

30 March 2024
The Great Vigil of Easter

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“This Is the Day the Lord Has Made”

You have heard, O child of God, the story of your God this night.

You heard in the creation account, that He is the creator of life.

You heard of the flood, where He is the cleanser of life.

You heard of His victory at the Red Sea, that He is the deliverer of life.

You heard of His gift of a new heart and a new spirit, that He is the restorer of life.

You heard the prophecy of Job, that He is the redeemer of life.

You heard the oracle of Zephaniah, that He rejoices in life.

And you heard the story of the fourth man in the flames, that He is the saviour of life.

But these are not just the story of your God. These are your stories.

For God has created *you*, and cleansed *you*, and delivered *you*, and given *you* a new heart and a new spirit, and redeemed *you*, and rejoices in *you*, and saves *you*. If these stories are not your stories, then they are just that - stories. Tales of old. But if these stories are your stories - as they are - then they are more than stories. They are your history. They are who you are.

Which is why we remember and celebrate Baptism this night. For Baptism is what makes these stories your stories. For you are baptized into Christ. And baptized into Christ, you are baptized into His story, His history; you are baptized into His body, His church. And in the church we are one body. United to one another in Christ. So that as St. Paul would say, when one of us suffers, we all suffer. When one of rejoices, we all rejoice.

But not only that - this too: **when one of us dies, we all die. And when one of us rises from the dead, we all rise.** And that's what Jesus has done for us these sacred days. He died and rose for us, and we die and rise in Him. The old sinful man in us dies and a new and righteous man rises to a new life.

This is the night! You heard that many times earlier. *This is the night.* Not this was the night. This *is* the night. Because this is the night that ushered in the new and eternal day - the day that will never end; the day that has ended night. The eighth day. In His resurrection, Jesus broke the old and inaugurated the new, the new and everlasting day. The day into which we are baptized. The day in which we now live. Christians do not live in the past; we live in the future. A future which is already present with us here and now. For where Christ is, there is His kingdom. Where Christ is, there is His life. Where Christ

is, there is eternity. For He is the great I AM. Not the *I was* or the *I will be*. But the great I AM. The one who does not change. Who is the same yesterday today, and forever. The one who speaks reality. The one where past, present, and future find their source and fulfillment. This is the night *in* which all prior history culminated, and *from* which all time now flows forth.

This is the night. The night that changed everything. The night when bondage is broken, the enslaver is enslaved, and the captive set free. This is the night of our re-creation, our cleansing, our deliverance, our restoration, our redemption, our joy, and our salvation. For this is the night when the tomb is empty. The women will discover that in the morning. And their mourning will be turned into dancing, and their sorrow into joy, for death is overcome by life.

They thought it too good to be true, until the one who is the way, the truth, and the life, showed them this is the way of life. His life. Our life. All life.

This is the night. So we gather here in vigil, in quiet joy, confident not only in the joy of tomorrow, but the joy of eternity.

For Christ is here. Christ is risen. And Christ lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. AMEN