

Keeping the Easter Vigil at Home

A directed Easter Vigil
for your home and household
offered by the Worship Commission
Emmanuel Church in the City of Boston¹

This year we hold an abbreviated vigil rather than a Great Vigil, a “vigil” in the original sense of a night prayer of anticipation and waiting. Our mood is hushed. The silence, stillness, and emptiness of Holy Saturday are very much with us. We have been living inside them. This night, we are at the hinge of Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday.

This service uses “one” and “all” for a leader and the other persons who are present. The various parts can be shared. Children as well as adults can read and lead. Each part can be either read by a single person (“One”) or by all (“All”). A single leader is not required if there are several people present. Adapt to your own situation.

Even when we pray separately from our congregation or even alone, we gather in spirit with the rest of the church on this holy night.

Washing Our Hands

Each person present washes their hands thoroughly with soap and running water. Once they have washed their hands, each should help with setting the table as they are able.

Setting the Scene

Assemble and set up your Vigil environment. You can do this at your dining or kitchen table, your desk, a corner of a room or windowsill. For set-up and symbols, use what is available in your home:

*--A **candle** (a white pillar candle if you have one) and something with which to light it.²*

*--A **bowl of water**.*

*--A **plant, flower(s), fruit and/or vegetable** (things from God’s creation).*

*--An **icon of Jesus Christ** (or other image evoking Christ: postcard, web-based image, child’s drawing, cross).*

You can lay these items on a bare table or on a white or brightly colored cloth.

If possible, have a copy of this script for each person present.

¹ If you live alone and can use a phone or videoconferencing platform (Google Hangouts, Zoom) you can team up with a friend or relative and follow this script together.

² Only if it is safe for you to do this in your home. Never leave a lighted candle unattended!

Quieting Down

Take some slow, deep breaths. Settle in your seat(s). Once your breathing has slowed, read the following, silently or aloud:

While it was still dark.
While it was still night.
While she could not see.
While she thought death held sway.
While she grieved.
While she wept.
While it was still dark, resurrection began.³

The Light of Christ

Take a deep breath. Light the candle.

Another deep breath. Gaze at the light for a while.

One: The light of Christ!

All: Thanks be to God!

The ancient Exultet (“Rejoice”) prayer follows, read by one or several. The Exultet may have originated with St. Ambrose in the second half of the 4th century and took final form in the 7th century.

Rejoice now, heavenly hosts and choirs of angels, and let your trumpets shout Salvation for the victory of our mighty King. Rejoice and sing now, all the round earth, bright with a glorious splendor, for darkness has been vanquished by our eternal King.

Rejoice and be glad now, Mother Church, and let your holy courts, in radiant light, resound with the praises of your people.

All you who stand near this marvelous and holy flame, pray with me to God the Almighty for the grace to sing the worthy praise of this great light; through Jesus Christ his Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

One: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

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

All: It is right to give God thanks and praise.

It is truly right and good, always and everywhere, with our whole heart and mind and voice, to praise you, the invisible, almighty, and eternal God, and your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

³ ©Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com.

This is the night, when you brought our fathers and mothers, the children of Israel, out of bondage in Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea on dry land. This is the night, when all who believe in Christ are delivered from the gloom of sin, and are restored to grace and holiness of life.

This is the night, when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell, and rose victorious from the grave. How wonderful and beyond our knowing, O God, is your mercy and loving-kindness to us, that to redeem a slave, you gave a Son. How holy is this night, when wickedness is put to flight, and sin is wash'd away. It restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to those who mourn. It casts out pride and hatred, and brings peace and concord. How blessed is this night, when earth and heaven are joined, and humanity is reconciled to God.

All: Holy Author, accept our evening sacrifice, the offering of this candle in your honor, a pillar of fire, the brightness of which diminishes not. For it is fed by melting wax, which the bees, your creatures have made to praise you. May it shine continually to drive away all darkness. May Christ, the Morning Star who knows no setting, find it ever burning—he who gives his light to all creation, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Keep the candle burning for the whole vigil. If it is a large enough candle, you can light it during the remainder of the fifty days of Easter, until the eve of Pentecost, when your household gathers for a meal or you sit for some quiet.

Word and Story

One: The vigil readings, which we will remember in paraphrase rather than read in full,⁴ are a dramatic celebration of freedom and life in the goodness of creation (Genesis 1), in our emancipation from slavery (Exodus 14), and of the gift of salvation freely offered to all (Isaiah 55).

