

Planning for the Great Vigil of Easter

What follows is the text for the Great Vigil of Easter from the Prayer Book, along with marginal notes regarding its celebration this year at St. Paul's. I have been collecting information about how we normally celebrate this service, as well as thoughts from many lay and ordained people about how we might celebrate it. Even if we mean to change nothing, I hope that carefully considering the mechanics of this service will result in a more fluid and satisfactory worship experience. I devoutly hope that we will make various changes and will create a deeply moving spiritual experience for both parishioners and visitors. There is no better time to bring a visitor to St. Paul's than for the Easter Vigil, by the way.

Not all the notes are of the same nature. Some capture what we now do (and will likely continue doing), such as having the lighting low at the beginning of the service. Others suggest alternatives, often suggested by people I have consulted. Still others are questions that seem to require answers, though some of the answers may be unknown to me only. Where I have made assertions as to what is done, I have intended to capture our usual practice, though, in writing this, I realize that I am uncertain about movements of the Celebrant, acolytes, and others. Correction of my misapprehensions is fervently solicited.

Under Bill Pickering, a rehearsal for the Vigil was held on Saturday morning, following rehearsal for baptism. This may be indicated this year. One priest indicated that he precedes the rehearsal with the (brief) Holy Saturday liturgy.

For as long as I have been at St. Paul's, an Agape Feast has followed the Vigil. This is a wonderful way of ending the celebration and welcoming the newly baptized. Like the service itself, this event may require some planning. I believe that we have relied too heavily on voluntary contributions in the past, and I suggest that Fellowship Commission should take on the Feast as a major project. There should be wine, cheese, juice, fruit, bread, vegetables, dip, chocolate, and all manner of wonderful food.

Lionel Deimel
February 27, 2001

Concerning the Vigil

This service has normally been scheduled for 7:30 PM. Apparently, some Roman Catholic churches schedule the service so that the Eucharist occurs around midnight, making this the first Eucharist of Easter Sunday, even by modern notions of when the day begins. With an Agape Feast after the service, 7:30 PM seems like a reasonable starting time.

Someone has suggested scheduling the Vigil before dawn and timing the service so that dawn comes with the Easter Acclamation.

We have not generally provided child care. Should we?

We should verify what clergy can be present?

Presumably, Bob Banse will preside.

St. Paul's does not have a deacon, much less one with a good voice. Who should carry the candle? Who should chant? (See next paragraph.) Can these roles be filled by different people?

Members of the Confirmation Class have read the lessons in recent years, but employing experienced adult readers has been suggested. This will likely move things along faster as well.

The Great Vigil, when observed, is the first service of Easter Day. It is celebrated at a convenient time between sunset on Holy Saturday and sunrise on Easter Morning.

The service normally consists of four parts:

1. The Service of Light.
2. The Service of Lessons.
3. Christian Initiation, or the Renewal of Baptismal Vows.
4. The Holy Eucharist with the administration of Easter Communion.

It is customary for all the ordained ministers present, together with lay readers, singers, and other persons, to take active parts in the service.

The bishop, when present, is the chief celebrant, presides at Baptism and administers Communion, and normally preaches the sermon.

The priests who are present share among them the reading of the Collects which follow each Lesson, and assist at Baptism and the Eucharist. In the absence of a bishop, a priest presides at the service.

It is the prerogative of a deacon to carry the Paschal Candle to its place, and to chant the Exsultet. Deacons likewise assist at Baptism and the Eucharist according to their order.

Lay persons read the Lessons and the Epistle, and assist in other ways. A lay person may be assigned to chant the Exsultet. It is desirable that each Lesson be read by a different reader.

In the absence of a bishop or priest, a deacon or lay reader may lead the first two parts of the service, the Renewal of Baptismal Vows, and the Ministry of the Word of the Vigil Eucharist, concluding with the Prayers of the People, the Lord's Prayer, and the Dismissal.

A deacon may also, when the services of a priest cannot be obtained, and with the authorization of the bishop, officiate at public Baptism; and may administer Easter Communion from the Sacrament previously consecrated.

When the Vigil is not celebrated, the Service of Light may take place at a convenient time before the Liturgy on Easter Day.

