

The Episcopal Church *of the* Transfiguration

THE LIGHTING OF THE PASCHAL CANDLE

SATURDAY, APRIL 3, 2021
8:00 PM



1860 Lake St. Louis Blvd
Lake St. Louis, Missouri 63367

The Mission of Church of the Transfiguration
is to be a Christian community;
accepting and inviting all persons to share in worship,
witness and service; as disciples of Jesus Christ
in the world.

The early Christians celebrated Easter with a late-night vigil service. Fire and light would have played both important functional and symbolic roles. Jewish lamp-lighting rituals prior to evening prayers would likely have had a significant influence on their liturgy. Historical documents referring to a single large **Paschal Candle** date from as early as the fourth century.

The Easter Vigil has both historic and roots in the Hebrew Passover. Since early times the Vigil included readings from the Hebrew scriptures tracing the history of God's plan for humanity's redemption and salvation. The Bible readings conclude with scripture concerning the resurrection of Jesus. The Paschal Candle thus represents both the pillar of fire leading the Israelites to freedom and the light of the risen Christ leading to everlasting life. The word *Paschal* evolved from the Greek word *Pascha*, which means Easter. *Pascha* in turn was derived from Pesah, the Hebrew word for Passover. Tradition dictates that the candle be lit by newly kindled and not from an already existing flame.

In the early Church, the Easter Vigil was the occasion for the newly converted to be baptized. The Council of Nicaea (325 AD) concurred that it was preferred for baptisms. In contemporary use it is customarily used throughout the fifty days of Easter and whenever the resurrection is recalled: baptisms, funerals, and some major feast days.

Following the lighting of the Paschal Candle is the great hymn in praise of the Paschal Candle, the **Exultet**. It is structured in three sections. The first marked by three exclamations, each beginning with, "Rejoice," (*Exsultet* in Latin). There follows a narrative in which the parallels between the Old Testament Passover and the joyful Resurrection of Christ are extolled. The Exsultet ends with a prayer that the Almighty Father accept the offering of the Paschal Candle.

It is preferably sung by a Deacon, but requires a high degree of vocal ability and is often assigned to a competent cantor. The original text famously includes the following section most often left out in contemporary liturgy.

*On this, your night of grace, O holy Father,
accept this candle, a solemn offering,
the work of bees and of your servants' hands,
an evening sacrifice of praise,
this gift from your most holy Church.*

*But now we know the praises of this pillar,
which glowing fire ignites for God's honour,
a fire into many flames divided,
yet never dimmed by sharing of its light,
for it is fed by melting wax,
drawn out by mother bees
to build a torch so precious.*



The Improvisation on the Easter Hymn will take its form from the liturgy of the Easter Vigil. It will begin with dark ponderous and unstable chord untethered to any key. Out of the harmonic darkness a single note can gradually be heard - representing the journey of the Israelites through the Red Sea and the emerging heartbeat of Jesus. As the music builds one can hear musical allusions to freedom and resurrection. The apex of this improvisation will be the point of departure for the prelude for Easter Day.

~ Tom Lee

The Lighting of the Paschal Candle

In the darkness, fire is kindled; after which the Celebrant may address the people in these or similar words

Dear friends in Christ: On this most holy night, in which our Lord Jesus passed over from death to life, the Church invites her members, dispersed throughout the world, to gather in vigil and prayer. For this is the Passover of the Lord, in which, by hearing his Word and celebrating his Sacraments, we share in his victory over death.

As the Paschal Candle is lit, the Celebrant says the following prayer

Let us pray.

O God, through your Son you have bestowed upon your people the brightness of your light: Sanctify this new fire, and grant that in this Paschal feast we may so burn with heavenly desires, that with pure minds we may attain to the festival of everlasting light; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Exsultet

Cantor: Drew Lawless

Then the Cantor sings or says the Exsultet, as follows

Rejoice now, heavenly hosts and choirs of angels,
and let your trumpets shout Salvation for the victory of our mighty King.

Rejoice and sing now, all the round earth, bright with a glorious splendor,
for darkness has been vanquished by our eternal King.

Rejoice and be glad now, Mother Church,
and let your holy courts, in radiant light, resound with the praises of your people.

All you who stand near this marvelous and holy flame,
pray with me to God the Almighty
for the grace to sing the worthy praise of this great light;
through Jesus Christ his Son our Lord,
who lives and reigns with him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

The Lord be with you.

Answer ***And also with you.***

Cantor Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Answer ***It is right to give him thanks and praise.***

Cantor

It is truly right and good, always and everywhere,
with our whole heart and mind and voice,
to praise you, the invisible, almighty, and eternal God,

and your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord;
for he is the true Paschal Lamb,
who at the feast of the Passover paid for us the debt of Adam's sin,
and by his blood delivered your faithful people.

This is the night,
when you brought our fathers, the children of Israel,
out of bondage in Egypt,
and led them through the Red Sea on dry land.

This is the night,
when all who believe in Christ are delivered from the gloom of sin,
and are restored to grace and holiness of life.

This is the night,
when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell,
and rose victorious from the grave.

How wonderful and beyond our knowing, O God,
is your mercy and loving-kindness to us,
that to redeem a slave, you gave a Son.

How holy is this night,
when wickedness is put to flight,
and sin is washed away.
It restores innocence to the fallen,
and joy to those who mourn.
It casts out pride and hatred,
and brings peace and concord.

How blessed is this night,
when earth and heaven are joined and man is reconciled to God.

Holy Father, accept our evening sacrifice,
the offering of this candle in your honor.
May it shine continually to drive away all darkness.
May Christ, the Morning Star who knows no setting,
find it ever burning--he who gives his light to all creation,
and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Improvisation on the Easter Hymn

Thomas C. Lee

*It is customary that the Paschal Candle burn at all services
from Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost.*

Liturgical texts are from The Book of Common Prayer