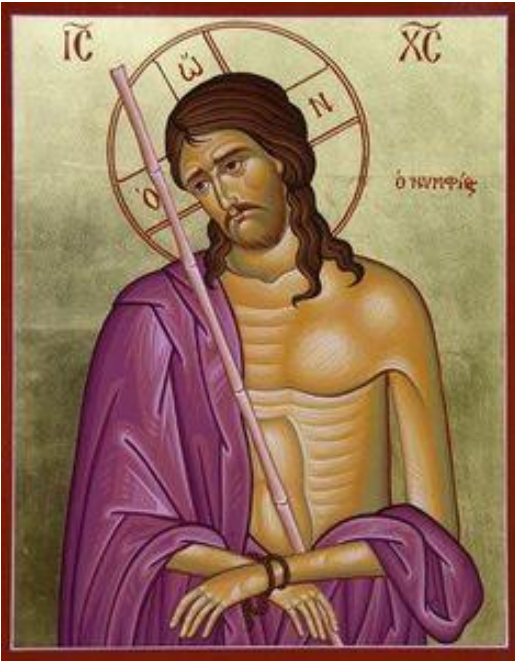


ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings



OUR JOURNEY TO THE CROSS AND THE EMPTY TOMB

“... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

~ Philippians 3:10-11

We Christians know that the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus is the defining event of the entire history of creation. Two-thousand years ago, in a small city in a backwater province of the Roman Empire, God came to visit His people. Holy Week is partly a historical reenactment of those days. But much more than history, Holy Week is prayer, worship, and our mystical participation in the life, death, and

resurrection of our Lord, who still lives and reigns in us and in His Church. Holy Week takes us through the hope and expectation of Palm Sunday, the dark days of His passion and crucifixion, the glorious joy of the discovery of the empty tomb, and His resurrection from the dead. It is a drama like no other, and our great God who loves mankind invites us each year to participate in it with Him!

The purpose of this booklet is to provide you with a brief explanation of each of the days of Orthodox Holy Week. Starting with St. Lazarus Saturday and ending with Pascha Sunday, I have provided you with (1) an **icon of the day**, (2) a **short explanation** of the events and how we observe them in church, (3) some of the key **hymns and prayers** for each day, and (4) **Scripture readings**.

All Orthodox Christians should make every effort to attend these services in person. God willing, this guide will help you better understand them. If you find you are unable to observe all of these days in church, read the prayers and Scripture readings along with your usual morning and evening prayers, at your icon corner, family altar, or the place where you

ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

normally pray. (If you do not have a regular routine of daily prayer, there is no time better than the present to start!)

I realize there are many Bible readings listed here, particularly towards the end of the week. Focus on the underlined readings if you don't have time for everything. Challenge yourself, but don't feel like you have to read everything each day.

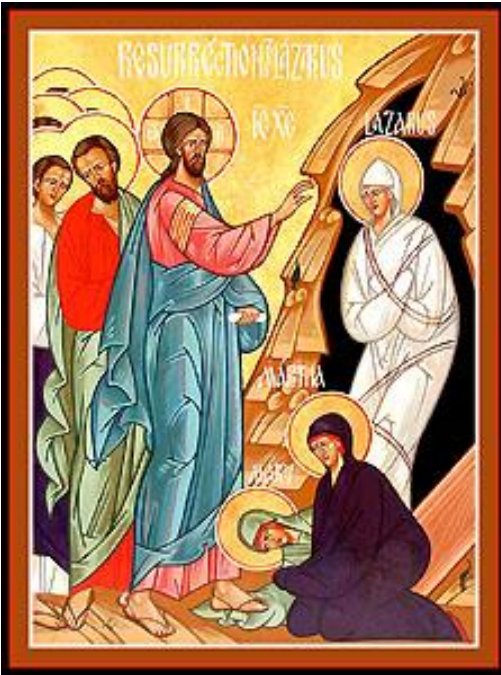
Note also that starting with Holy Monday, we celebrate these services in our churches by anticipation, about twelve hours early. Thus, the Bridegroom services are actually Matins (morning prayers) for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, but we serve them on the previous evenings. If you are observing any of the days of Holy Week from home, I recommend using this guide either with evening prayers the night before, or morning prayers on the day of the listed day, or divide the hymns and readings between the two.

