**St Paul’s Egham Hythe**

**Easter Fire**

***The Gathering***

*We gather outside the church around the new fire,*

*with the church in darkness*

*The Easter Candle is lit, and the following is said:*

**May the light of Christ, rising in glory,**

**banish all darkness from our hearts and minds.**

*We process into the church, lighting individual candles around the church on the way, and singing.*

**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation,**

**in God I trust, in God I trust. (Taize)**

***Ministry of the Word***

**Introduction**

The first time God spoke, at creation, God said, ‘Let there be light.’ Tonight we come to give thanks for Jesus, the Light of the world, which the darkness of sin and death have not been able to overcome.

It is a long story, the story of our salvation. Year by year, we read in scripture how God created men and women in his image, to live by his laws. We read how human beings chose to go their own way, with the consequent loss of their closeness to God and to each other.

We hear how God called his people with yearning love, again and again; how they responded and fell away. And God never let go. Sometimes, to save his people from disaster, God performed mighty acts, as with Noah, or at the parting of the waters of the Red Sea. Sometimes, individual prophets called the people back to God. At times, it seemed as though God’s purpose would never be fulfilled, as his people were overpowered by foreign nations, and finally taken into exile. But there, at one of their lowest points, God spoke again with a message of new life.

**Reading: Ezekiel 37: 1-14**

*We pause to reflect on God’s faithfulness.*

**Silence, ending with**

For all his mighty acts, and for his hidden mercies:

**God’s name be praised.**

For keeping the word of hope alive through prophets and leaders.

**God’s name be praised.**

For the promise of new life, when all seems hopeless and dead:

**God’s name be praised.**

**Hymn or Song**

Restoration to their land did not bring total restoration of their relationship with God, though, and succeeding generations followed the pattern of turning to God and turning away again. Finally, as words did not seem to get through to his people, God performed his mighty act of deliverance in Jesus Christ. His life was an embodiment of God’s word of love. His teaching and manner of life went right to the heart of what it means to live in close relationship with God. A tremendous struggle against the powers of darkness was focussed on him, and, at one point, darkness appeared to have won. But out of the darkness came the voice of Jesus from the cross – ‘It is finished. It is accomplished.’

On the third day, God’s people began to understand what that cry from the cross meant, when Jesus, the Light which could not be overcome, appeared among them, risen from the dead.

**Gospel: John 20: 1-8**

**The Easter Acclamation**

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

***All*   He is risen indeed. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

*A joyful fanfare may be played, bells rung, cymbals clashed, noise made.*

**Hymn: To God be the glory**

To God be the glory great things He has done
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin
And opened the life gate that all may go in

*Praise the Lord praise the Lord
Let the earth hear His voice
Praise the Lord praise the Lord
Let the people rejoice
O come to the Father through Jesus the Son
And give Him the glory great things He has done*

O perfect redemption the purchase of blood
To every believer the promise of God
The vilest offender who truly believes
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives

Great things He has taught us
Great things He has done
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son
But purer and higher and greater will be
Our wonder our transport when Jesus we see

And the story goes on. Our Easter candle is our proclamation that Jesus is alive and is the light for all people. And Jesus didn’t only say, ‘I am the light of the world’. He also said to his followers, ‘You are the light of the word … let your light shine so that people may give glory to your Father in heaven’ (Matthew 5: 14-16). In our baptism the person who is baptised is given a candle and told to ‘Shine as a light in the world, to the glory of God the Father’.

*We’re invited to respond by renewing our baptism promises.*

In baptism, God calls us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

To follow Christ means dying to sin and rising to new life with him.

Therefore I ask:

Do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God?

***All***   **I reject them.**

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?

***All***   **I renounce them.**

Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

***All***   **I repent of them.**

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?

***All***   **I turn to Christ.**

Do you submit to Christ as Lord?

***All***   **I submit to Christ.**

Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life?

***All***   **I come to Christ.**

May God, who has given you the desire to follow Christ, give you the strength to continue in the Way.

**Hymn or Song**

**Blessing**

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

***All*   He is risen indeed. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**