

Jesu Juva
“The Night of Victory”

We get lots of God’s Word tonight, as we gather not to mourn the dead but to await the living. Some of this word is familiar, some is not. Some is long, some is short. But in all of it we hear of God’s goodness - creating, saving, providing, gathering, and delivering. And that’s what we celebrate this night. For all the Word of God points to and proclaims and finds it’s fulfillment in the mystery of this night: the Passover of our Lord. His passing over from death to life, so that we who were born dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) might live as well. Live as we pass over with Him in Holy Baptism, which we also remember and celebrate this night.

For *this is the night*. The night of our victory. The night which ends all night, for Jesus, the Light of the world (John 8:12) lives, never to die again.

And maybe it’s the last reading that is always read on this night that really highlights that for us. The story of the three men in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). It’s one of the longer stories, and filled with repetition, as we hear about the king, the satraps, the prefects, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces . . . against just three young men. Not good odds. And what they refused to participate in was come pretty awesome worship. All the people were there, a huge horde, with a grand orchestra: horns, pipes, lyres, trigons, harps, bagpipes, and all kinds of music. It just didn’t get much more impressive than that! And as these things are repeated over and over it gives you the impression of these three young men against the world, against all human reason and pomp and power.

And yet the three young men *win*. Because with them is another, one who *in appearance was like a son of the gods*. For He was the Son of God, come to rescue His children from the flames of death and hell.

So it is with us. *This is the night*. The night we remember, as we confess in the creed, that Jesus descended into hell - not as part of His suffering, but as part of His victory. That like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we fear not the power and flames of death and hell, and like Job, *know that our Redeemer lives*. And that against Him, all human, all worldly, all demonic reason and pomp and power is nothing.

So we rejoice this night, the Church with the angels and all creation, in the triumph of our King. We will feel and smell once again the oil of gladness in our baptismal remembrance, and we will sound forth our *Alleluia* once again. For this is most good, right, and salutary. *This is the night*. The night the light breaks the darkness, life breaks death, and the separated are reconciled. Thanks be to God!