

The Great Vigil of Easter 2009

Exodus 14:10—15:1

“The Waters of Salvation”

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Our text for tonight is the Exodus and crossing of the Red Sea as recorded in the book of Exodus chapter 14.

We gather here tonight to keep vigil, or watch for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. *What makes this night different from any other night? Why should we gather here and hope and trust that our Lord has risen from the grave? Why should we, modern 21st century Americans, care two hoots about an event that happened close to 2000 years ago?*

We keep vigil tonight because Jesus’ death and resurrection from the dead is the defining event in the history of the world. We see the world through His death and resurrection. If you look at the world any other way, it simply is not reality.

The people of Israel were faced with a similar challenge almost 3500 years ago. Relentless Pharaoh pursued them. He had it in for them. He sought to kill the whole lot of them. Their very lives, their very existence as the people of God was in jeopardy. The armies of Pharaoh were on one side, the Red Sea on the other. *What would they do? Would God deliver them? Would they even survive?*

This is your lot as children of death. We are lost and hopeless. We, like them so many years ago, are in darkness and left with fear because of our sins. *Will God deliver us? Will God see us through this life and into the life to come?*

We know the rest of the story, of course. God opened a path for them right through the middle of the sea, so that they were safe on dry ground. The water that once spelled their death now was their salvation. God saved them through the water, by protecting them AND by destroying their enemies.

My dear friends in Christ, tonight we learn what this story is really about. This great story in the history of Israel was but a picture of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, and the life that is now yours through Holy Baptism.

When Jesus died on the cross, He was laid to rest in the tomb. For three days He rested in the grave. But after three days, He burst forth from the tomb. God had exalted Him, He had lifted Him up out of the grave and death. As Saint Paul said, **Death no longer had dominion over Him.**

Jesus rose triumphant from the grave! Just as the people of Israel passed through the sea of death to life everlasting, Jesus passed through death to life. Pharaoh is Satan, that old evil foe who seeks your life. But you are loosed from Pharaoh’s bitter yoke! Because you are baptized into His name, that journey is now your journey. You have passed from death to life through the

holy waters of baptism. You have traveled with Israel through the Red Sea and death, and have come out dry and safe on the other side. Satan is left at the bottom of the sea with your sins.

Perhaps Saint Paul said it best in Romans chapter six: **Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness of His* resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.**

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:3-11)

This is the song of all creation. His death is your death, and His life is your life. The women brought incense and spices to Jesus' tomb to bury him. These spices and incense were used to cover up the smell of death. But that smell which was meant to cover up death is now for us a reminder of life, eternal life in him. With Jesus' resurrection from death the power of Satan is undone, the power of death is finished, the power of hell is gone forever. So rejoice in your risen Savior! Pray and watch this night, for we rise in the morning to greet Him with the dawn of a new day, the Lord's Day, the day of the Resurrection of the Dead. In the strong name of Jesus. Amen.