

## THE GREAT VIGIL OF EASTER

At the heart of the Christian faith stands the Risen Lord, without whom, St. Paul declares, our faith is in vain. And at the heart of Christian worship of the Risen Lord, since the earliest centuries of the Church, is the Great Vigil of Easter. There is nothing more central to our life as members of Christ's Body, the Church, than this service. It links us across time and space to our earliest brothers and sisters in Christ.

This ancient service, with its roots in the first century, combines diverse elements. The first is the elemental symbol of the New Fire, from which the Paschal (Passover) Candle, symbolizing Christ as the Light of the world, is lit through the darkness. As through the wilderness the people of Israel were guided by a pillar of fire by night, so the Paschal Candle leads us through the dark church building, and from it we light our vigil candles. The Exultet, our song of rejoicing in "this holy night" and remembering the central events of the history of God's people, is sung to awaken our hearts. The Lessons are reminiscent of the ancient Jewish Passover Vigil, commemorating the liberation of the Hebrews from slavery, foreshadowing our own liberation through the passing from death to life in Christ Jesus. God's mighty acts to save his people throughout human history are recounted, and we respond with songs of praise. In the ancient Church the baptismal initiation of candidates at the Great Vigil came at the end of a rigorous training period, intensifying during Lent.

We then extinguish the candles and wait in the darkness, symbolically joining Christ in the tomb and marking the death of the church year. We hear a deep pounding on the door of the sanctuary – Christ calling us to welcome him into our hearts and new life in Christ! A torch bears the new light for the renewed year in the church, the altar candles and sanctuary lights are lit. We joyfully "make a loud noise" with hand bells, sleigh bells, keys, whatever you have that makes a joyful sound as the glad proclamation is raised "**Alleluia! Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast! Alleluia!**" We celebrate the first Eucharist of Easter, from which our gathering around the altar of grace each Sunday is derived.

*St. Thomas Parish, Newark, DE*

## *The Journey of Holy Week*

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The services of Holy Week are individual parts of a single great service in which we remember and celebrate the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This foundational event of the Christian faith is **the Paschal Mystery**. Just as the ancient Passover (*Pesach* in Hebrew, *Pasch* in Latin) commemorates the deliverance from slavery and the Covenant established between God and the chosen people of Israel, the Passover of God's New Covenant celebrates the deliverance of all humankind from the power of sin and death, into the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus. Early in our Christian history, the liturgical observance known as the *Triduum* (TRIH-duh-oom, Latin for "three days"), comprising the arrest, trial, execution and burial of Jesus, and his resurrection "on the third day," came to being. The services of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and the Great Vigil of Easter, together with Palm Sunday, focus on aspects of the Paschal Mystery. None of the services is complete in itself. It is only by entering fully into the commemoration of the Paschal Mystery through the experience of Holy Week worship that its meaning can be truly understood and richly experienced.

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### **THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION: PALM SUNDAY**

Our walk with Christ begins with a festive Procession of Palms recalling his walk from Bethany into Jerusalem. This is not a historic re-creation of an event long past; we are disciples proclaiming Jesus' saving presence *today*. When we wave our palms and sing "Hosanna," we claim our own belief in his presence and power.

The second part of the Liturgy includes a reading known as "The Passion," the account of our Lord's suffering and death. This is the only Sunday of the year that the story of our Lord's death is read. The gospel account is from Matthew, Mark, or Luke, according to our three-year lectionary cycle. From the joy of the triumphal procession, to the intensity of The Passion Gospel reading, this service generates many emotions. This range of feelings will be experienced again and again in the course of the week.

### **MONDAY THROUGH THURSDAY**

These are days to read and reflect upon the Scriptures appointed (listed on page 892 in the Prayer Book), to consider the way Jesus took to the cross, and what it means for us to follow him in that way. Each evening at 5:15 p.m., the Daily Office of Evening Prayer is read in the Sanctuary, which is done every Monday through Friday throughout the year.

### **MAUNDY THURSDAY**

On Maundy Thursday, we commemorate the institution of the Lord's Supper. The Epistle reading for this service gives St. Paul's account of the institution of the Eucharist. We experience the Gospel account of Jesus' washing his disciples' feet, acting out his own call and of those who would follow him, "not to be served, but to serve." He gave a new commandment to all: "Love one another as I have loved you." "Maundy" is the old English word derived from the Latin phrase *mandatum novum*, meaning "new covenant."

The Eucharist is about our table fellowship – God present with us, and we present to each other. Following the Eucharist, the sanctuary is stripped of all ornaments and furnishings, symbolically expressing Jesus' utter abandonment. We are invited to stay with Jesus "for just one hour" through the night watch vigil until noon on Good Friday.

### **GOOD FRIDAY**

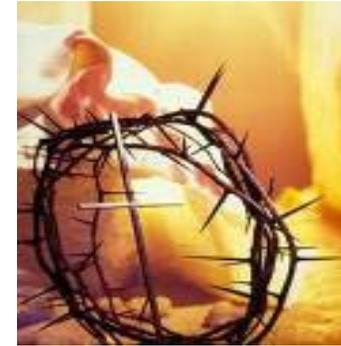
"In all things God works for good to those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." [Romans 8:28] Only in this sense can this day be called "good." We walk with Christ to Calvary and his crucifixion, reflecting on the extent of God's love for us. In the evening, the Liturgy Guild leads us in prayerful remembrance of the Good Friday events through The Stations of the Cross. As a sign of mourning, and in accordance with earliest tradition, there is no celebration of the Eucharist on Good Friday.

### **HOLY SATURDAY**

On this day the Church continues to mourn the death and burial of Christ and to commemorate the mystery. In this holy time of rest and waiting, the Eucharist is not celebrated nor is Communion received. Saturday is our day of spiritual preparation, pointing the way to a new focus. In eastern Christian tradition, this is the time for gathering and blessing of the Easter foods to be shared with friends and family at the Easter feast.

***Mystery to Majesty – Worship for Holy Week to Easter Day***

- **Sunday, April 9: Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday**
  - Liturgy of the Palms & Holy Eucharist at 8:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.
- **Monday, April 10 through Thursday, April 13**
  - Evening Prayer at 5:15 p.m.
- **Thursday, April 13: Maundy Thursday**
  - Holy Eucharist with Foot washing at 7:30 p.m., followed by Stripping of the Altar
  - Vigil in the Chapel of Repose until the Good Friday Liturgy
  - Compline at 10:00 p.m.
- **Friday, April 14: Good Friday**
  - Morning Prayer at 8:00 a.m.
  - Good Friday Liturgy with sermon at 12:00 noon
  - Stations of the Cross at 7:00 p.m.
- **Saturday, April 15: Holy Saturday**
  - The Great Vigil of Easter – Holy Baptism & Holy Eucharist with incense at 7:00 p.m.
- **Sunday, April 16: Day of the Resurrection – Easter Day**
  - Festal Celebration of Holy Eucharist at 8:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.
  - Children's Easter Egg Hunt follows the 10:30 a.m. service
  - NO 5:30 p.m. service on Easter Day



# ***The Journey of Holy Week***

