the Service of Baptism, and the Service of Holy Communion.

Before explaining the various parts of the service, several details need to be considered. First, everyone involved in the service needs to be part of a functioning team. This will require meetings and instruction for the pastor(s), organist, choir, ushers, and anyone else involved. The

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<sup>84</sup> Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, *The Roman Missal: The Sacramentary* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1974), 5.

<sup>85</sup> Cortright, 1.

<sup>86</sup> Pfatteicher, 258.

<sup>87</sup> Maschke, 310.

pastor will not want to carry out this service on his own. It is wise to procure volunteers well in advance of the service. Six months is a good time frame for planning. Solidifying volunteers early allows the pastor time to train the volunteers and time for the volunteers to wrap their minds around the majesty of this service.

There are also several logistical matters that need to be carefully thought through. Where will the kindling of a new fire take place? When and how will the congregation get the candles for the procession of light into the sanctuary? Are there any baptisms that will take place? Who will hold and eventually process with the paschal candle? Will there be a processional to begin the Service of Holy Communion? If so, does the congregation have the necessary items for a procession? Who will help with the procession?

Pastors, the organist, and choir director must carefully walk through the music well in advance of the service so there are no miscues. There is music found in the Vigil that is featured nowhere else during the year. The organist will not want to begin practicing the night before!

How should the church be prepared? After Holy Thursday, the altar is stripped of its ornaments, and the chancel left bare. Everything that was removed for Holy Thursday and Good Friday should be returned. The sanctuary and chancel should be adorned as a church would for Easter Sunday. It is appropriate for Easter paraments to be hung, for flowers to be placed at the foot of the altar, the altar cloth replaced, and communion vessels laid out and prepared for the celebration of the Lord's Supper at the end of the service. Concerning the baptismal font, if not already displayed in a prominent place, it should be moved to a place easily seen by all congregants since there is a section of the service devoted solely to baptism. The font should also be filled with water. The stand for the paschal candle stand should be placed in front of the altar, ready to receive the candle after the procession. The lights should remain dimmed for the first 3 services of the Easter Vigil. There should only be enough light in the sanctuary for the congregants to see their service folders.

As mentioned above, a significant paschal candle is needed as well as candles for the congregation. Paschal candles need to be prepared before the service. These should be purchased well in advance. Perhaps they could be placed on the congregation's wish list.

In *Christian Worship*, there is no order of service for people to follow along. A service folder will need to be created and printed for the congregation. This should be done with careful attention to detail. One WELS church, for example, uses a larger font for the sections where the

lights are dimmed. Explanations should be given for the different parts of the service and in particular for the symbolism of the evening.<sup>88</sup> For example, it would be wise for a pastor to include a short explanation about the Day, the Service itself, the Paschal Candle, and the ancient parts of the liturgy like the *Exsultet*.

How should pastors vest for this service? This will vary from congregation to congregation, as well as what vestments a pastor has available to him. Since the service begins in the austere darkness of Good Friday, it would be appropriate for the pastor to begin in a black Cassock and no stole. (A black Geneva, since it has no historical credence as a pastoral vestment at the Vigil, should perhaps be avoided.) If a black Cassock is unavailable, the pastor should wear his white Alb and purple stole.<sup>89</sup> Later in the service, the pastor will exit the chancel and change into an alb, and Easter stole. So, make sure those are on hand.

When should the Vigil begin? Start times will vary from congregation to congregation. Historically, the service always began at dusk. “Following the Jewish custom of reckoning the beginning of the day at sundown, the Easter Vigil began on Easter Eve with a time of prayer and meditation.”<sup>90</sup> However, as noted above, this service began to move earlier and earlier in the day, sometimes starting in the morning. However, when this service begins in the morning, or even in the evening when there is still much daylight left, the service loses some of its force. It is best to begin the service sometime around 8pm. Worship planners may want to consult with a solar table and schedule the service precisely at sundown.

Where will the Vigil take place? The answer to this question seems obvious—the church. However, the answer is more complicated than that. Since the service begins with the kindling of a new fire, there should be a place in which a fire can safely be lit. After the opening portion of the Vigil, there is a procession into the church itself where congregants light their candles. There is a procession in and around the sanctuary. Much like in fourth century Jerusalem, these are what can be best described as *stations* in the service. All of these liturgical actions are prescribed in the name of good order – not as a matter of law that binds consciences. If a church does not

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<sup>88</sup> A sample of one such explanation may be found in Appendix 1 on page 48.

<sup>89</sup> Messerli and Pfatteicher, 327.

<sup>90</sup> Maschke, 309.

have a place to light a fire, this does not mean that this service cannot be done. No, we enjoy the freedom to modify the service so that it fits the space available for the congregation.

### The Service of Light<sup>91</sup>

The Vigil begins in darkness, “the desolation of Holy Saturday with Christ lying in the tomb and the lives and hopes of his followers shattered.”<sup>92</sup> Elie Wiesel, in the book *Gates of the Forest*, says “suffering contains the secret of creation.”<sup>93</sup> So the first service of the Great Watch transports Christians back to the moment before creation, before man and God were separated by sin. “It is a return to a time behind time containing all possibilities, pregnant with potentiality, before any commitment to particular forms was begun.”<sup>94</sup> This service has its origins in the Jewish custom of blessing the lamp on Friday night, the start of the Sabbath. Pfatteicher, referencing *Apostolic Traditions*, says, “The Christian *lucernarium* was held every Saturday as the day of resurrection began with a service in Christian homes at the lighting of the lamps.”<sup>95</sup> As the service continued to develop in the Easter Vigil, it grew to contain three elements: the recognition of new fire, a presentation of the paschal candle, and the first expression of Easter joy.<sup>96</sup>

The entire focus of this first part of the Vigil is centered on light, “the first work of the Creator, the visible token of Christ, who proclaimed himself the Light of the world and who at Easter arose, shining as the dawning sun, conquering forever the dark night of sin.”<sup>97</sup> Since that is the case, the congregation gathers outside the church around an already lighted fire. The fire should be large enough for everyone to see. It should not be lit with a match that is quickly extinguished. In seventh-century Spain, there is record of the Vigil fire being started with flint. In the middle ages, there developed a connection between the flint and Christ, the stone that had been rejected.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> See also *The Sacramentary*, 232ff.

<sup>92</sup> Pfatteicher, 260.

<sup>93</sup> Elie Wiesel, *The Gates of the Forest* (New York: Schocken, 1982), 201.

<sup>94</sup> Pfatteicher, 260.

<sup>95</sup> Pfatteicher, 261.

<sup>96</sup> Maschke, 310.

<sup>97</sup> Messerli and Pfatteicher, 321.

<sup>98</sup> Maschke, 310; Messerli and Pfatteicher, 327-28; Pfatteicher, 321.

As the congregation gathers around the newly-kindled fire, the pastor begins the service with a short commentary:

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 Passover of the Lord in which, by hearing his Word and celebrating his sacraments, we share in his victory over death.

