

# The Great Vigil of Easter at Home

A Family-Friendly Celebration of Resurrection and Holy Mystery – Rev. Bradley Mattson

## Page 1: The Significance of Holy Saturday and the Easter Vigil

Holy Saturday is a day suspended in silence. It sits between the sorrow of Good Friday and the celebration of Easter Sunday. For the early followers of Jesus, it was a day of confusion and waiting—a sabbath of grief and wonder. The body of Jesus lay in the tomb. The promises of hope seemed buried. The world felt like it had stopped.

And yet, the Church has always known that even in the silence, God is at work.



The **Great Vigil of Easter** is the Church’s oldest liturgy, a service that begins in darkness and ends in light. It is the moment we proclaim with joy: *Christ is risen!* It doesn’t wait for sunrise. It begins “while it is still dark,” just like the Gospel tells us. It’s a celebration that gathers up the entire story of salvation—from creation, through liberation, into resurrection. It is dramatic. It is symbolic. And it is deeply holy.

In churches around the world, the Vigil often begins late on Saturday evening or just before dawn. A new fire is kindled, a large candle is lit, and readings from the Old Testament retell the great sweep of God’s saving acts. After waiting in the darkness, the Alleluias return. The tomb is empty. Death is defeated. Light breaks in.

**At home**, we can still keep vigil. We can still tell the stories. We can still light a candle, remember our baptisms, and proclaim the resurrection. Whether you’re gathered around a dinner table or huddled in pajamas with a flashlight, this home-based Vigil is an invitation to step into the heart of our faith.

This guide will help you enter into that sacred story - by marking the silence of Holy Saturday, remembering God’s promises, and rejoicing in the joy of Easter. You don’t need a sanctuary or stained glass to encounter the risen Christ. You just need to make space. Christ is risen—right where you are.

May God bless you this Eastertide - Hope Always - Bradley+

# Part One – The New Fire and the Light of Christ

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." – John 1:5

The Great Vigil of Easter begins in darkness. It is the darkness of the tomb. The stillness of Saturday. The waiting of creation for the dawn of redemption.

At church, this part of the liturgy usually takes place outdoors or in a darkened sanctuary. A new fire is kindled - one that will light the Paschal Candle, which burns throughout the Easter season. That flame is the symbol of Christ, the light of the world, rising in glory and scattering the darkness of death and sin.

At home, you are invited to **create your own version of the New Fire** and welcome the light of Christ into your space. This can be as simple or as dramatic as you'd like.



## Preparing the New Fire (Household Instructions)

You will need:

- A candle (a large white one is ideal, but any candle will do)
- Matches or a lighter
- A bowl of water (optional, for baptismal remembrance later)
- A Bible
- A quiet and darkened space (turn off lights, close curtains, pause screens)

If you are outside, consider a small backyard fire pit or a safely lit candle lantern. If you are indoors, darken the room and begin in silence.

As all lights are turned off, gather your household. Pause together in the stillness.

**A Reader may say:**

“Dear friends in Christ, on this most holy night, when our Lord Jesus passed from death to life, the Church invites us to come together in vigil and prayer. Even now, gathered in our homes, we wait in hope and keep watch for the rising of Christ. This is the Passover of the Lord.”

**Kindle the flame**, lighting your candle and holding it up.

**Say (all or a leader):**

“The Light of Christ.”

**All respond:**

“Thanks be to God.”

You may process slowly from one room to another, or simply lift the candle high, passing it from person to person. If you have multiple candles, each family member can light their own from the central candle and hold it.

### **A Prayer Over the Light:**

“O God, through your Son you have given us the light of eternal life. We praise you for the fire that burns in our hearts—the flame of your love and the light of Christ that no darkness can extinguish. Bless this fire, and all who keep watch this holy night. May it shine in our hearts with hope, joy, and resurrection. Amen.”

### A Home Paschal Candle (*Optional*)

You may want to create a special candle to serve as your "Paschal Candle" throughout the Easter season. Decorate a white candle with a cross, the Greek letters Alpha (Α) and Omega (Ω), and the year. This candle can be used in daily prayer, family meals, or lit during Easter week to keep the celebration alive.

