

Rejoice now, heavenly hosts and choirs of angels! And let your trumpets shout salvation, for the victory of our mighty King!¹ Thanks be to God!+ Amen.

Well, my friends, this is the night!!! The dark and penitent days of Lent are done, and the grief of Holy Week drops away: *This is the night! When Christ broke the bonds of death and hell, and rose victorious from the grave...*

There really are no words to describe our joy that can even come close to the beauty of the *Exsultet*, the prayers sung as the New Paschal Candle, the Light of Christ, is lit from the New Fire of Easter. Our beautiful liturgy and prayers tell it all more powerfully than any sermon of mine ever could – it moves us from the grief and shock of the dark tomb to the first glimmer of light, as Christ, waking from death, opens his eyes and rises from the cold stone: *the Light of Christ! Thanks be to God!*

And gathering up all salvation history as the precursor to his resurrection, we recount God's Mighty Acts of ages past – the same history that Jesus learned as a child - in which God tried so many times, in so many ways, to gather us closer to him. Laws and covenants, disasters and miraculously close calls – and yet, the history of God's people showed that we are slow learners; prone to wander; a totally fallible lot. And so God did a new thing: incarnate as Jesus, **Love came down** in human form, God's only Son, to walk us through our lives - teaching us The Way to live closer to the God who loves us this much.

How wonderful and beyond our knowing, O God, is your mercy and loving-kindness to us, that to redeem a slave, you gave a Son...

Jesus, the Son of God, became incarnate, and salvation history took a completely new turn – began a whole new book: the *New Covenant*. This New Testament give us a rule book that we can try, and try again, to follow; Jesus' incarnational walk through life and death teaches us, helps us: we are to love God, and one Another. We are to pray. We are to turn back to God every time we misstep. We are given the purification and initiation of Baptism, and the rite of renewing our Baptismal Vows. Again, our liturgy and prayers say it all: our baptismal covenant mandates that we are to seek and serve Christ in all persons, respecting the dignity of every human being. In our Holy Week liturgies we remember our mandates to serve one another, and to remember him in the bread and the wine. We are given the beautiful rite of celebrating the Holy Eucharist: *re-mem-bering* the Body of Christ, of him in us, and us in him. In his all-encompassing suffering and death upon the cross, we are given the incomparable gift of his constant Presence through every trial and suffering of our own. Jesus the Christ, self-given on the Cross, gathered all of creation, all of God's children, into the forgiveness of his saving arms. What more could

¹ *The Exsultet*, Book of Common Prayer, pp.286-287

we ask than this? But our story, our history, continues! Jesus, descended to the dead for three days, woke, shook off the linen wrappings, and rose again! Transformed; resurrected! He is risen!! Alleluia!!

But wait: the story still is far from over. Not only are we forgiven. Not only is he risen again. But in his rising, in his triumph over death into eternal life, by his will we are swept into eternal life with him - by his death on the Cross, that terrible, wonderful Cross: the only key to heaven's gates. What Jesus Christ did for all God's creation is truly beyond all knowing; it is truly too wonderful to comprehend. *How blessed is this night, when earth and heaven are joined, and man is reconciled to God...*

We celebrate God's Mighty Acts tonight, even as salvation history continues to unfold. Our story, our history, continues to be written. What will the future story tell about Christians? We are his people: we are baptized in water, sealed by the spirit, sent out to bear His light into the world. Like we see in the beautiful baptismal lesson in Godly Play, and like we see in our beautiful liturgy tonight, the light of the new Paschal Candle is undiminished even as it gives it's light to each of us - candle by candle, heart by heart – until the whole sanctuary is filled with his Light. Into what dark places will you take this light? Will the light of Christ's love in your heart make a difference to someone? What is the change you hope to make? What will *your* story tell?

Our collective story, the history of the world as created by the One Holy and Living God, will not be over until Jesus comes again, and the whole of salvation history is complete. Until that day, let us continue to pray in the words of *The Exsultet*:

Holy Father, accept our evening sacrifice, the offering of this candle in your honor. May it shine continually to drive away all darkness. May Christ the Morning Star who knows no setting, find it ever burning – he who gives his light to all creation, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen. Alleluia!!!

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April 11, 2009
Stamford, CT