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Great Vigil of Easter

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Our Ancestry.com”

Ancestry.com has become quite a popular website today. People go there to find out not only their genealogy, but with that, who they are, where they come from, and their story. Because your story is important.

Our country has its stories. The stories of the Mayflower, the Revolutionary War, the writing of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, Manifest Destiny, and many more. These stories tell us who we are and how we got here as a nation.

Your family has its stories. Maybe your ancestors were immigrants and you know the story of how they got here. You have stories of triumphs and tragedies, joys and hardships. These make you who you are as a family.

Tonight, we hear our story **as Christians**. The stories we hear tonight aren't just *someone else's* story, that happened a long, long time ago. These are the stories of who YOU are and where YOU come from. These are stories that shape us, and even more importantly, bind us together as Christians. The Church is very diverse, and rightly so. But we also have much in common.

And it is more important than ever that we hear these stories each year. So we don't forget them and lose them, AND because it has become fashionable these days to make up your own story. To identify yourself in whatever way you see fit. This might mean cutting yourself off from your past, your history. Or it might mean appropriating a new identity as your own. When that is done, the past is no longer the rock from which we are hewn, but the clay we shape into whatever we want it to be.

But that is not the way of it with God or Scripture. We have a story, and we have an identity. This is who we are, and it is good.

Our story goes all the way back to the beginning. The genealogies in the Bible might be hard to read through, but they connect us to those who have gone before us. And the stories we read in the Bible and the people we read about not only teach us about them, but about ourselves. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, Ezekiel, Jonah, and the Three Young Men - all live on in us. This is where we have come from. This is

who we are.

But there's one more story that tells us who we are and from where we have come - the most important story of all: of Jesus. When we are baptized into Him, His story becomes our story. We die and rise with Him to a new life. We ascend with Him. We are sons of God in Him. That is our identity: we are the baptized children of God.

That's why a part of the service tonight is a remembrance of Baptism. For it is our baptism that has grafted us into Christ and into this story. When we renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways, we are renouncing not only him, but also any other identity, HE tries to convince us of, or even who we might make ourselves to be. NO! My identity is not here or from him or in what I do - I am a baptized child of God.

So when we go back and read through the stories of the Scriptures - and yes, some of them are long! - this is our spiritual ancestry.com. This is our spiritual genealogical research. This is the rock from which we are hewn. The Rock that is Christ and all that He has done for us. And as that Rock fed His people manna and gave them drink in the wilderness, so He will give us the food and drink of the New Testament tonight. And our story will continue. A story to pass down to our children, and their children. A story that is important to know. This is who we are.

Let us hear again, remember, rejoice, and give thanks.