

Hymn of the Month

At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing (LSB 633)

Holy Saturday is the third day of the Triduum, the three last days of our Lord's Passion (Holy Week). Following Jesus' death and burial on Good Friday, Holy Saturday was understandably rife with confusion and even despair for those who knew our Lord. Last month's hymn, "O Darkest Woe" (LSB 448) captures the grief of Holy Saturday, but our hymn this month ends the same day with the glorious triumph of the Easter Vigil.

Before we dig into "At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing," let us first recall what all is happening at the Easter Vigil service. The great vigil is made up of six main *services*, and one of those is the Service of Holy Baptism.

Leading up to the great vigil, catechumens (i.e., people learning about the Faith who were not yet baptized) underwent intense training, and it was at the Easter Vigil that they were finally baptized. Until the moment of their baptism, they did not participate in the Lord's Supper, and in fact, they weren't even allowed to 'sit in the pew,' as it were; they had to leave the sanctuary altogether! But upon rising from the baptismal waters at the great vigil, they were immediately clothed with a white garment, and the first words they spoke were "Our Father, who art in heaven...", for they were born into Christ and now God was truly their Father! And, being born into Christ's Body, they could fully partake in the communion of the Lord's Supper. As you can imagine, this night was deeply weighted for these new Christians.

Our hymn of the month reflects the joy of these newly baptized catechumens. It bursts forth with the praises of those who have been drawn out of the baptismal tide, as the Israelites from the Red Sea, rejoicing in the Easter victory of Christ. As a counterpart to "O Darkest Woe," it transforms Holy Saturday's grief and confusion into the jubilant cries of Easter joy.

Particularly fitting for the Easter Vigil, our hymn draws *heavily* upon the Old Testament imagery of the Exodus from Egypt (one of our twelve readings from

the Service of Prayer).

Consider Exodus 12, as the Passover lamb is slaughtered, its blood shielding the Israelites from the Angel of Death, its flesh eaten by the children of God on the night of their salvation. This all is fulfilled by *the* Passover Lamb, with the connections made clear in the lyrics of our hymn.

Opening with a reference to the water and blood which poured from Jesus' side at the crucifixion (John 19:34), it recognizes these as the water of baptism and the blood of the Sacrament. Stanza two explicitly mentions Jesus' Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper—in the Marriage Feast of the [Passover] Lamb! In stanza three, the Angel of Death “sheathes the sword” as it sees the Lamb's blood; and we the Church, the New Israel, tread through the proverbial Red Sea of baptism, whose waves drown our ancient foes of sin, death, and the devil. Stanza four connects the Paschal Lamb with the manna God provided for His people in the wilderness, flesh and bread coming together in one life-giving meal (...the Eucharist!).

Fast-forward a millennium or two, and the remaining stanzas focus the events of Easter itself. The Mighty Victim (a wonderful oxymoron, *a la* 1 Cor. 1:18-31, 2 Cor. 12:9) conquers hell's fierce powers, defanging death and inverting the grave into the very portal of Life. Jesus' resurrection secures our own resurrection on the Last Day. Stanza seven invokes Easter directly (even alluding to us all as ‘newborn souls,’ together with the newly baptized catechumens we mentioned earlier), and we conclude the hymn with a doxology glorifying the Trinity.

Every stanza of this hymn ends with the word we kept from our lips throughout the six weeks of Lent. The last time we sang it was at our Lord's Transfiguration, when we saw Him in glory but could not understand – like foolish moths bumping dumbly against a light. For the first time since then, with all events of our Lord's suffering and Passion illuminating our darkened hearts, we cry out with the joy of the resurrection, “Alleluia!” *Praise the Lord!*

He is risen! He is risen, indeed.

Alleluia!