



Easter Sunrise Service

Created by the Hernon Family – updated 2020

THE PREPARATION

The purpose of this service is to create a sense of wonder in your children and a deeper appreciation of the power of the Resurrection. The readings, songs, and the fire itself are used to incarnate the spiritual reality of the triumph of Christ over darkness, sin and death.

Not all the members of the family should necessarily participate in this event. In our family, usually Dad and the older kids do this service. Use your best judgment to make this a peaceful and meaningful service for those who would like to participate.

This service is best started about 20 minutes before sunrise in your area, and it's best if you can take time to read the readings and prepare the service the day before as much as possible.

If you have a bonfire area, a chiminea, or a fire pit outside your home, **prepare everything you need to make a fire (kindling, wood, a lighter, etc) the night before**. Make sure to set up or plan places for everyone to sit, whether on porch furniture or just a blanket on the grass. You should also make sure to have an extra flashlight or phone light available for the readings, and just in case it's difficult to find things in the dark! You can provide music via your phone, a small speaker, or have the words for songs available on a tablet or phone. Unaccompanied singing can be very powerful.

We have compiled about ten minutes worth of readings and responses taken from the Church's Easter Vigil below, and you can do as few or as many as you like. We have not included all the readings, but if you would like to include them all, you can find them at usccb.org. You could choose to retell some of the readings in your own words, such as the story of creation. Do what works for your family.

The readings should begin in the dark with no fire. The fire is kindled right before beginning the New Testament readings. The timing is such that the gospel is read as the sun is coming up. The timing isn't as important as the simple drama of starting in the darkness and ending in the light.

As you gather your children to begin, talk to them about darkness and light. Use phrases that are genuine and meaningful to you to describe the world without Christ. Explain that we were in darkness, heaven was closed to us, we didn't know the way to the Father. But Christ shows us the way. As dark as our days may be, we need to remember that dawn is always coming, the sun will always rise, and Christ will always conquer over death. "We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song," said John Paul II.

Feel free to add more Easter songs, and invite the children to participate as much as they are able. Following the form we have laid out here isn't as important as involving the children as much as possible. This should be a morning of wonder and celebration for He has risen!

The Service

Begin in the dark with no fire. The leader begins by reading from the family bible or from this page.

THE OLD TESTAMENT READINGS

Reading 1

GENESIS 1:1- 26

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.

Then God said,

“Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw how good the light was.

God then separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” Thus evening came, and morning followed—the first day..

Then God said:

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground.”

God created man in his image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth.”

God also said: “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; and to all the animals of the land, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the ground, I give all the green plants for food.”

And so it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good.

The Word of the LORD.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reading 2

GENESIS 22:1-2, 9A, 10-13, 15-18

God put Abraham to the test. He called to him, “Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

Then God said: “Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you.”

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it.

Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the LORD’s messenger called to him from heaven, “Abraham, Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he answered.

“Do not lay your hand on the boy,” said the messenger. “Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son.”

As Abraham looked about, he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket.

So he went and took the ram and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son.

Again the LORD’s messenger called to Abraham from heaven and said: “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son, I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants shall take

possession of the gates of their enemies, and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing—all this because you obeyed my command.”

The WORD of the LORD

All: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

PSALM 19:8, 9, 10, 11

R. (John 6:68c) *Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.*

The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul;
the decree of the LORD is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple.

R. *Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.*

The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;

the command of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eye.

R. *Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.*

They are more precious than gold, than a heap of purest gold;
sweeter also than syrup or honey from the comb.

R. *Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.*

LIGHTING THE FIRE

We often share this story with the children while lighting the fire. Feel free to share your own story instead.

Why light a fire in the morning? We are following one of our older brothers in the faith—St. Patrick of Ireland. On Easter Sunday, in 433, the leaders of Ireland assembled at the Hill of Tara, and the decree went forth that the fires throughout the kingdom should be extinguished until the signal blaze was kindled by the druids and high king. St. Patrick arrived at the hill of Slane, at the opposite extremity

of the valley from Tara, on the eve before Easter and on the summit of the hill kindled the Paschal fire. The druids at once raised their voice. “O King”, this fire, which has been lighted in defiance of the royal edict, will blaze forever in this land unless it be this very night extinguished.” May the light of Christ blaze within our land forever!

THE NEW TESTAMENT READINGS

Epistle

ROMANS 6:3-11

Brothers and sisters:
Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.

For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection. We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that

our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin. For a dead person has been absolved from sin.

If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him. As to his death, he died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God. Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.

The WORD of the LORD

All: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

PS 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23

R. *Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.*

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever.

Let the house of Israel say, "His mercy endures forever."

R. *Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.*

The right hand of the LORD has struck with power; the right hand of the LORD is exalted.

I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.

R. *Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.*

The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

By the LORD has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes.

R. *Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.*

Before the Gospel, have all stand. Sing an "Alleluia" chant or song before beginning.

Gospel

MATTHEW 28:1-10

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew.

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow. The guards were shaken with fear of him and became like dead men.

Then the angel said to the women in reply, "Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. Come and see the

place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.' Behold, I have told you."

Then they went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce this to his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

The Gospel of the LORD

All: Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ!

THE EXSULTET: THE PROCLAMATION OF EASTER

All remain standing. This can be sung or recited. You can listen to a [recording of it here](#).

Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven,
exult, let Angel ministers of God exult,
let the trumpet of salvation
sound aloud our mighty King's triumph!

Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her,
ablaze with light from her eternal King,
let all corners of the earth be glad,
knowing an end to gloom and darkness.

Rejoice, let Mother Church also rejoice,
arrayed with the lightning of his glory,
let this holy building shake with joy,
filled with the mighty voices of the peoples.

(Therefore, dearest friends,
standing in the awesome
glory of this holy light,
invoke with me, I ask you,

the mercy of God almighty,
that he, who has been pleased to number me,
though unworthy, among the Levites,
may pour into me his light unshadowed,
that I may sing this candle's perfect praises.)

V. The Lord be with you.

R. And with your spirit.)

V. Lift up your hearts.

R. We lift them up to the Lord.

V. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

R. It is right and just.

It is truly right and just, with
ardent love of mind and heart
and with devoted service of our voice,
to acclaim our God invisible,
the almighty Father,
and Jesus Christ, our Lord, his
Son, his Only Begotten.

Who for our sake paid Adam's
debt to the eternal Father,
and, pouring out his own dear Blood,
wiped clean the record of our
ancient sinfulness.

These, then, are the feasts of Passover,
in which is slain the Lamb,
the one true Lamb,
whose Blood anoints the
doorposts of believers.

This is the night,
when once you led our forebears,
Israel's children,
from slavery in Egypt
and made them pass dry-
shod through the Red Sea.

This is the night
that with a pillar of fire
banished the darkness of sin.

This is the night
that even now, throughout the world,
sets Christian believers apart
from worldly vices

and from the gloom of sin,
leading them to grace
and joining them to his holy ones.

This is the night,
when Christ broke the prison-bars of death
and rose victorious from the underworld.

Our birth would have been no gain,
had we not been redeemed.

O wonder of your humble care for us!
O love, O charity beyond all telling,
to ransom a slave you gave away your Son!
O truly necessary sin of Adam,
destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!
O happy fault
that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!

O truly blessed night,
worthy alone to know the time and hour
when Christ rose from the underworld!

This is the night
of which it is written:
The night shall be as bright as day,
dazzling is the night for me,
and full of gladness.

The sanctifying power of this night
dispels wickedness, washes faults away,
restores innocence to the fallen,
and joy to mourners,
drives out hatred, fosters concord,
and brings down the mighty.
On this, your night of grace, O holy Father,
accept this candle, a solemn offering,
the work of bees and of your servants' hands,
an evening sacrifice of praise,
this gift from your most holy Church.

