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The Vigil of Easter  
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Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

In the Bible, evening comes before morning. It is now the evening of the third day, the beginning of the first day of the week. This is the holiest of nights. This is the night when Christ, who died for sins once for all, was made alive in the Spirit and preached to the disobedient spirits in the prison Hades, proclaiming the victory of His death even to the depths of hell. It is the night when Christ rose bodily from the dead. In the morning an angel will roll the stone away from the tomb to reveal it to be empty. This is the night of fulfillment, when all the Old Testament types of salvation are brought to their focus and completion in Christ's death and resurrection. This is the night when everything that the Scriptures teach comes together in Jesus.

It is the night of the first day of a new creation, in which the creative Word again is spoken into the darkness, "Let there be light." And there is. The darkness of our death is dispelled. The sin-induced disorder of our lives is ordered again. Christ has entered the cursed darkness of death for us and said, "Let there be light." He is the light of the world. "The light shines in the darkness." The Word has brought in a new creation with Jesus' death and resurrection. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come. To be baptized into Christ is to live in the Light, not in the darkness, to expose the darkness of our death to the light of His life and live.

It is the night of Isaac and the ram. "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering," Isaac asked father Abraham. We are Isaac, sentenced to die on the altar by the law that demands the sacrifice of our perfect obedience. Christ is the ram, caught in the thicket of the cross, pinned to the wood. "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering." He sent His only Son to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is our sacrificial substitute, a burnt offering roasted by the fire of God's judgment and His burning desire to save.

It is the night of the Passover. This is Israel's last night of captivity in Egypt. We are in bondage to death and cannot free ourselves. Death is our taskmaster, driving and pushing us, whipping and dogging us all our days. Tonight Israel eats and drinks in freedom and joy under the blood of the Lamb, eating the Lord's Supper with sandals on their feet and staff in

hand and cloaks tucked in. Death passes over. The children of Israel walk in freedom under the doorpost stained with the Lamb's blood. We eat and drink the Lord's Supper and walk in freedom and joy under the blood-stained wood of the cross.

It is the night of Exodus. Israel passes through the water of the Red Sea accompanied by Christ in the pillar of cloud and fire. "This corresponds in type to Baptism which now saves you," writes the apostle Peter. Baptism incorporates us into Jesus' death and resurrection. In Christ's death, we died. In Christ's life, we live. The old sinful nature is drowned with Pharaoh and his army. The new nature in Christ walks through the parted water on dry ground. We are a people, a royal priesthood, a nation, God's treasured possession in Jesus Christ. The water of Baptism testifies it to be so.

It is the night of the fiery furnace. The devil, the world, our own sinful flesh dog us like Nebuchadnezzar and tempt us to bow down to the idols of our age and to worship according to the liturgy of self-service instead of Divine Service. And when we resist and refuse to bow down to the golden images of our age when their music plays, there is a fiery furnace awaiting us—the purging fire of this life in which our faith is refined like precious gold. Yet Christ goes with us, as He did with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, all the way through death and the grave, delivering us from all evil so that we can walk in freedom even through the fire of persecution and temptation.

It is the night of vindication for Job's Redeemer. Job, that great sufferer of the Old Testament. His family was shattered by death. His property was carried off by thieves. His body was devastated by disease. His friends offered him only the sour wine of bad religion. "Get right with God, and God will get right with you." Yet Job clung in faith to the mercy of God. "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God."

Jesus absorbed into His own flesh our suffering, sickness, sorrow. He became Job for us—the righteous One who suffers. And through His suffering, He redeemed us, bought us back. He paid the price for our freedom and healing in His own body.

It is the night of feasting—feasting on the Word, on Holy Baptism, on the Holy Supper. The prophet Isaiah invited all to feast of free things: water, bread, wine, and milk—all for nothing. Jesus paid for it all. He picked up the tab for the heavenly banquet, this Divine Service. He is the source of the water—thirst-quenching living water that flows from Him

with His Spirit. His body is the bread; His blood is the wine. His Word is the milk on which the baptized can feed and grow as newborn babies.

The feast is ready. Come to the feast. Come, eat and drink without cost. The feast is free. The price was paid on Calvary. "Listen, listen to Me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare."

This is the night when it all comes together in Jesus. On this night of the first day of the week. Creation, Passover, Exodus, Baptism, Supper, Resurrection, Freedom, Light—all in Jesus.

Such a night! Such a Savior!

In His name.