

Worship Service

BY DAVID W. MUSIC

CELEBRATING THE LIGHT AN EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE

Instrumental Prelude

*Welcome and Instructions for the Service*¹

*Opening Sentence: Psalm 30:4-5 (ESV)*²

Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints,
and give thanks to his holy name.

For his anger is but for a moment,
and his favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.

Hymn of Response

“When Morning Gilds the Skies” (stanzas 1, 2, and 4)

When morning gilds the skies,
my heart awaking cries,
may Jesus Christ be praised!
Alike at work and prayer,
to Jesus I repair;
may Jesus Christ be praised!

The night becomes as day,
when from the heart we say,
may Jesus Christ be praised!
The powers of darkness fear,
when this sweet song they hear,
may Jesus Christ be praised!

In heaven's eternal bliss
 the loveliest strain is this,
 may Jesus Christ be praised!
 Let earth, and sea, and sky
 from depth to height reply,
 may Jesus Christ be praised!

German (c. 1800); translated by Edward Caswall (1858), alt.
Tune: LAUDES DOMINI

Prayer

THE FIRST DAY

Light is an amazing phenomenon. By it we see the wonders of nature, illuminate our homes, measure the distance to far stars and galaxies, and gain warmth and heat. In anticipation of the light of dawn on this Easter Sunday, we reflect upon the origin of this marvelous creation that made possible the first day.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 1:1-5 (ESV)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Responsive or Antiphonal Reading: Psalm 148

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord from the heavens;
 praise him in the heights!

**Praise him, all his angels;
 praise him, all his hosts!**

Praise him, sun and moon,
 praise him, all you shining stars!

**Praise him, you highest heavens,
 and you waters above the heavens!**

Let them praise the name of the Lord!

For he commanded and they were created.

**And he established them forever and ever;
 he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.**

Praise the Lord from the earth,
 you great sea creatures and all deeps,
 fire and hail, snow and mist,
 stormy wind fulfilling his word!

**Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!**
**Beasts and all livestock,
creeping things and flying birds!**
Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and maidens together,
old men and children!
**Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his majesty is above earth and heaven.**
He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his saints,
for the people of Israel who are near to him.
Praise the Lord!

Commentary

The first of all visible beings that God created was light; not that by it he himself might see to work (for the darkness and light are both alike to him), but that by it we might see his works and his glory in them, and might work our works while it is day. The works of Satan and his servants are works of darkness; but he that does truth and does good, comes to the light, and covets it, that his deeds may be made manifest.

Light is the great beauty and blessing of the universe. Like the first-born, it does, of all visible beings, most resemble its great Parent in purity and power, brightness and beneficence; it is of great affinity with a spirit, and is next to it; though by it we see other things, and are sure that it is, yet we know not its nature.... By the sight of it, let us be led to and assisted in the believing contemplation of him who is light, infinite and eternal light, and the Father of lights, and who dwells in inaccessible light.

In the new creation, the first thing wrought in the soul is light: the blessed Spirit captivates the will and affections by enlightening the understanding; in this way it comes into the heart by the door, like the good shepherd to whom the sheep belong, while sin and Satan, like thieves and robbers, climb up some other way. Those who, by sin, were darkness, by grace become light in the world.

The light was made by the word of God's power. He said, "Let there be light"; he willed and appointed it, and immediately there was light—such a copy as exactly answered the original idea in the Eternal Mind. O the power of the word of God! He spoke, and it was done, done really, effectually, and for perpetuity, not in show only, and to serve a present turn, for he commanded, and it stood fast: with him it was *dictum, factum*—a word, and a world.

The light that God willed, when it was produced, he approved of: God saw the light that it was good. It was exactly as he designed it, and it was fit

to answer the end for which he designed it. It was useful and profitable; the world, which now is a palace, would have been a dungeon without it. It was amiable and pleasant. Truly the light is sweet; it rejoices the heart.

...What God commands, he will approve and graciously accept; he will be well pleased with the work of his own hands. That is good indeed which is good in the sight of God, for he sees not as we see. If the light is good, how good is he that is the fountain of light, from whom we receive it, and to whom we owe all praise for it and all the services we do by it!

