

4 April 2026  
Great Vigil of Easter

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Who Swallowed Who?”

Text: Numbers 16; Romans 6:3-11

The Old Testament has much to teach us about Christ. That’s why we read so much of it every year on this night of vigil. These stories about how the Son of God was providing for and rescuing His people of old, and how these stories pointed to the *greater* rescue He accomplished for us this night. This night. The night of our life.

For God is life. God gives life. He wants life for us. So God creates life, cleanses life, rescues life, restores life, redeems life.

It is sin that robs us of life. Makes our lives less than God created them to be. Kills us. Enslaves us. Entombs us. Because our sin thrust all of creation into sin, the ground God created to bring forth life, the ground God created life from, forming Adam from that very ground, opens its mouth and swallows us up in death. Six feet under, as we say. Life ended.

There is an interesting story about this in the Old testament, in the book of Numbers. A man named Korah, along with Dathan, Abiram, and On, led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, and so against God. They claimed a holiness and life for themselves, apart from God. But of course, nothing apart from God is holiness and life - only sin and death. So the ground opened its mouth and swallowed them up, they and all their households. And all Israel feared and fled, saying: *Lest the earth swallow us up* (Numbers 16)!

Well, the earth *is* going to swallow us up. Maybe not as dramatically as that, but just as surely. Because that’s the wages of sin. And we are sinners. We have inherited a sinful nature, and so seek life apart from God and His Word, too. And so children die. Parents die. There is sudden death, and long-suffering, drawn out death. There is intentional death, accidental death, natural death, and unnatural death. But all of it, no matter how it comes, *evil death*. Death that was never meant to be. *Dust you are, and to dust you will return* (Genesis 3:19).

But tonight . . . *that all changed*. Tonight, the earth that opened up its mouth and swallowed up Jesus in death, was forced to open its mouth again! To release the one it swallowed, but had no right to. The earth would not open again for Korah and the others, and it would not open again for us, for we are guilty. But when it swallowed

the sinless Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, its mouth is now forced open *from the inside out*. It cannot hold Jesus. It must relinquish its prey. So we have hope.

For this is the night the tables were turned - and the swallower, death, was swallowed. This is the night of life and light.

And so in a moment we will remember our baptism - the water of God that broke the grip of sin, death, and the devil *on us*. The water where we die and rise with Christ, the dust of death is forced to release us, and the flames of the fiery furnace of hell cannot touch us. For this is what Paul says, as we will hear: ***For do you not know, he says, that if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.*** United to the one who broke death and the grave *for us*.

So we will remember that truth tonight. We renounce the devil, and all his works, and all his ways - his darkness, sin, and death. And we confess the life and light of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who has given us new birth, and a new heart, and a new spirit. And baptized into Christ, in the ark of Christ's body, we are safe.

This is the night. The night when the light scatters the darkness. The night when joy scatters all sadness. The night the grave was broken. The night when the earth was forced to open its mouth, and life returned from the dead. As it will for you, too. And all who are in Christ.

This is the night. It is done. Thanks be to God.