



## The Great Vigil of Holy Saturday

### Introduction

Humans have since ancient times told stories and tried to make sense of the world around them. And they have told these stories around fires. Fire – a sign of hope, a giver of light, but also a destructive force. In the right hands and put to right use it can be warming, a purifier, a light – it can save. In the wrong hands it can kill and destroy. And the same can be said of stories, especially those given special status as Holy or Sacred Scripture: they need careful handling – they can liberate, inspire and enlighten; or they can be used to imprison, kill the imagination and encourage ignorance.

We light a candle from the central flame as a sign of the light and hope we find and seek in the stories of the Jewish and Christian tradition that we will hear tonight, stories that we believe tell us how God works in human encounters; and as Christians we hear these stories as telling one big story of the promise of the liberation of humanity that we see most fully revealed in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth that we await with hope.

*We light our candles from the central flame.*

We have gathered to prepare ourselves for the Great Festival of Easter, for our celebration, at tomorrow's dawn, of the Resurrection and the Living Presence of Jesus Christ.

We have come to renew our participation in the same process of dying and rising, the movement of transfiguration of all that is of the earth into unimagined glory.

We meet as the darkness of night deepens; we look forward to the light of the new day.

We shall then remember the buried Jesus; we shall kindle and gather round a new fire; and we shall light a single candle flame from that fire to proclaim Christ penetrating the darkness in resurrection and eternal life.

We shall recall the drowning waters through which we were baptized into that new and risen life, and we shall share the bread and wine, bearers to us of the life-giving Body and Blood of the crucified and risen One.

But first, in this time of vigil, we shall read from the Older Covenant, and look forward to the initiation of the Newer Covenant, sealed in the Spirit of the Lifeblood of Christ, poured out and spent for us, enriching and fulfilling the promises of God made to our ancestors of faith so very long ago.

So we pray:

Eternal God, whose power is love,  
**ceaselessly at work for the glorifying of the universe  
and for the flourishing of each and every one,  
rescue us and all peoples  
from everything that enslaves us,  
as you rescued our ancestors from slavery in Egypt,  
and free us from the grip of evil and death,  
making us heirs of a new transformed creation,  
in the realm of Jesus Christ,  
our dying and rising Redeemer.**

# THE VIGIL

## One

*A Reading from Genesis chapter 1, verse 1  
to chapter 2, verse 3*

*Psalm 33.1-9*

Let those who serve you praise you, O God,  
let the true of heart give you thanks.  
Let the melodies of the strings be played,  
accompanying our words in your praise.

**Praise to the love that moves the stars  
and stirs the hearts of the people.**

For your word, O God, is true,  
your deeds fulfil your covenant.  
You love the justice of relationships made right,  
the world is full of your steadfast love.

**Praise to the love that moves the stars  
and stirs the hearts of the people.**

O God, you are the God of creation:  
by your word the universe begins, again and again,  
the numberless stars by the breath of your mouth.  
You held the waters of the seas  
in the hollow of your hand,  
you gathered to yourself all the treasures of the deep.

**Praise to the love that moves the stars  
and stirs the hearts of the people.**

Let the whole earth be in awe of you,  
all the inhabitants of the world greet you with joy.  
For you spoke, and the wonderful deed was done;  
you commanded, and it all came to pass.

**Praise to the love that moves the stars  
and stirs the hearts of the people.**

*Pause*

Father God, Mother God,  
**by the energy of creative love  
you have brought all things into being,  
continually creating and restoring us,  
making us in your image,  
sharing in our humanity  
that we might come to share in your divinity.  
We contemplate your creation:  
the darkness of this night,  
the light of the dawn,  
our birth in the waters,  
our life sustained and transformed by you.  
Mother God, Father God,  
we rest in the silence of your presence.**

*Silence*

## Two

*A Reading from Genesis, chapter 3*

*Psalm 130*

Empty, exhausted, and ravaged,  
in the depths of despair I writhe.  
Anguished and afflicted, terribly alone,  
I trudge a bleak wasteland, devoid of all love.