God divided the light from the darkness, so put them asunder as that they could never be joined together, or reconciled; for what fellowship has light with darkness? And yet he divided time between them, the day for light and the night for darkness, in a constant and regular succession to each other. Though the darkness was now scattered by the light, it was not condemned to a perpetual banishment, but takes its turn with the light, and has its place, because it has its use; for, as the light of the morning befriends the business of the day, so the shadows of the evening befriend the repose of the night, and draw the curtains about us, that we may sleep the better. God has thus divided time between light and darkness, because he would daily remind us that this is a world of mixtures and changes. In heaven there is perfect and perpetual light, and no darkness at all; in hell, there is utter darkness, and no gleam of light. In that world between these two there is a great gulf fixed; but, in this world, they are counterchanged, and we pass daily from one to another, that we may learn to expect such vicissitudes in the providence of God, peace and trouble, joy and sorrow, and may set the one over-against the other, accommodating ourselves to both as we do to the light and darkness, bidding both welcome, and making the best of both.

God divided them from each other by distinguishing names: he called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." He gave them names, as the Lord of both; for the day is his, the night also is his. He is the Lord of time, and will be so, till day and night shall come to an end, and the stream of time be swallowed up in the ocean of eternity. Let us acknowledge God in the constant succession of day and night....

This was the first day's work, and a good day's work it was. The evening and the morning were the first day. The darkness of the evening was before the light of the morning, that it might serve for a foil to it, to set it off, and make it shine the brighter. This was not only the first day of the world, but the first day of the week. I observe (to the honor of that day) that the new world also began on the first day of the week, in the resurrection of Christ, as the light of the world, early in the morning. In him the day-spring from on high has visited the world; and happy are we, forever happy, if that day-star should arise in our hearts.

Matthew Henry (1662-1714)³

Hymn of Response

“We Sing the Mighty Power of God” (stanza 1)

We sing the mighty power of God
that made the mountains rise,
that spread the flowing seas abroad
and built the lofty skies.

We sing the wisdom that ordained
the sun to rule the day;
the moon shines full at his command,
and all the stars obey.

Isaac Watts (1715), alt.

Suggested Tunes: ELLACOMBE or FOREST GREEN

THE EIGHTH DAY

The early Christians often called Sunday “the eighth day” because it marked a new act of creation—the provision of salvation for humanity through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Just as God rested from his labors on Saturday, the last day of the original creation week, so Jesus rested in the tomb on Saturday, the last day of the original Holy Week. But the next day literally made “all the difference in the world,” as God raised Jesus and began a new creation.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 28:1-9

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.

Commentary

Let those who are devout and love God rejoice in this beautiful, radiant Feast.
Let those who are grateful servants be glad and enter into the joy of the Lord.

Let those who have fasted now receive their wages.
Those who have labored since the first hour
 may now accept their just reward.
Those who arrived at the third hour
 may join in the festival with thankfulness.
Those who came at the sixth hour should not doubt,
 for they too shall lose nothing.
Those who tarried until the ninth hour should not hesitate,
 but should come also.
And those who did not arrive until the eleventh hour
 should not fear because of their delay.
For God is merciful and welcomes those who came last,
 as well as those who came first.
The Lord provides rest to those who come at the eleventh hour
 even as he does to those who labored from the first hour.
The Lord gives favor to one person as well as to another.
 He accepts their work and rewards their faith.
 He recognizes what they have done and why they have done it.

Let us all come into the joy of the Lord!
The first and the last receive the same reward;
 You who are rich and you who are poor, be glad together!
 Industrious and lazy, rejoice in this day!
 You who have fasted and you who have not,
Be glad on this day, for the Lord's table is full of good things!
Come! Partake of the fatted calf at this royal feast!
 Do not go away hungry!
 Come! Drink the cup of faith!
 Enjoy all the bounty of the Lord!

No one should be ashamed because they are poor,
 for the eternal kingdom has been brought to light.
No one should grieve because they have sinned repeatedly,
 because pardon has risen from the tomb.
Do not fear death; the Savior's death has brought freedom.
 He endured death and thus destroyed it.
He descended into Hell and destroyed it.
 Even as Hell tasted his flesh he threw it into chaos.
All this was foretold by Isaiah, who said,
 "Hell below is moved to meet you at your coming." [Isaiah 14:9]
Hell was in chaos because it was annihilated.
 It was in chaos because it was cheated.
 It was in chaos because it was done away with.
 It was in chaos because it was defeated.
 It was in chaos because it was led away captive.