O God, you are like a refiner's fire, and your Spirit kindles the hearts of your faithful people with the fire of your life. Bless, we ask you, this new flame and those who keep this joyful Easter festival. Burning with desire for your life with you, may we be found rightly prepared to share in the Feast of Light which has no end.<sup>99</sup>

Following this short commentary, the paschal candle<sup>100</sup> is brought forward by an assisting minister. On the candle there should be a cross, the Greek letters Alpha (A) and Omega (Ω), and the numerals of the year. The presiding minister approaches the candle and carries out the following actions:

*Tracing the vertical arm of the cross:* Christ Jesus, the same yesterday, today, and forever,

*Tracing the horizontal arm of the cross:* the beginning and the ending

*Tracing the alpha:* the alpha

*Tracing the omega:* and the Omega.

*Tracing the first numeral:* His are time

*Tracing the second numeral:* and eternity;

*Tracing the third numeral:* His are the glory and dominion,

*Tracing the last numeral:* now and forever.<sup>101</sup>

After the tracing the cross, alpha, omega, and numerals, an ancient practice directs the pastor to insert five wax nails into the cross<sup>102</sup> in this order and with these words:

*Placing a wax nail in the upper vertical part of the cross:* By His wounds

*Placing a wax nail at the cross beam:* we have healing

*Placing a wax nail in the lower vertical part of the cross:* both now

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<sup>99</sup> *CWOS*, 228.

<sup>100</sup> Pfatteicher, 262, says the use of the paschal candle goes back to at least the sixth century. The Paschal Candle is a symbol of Christ, the light of the world. After the Vigil, the paschal candle is lighted for every service held during the Easter Season, as well as for every baptism and every funeral.

<sup>101</sup> Maschke, 310.

<sup>102</sup> Maschke, 311. Messerli and Pfatteicher, 330, say, "The number five represents the five wounds of Jesus: hands, feet, and side. It is further testimony to the fact that ritually the paschal candle becomes Christ."



*Placing a wax nail in the left arm of the cross: and forever.  
Placing a wax nail in the right arm of the cross: Amen.*<sup>103</sup>

After the placing of the wax nails, the presiding minister lights the paschal candle from the newly kindled fire. It is tacky to do this with a match or a lighter. It is better to light it with a piece of kindling. As the fire is lighted, the presiding minister says,

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

Almighty and most merciful Father, once we were darkness, but now we are light in Jesus Christ our Lord. Bless abundantly all who joyfully celebrate this night in faith in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Fill them with your heavenly blessing in him, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.<sup>104</sup>

After the lighting and blessing of the paschal candle, the assisting minister lifts the candle high and begins the procession<sup>105</sup> into the gathering space of the church. The presiding minister and congregation follow closely behind. Once in the gathering space of the church, which is dimly lit, those in attendance gather around the paschal candle and light the individual candles given them before the start of the service. Once everyone's candles are lit, the procession begins again.<sup>106</sup> When the assisting minister reaches the doors of the sanctuary, he lifts the candle high and chants, "The Light of Christ." The congregation responds, "Thanks be to God." The procession then continues around the sanctuary. The sanctuary should be dimmed, with as little light as necessary to continue the austerity with which the service began. Depending on the number of congregants in attendance, and the setup of the sanctuary, the route of procession may take various forms. One such route would be to start and move along the walls, eventually moving up the center aisle. This allows for the entire body in attendance to join in the procession and see the paschal candle. No matter what route the procession takes, the procession should not be done hurriedly, rather deliberately and meditatively.

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<sup>103</sup> Maschke, 311; See Messerli and Pfatteicher, 330, for a diagram.

<sup>104</sup> *CWOS*, 228.

<sup>105</sup> Messerli and Pfatteicher, 328, give the follow comment about this procession: "As the children of Israel were led by a pillar of fire from slavery to freedom in the promised land, so the church is led from the slavery of sin to the glorious liberty of the children of God in the heavenly land of promise. Again, a pillar of fire, the candle, leads the way."

<sup>106</sup> The practice of procession may have developed out of the visitation of different stations, such as the Empty tomb, during the Vigil celebrated by Cyril in the fourth century. For more information see *Diary of a Pilgrimage*, chapters 45-47.

When the assisting minister reaches the center of the middle aisle, he pauses, lifts the candle high and chants, “The light of Christ.” The congregation responds in turn, “Thanks be to God.” As the assisting minister makes his way up the aisle toward the chancel, the congregants file into the pews. When the assisting minister reaches the altar, in front of which is placed the paschal candle stand, he faces the congregation, lifts the candle high a third time and chants, “The Light of Christ.” The congregation responds, “Thanks be to God.” He then places the paschal candle in the stand.

Standing next to the paschal candle, either the presiding or assisting minister continue with the chanting of the *Exsultet*.<sup>107</sup> The title for this song comes from its first line in Latin, *Exsultet jam angelica turba caelorum*. “This song is very ancient, drawing upon the thought of Ambrose and Augustine and making use of still older texts, among which is the oldest known hymn of praise to the night of Easter, dating from the first half of the fourth century and found in the Easter Sermons of Asterius the Sophists.” “This early Christian hymn is a masterpiece of liturgical poetry and is filled with biblical imagery, allusions, and typologies.”<sup>108</sup> Messerli and Pfatteicher explain the meaning of this song:

It is a grand and ancient song of praise, inviting first heaven then earth, then the church and this congregation to join in the praise of God. In thanksgiving significant biblical events are recalled—Adam, the Passover, the Exodus, and the resurrection. “This is the night:” time is erased and the past events live again and we are present to them all. The

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<sup>107</sup> *CWOS*, 230-233, contains the following translation of the *Exsultet*. “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 out 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.

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places, with all our heart and mind and voice, praise you, O Lord, Holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, with your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. For he is the Paschal Lamb who offered himself for the sin of the world, who has cleansed us with the shedding of his precious blood.

This is the night when you brought our fathers, the children of Israel, out of the 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 grace is broken, and new creation breaks forth out of night.

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 lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

<sup>108</sup> Pfatteicher, 264.

mystery of the candle, the light of which is not dimmed, no matter how much is divided, is made a source of instruction for u in the blessedness of generosity and self-sacrifice.<sup>109</sup>

Robert Webber, Professor of Ministry at Northern Seminary, writes about the first time he heard this old hymn sung at a Vigil:

It...expresses the deep theological meaning of this very special night. This is the night of the new Passover, the night when darkness becomes light, sadness becomes joy, despair becomes hope, death becomes life. The content of this great proclamation and the symbolic context of darkness turning into light impressed upon me how truly life changing the resurrection is. I was also reminded how important it is for us to find a way in the symbolic world in which we live to express this great truth in a new and unforgettable way.<sup>110</sup>

This song, which covers thousands of years of salvation history has been sung for over 1,800 years in the church. It connects Christians today with Christians of old as we proclaim the great and mighty acts of the salvation of our God. The *Exsultet* concludes the Service of Light and the transition to the Service of Lessons begins.

