

Sounds of Worship

Easter Vigil

The Easter Vigil is the third part of the Holy Triduum which leads us through the sorrows of Passiontide to the resurrection Joy of Easter Eve. The Easter Vigil takes us back to the Creation story in the old testament as well as other related expressions of hope and re-birth. Then comes the preparation of the Pascale candle around the Easter fire. The candle leads the procession into the church with the declaration of "The Light of Christ". The Exsultet is sung after which the church is fully illuminated and the Gloria sung. The service continues with renewal of Baptism vows and Eucharist.

This is a service about renewal, from darkness to light.

I will focus on two hymns we would use at this service both written by the same author.

"Word of God, renew your people AM 342 words and music by Bernadette Farrell (b1957)



Figure 1 "Word of God, renew your people" AM 342

1. Word of God, renew your people,
Make us now your living sign.
Recreate us for your purpose
In this place and in this time.
2. Word of hope and Word of healing,
Make us now your living sign.
Recreate us for your purpose
In this place and in this time.
3. Word of peace and Word of justice,
Make us now your living sign.
Recreate us for your purpose
In this place and in this time.
4. God alone the power we trust in,
Make us now your living sign.
Recreate us for your purpose
In this place and in this time.
5. To the waters lead your people,
Make us now your living sign.
Recreate us for your purpose
In this place and in this time.

This is a remarkably simple hymn, the first line varies verse by verse but the remaining three lines are the same throughout. It is almost like a responsorial psalm where the first line could be sung by a cantor and everyone responds with the rest of the verse. Another way of looking at this hymn is to combine the first lines into a single verse:

Word of God, renew your people,
Word of hope and Word of healing,
Word of peace and Word of justice,
God alone the power we trust in,
To the waters lead your people.

The repeated three lines of this hymn provide a contrast to the poetic scene setting of many hymns. "There is a Green hill, far away", being a classic example. Here, Farrell makes the message urgent and rooted in the specific liturgy of the Easter Vigil.

Make us now your living sign.
Recreate us for your purpose
In this place and in this time.

Surely there can be no better message at this service than seize the moment.

The other hymn at this service by Bernadette Farrell is "This is the night of new beginnings" AM189. The text is based on the words of the Exultet and I have included the full text of the Exultet at the end for reference. The hymn has a refrain repeated between the verses, "Christ, be our light!" which is set in a bright major key while the verses are set in a darker minor mode. This musical effect emphasises the darkness to light mood of the service.



Figure 2 "This is the night of new beginnings" AM 189

1. This is the night of new beginnings.
This is the night when heaven meets earth.
This is the night filled with God's glory,
Promise of our new birth!

Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.

2. This is the night Christ our Redeemer
Rose from the grave triumphant and free,
Leaving the tomb of evil and darkness
Empty for all to see.
3. Now will the fire be kindled in darkness
Burn to dispel the shadows of night.
Star of the morning, Jesus our Saviour,
you are the world's true light!
4. Sing of the hope deeper than dying.
Sing of the power stronger than death.
Sing of the love endless as heaven,
Dawning throughout the earth.

5. Into this world morning is breaking.
All of God's people, lift up your voice.
Cry out with joy, tell out the story,
All of the earth, rejoice!

The service would have concluded with a loud and bright piece of organ music but because I have the opportunity to insert music of any type, one piece springs to mind which more than any other expresses the darkness to light theme. It is the "Representation of Chaos" from Haydn's "The Creation". Haydn was inspired to write "The Creation" after hearing performances of Handel's Oratorios in London. "The Creation" covers the entire creation story but the evocative opening orchestral introduction and chorus takes us from the formless void of the evolution of the universe to the creation of the planets and then the stunning emergence of the sun illuminating the earth. The piece lasts 7 minutes but be patient, the final part is well worth the time spent listening to it.



Figure 3 "The Representation of Chaos" from The Creation by J Haydn

For reference please see the text of the Exsultet:

Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!
Exult, all creation around God's throne!
Jesus Christ, our King, is risen!
Sound the trumpet of salvation!

Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendour,
radiant in the brightness of your King!
Christ has conquered! Glory fills you!
Darkness vanishes for ever!

Rejoice, O Mother Church! Exult in glory!
The risen Saviour shines upon you!
Let this place resound with joy,
echoing the mighty song of all God's people!

It is truly right that with full hearts and minds and voices
we should praise the unseen God, the all-powerful Father,
and his only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

For Christ has ransomed us with his blood,
and paid for us the price of Adam's sin
to our eternal Father!

This is our passover feast,
when Christ, the true Lamb, is slain,
whose blood consecrates the homes of all believers.

This is the night when first you saved our fathers:
you freed the people of Israel from their slavery
and led them dry-shod through the sea.

This is the night when the pillar of fire
destroyed the darkness of sin!

This is the night when Christians everywhere,
washed clean of sin
and freed from all defilement,
are restored to grace and grow together in holiness.

This is the night when Jesus Christ
broke the chains of death
and rose triumphant from the grave.
What good would life have been to us,
had Christ not come as our Redeemer?

Father, how wonderful your care for us!
How boundless your merciful love!
To ransom a slave you gave away your Son.

O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam,
which gained for us so great a Redeemer!
Most blessed of all nights, chosen by God
to see Christ rising from the dead!

Of this night scripture says:
"The night will be as clear as day:
it will become my light, my joy."

The power of this holy night
dispels all evil, washes guilt away,
restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy;
it casts out hatred, brings us peace, and humbles earthly pride.

Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth
and man is reconciled with God!
Therefore, heavenly Father, in the joy of this night,
receive our evening sacrifice of praise,
your Church's solemn offering.

Accept this Easter candle,
a flame divided but undimmed,
a pillar of fire that glows to the honour of God.

Let it mingle with the lights of heaven
and continue bravely burning
to dispel the darkness of this night!

May the morning Star which never sets find this flame still burning:
Christ, that Morning Star, who came back from the dead,
and shed his peaceful light on all mankind,
your Son who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Amen.