May God bless all of us, and grant us repentance and a deeper participation in His life, death, and resurrection!

Fr. Andrew Kisbler
All Saints Antiochian Orthodox Church, Chicago, Illinois
Holy Week 2021

ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings



ST. LAZARUS SATURDAY

On the day before Palm Sunday, we commemorate the resurrection of Jesus' good friend Lazarus. Lazarus lived with his sisters Mary and Martha in the town of Bethany near Jerusalem. Jesus receives the news that his friend is sick, and declares to His disciples: *"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it"* (John 11:4). Jesus later announces to Martha: *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live"* (John 11:25). Jesus brings his friend back from the dead to *"reveal the universal resurrection,"* the fact that we will *all* rise from our tombs (see the troparion below). This miracle leads many to faith, but also prompts Jesus' enemies to begin plotting His death (11:45-54).

Churches often serve Compline with the Canon of St. Lazarus on Friday evening, and Divine Liturgy on Saturday morning.

Troparion for Lazarus Saturday

O Christ God, when Thou didst raise Lazarus from the dead before Thy passion, Thou didst reveal the universal resurrection. Wherefore, we like the children carry palms of victory and triumph, and cry to Thee, O Vanquisher of Death: "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who cometh in the name of the Lord!"

Divine Liturgy readings

Hebrews 12:28-13:8

John 11:1-45

ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

PALM SUNDAY:

THE ENTRANCE OF OUR LORD INTO JERUSALEM

Our Lord rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, while the crowds greet him with palm branches, crying “*Hosanna!*” (a Hebrew exclamation from Psalm 117:25, “*O Lord, save us!*”).

The people hail Jesus as their conquering king, not yet realizing that His Kingdom is “*not of this world*” (John 18:36).

We wave palm branches,

proclaiming Jesus as our Lord, Savior, King, and Messiah. The palms are our pledge to Him that we are willing to follow Him, even to the Cross.

Palm Sunday services consist of Saturday evening Vespers, Sunday morning Matins and Divine Liturgy, with a procession of palms around the inside and outside of the church.



Celebrating at home: Take some of the palm leaves from church or other greenery and decorate your home. Many also fold their palm leaves into crosses signifying both the joyful anticipation of victory on Palm Sunday and the sufferings of our Lord as we progress through the week.

ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

Troparion for Palm Sunday

O Christ God, when we were buried with Thee in baptism, we became deserving of Thy Resurrection to immortal life. Wherefore, we praise Thee, crying: "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord!"



Saturday Vespers

Genesis 49:1-2, 8-12 / Zephaniah 3:14-19 /
Zachariah 9:9-15

Sunday Matins

Matthew 21:1-17

Sunday Divine Liturgy

Philippians 4:4-9 / John 12:1-18

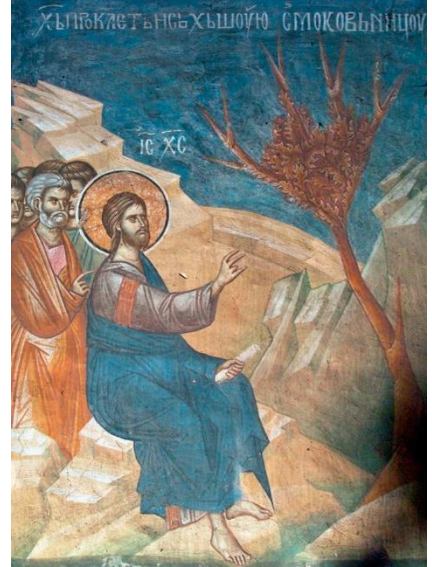
ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

HOLY MONDAY

The Bridegroom (Greek *Nymphios*) services of Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday are so named after the wedding imagery in the **Parable of the Ten Virgins** (Matthew 25:1-13), and the **Parable of the Wedding Feast** (Matthew 22:1-14). Christ our Lord is the “Bridegroom,” coming to destroy death and welcome us to the great heavenly banquet, but the people are not prepared to receive Him. The message to us is clear: Be ready to meet the Lord when He comes!

