

Preparing for the Easter Vigil

We are going to attend an Easter Vigil service. How do we participate as a family, and how do I engage my children?

The Easter Vigil is a Divine Service. God gives His gifts of Word and Sacrament, even without our intentional engagement. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (ROM. 10:17). From an educational perspective, however, the Easter Vigil is an ideal learning environment. Children learn by seeing, hearing, touching and doing. The Easter Vigil includes fire (!), movement, dynamic lighting, beautiful decorations, meaningful music and stories. These beautiful coloring pages will also engage your child in the service both physically and visually. May the time you and your children spend contemplating Christ during the Easter Vigil spark a lifetime of growing in the Word and a joyful habit of looking forward to Holy Week and Easter.

Before the Service

If you have time, prep your child on what to expect at the service. Review this introduction with your child. Walk through the summary below of each of the parts of the service. Then, let your child peek at the coloring pages. Do your best to create an air of excitement and anticipation. Finally, feel free to choose one of the coloring pages to complete ahead of time. Like any celebration, the anticipation and preparation are often half the fun.

During the Service

Encourage your child to color one or more coloring pages. Look through the prompts on the opposite side for questions to ask, things to look for and connections to discuss. It is not irreverent when parents whisper quietly with their children during the service to instruct them in the faith.

After the Service

If they haven't finished coloring, give them time to finish whatever they were working on during the service. Look through their completed coloring page(s). Praise their efforts. If you didn't get to its opposite page, look through the information and do the prompts. Let them color a few more pages if they show interest. Finally, give them plenty of time to ask questions or explain what they found interesting about the service.

Understand that the following pages are tools to point you and your children to Jesus, not homework to be judged or graded. Take what is helpful and leave the rest. If your child only colors one page during the service and you don't have time to do anything else, you, as a Christian parent, have still successfully engaged your child with the Word and worship of Christ in a meaningful way.

What is the Easter Vigil?

The Easter Vigil service is held after sunset on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter. The word vigil means “to keep watch.” The Easter Vigil is a time set aside for attentive waiting and prayer. The disciples, who just witnessed their Lord's death on the very first Holy Saturday, would have been in a state of shock, unbelief and grief. We, however, know and believe the end of the story, so we can watch and wait on Saturday knowing that the Resurrection is just hours away. Tonight we celebrate our Lord's passing over from death to life, and ours with Him. This service acts as the bridge between the reflective season of Lent and the joyful season of Easter, connecting Good Friday to Easter Sunday. The Easter Vigil also completes the Triduum.

What is the Triduum?

The Triduum is the three-day observance that includes Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Vigil. If you attend the Maundy Thursday or Good Friday services, you may notice that they do not end with the Benediction, the final blessing. Instead, these services end in silence. At last, we hear the Benediction again at the end of the Easter Vigil.

What can I expect?

The Easter Vigil narrates the story of salvation from creation to the cross. The service is full of contrasts between darkness and light, punishment and mercy, all the while remaining focused on baptism. The readings and songs, as well as the lighting and decoration of the chancel, mark the transition from Lent to Easter.

Is it a regular Divine Service?

The traditional Divine Service has two parts: the Service of the Word and the Service of the Sacrament. The Easter Vigil tends to be longer than a standard service and typically has six parts: the Service of Light, the Service of Readings, the Service of Holy Baptism, the Service of Prayer, the Service of the Word and the Service of the Sacrament.

What can we expect during each part of the service?

The following is a very general summary of the Vigil as it appears in the *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book*. Keep in mind each congregation will have its own traditions. *The asterisk denotes a coordinating coloring page.

1. Service of Light

- The new paschal candle is dedicated, lit, and processed into the church. (*Paschal Candle and Lumen Christi)
- Many churches will start the Vigil outside with a bonfire.

2. Service of Readings

- Twelve Old Testament readings are appointed for the Vigil. A coloring page is provided for each of these readings.
- The entire packet may be printed as a booklet, especially for a full Easter Vigil.
- Not all congregations will read all twelve readings. You could ask your pastor in advance for the lessons that will be used at your congregation. Then, hand out the specific page as it appears in the bulletin.

*The Creation (GEN. 1)

*The Flood (GEN. 7, 8, 9)

*The Testing of Abraham (GEN. 22)

*Israel's Deliverance at the Red Sea (EX. 14)

*Salvation Offered Freely to All (IS. 55)

*A New Heart and a New Spirit (EZEK. 36)

*God's Faithfulness to Israel (DEUT. 31)

*The Valley of Dry Bones (EZEK. 37)

*Job Confesses the Redeemer (JOB 19)

*Jonah Preaches to Nineveh (JONAH 3)

*The Gathering of God's People (ZEPH. 3)

*The Fiery Furnace (DAN. 3)

- These stories are full of contrasts: light and dark, good and evil, punishment and mercy. These contrasts are excellent talking points for your family. They tell the stories of the Lord's

salvation for His people in the past and point ahead to what Jesus has done for us and all the world now in His death and resurrection.

3. Service of Holy Baptism

- In the early church, Lent was often used as a time to catechize, or teach the faith to, new members. The Easter Vigil concluded their catechesis, culminating in the catechumens' baptisms.
- Some congregations also use this service to confirm new confirmands.
- If there are no baptisms or confirmations to perform, the congregation will renew their baptismal vows. (*A New Heart and Spirit)

4. Service of Prayer

- Your child may be able to participate in the repeated or familiar responses with your help.

5. Service of the Word

- This part will be familiar from the Service of the Word in a typical Divine Service.
- The Easter Acclamation (*Alleluia) is said and sung again after having fallen silent for many weeks.
- The chancel may be adorned and lights brightened for Easter.
- The Holy Gospel is read. (*The Easter Story)
- The Sermon is preached. (This may be a good time for young children to color on their own as they listen!)

6. Service of the Sacrament

- This part is also familiar from a typical Divine Service.
- The Lord's Supper is distributed. (*Salvation Offered Freely to All)
- The final blessing, or Benediction, is given.

The Easter Vigil is a stunning service that will have you noticing new riches and treasures each year. God's story of salvation is for our families and us. God loves us and sent His Son for us, even while we were still sinners. He reached out as the Light of the World to dispel the darkness of our sin. When we deserved punishment, He showed us mercy. We pray this Easter Vigil is a blessing to you and your children as you celebrate the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.