Hell swallowed humanity and discovered divinity.

It swallowed earth and experienced heaven.

It swallowed the visible

and was defeated by the invisible.

O death, where is your sting?

O grave, where is your victory?

Christ is risen, and death is destroyed!

Christ is risen, and the powers of Satan are defeated!

Christ is risen, and the angels celebrate!

Christ is risen, and life has been set free!

Christ is risen, and the grave has given up the dead,

for Christ, in his resurrection,

has become the first-fruits of those that sleep.

To him be the glory and the power throughout all eternity. Amen.

*John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)*⁴

Hymn of Response

"We Welcome Glad Easter"

We welcome glad Easter when Jesus arose
and won a great victory over his foes.

*Then raise your glad voices, all Christians, and sing,
bring glad Easter praises to Jesus, your King.*

We tell how the women came early that day
and there at the tomb found the stone rolled away.

Refrain

We sing of the angel who said: "Do not fear!
Your Savior is risen and he is not here."

Refrain

We think of the promise which Jesus did give:
"That he who believes in me also shall live!"

Refrain

Anonymous

Tune: ST. DENIO

THE ETERNAL DAY

For early Christians, the eighth day also was symbolic of the new creation, the infinity that will begin when Jesus returns in glory and those who believe will enter everlasting life. The order that began on that first day with the creation of light will be swept away and we will be with the Lord forever and ever, world without end.

New Testament Reading: Revelation 21:1-5a, 22-26

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Commentary

It is the purpose and intention of the Lord Jesus to make this world entirely new. You recollect how it was made at first – pure and perfect. It sang with its sister-spheres the song of joy and reverence. It was a fair world, full of everything that was lovely, beautiful, happy, holy. And if we might be permitted to dream for a moment of what it would have been if it had continued as God created it, one might fancy what a blessed world it would be at this moment. Had it possessed a teeming population like its present one, and if, one by one, those godly ones had been caught away, like Elijah, without knowing death, to be succeeded by pious descendants – oh! what a blessed world it would have been! A world where every person would have been a priest, and every house a temple, and every garment a vestment, and every meal a sacrifice, and every place holiness to the Lord, for the tabernacle of God would have been among them, and God himself would have dwelt among them! What songs would have hailed the rising of the sun – the birds of paradise caroling on every hill and in every dale their Maker's praise! What songs would have ushered in the stillness of the night! Ay, and angels, hovering over this fair world, would oft have heard the strain of joy breaking the silence of midnight, as glad and pure hearts beheld the eyes of the Creator beaming down upon them from the stars that stud the vault of heaven.

But there came a serpent, and his craft spoiled it all. He whispered into the ears of a mother Eve; she fell, and we fell with her, and what a world

this now is! If people walk about in it with their eyes open, they will see it to be a horrible sphere. I do not mean that its rivers, its lakes, its valleys, its mountains are repulsive. Nay, it is a world fit for angels, naturally; but it is a horrible world morally. ...

But Jesus Christ, who knew that we should never make this world much better though we do what we would with it, designed from the very first to make a new world of it. Truly, truly, this seems to me to be a glorious purpose. To make a world is something wonderful, but to make a world new is something more wonderful still.

When God spoke and said, "Let there be light," it was a fiat that showed him to be divine. Yet there was nothing then to resist his will; he had no opponent; he could build as he pleased, and there was none to pluck down. But when Jesus Christ comes to make a new world, there is everything opposed to him. When he says, "Let there be light," darkness says, "There shall not be light." When he says, "Let there be order," chaos says, "Nay, I will maintain confusion." When he says, "Let there be holiness, let there be love, let there be truth," the principalities and powers of evil withstand him, and say, "There shall not be holiness, there shall be sin; there shall not be love, there shall be hate; there shall not be truth, there shall be error; there shall not be the worship of God, there shall be the worship of sticks and stones; people shall bow down before idols which their own hands have made."