The hymns and prayers of Holy Monday also refer frequently to Christ’s cursing of the fig tree (Matt. 21:18-19). The fig tree becomes a symbol of all who hear the Word of God but do nothing with it, who are not prepared through love and good deeds to meet their King and Maker when He comes.



Troparion of the Bridegroom

Behold, the Bridegroom cometh in the middle of the night, and blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching. But unworthy is he whom He shall find in slothfulness. Beware, therefore, O my soul, and be not overcome by sleep, lest thou be given over to death, and shut out from the Kingdom. But return to soberness and cry aloud: “Holy, holy, holy, art Thou O God; through the Theotokos, have mercy on us!”

Hymn from the Praises

As the Lord went to His voluntary Passion, He said to His apostles on the way: “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be betrayed, as it is written of Him.” Come, then, and let us also journey with Him, purified in mind; let us be crucified with Him and die for His sake to the pleasures of this life, that we may also live with Him and hear Him say: “No longer do I ascend to the earthly Jerusalem to

ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

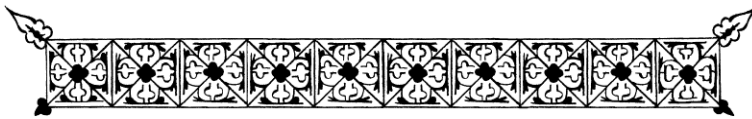
suffer, but I ascend to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God; and I shall raise you up to the Jerusalem on high in the Kingdom of Heaven."

Bridegroom Matins (Sunday evening)

Matthew 21:18-43

Hours and Vespers (Monday morning)

Ezekiel 1:1-20 / Exodus 1:1-20 / Job 1:1-12 / Matthew 24:3-35



HOLY TUESDAY

After Palm Sunday, Jesus spends the next three days teaching and preaching in the Temple. Holy Tuesday's hymns zero in on the content of His teaching, particularly the theme of

watchfulness and readiness in **The Parable of the Ten Virgins** (Matthew 25:1-13) and the **Parable of the Talents** (Matt. 25:14-30). Five of the ten virgins think ahead and bring extra oil; this extra oil represents all the good works we do in this life to prepare ourselves and others for the next. The talent (a large sum of money) likewise symbolizes good works: Jesus



praises those who use their talents to make more talents, while the one who buries his talent is condemned as *"wicked and lazy."*

ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

Again, the message for us is watchfulness: Be ready—the time is short! Hear the Word of God, and do what it says. And let us live every moment of our lives serving God and serving each other with the blessings, talents, and abilities God has given us.

Troparion of the Bridegroom

Behold, the Bridegroom cometh in the middle of the night, and blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching. But unworthy is he whom He shall find in slothfulness. Beware, therefore, O my soul, and be not overcome by sleep, lest thou be given over to death, and shut out from the Kingdom. But return to soberness and cry aloud: "Holy, holy, holy, art Thou O God; through the Theotokos, have mercy on us!"

Hymn from the Aposticha

*Come, ye faithful, and let us serve the Master eagerly, for He gives riches to His servants. Each of us according to the measure that we have received, let us increase the talent of grace. Let one gain wisdom through good deeds; let another celebrate the Liturgy with beauty; let another share his faith by preaching to the uninstructed; let another give his wealth to the poor. So shall we increase what is entrusted to us, and as faithful stewards of His grace we shall be counted worthy of the Master's joy.
Bestow this joy upon us, Christ our God, in Thy love for mankind.*

Bridegroom Matins (Monday evening)