As people enter the church, the room should be as dark as possible consistent with safety concerns. Bulletins and candles are distributed. Musicians and other participants not needed to light the Paschal candle should take their places in the chancel in an orderly fashion a few minutes before the service is to begin.

Normally, Easter flowers have been placed in the chancel but are covered when the service begins. Most liturgical furnishings—which were removed on Maundy Thursday—are still not in the church. There seems to be some question as to whether some furnishings are replaced before the service and, if so, should they be.

We light the fire with a match, using notes nailed to the cross on Good Friday. The fire is started in a coffee can outside the front door. Arguably, this is not very ceremonial. In some churches, worshippers watch the fire being kindled outside, then enter the building. In any case, something more attractive than a coffee can might be in order (a brass brazier?). One priest reports using flint and steel, which is a nice touch. Could we start the fire indoors at the back of the church? (This idea should not be dismissed out-of-hand. It could be very dramatic.)

The Celebrant (and perhaps whoever sings the Exsultet) should be miked using one of the belt-pack transmitters.

How is the new fire carried is? Is a normal torch used?

If a singer not the Celebrant chants here (S 68), that person could presumably be anywhere (e.g., in the gallery). If this person also chants the Exsultet, however, he presumably should be near the holder for the Paschal Candle (see next page).

The Great Vigil of Easter

The Lighting of the Paschal Candle

In the darkness, fire is kindled; after which the Celebrant may address the

people in these or similar words

Dear friends in Christ: On this most holy night, in which our Lord Jesus passed over from death to life, the Church invites her members, dispersed throughout the world, to gather in vigil and prayer. For this is the Passover of the Lord, in which, by hearing his Word and celebrating his Sacraments, we share in his victory over death.

The Celebrant may say the following prayer

Let us pray.

O God, through your Son you have bestowed upon your people the brightness of your light: Sanctify this new fire, and grant that in this Paschal feast we may so burn with heavenly desires, that with pure minds we may attain to the festival of everlasting light; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Paschal Candle is then lighted from the newly kindled fire, and the

Deacon (the Celebrant if there is no deacon) bearing the Candle, leads the procession to the chancel, pausing three times and singing or saying

People The light of Christ.
 Thanks be to God.

How do we usually proceed here? Clearly, candles should be lit to light congregational candles before the Pascal Candle is put into its holder. Acolytes could use the two processional torches, though probably more candles and acolytes are needed. (Moreover, one torch may still be at the back of the nave.) Acolytes should take the flame to people: (1) in the chancel, (2) in each transept, and (3) to pews to the left and right of the nave. Using five acolytes will move the process along and minimize anxiety about dripping wax. Where do torches and candles go when the acolytes are done?

Note location. The Exsultet (S 69) could be chanted from behind the screen near the font.

Since the optional text emphasizes the symbolism of the ceremony, it probably should not be omitted.

If candles have been distributed to members of the congregation, they are lighted from the Pascal Candle at this time. Other candles and lamps in the church, except for those at the Altar, may also be lighted.

The Pascal Candle placed in its stand.

Then the Deacon, or other person appointed, standing near the Candle, sings or says the Exsultet, as follows (the indicated sections may be omitted)

Rejoice now, heavenly hosts and choirs of angels,
and let your trumpets shout Salvation
for the victory of our mighty King.

Rejoice and sing now, all the round earth,
bright with a glorious splendor,
for darkness has been vanquished by our eternal King.

Rejoice and be glad now, Mother Church,
and let your holy courts, in radiant light,
resound with the praises of your people.

All you who stand near this marvelous and holy flame,
pray with me to God the Almighty
for the grace to sing the worthy praise of this great light;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

The Lord be with you.

Answer And also with you.

Deacon Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Answer It is right to give him thanks and praise.

Deacon

It is truly right and good, always and everywhere, with our

whole heart and mind and voice, to praise you, the invisible, almighty, and eternal God, and your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; for he is the true Paschal Lamb, who at the feast of the Passover paid for us the debt of Adam's sin, and by his blood delivered your faithful people.

This is the night, when you brought our fathers, the children of Israel, out of bondage in Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea on dry land.

This is the night, when all who believe in Christ are delivered from the gloom of sin, and are restored to grace and holiness of life.

