

## **Easter Morning Liturgy**

**Designed by UU Minister Rev. Lori Staubitz 3/23/08**

**"The cross"**, which in Christianity is a symbol of the crucifixion and Easter is also a more ancient symbol of the four seasons - hence hot cross buns, marked to represent the four seasons. The word Easter, then, originally may have meant the celebration of the spring sun, which had its birth in the East and brought new life upon earth. This symbolism was transferred to the Christian story of resurrection"- Jonathan Went.-Jonathan Went teaches at Christ for England Bible School.

The Passion Story of the Crucifixion of Jesus is familiar to many here in the U.S. A. However, the oldest Resurrection account came from Sumerian /Babylon and serve as the basis for many future resurrection narratives. The Descent of Inanna or Ishtar- Queen of Heaven" predates and influences the myths of Persephone (Greek/Roman); accounts of Orpheus (Egyptian) and the Judaic Messianic tradition and Christian Gospels) by thousands of years.

The Sumerian account of the Descent of Inanna and The Passion of Christ share many traditional elements:

1. Separation and alienation
2. Regression
3. Suffering / Death
4. Resurrection
5. Sacrifice

-resource: (Macia Starck and Cynn Stern: The Dark Goddess: Dancing with the Shadow, Crossing Press: 1993)

This Easter morning let us open ourselves to the interplay of life and death as new life comes forth. Let this Easter liturgy be for us a time to delve more deeply into the inner realms of the human heart and soul.

Let us open to the mystery of renewal and regeneration as they are revealed in ancient story, seasonal imagery, poetry and questions.

Let us weave music, poetry and ancient scripture reading together so we can make greater connections to an ancient celebration and with the ongoing power of rebirth in our lives this Easter morning.

**Now is the great turning....**

The Summer Sun grows dim as fruit falls from the tree...  
The chill of autumn winds send the winged ones on their flight  
Still others are called to deeper realms.- Rev. Lori Staubitz

Inanna, the daughter of the Moon, set her mind.  
To the dark house,  
To the house which none leave who have entered it,  
To the road from which there is no way back,  
To the house where there is no light.  
Where dust is their fare and clay their food,  
Where they see no light, residing in darkness,  
"From the Great Above she opened her ear to the Great Below.

From the Great Above, the goddess opened her ear to the Great Below.  
It is the cry of her sister suffering which leads her.  
For the love of another Inanna prepared to descend.

"Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."-John 13 NRSV-

"To enter the great continent of death, through the hard door Is  
to surrender the country of breath for the Kingdom of the core."  
-Carl Seaburg

Innana calls to her loyal companion Ninshubar. to stand vigil, should she fail to return. She instructs him in the ways of keeping watch.

**They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray 34" My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch with me." - NRSV Mark 32**

It is the Eleventh Hour; Here in this calm before the storm

Who will keep vigil?

In this hour of our need, who will keep watch with us?

"Let none fear; for greater than sorrow is love, which endures through pain and conquers even grief. Love binds all hearts in bonds of (community) and courage. They who love unselfishly face even the depths with courage, for their strength is the strength of many and their courage rests upon the love of (one another)."

-UU Minister Robert Weston from "A Cup Of Strength

### Now is the great turning

Bitter rains and winds strip the brown leaves from the trees. Barren limbs and withered grasses stand stark against the darkening sky.  
Nights grow chill and the earth grows cold with frost.-Rev. Lori Staubitz

When Inanna reached the gate of the Land of No Return,  
She said to the gatekeeper:  
Open thy gate so I may enter!  
The gatekeeper spoke, saying to exalted Ishtar:  
Who do you say you are??

It is I, Inanna, Queen of heaven

The gatekeeper entered the death queens chamber saying:  
"Behold, thy sister Inanna is waiting at the gate,  
She who upholds the great festivals,  
Who stirs up the deep. She has come for you.  
When Ereshkigal heard this, her face turned pale  
While her lips turned darker than night.

What drove her heart to me?  
Should I the one who writhes in pain be summoned to compassion?

Should I the one who suffers give thought to love?

How dare my sister come bearing her pity.

Enraged, the Queen of death speaks:

Go then, let open the gates of death-Let her enter.  
With that the gatekeeper returned to Inanna saying...

"Enter, my lady, that (death) may rejoice over thee,  
That the palace of the Land of No Return may be glad at thy presence."

**Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.**

**Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate.**

**and he answered "You have said so"-Mark 2 NRSV**

How bound together are both love and integrity; each born of courage and sacrifice. Courage without love serves few, Love without courage serves no one. Where are those who will journey forth with both love and courage to face the days ahead ? -Rev. Lori Staubitz

Inanna entered the first gate and took the great crown from her head.

The Queen is stripped of her title and crown.... At the second gate she took away the pendants on her ears....at each gate she is humbled. At each gate all that she ties her to position, power and beauty is given over.

"I went there of my own free will. I went there in my finest gown with my rarest jewels and Queen of Heaven crown.

Seven times at seven gates- I was stripped of all that I have.

Now I stand, left with nothing but the truth of who I am and I am free."

### **Mark 16**

**The soldiers led Jesus away. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and Then they led him out to crucify him.**

**Now is the great turning** : Death shrouds the earth, and shadows reigns, birds take flight as lifeless seeds lay crushed against the hard, frozen earth ...so much loss and too much bitterness...yet even now, there is so much to lose, even now...there is so much possibility" -Rev. Lori Staubitz

**The Crucifixion NRSV Bible:** Mark 15

**They brought Jesus to the Place of the Skull. They offered him wine mixed with myrrh but he would not take it.**

**It was morning when they crucified him and divided his clothes among them. Those who passed by derided him saying "Save Yourself" Those who were crucified with him also taunted him. Darkness covered the whole land. Jesus cried out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"Then he gave a loud cry and breathed his last**

"Inanna stands naked before death- her sister, her shadow.

Ereshkigal strikes out to pronounce the death sentence.

And the Queen of Heaven is placed on a hook to hang from the wall.

What can Heaven know of the grave? Deep is the wisdom of those who dare to journey into the light and the shadows. Great are the holy ones who journey with us into the day as well

as the night.-Rev. Lori Staubitz Three days and three nights pass. Ninshubar, Inanna's faithful servant does as he is instructed and seeks help to retrieve his Queen from the underworld.

Two creatures are fashioned by Enki- Innana's grandfather.

Together they descend to petition Ereshkigal for her body.

Gently one sprinkles her corpse with the food of life; the other tends her body with the waters of life so she might be resurrected.

**Joseph of Arimathea took courage and went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus. He brought a linen shroud and taking him down, wrapped him in the shroud and laid him in a tomb and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. When the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of James bought spices so they might anoint him.** Mark 15:43

"We look with uncertainty Beyond the old choices for Clear-cut answers

To a softer, more permeable aliveness

Which is every moment at the brink of death;

For something new is being born in us If we but let it.

We stand at a new doorway, awaiting that which comes...

Daring to be human creatures.

Vulnerable to (the mystery and) the beauty of existence.

Learning to love. -Anne Hillman

Someone is here to greet you, to help you remember that you are not alone. This Easter morning we are here to touch and feel the living edge of life, for we have all descended.

Touch, Link, Circle, Hold on...Hold on to the memory of who we are and what we are to do...for we are emerging and no barrier can contain us.

Hold on and together we can bring the dead, parched lands the waters of restoration for new life.

-(paraphrase of Innana's Descent by Starhawk from Dreaming the Dark)

**At early dawn they came to the tomb, saying:**

**Who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb?**

**They looked up and saw that the stone had already been rolled back, and on the right they saw a young man. They were alarmed.**

**But the man said to them: Why do you seek the living among the dead?-Mark 16**

“To suffer hope which Hope thinks infinite; To forgive wrongs darker than death or night; To defy corrupt power which seems omnipotent; to love and bear; to hope till Hope creates from its own wreck the thing it contemplates; This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be GOOD, great and Joyous, beautiful and free; This IS alone Life, Joy, Kingdom and Victory!”

-From Prometheus Unbound by Percy Shelley

**Resources:**

Jonathan Went.-Jonathan Went teaches at Christ for England Bible School

(Macia Starck and Cynn Stern: The Dark Goddess: Dancing with the Shadow, Crossing Press: 1993) Innana’s Descent by Starhawk from Dreaming the Dark -The Descent of Innana-Ancient Sumerian Texts -NRSV Bible

- Descent of Ishtar From Ancient Near Eastern Texts, translated by E.A. Speiser

-Great Occasions edited by Carl Seaburg- Specific authors cited in text above.

-Descent of Inanna Workshop designed by Women’s Circle-Austin Texas; based on

Starhawk: Dreaming the Dark; as designed by Linda Webster