

THE SERVICES OF HOLY WEEK AND PASCHA, IN PICTURE & DESCRIPTION

We are grateful to Kh. Erin Kimmett and the Orthodox Christian Education Commission for use of the publication, "Teaching Pics," that we may recall to our children these holiest of services as we worship together in our hearts and in our homes, ever-united by the Holy Spirit.

The Antiochian Orthodox Department of Christian Education
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"Harrowing of Hades" courtesy of Legacy Icons.

Saturday and Sunday

Lazarus Saturday and the Entrance into Jerusalem



The day before Palm Sunday is Lazarus Saturday, which celebrates Christ's raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-45). Lazarus, and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were good friends of Jesus. They lived in Bethany near Jerusalem. Lazarus became very sick and died. Jesus came to Bethany four days after Lazarus died. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead by saying, "Lazarus, come forth!" (John 11:44). Lazarus came out of his tomb alive. The miracle of the raising of Lazarus from the dead shows that Christ is the resurrection and the Life and our resurrection.

Because Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and had performed other miracles, many people glorified him as the Messiah, the Savior. As Jesus entered the city, people greeted Him with palm branches and shouted out praises. Palm Sunday commemorates the entry of Christ into Jerusalem and marks the beginning of Holy Week. It is celebrated by the blessing of palms or pussy willows. In this picture, pussy willows are being blessed before the Palm Sunday Liturgy. In some churches, pussy willows are used in the celebration.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday

Holy Week Bridegroom Matins



The Bridegroom services occur on the first three nights of Holy Week. They are the Matins (morning) Service, but as with all the Holy Week services they are done in anticipation. The Monday service, therefore, is done on Sunday night, Tuesday's service on Monday night and Wednesday's on Tuesday evening. The name "Bridegroom" is based on the main figure in the parable of the ten virgins, (Matthew 25:1-13), which is read on Holy Tuesday. Christ is the bridegroom. The troparion sung at the beginning of each service begins, "Behold the Bridegroom comes in the middle of the night." The icon of Christ as Bridegroom shows Christ wearing a crown of thorns and a purple robe. This is how he appeared before Pilate who presented him saying, "Behold the man." (John 19:5) The Bridegroom is the suffering servant.

The readings and hymns during the Bridegroom service suggest an intimacy of love as well as themes of the Second Coming. On Sunday the story is told of the Old Testament Patriarch Joseph and the empty fig tree. Holy Tuesday commemorates the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) who awaited the bridegroom. The parable of the Talents is also recounted; it too is a story about the Second Coming. On Great Wednesday, we remember the betrayal by Judas and the woman who anointed Jesus with oil.

On Wednesday evening, the Bridegroom Service is usually replaced with the Service of Holy Unction. In some churches, the people are anointed in the service of Holy Unction. Holy Unction is the blessing and anointing of Holy Oil used for healing. (Luke 7:36-50). On this evening, the priest anoints our forehead and hands for spiritual, physical and mental healing. This is preparation for the events of the Passion which is to come, as well as a way to get ready to celebrate Great and Holy Pascha.