This is the night, when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell, and rose victorious from the grave.

Is there any reason to omit the optional text here?

How wonderful and beyond our knowing, O God, is your mercy and loving-kindness to us, that to redeem a slave, you gave a Son.

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.

How blessed is this night, when earth and heaven are joined and man is reconciled to God.

Holy Father, accept our evening sacrifice, the offering of this candle in your honor. May it shine continually to drive away all darkness. May Christ, the Morning Star who knows no setting, find it ever burning—he who gives his light to all creation, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Hand-held candles are usually extinguished here. Participants in the chancel should extinguish their candles, and, it is to be hoped, others will follow the lead without additional (and distracting) instruction. There should be an appropriate notation in the bulletin, of course.

It is customary that the Paschal Candle burn at all services from Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost.

The Liturgy of the Word

How does the Celebrant place the Pascal Candle and where is he during the Exsultet? Does he read these words from behind the altar?

The intention here is to tell the story of God's relation to His people before the coming of the Messiah. To read but two of the nine lessons seems niggardly. Unfortunately, the addition of each lesson requires additional scripture, silence, and prayer. This section should run like clockwork, though without any obvious signs of haste. It may help to have each reader assigned to more than one passage. (Admittedly, however, on page 284, it is said to be desirable to have different readers for each lesson.) It would be both faster and less disruptive if the reader of the prayers (does it have to be the Celebrant) not have to move into position to pray. (Perhaps the Celebrant could read from his seat or a lay reader could read from the microphone near the font, remaining standing for the readings.) Note: The Lessons are shown in their entirety in the appendix, which follows p. 295.

The psalms and canticles listed are not required, so they could be replaced by shorter passages. Perhaps appropriate single verses (or but a few verses in each case) could be chosen, and these could be set to music and sung by the choir. If conceived of as a set, this would help tie the passages together, yet still keep the service moving along. The music should be spare—Gregorian chant would be appropriate, for example.

The Celebrant may introduce the Scripture readings in these or similar words

Let us hear the record of God's saving deeds in history, how he saved his people in ages past; and let us pray that our God will bring each of us to the fullness of redemption.

At least two of the following Lessons are read, of which one is always the Lesson from Exodus. After each Lesson, the Psalm or Canticle listed, or some other suitable psalm, canticle, or hymn may be sung. A period of silence may be kept; and the Collect provided, or some other suitable Collect, may be said.

The story of Creation

Genesis 1:1-2:2

Psalm 33:1-11, or Psalm 36:5-10

Let us pray. *(Silence)*

O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Flood

Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18; 8:8-18; 9:8-13

Psalm 46

Let us pray. *(Silence)*

Almighty God, you have placed in the skies the sign of your covenant with all living things: Grant that we, who are saved through water and the Spirit, may worthily offer to you our sacrifice of thanksgiving; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac

Genesis 22:1-18

Psalm 33:12-22, *or* Psalm 16

Let us pray. *(Silence)*

God and Father of all believers, for the glory of your Name multiply, by the grace of the Paschal sacrament, the number of your children; that your Church may rejoice to see fulfilled your promise to our father Abraham; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea

Exodus 14:10-15:1

Canticle 8, *The Song of Moses*

Let us pray. *(Silence)*

O God, whose wonderful deeds of old shine forth even to our own day, you once delivered by the power of your mighty arm your chosen people from slavery under Pharaoh, to be a sign for us of the salvation of all nations by the water of Baptism: Grant that all the peoples of the earth may be numbered among the offspring of Abraham, and rejoice in the inheritance of Israel; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

God's Presence in a renewed Israel

Isaiah 4:2-6

Psalm 122

Let us pray. *(Silence)*

O God, you led your ancient people by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night: Grant that we, who serve you now on earth, may come to the joy of that heavenly Jerusalem, where all tears are wiped away and where your saints for ever sing your praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Salvation offered freely to all

Isaiah 55:1-11

Canticle 9, *The First Song of Isaiah*, or Psalm 42:1-7

Let us pray. *(Silence)*

O God, you have created all things by the power of your Word, and you renew the earth by your Spirit: Give now the water of life to those who thirst for you, that they may bring forth abundant fruit in your glorious kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

