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St. John's Lutheran Church – Kimball, NE

Easter Vigil

April 19, 2014

Text: Liturgical Readings – Creation, Flood, Red Sea, Fiery Furnace

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

All things have a beginning, including the heavens and the earth. Over six incredible days, the Lord God created the universe, all that is visible and invisible. The Jews took the Scriptures seriously, so much so, that they organized the beginning and ending of the day according to the pattern of creation. Six times tonight we heard “and there was evening and there was morning” the first, second, third day, and so forth. So the Jews began the day in the evening; roughly around what we would call 6:00 p.m.

Over the past couple of nights, I've emphasized the triduum, the 3 days leading up to Easter. The first of the 3 days began Maundy Thursday and continued into Good Friday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> day. Now, it's Holy Saturday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 3 days. Except there's one catch in this line of thinking. It's after 6:00 p.m. According to Jewish sensibilities, we are about 1½ hours into Sunday, the first day of the week! That's right, according to the way time was calculated when Jesus was alive, it's early Easter evening.

We heard from Mark 16 that when the women went to Jesus' tomb early Sunday morning, the stone had already been rolled away; Jesus was already alive, raised from the dead. The angel declared, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.” Sometime between 6:00 p.m. and sunrise, Jesus rose from the dead. This is the night of salvation, of the new creation

We gather this evening to celebrate in prayer vigil the night when Christ was made alive in the Spirit. As part of that prayerful devotion, we heard some of the most spectacular events of Biblical history: creation, Noah's flood, the Red Sea deliverance, and the Fiery Furnace. Each of them illuminates the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ so as to draw out our Lord's glory all the more.

During the original creation, God said, “Let there be...” and whatever God said came to pass. On this holy night, God the Father spoke His creative, life-giving Word and Jesus rose from the dead, never to taste sin and death again. Through Jesus'

resurrection, the new creation is established. All things are made new! Anyone baptized into Jesus, is baptized into His new creation. To claim be born again in Christ, is nothing more than to confess that he/she is made anew in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Tonight, we restated our baptismal vows by renouncing “the devil and all his works and all his ways” and by purposely declaring our intent “to continue steadfast in this [Trinitarian] faith...and to be diligent in the use of the means of grace and prayer.” Noah’s flood illuminates this baptismal life and hope. In the ark of the Christian Church, where God’s Word, the Sacraments, and prayer are held in the highest regard, we are safe from the death and destruction that reigns unchallenged in the world. Christian baptism certainly brings death to our old, sinful flesh but it also gives a good and clear conscience through the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation it promises. Noah’s flood, says the apostle Peter, “corresponds in type to Baptism which now saves you” (I Pe 3:21).

During these first hours of Easter, we remember that OT Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea accompanied by Christ in the pillar of cloud and fire. Through baptism, our old, sinful nature is drowned even as Pharaoh and His army perished in the Red Sea. Our new self, created in the image and likeness of the resurrected Jesus, walks in freedom as we arose from our baptism in the victory of Good Friday and Easter.

But tonight reminds us that our sinful flesh continues to dog us like wicked Nebuchadnezzar of old. Our old Adam tempts us to bow down to the idols of our age and to worship the false gods of self-pleasure and fulfillment. And when we refuse to bow down to the golden images of our age, there is a fiery furnace awaiting us. 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.

This is the night we confess anew our saving faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ. To confess that we would rather suffer death than deny the teachings of the Bible is a most profound promise rooted in the steadfast confidence that death is defeated in Christ and we will be resurrected on the Last Day in Christ. May our Lord who conquered the darkness of sin, Death and the Devil through His crucifixion and resurrection keep us all steadfast in such unmovable faith.

It may be the early evening of Easter and this year's triduum has come to its appointed end, but we are just beginning to celebrate, to celebrate eternally Christ's victory as well as our glorious triumphant in Him.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.