Matthew 22:15-23:39

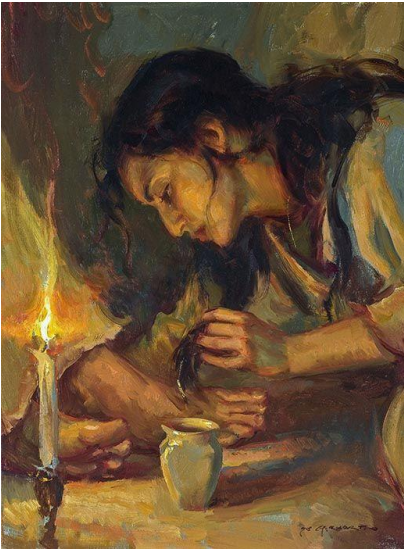
Hours and Vespers (Tuesday morning)

Ezekiel 1:21-28 / Exodus 2:5-10 / Job 1:13-22 / Matthew 24:36-26:2

ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

HOLY WEDNESDAY



According to St. Matthew's Gospel, Holy Wednesday (also known as Spy Wednesday) is the day the chief priests, scribes, and elders of Israel plot to put Jesus to death (26:1-5), a woman anoints Jesus' head with expensive oil (26:6-13), and Judas conspires to turn Jesus over to the chief priests (26:14-16). The hymns movingly contrast the betrayal of Judas with the simple faith of the woman who anoints Jesus. While the disciples are "indignant" at the woman's wasteful act, Jesus praises her and treats it as an act of devotion: *"She has done it to prepare me for burial."*

(This service actually combines three different Gospel stories of women anointing Jesus. In Matthew 26 and Mark 14, a woman anoints Jesus' head at Simon the Leper's house in Bethany. St. Luke (7:36-50) tells us of a sinful woman tearfully anointing the feet of Jesus in the home of Simon the Pharisee: *"Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much"* (7:47). In John's Gospel (12:1-8), it is Mary of Bethany who anoints Jesus' feet, the day before Palm Sunday.)

Troparion of the Bridegroom

Behold, the Bridegroom cometh in the middle of the night, and blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching. But unworthy is he whom He shall find in slothfulness. Beware, therefore, O my soul, and be not overcome by sleep, lest thou be given over to death, and shut out from the Kingdom. But return to soberness and cry aloud: "Holy, holy, holy, art Thou O God; through the Theotokos, have mercy on us!"

ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

Hymn of St. Kassiani

The woman who had fallen into many sins, perceiving Thy Divinity, O Lord, fulfilled the part of a myrrh-bearer. And with lamentations, she brought sweet-smelling oil of myrrh to Thee before Thy burial. 'Woe is me,' she said, 'for night surrounds me, dark and moonless, and stings my lustful passion with the love of sin. Accept the fountain of my tears, O Thou who drawest down from the clouds the waters of the sea! Incline to the groanings of my heart, O Thou who in Thine ineffable self-emptying hast bowed down the heavens! I shall kiss Thy most pure feet and wipe them with the hairs of my head, those feet whose sound Eve heard at dusk in Paradise, and hid herself for fear. Who can search out the multitude of my sins and the abyss of Thy judgments, O Savior of my soul? Despise me not, Thine handmaiden, for Thou hast mercy without measure!'

Bridegroom Matins (Tuesday evening)

John 12:17-50

Hours and Vespers (Wednesday morning)

Ezekiel 2:3-3:3 / Exodus 2:11-22 / Job 2:1-10 / Matt. 26:6-16



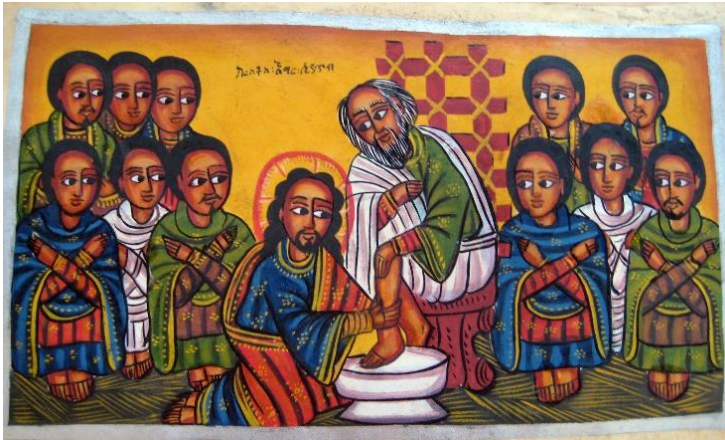
ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

