

Rejoice, now heavenly hosts and Choirs of Angels

the Resurrection and the gift of new life. Many traditional Baptismal fonts today, perhaps accidentally, have 8 sides as the old Baptistery buildings did. There was not enough room for those not directly involved with the Baptismal candidates, so, while Baptisms took place, the congregation spent the time praying, chanting psalms and hearing Old Testament stories the saving acts of God's given to his ancient people. The rejoicing newly Baptized, the *infantii*, returned to the cathedral to share in their first Easter Mass.

We continue to publish many lessons, a liturgical relic of earlier times. Perhaps some congregations have enough Baptisms to all include the lessons and hear them in the ancient way.

4) The Baptisms

The earliest exacting reference to the method of Baptism is found in the above mentioned Hippolytus of Rome. The catechumens are to remove their clothing and stand in *flowing* water, if available. Water is poured on their heads thrice, they are Anointed, Confirmed, and receive Holy Communion, then drink of milk, sweetened with honey for they have come to *the promised land flowing with milk and honey*. Later, the 5th century Baptisteries introduced the more dramatic immersion pool which was in use for about 100 years until there were few European adults left who were not Christian. The church then returned to the earlier custom of pouring water because those Baptized were usually tiny children



Fifth Century
Baptismal Pool
*Cathedral of San Gennaro, Naples,
Italy*
Said to be the oldest such pool in
Christendom.

whose lives would be in danger if immersed.

In traditional churches today, adult Catechumens are Baptized either standing with their heads bent over the font or kneeling while immersed in a large water pool.

The Easter Vigil



SECTION OF AN ILLUSTRATED UPSIDE-DOWN *EXULTET* MANUSCRIPT, ABOUT 1060. CATHEDRAL MUSEUM, BARI, ITALY.

At one time in Italy it was customary to make illustrated scrolls of the Exultet. They were unrolled by the singer, usually a deacon, and draped down from the lectern as he sang. In these manuscripts the chant text and its

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music is printed *upside down!* (see illustration). As the scroll was unrolled the pictures were revealed. In the dim light of the church it must have been impossible for the worshipers to see the pictures, but that was not their purpose. They were in honor of God, the Virgin, the saints and the temporal powers; the latter were notified of their inclusion and of course properly flattered.

The text included prayers for the Holy Roman Emperor and other dignitaries. Napoleon forced the last Holy Roman Emperor to resign in 1804. Imperial Prayers were included (but no longer chanted) in the Roman Catholic liturgy until 1955.

The Easter Vigil Service is Very, Very Old.

Saint Hippolytus gives extensive directions for the Easter Vigil in his *Apostolic Tradition*, dated 215. The Saint was an old fashioned fellow who hoped to enshrine the customs of his youth, say about year 160. The service took place Holy Saturday at sundown. The Catechumens (those prepared for Baptism) were Baptized, Confirmed by the Bishop and received Holy Communion for the first time. The Saint even mentions sponsors: he directs that if there are children too young to answer for themselves parents or family members should answer in their name.

All of course was done in secret for in those days the mere act of being a Christian was grounds for summary justice and immediate execution. When Christianity became legal in 313 the formerly secret liturgy became public and was enhanced with several details that are found in our Episcopal Prayer Book. Although out of use (or in the Roman Catholic Church, perfunctorily celebrated) for centuries, the vigil was revived in Episcopal, R .C. and Lutheran Churches in the 1950's and 60's.

There are four parts that precede the Easter Eucharist:

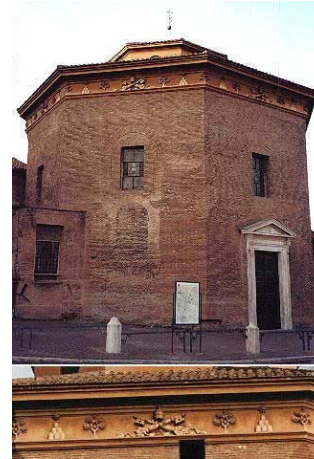
- 1) The Lighting of the fire
- 2) The Exultet
- 3) The Lessons
- 4) The Baptisms

1) The Lighting of the fire`

In the midst of darkness a fire is struck from flint and steel. (today we usually use a lighter!) What once was a utilitarian practice very early became a ceremony. Five grains of incense set in wax are arranged crosswise on the great Easter Candle to signify the sacred wounds in Christ's glorified body. The lighting of the candle with

The Easter Vigil

new fire itself serves as a reminder of the ancient Jews crossing the Red Sea (actually, in Hebrew, *Reed Sea*) and led to the promised land by a pillar of fire by night. The candle itself is an image of the Resurrection, reminding us that **Jesus, the light of the world scatters the darkness of sin.** After the Easter Candle (a.k.a., *Paschal Candle*) is lit, the candles of the clergy and laity are lit from the large candle as it is carried to the front of the church in procession.



The Easter Candle itself dates from at least the 4th century and may in fact be earlier. In Medieval times the candle "grew" to great heights: In 1517, church directions at Salisbury Cathedral demanded one 36 feet tall! Westminster Abbey boasted a candle weighing 300 pounds. Such candles of course were not carried; they were lit where they stood with a unique kind of long taper.

2) The Exultet

Rome's
Lateran
Baptistery,
c. 440

The great hymn of Praise is believed to be the work of St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan from 373 - 397. Ambrose was a public official, the governor of Upper Italy, and not yet a Christian. He was moderating an unruly election for the bishop of Milan; to his utter surprise he found *himself* elected by bishop by acclamation. Ambrose, a Catechumen, was hastily Baptized and ordained in the space of a week. He turned out to be a spectacular bishop, a deft administrator and one who used his great rhetorical skills in the writing of moving homilies, teaching sermons and many hymns, nearly a dozen of which are in our hymnal.

3) The Lessons

You'll note that the Prayer Book lists 9 Old Testament lessons, psalms and prayers, but requires that only two be read. *Why so many; why so few?* In earlier times, in Italy and France and in some Italian cities today, Baptisms took place once or twice a year in the cathedral's baptistery, a separate building. (Rome's Lateran Baptistery, is shown above). Most such baptistery buildings have 8 sides; seven are said to symbolize Genesis' days of creation and one,