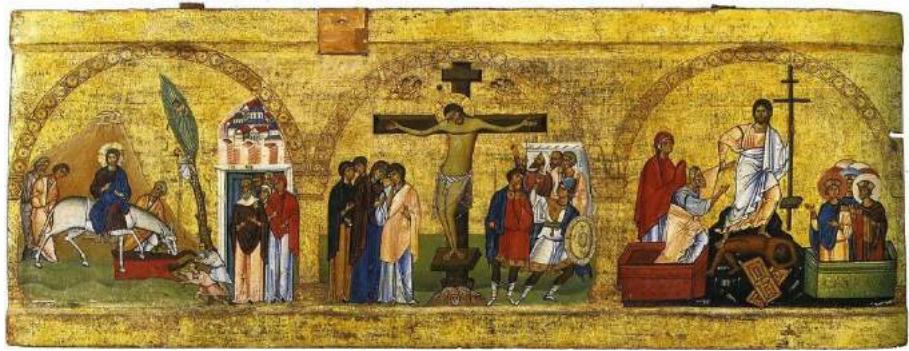


The Journey to Pascha Through Icons

Lazarus Saturday
Epistle: Hebrews 12:28-13:8
Gospel: John 11:1-45



About the Feast

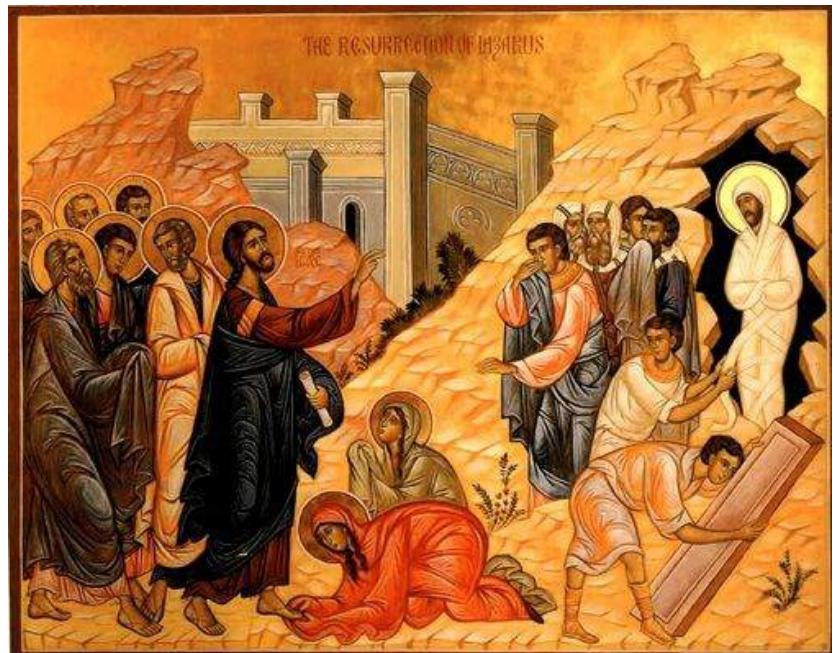
Lazarus Saturday is a paschal celebration. It is the only time in the entire Church Year that the resurrection service of Sunday is celebrated on another day. At the Liturgy of Lazarus Saturday, the Church glorifies Christ as "the Resurrection and the Life" who by raising Lazarus has confirmed the universal resurrection of mankind even before His own suffering and death.

At the Divine Liturgy of Lazarus Saturday, the baptismal verse from Galatians ("As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" **Galatians 3:27**) replaces the Thrice-Holy Hymn, thus indicating the resurrectional character of the celebration, and the fact that Lazarus Saturday was once among the few great baptismal days in the Orthodox Church Year.