But now we know the praises of this pillar,
which glowing fire ignites for God's honor,
a fire into many flames divided,
yet never dimmed by sharing of its light,
for it is fed by melting wax,
drawn out by mother bees
to build a torch so precious.

O truly blessed night,
when things of heaven are
wed to those of earth,
and divine to the human.

Therefore, O Lord,
we pray you that this candle,
hallowed to the honor of your name,
may persevere undimmed,
to overcome the darkness of this night.

Receive it as a pleasing fragrance,

and let it mingle with the lights of heaven.

May this flame be found still burning
by the Morning Star:
the one Morning Star who never sets,
Christ your Son,
who, coming back from death's domain,
has shed his peaceful light on humanity,
and lives and reigns for ever and ever.

R. Amen.

THE CELEBRATION!

After completing all the readings, now is a wonderful time to break out some marshmallows or Peeps to roast over the fire. Sing or play your favorite Easter songs. Tell them some of your favorite stories from your childhood. Make up stories together. Encourage the children to cheer, dance, and celebrate for He is Risen!

After coming inside you may choose to allow them to dive into their Easter baskets. You could also make up an Easter basket treasure hunt for them and make clues hidden around the house. We enjoy doing an Easter Egg hunt with our kids and allowing the older children to hide the eggs for the younger ones. You may choose to hide eggs for your older children if you like. Put some money inside to make it even more fun for them!



BONUS MESSY FAMILY FUN

A Scriptural Easter Egg Hunt

Print out the following clues on paper (if you want, just print this sheet and cut it up with scissors). Roll them up and place each clue inside a plastic Easter egg and hide the night before Easter, after bedtime. (Pro tip: Parents, have your energetic older kids prepare this surprise for you while you're doing other Easter prep work.) The final surprise can be a present for the family, a family Easter basket, or even a picture of the Risen Christ to add to your family altar or prayer focal point!

1

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth...Then God said, "Let there be light", and there was light.

GENESIS 1

You begin your quest by seeking light or the place where light is found.

2

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground."

GENESIS 1

Journey to where the Creator allows the birds of the air gather for us.

3

God put Abraham to the test. He called to him, "Abraham...take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love...offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you."

GENESIS 22

Go up to the place where the sons of Adam sleep. Look under the pillows.

4

The One who has become your husband is your Maker; his name is the Lord of Hosts; your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, called God of all the earth...Though the mountains may fall and the hills be turned to dust, my love shall never leave you nor my covenant of peace be shaken says the Lord, who has mercy on you.

ISAIAH 54

Find the book of images with your parent's wedding.

5

The Lord said to Moses, "Lift up your staff and with hand outstretched over the sea, split the sea into two that the Israelites may pass through it on dry land." ...As the water flowed back, it covered the chariots and charioteers.

EXODUS 14

Like the Israelites, go with haste and find the next clue in the modern day family chariot.

6

Thus says the Lord: All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come receive grain and eat, come without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk! Seek the Lord while he may be found, call to him while he is near. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.

ISAIAH 55

Go to the place where you find food and drink.

7

Hear, O Israel, the commandments of life: listen, and know prudence! Learn where prudence is, where strength, where understanding; that you may know also where are length of days, and life, where light of the eyes, and peace. Who has found the place of wisdom, who has entered her treasuries?

BARUCH 3

Go to our home "treasury" where you find can find money.

8

I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees. You shall live in the land I gave your fathers; you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

EZEKIEL 36

All of you hold hands, walk slowly, follow your heart until you stand before the Sacred Heart.

9

Brothers and sisters: are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.

ROMANS 6

Run outside together to search for new life in the form of flowers. Search for the next clue.

10

Very early when the sun risen, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb. The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid! You seek Jesus of Nazareth; the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.'"

MARK 16

Do not delay, travel as a group to the place where our clothes are made clean.