

the Liturgy of Light

This prayer experience can be celebrated at home any time during the Easter Season. It is based on a portion of the liturgy celebrated at the Easter Vigil Mass, and can augment children's understanding and reflection upon what they see happening at church.

Prepare a darkened room with a cloth placed on a coffee or kitchen table. You will need one larger candle (held by a parent); give an unlit tea-light to each family member. Start in a different room. Holding the unlit larger candle, explain:

The Meaning of the Paschal Candle

At Church we have a very large candle that is called the Easter or Paschal Candle. **It is a sign of the Risen Jesus.** For our prayer today, we will use this smaller candle as our own Paschal Candle.

Even before Jesus was born, God's people were expecting "a great light" to come. Then, on the first Christmas, Jesus was born. **The great light came to our world!**

Light the larger candle.

Light is beautiful and makes us want to look at it, and get closer to it. That's how the people around Jesus felt. But then, we know that **on Good Friday, Jesus died on the cross. The light went out.**

Extinguish the candle.

But **on Easter Sunday**, what happened? **Jesus rose from the dead!** He came back to life!

Relight the candle.

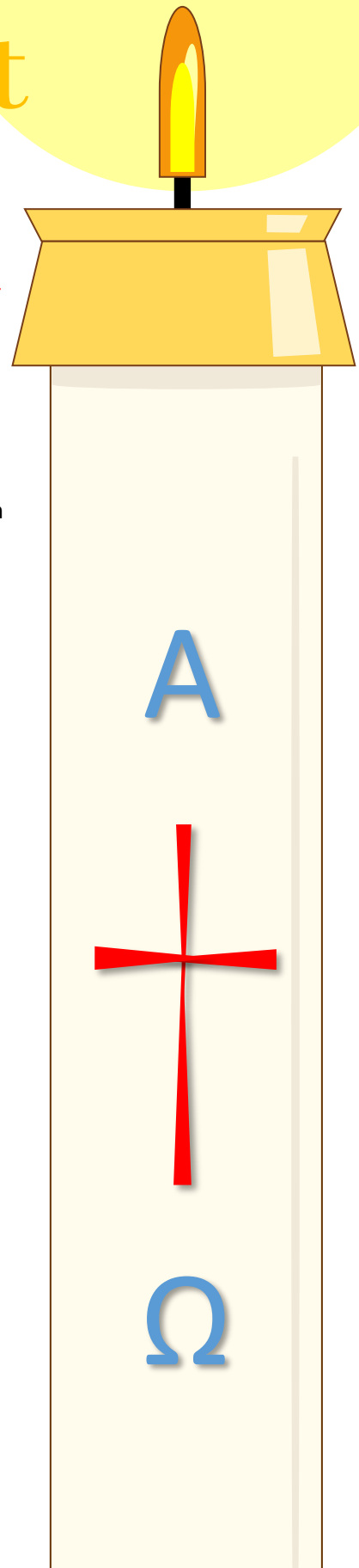
And this time, **the light of Jesus can never be put out again!** His light is stronger than death!

Sing a simple, joyful "Alleluia" song like one we'd sing before the Gospel reading at Mass.

A Reading from the Gospel of Mark (Mark 16: 1-8a)

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him. Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back; it was very large. On entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe, and they were utterly amazed. He said to them, "Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold, the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.'" Then they went out and fled from the tomb. . ."

Explain that you will now have a little procession into the darkened room. Everyone follows the parent with the lit candle, and sings when appropriate.



The Procession

Stopping at three different points on the way, sing at each stop (make up your own chant if you're not familiar with the tune!):

"Christ our light; thanks be to God!"

Place the candle on the prepared table. Then read or sing the following excerpts from a poetic proclamation sung at the Easter Vigil Mass, called the Exsultet.

Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven! Let the trumpet of salvation sound aloud our mighty King's triumph! Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her, ablaze with light from her eternal King, let all the corners of the earth be glad, knowing an end to gloom and darkness. Rejoice!

This is the night, when Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld. This is the night of which it is written: The night shall be as bright as day.

On this, your night of grace, O holy Father, accept this candle, a solemn offering, the work of bees and of your servants' hands, an evening sacrifice of praise.

The Sharing of the Light

The Risen Jesus didn't keep the light to himself. Of course, **he came to share that light with everyone!** **When we were Baptized, he gave us this light in a special way.** Our parents or godparents received a little Baptismal candle that was actually lit from the Paschal Candle. We're going to light our small candles now, to remind us of this.

Call each family member by name to come forward and have their tea-light lit from the larger candle. Take a moment of silence to note and enjoy the growing glow that has filled the dark room. Then quietly ask:

Our candles are just a symbol. **Where do we hold the actual light of the Risen Jesus?** And like Jesus, is this light meant just for us?

Take a moment for quiet family conversation about this theme or to lift up any spontaneous prayers that come to your hearts and minds or even sing a favorite praise song. Do what feels right for your family. Then, have everyone set their light around the larger candle for the closing prayer.

Closing Prayer (from the Exsultet)

May this flame be found still burning by the Morning Star: the one Morning Star who never sets, Christ your Son, who, coming back from death's domain, has shed his peaceful light on humanity, and lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

Close with an appropriate song, such as "Christ the Lord is Risen Today."

Background Information on the Paschal (or Easter) Candle

- Paschal refers to the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
- The candle is made of beeswax. Designs vary, but include: a cross, the Greek letters "alpha" and "omega" (symbolizing that God is the beginning and the end—eternal), the year, and five pieces of incense pinned onto the cross (symbolizing the wounds of Jesus).
- A new candle is blessed each Easter. It remains in the sanctuary (or front area near the altar) for the entire Easter season (until Pentecost). Then it is placed near the Baptismal font where Baptisms occur. It is used for Baptisms and funeral Masses throughout the year.