

Easter Vigil: Order of Service

First Service of Easter

The Great Vigil of Easter is the brightest jewel of Christian liturgy traced to early Christian times. It proclaims the universal significance of God's saving acts in history through four related services held on the same occasion, and consists of:

Service of Light

The service begins in the darkness of night. In kindling new fire and lighting the paschal candle, we are reminded that Christ came as a light shining in darkness (John 1:5). Through the use of fire, candles, words, movement, and music, the worshiping community becomes the pilgrim people of God following the "pillar of fire" given to us in Jesus Christ, the light of the world. The paschal candle is used throughout the service as a symbol for Jesus Christ. This candle is carried, leading every procession during the vigil. Christ, the light of the world, thus provides the unifying thread to the service.

Service of Readings

The second part of the vigil consists of a series of readings from the Old and New Testaments. These lessons provide a panoramic view of what God has done for humanity. Beginning with creation, we are reminded of our delivery from bondage in the exodus, of God's calling us to faithfulness through the cry of the prophets, of God dwelling among us in Jesus Christ, and of Christ's rising in victory from the tomb. The readings thus retell our "holy history" as God's children, summarising the faith into which we are baptised.

Service of Baptism

In the earliest years of the Christian church, baptisms commonly took place at the vigil. So this vigil includes baptism and/or the renewal of the baptismal covenant. As with the natural symbol of light, water plays a critical role in the vigil. The image of water giving life—nurturing crops, sustaining life, and cleansing our bodies—cannot be missed in this part of the vigil. Nor is the ability of water to inflict death in drowning overlooked. Water brings both life and death. So also there is death and life in Baptism, for in Baptism we die to sin and are raised to life. Baptism unites believers to Christ's death and resurrection.

Service of the Eucharist

The vigil climaxes in a joyous celebration of the feast of the people of God. The risen Lord invites all to participate in the new life he brings by sharing the feast which he has prepared. We thus look forward to the great Messianic feast of the kingdom of God when the redeemed from every time and place "will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29). The vigil thus celebrates what God has done, is doing, and will do.

For more details of this service see, "Book of Common Worship" Presbyterian Church USA, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993 or "Handbook of the Christian Year", Hickman, Saliers, Stookey, White, Abingdon Press.

An Outline of the Great Vigil of Easter

- The vigil begins in darkness, after nightfall.
- If possible, the lighting of the new fire takes place outside the church building; otherwise at the entrance to the church.
- All gather in silence at the place where the new fire will be lighted.
- A small candle is given to each worshipper.

The Service of Light

Greeting and Introduction

Opening Prayer

Lighting of the Paschal Candle

Procession Into the Church

- The procession into the darkened church begins, led by the bearer of the paschal candle.
- The procession pauses three times at various places - the third being when the paschal candle is about to be placed in the Church for all to see.
- A leader and the people sings or says responsively:

Leader:

All:

The light of Christ. Thanks be to God.

All light their candles from the paschal candle.

Easter Proclamation (the Exsultet)

‘Uniting in worship’ People’s Book, page 156, No.21

Or all may sing the version:

Sing choirs of heaven! Let saints and angels sing!

Around God's throne exult in harmony!

Now ,Jesus Christ is risen from the grave!

Salute your king; in glorious symphony!

Sing choirs of earth! Behold, your light has come!

The glory of the Lord shines radiantly!

Lift up your hearts, for Christ has conquered death!

The night is past; the day of life is here!

Sing church of God! Exult with joy outpoured!

The gospel trumpets tell of victory won!

Your Saviour lives: he's with you evermore!

Let all God's people shout the long Amen!

(Tune: Woodlands)

After the proclamation the lights of the Church are turned on and the people's candles extinguished

The Service of the Word

- The number of readings may vary according to the length of the service.
- There should always be three readings from the Old Testament, including Exodus 14.
- Each reading is followed by a brief silence then a Psalm is read or sung, followed by a prayer.
- A verse of an Easter hymn/song may be used after each prayer or perhaps the refrain of TIS 390 may

be used repeatedly

[Old Testament Readings](#)

First Reading: Story of Creation

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

Silence.

Psalm 136:1-9, 23-26

Let us pray.

Second Reading: The Flood

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

Silence.

Psalm 46

Let us pray.

Third Reading: Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac

Genesis 22:1-18

Silence.

Psalm 16

Let us pray.

Fourth Reading: Israel's Deliverance at the Red Sea

Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21

Silence.

Exodus 15:1b-6, 11-13, 17-18

Let us pray.

Fifth Reading: Salvation Offered Freely to All

Isaiah 55:1-11

Silence.

Isaiah 12:2-6

Let us pray.

Sixth Reading: The Wisdom of God

Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6

Silence.

Psalm 19

Let us pray.

Seventh Reading: A New Heart and a New Spirit

Ezekiel 36:24-28

Silence.

Psalms 42 and 43

Let us pray.

Eighth Reading: The Valley of the Dry Bones

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Silence.

Psalm 143

Let us pray.

Ninth Reading: The Gathering of God's People

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Silence.

Psalm 98

Let us pray.

Hymn of Praise (Such as "Glory to God in the Highest" eg SA 99b or 100b)

Prayer of the Day

Epistle Reading Romans 6:3-11

Psalm

Psalm 114

Worship', the Breaking of the Bread, the Lamb of God, the Communion of the People, and

the Prayer after Communion.

The Sending forth of the People of God

Hymn, Song

Words of Mission

Blessing

Dismissal