

## **Faithful greet Easter at sunrise by the river**

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Alex Taylor

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NYACK -- Enveloped in the stillness of dawn, a group of about 25 early rising worshippers gathered along the riverbank in Memorial Park for an ecumenical Easter sunrise service.

It was organized by the historic First Reformed Church of Nyack, which has welcomed Easter outdoors at various sites for about 84 years.

For the faithful, Easter is the holiest day of the Christian calendar. It marks the day Christians believe Christ rose from the dead. It's a time of renewal, reconciliation and messages of redemption.

Indeed, as the sun rose through the light blue sky over the Hudson River shortly after 7 a.m., the area seemed to awaken with life.

Sea gulls hovered overhead in the red-gold sunrise as a truck and traffic rumbled over a distant Tappan Zee Bridge. Nearby, on the beach, three or four fishermen cast their lines on the water's glowing, glassy surface.

“There's a sense of renewed spirit,” said Kevin Graham, 53, of Nyack, who had come to the service with his daughter, Elise, 13, a student at Nyack Middle School.

They were led in prayer by Fernando Arzola Jr., the newly appointed pastor at First Reformed Church and a dean at Nyack College.

The message of Arzola's reflection was taken from the Gospel of Luke, which describes a pair of angels appearing before Jesus' mother, Mary, and Mary Magdalene and telling them that Jesus had left his sepulcher and risen as he had promised.

“It’s important for people to know that God loves them,” he said. “No matter how bad things get, there’s always new life. Morning always comes after the darkness.”

The service was moved from Nyack Beach State Park, which remains closed due to Superstorm Sandy, to Memorial Park.

Participants said it was spiritually invigorating to have a gathering along the pebbly riverbank. The beautiful views only enhanced their Easter reflection.

“I try to come every year,” said Terri Wanamaker, 53, of Upper Nyack. “The sunrise is an inspiration.”

Margaret Francke-Olano, 49, of Pomona said her family has been going to the sunrise service for decades, including when it was held atop Hook Mountain.

“The meaning of Christ's Resurrection doesn’t change,” she said.

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