### **Say together:**

“Jesus Christ, yesterday and today, the beginning and the end. Alpha and Omega. All time belongs to him, and all ages. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

**Place the candle in a prominent place** - a dining table, a mantel, or a prayer corner.

### From Darkness to Light.

Now that the light has been kindled, sit with it. Feel the stillness. This is the turning point—from grief to joy, from silence to song. Let the light settle over your family.

You might wish to sing a simple song or hymn. Here are some suggestions:

- *This Little Light of Mine*
- *Jesus Christ is Risen Today*
- *The Light of Christ Has Come Into the World* (Taizé)

Or simply hum quietly together.

### Conclude this section with these words (*said by all*):

“May the light of Christ, rising in glory, banish all darkness from our hearts and minds.”

Let the light remain lit throughout the rest of your home vigil.

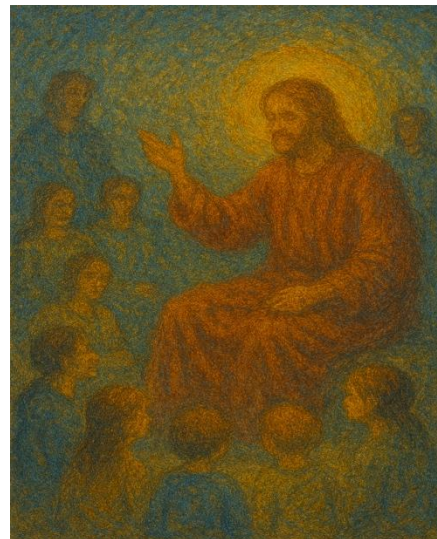
## Part Two – Telling the Sacred Story

"Remember the marvelous works God has done, his wonders and the judgments of his mouth." – Psalm 105:5

The Great Vigil of Easter is a journey through the story of salvation. We remember how God has acted across time to bring life out of death, freedom out of slavery, and hope out of despair. At church, this is the longest part of the service, with a rich series of readings from the Old Testament.

At home, we can **tell this story simply, reverently, and creatively** using scripture, prayer, imagination, and silence.

Choose 3 or 4 of the following readings (*or all, if desired*), and consider having different people read each one. For families with children, you might pair each story with a brief explanation or question. You can also act them out, use drawings, or light a small tea candle after each reading to mark the growing light.



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### 📖 Story 1: Creation

**Genesis 1:1-2:2** (*abbreviated or full*)

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth..."

**Reflection Prompt:**

What is your favorite part of God's creation? What does it mean to you that God called all things "good"?

**Prayer:**

"Creator God, you made all things and called them good. Make us good stewards of your world. Fill us with wonder, and renew the face of the earth. Amen."

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### 📖 Story 2: Deliverance at the Red Sea

**Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21**

"Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today..."

**Reflection Prompt:**

Can you think of a time when you were afraid, but something or someone helped you through it?

**Prayer:**

"Delivering God, you led your people through the sea. Lead us from fear to freedom. Teach us to trust your presence. Amen."

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☐ Story 3: God's Invitation to New Life

**Isaiah 55:1–11**

“Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters...”

**Reflection Prompt:**

What do you thirst for in your life—love, belonging, peace? What do you think God offers to fill that longing?

**Prayer:**

“Generous God, your word is like rain on thirsty ground. Nourish our spirits and help us grow in grace. Amen.”

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☐ Story 4: The Valley of Dry Bones

**Ezekiel 37:1–14**

“I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live...”

**Reflection Prompt:**

When have you felt tired or dry like bones? What gives you life again?

**Prayer:**

“Breath of God, breathe on us. Revive our hearts. Make us alive with hope and courage. Amen.”

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☐ Story 5: Gathering God's People

**Zephaniah 3:14–20** (*optional*)

“The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory...”

**Reflection Prompt:**

What does it feel like to be gathered in love? How do we help others feel welcome?

**Prayer:**

“God of joy, gather all your people. Help us rejoice in you and restore those who feel alone or lost. Amen.”

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**Optional Pause**

After the final story, take a few moments to rest in silence or share thoughts aloud. You may also:

- Play quiet music
- Invite children to draw one of the stories they heard
- Reflect: “What story stood out to you most tonight?”
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As you conclude this part of the Vigil, extinguish any tea lights you lit for each reading - except for the central Christ Candle, which remains burning.

