

**EASTER VIGIL – 2011**  
**Fr. Jerry Kopacek**

From the darkness of Calvary and the tomb to the brilliant light of Jesus' resurrection from the dead: we have come to this Easter Vigil, the peak moment of the entire church year. Every year we begin our celebration of the Vigil outside in the darkness to call to mind the solemn events of Good Friday. But then we dispel that darkness by blessing the Easter fire and bringing the newly-lit Easter candle into our darkened church to proclaim the risen Christ is truly our light—to which we all responded “thanks be to God!” I wish all of you and all your loved ones all the joy, gladness and blessings of this new Easter season; may the grace and peace of the risen Christ be with you always.

There is so much richness to this Easter Vigil, so many ways we celebrate Jesus' ultimate and eternal victory over sin and death. In our Holy Thursday and Good Friday liturgies, we reflected on the amazing gifts that Jesus has offered us through the Paschal Mystery. Tonight, we certainly express our gratitude to God for the gift of his Son's resurrection and the hope of our sharing in his heavenly glory. And one of the ways we live that gift and hope is through the sacrament of baptism. St. Paul in the reading from his letter to the Romans spoke about the fundamental connection between baptism and the dying and rising of Jesus. Listen again to what he says: “We were indeed buried with [Jesus] through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.”

Because of that strong link between baptism and the resurrection of Jesus, the Easter Vigil is the most appropriate time to celebrate the gift, the sacrament of baptism for those who are called to share this new life in the risen Christ. Tonight we are truly privileged to welcome Melissa Timm and her newborn son Nolan Huffman, Matt Rogers, and Gregory Gilling to the waters of baptism. Baptism is truly a gift—it is the means by which we are first incorporated into the Body of Christ, the Church. It is the way in which eternal life and joy are made available to us. It is the way in which we are freed from the stain of original sin and, for those like Melissa, Matt and Gregory who have reached the age of reason, it is the way in which they are washed clean of all personal sins. And not only is baptism a gift for you, Melissa, Nolan, Matt and Gregory—your baptism is also a gift to the rest of us and the whole Church. By taking on the likeness of Christ, by “putting on Christ” in baptism, you will share the gift of yourselves with the Church which is the presence of the risen Christ in the world. As you receive the gift of baptism, we thank you for offering the gift of yourselves for the sake of Jesus in and through his Church.

After the celebration of baptism, it will be our joy to welcome Justin Rathjen into full communion with the Catholic Church. Justin, you have already received the gift of Christian baptism and we thank you for offering the gift of yourself as you fulfill your desire to be fully initiated into the Church of Jesus Christ. You will join Melissa, Matt and Gregory to receive the gift of the sacrament of confirmation—that great gift by which you will receive the seven-fold gifts of the Holy Spirit. Finally, the four of you will receive the sacrament of the Eucharist for the first time—the priceless gift of the very Body and Blood of the risen Christ, a gift he instituted at the Last Supper.

What an amazingly giving God we have! One who gave us life and existence by creating us in his image and likeness and then, when we turned away from him in sin, put into place his plan for our redemption and reconciliation through his Son who would come into this world to do just that. Jesus, the word who is God and who became flesh to dwell among us, is the one who offers us the gift of himself through the Paschal Mystery—his suffering, death and resurrection—so that “we might no longer be in slavery to sin” in the words of St. Paul. May we never tire of offering our thanks to God for the gifts of his Son and of our Easter faith!