#### The Service of Lessons

The Service of Light transports people, in a symbolic way, to a time before time began. With the kindling of a new fire, it is as if people are witnessing the first day of creation when God said, “Let there be light.” The singing of the *Exsultet* has not only invited the heavenly beings, but all people, to rejoice in the mighty salvific acts of God. The Service of Lessons transports the people at the Vigil through ancient history, allowing them to see Creation, the Flood, the Red Sea, and a multitude of other gracious acts of God. In each of the readings selected for the Easter Vigil, a connection to Paschal Mystery can be seen. “Baptism can be seen

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<sup>109</sup> Messerli and Pfatteicher, 329-330.

<sup>110</sup> Webber, 136. On pages 134-139, Webber describes his first encounter with the Easter Vigil. Growing up Evangelical, Easter was not the central service of the Church year for him. However, his attitude changed after witnessing the Vigil. His first-hand account helps to put a person in the shoes of someone who is witnessing the Vigil for the first time and may be able to help a pastor who is considering implementing this service into their congregation understand the emotions and feelings his members may have about the service.

in the flood, the crucifixion in the sacrifice of Isaac,<sup>111</sup> the flight from sin through baptism in the crossing of the Red Sea.”<sup>112</sup>

In the early church, the readings of the Vigil served as the final instruction for the catechumens. It was common for these readings to last almost to dawn.<sup>113</sup> The number of readings the Vigil contains has varied greatly throughout history. Nocent says,

The Coptic Rite has a very large number of readings, as does the Byzantine Rite. The Roman rite has known different systems over the centuries. The Gregorian Sacramentary has four readings, and the Gelasian ten, while at Rome there were six lessons, later on twelve. During the period when the powers were Easterners, that is, in the seventh and eighth centuries, there were twelve lessons, sung in both Latin and Greek.<sup>114</sup>

The revised Sacramentary of 1969 contains nine readings.<sup>115</sup> In most modern adaptations of the Vigil, seven readings seem to be common. However, “the number of readings from the Old Testament may be reduced for pastoral reasons.”<sup>116</sup> Whether there are four readings or twelve, there are two that should always be included: Genesis 1:1-2:3 (creation) and Exodus 14:10-15:1 (Red Sea).<sup>117</sup>

The Service of Lessons opens with the following dialogue from the presiding minister, who is standing in the light of the paschal candle: “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.”<sup>118</sup> The presiding minister, assisting

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<sup>111</sup> The hermeneutic of the author of this paper sees the phrase, “the crucifixion in the sacrifice of Isaac,” as allegory. Seeing the crucifixion in the sacrifice of Isaac is not new. It is a view held by many theologians of the past. However, that doesn’t make it correct.

<sup>112</sup> R. Michael Wyatt, *On the Great Vigil of Easter as an Expression of the Paschal Mystery* (Anglican Theological Review 66, 1984), 57.

<sup>113</sup> Cortright, 16.

<sup>114</sup> Nocent, 103.

<sup>115</sup> *The Sacramentary*, 244-248.

<sup>116</sup> *The Sacramentary*, 244.

<sup>117</sup> For a full list of readings from multiple church bodies and an explanation for why they are chosen, see Messerli and Pfatteicher, 331-333; Nocent, 113-126; Pfatteicher, 273-282. See also *Lutheran Service Book: Three-Year Lectionary Series A, B, and C* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006) and *Lectionary for Worship: Revised Common Lectionary Cycles A, B, and C* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997).

<sup>118</sup> *CWOS*, 234; *LSB: Altar Book*, 537.

minister, or lectors then read the first lesson. A period of silence is observed for meditation after each lesson. Then an appointed prayer<sup>119</sup> is prayed. This is the pattern followed for each lesson read. There may be hymns, psalms, or choir pieces inserted between the lessons. But keep in mind, with each element added to the service, time is also added. Egeria said, “For the sake of the people, everything is done rapidly...”<sup>120</sup> Following that advice is wise. But when this service is done too rapidly, its dignity is lost. It is better to do fewer lessons and pace them well rather than speed through several lessons.

Following the final reading (historically, Daniel 3:1-29), the canticle *Benedicite, Omnia Opera*<sup>121</sup> may be sung.<sup>122</sup> Tradition holds that this song was sung by one of the three men in the fiery furnace. It comes from the apocryphal addition of Daniel 3.<sup>123</sup> The text of this song emphasizes the redemption of the world and the role of nature in the praise of God. During the *Benedicite, Omnia Opera*, the assisting minister carries the paschal candle to the baptismal font. The conclusion of the song marks the end of the Service of Lessons and begins the Service of Holy Baptism.

### Service of Holy Baptism

In the ancient church, the Vigil was *the* day for baptism. Catechumens would go through catechesis for a period of several years. Their instruction culminated during Lent. After completing several rituals, including an examination and several exorcisms, the catechumens

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<sup>119</sup> For a listing of various appointed prayers and psalm responses, see *CWOS*, 234-236; *LSB: Altar Book*, 537-541; and *The Sacramentary*, 245-248.

<sup>120</sup> Gingras, 114.

<sup>121</sup> The following is a translation found in *CWOS*, 237-238: “All you works of the Lord, bless the Lord—Praise him and magnify him forever. You angels of the Lord, bless the Lord; you heavens, bless the Lord; all you powers of the Lord, bless the Lord. You sun and moon, bless the lord; you stars of heaven, bless the Lord; you showers and dew, bless the Lord. You winds of God, bless the Lord; you fire and heat, bless the Lord; you winter and summer, bless the Lord. You dews and frost, bless the Lord; you frost and cold, bless the Lord; you ice and snow, bless the Lord. You nights and days, bless the Lord; you light and darkness, bless the Lord; you lightning and clouds, bless the Lord. Let the earth bless the Lord: you mountains and hills, bless the Lord; all you green things that grow on the earth, bless the Lord. You wells and springs, bless the Lord; you rivers and seas, bless the Lord; you whales and all who move in the seas, bless the Lord. All you birds of the air, bless the Lord; all you beasts and cattle, bless the Lord; all you children of mortals, bless the Lord. You people of God, bless the Lord; you priests of the Lord, bless the Lord; let you servants of the Lord, bless the Lord. You spirits and souls of the righteous, bless the Lord; you pure and humble of heart, bless the Lord; let us bless the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Praise him and magnify him forever.”

<sup>122</sup> Pastoral consideration may be made to sing another hymn in place of this song, as it is long.

<sup>123</sup> Messerli and Pfatteicher, 333.

were ready for initiation into the church through the waters of baptism. However, as mentioned above, the practice of the Vigil being *the* day for baptism gradually fell out of use. That does not mean, however, that the Service of Baptism must be deleted from Vigil. If a congregation has candidates for baptism, this is a theologically significant night to baptize. If there are no candidates for baptism, this service serves as an opportunity to renew the congregations' baptismal promises.