One: Here is water, in a round bowl.
We remember the chaos of the beginning, the oceans and the earth, the rivers and the lakes,

All: created by God.

One: Here is light, outside is darkness. We remember night and day,

All: created by God.

One: Here are plants and fruit from the earth,

All: created by God.

One: We are here with our animal and human companions,

All: created by God.

⁴ Genesis 1:1-2:2; Exodus 14:10-31; Isaiah 55:1-11; Matthew 28:1-10.

One: We remember that after creating the world and all that is in it, God said:

All: It's good! It's very good!

All: *Sing or say this verse from the Song of Miriam (Exodus 15):*

setting by Carl Daw

Shout with joy to the LORD, all you lands; lift up your voice, rejoice and sing.

One: We remember the Exodus, the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites, led by Moses, guided by God, a journey of liberation from slavery, a departure from Egypt, which in Hebrew is *Mitzrayim*, meaning “the narrow place.”

One: Which narrow place do you need and wish to leave?

All: *Silent reflection or sharing aloud.*

One: From which narrow place or enslavement has the Holy One already delivered you?

All: *Silent reflection or sharing aloud.*

One: What liberation do you wish and pray for in and for our world?

All: *Silent reflection or sharing aloud.*

All: *Sing or say this verse from the Song of Miriam (Exodus 15):*

setting by Carl Daw

Shout with joy to the LORD, all you lands; lift up your voice, rejoice and sing.

One: As we keep vigil, we remember creation,
we remember liberation,
we remember healing and salvation freely offered to all.

“All who thirst,” says the prophet Isaiah,
“Come to the water! ...
Give ear and come to me;
listen, that you may live.
I will make an everlasting covenant with you...”

All: Sing or say this verse from the Song of Miriam (Exodus 15):

setting by Carl Daw

Shout with joy — to the LORD, — all you lands; lift up your voice, re - joice — and sing.

Remembering Our Baptism, Renewing Our Vows

One: Gaze at the water in the bowl before us. It speaks to us of the waters of creation, the waters of the womb in which we all swam, the waters of oceans and rivers. It speaks to us of the life-giving nature of water in this time of pandemic, when water cleanses, protects, and renews. It speaks to us also of our baptism.

One: Paul wrote to the church at Rome:
Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.⁵

One: Through the Paschal mystery, we are buried with Christ by Baptism into his death and raised with him to newness of life. I call upon us, therefore, now that our Lenten observance is ended, to renew our solemn promises and vows of Holy Baptism.

The Renewal of Baptismal Vows.

One: Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil and renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?

All: I do.

One: Do you believe in God the Father?

All: I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

One: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

⁵ Excerpted from Romans 6: 3-11.

All: I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

One: Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

All: I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

One: Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

All: I will, with God's help.

One: Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

All: I will, with God's help.

One: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

All: I will, with God's help.

One: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

All: I will, with God's help.

One: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

All: I will, with God's help.

One: We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over the waters the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through water it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In water your Child Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the everlasting life. We thank you for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.

All: Blessed are you, Holy One, for water and for the Holy Spirit, through which we are cleansed from sin and are born again. May we continue forever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior. To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

One: Let us bless ourselves with the sign of the cross.

(With or without dipping hand in the bowl of water. Either way, no sharing of water among multiple people, for reasons of health.)

One: Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who are reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Alleluia! Good News!

Sing! "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMwPEmUMP7U>

Proclaim: *Matthew 28: 1-10*

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

An Ancient Easter Message

Before we read this ancient text, we hear excerpts from an introduction our Rector Pam gave to it at last year's Easter Vigil. The stomping of feet applies to households, not just congregations, so go for it!⁶

Pam's words: There is an ancient tradition among Eastern Orthodox churches of reading the Easter Sermon of St. John Chrysostom at matins or at the Great Vigil of Easter. Roman and Anglican Catholics have picked up the practice over the years. John Chrysostom was Archbishop of Constantinople at the turn of the 5th century. Chrysostom was not his surname, but a description – it means golden mouth. He used his golden mouth in powerful ways, some very beautiful, and some very ugly. His preaching against Christians in his congregations participating in Jewish festivals and fasts, liturgies of Shabbat and Holy Days is particularly egregious, and his rants against homosexuality both have done lasting damage to the Church and grave damage to his targeted victims. I like to think that we could have changed John Chrysostom's heart at Emmanuel Church, with our covenant relationship with Central Temple and our Queerness, and the reason I think that is that his primary concern in his preaching and in his life, was social justice. He thought that social injustice was as bad or worse than murder. I think we could have found common ground. ...