Because of the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead, Christ was hailed by the masses as the long-expected Messiah-King of Israel. When in fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament, he entered Jerusalem, the City of the King, riding on the colt of an ass (**Zechariah 9:9; John 12:12**) the crowds greeting him with waving branches and shouts of praise: Hosanna! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord! The Son of David! The King of Israel! Because of this glorification by the people, the Jewish priests and scribes were finally driven "to destroy Him, to put Him to death." (**Luke 19:47; John 11:53, 12:10**)

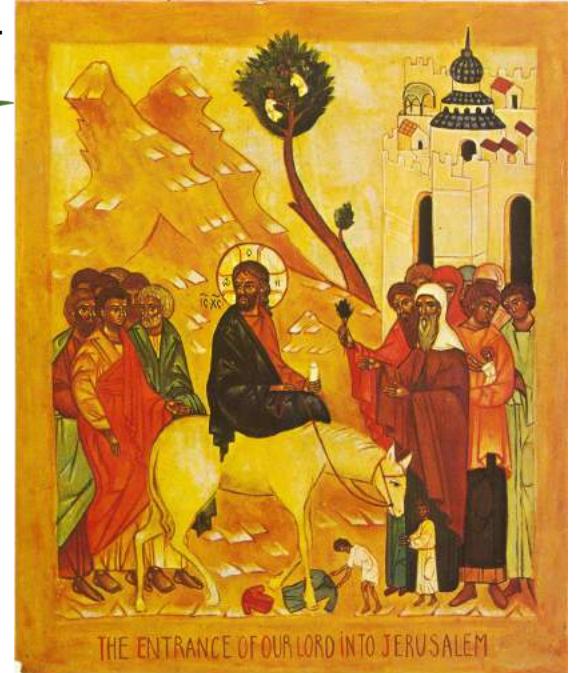
About the Icon

This icon is very visual and factual of what happened that day, there are no hidden meanings, it is just what happened. It offers the physical side of the miracle, and makes it accessible to human understanding. This was a situation that was meant to be seen, Christ knew that His friend Lazarus was ill and He could have returned earlier to either heal him or raise him just after his death, but rather He chose to make it a more visually impressive miracle by raising a person who has been dead for 4 days and is wrapped in linen. A man is rolling away the stone to show that it would not have been possible for Lazarus to come out without assistance. Those in attendance hold their noses because of the smell, all of these details are included to show how real and impressive this miracle was. St. Peter, representing all the twelve disciples, and Sts. Mary and Martha the sisters of Lazarus stand behind Christ. The walled city of Jerusalem, where Christ will arrive in triumph the following day, is depicted in the background.



Palm Sunday The feast of Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem,

Matthew 21:1-11, 15-17 (Matins Gospel)
Philippians 4:4-9
John 12:1-18



About the Feast

A palm branch is a symbol of joy and feasting, the Jews used them to welcome people of high rank. Children play an integral part of the icons and the story. It is the children who treat Him as the rightful king with their spreading of coats and palm branches,. Even though it really is a sad time; Christ is heading toward His crucifixion, it is a joyous icon because He is recognized for what He has always been and will be known for The King of Glory. It is those with child-like simplicity and devotion who truly praise the Lord.

There had been prophecies in the Old Testament telling of this event. ***Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. Zech 9:9*** As He came into the city the crowds greeted Him with branches in their hands and shouted praises: ***"Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna to David's son"*** The beginning of Christ's Passion is today's triumphal procession; the people expected a king, a leader – and they found the Saviour of their souls. Nothing embitters a person so much as a lost, and disappointed hope. This helps to explain why people who had received Him with honor, who witnessed the raising of Lazarus, who saw Christ's miracles and heard His teaching, and admired His every word, who were ready to become His disciples as long as He brought victory, broke away from Him, turned their backs on Him a few days later shouted, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." When the Jewish scribes and priests heard them call Christ the Son of David, it proved to them that He really was Jewish and people were calling Him king. The glorification of Christ by the crowds drove the priests and the scribes to plan to destroy Him and put Him to death.

At the vigil of the feast of Palm Sunday the prophecies of the Old Testament about the Messiah-King are read together with the Gospel accounts of the entry of Christ into Jerusalem. At Matins, branches are blessed for the people to carry throughout the celebration as a sign of their own glorification of Jesus Christ as Saviour and King. These branches are usually palms, or, in the Slavic churches, pussy willows which came to be customary because of their availability and their early blossoming in the springtime.