**I wait in the darkness for your mercy.**

In the echoing abyss I call out:  
no God of compassion hears my voice.  
Yet still I pray, Open your heart,  
for my tears well up within me.

**I wait in the darkness for your mercy.**

If you keep account of all that drags me down,  
there is no way I can ever stand firm.  
Paralyzed and powerless, I topple over,  
bound by the evil I hate.

**I wait in the darkness for your mercy.**

But with you is forgiveness and grace,  
there is nothing I can give – it seems like a death.  
The power of your love is so awesome:  
I am terrified by your freeing embrace.

**I wait in the darkness for your mercy.**

Drawn from the murky depths by a fish hook,  
I shout to the air that will kill me:  
Must I leave behind all that I cherish  
before I can truly breathe free?

**I wait in the darkness for your mercy.**

Suspended between one world and the next,  
I waited for you, my God.  
Apprehension and hope struggled within me,  
I waited, I longed for your word.

**I wait in the darkness for your mercy.**

As a watchman waits for the morning,  
through the darkest and coldest of nights,  
more even than the watchman  
    who peers through the gloom  
I hope for the dawn, I yearn for the light.

**I wait in the darkness for your mercy.**

You will fulfil your promise to bring me alive,  
overflowing with generous love.  
You will free me from the grip of evil,  
O God of mercy and compassion.

**I wait in the darkness for your mercy.**

Touching and healing the whole of my being,  
you are a God whose reach has no limit.  
All that has been lost will one day be found:  
the communion of the rescued will rejoice in your name.

*Pause*

Through the dark despairing depths  
**and the drought of the desert,**  
**through the abyss opened up**  
**by our failings and folly,**  
**we dare to risk our cry to the living God.**  
**For you will not let us escape**  
**from our greatest good.**  
**In our struggle with you, fierce, fiery Lover,**  
**let some new glory be wrought,**  
**and new and unexpected life come to birth.**

*Silence*

### Three

***A Reading from Genesis, chapter 7, verses 1 to 5 and  
10 to 18; chapter 8, verses 6 to 18; and chapter 9,  
verses 8 to 13***

***A Psalm based on Psalm 105***

You sustain your covenant with Noah,  
with the living creatures of earth,  
that never again will you destroy them,  
with a flood laying waste to the world.  
Your love is for the whole of our planet,  
a vow of restraint and protection for ever.

**You keep faith with the earth for ever.**

Again and again you renew your promise,  
putting a new heart and spirit within us,  
through a covenant sealed with your life-blood,  
your last will and testament for us.

**You keep faith with the earth for ever.**

You demand no unthinking obedience,  
a loyalty blind and correct.  
You do not try to control us,  
you seek the pledge of our wills and our hearts.

**You keep faith with the earth for ever.**

You are the One who endures our betrayals,  
with a precarious and vulnerable love.  
You keep faith with us and humble us,  
and so renew us in hope.

**You keep faith with the earth for ever.**

You laid down the power of coercion,  
and gave of yourself with generous love.  
Our hearts burst out with gratitude,  
in awe at the wonder of your goodness.

**You keep faith with the earth for ever.**

You have bound us to yourself – we belong to you,  
and to one another – there is no way to escape.  
Keep us responding in friendship and service,  
giving and receiving your presence among us,  
protecting those who are weak and in need,  
trust deepening in sacraments of love.

*Pause*

In the mystery of Divine Love,  
**we become gifts to one another,  
bound together in the covenants of God.  
In the paradox of our free will and destiny,  
let us embrace one another and all humankind,  
choosing in friendship  
to share our being and becoming.  
And with that divine love,  
and in the spirit of that love,  
let us promise  
to be steady and reliable in our loving,  
to work for our mutual well-being  
and for the cherishing of the earth,  
to honour one another as God's dwelling place,  
and to keep loyal and full of faith, our life-day long.**

*Silence*

## **Four**

***A Reading from Genesis, chapter 22, verses 1 to 18***

***Psalm 16. 7–11***

We give you thanks for the wisdom of your counsel,  
even at night you have instructed our hearts.  
In the silence of the darkest of hours  
we open our ears to the whisper of your voice.