And yet, for all that, Jesus Christ, coming in the form of a man, revealing himself as the Son of God, determines to make all things new; and be assured, brothers and sisters, he will do it. Even though he pleases to take his time, and to use humble instrumentalities to effect his purposes, yet do it he will. The day shall come when this world shall be as fair as it was at the primeval Sabbath; when there shall be a new heaven and a new earth, wherein shall dwell righteousness. The ancient prophecy shall be fulfilled to the letter. God shall dwell among humanity, peace shall be domiciled on earth, and glory shall be ascribed to God in the highest. This great work of Christ, this grand design of making this old world into a new one, shall be carried into effect.

*Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892)*⁵

Hymn of Response

"The First Day of Creation"

The first day of creation
God said, "Let there be light!"
and by this proclamation
the darkness put to flight.
The morning stars together
in melody gave voice
to sing of their Creator
and in God's name rejoice.

The day of resurrection
God once again turned night
to joyful adoration
and anthems of delight;
for Christ from death ascended,
the stone was rolled away;
the reign of death was ended
on that first Easter day.

In glad anticipation
of Easter's dawning bright
we wait night's transformation
to resurrection light.
Rejoice in celebration,
your voices all as one,
to sing the new creation
in Christ, God's risen Son.

David W. Music (2013)

Tune: AURELIA (pp. 53-55 of this volume)

Benediction

THE DISMISSAL

Closing Sentence: Romans 13:12 (ESV)⁶

The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

NOTES

1 Give these first three instructions to the congregants. (1) Explain that each scripture passage will be followed by a portion of a commentary or sermon by a historic figure. (2) Explain how the psalm will be read (responsively/antiphonally) and how the sung response (if used) will work. (3) Practice any congregational songs that might be unfamiliar.

The following notes are for worship leaders as they prepare the service. This order is designed as an Easter sunrise service, with an emphasis on the light of morning at creation, the Lord's resurrection, and the *parousia*. Because a regular Easter Sunday worship service will take place later in the morning, such items as an offering, a sermon, and standard Easter hymns are not included. Of course, these items may be added to or substituted for other elements of the service in order to adapt it for a regular Easter Sunday service or an Easter vigil.

Apart from the opening and closing sections, the service is divided into three principal parts: "The First Day" (creation), "The Eighth Day" (Christ's resurrection) and "The Eternal Day" (unending life with God). Each section contains an opening comment, a scripture passage, a commentary on the passage from a historic Christian figure, and a congregational song; the first section also includes a psalm reading. At least three different persons should be employed for the various readings; use both men and women, and perhaps multi-age readers as well. The longer commentaries may be broken

up among the different readers. The readers should be given their assignments well in advance, should practice them, and should receive coaching in reading them effectively from appropriate persons before the day of the service. If a sermon is included it should come after the singing of “The First Day of Creation” and should serve to summarize the three “days.”

Determine how the psalm will be read, whether responsively (one person reading the plain type and the group responding with the bold print) or antiphonally (one group reading the plain print and another group responding with the bold print). If antiphonal reading is used, the congregants may be divided by right and left sides, by front and back of the worship space, by men and women, or by choir and congregation.

If the service is held out of doors where a piano is not available, most of the congregational hymns may be sung a cappella or accompanied by a guitar or other transportable instruments.

2 Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved.

3 This passage is adapted from the notes on Genesis 1:3-5 in *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, available online at www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/genesis/1.html (accessed December 4, 2013).

4 This passage is adapted from John Chrysostom's Easter Sermon, available online at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paschal_Homily (accessed December 4, 2013).

5 This passage is adapted from Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “A New Creation,” Sermon 3467, based on Revelation 21:5, available online at www.spurgeon.org/sermons/3467.htm (accessed December 4, 2013).

6 An option for the dismissal is for the choir to sing Felix Mendelssohn's “The Night is Departing” from his *Lobegesang [Hymn of Praise]*, No. 7, which is based on Romans 13:12. There are several editions of this work; a free downloadable score is available at www.free-scores.com/download-sheet-music.php?pdf=7491 (accessed December 4, 2013). If desired, the piece can conclude at measure 66 (the entire work is 215 measures long).



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