

The Vigil of the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord
St. Matthew 28:1-7
April 11th, 2020
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

He Is Risen, As He Said

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

The origins of this Easter Vigil service that we are observing tonight began in the Early Church. The saints were so eager to be in church for the Easter morning Divine Service that they would show up the night before and keep watch and pray—keep vigil—until the morning. Eventually someone got the idea to add to the people’s prayers and singing of psalms some readings from the Holy Scripture. These developed into the twelve readings which we heard earlier taking us through the history of the Church’s redemption through our Lord + Jesus Christ found in the Old Testament.

This is how the Church has always celebrated. By gathering together as the Body of Christ around the Word of God the Church celebrates her heritage and the promise of eternal life in the Lord + Jesus. We gather in the night—while it is still dark—in anticipation of the morning light; of that eternal Light that has enlightened the darkness of this dark world, and won salvation for all mankind, and especially for those who believe on Him. This is what is symbolized in how we worshiped tonight. We began in darkness, and then a few small lights were lighted, and now we are surrounded by light. Such it was with the beginning of the Church. The Light of the Christ started with the Apostles and other disciples and reached into all the world. The light of the Gospel illumines this dark night—the promise that through the works and merits of the Christ we have forgiveness, life and salvation.

Even the life of our Lord + Jesus Christ illuminates this. For He was born into our flesh at midnight—in darkness. The angel appeared to the shepherds in the night and proclaimed the birth of our Savior—of their Savior—and then the whole company of Heaven joined that angel and sang out the song which sang tonight for the first time in several weeks, “Glory be to God on High, and on Earth, peace, goodwill to men,” the Gloria in Excelsis, and the whole of the heavens were illuminated with the glow of the majesty of Heaven and her angels.

The women in the Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew also come to the tomb of our Lord + Jesus while it was still dark; just before the dawn. When they arrive at the tomb, they find that the stone had been rolled away—by a great earthquake in the night, we are told by St. Matthew that knocked the guards guarding the tomb unconscious. They also see an angel, who shines with the brilliance of Heaven. He shone like lightening and his clothes were as white as snow. The light of Heaven dispelled the gloom of night. They came expecting to see death—the dead body of the Lord + Jesus—and anoint Him with fragrant oils, since there was not time to properly do that on the day of

His death. But instead they are met with life. They come in the dark expecting to find death, but are shown the light of Heaven and are met with a resurrected Lord and Christ.

It is this anticipation of eternal joy and bliss that prompted the Christians of the Early Church to gather very early in the morning to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord + Jesus. It is why we gather this night in eager anticipation, not only of the Easter celebration we will celebrate in just a few hours, but also in eager anticipation of the day when darkness will no longer overshadow; when death will no longer have dominion over us; when sin will no longer reign over us and our thoughts, words and deeds. But we look forward to the day when we will walk in eternal light, life and forgiveness.

The women who went to the tomb were the first to go to meet the Lord after His resurrection. We gather here tonight to be the first to celebrate the commemoration of our Lord's resurrection from the dead. The Lord + Jesus promised before His crucifixion and death that He would rise again on the third day. Today, He is risen, just as He said. His promises are sure. What He promises will surely come to pass. He has promised us an eternal home in Heaven. He has promised to deliver us from the darkness of sin and from this world of woe. He will take us to Heaven, even as He daily and richly forgives our sins and the sins of all believers in Him.

Therefore, my dear friends, in the same way that our Lord's birth and His resurrection are proclaimed by angels, and by lowly shepherds and humble women going to see Him and worship Him, we too can gather with all the rest of the saints, both those here on Earth, and those who have already attained the crown of eternal life. Let us rejoice this night that our Lord + Jesus has conquered death, and promised us life. Let us rejoice that our Lord + Jesus has dispelled the darkness and won for us a life filled with eternal light.

There in Heaven we will be clothed in raiment just like the angel who appeared to the women who went to the tomb. We will be clothed with the righteousness of the Christ, and we will shine like lightening, and our clothes will be as white as snow. There we will sing the eternal Liturgy of the Lamb in His Kingdom, which will have no end. There we will sing for all eternity with the angels of Heaven, "Glory be to God on High, and on Earth, peace, goodwill to men." In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!