So I'm going to read John Chrysostom's Easter Homily for you and invite you to participate. The Eastern Orthodox custom is for congregational engagement. When death is mentioned, we are to stomp our feet to enact Jesus's victory over death. (*practice – death – stomp*) Whenever the word disturbed

⁶ Unless, of course, you live in an apartment above another apartment and it is late at night! In which case, clap your hands or wiggle in your chair.

is mentioned, the congregation repeats *disturbed*. (*practice with a frown – disturbed – disturbed*). Whenever the word “risen” is mentioned, the congregation repeats *risen* (*practice with a smile – risen – risen*). Just a note about the disturbance of Hell, sometimes called the embitterment of Hell: the disturbance or embitterment comes from Jesus’ emptying Hell out entirely. Hell is disturbed or embittered because it is now empty. In John Chrysostom’s view, it still exists, but there’s nobody there. The homily is four paragraphs long and the congregational participation comes in the last two paragraphs. Here we go.

John Chrysostom’s words: “If any be devout and love God, let them enjoy this fair and radiant triumphal feast. If any be wise servants, let them rejoicing enter into the joy of their Lord. If any have labored long in fasting, let them now receive their recompense. If any have worked from the first hour, let them today receive their just reward. If any have come at the third hour, let them with thankfulness keep the feast. If any have arrived at the sixth hour, let them have no misgivings; because they shall in nowise be deprived thereof. If any have delayed until the ninth hour, let them draw near, fearing nothing. If any have tarried even until the eleventh hour, let them, also, be not alarmed at their tardiness; for the Holy One, who is jealous of their honor, will accept the last even as the first; the Holy One gives rest to the ones who come at the eleventh hour, even as unto the ones who have worked from the first hour.

And the Holy One shows mercy upon the last, and cares for the first; and to the one gives, and upon the other bestows gifts. And the Holy One both accepts the deeds, and welcomes the intention, and honors the acts and praises the offering. Wherefore, enter you all into the joy of your Maker; and receive your reward, both the first, and likewise the second. You rich and poor together, hold high festival. You sober and you heedless, honor the day. Rejoice today, both you who have fasted and you who have disregarded the fast. The table is full-laden; feast ye all sumptuously. Your participation is long awaited; let no one go hungry away.

Enjoy you all the feast of trust in Love: Receive you all the riches of loving-kindness. let none bewail their poverty, for the universal kin-dom has been revealed. Let none weep for their iniquities, for pardon has shown forth from the grave. Let none fear **death [stomp]**, for the Savior’s **death [stomp]** has set us free. He that was held prisoner of it has annihilated it. By descending into Hell, He made Hell captive. He **disturbed** it when it tasted of His flesh. As Isaiah ... did cry: Hell, said he, was **disturbed**, when it encountered Thee in the lower regions. It was **disturbed**, for it was abolished. It was **disturbed**, for it was mocked. It was **disturbed**, for it was slain. It was **disturbed**, for it was overthrown. It was **disturbed**, for it was fettered in chains. It took a body, and met God face to face. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took that which was seen, and fell upon the unseen.

O **death [stomp]**, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory? Christ is **risen**, and you are overthrown. Christ is **risen**, and the demons are fallen. Christ is **risen**, and the angels rejoice. Christ is **risen**, and life reigns. Christ is **risen**, and not one dead remains in the grave. For Christ, being **risen** from the dead, is become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To Christ be glory and dominion unto ages of ages.⁷⁷ Amen and Happy Easter everyone!

⁷ <https://oca.org/fs/sermons/the-paschal-sermon> and performance instructions: <http://janevoigts.com/blog/2014/4/23>

Sharing Food and Drink, Giving Thanks

Have some food and drink and remember with thanks, giving the life and witness of Jesus Christ and their presence in your life.

Going Forth in Joy

At the end of the celebration and meal, pray:

One: May the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the love of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do God's will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in God's sight; in the name of God Almighty, Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit, who lives among us and will remain with us always.

All: Amen.

Sing! "Hail the Day That Sees Him Rise" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjofDCZlyRY>

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