HOLY THURSDAY

On Thursday of Holy Week (Maundy Thursday, from the Latin *mandatum*, “commandment”), we reflect on the many events immediately before the Lord’s crucifixion: the Last Supper, Jesus washing the disciples’ feet, St. Peter’s denials, the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas’ betrayal, and Jesus’ arrest and trial.

The Church begins Holy Thursday appropriately with a Divine Liturgy commemorating the Last Supper: *“This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me”* (Luke 22:19). *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes”* (1 Corinthians 11:26). In preparation for this solemn Eucharist, many churches offer the Sacrament of Holy Unction on Wednesday evening, for the health of soul and body, and for the strength to share in His sufferings. Priests also consecrate extra Holy Communion on Holy Thursday, to serve throughout the coming year to the sick and shut-ins.



CELEBRATING AT HOME: Serve a special, prayerful meal for family members or loved ones. Imitate Jesus by washing each other’s feet or performing a simple act of service.

ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

Troparia from the Matins Canon

Come, ye faithful, let us raise our minds on high and enjoy the Master's hospitality and the table of immortal life in the upper room. And let us hear the exalted teaching of the Word whom we magnify.

O God the Lord and Creator of all, Thou art become poor, uniting a created nature to Thyself, while remaining free from passion. Since Thou art the Passover, Thou hast offered Thyself to those for whose sake Thou wast soon to die; and Thou hast cried: 'Eat my body, and ye shall be firmly established in the faith.'

Filling Thy cup of salvation with joy, O loving Lord, Thou hast made Thy disciples to drink from it. For Thou offerest Thyself in sacrifice, crying: 'Drink my blood, and ye shall be firmly established in the faith.'

Matins (Wednesday evening)

Luke 22:1-39

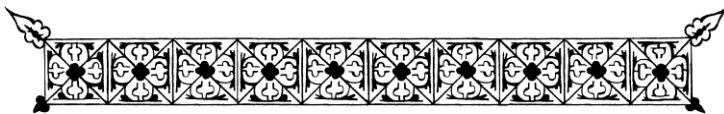
Vesperal Liturgy (Thursday morning)

Exodus 19:10-19 / Job 38:1-21, 42:1-5 / Isaiah 50:4-11

1 Corinthians 11:23-32

Matthew 26:2-20 / John 13:3-17 / Matthew 26:21-39 / Luke 22:43-44 /

Matthew 26:40-27:2



ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

GOOD FRIDAY

We mark the most solemn day of the Christian calendar with a strict fast, and a full day of prayer, meditation, and Bible reading. Mankind, both Jew and Gentile, lashes out against God by beating Him, torturing Him, and nailing Him to a cross, perhaps the most brutal form of execution ever invented. We walk with Jesus as He stands before Pontius Pilate, and as He is mocked and beaten by the soldiers. We also reflect on a few bright beams of light on this otherwise dark and tragic day: Simon of Cyrene carries the cross, the good thief repents, and a group of Jesus' female disciples follow and mourn.



The first service of Good Friday is the **Twelve Passion Gospels**, celebrated on Thursday evening. One of the most memorable points of Holy Week for

Orthodox Christians is the priest's procession with the Cross around the inside of the church: *"Today He is suspended upon a tree, who suspended the earth over the waters."*

On the morning of Good Friday we observe the **Royal Hours**, at which we hear the crucifixion narratives from each of the four Gospels. Then in the afternoon at **Vespers**, we remove the icon of the body of Jesus from the Cross, and in solemn procession, place the burial shroud (*epitaphios*) of our Lord on a decorated tomb. This commemorates the loving act of Saints Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who removed the body of Jesus and laid it in "a new tomb."

