

*Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark...* (John 20:1a)

My favorite service since at least middle school has been the Easter Vigil service. Gathering outside – rain or shine, cold or warm, light or dark – and processing into the church to hear the good news of Jesus’ resurrection simply has no comparison for me. But, the Easter Vigil service isn’t familiar to everyone. A lot of people, including here at Immanuel, have little to no idea what it is. It was only starting in 2020 that we began celebrating the Vigil at Immanuel. So, what is it, and why do we do it?

The Easter Vigil service seems to capture just about the entirety of what it means to be a Christian. From the darkness of death and the grave to the light of the resurrection of Jesus; from the beginning of God’s story to its fulfillment in Christ; from prayer to celebration; from the sadness of Good Friday to the joy of Easter – the Vigil service is a wonderful conclusion to the ancient *triduum* (three-day Holy Week service). Below is a short summary of what the Vigil looks like, broken into its six ‘services’:

**Service of Light:** The congregation gathers outside around a lit fire (traditionally) under the darkening sky to hold vigil while we await the resurrection. The Paschal Candle is lit from the fire, and the congregation processes in with their own candles as the “light of Christ” goes forward triumphant over sin and death.

**Service of Readings:** The congregations hears again God’s grand salvation story, from the beginning of creation through the exodus and the promise of resurrection and new life, even in the midst of danger, loss, and death all around.

**Service of Holy Baptism:** Traditionally, catechumens seeking Baptism were baptized during this service, a powerful reminder of the connection between the death and resurrection of Jesus and the promises given in Baptism. But, the whole congregation renews their baptismal vows and confesses their faith in Christ.

**Service of Prayer:** The pastor and congregation pray the Litany of the Resurrection to seek God’s mercy, grace, and salvation in Christ.

**Service of the Word:** Jesus’ resurrection is proclaimed, the congregation sings, and the Gospel account of the resurrection is read.

**Service of the Sacrament:** With extra joy and gladness, we gather for the pinnacle of the celebration of Jesus’ gift to us while we are still here on earth. His body and blood – given and shed on the cross for our forgiveness, life, and salvation – are mysteriously given to us by our *risen* Lord and Savior.

As you can see, the service is beautiful and meaningful in that it brings into focus who Jesus is, what he has done for us, and what it means for our lives. This year, I encourage you to join us at 7:00 PM to hold vigil for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ!

-Pastor Squire

“Awake, my heart, with gladness, see what today is done; now, after gloom and sadness, come forth the glorious sun. My Savior there was laid where our bed must be made when to the realms of light our spirit wings its flight.”

(“Awake, My Heart, with Gladness,” *LSB* 467, v. 1)