

## Romans 6.3-11

In the early church, Easter was the time for baptism. As the gloom of Holy Saturday gave way for the new dawn of Easter Sunday, so new Christians would be plunged into water – ‘buried with Christ by baptism into death’ (as Paul puts it in Romans 6.4) – and would then emerge again, just as Christ was raised from the dead, so that (Paul continues) they too ‘might walk in newness of life’. For all of us, then, Easter gives us a chance to remember our own baptism, and to rejoice that God brings us from death to life, through the death and resurrection of his Son. A change has happened in us – and now we are set free to serve God, in newness of life. As Paul writes, ‘So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ Jesus’ (6.11). Easter is a time of wonderful liberation – the dawn that broke that first Easter morning now breaks afresh in our hearts too.

## Elements of the Mass

### Paschal Candle

The Paschal or Easter Candle is blessed at the Easter Vigil. It bears the first light of Easter, lit from the new Easter fire into the Church. The candle is often decorated with an elaborate wax relief of painted design. When the priest comes to bless the candle he uses a stylus to mark various things. He marks first a cross, then reminds us that God is Alpha and Omega, he also marks the year in which the candle is blessed (this is all often shown on the wax relief). There are then 5 incense grains or studs placed into the candle in the shape of the cross. These represent the 5 wounds of Christ on the Cross. As the Paschal Candle is taken into church we sing ‘The Light of Christ’. During Eastertide all of the candles in church are lit from the Paschal Candle. During the Vigil the Exultet and Gospel are read by the light of the Paschal Candle, no acolyte candles are used. The Paschal Candle is used at all baptisms and funerals as a reminder that we die and live with Christ through the sacraments.

11th April  
2020

Easter Day  
(Easter Vigil)

## The Fire



The old rite of the mass knew three separate prayers of blessing over the new fire at the Easter Vigil, three different images are invoked to express the mystery of this holy fire. Christ bestowed on his disciples the fire of his brightness, so that the new fire would enlighten the church with hope and love. Like the pillar of fire which led Moses and the people of God out of slavery from Egypt, we pray that the new fire would enlighten our faith and hope. And thirdly, this holy fire is a protection against the fiery darts of the enemy who tempts us and causes us to sin. The new fire is both used to light the charcoals on which incense will be burnt and the Paschal Candle. The candle is itself an image of the pillar of fire that leads the people of God out of darkness into Christ’s marvellous light. The fire of God’s love is carried into church and enlightens the tomb in which Christ rose from the dead. May our hearts be set on fire with love for him.

### O Sing Unto the Lord

One of the musical high points of the Easter Vigil is undoubtedly the proclamation of Christ’s victory and man’s salvation expressed in the incomparable song of the deacon – the Exultet. Precisely when this rite was introduced into the Paschal Vigil we do not know, but there is evidence that it can be traced back at least as far as the third century, and the version currently in use is often attributed to St Ambrose. It is a hymn to the risen Christ symbolised by the burning Paschal Candle, couched in poetic lyrics, yet filled with a profound doctrinal content reminding us of the history of our salvation.