



The Great Easter Vigil

First Congregational
United Church of Christ
Saturday, March 26, 2016

The Order of Celebration of
The Great Easter Vigil

SERVICE OF LIGHT

LIGHTING OF NEW FIRE

The people may gather outside around the fire, or remain inside the entryway of the church, whichever is most comfortable. After the fire is kindled, the liturgy begins near the fire:

GREETING

One: Grace to you from Jesus Christ, who was, and is, and is to come. Sisters and brothers in Christ, on this most holy night when our Savior Jesus Christ passed from death to life, we gather with all the church throughout the world in vigil and prayer. This is the Passover of Jesus Christ: Through light and the word, through water and the bread and wine, we recall Christ's death and resurrection, we share Christ's triumph over sin and death, and with invincible hope we await Christ's coming again. Hear the word of God: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In the Word was life, and the life was the light of all humanity. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

BLESSING OF NEW FIRE

One: Let us pray. Eternal God, giver of light and life, bless this new flame, that by its radiance and warmth we may respond to your love and grace, and be set free from all that separates us from you and from each other; through Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness. Amen.

LIGHTING OF THE PASCHAL CANDLE

The Paschal Candle is lit. The people gather in the church entryway.

One: May the light of Christ, rising in glory, illumine our hearts and minds.

FIRST RAISING OF THE PASCHAL CANDLE

One: Christ our light.

All: Thanks be to God.

The light from the Paschal candle is passed around. Please be careful with individual candles. Electric candles are available for children and those not comfortable with open flame. When everyone has a candle we will process to the narthex.

SECOND RAISING OF THE PASCHAL CANDLE

One: Christ our light.

All: Thanks be to God.

The congregation will process into the fellowship hall.

THIRD RAISING OF THE PASCHAL CANDLE

One: Christ our light.

All: Thanks be to God.

The paschal candle is placed in its stand.

EASTER PROCLAMATION

One: Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!

All: Jesus Christ, our light, is risen! Sound the trumpet of salvation!

One: Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendor, radiant in the brightness of your Sovereign!

All: Christ has conquered! Glory fills you! Night vanishes forever!

One: Rejoice, O servant church! Exult in glory! The risen Savior shines upon you!

All: Let this place resound with joy, echoing the mighty song of all God's people!

One: My dearest friends, standing with me in this holy light, Join me in asking for God's mercy,

All: May God give an unworthy minister grace to sing these Easter praises.

One: God be with you.

All: And also with you.

One: Lift up your hearts.

All: We lift them to God.

One: Let us give thanks to God Most High.

All: It is right to give God thanks and praise.

One: It is truly right that with full hearts and minds and voices we should praise you, the unseen God, the eternal Creator, and your only begotten one, our Savior Jesus Christ.

All: For Christ has ransomed us with the blood. And for our salvation has paid you the cost of Adam and Eve's sin!

One: This is our Passover feast, when Christ, the true lamb, is slain, whose blood consecrates the homes of all believers.

All: This is the night when first you saved our ancestors: you freed the people of Israel from their slavery and led them dry-shod through the sea.

One: This is the night when the pillar of fire destroyed the shadows of sin!

All: This is the night when Christians everywhere, washed clean of sin and freed from all defilement, are restored to grace and grow together in holiness.

One: This is the night when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave.

All: O God, how wonderful your care for us! How boundless your merciful love!

One: To ransom a slave you gave your only child. O happy fault, O necessary sin of Eve and Adam, that gained for us so great a redeemer!

All: Most blessed of all nights, chosen by God to see Christ rising from the dead!

One: Of this night scripture says: "The night will be as clear as day; It will become my light, my joy."

All: The power of this holy night dispels all evil, washes guilt away, restores lost innocence, and brings mourners joy.

One: It casts out hatred, brings peace, and humbles earthly pride.

All: Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth and humanity is reconciled with God!

One: Therefore, gracious Creator, in the joy of this night, receive our evening sacrifice of praise, your church's sol-

emn offering.

All: Accept this Easter candle—a flame divided but undimmed—a pillar of fire that glows to your honor, O God.