**Greet us all in the joy of your presence.**

We have set your face always before us,  
in every cell of our being you are there.  
As we tremble on the narrowest of paths,  
the steadying of your hand gives us courage.  
Fleet of foot, with our eyes on the goal,  
headlong in the chasm we shall not fall.

**Greet us all in the joy of your presence.**

Therefore our hearts rejoice and our spirits are glad,  
our whole being will rest secure.

For you will not give us over to the power of death,  
nor let your faithful ones see the pit.

**Greet us all in the joy of your presence.**

You will show us the path of life:  
in your countenance is the fulness of joy.  
From the spring of your heart flow rivers of delight,  
a fountain of water that shall never run dry.

**Greet us all in the joy of your presence.**

*Pause*

God of the living,  
**keep our eyes fixed on the goal of our journey,  
that we may be fleet of heart,  
and in all our dyings leap to the embrace of the One  
who lures us with love,  
the pioneer of our salvation,  
Jesus, our elder brother and our faithful friend.**

*Silence*

## Five

***A Reading from Exodus, chapter 14, verses 15 to 31***

***A Psalm based on part of Psalm 105***

You brought Israel out with silver and gold,  
and not one of our tribes was seen to stumble.  
Egypt was glad at our going,  
for dread of Israel had fallen upon them.

**Glory to God who has delivered us.**

You spread out a cloud for our covering,  
and fire to lighten the night.  
The people asked and you brought us quails,  
and satisfied us with manna from your hand.

**Glory to God who has delivered us.**

You opened a rock so that the waters gushed,  
and ran in the parched land like a river.  
For you had remembered your holy word,  
the promise to Abraham your servant.

**Glory to God who has delivered us.**

So you led out your people with thanksgiving,  
your chosen ones with shouts of joy.  
You gave us the land you had promised,  
and we inherited the toil of others,  
so that we might keep the gift of your law,  
and faithfully fulfil your covenant.

**Glory to God who has delivered us.**

*Pause*

Merciful and compassionate God,  
**save all who drown,  
the oppressed and those who oppress them.  
Wash away all iniquity in the torrent of your justice,  
yet save also the Egyptians,  
and bathe them in your tears of mercy,  
wider and deeper than all the oceans of the earth.**

*Silence*

## Six

*A Reading from Deuteronomy, chapter 30,  
verses 6 to 20*

### *Psalm 19*

The law of God is perfect,  
refreshing the soul.  
The words of God are sure,  
and give wisdom to the simple.

**Write your Wisdom in our hearts.**

The justice of God is righteous,  
and rejoices the heart.  
The commandment of God is pure,  
and gives light to the eyes.

**Write your Wisdom in our hearts.**

The fear of God is clean,  
and endures for ever.  
The judgments of God are true,  
and just in every way.

**Write your Wisdom in our hearts.**

So they dance as the stars of the universe,  
perfect as the parabolae of comets,  
like satellites and planets in their orbits,  
reliable and constant in their courses.

**Write your Wisdom in our hearts.**

*Pause*

God of law and wisdom,  
**of justice and truth,**  
**keep us true to your commandments of love,**  
**that we may desire them more than gold**  
**and find them sweeter than honey from the comb.**

*Silence*

## Seven

*A Reading from Isaiah, chapter 55, verses 1 to 11*

### *Canticle based on Isaiah 12*

I will praise you, O God:  
though in your love you were angry with me,  
your anger has melted away,  
and you have comforted me.  
Surely you are my saviour:  
I will trust you and not be afraid.

**Praise to the God whose love has triumphed.**

You are my strength and my song,  
you have become my salvation.  
I give you thanks and praise you,  
and rejoice in your holy name.  
I will make known the wonders you have done,  
and I will proclaim your name and nature.

**Praise to the God whose love has triumphed.**

I will sing hymns to you,  
for your way of love has triumphed.  
Let this be known to the whole world.  
Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of God:  
great in our midst is the Holy One of Israel.

