

## The Great Vigil of Easter

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

Genesis 22:1-18

Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Romans 6.3-11

Mark 16.1-8

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+Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and on those in the tombs bestowing life!

Where do the dead go when they die? The body will decompose and will over time become nourishment for new life which too will someday perish. But human cultures have speculated since before written history the fate of the mind, soul, breath, essence, or whatever you may call it. Does it reincarnate, does it simply end, does it go somewhere? Such places and things go by many names, Shuwalu, Eretsu, Sheol, Hades, Hell. Names come and go, but the idea is more or less the same. All are destined for there, eventually to be forgotten. Death is the maw that consumes life.

The wages of sin are death, the first people who consumed the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the beginning brought forth death because only God can truly comprehend Good and Evil. The seeds of that tree were planted, and death becomes the fate of all finite beings such as we are. It is the order of things.

But that is not the end of the story.

“Death received a body and encountered God. It received earth, and met heaven. It received that which it saw, and fell to what it did not see.”

Death cannot consume that which is infinite. God's infinite being, love, and mercy carried by Jesus Christ into death fills it more and more until it bursts, unable to contain it. Jesus came to the dead to lead his people home and from that maw he pulls out all of death's victims leaving it empty and bare. He came to that desolate place and sanctified it. He became the Tree of Life and offers life in the face of death. Not resuscitated life, not a repeat of a cycle of life, but life transformed by his love towards us and all creation, a life where we are restored fully into the image and likeness of God. We do not return to the Garden of Eden, to before the Fall, there is no going back to that, but the life restored by Christ is greater than that primordial grace in the beginning because we now can truly know the Father through the Works of the Son by the Power of the Spirit. Death loses its might in the face of the Triune God's infinite love for us.

But this isn't the order of things?! Death is supposed to be the end for all, so why does God change the story, why does Christ offer life to all in the face of death?! Life triumphs over death

because God has judged us and this world, this world we abuse, this world we fill with hatred, evil, and sin, and he still judges it as good and worth saving despite all we do. God declares that there is no journey gone so far so far that we cannot stop and change direction because of his abundant love for us all.

Jesus bursts forth from the tomb and says no to death, no to its empire, and no to its hold over us! The old gods are dead, the idols we build of fear, hate, prejudice, violence, and sin are as nothing when confronted with the love that shines forth from the tomb. All those from the lowest depths to the highest heavens can only proclaim “Glory be to God on High!” as the very cosmic order so disrupted by sin and death is made whole and we share in that triumphal anthem.

O death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory? As S. John Chrysostom says “Let no one fear death, for the death of the Saviour has set us free! He has quench by it, He has led Hades captive, He Who descended into Hades!” The Mouth of Hell is forever shut, never to hold captive those whom God has made and loves. The Way to Life is opened forever by Christ’s resurrection. He transforms death itself to be the source of new life!

Resurrection, new life and more abundant is what we share with Christ. Bright and James, in baptism, we share in Jesus’ descent to the dead and we rise with him in his resurrection and we too say no to the power of death! We burst forth from the baptismal font and proclaim Christ’s resurrection to a world redeemed, loved, and beloved by God. And it all begins here on this night.

This is the night, when all who believe in Christ are delivered from the gloom of sin, and are restored to grace and holiness of life! This is the night, when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell, and rose victorious from the grave! All the cosmos is transformed by Christ’s mighty acts which bridge Earth forever to Heaven!

All you heavens bless the Lord, Christ is Risen, Alleluia!  
 Stars of the heavens bless the Lord. Sing to the Lord, Alleluia!  
 Give thanks to the Lord for God is good, Christ is Risen, Alleluia!  
 For God’s love has no end. Sing to the Lord, Alleluia!

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