



Easter Vigil

Narrator (Before Entering the Tomb):

Let us light our candles.

We are an Easter people, therefore let us keep an Easter Vigil. The Easter Vigil is an ancient solemn practice that is observed during the hours of darkness between sunset on Holy Saturday and sunrise on Easter Sunday. The setting is always a dark room which represents the tomb of Christ. Let us enter into our darkened room, our darkened tomb, and be mindful "that all of us baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death" and that "we were buried with him through baptism into death (Rom 6. 3-4)."

Narrator (After Entering the Tomb):

Each of us hold a candle which is our symbol of devotion towards our stricken saviour. Let the light from our candles reflect our inner faith in the resurrection. As we await the morning hours to celebrate the resurrection of our Saviour, let us recount biblical stories of creation, salvation, and eternal life while together deep within the tomb. Let us pray.

Everyone Prays: You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave . . . (Ps 88. 6, 5a)

Reader 1:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds."

Everyone Prays: He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead. He has walled me in so I cannot escape (Lam. 3.6-7a);

Reader 2:

And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind."

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Reader 3:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, . . . and the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Then the LORD God made a woman.

So male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Adam lived . . . and then he died.

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Reader 4:

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.¹

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Reader 5:

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know."

¹ I Cor 15. 21-22; 45-49

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD."²

Everyone Prays: He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead. He has walled me in so I cannot escape (Lam. 3.6-7a);

Reader 6:

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light." After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not

² Ezekiel 37.1-6

there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."³

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Reader 7:

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached

³ John 11. 1-16

the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

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Reader 8:

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."⁴

Everyone Prays: You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave . . . (Ps 88. 6, 5a)

⁴ John 11. 17-44

Reader 9:

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."⁵

Everyone Prays: He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead. He has walled me in so I cannot escape (Lam. 3.6-7a);

Reader 10:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their

⁵ Matt 16. 21-28

God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."⁶

Everyone Prays: You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave . . . (Ps 88. 6, 5a)

Narrator: Let us be mindful "that all of us baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death (Romans 6.3)" and that "we were buried with him through baptism into death (Romans 6.4)." Let the light from our candles represent and reflect our inner faith in our baptism.

Reader 11:

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 like this 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.⁷

Everyone Prays: We were baptized into his death and were buried with him through our baptism.

⁶ Rev 21. 1-5

⁷ Romans 6.3-7

Reader 12:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.⁸

Everyone Prays: We were baptized into his death and were buried with him through our baptism.

Narrator:

The ancient solemn service of Easter Vigils has always been closely associated with baptism as noted centuries ago by the ecclesiastical writer Tertullian in the year 200 AD. Let us join the many many voices of the past centuries who expressed their baptismal vows by candlelight in the pre-Easter darkness by expressing and forging our common baptismal vows together as an Easter People. Let us express our vows.

We believe in God the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth;
We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Saviour;
We believe in the Holy Spirit the giver of life;
We will love the Lord our God with our whole heart and soul;
We will love our neighbors as our self;
We will continue in the teaching and fellowship of the scriptures;
and We will continue to proclaim by word and example
the Good News of God in Christ.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 4. 16-18

Narrator:

Let us go forth to our homes and await the morning hours with our love ones to commemorate and celebrate the resurrection of our Saviour.

(copies of the Easter Vigil can be obtained on www.urban-monk.org)