

## Easter Vigil Meditation

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Anyone who's spent a night sitting by the bed of a sick child or a sick parent or a sick animal or a dying loved one knows what it means to keep vigil. It's lonely, it's nerve-wracking, and it's exhausting. It's also uncertain – anything can happen – and this not-knowing what may happen from one minute to the next makes those minutes and hours feel like an eternity.

And we keep such vigils as those even when there is no sickness or dying. Watching comes naturally to us, and we look for signs of emergence and growth as well as decline and loss. There is a reason we call them “expectant” parents, and although the expectations are clear, even in circumstances as hopeful and promising as pregnancy, uncertainty remains a part of the waiting.

That's one kind of vigil. This is the other. There is nothing uncertain about this evening or this service. We are not waiting to see what might happen; we know what has happened, what is happening, and what will one day happen. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. That's what we believe and that's what we affirm, with millions of other Christians, when we celebrate communion. It's what the church's teachers call the Paschal mystery, represented in our service by that great candle that we light and raise and follow into this darkened sanctuary at the start of this service. There is drama in that opening liturgy to reflect the drama of that which we commemorate and celebrate this night: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

I love this service because I love the mystery those words express. Why did Jesus have to die? God knows, and we've been speculating for 2,000 years. How is Christ risen? I haven't a clue and no one else has, either, but the point is to live his resurrection, not try to figure it out. When will Christ come again? No one knows, despite the enduring cottage industry surrounding the “end times.” Our job, as the gospel hymn puts it, is to “work till Jesus comes.” Our business is not the end time, it's the meantime.

And much of that meantime defies explanation, and is not meant to be explained anyway. This service is that sort of time. It's a time for listening, for walking, for looking, for speaking, for feeling, for imagining. The Easter fire that we light isn't about physics; it's about light and warmth and following and sharing. The sprinkling isn't magic; it's a tangible reminder of the wonder of creation and God's grace in our baptismal re-creation. The bread that we break isn't about nutrition; it's about nourishment for our souls, one another, and the world around us and within us.

So don't think too hard about this service. Don't try to figure it out. Enter into it, instead, how and where you can. Enjoy it, tell your relatives and friends

about it over dinner tomorrow, invite them to join us in it next year, and when you say grace over the Easter ham or lamb, remember to give thanks for a God who can still speak even when we don't fully understand.