

Easter Vigil 2020 SSP online

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Throughout his ministry Jesus did many mighty works, miracles, on the Sabbath. It was one of the things that got him into trouble – one of the accusations (“Sabbath-breaker”) in his condemnation by the religious authorities.

Now, after his death on Good Friday afternoon, Jesus’s body lies in the tomb on Saturday, the Seventh Day, the Sabbath.

Yet even then, as in his life so also in his death, Jesus did his mightiest work of all. In the words of the First Epistle of Peter 3:18-20: “Christ suffered for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey....” In the words of the Apostles Creed, He descended into hell. The old 1928 Prayer Book explains this to mean “He went to the place of departed spirits.” Newer versions say simply, “He descended to the dead.”

This is very Good News. Our current Prayer Book Catechism explains that when Jesus descended to the dead, “He offered them the benefits of redemption.” In other words, all who love the Lord’s appearing have in his descent among the dead their desire granted. Now no one, including those who died outside the time and space of Christ and who could not know Jesus by name, no one, is beyond the reach of the Savior. Jesus came to bear witness to the truth. In his own words, “all who are of the truth hear my voice.” They all belong to him and he to them.

In the words of the great poet and priest John Donne, “Salvation to all that will is nigh.”

Perhaps the greatest Christian poet of all time, Dante, based his entire masterpiece, The Divine Comedy, on what Jesus Christ did as his body lay at rest in the tomb. What Dante called “The Love that moves the sun and other stars” was incarnate in Jesus who in the spirit descended to the souls in the prison-house of death, where all who desire him may have him and be with him, if they will.

All this mighty work was done in the spirit on the Holy Day of Rest, when our Lord brought eternal rest to the departed. Holy Saturday was the Sabbath to end all Sabbaths.

Then, as Saint Matthew tells us in the Gospel for the Easter Vigil:

- Early in the morning on the First Day, Sunday, as it began to dawn, the women among the disciples came to visit the tomb to finish the work on Jesus’s body that was interrupted by the onset of the Sabbath on Friday at sundown. But the tomb was open and empty and Jesus’s body was not there.
- There had been an earthquake. The high priests guards had become like dead men at the sight of the risen Lord.
- The women were afraid and dismayed, and as they ran to tell the men among the disciples, Jesus met them on their way: “All Hail!” There he was, alive and glorious on the other side of death.

Much was yet to happen over the ensuing weeks as Jesus appeared to the disciples, including to many at one time. But for now, it is quite enough to say: Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.