

## **This is the Night**

Sermon, Easter Vigil, April 3, 2010  
Grace Episcopal Church, Elmira, NY

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*Exodus 14:10—15:1, Isaiah 55:1-11, Ezekiel 36:24-28, Zephaniah 3:12-20*  
(preached after reading of Zephaniah)

“Something strange is happening – there is a great silence on earth, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear.”<sup>1</sup>

The pain and agony are over. Release from the cross has come in death. Jesus has descended to hell, to pervading nothingness, to loneliness, abandoned, and cut off from everything. In hell only the self exists; there is no other, no comfort, only an endless cold and lonely isolation. Jesus walks through this gray half-light of chaotic nothingness; and as God walks its lonely paths, hell trembles.

Jesus is dead and we wait. We listen to the stories of our heritage as we wait. We know this is the night when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell, and rose victorious from the grave. And so, we wait.

Suddenly there is a flickering flame, a glimmer in the darkness. Souls caught in endless isolation can see others around them – they are not alone! The chains of desolation are broken. This flicker is the warmth of returning life, which breaks the bonds of death. This small flame penetrates the darkness of hell, and hell trembles.

The Lord approaches the dead and says, “Awake, O sleepers, rise from the dead, and I will give you light. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form only one person and we cannot be separated.”<sup>2</sup>

How holy is this night, when wickedness is put to flight, and sin is washed away. It restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to those who mourn. It casts out pride and hatred, and brings peace and concord.<sup>3</sup>

This is the night of the new fire – the new fire, which pushes back the darkness and kindles a new fire in our hearts. We have new hearts and a new spirit. The spirit of the Lord is within us. We are his people and he is our God.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous homily for Holy Saturday, *The Liturgy of the Hours II*, p. 496

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 497.

<sup>3</sup> *Exsultet*, *Book of Common Prayer* p. 287.

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 36:26-28.

“As the deer longs for the water-brooks, \* so longs my soul for you, O God. My soul is athirst for God, athirst for the living God.”<sup>5</sup> We thirst for God, for the divine water, the living water. In the rushing waters of baptism, “we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>6</sup> Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters,<sup>7</sup> come to the banquet, which will shortly be prepared for you.

Fire and water – new fire, holy water, joined as one with earth and air. This is the magic of God’s creation. We are reborn in the newness of Christ’s resurrection in the newness of springtime. The vigor of returning life fills us. May we be one with Christ, our Morning Star, in the eternal life of paradise. “The banquet is prepared, the dwelling place made ready, the treasure house of all good things lies open. The kingdom of heaven is prepared for you.”<sup>8</sup> Rejoice and be glad now Mother Earth, for this is the night when earth and heaven are joined and humanity is reconciled to God.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Psalm 42:1-2a.

<sup>6</sup> Thanksgiving over the Water, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 306.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 55:1

<sup>8</sup> *The Liturgy of the Hours II*, p. 498.

<sup>9</sup> *Exsultet*, pp. 286, 287.