

Pastor Kenneth Mars

St. John's Lutheran Church – Kimball, NE (dual parish w/Immanuel, Burns, WY)

Easter Vigil

April 3, 2021

Theme: This Is the Passover of the Lord

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

“Beloved in the Lord, on this most holy night, in which our Lord Jesus passed over from death to life, we are gathered here in vigil and prayer. This is the Passover of the Lord in which, by hearing His Word and celebrating His sacraments, we share in His victory over death.” Our service tonight began with those majestic, joyous words of triumph and joy. This night is shrouded in divine mystery and wonder. The Lord Jesus passed over from death to life during these hours in which we wait in prayer and anticipation. God's inspired Word teaches us that Christ's resurrection from the dead was a work of the Holy Trinity. The Father raised Christ from the dead by the power of the Spirit. As the resurrected Lord of glory, He lives and reigns to all eternity over all creation for the benefit and glorification of His beloved Church. By the same Spirit of holiness, we believers in Christ are raised to newness of life, having the hope of an inheritance that is imperishable, unfading, and established in the heavens. Thus, we gather tonight in vigil and prayer. This is the Passover of the Lord in which we share in His victory over death.

Yesterday evening, we commemorated with great solemnity that upon the life-giving cross was hung the salvation of the world. Christ the Savior was crucified unto death and buried in a borrowed tomb. The stark truth is that Jesus suffered and died; the joy and wonder of Christ's death, however, is that His death is the means of the Father reconciling the world unto Himself. Because Christ Jesus shed His blood, God the Father is now our Father who art in heaven. We seek to live in His kingdom and according to His will in all things. For Christ's blood washes away all our sins while the Holy Spirit gives us the pure righteousness of faith in Christ Jesus. The reverential solemnity of last night's service was permeated with joy and victory. We left in the sure and certain hope of Christ's resurrection.

Such godly hope continues on this Passover night. The Bible doesn't really tell us what happened when that first Easter Sunday arrived. We must remember that in the Biblical reckoning of time, the new day began at 6 pm, not midnight as we consider it. The Bible doesn't describe what took place between the beginning of Sunday, roughly

6 pm, and the early dawn when the women went to the tomb, found the stone rolled away, and Jesus already risen from the dead. Scripture tells us a little of what took place over Holy Saturday when Jesus descended into hell. The Lord Jesus declared, “Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40). While in the heart of the earth, the Lord proclaimed His victory over death, the grave, Satan, and hell to the spirits held in prison. For those spirits condemned to eternal judgment in the torments of hell, Christ’s proclamation surely brought dismay and shame. But for the spirits of the just, not suffering torment, but resting in peace for the resurrection of the Last Day, Christ’s proclamation was pure joy and triumph.

This night, which is the beginning of Easter for us, is the Passover of our Lord in which He passed over from death into life. His pure, perfect body came back to life again without seeing any corruption or decay. The night of death came to end. And I do not mean here merely those hours when it is dark outside. The night of death, that is, the entire rule and reign that death illegitimately claimed over this world, is over. The resurrected Lord Jesus has passed over from death to life. The light of life has dawned, piercing the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death. By His resurrection glory, Christ Jesus has abolished the power and dominion of death. Everyone who believes in Christ Jesus, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in Christ shall never die (John 11:26–26).

The purpose of tonight’s prayer vigil is to hear God’s Word, to rejoice in Christ’s life-giving sacraments, and to be renewed in the Spirit of holiness. Ezekiel foresaw this new age of light and life in the Holy Spirit when he prophesied, “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you....And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my just decrees” (Ezek. 36:26, 27). In the strength of Christ and the grace of the Spirit of holiness, we rejoice in living according to the Father’s just decrees with a new heart. Holiness of life is our joy and our goal. 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.

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.