One: Let it mingle with the lights of heaven and continue bravely burning to dispel the shadows of this night!

All: May the Morning Star which never sets find this flame still burning: Christ, that Morning Star, who came back from the dead, and shed your peaceful light on all creation, your only begotten one who lives and reigns for ever. Amen.

At the conclusion of the Easter proclamation, please extinguish individual candles and be seated.

SERVICE OF THE WORD

GREETING

One: Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: We have begun our solemn vigil. As we watch and wait, let us listen to the word of God, recalling God's saving acts throughout history and how, in the fullness of time, God's Word became flesh and dwelt among us: Jesus Christ, our Redeemer!

All: We do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

OLD TESTAMENT READINGS:

FIRST LESSON: Genesis 1:1—2:3

One: Let us pray.

All: Almighty God, who wonderfully created, yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature, grant that we may share the divine life of the one who came to share our humanity: Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Amen.

SECOND LESSON: Genesis 22:1—18

One: Let us pray.

All: Gracious God of all believers, through Sarah's and Abraham's trustful obedience you made known your covenant love to our ancestors and to us. By the grace of Christ's trustful obedience, even unto death, fulfill in your church and in all creation your promise of a new covenant, written not on tablets of stone but on the tablets of human hearts; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

THIRD LESSON: Exodus 14:15-15:1

One: Let us pray.

All: God our Savior, even today we see the wonders of miracles you worked long ago. You once saved a single nation from slavery, and now you offer that salvation to all through the grace of baptism. May all the peoples of the world become true daughters and sons of Abraham and Sarah and be made worthy of the heritage of Israel; through Jesus Christ, our only mediator and advocate. Amen.

FOURTH LESSON: Isaiah 55:1-11

One: Let us pray.

All: Eternal God, you created all things by the power of your Word, and you renew the earth by your Spirit. Give now the water of life to all who thirst for you, and nourish with the spiritual food of bread and wine all who hunger for you, that our lives on earth may bear the abundant fruit of your heavenly reign; through Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead, who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns for ever. Amen.

NEW TESTAMENT READINGS

EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 6:3-11

Worshippers may rise in body or spirit for the reading of the Gospel

GOSPEL LESSON: Mark 16:1-8

SERVICE OF WATER

Worshippers are invited into the Narthex.

GREETING

One: Dear friends, on this night of prayerful vigil as we come to this font of living water, let us recall the meaning of baptism. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

All: For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free— and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

One: Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

BLESSING OF WATER

One: Eternal God, on this night of watching and waiting, we offer our prayers to you.

All: Be with us as we recall the wonder of our creation and the greater wonder of our redemption.

The water is poured.

One: Bless this water. It makes the seeds to grow. It refreshes us and makes us clean.

All: You have made of it a servant of your loving-kindness: Through water you set your people free and quenched their thirst in the desert.

One: With water the prophets announced a new covenant that you would make with all humanity.

All: By water, made holy by Christ in the Jordan, you made our sinful nature new in the bath that gives rebirth.

One: Let this water remind us of our baptism.

All: Let us share the joy of our brothers and sisters throughout the world who are baptized this Easter; through Jesus Christ our risen Savior. Amen.

RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL VOWS

One: Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil and renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?

All: I do.

One: Do you believe in God?

All: I believe in God, the creator of heaven and earth.

One: Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

All: I believe in Jesus Christ, the only one begotten of God before all worlds.

One: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

All: I believe in God, the Holy Spirit.

One: Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and community, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer?

All: I will, with God's help.

One: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being?

All: I will, with God's help.

BLESSING OF THE PEOPLE

One: Let us pray: Eternal God, you have come to us in Jesus Christ, given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and forgiven all our sins. Bless us now with the grace we need to fulfill what we have promised.

All: Keep us faithful to our Savior Jesus Christ, for ever and ever. Amen.

Worshippers are sprinkled.

SERVICE OF BREAD AND WINE

The congregation moves into the sanctuary.

GREETING

One: Alleluia! Christ is risen.

All: Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

PASSING THE PEACE

One: So if you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there remember that your sister or brother has something against you, leave your gift in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother or sister, and then come back and offer your gift.