Celebrating at home: Observe a vigil throughout all or part of the night by reading through the Psalms or Gospels in front of your icons.

ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

The 15th Antiphon

Today He is suspended upon a tree, who suspended the earth over the waters. A crown of thorns was placed on the head of the King of angels. He who wore a false purple robe, covered the heavens with clouds. He was smitten, who in the Jordan delivered Adam. The Groom of the Church was fastened with nails, and the Son of the Virgin was pierced with a spear. Thy sufferings we adore, O Christ; make us to behold Thy glorious resurrection!

Hymn from the Praises

Every member of Thy holy body, O Savior, hath endured humiliation for our sakes: the head with thorns, the face with spitting, the cheeks with blows, the mouth with the taste of vinegar mixed with gall, the ears with blasphemies replete with infidelity, the back with scourges, and the hand with the rod, and the extension of the whole body with the Cross, the extremities with nails, and the side with the spear. Wherefore, O Thou who didst suffer for us and didst deliver us from suffering, condescending to us for Thy love of mankind, and raised us, O Thou Almighty, have mercy upon us!

Twelve Passion Gospels (Thursday evening)

John 13:31-18:1 / John 18:1-28 / Matthew 26:57-75 / John 18:28-19:16 /
Matthew 27:3-32 / Mark 15:16-32 / Matthew 27:33-54 / Luke 23:32-49 / John
19:25-37 / Mark 15:43-47 / John 19:38-42 / Matthew 27:62-66

Royal Hours (Friday morning)

Zachariah 11:10-13 / Galatians 6:14-18 / Matthew 27:1-56
Isaiah 50:4-11 / Romans 5:6-10 / Mark 15:16-41
Isaiah 52:13-54:1 / Hebrews 2:11-18 / Luke 23:32-49
Jeremiah 11:18-12:15 / Hebrews 10:19-31 / John 19:23-37

Vespers (Friday afternoon)

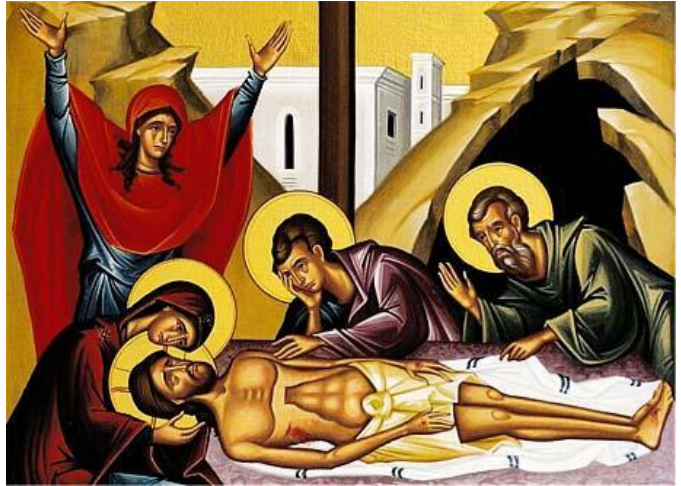
Exodus 33:11-23 / Job 42:12-17 / Isaiah 52:13-54:1
1 Corinthians 1:18-2:2
Matthew 27:1-38 / Luke 23:39-43 / Matthew 27:39-54 / John 19:31-37 /
Matthew 27:55-61

ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

HOLY SATURDAY: THE SABBATH OF LIGHT

Holy Saturday prayers begin Friday night with the beloved **Lamentations at the Tomb**. We put ourselves mystically in the place of the Theotokos and the myrrh-bearers, mourning the brutal death of the Savior. It begins in a dark, solemn manner, but never without at least a hint of the victory to come: *“O Lord my God, I shall praise Thy burial with funeral dirges... O Thou through whose burial the entrance of life hath opened for me.”* By the end of the