**Say together:**

“This is our story. This is the story of God and God's people. We remember it tonight, and we trust that the story continues—because love is stronger than death.”



## Part Three – Remembering Baptism and Proclaiming Resurrection

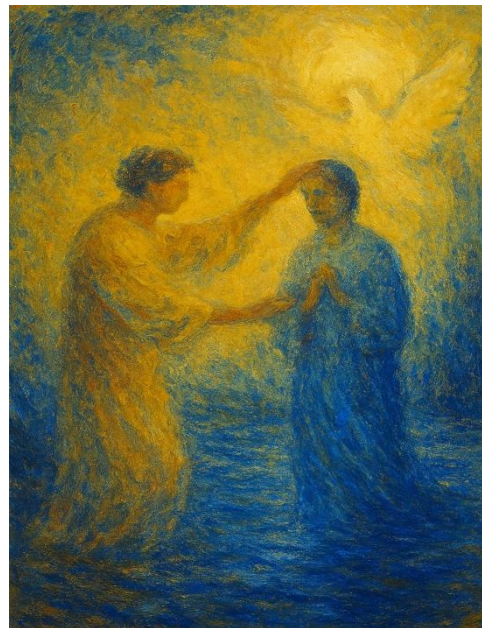
"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that... just as Christ was raised from the dead... so we too might walk in newness of life." – Romans 6:3–4

The Great Vigil of Easter is not only about looking back. It is about becoming part of the story ourselves. Through the waters of baptism, we are joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus. We become a new creation. Even at home, we can remember our baptism and proclaim our faith in the Risen Lord.

This final part of the Vigil invites your household to renew your baptismal promises and to shout the first "Alleluia" of Easter.

### Remembering Our Baptism

Place a bowl of water near your Christ Candle. You might gently stir it or touch the surface to feel its movement. Invite everyone to dip their fingers into the water and make the sign of the cross on their foreheads - or on each other's foreheads - as a reminder of baptism.



#### **Say together:**

"We thank you, God, for the gift of water. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. From it we are raised to share in his resurrection. In it, we are reborn by the Holy Spirit."

You may continue with a renewal of the baptismal promises using simple language for children:

#### **Leader or all:**

Do you believe in God who made the world and called it good?

– *We do.*

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, who died and rose to bring us new life?

– *We do.*

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, who breathes life into us and the Church?

– *We do.*

Will you try to follow Jesus in love, forgive others, and care for the earth?

– *We will, with God's help.*

Will you love your neighbor, tell the truth, and seek peace and justice?

– *We will, with God's help.*

Will you trust in God's love, even when things are hard?

– *We will, with God's help.*

#### **A final prayer may be offered:**

"Holy God, through the waters of baptism you have made us your children and called us into resurrection life. Help us walk as Easter people—alive with joy, ready to love, and eager to serve. Amen."

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 Proclaiming the Resurrection

**Turn the lights back on.** Let the house be filled with light! Clap, cheer, ring bells - anything to break the silence with joy.

**Say or shout together:**

**Alleluia! Christ is risen!**

— *The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

If you have musical instruments, play them. If not, tap pots and pans. Dance. Laugh. Celebrate that love has won.

You may sing one of the following simple songs:

- *Jesus Christ is Risen Today*
- *Alleluia, Give Thanks to the Risen Lord*
- *Christ the Lord is Risen Today*
- *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands* (Easter verse: "Now the tomb is empty, he is risen...")

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 A Blessing for the Household

"May the God who brought Jesus from death to life  
fill this home with peace, light, and joy.  
May you know the power of resurrection  
in your laughter, in your learning, and in your loving.  
Christ is risen! Alleluia!"

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 Closing Options

You may conclude your vigil by:

- Sharing a treat or small Easter snack together
- Placing flowers near your Christ Candle
- Writing your own prayers of thanksgiving and placing them in a bowl
- Simply sitting in the light, quietly holding space for the joy to settle in

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**Easter has begun.**

Let it echo through your week.

Let it shine in your home.

Let it rise in your hearts.

**Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.**