

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Lectionary-based Catechesis • Year A

Opening prayers, Easter Vigil²

The Easter Vigil

Principal Service readings

The following are the essential readings for the Easter Vigil, for other readings refer to the lectionary

Exodus 14.10-31; 15.20,21 The crossing of the sea
Canticle: Exodus 15.1b-13,17,18 The song of victory
Romans 6.3-11 Baptized into Christ
Psalm 114 Crossing the waters
Matthew 28.1-10 The empty tomb

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The empty tomb

¹After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And 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. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then 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.' ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

Matthew 28.1-10 NRSV¹

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² *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for Years A, B and C from the sacramentary : the ICEL collects / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

Matthew used the Gospel of Mark as a source, but he presents Easter Sunday morning in a much more dramatic way. In Matthew's version it is clear that an angel has rolled the stone away from the entrance to the tomb, who in appearance is like lightning. The guards, who were posted by Pilate himself, were in a daze, and the earth shook. Jesus himself appears to the women. Significantly, in Matthew, the risen Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and 'the other Mary'. Women are the first people to witness the resurrection. Having greeted them, Jesus gives them a task to do: to tell the other disciples that he is risen and that they will see him in Galilee. Here it is not Peter or the Beloved Disciple or any other disciples who see him first, but Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.

We know from other stories in the gospels that the male disciples of Jesus dismissed the stories of the women who said they had seen the risen Christ (Luke 24.11). Why were they so reluctant to believe? Would we have acted differently if we had been there? It can be hard to break through to a new way of thinking, that death is not the end. The women have mixed feelings 'fear and joy' – but they are impelled to share the good news. If we had been there, would we have been able to do the same?

Quotations

1

Jesus's resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord's Prayer is about.

Surprised by hope: rethinking heaven, the resurrection, and the mission of the church
/ N.T. Wright. 2007

2

If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead.

The reason for God: belief in an age of skepticism / Timothy Keller. 2008

3

It is not easy to convey a sense of wonder, let alone resurrection wonder, to another. It's the very nature of wonder to catch us off guard, to circumvent expectations and assumptions. Wonder can't be packaged, and it can't be worked up. It requires some sense of being there and some sense of engagement.

Eugene H. Peterson, 1932–2018

4

For me the most radical demand of Christian faith lies in summoning the courage to say yes to the present risenness of Jesus Christ.

Abba's child: the cry of the heart for intimate belonging / Brennan Manning. 1994

Related topics

For further study:

Resurrection; paschal mystery; baptism/confirmation; eucharist; symbols: community, fire/light, water, oil, garment, bread and wine, cross

Closing Prayer

O God,
your saving plan has brought us
to the glory of this night.
Slaves, we become your sons and daughters,
poor, your mercy makes us rich,
sinners, you count us among your saints.

Bring us to know the place that is ours
in the unfolding story of your purpose,
and instil in our hearts
the wonder of your salvation.

Grant this through Jesus Christ,
our passover and our peace,
who lives with you now and always