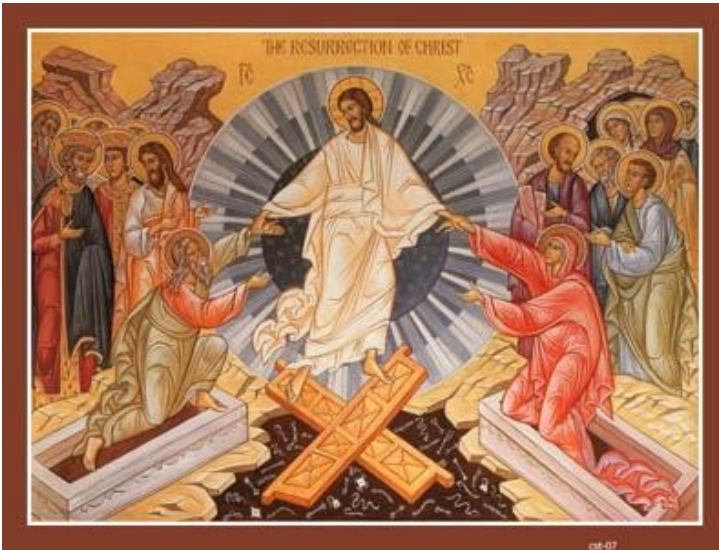
service, we are already joyfully anticipating Pascha morning: *“The myrrh-bearing women mourned, as bearing spices, they drew near Thy tomb, O Savior. But the angel spake unto them, saying: ‘Why number ye the living among the dead? In that He is God, He is risen from the grave!’”*

On Saturday morning, we offer a **Vespertine Divine Liturgy**. Fifteen Old Testament readings provide us with many Biblical foreshadows of the resurrection, from Moses’ crossing the Red Sea, to Jonah and the whale, and to the Three Holy Youths in the fiery furnace, and many others. Jesus’ victory in Hades is celebrated by throwing bay leaves or flower petals around the church, as we sing the words of Psalm 81: *“Arise O God; judge the earth, for Thou shalt inherit among all the nations!”* Jesus has descended into the shadowy realm of the dead (Hebrew *Sheol*, Greek *Hades*) and His victory begins! In some traditions, Holy Saturday is even referred to as “the Resurrection in Hades,” while Easter Sunday is “the Resurrection from the tomb.”

ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

CELEBRATING AT HOME: Color Easter eggs (traditionally dark red) and put together a Pascha basket to enjoy late tonight or tomorrow morning. In some traditions the basket would be filled with specific items, or we may simply include all the foods we have been avoiding for Lent.



Troparion for St. Joseph of Arimathea

The pious Joseph, having brought down Thy pure body from the tree, wrapped it in fine linen, embalmed it with ointment, and laid it in a new tomb.

Hymn from the 9th Ode
'Mourn not for me, Mother, as thou beholdest me in the grave! For I, thy Son,

whom thou didst conceive in thy womb without seed, shall rise and shall be glorified! And being God, I will ceaselessly exalt and ennoble those who in faith and longing magnify thee!'

Hymn from Vespers

Today hath Hades groaned, crying: 'It would have been better for me had I not received the Begotten of Mary! For when He approached me, He loosed my power and crushed my gates of brass, arousing the souls which I had possessed, He being God.' Wherefore, glory be to Thy Crucifixion and to Thy Resurrection, O Lord!

ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

Doxastikon from Vespers

The great Moses foreshadowed this day mystically by his saying: 'And God blessed the seventh day' – for this is the day of quiet and rest, on which the only Son of God rested from all His works, keeping the Sabbath in the body (by means of the mystery of the dispensation taking effect in death) returning through Resurrection to what He had been, and granting us eternal life. For He alone is good and the Lover of mankind!