**Praise to the God whose love has triumphed.**

*Pause*

Come, Living Christ,  
**with burning coals and purge our lips;**  
**come with the judgment that saves,**  
**and give us back our sense of worth**  
**because it matters what we do;**  
**come with passionate desire**  
**and sweep us into your arms;**  
**come with the love that will not let us go.**

*Silence*

## **Eight**

*A Reading from Ezekiel, chapter 36, verses 22 to 28*

*Psalm 42–3 (with said response)*

As a deer longs for streams of water,  
so longs my soul for you, O God.  
My soul is thirsty for the living God:  
when shall I draw near to see your face?

My tears have been my food in the night:  
all day long they ask me, Where now is your God?  
As I pour out my soul in distress,  
I remember how I went to the temple of God,  
with shouts and songs of thanksgiving,  
a multitude keeping high festival.

**Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul,**  
**and why so rebellious within me?**  
**Put your trust in God,**  
**patiently wait for the dawn:**  
**you will then praise your deliverer and your God.**

My soul is heavy within me:  
therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan  
and from the hills of Hermon.  
Deep calls to deep in the roar of the waterfalls,  
all your waves and your torrents have gone over me.  
Surely, O God, you will show me mercy in the daytime,  
and at night I will sing your praise, O God my God.  
I will say to God, my rock,  
Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I go like a mourner  
because the enemy oppresses me?  
Like a sword piercing my bones,  
my enemies have mocked me,  
asking me all day long, Where now is your God?

**Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul,**  
**and why so rebellious within me?**  
**Put your trust in God,**  
**patiently wait for the dawn:**  
**you will then praise your deliverer and your God.**

O God, take up my cause and strive for me  
with a godless people that knows no mercy.  
Save me from the grip of cunning and lies,  
for you are my God and my strength.

Why must you cast me away from your presence?  
Why must I be clothed in rags, humiliated by my enemy?  
O send out your light and your truth  
and let them lead me,  
let them guide me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.  
Then I shall go to the altar of God,  
the God of my joy and delight,  
and to the harp I shall sing your praises, O God, my God.

**Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul,**  
**and why so rebellious within me?**  
**Put your trust in God,**  
**patiently wait for the dawn:**  
**you will then praise your deliverer and your God.**

*Pause*

Loving God, as we join our cries with those  
who are depressed and in despair,  
renew in us the spirit of hope,  
the yearning for life in you alone,  
and the expectancy that even when  
every door is closed,  
yet you will surprise us with joy.

*Silence*

## Nine

*A Reading from Ezekiel, chapter 37, verses 1 to 14*

*Psalm 126*

When God takes us home from our exile,  
we shall wake from this nightmare and live again.  
Bars of iron will be shattered: we shall walk free  
from gulag and ghetto, from dungeon and tower.

**Home at last, contented and grateful.**

We shall sing and laugh for joy,  
echoed by birdsong and breeze of the spring.  
The land itself will rejoice in God,  
the whole world give praise for the wonders we have seen.

**Home at last, contented and grateful.**

Lead us home, renew our hope, bring us to life,  
like impossible rivers in the cursed and barren desert.  
We go on our way sadly, with tears sowing seeds that will die,  
we shall return with joy, with gladness bearing our sheaves.

**Home at last, contented and grateful.**

*Pause*

Restore the years, O God, that we have lost,  
**that the locusts have eaten.**

**Give to us the future**

**that we thought we should never see.**

**Make of the present moment  
a firstfruit of true liberation.**

**Even when we feel exiled, locked in, despairing,  
move secretly within us and among us,  
and without our realizing it,  
keep us moving on our journey to your city.**

*Silence*

## Ten

*A Reading from 1 Peter, chapter 3, verses 17 to 22*

*Psalm 30*

From the depths of despair I cried out,  
seared with pain and with grief.

Where are you, O God?

How long must I suffer?

**With gentle hand you raise me,  
from death you call me to life.**

You drew me up from the deeps,  
like a prisoner out of a dungeon,  
a flesh-body touched by your hand,  
flickering and trembling with life.