William Harmless, in his book *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, quotes Aidan Kavanagh about the practice of baptism and initiation at the Vigil. He writes:

The insistence on the Easter Vigil as the normal setting for Christian initiation is neither ecclesiastical nostalgia nor doctrinal wistfulness. There is simply no other time of the year, and certainly no other liturgical context, that serves as so rich a setting for sacramental initiation and its meaning. Not only are the initiates dying and rising in Christ as the Church commemorates his passage from death to life long ago. More importantly the initiates are entering into his corporate real presence which is the Church... Only the Easter Vigil yields up an ecclesiology worthy of baptism.<sup>124</sup>

While Kavanagh may be overstating his case in the interest of the Vigil, he certainly is on to something. This author does not believe that the Easter Vigil is the only time of the year when baptism may be administered. However, the Vigil's focus on Christ's death and resurrection and the connection the Christian has with Christ's death and resurrection in Baptism is both strong and spiritually deep. Particularly in the case of an adult, baptism at the Easter Vigil may make their understanding of baptism's meaning deeper.

The Service of Holy Baptism begins with a dialogue.<sup>125</sup> This opening dialogue helps the congregation see the connection between Christ's death and resurrection to the sacrament of baptism using Romans 6:3-11. Some pastors may see this opening section as too long and

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<sup>124</sup> William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 6-7.

<sup>125</sup> *CWOS*, 239. "On this holiest of days, 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 precious means of grace by which our Father in heaven connects us with Christ in his life, death, and resurrection. The apostle Paul says: "Don't you know that 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. If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

modify it for their congregation for the sake of time. If modifications are made, they must be done carefully so that, even in the shortened version, people are still able to make the connection between Christ's death and resurrection and baptism. Jonathan Schroeder, pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, Sharpsburg, Georgia, shortened this opening paragraph for the sake of time.<sup>126</sup>

There is also a deliberate connection between the Paschal Candle and the Service of Baptism. The paschal Candle is a symbol of the resurrection Christ. While at the font, the assisting minister dips the paschal candle into the font three times during the presiding minister's opening dialogue. This action is a sign of Christ's death and resurrection, which gives baptism its power. This act is highly symbolic, but should not be done without some explanation in the service folder. As mentioned above, the Paschal Candle remains burning for the 50 days of Easter. It is also lit at every baptism and every funeral throughout the year to serve as a reminder of Christ's resurrection. During the middle ages, a practice developed which gave "dramatic impact to the action at the font and tying the baptism, death, and resurrection of Christ to the baptismal dying and rising of the candidates."<sup>127</sup>

If there are candidates for Holy Baptism at the Vigil, the service continues with the usual baptismal rite.<sup>128</sup> If there are no candidates, a rite is provided in *Christian Worship: Occasional Services* for the renewal of baptism and professing the faith. This serves as a remembrance of what God has done for them through the water and the word.<sup>129</sup> In the renunciation, the pastor asks the congregation pointed questions about the Christian faith. The congregation responds to the questions using words selected from the Apostles' Creed. After the congregation's last response, the pastor blesses the congregation. The paschal candle is returned to its stand.

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<sup>126</sup> Jonathan Schroeder, *Easter Vigil Service Folder*, 12: "On this holiest of days, the whole Church of our Lord Jesus Christ recalls his death and burial, rejoicing in the gospel of his glorious resurrection. St. Paul said, "Do you not know that 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."

<sup>127</sup> Pfatteicher, 282.

<sup>128</sup> Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), 13ff. There are also two baptismal rites given in *CWOS*. If using Holy Baptism I, 5-7, the confession of sins is omitted. If using Holy Baptism II, 8-12, the Apostles' Creed is omitted.

<sup>129</sup> *CWOS*, 239-240.

### Logistics for the Service of Holy Communion

After the completion of the Service of Holy Baptism, the Easter Vigil is now at a transitional point. Up to this point, the church has remained dimly lit, the pastor is either vested in a black Cassock or white Alb and purple stole. The whole Easter Vigil, thus far, has been a gradual transition from darkness to light, from death to life, from sadness to joy. However, that changes here as the service shifts from the Service of Holy Baptism to the Service of Holy Communion. After the paschal candle is placed in its stand, the congregation is instructed to sing a hymn.<sup>130</sup> During the singing of the hymn, the presiding and assisting ministers exit the sanctuary and change into full Easter vestments. It can hardly be overdone. Most certainly, the white Alb and Easter stole should be worn. If available, an Easter chasuble<sup>131</sup> may be worn. While the hymn is sung and the pastors are vesting, the lights of the church are turned all the way up. The chancel, which was prepared with Easter adornments, liturgical banners, and paraments can finally be seen.

The lights being turned on in the sanctuary has a historical connection to the Vigils of old. Attempting to recreate what happened in ancient Easter Vigils, the lights are fully turned on, signaling the full celebration of the Resurrection. In the ancient church, the first three parts of the vigil would last until early morning. As Easter's morning light crested the dawn, the Lord's Supper would be celebrated. Again, the connection between Jesus' death and resurrection to the Lord's Supper in the Easter Vigil is strong. Imagine being one of the Catechumens on this night: After years of catechesis, they are finally baptized into the faith. As Easter dawns, they can celebrate the Lord's Supper with the rest of the congregation for the very first time. It was an emotionally charged day! Today, an Easter Vigil rarely lasts more than an hour and a half.

At the Easter Vigil, the Service of Holy Communion may begin with a procession. For a procession, the following items may be used: A crucifix, a gospel book, torches (two) or candle lighters, gospel banner, and a thurible (not commonly used in WELS). However, not all are necessary for a procession. If a procession is going to be held, at least the crucifix and the gospel book are needed. A pastor will need to procure a volunteer for each item used in the procession.

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<sup>130</sup> Any one of the Easter Hymns would be appropriate here. One option would be *Christian Worship Hymn #156, Awake, My Heart, with Gladness, vv 1-4*, text by Paul Gerhardt. Gerhardt's words beautifully proclaim what the congregation has been celebrating throughout the entirety of the Vigil, which is about to reach climax at the service of Communion.

<sup>131</sup> For a thorough, but concise history and explanation of the chasuble, see Maschke, 207-08; 216-17.



Each member of the procession should be vested in an Alb. The processional group should be instructed on how the procession will work before the service. During the final part of the Service of Baptism, the members of the processional group should exit the sanctuary and get ready for the processional.

