



EASTER VIGIL

A Message from Bishop Andrew Cozzens



Diocese of
CROOKSTON

The Easter Vigil is the high point of our Church year. It's the most important celebration we have in the year. It's the moment when we gather to celebrate and remember Christ's victory over death. It's the one night where we all stay up into the night vigiling. What is vigiling? Vigiling is waiting. What are we waiting for? Of course, we're waiting for the Resurrection, not the first Resurrection, which already happened, but Christ's Second Coming. It makes sense that if Christ rose from the dead on this day, and we know he's coming back, he might come back on this day. And so, we wait into the night, hoping this will be the year when Christ will come and complete the victory he began at the first Resurrection.

The other important thing we do on this night is we welcome all those who have been chosen by God to join us in his Kingdom of Light. This is the night we celebrate the Easter sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation for all those whom Christ is reconciling to Himself and His Church. These new members are a great joy for us and a great sign of the fruitfulness of God's Church.

On this night, we read the whole history of salvation, and we meditate on how Christ prepared the world so he could come and free us from sin and death through his Incarnation, Death and Resurrection. For all these reasons, the Easter Vigil is one of the longest Masses in the year and one of the most important. The Church is clear that it's supposed to take place at night. The Roman Missal is clear that the vigil is to begin after nightfall, which is a minimum of 30 minutes after sunset. The reason for this is clear – we are celebrating Christ as the Daystar, and we are lighting the Easter candle – the symbolism of the candles lighting up the darkness of the night is important. We also begin the Easter Vigil by singing the Easter Exsultet, which is one of the most important liturgical texts in our tradition. This hymn of praise to God points out that it was night when Christ rose from the dead. This was, in fact, one of the main reforms of the liturgy that happened even before the Second Vatican Council. The Easter Vigil was moved from Saturday morning to its proper place after nightfall.

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This becomes difficult for us in the northland, especially when Easter is late, because sunset happens late. When Easter is late in the year, and because sunset happens late – on Easter sunset will be at 8:15 p.m. – the Church law would say the vigil should not begin before 8:45 p.m. It seems to me that it is best that the vigil begin at 9:00 p.m. However, I would understand if for pastoral reasons, pastors felt the need to begin the Easter Vigil at 8:30 p.m.

I hope many people will choose to attend the Easter Vigil because it is such an important celebration for our faith. May this year's celebration of Lent and the Paschal Triduum be a time of deep renewal within us so we can truly live the resurrected life Jesus desires for us. This is what will happen if we fully enter into the liturgies of this season. God bless you!