A new heart and a new spirit

Ezekiel 36:24-28

Psalm 42:1-7, or Canticle 9, *The First Song of Isaiah*

Let us pray. *(Silence)*

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all

who are reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The valley of dry bones

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 30, *or* Psalm 143

Let us pray. (*Silence*)

Almighty God, by the Passover of your Son you have brought us out of sin into righteousness and out of death into life: Grant to those who are sealed by your Holy Spirit the will and the power to proclaim you to all the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The gathering of God's people

Zephaniah 3:12-20

Psalm 98, *or* Psalm 126

Let us pray. (*Silence*)

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquillity the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The homily—the preaching should be kept short—is usually preached at St. Paul’s here. After the Gospel seems to be a more appropriate place, however, and one that would seem to admit of more exuberance. (See p. 295.)

As we invariably have people to baptize, we normally continue with Holy Baptism on p. 301. The intensity of the lighting is usually increased for this part of the service, which somewhat detracts from the dramatic lighting change following the Easter Acclamation. (Lights must be lowered after baptism, of course.) Keeping the lighting low might help, though it might make baptism difficult. Another problem with having Holy Baptism here is that, if infants are involved, the solemnity of the occasion is likely to be compromised. (Worship Commission once proposed that we ban infant baptisms from Easter Vigil.)

A better strategy might be to move Holy Baptism to a place after the Gospel. (If the homily is moved also, it would follow the homily.) This would allow baptism to be a more celebratory affair.

A homily may be preached after any of the preceding Readings.

Holy Baptism (beginning with the Presentation of the Candidates, page 301, and concluding with the reception of the newly baptized) may be administered here or after the Gospel. Confirmation may also be administered.

In the absence of candidates for Baptism or Confirmation, the Celebrant leads the people in the Renewal of Baptismal Vows, either here or after the Gospel.

The Celebrant may first address the people in these or similar words, all standing

Through the Paschal mystery, dear friends, we are buried with Christ by Baptism into his death, and raised with him to newness of life. I call upon you, therefore, now that our Lenten observance is ended, to renew the solemn promises and vows of Holy Baptism, by which we once renounced Satan and all his works, and promised to serve God faithfully in his holy Catholic Church.

The Renewal of Baptismal Vows

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

People I do.

Celebrant Do you believe in God the Father?

People I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Celebrant Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

People I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Celebrant Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

People I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

Celebrant Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever
you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of
God in Christ?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your
neighbor as yourself?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
People I will, with God's help.

The Celebrant concludes the Renewal of Vows as follows

If the homily and baptism are moved after the Gospel, a contemplative mood can be sustained through the dressing of the chancel (below). This might de-emphasize the "set change" and transform it into a period of silence and meditation. Might a soft, abstract musical interlude be appropriate here to distract people from the "set change"?

At this time, the church is reduced to near darkness while Altar Guild members replace liturgical furnishings and uncover and add flowers. It has been suggested that, in times past, the church was so dark that Altar Guild members had to use flashlights. This may be a legend, however. In any case, when everything has been prepared to continue the service, the organist presses the signal button that lights a lamp in the narthex.

St. Paul's deviates from the Prayer Book here by adding a dramatic dialogue whose origin has not been determined, though it seems to have been the practice of General Theological Seminary, whether or not it originated there. Fr. Klukas suggests the addition is displaced from Tenebrae, though it seems more likely that it was designed to parallel the events of the Tenebrae service. (Should we add Tenebrae to Wednesday night of Holy Week?)

From the narthex, someone knocks loudly at the door.

Inside, someone asks: *Whom do you seek?*

From the narthex: *Jesus of Nazareth.*

Inside: *He is not here. Alleluia. Christ is risen.*

Congregation: *The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.*

At this point, the lights are instantly raised to their full intensity and music, including trumpets, is heard. Dr. Starr will have to provide exact details. This is an excellent place to use the trompette en chamnade stop of the gallery organ.

The lights are usually kept at full intensity for the rest of the service, but this should be reconsidered.

Candles in the chancel are lit by acolytes after the lights come up.

May Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and bestowed upon us the forgiveness of sins, keep us in eternal life by his grace, in Christ Jesus our Lord. *Amen.*

At the Eucharist

The candles at the Altar may now be lighted from the Paschal Candle.

