

Easter Vigil
April 23, 2011

John 20:1–18

The fire we lit has signaled the light of Christ overcoming the darkness.

The proclamation that was chanted sounded in present tense that **This is the night.**

The ancient stories have been washed over us as if they have immersed us into the font.

The water we surrounded allowed us to die to sin, death, and evil, and to rise with Christ.

And Mary, proto-evangelist, first to proclaim Christ's resurrection overturns our grief in her encounter and in her announcement, "I have seen the Lord."

Jesus breaks the bonds that plague the powerless, ushers in a new dawn that declares God's forever and again are stronger than fearful ends, more powerful than death itself.

We declare with apostle Paul that in Christ, all is made new.

We sing with the three young men in Nebachhnezer's furnace unscathed by fire.

We gather around Lady Wisdom at the feast for all comers.

With the Israelites, we have made it safely to the other side of the sea, and with Miriam play the tambourine and dance.

This is the night.

We are the ones made new.

So let our joys rise full and free, Christ our comfort true will be Alleluia.

At Easter in the late fourth century, seventeen hundred years ago, the extraordinary preacher, liturgist, and sage of the Eastern Church John Chrysostom describes the sight of the newly baptized emerging from the font in an early church father bubbly kind of fashion:

As soon as they come forth from those sacred waters, all who are present embrace them, greet them, kiss them, rejoice with them, and congratulate them, because those who were heretofore slaves and captives have suddenly become free people and children and have been invited to the royal table. For straightway after they come up from the waters, they are led to the awesome table heavy laden with countless favors, where they taste of the Master's body and blood, and become a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. Since they have put on Christ himself, wherever they go they are like angels on earth, rivaling the brilliance of the rays of the sun.

Mary don't you weep. Martha don't you moan. Pharoah's army got drowned; O Mary don't you weep!

The recovery of the Easter Vigil as the pinnacle and ground of the liturgical year fits the dramatic and deep experience of baptismal life.

Coming to birth in God's river is overwhelming.

Seeing the light of the Christ overcoming the dark is awe-inspiring.

Being in the company of those infused by the Spirit, those who have put on Christ, is like being in the company of angels.

The declaration on this night that we are freed, slave no more, allows us to live in the age of new life that God has made so.

Stand tall in those promises.

Come to the table that is for us a feast of God's promised future.

Share the bounty of this resurrection dawn, that all who are stuck in grief, those who are facing Pharoahs or pouting in the belly of a fish, might be invited to walk with us, to put on the clothes of Christ, and to feast in God's neverfailing love.

This is the Night.