Holy Thursday

The Mystical Supper

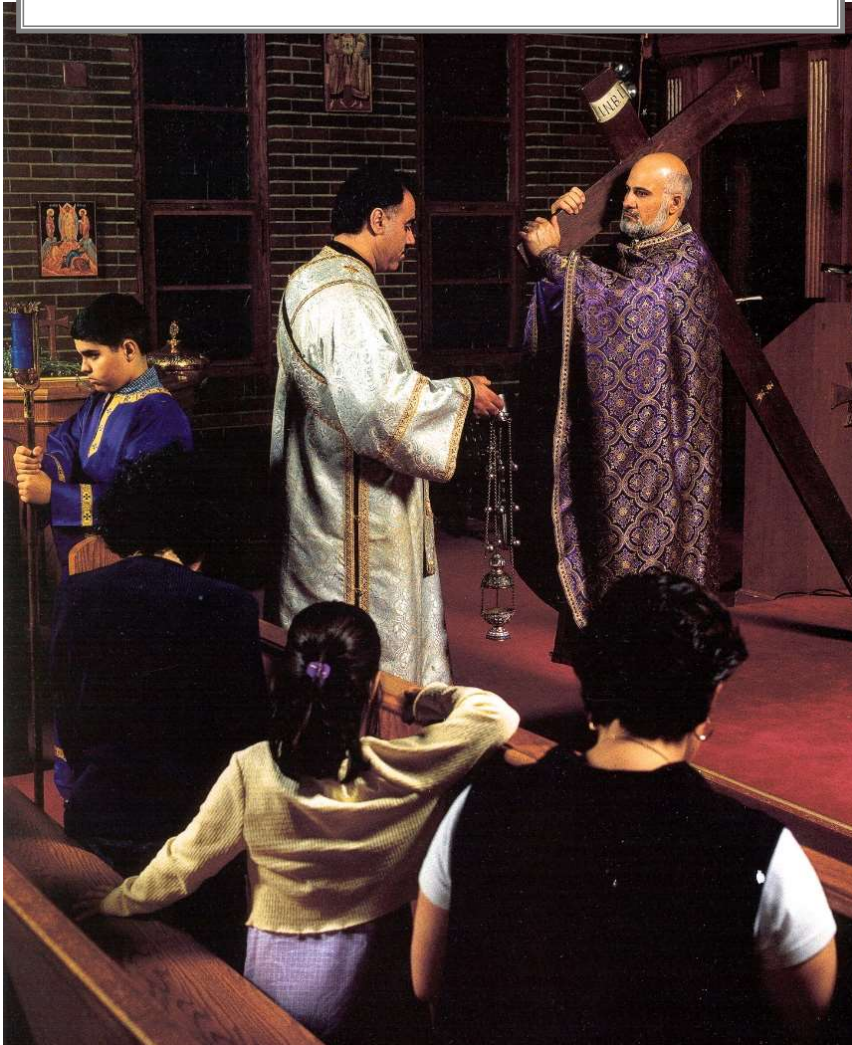


We take part in the Divine Liturgy

to remember the Last Supper when Jesus gave His disciples His body and blood in the form of bread and wine – the start of Holy Communion. In this picture, the icon of the Mystical Supper is being venerated. In some churches, the washing of the disciples' feet is remembered when the priest washes the feet of twelve faithful. The Gospel reading is a compilation of several readings. It commemorates Christ's washing of His disciples' feet (John 13:3-17) as an act of love and humility. It also remembers His Last Supper with His disciples (Matthew 26:17-30), His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46) and His betrayal by Judas (Matthew 26:47-56).

Holy Thursday

Passion Gospels



In the evening of Holy Thursday, we remember how Jesus was betrayed and arrested and crucified at the service of the Twelve Gospels. After the fifth Gospel, in some traditions, the priest carries the cross in a procession around the church. The body of Jesus is then placed on the cross in front of the church during the remaining Gospel readings.

During the procession, a special hymn is sung while the faithful kneel: *"Today is hung upon the Tree, he who suspended the land in the midst of waters. A crown of thorns crowns Him, who is the King of Angels. He is wrapped about with the purple of mockery, who wrapped the Heavens with clouds. He received buffetings, who freed Adam in Jordan. He was transfixed with nails, who is the Son of the Virgin. We worship Thy Passion, O Christ. Show also unto us Thy glorious Resurrection."*

This service begins with a Matins service with readings of Psalms and verses. The priest reads twelve Gospels. In some churches, a candelabrum is used to hold twelve candles which are lit one by one after each Gospel. In other churches, it is the custom for all the faithful to hold lighted candles during the reading of the Passion Gospels.

Before each Gospel, the choir sings, "Glory to Thy passion, O Lord" and after the Gospel, the choir sings, "Glory to thy long-suffering O Lord." Hymns, which tell about the people who were present during Christ's Passion, are sung between the Gospels.

Great and Holy Friday- Vespers

Taking Down the Body of Christ



Good Friday is the holiest and most solemn day of the year for Orthodox Christians. On Great and Holy Thursday, we remember the crucifixion of Jesus. On Great and Holy Friday, we celebrate the burial of Jesus. On Good Friday, Great Vespers is celebrated in the afternoon. It is like a regular Vespers service in many ways, yet so different in others. One difference is that it includes a Gospel reading (made of passages from Matthew, Luke and John). Towards the end of the Gospel reading (or in some parishes at the very end of the Gospel) the priest, holding a white cloth, comes out to the cross that holds the crucified Lord and takes down the body from the cross and wraps it in the cloth. "And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb" (Matthew 27:59-60).

A troparion, or special hymn, is sung with these words: *"The Noble Joseph, when he had taken down Thy most pure body from the tree, wrapped it in fine linen and anointed it with spices, and placed it in a new tomb."*

During some special hymns, called the aposticha, a procession takes place. A special "shroud" called the epitaphios or plaschanitsa is carried in procession. The holy shroud is a large cloth with an icon of Christ's burial painted or sewn on it. The clergy process with the shroud to the tomb, which has been placed in the area in front of and in the center of the iconostasis. In some churches, the tomb is beautifully decorated with flowers and greens. We now are ready to bury Jesus. This service, the Matins of Holy Saturday, will be done in the evening.



Good Friday evening

The Burial of Christ

The Matins of Holy Saturday is

celebrated on Good Friday evening. In the Orthodox Church, the day starts at sundown. Hence, after the prokeimenon during the Great Vespers for Great and Holy Friday, it is now, liturgically at least, Saturday. The Matins for Holy Saturday celebrates the burial of Christ. In some parishes, this service is especially moving because of the chanting of all of the lamentations. The lamentations are divided into three parts, or stanzas, each with its own melody. During the chanting of the third stanza, a hymn about the Myrrh Bearing Women is heard. At this point, the priest takes the holy water sprinkler and blesses all with holy water mixed with rose water.