One of the following Canticles is then sung. Immediately before the Canticle the Celebrant may say to the people

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

The Canticles

Gloria in excelsis
Te Deum laudamus
Pascha nostrum

The Celebrant then says

The Lord be with you.
People And also with you.
Celebrant Let us pray.

The Celebrant says one of the following Collects

Almighty God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

or this

O God, who made this most holy night to shine with the glory of the Lord's resurrection: Stir up in your Church that Spirit of adoption which is given to us in Baptism, that we, being renewed both in body and mind, may worship you in sincerity and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

A cantor can chant S 70 here.

Epistle Romans 6:3-11

"Alleluia" may be sung and repeated.

Psalm 114, or some other suitable psalm or a hymn may be sung.

Gospel Matthew 28:1-10

See comments above.

If a sermon or homily was not preached earlier, it follows here.

The Nicene Creed is not used at this service

See comments above.

Holy Baptism, Confirmation, or the Renewal of Baptismal Vows may take place here.

The celebration continues with the Prayers of the People.

Preface of Easter

Appendix: The Lessons

The story of Creation

Genesis 1:1-2:2

¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

³Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' ⁷So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹Then God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.' And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.' And it was so. ¹⁶God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' ²¹So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.' ²³And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. ²⁵God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' ²⁷So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'

²⁹God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so.

³¹God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

¹Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ²And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.

The Flood

Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18; 8:8-18; 9:8-13

¹Then the LORD said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation. ²Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and its mate; ³and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the face of all the earth. ⁴For in seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.'

⁵And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.

¹¹In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.

¹²The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.

¹³On the very same day Noah with his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons entered the ark, ¹⁴they and every wild animal of every kind, and all domestic animals of every kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every bird of every kind—every bird, every winged creature. ¹⁵They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. ¹⁶And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

¹⁷The flood continued forty days on the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. ¹⁸The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters.

⁸Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; ⁹but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him. ¹⁰He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark; ¹¹and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.

¹²Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him any more.

¹³In the six hundred first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was drying. ¹⁴In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

¹⁵ Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁷Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.' ¹⁸So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives.

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.'

¹²God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac

Genesis 22:1-18

¹After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' ²He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.'

³So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.' ⁶Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'Father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' He said, 'The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' ⁸Abraham said, 'God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together. ⁹When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

¹¹But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' ¹²He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.' ¹³And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called that place 'The LORD will provide'; as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.'

¹⁵The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, ¹⁶and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, ¹⁸and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.'

This lesson is required.

Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea

Exodus 14:10-15:1

¹⁰As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the LORD. ¹¹They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt?' ¹²Is this not the

very thing we told you in Egypt, “Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians”? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.’¹³ But Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again.’¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.’

¹⁵Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward.’¹⁶ But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground.¹⁷ Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.¹⁸ And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.’¹⁹ The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them.²⁰ It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

²¹Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided.²² The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.²³ The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and chariot drivers.²⁴ At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic.²⁵ He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, ‘Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.’²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.’²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea.²⁸ The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained.²⁹ But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.³⁰ Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.³¹ Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.¹ Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: ‘I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

God’s Presence in a renewed Israel

Isaiah 4:2-6

²On that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel. ³Whoever is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, ⁴once the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. ⁵Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over its places of assembly a cloud by day and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night. Indeed over all the glory there will be a canopy. ⁶It will serve as a pavilion, a shade by day from the heat, and a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

Salvation offered freely to all

Isaiah 55:1-11

¹Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. ³Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. ⁴See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. ⁵See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

⁶Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; ⁷let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. ¹⁰For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

A new heart and a new spirit

Ezekiel 36:24-28

²⁴I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land.

²⁵I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will

remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. ²⁸Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

In recent years, we have read this lesson.

The valley of dry bones

Ezekiel 37:1-14

¹The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” ⁴Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.” ⁷So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. ¹¹Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act,” says the LORD.

The gathering of God’s people

Zephaniah 3:12-20

¹²For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD— ¹³the remnant of Israel; they shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths. Then they will pasture and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid.

¹⁴Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! ¹⁵The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of

Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more.
¹⁶On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. ¹⁷The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing ¹⁸as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. ¹⁹I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. ²⁰At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the LORD.