Lamentations at the Tomb (Friday evening)

Ezekiel 37:1-14 / 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 / Galatians 3:13-14 /
Matthew 27:62-66

Divine Liturgy (Saturday morning)

Genesis 1:1-13 / Isaiah 60:1-16 / Exodus 12:1-11 / Jonah (all) / Joshua 5:10-15 / Exodus 13:20-15:19 / Zephaniah 3:8-15 / 3 Kingdoms 17:8-24 / Isaiah 61:10-62:5 / Genesis 22:1-18 / Isaiah 61:1-9 / 4 Kingdoms 4:8-37 / Isaiah 63:11-64:5 / Jeremiah 31:31-34 / Daniel 3
Romans 6:3-11 / Psalm 81 / Matthew 28:1-20

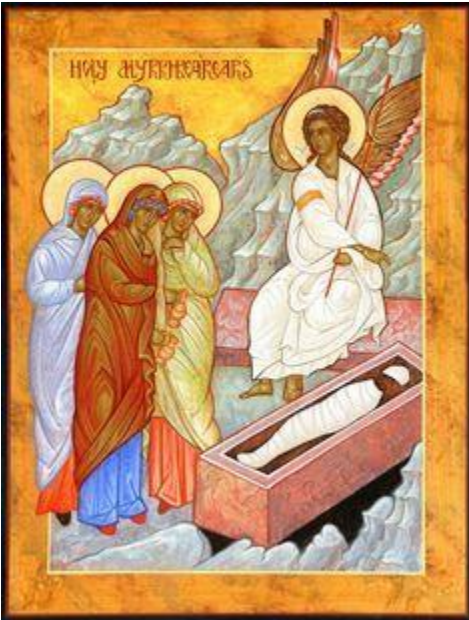


ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

HOLY PASCHA:

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST



The greatest moment in the history of the universe is the resurrection from the dead of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. We begin our commemoration late Saturday night, in a darkened church, with the quiet prayers of the traditional Midnight Service. All candles are extinguished; all lights are turned off, and the priest emerges from the altar with one lit candle: *“Come, receive the light, from the light that is never overtaken by night. Come, glorify Christ, who is risen from the dead!”* The people process outside, where the Paschal Matins service begins: *“Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death!”* With the words of Psalm 23 and a dramatic door-knocking, we reenter a bright, festive church where the Paschal services continue until the early hours of morning.

The Paschal vigil includes the **Midnight Service, Rush Procession, Paschal Matins, and Divine Liturgy**. On Pascha Sunday, many churches regather in the late morning or afternoon for **Agape Vespers**, which commemorates the Risen Christ’s first visit to His disciples, and the doubt of St. Thomas.

Paschal Troparion

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs, bestowing life!

Hypakoe of Pascha

They who were with Mary came before the dawn, found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher, and heard the angels say unto them: ‘Why seek ye Him as man with

ORTHODOX HOLY WEEK

Explanation, Prayers, and Scripture Readings

the dead, who dwells in light eternal? Behold the grave wrappings; make haste and declare to the world that the Lord is risen, and hath caused death to die; for He is the Son of God, the Savior of mankind!

Kontakion for Pascha

O Immortal One, when Thou didst descend into the tomb, Thou didst destroy the power of Hades; and Thou didst rise victorious, O Christ God. Thou hast said to the ointment-bearing women: 'Rejoice!' And Thou gavest peace to Thy Disciples, O Bestower of Resurrection to those who had fallen.

Hymn to the Theotokos

The angel cried to the Lady Full of Grace: "Rejoice, O Pure Virgin! Again I say: Rejoice, thy Son is risen from His three days in the tomb. With Himself He has raised all the dead; rejoice, rejoice, all ye people!" Shine, shine, O New Jerusalem; the glory of the Lord has shone on thee. Exalt now and be glad, O Zion. Be radiant, O Pure Theotokos, in the Resurrection of thy Son!

Matins (Saturday late night)

Mark 16:1-8

Divine Liturgy (Saturday late night)

Acts 1:1-8 / John 1:1-17

Agape Vespers (Sunday morning or afternoon)

John 20:19-25

Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!