

Closing Prayer

O God,
your saving plan has brought us
to the glory of this night.

Slaves, we become your sons and daughters,
poor, your mercy makes us rich,
sinners, you count us among your saints.

Bring us to know the place that is ours
in the unfolding story of your purpose,
and instil in our hearts
the wonder of your salvation.

Grant this through Jesus Christ, our passover and our peace,
who lives with you now and always in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers · Easter Vigil²

Easter Vigil

Principal Service readings

Genesis 1.1 – 2.4a	Psalm 136.1-9,23-26
Genesis 7.1-5,11-18; 8.6-18; 9.8-13	Psalm 46
Genesis 22.1-18	Psalm 16
Exodus 14.10-31; 15.20,21	Canticle: Exodus 15.1b-13,17,18
Isaiah 55.1-11	Canticle: Isaiah 12.2-6
Baruch 3.9-15,32 – 4.4	
or Proverbs 8.1-8,19-21; 9.4b-6	Psalm 19
Ezekiel 36.24-28	Psalms 42, 43
Ezekiel 37.1-14	Psalm 143
Zephaniah 3.14-20	Psalm 98
Romans 6.3-11	Psalm 114
Luke 24.1-12	

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The empty tomb and the angel's message

¹On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women who had accompanied Jesus came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' ⁸Then they remembered Jesus' words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But Peter got up and ran to

² *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.

the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Luke 24.1-12 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

Luke recounts the story of the resurrection of Jesus both at the end of his gospel and at the beginning of Acts. Jerusalem takes a central place in Luke's story, and is the setting for both the beginning and the end of his gospel.

Some women had accompanied Jesus to the tomb (24.1). They hadn't assisted in the burial then because they had no spices or ointments. They rested on the Sabbath and then, on the first day of the week, they return with the spices. Luke shows them to be observant of the law. The fact that they arrive at dawn shows their eagerness to care for the body of Jesus. When they arrive, though, they find what they do not expect, an open tomb, with the entrance stone rolled back. They are perplexed, and then fearful as they see the two angelic figures in dazzling garments (24.23 identifies them as angels). We might recall that at the beginning of the gospel an angel appears to the shepherds to explain what is happening. Here, the angels have a rhetorical question that implies that Jesus, who was dead, is now alive (24.5). The two angels implicitly rebuke the women for failing to understand that the resurrection had to follow the crucifixion (24.7). They now recall this and return from the tomb to the eleven to share their thoughts (24.8). At this point Luke identifies the women: Mary Magdalene, whom Jesus had healed (8.2); Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; 'Mary of James' whom Luke has not previously mentioned, and other unnamed women. The fact that Mary Magdalene and Joanna were companions of the twelve in Galilee (8.1-3), makes it surprising that their story is treated by the eleven as silly chatter (24.11). However, Peter, seeming to want to test the women's story gets up and runs to the tomb. What he encounters is a puzzle: the linen wrappings are on their own, but who would take off the wrappings of a dead body before moving it?

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Quotations

1

No tabloid will ever print the startling news that the mummified body of Jesus of Nazareth has been discovered in old Jerusalem. Christians have no carefully embalmed body enclosed in a glass case to worship. Thank God, we have an empty tomb. The glorious fact that the empty tomb proclaims to us is that life for us does not stop when death comes. Death is not a wall, but a door.

Peter Marshall, 1902–1949

2

Sunday morning sneaks up on us like dawn, like resurrection, like the sun that rises a ribbon at a time. We expect a trumpet and a triumphant entry, but as always, God surprises us by showing up in ordinary things: in bread, in wine, in water, in words, in sickness, in healing, in death, in a manger of hay, in a mother's womb, in an empty tomb.

Rachel Held Evans, 1981–2019

3

Christianity, unlike any other religion in the world, begins with catastrophe and defeat. Sunshine religions and psychological inspirations collapse in calamity and wither in adversity. But the Life of the Founder of Christianity, having begun with the Cross, ends with the empty tomb and victory.

Fulton J. Sheen, 1895–1979

Related topics

For further study:

Resurrection; paschal mystery; baptism/confirmation; eucharist; symbols: community, fire/light, water, oil, garment, bread and wine, cross