

The Triduum: *Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and The Great Vigil of Easter*

St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church, Lockport, IL



The Three Days (or Triduum) slow down time as we move through the climax of the story of faith, Jesus' betrayal, death, and resurrection. Worship throughout the rest of the year skims the surface in some ways, whisking us through the story of Jesus' life. But in these three days we linger. There is so much centered here. We have to take our time to be able to receive it.

Worship on these days will cover it all: creation and redemption, death and life, fire and water, desolation and celebration. These days enact the great Christian drama, and the liturgies are, in many ways, dramas that embody the story, the tensions, and the teachings at the core of our faith.

The Triduum liturgies are, in effect, one continuous rite spread over three consecutive days. Thus, there is no blessing or dismissal until the conclusion of the First Mass of the Resurrection on Easter Eve.

Maundy Thursday (PAGE 3): This evening marks the beginning of the Triduum. We reach back to the beginning of Lent to recall the confession we made on Ash Wednesday. This service is clearly different from the regular flow of the Eucharist as we celebrate it weekly, because what we commemorate this evening is different. Tonight we begin a celebration that will not end until the exultant conclusion of the Great Paschal Vigil. Tonight, we hear the words of forgiveness in a new way. It is only with the knowledge of being forgiven that we can engage the rest of the story. We watch and we eat a last supper with Jesus. We hear him offer all of himself to us, even his body and blood. We end the service with the stripping of the chancel. Adornment after adornment leaves the sanctuary as the words of the psalm drift through the air, and we are reminded of what this love will cost Jesus. We leave the service lingering. It is holy time.

Good Friday (PAGE 11): When we return to the sanctuary on Good Friday, hours have passed. We hear about Jesus' betrayal, capture and trial. We hear of his humiliation, his interrogation. We know the night was long for him, and lonely. Our visual center is the cross. There is nothing else to distract us. The pace is slow, as those final hours must have been for him. We move relentlessly toward the end. We pray, interceding for the world around us, for our church, and ourselves. We are reminded that Jesus' death was paradoxically, the moment of his triumph. Through his death, he defeated death.

The Great Vigil of Easter (PAGE 20): Now we are almost there, almost at the hour when Jesus' death itself was overcome, the death became life – the victory we so need. Now time stands still for us to remember all that has gone before. No other service is so full of the heritage of faith; no other time in the year do we gather together all of the richest metaphors and symbols of faith. We gather around new fire, itself a sign of creation renewed. From it we light the paschal candle to illumine our way. As the pillar of fire led the people of Israel in the wilderness, so the paschal candle will lead us to Easter – the light of Christ our beacon. In the silence from Good Friday, the light is rekindled. Gathered around the light, we wrap the great stories of faith like a blanket around ourselves. We recall our ancestors and God's saving work among us throughout the ages – creation from a word, the earth washed clean in the flood, the deliverance at the Red Sea, dry bones given life again. The baptismal font beckons to affirm our baptisms, to remember our welcome into the community of faith, and to welcome others newborn into the faith. The Gospel reading draws us out of our holy recollections and into the events of the story again. Now we are prepared. We know where we have come from before we peek into the tomb with the women and Peter. When we hear the angel say, "He is not here, but has risen," we know again that life is always God's way with us. Death is defeated. We dance through the holy meal, now each one confessing the truth of the story. Light the church! Shout Alleluia! Celebrate with high praise! He is risen! We continue our celebration in the Parish Hall with a gala reception.

--adapted from *Sundays and Seasons 2004 (Augsburg/Fortress, 2003)*, pp. 158-159