Introduction: The Night That Changed History

Imagine for a moment the scene: a cold dawn in Jerusalem, the eerie silence of a sealed tomb, and suddenly… **Light shatters the darkness!** The lifeless body of Christ is transfigured in glory, the stone rolls away, and angels proclaim: *"He is not here, for He has risen!"* (Matthew 28:6).

But **at what exact time did this miracle occur?** Why does the Catholic Church celebrate the Resurrection at night, during the **Easter Vigil**, rather than at dawn? This article will unravel the profound biblical symbolism, apostolic tradition, and spiritual significance of this pivotal moment in the Christian faith.

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1. The Exact Time of the Resurrection: Midnight or Dawn?

The Gospels do not specify the exact hour of Christ's Resurrection, but **there are revealing clues**:

- **Matthew 28:1** states that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb *"at dawn on the first day of the week"* and found it empty.
- **Mark 16:2** also mentions that they arrived *"very early in the morning, just as the sun was rising."*
- **Luke 24:1** confirms that they went *"at early dawn."*

However, **the oldest Christian tradition** (based on writings from Church Fathers like St. Jerome and St. Augustine) suggests that **Jesus rose at midnight**, precisely as the first day of the Jewish week (our Sunday) began.

Why Midnight?

- **Cosmic Symbolism**: In Jewish thought, the new day begins **at sunset** (Genesis 1:5: *"And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day."*). Midnight marks the turning point between darkness and light.
- **Fulfillment of Prophecy**: The **Exodus of Israel from Egypt** (a foreshadowing of Christian Passover) happened at midnight (Exodus 12:29).
- **"God's Hour"**: Jesus Himself said the Son of Man would come *"at midnight"* (Matthew

25:6), symbolizing His victory over death at the darkest hour.

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2. The Easter Vigil: Why Is It Celebrated at Night?

The **Easter Vigil** is the most important celebration of the liturgical year, and the Church holds it **after nightfall on Holy Saturday** for deep theological reasons:

A. Biblical Reasons

- **The Jewish Passover (Pesach) was celebrated at night** (Exodus 12:8). Jesus, the **Lamb of God**, fulfilled this feast through His death and Resurrection.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:5** declares: *"You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness."* The Vigil symbolizes the passage from darkness to Christ's light.

B. Liturgical Reasons

- **The new fire and the Paschal Candle** (symbolizing Christ) are lit in darkness, showing that **He is the Light of the World** (John 8:12).
- **The singing of the "Exsultet"** (the Easter Proclamation) announces: *"This is the night when Christ broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave!"*

C. Practical Reasons

- **In the early centuries**, Christians would keep vigil all night awaiting the Resurrection, following the parable of the wise virgins (Matthew 25:1-13).
- **Sunday begins with Saturday's Vespers** (according to Jewish tradition), so the Vigil inaugurates the day of Resurrection.

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3. Modern Significance: Why Does This Matter Today?

In a world filled with crisis, war, and despair, **the nighttime Resurrection reminds us that:**

 God works in our darkest moments. Just as in the midnight of the tomb, He brings light

where there seems to be no way out.
 Faith overcomes fear. The women went to the tomb *"before dawn"*, trusting against all odds.
 The Easter Vigil is not an ancient ritual but a living encounter with Christ. Each year, the Church renews its hope amid darkness.

Fun Fact:

In the **Church of the Holy Sepulchre** (Jerusalem), every Holy Saturday, Orthodox Christians celebrate the **"Miracle of the Holy Fire,"** where a miraculous flame appears in Christ's tomb, symbolizing His Resurrection.

Conclusion: Living in the Light of the Resurrection

The next time you participate in the **Easter Vigil**, remember: **you are not just reenacting a ritual—you are reliving the moment death was defeated.** The midnight Resurrection teaches us that **God always triumphs**, even when all seems lost.

> *"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!" (Luke 24:5-6).*

May this truth illuminate your life today and always. Happy Easter!