The processional group should line up in the following order: thurifer (incense bearer), crucifer (crossbearer), torch bearers or acolytes, who flank the crucifer a few steps behind, banner bearer, gospel bearer, assisting minister, and presiding minister. In the case of the Easter Vigil procession, it will be helpful to have the assisting minister serve as the gospel bearer because the gospel is read from the midst of the congregation. This is how the procession should take place: After the congregational response (see below), a refrain of alleluias is played and sung. During the singing of these alleluias, the procession starts. The crucifier stops the procession when he is three-quarters of the way up the center aisle of the church. Stopping there will place the gospel book at the center of the congregation. The crucifier, acolytes or torch bearers, banner bearer, and gospel bearer all turn and face the presiding minister, who is following in procession. The crucifer lifts the crucifix high, the acolytes hold the flames steady, standing in front of the crucifer to the right and to the left; the banner bearer holds the banner with arms at his chest, and the gospel bearer holds the gospel book in such a way that it is easily readable by the presiding minister. After the reading of the gospel, the processional group finishes the procession, placing the individual items in their appropriate places. Then they may go and change from their albs and return to sanctuary for the remainder of the service as there is no recessional.<sup>132</sup>

### The Service of Holy Communion<sup>133</sup>

After the presiding and assisting ministers are finished changing, they wait expectantly at the sanctuary doors with the members of the processional group. When the hymn is finished

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<sup>132</sup> Commission on Worship of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Christian Worship: Altar Book* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999), 27, 28. There are further instructions found on these pages concerning a recessional and a gospel procession in the middle of the service.

<sup>133</sup> *LSB: Altar Book*, 546-551, further divides the Vigil by adding a Service of Prayer, and an additional Service of the Word. *CWOS* omits the service of prayer and places the Service of the Word under the Service of Holy Communion. The Service of Prayer that *LSB: Altar Book* includes is a Litany of the Resurrection. It is beautiful prayer describing the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. If so desired, a pastor could include this Service of Prayer at his congregation's Easter Vigil. However, caution must be given to the amount of time it would add to the service.

playing, the sanctuary doors are opened and the pealing of the bell is heard. At the pealing of the bell, the congregation is instructed to stand and face the processional group. At this, the presiding minister utters a word which has been absent for the entirety of Lent. He triumphantly cries out: “Alleluia! Christ is Risen!” And in joyful response, the congregation shouts, “He is risen indeed! Alleluia!” The presiding minister then sings the refrain found in *CWOS*<sup>134</sup> and the congregation then repeats the refrain.

While the alleluia refrain is sung, the processional group moves as described above. After congregation finishes the refrain, and the procession has paused, the presiding minister chants this verse: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ, all will be made alive. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” The congregation responds in turn with the alleluia verse. The presiding minister then opens the gospel book, held by the gospel bearer, and reads the account of the *Empty Tomb*.<sup>135</sup> After the Gospel, the congregation responds with the alleluia refrain once more. During the alleluia refrain, the procession concludes by placing the individual items in their appropriate spaces in the chancel. The service continues with the Prayer of the Day, the Lord’s Prayer, and the celebration of Holy Communion. The liturgy for the celebration of Holy Communion is the same as what would be used on at a regular Sunday service.

Finally, the Easter Vigil comes to a close with an element of worship that has not been heard since Palm Sunday: the Blessing. Since the *Triduum* is not three separate services, but one service with three parts, the blessing is omitted after Holy Thursday and Good Friday. Now, as the congregation has celebrated the Jesus’ resurrection and contemplate this life-changing reality, God’s called servant confers the blessing upon the people: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.” It is only through Jesus’ death and resurrection that Christians have true peace. Because of Jesus’ perfect life, innocent death, and bodily resurrection, God has given his people the insurmountable blessings of forgiveness of sins, salvation, and life forever with him.

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<sup>134</sup> *CWOS*, 240.



<sup>135</sup> Matthew 28:1-12, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12, or John 20:1-18.

## IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING AN EASTER VIGIL SERVICE

At the 1995 WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts, Professor Charles Cortright assembled and carried out an Easter Vigil service for one of the main services. This was the first time the Vigil was celebrated in WELS on a large scale. As one can imagine, this “new” service struck some participants as strange. Considering all the services that could be held in a WELS church, the Easter Vigil is probably the most “high church.” If one is not taught the historicity of the Vigil, shown the deep and rich symbolism contained in the service, and led to see the connection to Jesus’ resurrection, this service will continue to seem strange.

How can a pastor, whose congregation has never observed the Easter Vigil, implement one? There is no one simple answer to that question. Because of the “high church” stigma that follows the Easter Vigil, this service will not be well-received if a pastor decides to do this service on a whim. Implementing a service of this magnitude is going to be a multistep process over the course of several years. With that said, don’t be discouraged. The time spent preparing your congregation for the implementation of the Easter Vigil will be well spent, both for the pastor and for his congregation.

Every congregation in the WELS is unique. It is made up of different people from different walks of life. Congregations were started at different times, in different places, with different pastors. The make-up of a congregation will determine how a pastor will implement the Easter Vigil. For example, a congregation that has known nothing but excellence in worship and has become accustomed to, for lack of a better term, “high church” elements in services, will likely be receptive to the Easter Vigil Service. On the other hand, a congregation whose usual alternate worship experience is a hymn from *Let All the People Praise You* played on the piano will likely have a more difficult time accepting the Easter Vigil Service. It seems to this author that the millennial generation generally welcomes new worship experiences.

When introducing the Easter Vigil in a congregation, a pastor should begin with a commitment to excellence in worship, including the way in which he leads it. There is a certain sense of reverence that should be observed when conducting a service. That does not mean a pastor needs to be stuffy and never smile. He should never do things haphazardly or with a laissez-faire attitude. If the pastor has little sense of reverence on the average Sunday, the reverence demanded by the Vigil will only seem fake.

The pastor should strive to make every Sunday feel like a festival service. He must know why he is doing what he is doing and how he is doing it. Only then, can he explain it to his people. In an effort to enrich the worship life in his congregation, a pastor will want to pastorally introduce things that are more “high church.” This does not need to be anything dramatic right away. For example, don’t include a thurible in the first year of revamping worship life. People will not understand what it means. It will likely communicate “Catholic” to people who have not been carefully and patiently taught. There are other ways to do this.

When long-range planning for worship, give thought to using orders of service other than page 15 and page 38 in *Christian Worship*. Careful selection of hymns, alternative psalm settings, and musical settings for the verse of the day, will dramatically improve worship. A thoughtful and artful use of the weekly *Propers* will prepare worshipers for many elements in the Vigil. When the pastor senses his church is ready for more, a cross processional on festival Sunday’s, such as Christ the King, Easter, and Ascension, can be added to the service. In and of themselves, these steps may not seem connected to the Easter Vigil. However, they will all play an integral role in preparing a congregation for what they will see at an Easter Vigil.

A second key part in implementing an Easter Vigil service is education. It is not only the pastor who needs to know why he is doing what he is doing and how is doing it. The congregation needs to know these things, too. A four-week Bible class on worship will go a long way in helping the congregation understand what is happening in a service. For example, this class will help them make connections between the invocation and their baptism. This education does not only have to be done in a classroom setting. It can also be done in a service. This author is not advocating for lengthy discourses that disrupt the flow of the service. Far from it. In the service folder, consider placing notes explaining key parts of the liturgy, such as the *Kyrie, Gloria, and Creeds*. In a practical way, this will help God’s people understand their significance in the context of a service. It will also connect them to the Christian traditions that have been used for centuries in the church.