About the Icon

Even though Christ comes into Jerusalem in a simple way, we can see His invisible glory through the Halo. The scroll He holds, symbolizes Holy Wisdom. His disciples follow behind Him. They were concerned about Christ's return to Jerusalem, it was the seat of the Jewish religious authorities who were determined to kill Him. Christ is turning back to encourage the disciples to have faith. Out of Jerusalem's gates come the Hebrews who had gathered for Passover. They cry out to Him with honor but it the *children* who are laying down their garments and cutting down palm branches

The message is clear: it is those with child-like simplicity and devotion who truly praise the Lord, whilst the adults – both the Apostles and the Jews – tend to get distracted and start wondering among themselves.

The celebration of Bridegroom Matins

About the Service

Bridegroom Matins are services specific to the beginning of Holy Week. They are called Bridegroom in remembrance of the 10 Virgins who were awaiting the Bridegroom with their lamps. The Hymn of the Bridegroom warns us to be prepared for Christ's coming. ***Behold the Bridegroom comes at midnight, and blessed is the servant whom he shall find watching, and unworthy is the servant whom he shall find heedless. Beware, therefore, oh my soul. Do not be weighed down with sleep, lest you be given up to death, and lest you be shut out of the kingdom. But rouse yourself, crying, Holy, Holy, Holy are Thou our God. Through the Theotokos, have mercy on us.***

Incorporated into these services are the themes for the beginning of Holy Week; repentance and watchfulness. These are the last teachings of Christ to his disciples. As such, these services incorporate readings and hymns to give us inspiring lessons. The mood of the services is to experience sorrow and to feel Christ's voluntary submission to His passions and highlight the purpose behind the evil that is about to take place against the Lord. The atmosphere is one of mourning for our sins.



It might be expected for the Bridegroom icon to show Christ in Glory, or at His Second Coming. Yet the Icon shows Christ humiliated by Pontius Pilate's soldiers. In a cruel irony, the soldiers mockingly worshiped Jesus and through insults proclaimed Him rightly to be the King of the Jews. Crowned with thorns, cloaked in scarlet, bound and holding a reed, this is how Christ appears in the Bridegroom Icon.

The crown is a symbol of Christian marriage in the Orthodox Church, and the ropes binding Christ's hand are a near-universal symbol of marriage. The reed used as a mock-scepter is a symbol of humility, of a person that does all possible to bend in service to others. In stark contrast to the fearsome images of Christ the King presented at the beginning of Lent, we are now presented with our suffering Bridegroom. Why does He suffer? Because of human sin. The betrayal of Judas, the hatred of the Jews, the cowardiness of Pilate, the cruelty of the Romans: this is why Christ appears as He does. What form of humanity is not represented by those who mocked Jesus? Yet still He stands before us. While we are still as unfaithful as harlots, Christ is betrothed to us. This is Divine Love, *that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. Such perfect, divine, love casts out all fear; and so instead of the stern Judge of the Apocalypse to spur us to repentance, we "behold the man": the Bridegroom Who burns with such love for us that He suffers death on the Cross.

This Icon, this image of the Bridegroom, shows us nothing more than what the Roman soldiers who spat upon Christ saw. It is up to us whether we see beyond the bloody, brutalized, Jew before us and recognize our divine spouse. A good sign we have benefited from the rigors of Lent is when we look upon our humiliated King and still worship Him.

We must not be like the Jews who with hard-hearts hailed Him as king, bowed down before him, then led Him off to be executed. Our worship, our repentance, must be longer-lasting.

