



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York**

The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, OBE, DD, *Rector*
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www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Saturday, March 30, 2002
Easter Even

The Great Vigil & First Eucharist of Easter
at 5:30pm

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector

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EASTER VIGIL 2002

Alleluia. Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

This evening's Great Vigil of Easter has taken us on a long journey through the history of faith in God, specifically the Lord God of Israel whom Jesus called his Father. What we have seen all along the way is that from the very beginning the Lord God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *acts*.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He "spoke" the cosmos into existence and ordered it by the power and wisdom of his Word, and behold, it was very good. When evil threatened to overrun the earth, God blotted it out with the Flood and saved a faithful remnant. When Abraham, the father of believers, showed he was willing even to sacrifice his only son Isaac, God stopped him, providing a ram instead and pointing to Christ's voluntary sacrifice yet to come.

By a great deliverance at the Red Sea, the Lord saved his people Israel from destruction and led them to the Holy Land. Finally, when Israel's hope seemed exhausted and cut off by disobedience and exile, the Lord showed that he would raise them from the valley of dry bones.

We ourselves have been baptized into this inheritance, and at this vigil of Easter we have just renewed ourselves in the promises of our life in Christ. Chanting the litany of the saints reminds us that we are joined not only by countless millions of fellow Christians (and Jews) around the world, but by the servants of God in every generation who are with us in the Spirit and pray for us and with us in the mystical Body of Christ.

That Body of Christ exists by the sheer act of God. Just as certainly as God called the world into existence, just as surely as God delivered Israel in the Exodus, God created the mystical Body of Christ by raising his crucified Son Jesus Christ from the tomb on the third day.

Like the testimony of witnesses at a trial, each of the four evangelists, Matthew (whom we read tonight), Mark, Luke and John (whom we will read tomorrow), provide different details and perspectives. But they all absolutely agree about two things: 1) that Jesus' dead body was not in his tomb at dawn on Sunday, having been laid there on Good Friday; and 2) that, beginning on that Easter Sunday, Jesus began appearing to his disciples alive, that is, risen from the dead.

In describing these appearances, the evangelists show that by the Resurrection of Jesus they mean neither his resuscitation back to life, nor his survival of death as a disembodied spirit. But that is another sermon. Suffice us to say tonight what the disciples heard from angel at the tomb:

“You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen as he said.”
(Mt 28:1-10)

“Behold, I show you a mystery.” This mighty act of God, which raised Jesus from the dead, is the power that keeps the Church, the Body of Christ, alive as his witness. It is the same power that transforms bread and wine and communicates Christ’s life-giving Body and Blood to us in the Eucharist. It is the grace in which Christians live day by day.

Tonight, let us simply rejoice in this mighty act. Then let us begin to realize its life-changing implications.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*