The pastor will also want to educate his people on the church year. The congregation needs to know the what and the why of the church year. Every time the church enters a new season, the pastor will want to explain purpose of the season. Within that season, the pastor needs to clearly identify and explain the focus of each specific service and how it connects to days and seasons in the year. Begin with explaining the church year; then explain the festival

half of the church year with its seasons, then the non-festival half of the church. See Appendix II on page 64 for a chart to help with this education process.

A third key part in implementing an Easter Vigil is found in preaching. The pastor much be a sacramental preacher. This is more than just a passing reference to baptism on Epiphany 2 or the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. The sacraments need to be in the air the people breath in the sanctuary. Being a sacramental preacher is extremely important when implementing the Vigil because of its sacramental focus. If the sacraments are not mentioned on a regular basis, the Vigil will seem out of place.

With the above in place, there are practical things a pastor can do to enhance the congregation's worship life to prepare them for the magnificent Vigil. Begin slowly celebrating the minor festivals of the church year. Start by celebrating St. Michael and All Angels at the end of September. Add one minor festival a year until four or five are being celebrated. The riches of the calendar are now being tapped into. Finally, when it comes to Holy Week: enrich the week. Begin with a clear rationale of Good Friday—day and evening services. Then move to Passion Sunday. Then observe Holy Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday with brief prayer services.<sup>136</sup> Finally, the Vigil connects this all together. Pastor Aaron Christie, Trinity Lutheran Church, Waukesha, Wisconsin, carried out this plan. He took his congregation—who had a one hundred and twenty-five year “low church” worship life—to observing the Vigil within four years.

When a pastor feels his congregation understands the why, what, and how of worship and they congregation has seen a more “high church” form of worship, it may be time to introduce the concept of the Easter Vigil. However, the Vigil is not the place to begin. Education must be started on a broader scale—Holy Week and the Triduum. In the weeks and months leading up to Holy Week, it would be wise for a pastor to teach several Bible classes which touch on its structure and form. Use this time to explain the history, the facets of the different services, the inter-connectedness of the Triduum, and the unique symbolic acts that happen during the Triduum. The Easter Vigil will undoubtedly take the most amount of explanation because it will likely be a service the congregants have never seen before. Great care should be taken in

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<sup>136</sup> Consider using a Taizé service. A Taizé service involves sung and chanted prayers, meditation, a period of silence, liturgical readings. It is a simple and meditative service that would fit the needs of a short service for Holy Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

explaining the four individual parts of the Vigil; the use of the paschal candle; the connection of baptism with Jesus' death and resurrection. This could also serve as a time for some catechetical review on baptism and the Lord's supper.

The pastor will also need to take into consideration the special and varied needs for the service. Questions a pastor should ask: Does my congregation have a paschal candle? Does my congregation have the other items for a processional? If not, does our congregation have the money to buy these items? Is there space in my sanctuary to carry out the different functions needed at the service? Do I have enough volunteers to help with the service? Is there enough interest in the congregation to make observing the Vigil worthwhile? Have I done enough education? This list of questions is not exhaustive but serves as a starting point.

Implementing the Easter Vigil will take time and concerted effort, and should not be done with quickly. Simply throwing an Easter Vigil service in at a moment's notice will catch the congregation off-guard and attendance will be low. Speak with the leaders of the congregation and the musicians. They often have their fingers on the pulse of the congregation and understand what is needed to carry out the implementation. Whatever the case may be, do not give up. The Vigil is worth the effort. The congregation will thank you for it!

### CONCLUSION

At the first Vigil this author attended, the final blessing affected him deeper than it usually did. It hit the strings of the heart in a way it never had before. That is what the Easter Vigil does. The Easter Vigil is different from every other service celebrated throughout the church year. The ceremony, symbolism, reverence, music, and readings touch the whole human creature – body, mind, emotions, and soul – in a profound way. The sensuality of the service puts the promises of God in Word and Sacrament on display for everyone to see. Beginning the service in darkness calls to mind not only the beginning of creation but how every person is born in spiritual darkness. The brightness of the newly kindled fire serves as a symbol Jesus, who is our light and life. He scatters the darkness of our hearts and brings us into his marvelous light. The Service of Lessons puts the heart of God on display. It shows that he is a God of grace; a trustworthy God who remains faithful to every single promise he has made. Even in the dark and fearful days of this life, God is there watching over and protecting us.

The Service of Baptism demonstrates the faithful love God has for his people. Through water and the Word, God adopts sons and daughters into his royal family. He makes them heirs

of the heavenly kingdom whose light will never dim and whose glory will never fade. He washes away sin and clothes his children with the robes of Christ's righteousness. He creates true faith in their hearts which clings to every promise spoken in his Word. The promise God made at baptism he will fulfill at death: "Since we have been united to Christ in his death, we will certainly be united with him in his resurrection."<sup>137</sup> It is Jesus' death and resurrection that give baptism its power. The Easter Vigil is not only a celebration of Christ's passing from death to life but also the Christian's. Through water and the word, Christ's victory is made the Christian's victory.

The transition in the Easter Vigil from darkness to light, from death to life, and from sadness to joy is most deeply felt when the triumphant shouts of "Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!" burst through the church doors. That Easter acclamation is the beating heart of the Gospel. It is the anchor of our faith. In the Service of Holy Communion, Jesus offers Christians his true body, given into death for all their sins. He gives them his true blood which was shed on Calvary for the forgiveness of their sins. In the Lord's Supper, the Christian is offered and assured of his forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.<sup>138</sup> At the Easter Vigil, as Christians stand together at the Lord's table, their faith in God is strengthened and their fellowship with one another is refreshed. All this happens because Jesus defeated death by death itself and rose gloriously and victoriously from the tomb on Easter morn.

The Easter Vigil places Christians at the very heart of the resurrection story. When the account of the empty tomb is read, it is as if each individual person is right there with Peter and John, the three Marys', and the rest of the disciples in the upper room. Like his first followers, Christians experience the excitement and joy of the empty tomb anew. It is as if Jesus is standing right before them, showing the marks in his hands and side. The Easter Vigil brings a person along on an emotional journey of faith, one unlike any other throughout the Christian year. It is for all the reasons listed above that Augustine calls this service, "the mother of all vigils."<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Romans 6:4

<sup>138</sup> David P. Kuske, *Luther's Catechism* (Milwaukee: Board for Parish Education, 1982), 256.

<sup>139</sup> Augustine, *Sermon 219: For the Vigil of Easter* (found at [https://archive.org/stream/fathersofthechur009512mbp/fathersofthechur009512mbp\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/fathersofthechur009512mbp/fathersofthechur009512mbp_djvu.txt)), accessed 23 November, 2016.

The Easter Vigil is not a liturgical invention that came out of Vatican II, nor is it a fleeting fad. The Great Easter Vigil is a service rooted in the antiquity of the Christian Church. The Great Vigil contains more Christian symbolism and displays the Means of Grace more abundantly than any other service in all of Christendom. Because of the way the Vigil touches the emotions and solidifies the deep truths of God in the heart of the believer, it is a service that should be celebrated year after year. When and where the Easter Vigil is celebrated on Saturday, it will most certainly heighten the celebration of the resurrection on Easter Sunday!



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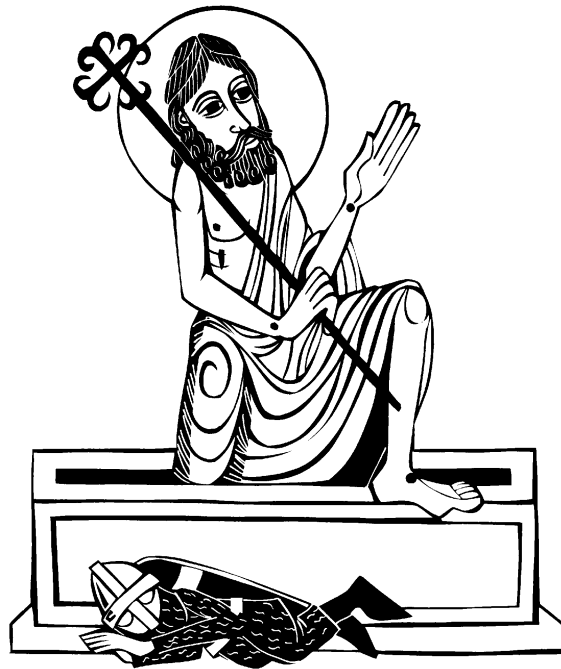
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APPENDIX I  
Easter Vigil Service Folder<sup>140</sup>

The Great  
Vigil of Easter

7:00pm March 26, 2016



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<sup>140</sup> This service folder was created by Pastor Jon Schroeder, Faith Lutheran Church, Sharpsburg, Georgia.

## Easter Vigil Service Notes

**The Day:** In the early church, the Saturday of Holy Week was called the “Great Sabbath.” It was a day of meditation, fasting, and reflection in preparation for Easter. The Easter Vigil has been celebrated regularly since the days of Constantine the Great (300 A.D.).

**The Service:** It is called a “vigil” because it is a service of watching and waiting, using prayer, Scripture, and hymns. It is composed of four parts: The service of light, the service of lessons, the service of baptism, and the service of Holy Communion.

The Vigil remembers the great Passover of God. On the night when the 10<sup>th</sup> plague, the plague of the firstborn, struck the land of Egypt, God promised to deliver all his people whose doors were marked by the blood of a Passover lamb. God’s judgment would pass over them.

Centuries later, God fulfilled that first Passover, with the sacrifice of the Lamb of God during the Passover feast. Now we are assured that because of the blood of that Lamb, God’s judgment passes over us.

Vigils remain popular services, but are often thought of in other ways. Christmas Eve services and New Year’s Eve services are modern-day vigils. Even Easter sunrise services have their roots in the historic service we observe tonight.



## The Service of Light



*The congregation assembles in the memorial garden in the twilight. All are given candles as they arrive. A new fire has been kindled.*

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C **Amen.**

L Beloved in the Lord, on this most holy night, in which our Lord Jesus Christ passed from death to life, we are gathered here in vigil and prayer. This is the Passover of the Lord 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 enkindles the hearts of your faithful people with the fire of your love. Bless, we implore you, this new flame and those who keep this joyful Paschal festival, that burning with desire for life with you, we may be found rightly prepared to share in the Feast of Light that 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 paschal candle is brought before the presiding minister, who traces the cross and Greek letters alpha and omega on it as he says:*

L Christ Jesus, the same yesterday, today, and forever, the beginning and the end, the *Alpha* and the *Omega*.

*He traces the year upon the candle, saying:*

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

*He puts five wax nails into the candle to represent the five wounds of Christ, saying:*

L By his wounds we have healing, both now and forever. Amen.



*As the minister lights the paschal candle, he says:*

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

*The congregation processes to the gathering area. All the people light their candles from the paschal candle.*

**L** Almighty and merciful God, pour out on us your abundant blessing, that all who in true faith share this night in joyful celebration of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead may be filled with your heavenly benediction. Once we were in darkness, but now we are in the true Light, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*The paschal candle is lifted high. The leader sings, and the congregation responds:*

**M:** The light of Christ! **C:** Thanks be to God!

*The procession into the darkened church begins, led by the paschal candle. Halfway to the chancel, the paschal candle is lifted high a second time, the leader sings, and the congregation responds:*

**M:** The light of Christ! **C:** Thanks be to God!

*The people take their seats. When all have reached their places, the paschal candle is taken before the altar, and is lifted high the third time, the leader sings, and the congregation responds:*

**M:** The light of Christ! **C:** Thanks be to God!

## The Easter Exsultet<sup>141</sup>

- L 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 out 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.



**M** The Lord be with you.



**C** And al - so 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.

<sup>141</sup> Latin for "rejoice" or "exult." For 1400 years, the Church has sung this ancient hymn by the light of the paschal candle at the Vigil.



- L It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places, with all our heart and mind and voice, praise you, O Lord, Holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, with your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. For he is the Paschal Lamb who offered himself for the sin of the world, who has cleansed us with the shedding of his precious blood.

This is the night when you brought our fathers, 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 grave is broken, and new creation breaks forth out of night.

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 lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- C **Amen.**

*Candles may be extinguished at any time.*

# The Service of Lessons



*In the ancient church, the lessons served as the final instruction for new believers about to be baptized. In those days, the series of lessons extended all through the night until dawn the next day! Over time, the readings were reduced significantly. Tonight we will have four readings.*

## The First Lesson

## Genesis 1

*The perfection of God's original creation*

L The Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

*Silence*

L Let us pray. Almighty God, you most wonderfully created human nature and yet 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 Lesson

## Genesis 7

*By the waters of the flood, God rescues Noah and his family.*

L The Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

*Silence*

L Let us pray. O Lord, you brought the flood on a wicked and perverse generation and yet saved faithful Noah and his family. Gather your elect 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 #718, Rest, O Christ, From All Your Labor**

1 Rest, O Christ, from all your la - bor;  
 2 Peace at last from all your an - guish,  
 3 Help us keep this sol - emn Sab - bath  
 4 As through part - ing Red Sea wa - ters

Sleep with - in your bor - rowed tomb. Foes have  
 Wounds in hands and feet and side. En - e -  
 As we wait for Eas - ter dawn. Earth's dark  
 Is - rael marched to lib - er - ty, So we

cru - ci - fied and bound you Fast with -  
 mies no long - er mock you, Scourged, a -  
 night of sin is pass - ing; Death's long  
 pass through bap - tism's wa - ter, Washed by

in death's nar - row room. Pi - late's  
 ban - doned, cru - ci - fied. Faith - ful  
 reign will soon be gone. Christ, in  
 grace, from sin set free. Je - sus,

guards stand watch - ing, wait - ing Where they rolled the  
 wom - en gath - er spic - es, Weep for you whom  
 whom the new cre - a - tion Ris - es bright - er  
 ris - en, liv - ing, reign - ing Now and through e -

seal - ing stone. All un - seen an - oth - er  
 sin has slain. Though they mourn, the God who  
 than the sun: May we, as we watch for  
 ter - ni - ty: Grant that, through your life un -

watch - es: God will not for - sake his own.  
 guards you Will not let your death be vain.  
 morn - ing, Trust the vic - t'ry you have won.  
 dy - ing, We may live vic - tor - ious - ly.