**With gentle hand you raise me,  
from death you call me to life.**

You brought me out of a land full of gloom,  
a place of hollow silence and cold.  
You melted my paralyzed fear:  
your warmth like the sun's coursed through my veins.

**With gentle hand you raise me,  
from death you call me to life.**

The wrath of your love lasts but a moment,  
for a lifetime your mercy and healing.  
Heaviness and weeping last through the night,  
yet day breaks into singing and joy.

**With gentle hand you raise me,  
from death you call me to life.**

I shall praise you, O God, for you are making me whole.  
I shall give you great thanks in the midst of your people.

**With gentle hand you raise me,  
from death you call me to life.**

*Pause*

Living God,  
**look upon us with eyes of compassion,  
call us with the words of healing and forgiveness,  
again and again, to seventy times seven,  
that we may at last hear and see,  
and turn our stricken and wounded faces,  
and know ourselves accepted and embraced,  
loved into a healing and a joy  
beyond measure and without reserve.**

*Silence*

## Eleven

*A Reading from the Odes of Solomon, ode 42,  
verses 10 to 20*

### *Psalm 23*

Dear God, you sustain me and feed me:  
like a shepherd you guide me.  
You lead me to an oasis of green,  
to lie down by restful waters.  
Quenching my thirst, you restore my life:  
renewed and refreshed, I follow you,  
a journey on the narrowest of paths.

**Dwell in me that I may dwell in you.**

Even when cliffs loom out of the mist,  
my step is steady because of my trust.  
Even when I go through the deepest valley,  
with the shadow of darkness and death,  
I will fear no evil or harm.  
For you are with me to give me strength,  
your crook, your staff, at my side.

**Dwell in me that I may dwell in you.**

Even in the midst of my troubles,  
with the murmurs of those who disturb me,  
I know I can feast in your presence.  
You spread a banquet before me,  
you anoint my head with oil,  
you stoop to wash my feet,  
you fill my cup to the brim.

**Dwell in me that I may dwell in you.**

Your loving kindness and mercy  
will meet me every day of my life.  
By your Spirit you dwell within me,  
and in the whole world around me,  
and I shall abide in your house,  
content in your presence for ever.

**Dwell in me that I may dwell in you.**

*Pause*

Wise and loving Shepherd,  
**guiding your people in the ways of your truth,  
leading us through the waters of baptism,  
and nourishing us with the food of eternal life,  
keep us in your mercy,  
and so guide us through the perils of evil and death,  
that we may know your joy at the heart of all things,  
both now and for ever.**

*Silence*

## Twelve

*A Reading from Philippians chapter 2, verses 5 to 11*

*Psalm 24.7–10*

Let the gates be opened, let the doors be lifted high,  
that the great procession may come in.  
Who is the One clothed with glory?  
It is our God, the God who has triumphed,  
who has striven with evil and prevailed.

**Praise to the glory of God,  
shining through Jesus Christ.**

Let the gates be opened, let the doors be lifted high,  
that the great procession may come in.  
Who is the One clothed with glory?  
It is the great God of all the universe,  
glorious in a love that never fails.

**Praise to the glory of God,  
shining through Jesus Christ.**

*Pause*

May the light and love of God shine in our hearts  
**and reach the furthest bounds of the universe,  
that the whole creation may be transfigured to glory,  
in and through Jesus,  
radiant in the splendour of the wounds of love.**

*Silence*

## Looking forward ...

*A Psalm out of Psalm 22*

You are a God who creates out of nothing,  
you are a God who raises the dead,  
you are a God who redeems what is lost,  
you are a God who fashions new beauty,  
striving with the weight of your glory,  
bearing the infinite pain.

**In the depth of our darkness  
you are rising, O Christ.**

The footfalls of faith may drag through our days,  
God's gift of a costly and infinite enduring.  
We remember your deliverance of your people of old,  
we remember the abundance of the earth  
you have given us,  
we remember the care and compassion of folk,  
we remember your victory of long-suffering love.  
The power of the powers is but a feather in the wind!  
Death is transfigured to glory for ever!

**In the depth of our darkness  
you are rising, O Christ.**

*Silence*