

The Vigil of the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord
St. Matthew 28:1-7
April 4th, 2026
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald P. Dulas

The First Day of the Week

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

“Now late on the Sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.”

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.

My dearly beloved friends, Hallelujah! Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! The celebration of our Lord’s resurrection from the dead begins in darkness. Historically, this Service that we are observing tonight began at Midnight. Indeed, in the Propers for Holy Saturday in the Augustana Service Book and Hymnal Supplement it reads in the footnote, “The Propers for this Day are for use in the Divine Service in the evening, preferably for a midnight Mass.” It is the intention of the Propers that this Service begin in darkness, as has been done for centuries. The Easter Vigil, historically, began around a fire lit in the darkness. Obviously, we are unable to do that because of our location, but from this fire was lit a new candle, which in turn would light the Paschal Candle which we have lit tonight, and will remain lit throughout the season of Easter.

The Paschal Candle represents the light of the Christ among His people. Indeed, in the processional we hear sung, “The Light of Christ” to which we responded, “Thanks be to God.” The entire sanctuary was dark except for the light from the Paschal Candle. This represented His light among us. He is the One Who enlightens us. It is His light which we follow. We follow after the Light of the Christ, because we who have been bound in darkness have seen a great light. We follow that light out of the darkness. And just as at the dawning of a new day, the light of the sun slowly fills the whole world, the Light of the Christ slowly filled this sanctuary, as we first had darkness, then only the light of the Paschal Candle, then was added the light of other candles, and finally all the lights in the sanctuary were lit. The full light of the Christ filled this dark chancel. The full light of the Christ fills our hearts with the hope of the resurrection from the dead.

This is where the Gospel of the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew for tonight begins. His Gospel history of the resurrection of our Lord + Jesus begins in darkness: “Late on the Sabbath Day.” As the day of rest comes to a close, as the day of our Lord’s rest in the grave came to a close, the women begin to come to the tomb. While it was yet dark, they gathered to see the tomb of our Lord and intended to minister to His dead body. As the first light of dawn began to be seen on the horizon, St. Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary came to see the sepulchre. Our actions in tonight’s Easter Vigil

are not much different. We came to see our Lord while it was yet being dark. Only we knew the outcome already. The women who came to our Lord's tomb did not know that He had risen from the dead. We came to see our Lord in darkness knowing full well that He has indeed risen from the dead. We came knowing that the light of the Christ would fill this whole place. Indeed, my dearly beloved, the Light of the Christ has filled the whole world.

St. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come expecting to find the dead body of the Lord + Jesus. But when they came to the tomb, they did not find the body of the Lord; they did not find a great stone covering the tomb, rather they found the stone rolled away, and the tomb empty. An angel causing a great earthquake had rolled the stone away. This is who they find when they come to the tomb. They find him sitting upon the stone that had been rolled away, and the tomb empty. The Lord + Jesus Who had been crucified for the sins of mankind, Who had been dead and wrapped up in linen clothes, and laid in a tomb, was no longer there. He had risen from the dead!

The darkness of death, in which we found ourselves on account of our many sins and trespasses—on account of the sin of Adam which inheres in all of us—has been replaced with the light of life immortality. We are no longer in darkness, but we now dwell in the light of the Christ. We are no longer bound in the chains of sin and death. For our Lord + Jesus has burst open the gates of death. He has opened unto us the gates of heaven. Darkness has been replaced with light. Death has given over into life. The curse that hung over Adam and his children no longer has any effect, for we are freed from the tyranny of the devil who held us trapped in sin and death.

Darkness has given way to light. The new day has dawned. Death has been defeated. The stone has been rolled away. The tomb is empty. Our Lord + Jesus is not there. He has risen from the dead, just as He said He would. This is proof that the sacrifice that He made upon the tree of the holy cross has been accepted by the heavenly Father. The wrath of the Lord God has been appeased. His wrath was poured out in full upon the Son of the Lord God. The Lord + Jesus bore the full brunt of our Lord's wrath towards us. And then He rested for three days. Now on the third day, as the darkness begins to fade, we now walk in newness of life. A new reality has come for mankind. This new reality is for all those who cling in faith to the Lord + Jesus. It is for all those who trust in Him and His promise of life everlasting for all those who believe that what He did for us does indeed bring life and immortality to light.

By this we know that our sins have been forgiven. For the empty tomb proves that our sins have found an atonement. They have been satisfied. No one can accuse us any longer for our sins have been paid in full by our Lord + Jesus. We now have life and salvation through Him. We now no longer walk in darkness, but in the light of the Christ. We follow His light into His Kingdom of heaven. We bear this light in our hands, in our candles, but we also bear this light in our hearts, where we have been illumined with faith to trust in our Lord and His promises.

This is why this Service tonight began in darkness and slowly light filled the whole place. For the light of the Christ illumines this whole place. It illumines us to see that by our Lord's resurrection on the first day of the week, we have life and immortality in our Lord + Jesus. In the Early Church, this Easter Vigil would begin at Midnight. It was called a vigil, because that is what people would be doing. Vigil means "to watch." The people would gather to pray and keep watch. They would wait for the Easter Service to begin. The original Service was designed so that as the first rays of the sun began to be seen, they would be celebrating the Lord's Supper. For in this meal, we are granted a strengthening of our faith, the faith that was gifted to us in the waters of Holy Baptism. In this Service we have remembered the Sacrament that first enlightened us, and we will share in this meal that continues to enlighten us until we are called out of this life into the eternal life that awaits us all. For our Lord + Jesus has dispelled the darkness of sin and death from us, and brought us into His marvelous light. Hallelujah! Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord + Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same + Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!