Towards the end of this service, the Great Doxology is chanted. During this, however, the tomb (or in some parishes just the epitaphios or plaschanitsa) is carried around in procession. This procession confirms for us, the faithful, that Christ has defeated the power of death and gives life to all that love and believe in Him.

Great and Holy Saturday Morning

God Has Saved His People



On Saturday morning, the Vesperal

Liturgy of St. Basil the Great is served. The service begins like a Vespers service. Following the Entrance, which has been made with the Gospel, "Gladsome Light" is sung followed by fifteen readings from the Old Testament. The Epistle is taken from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (6:3-11). After the Epistle, something quite moving takes place. Portions of Psalm 82 are chanted: "Arise O Lord and judge the earth, for to Thee belong all the nations," while bay leaves, in some traditions, are scattered all around the church. This is a symbol of the first news of Christ's resurrection from the dead – His destruction of death. In the Gospel reading (Matthew 28:1-20), the women who came to Christ's tomb learn about the Resurrection from an angel. Christ lies dead, yet He is alive; He is "trampling down death by His death and to those in the tombs He bestows life."

Pascha night!

"Come Ye Take the Light"



Have you ever been home during a storm when the lights have gone out? What is it like? We can't see anything, we don't know where anything is, and we are confused. Our lives as Orthodox Christians are not like this because we have The Light, Jesus Christ. We read in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." When we follow Jesus, our path in life is that much easier to navigate. God's way must become our way.

Pascha night is the most important night in the Church liturgical year. The Church celebrates twelve major feast days and Pascha is not one of them. It is the Feast of Feasts, Holy Day of holy days. When you enter the church that night, the church is in total darkness. In some parishes, readers have kept vigil over the tomb of Christ since Good Friday night reading from the book of Acts and the Gospels. At midnight as the Nocturne service concludes, the curtain in front of the Royal Doors is opened and the priest in his white Paschal vestments stands there with a lit candle. He and the choir chant: "Come ye take light from the light, that is never overtaken by night, come glorify Christ Risen from the dead." As this is chanted, the people come one by one to have their candle lit from the Light. After all have had their candles lit, all those gathered go outside for the Resurrection service.



Pascha Night!

"Open the Gates"

After all the candles are lit, the joyous Paschal procession begins. The procession circles the church (or in some traditions processes out the front door) while the faithful are singing and the bells are ringing. The processional hymn is sung: "The angels in heaven, O Christ our Savior, sing of thy resurrection and enable us to glorify thee with a pure heart."

The Resurrection is announced with the reading of Saint Mark's Gospel (16:1-8). The words "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is Risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him" bring great joy to the faithful. After the Gospel is read, the Paschal Troparion is sung by all: "Christ is Risen from the dead, trampling down death by death. And to those in the tombs bestowing life." This one hymn sums up the Christian faith. As St. Paul says, "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile" (I Corinthians 15:17).

After hymns and petitions are chanted, something very dramatic and powerful happens in some traditions. Quoting from Psalm 23, the priest bangs on the front door of the church and says, "Lift up ye gates, O ye princes; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting gates, and the King of glory shall enter in." A person who has remained inside the darkened church responds to the priest: "Who is this King of glory?" The priest replies, "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in war." Knocking again, the priest repeats "Lift up ye gates..." two more times and the person responds with the same question. After the third time, the doors are opened wide and the priest replies to the question "Who is this King of glory?" with "The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory."



Pascha!

"Christ is Risen!"

The faithful re-enter the church to continue the service of Paschal Matins. In this picture, the priest is censuring the faithful as he shouts, "Christ is risen" and the people respond, "Truly He is risen." Throughout the Paschal Matins service, the priest censures the church and exclaims "Christ is risen" many times.

Sometimes the priest will say it in as many languages as he knows. The Paschal candle in this picture has three candles. It represents the Trinity. In some churches, just one candle is used. In other churches, the candle is decorated with beautiful flowers. The church itself is also festively decorated.



Pascha Afternoon

Agape Vespers - Resurrection

On the afternoon of Pascha, the Vespers of the Resurrection is celebrated. This service is usually referred to as the Agape Vespers. The word "agape" means love. At this service, the Resurrection Gospel of St. John 20:19-25 is read in many languages, and a procession with the icon of the Resurrection takes place. The faithful who know different languages share in the reading of the Resurrection Gospel.

The week after Pascha is called "Bright Week," and the doors of the iconostasis remain open to signify the empty tomb. Bright Week is a period of Christian joy filled with rejoicing and feasting.