

The Stories of Salvation

The Easter Vigil is my favorite service of the church year. I love the kindling of the new fire signaling the light of Christ breaking into darkness of the 40 days of Lent. I love the telling of the stories of salvation history by candlelight. I do love renewing our baptismal vows together and sprinkling everyone with water. And then how wonderful it is when the lights come on, and we shout our Alleluias and go on to share in the first Holy Communion celebration of Easter.

I always get a little frustrated when I try to describe the storytelling in the first part of the Vigil, because I find I can never do it justice in a few words. How can you possibly sum up such powerful stories like the creation of the world, the parting of the Red Sea and the dry bones coming to life? Plus calling them the stories of salvation history doesn't seem very clear. What does that really mean. Our salvation is from Jesus and these stories are from the Old testament when Jesus has not come yet. However, one of my friends in her sermon for Easter Vigil put it so beautifully.

“Our life with Christ did not begin in a manger, it did not begin at the river Jordan when Jesus was baptized by John, it did not begin with Jesus’ miracles or healings, and our relationship with Jesus did not even begin with Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. No. Our life with Jesus Christ began in the beginning when the Spirit of God moved over the waters of creation.”¹

Our life with Jesus Christ began in the beginning when the Spirit of God moved over the waters of creation which is the first of the nine stories of Salvation history used in the Easter Vigil. These stories lead us towards the greatest of all of God’s salvation stories which we will hear once the lights come up and we celebrate Easter.

Our life with Christ continues in the eight stories that follow the creation – The story of Noah and the flood with God sending a rainbow as a sign that he would never send a flood like that again,

- Abraham’s faithfulness to God in being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac, Israel’s deliverance at the Red Sea,
- the prophet’s Isaiah’s proclamation that salvation is for all, the invitation
- wisdom and understanding in Proverbs,
- Ezekiel’s promise of a new heart and a new Spirit, and then his prophesy of the dry bones becoming fleshed out and raised back to life, and in
- Zephaniah where God renews and rejoices on the people of Israel.

At St. Peter’s in my time, we have only done a few of these stories not all nine. Each year I use different ones except for the deliverance of the Israelites from the Red Sea as they escaped Egypt which is always told.

¹ Rev. Phyllis Spiegel, Easter Vigil Sermon, April 11, 2020, St. Ann’s West Chester, Ohio.

Sometimes we act out the stories. Sometimes we have sound effects. Last year we had liturgical dance. We do this to bring life to these stories that tell of the power of God working to save his people over thousands and thousands of years. These stories bring us to Christ and so we tell these stories of salvation as we approach our celebration of Easter.

Tonight we will hear two – the creation story and the Israelites escaping from the Red Sea. As the stories are told listen to how God has always been working to save us and love us. Let these stories prepare our hearts to once again celebrate the resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ.