

## **Easter Vigil April 3, 2021**

The people of Israel's sense of identity as a nation springs from one great historical event - when God freed them from slavery in Egypt. They call this event "Passover", when God parted the Red Sea to deliver them from Pharaoh's army and lead them through the desert to freedom. By God's mighty hand, Israel passed over from slavery into freedom.

Our Jewish brothers and sisters continue to celebrate Passover every year with a meal of lamb and other foods that call to mind how God saved them. As good Jews, Jesus and His disciples also celebrated Passover every year. In fact, on Holy Thursday, the Last Supper was a Passover meal in which Jesus gave us His Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

As Christians, we also celebrate the Passover. Though we call this day "Easter", it really is a Passover celebration. But, the Passover we celebrate tonight is not just the crossing over of the Israelites from slavery into freedom. Rather, it is the pass over of Jesus from death into life.

Tonight, we proclaim that our Lord who was crucified, laid in a tomb, and descended into hell, is risen from the dead. By dying on the cross and rising, He has liberated us from the two greatest slave masters of history - sin and death. Just as God lead the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea so Jesus has lead us out of sin and death by rising from the dead.

Our identity as Christians, then, is grounded in our profession of faith that Jesus is risen from the dead and that we who believe in Him have freedom from our sins and the hope that we too will rise with Him.

For the people of Israel, freedom came when they crossed through the waters of the Red Sea. For Christians, salvation comes through another life-giving stream - the waters of baptism.

St Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans: "...we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life."

Baptism is the way that the saving power of Jesus' death and resurrection is applied to us. That is why baptism is necessary for our salvation. Just as the people of Israel could not be saved from Pharaoh's army unless they crossed the Red Sea, so we cannot be saved from sin and death unless we cross through the waters of baptism.

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At the same time, just as crossing the Red Sea was just the beginning of a long journey through the desert for the people of Israel, so baptism is just the beginning of a long journey in the life of a Christian. Every day we are called to live our baptismal promises by dying to sin and rising to a new life in Jesus. It means saying “no” to temptation and learning to rely on the strength that Jesus gives us. It means dying to our desire for comfort and pleasure so that we can serve the needs of the people around us. Sometimes it means putting up with ridicule, rejection, and humiliation to witness to our faith in Jesus’ resurrection. As St Paul tells us, we must “think of yourselves as being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus”.

Jesus is risen - and we will rise with Him as well. We have this assurance because of our baptism and we experience it in our daily lives as sin is rooted out of our souls and the hope of everlasting life revives our spirit. At this liturgy, we will renew our baptismal vows. It is the culmination of all the prayers and sacrifices we have made during the Lenten season. Let us take up these promises again with renewed conviction and vigor. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! Sin and death have no more power over us!