## The Third Lesson

## Exodus 14:10ff.

*God uses the waters of the Red Sea to deliver Israel.*



L The Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

*Silence*

L Let us pray. O God, you once delivered your people Israel from bondage under Pharaoh and led them safely through the Red Sea. By this, you gave us a picture of our baptism. Lead us to always rejoice in your baptismal promise that we may live in its grace and declare to all people your desire to make them true children of Abraham, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C **Amen.**

## All the Earth Sing Forth

*By J.S. Bach, sung by the Junior Choir*

All the earth sing forth, give praise to the Lord forever.  
Every voice, sing, rejoice.  
Sing your praise to the Lord forever more.  
Shout your praise to the Lord, lift up your hearts rejoicing.  
Shout your praise to the Lord, your joyful songs be voicing.  
Every voice, sing, rejoice.  
Shout and sing your joyful praise forever more.  
Praise the Lord with dance and song. Sound the cymbals loud and strong.  
Sound the trumpet, lute, and harp. All that breathes now praise the Lord.

## The Fourth Lesson

## Daniel 3:13-27

*The Fiery Furnace*

L The Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

*Silence*

L Let us pray. O God, Your Son protected faithful Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace of the king. Grant us protection in our time of testing that we would 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, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

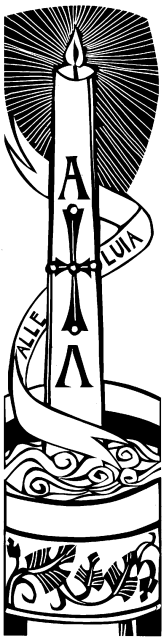
C **Amen.**

## And Sleeps My Lord in Silence Yet

*Sung by the choir*

*This beautiful song contemplates Holy Saturday, when Jesus' body lay in the tomb. Did death win? Were all of Christ's works in vain? No. The questions find their answer in the resurrection of the Son of God. Timothy Dudley-Smith, 1984.*

And sleeps my Lord in silence yet, within the darkness laid away;  
where none remember nor forget, where breaks no more the sunlit day?  
And sleeps my Lord in silence yet, where cold His lifeless body lay?  
And does the sting of death remain to work unchanged its bitter will?  
Were cross and passion all in vain, no battle won on Calv'ry's hill?  
And does the sting of death remain, and gapes the grave in triumph still?  
Have faith in Christ, the risen Son, who reigns eternal, glorified!  
Who death destroyed, who triumph won, who flung the gates of heaven wide!  
Have faith in Christ, the risen Son, the living Lord of Eastertide!



## The Service of Holy Baptism

*The paschal candle is a symbol of the resurrection of Christ. Lit during the Easter Vigil, it remains burning through the 50 days of Easter. Then it is lit at every baptism and every funeral as a reminder of Christ's resurrection. The paschal candle is dipped in the water of the baptismal font as a sign of Christ's death and resurrection, which gives baptism its power.*

- L On this holiest of days, the whole Church of our Lord Jesus Christ recalls his death and burial, rejoicing in the gospel of his glorious resurrection. St. Paul said, "Do you not know that 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."

### Renunciation and Confession of Faith

- L In Holy Baptism, God forgives our sins and grants us a new life in Christ, our Lord. By faith we renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways; we confess the gift of faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I ask you: Do you renounce the devil?

C **I do renounce him.**

L And all his works?

C **I do renounce them.**

L And all his ways?

C **I do renounce them.**

- L Do you believe in God the Father?
- C **Yes, I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.**
- L 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.**
- L 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.**
- L Is it your earnest purpose to continue steadfast in the faith into which you were baptized and, as a member of the Church, to be diligent in the use of the means of grace and prayer?
- C **Yes, with the help of God.**
- L Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given you the new birth of water and of Spirit and has forgiven you all your sins, strengthen you with his grace to life everlasting.
- C **Amen.**

**Hymn: #156, *Awake, My Heart, with Gladness, vv. 1-4***

*Paul Gerhardt was a prolific German hymn writer who lived during 17th century. He was born on March 12, 1607, in Gräfenheim, near Wittenberg, Germany. Trained to be a Lutheran pastor, he matriculated as a student at the University of Wittenberg, where Martin Luther had taught a century earlier. He died May 27, 1676. Paul Gerhardt wrote 123 hymns in total and many are still sung today.*

*At the pealing of the bell, please stand.*

## The Verse of the Day

*The congregation turns to face the pastor as the procession comes to the middle of the assembly.*

L Christ is risen!

C **He is risen indeed!**

*Refrain*



L Refrain

C **Refrain**

L For as in Adam all die, so in Christ, all will be made alive. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

C **Refrain**

## The Gospel

**John 20:1-18**

*After the reading*

L The Gospel of our Lord.



C

Al - le - lu - ia!

Al - le - lu - ia!

Al - le - lu - ia!

## Prayer of the Day

L Let us pray.

*The leader says the Prayer of the Day.*

C **Amen.**



## The Service of Holy Communion

L The Lord be with you.



C: And al - so with you.

L Lift up your hearts.



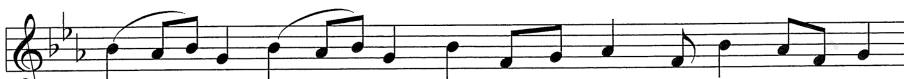
C: We lift them up un - to the Lord.

L Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.



C: It is good and right so to do.

L It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, and we praise you especially for the glorious resurrection of your Son, the true Passover Lamb. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:



C: 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, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen.

## The Words of Institution

- L 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.

C: 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.

## Distribution

*Come forward at the direction of the ushers.*

### **Distribution Hymn: *Ave Verum Corpum***

*By Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, sung by Mrs. Tiffany Harris*

Lord most holy, born of Mary,  
praise and honor be to you, O Lord.  
In your passion you have suffered,  
your blood on the cross was poured.  
Blessed Savior, Lord of mercy,  
glory be to your name adored.  
Songs of praise and thanks are given  
forever to you, O Lord,  
forever to you, O Lord.

### **Blessing**

*It is traditional to take home the candles from the Easter Vigil and use them on the table for Easter dinner and as long as they last during the fifty days of the great Easter feast.*

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APPENDIX II

Seasons of the Church Year Diagram