All: In response to Christ's command, we reach out to each other in love.

Please pass the peace to your neighbors. After passing the peace, the congregation may be seated.

THE CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION

One: Christ is risen!

All: Christ is risen indeed!

One: Lift up your hearts.

All: We lift them up to God.

One: Let us give thanks to Almighty God.

All: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

One: Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love, you are beyond complete knowledge, above perfect description, Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit; Source of Life, Living Word and Bond of Love, you are self-giving, generously moving in all the near and distant corners of the universe.

All: Nothing exists that does not find its source in you.

One: Through fear-filled days and aching nights when the powers of death have done their worst, your love has never deserted us.

All: Even when we turn away from you, you are with us; your presence never fails us, your gifts of hope and new life transform us.

One: We praise you for Jesus Christ, risen to life, eternal as your love. With the women at the tomb, we raise the strain of gladness.

All: Hallelujah! Life is stronger than death! The day of resurrection has come, scattering fear and gloom.

One: And so we rejoice with all your people of every time and place, and with the angels and archangels, to proclaim the glory of your name:

All: Holy, holy, holy, God of love and majesty, the whole universe speaks of your glory, O God Most High. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God! Hosanna in the highest!

One: It is Jesus, God incarnate, the Risen Christ, who joins us together as a community of broken but hopeful believers: loving what he loved, living what he taught, and striving to be his faithful servants in our time and place.

All: In this meal we remember Jesus, his promises, and the price he paid for who he was, and what he said, and what he did.

One: Together we pray the prayer Jesus taught us:

All: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom,

**the power, and the glory are yours now and forever.
Amen.**

One: On the night before Jesus died, he took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and said:

All: "Take and eat. Whenever you do this, remember me."

One: After supper, Jesus took the cup, and poured, saying:

All: "This is the new covenant, remember me."

One: We do remember.

All: We remember his life of love, his friendship, his teaching, his dying, and his rising again.

One: Holy Mystery, God the Spirit, we call on you to transform these familiar things, as you continually transform the world around us.

All: Bless this bread and this cup, the wheat and the grape, the farmer and the harvest, the seed and the sower, so that in the sharing of these simple elements in community, we may taste and see your goodness.

One: Through Christ, in Christ, and with Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory is yours, God most holy, now and forever.

All: Amen and Amen!

One: The body of Christ

All: the bread of life

One: The lifeblood of Christ

All: the cup of blessing

One: The gifts of God for the people of God

All: Thanks be to God!

Communion will be shared by intinction. When served, take a piece of bread, dip it in the cup and eat.

The bread is gluten-free.

The cup is alcohol-free.

Those who wish to be served in the pew may indicate by raising their hand and servers will come to you.

One: Friends, let us give thanks:

All: Thank you, O Christ, for this feast of life. We are fed by your love. We are strengthened by your life. We are sent forth into this world to live your way and share your joy. We are now commissioned to feed as we have been fed, forgive as we have been forgiven, love as we have been love. Thanks be to God. Amen!

After a season of somber quiet, this is an occasion for joyful noise. Please greet other worshipers as we depart from the sanctuary.



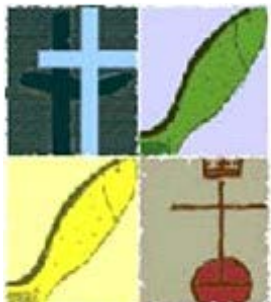
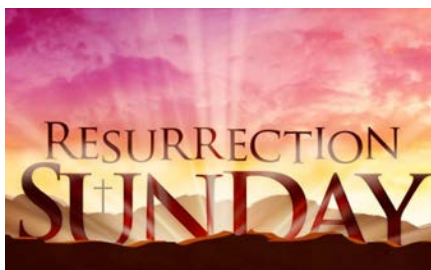
**JOIN US FOR THESE
EASTER EVENTS**

**Easter Sunrise at
Main Street Square
Sunday, March 27, 6 am**



**Easter Breakfast
Sunday, March 27, 8 am**

**Resurrection Celebration
Sunday, March 27, 9:30 am**



**First Congregational
UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**

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