

30 March 2013
The Great Vigil of Easter

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Paradise Is Open Again”

The world holds candlelight vigils to remember the dead.
The Church’s candlelight vigil is to wait for the living.
For our Lord, who was crucified for us and then laid in the tomb, is not dead,
but is risen from the dead.
Tonight, we begin to remember and celebrate that is a small way.
Tonight is not the full joy of Easter, but the quiet confidence that Easter is
coming in the morning.
Tonight we prepare for that celebration.
We prepare by remembering the works of God and the promises of God.
All that He has done for His people in the past, and His promises for the
future.

And so we will hear of creation, and remember that with Jesus’ resurrection is
the new creation.

We will hear of the flood and how God saved Noah and his family, and
remember that God keeps us in safety in the ark of Christ’s body, the Church.

We will hear of Abraham and Isaac and remember that the Father who
sacrificed His Son for us was God, not Abraham, and that Jesus is the Lamb
God provided.

We will hear of how Israel passed through the Red Sea on dry land, but that
Pharaoh and his army were drowned, and remember that in passing through
the waters of Holy Baptism, we are rescued from our enemy, satan.

We will hear from the prophet Isaiah that the Word of God always
accomplished that for which it is sent, and remember that the Word made
flesh did exactly that - accomplished the salvation of mankind for which He
was sent.

We will hear of Jonah and his preaching to Nineveh after his three day stay in the belly of the great fish, and remember our Lord's coming to us after his three day stay in the grave.

And we will hear of God's great rescue of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace, and remember that Jesus has saved us from the flames of hell.

And then we will hear from the Apostle Paul, *how baptism is our Easter*. How in baptism we are joined with the death and resurrection of Jesus and raised to a new life in Him. And we'll remember our baptism and rejoice in it.

And when we awake in the morning, all joy will break out - in the church and in all creation! For our Lord Jesus is risen from the dead, never to die again. And our joy will not be because we are caught up in an emotion, but the joy that is founded on God's Word and promises. His Word and promises fulfilled for us. For that is true joy. Joy that will last. Joy that cannot die.

For Paradise is open again.

That's what Jesus has done for us.

The angels which once guarded the way to the Tree of Life now announce to us that the grain that was buried in the ground has come forth as a new Tree of Life for us, that we may eat of Him and live forever.

And so we do, and so we will.

This is the night. The night that has changed everything.

Thanks be to God.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.