

A Night That Transforms

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This year, the Jewish holiday of Passover, which begins on March 30 and ends on April 7, coincides with the celebration of Easter. During the Passover seder, the youngest person at the table asks, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” This question seeks to identify those things that make the Passover seder different from other holiday meals.

At the Easter Vigil, which has its roots in the celebration of Passover, we keep that solemn night when Christ passed over from death to life. Like the child at the seder meal, we too may ask, “What makes this night different from all other nights?”

This night is determined by the cosmos. We assemble on or near the full moon of spring when all of creation is being transformed. In the Northern Hemisphere, winter’s chill yields to spring’s warmth as the earth is awakened and renewed.

Our prayer begins in the dark, when the defenses we don during the day surrender to the vulnerabilities of the night. Amidst a blazing fire, we see more clearly who we truly are: the beloved of God. We gaze at the fire, mesmerized by its ability to transform the darkness. This is the light of God’s love, ever burning, never consumed. We are so engulfed by its flame that we have no choice but to become bearers of light. Step by step, we march in celestial rhythm and form a sacred parade, the divine glow reflected in the faces of the people God has chosen. Our lights mingle with the lights of heaven in cosmic radiance. We are ready to praise the Risen One who draws us into the dance of divine love.

We stand around the Paschal flame and then follow the Paschal candle into the church to listen to the ancient hymn of the *Exsultet*. This is no ordinary song—this is poetic praise, lavish and abundant in its imagery of the night. This is the night when hatred yields to peace, when sinners are washed clean, and when those who mourn are overcome with joy. Over and over, the poet cries out, “This is the night.” We are summoned to be present to the moment, called to soak in the sights, the sounds, and the tastes of this evening. Our fasting has ended. The time of feasting is here.

First, we feast at the table of God’s Word. We hear the stories of salvation and sing the songs of remembrance and hope. We begin in the garden with the divine artist, who forms creation out of chaos, who molds and shapes humanity into God’s image. Throughout this sacred narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures, we hear how God’s faithful love saved, liberated, and restored humankind over and over again. St. Paul exhorts us to live in new ways, dead to sin and alive in Christ! And finally we come to the empty tomb, where anticipation



At the Easter Vigil, heaven and earth unite as we gather around a fire, listen to salvation history, initiate new Christians, and celebrate our new life in Christ.

and ambiguity hold each other in a divine embrace. The only thing for certain is that nothing will ever be the same.

The hope of the resurrection calls us to the waters of Baptism. We process to the font with the saints, reminding us that we do not journey alone. Our elect are bathed in a holy washing, clothed in a garment of new life, and perfumed with sacred oil. Freed and forgiven, they walk now as children of light and are invited to the royal banquet.

It is at this divine table where love is consummated. The new bread and new wine of this night call us to be with each other in new ways. Saints and sinners are welcome. No one will go away hungry.

This is the night when heaven meets earth. Transformed by divine love, we discover and reveal a new humanity. That is why this night is different from all other nights.