Matthew 24:3-35 (Gospel)

Monday ~ Christ's Cursing of the Fig tree and Blessed Joseph

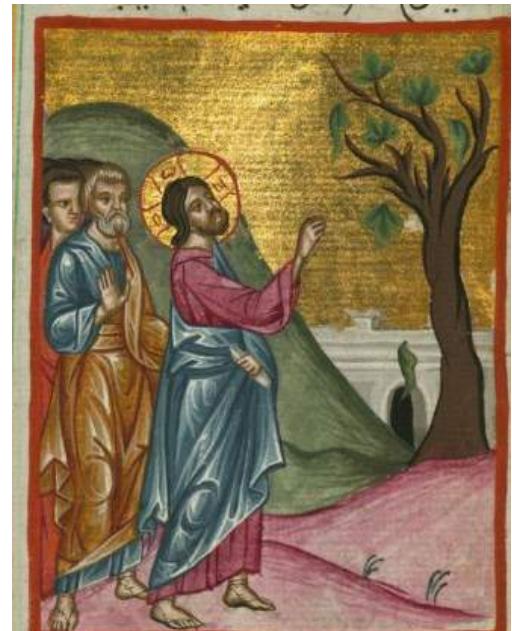
About the Day

In Gospel times, in Palestine, fruit trees were often planted in vineyards. Three years had to pass before the fruit of the fig tree would become fit for picking and use. The fig tree in the parable did not bear fruit after the three year period, even though it had been given all of its needs to grow into a healthy, producing tree. Among the Jewish people, there was a tale of such a tree. This was a story known by many at that time including the disciples. "The vine dresser, or person in charge of the trees, asks the owner for mercy for the tree, when it was seen that this tree will be cut down. He begs the owner to give him a chance to nurture the tree to bear fruit. The tree's owner makes a decision to cut the tree down. The owner reminds the vine dresser that in spite of the fact that it grew next to a spring, the tree had not produced. The tree begged the owner: 'Transplant me, and if I do not bear fruit in the new place either, then cut me down'. In reply, the owner said: 'When thou didst stand next to the water, thou didst not bear fruit. Why then should fruit appear on thy branches if thou should stand in a different place?'" Jesus used this well-known tale in His parable. In the parable of the barren fig tree, God's longsuffering toward the chosen people, who occupied a special position, just as the fig tree in the vineyard, is underscored. The vineyard symbolizes the whole world and all its peoples. God expected from His people a living faith in His Son, repentance and a life according to faith; but the absence of this in the masses brought down God's wrath upon them, which is expressed in the parable under the guise of the owner's decision to cut down the barren fig tree. But the kindhearted Christ (the vinedresser), doing everything possible throughout the course of His public ministry in order to bring the people to the saving faith and awaiting from it the fruits of His labors, entreated the Father to put off the judgment of the people, desiring to give understanding through His teaching and deeds to all those who still could be saved (Luke 13:7-9).

The Saviour's kindheartedness is the main thought of the parable. The three years of the owner's waiting for the vine-dresser in the parable signify the three years of Christ's public ministry. The fourth year is the year of the final rejection of Christ by the people, His crucifixion and the consequences - the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and the subjugation of Israel by the Romans. The very same thought is expressed symbolically by the Saviour in the cursing of the barren fig tree that took place not long before His passion.

The withering of the fig tree was a miracle of special symbolism, since the tree had leaves, but no fruit. It is symbolic of the many people who claim ethical and religious identity, but who in reality have empty lives that yield no fruit. This was also the case with some of the Pharisees of that period in which the Saviour did not find the necessary fruits of obedience to God and faith in Him, but only the leafy shade of the Law; He took away even this, leaving it completely bare. Jesus cursed the tree: "*May no fruit ever come from you again!*" As disciples of Christ being led towards the Resurrection, we must not cultivate our outward piety whilst neglecting the genuine fruits of faith. Those who belong to Christ ought to live and walk in the Spirit; and the Spirit will bear fruit in them. If we are without fruit, the withered fig tree reminds us of Christ's swift strictness at the Last Judgment.

Blessed Joseph, the son of Jacob the Patriarch is also commemorated on this day. Joseph is often seen as a type of Christ. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, thrown into a pit, and sold into slavery by them. In the same way, Christ was rejected, betrayed by His own, and sold into the slavery of death.



Monday

Matthew 21:18-43 (Bridegroom Matins Gospel)

6th Hour and Vespers Ezekiel 1:1-20 ~ Exodus 1:1-20~
Job 1:1-12

Tuesday of Holy Week

On this day the Church commemorates two Parables of Christ.

Parable of the Ten Virgins

The first is the Parable of the Ten Virgins with its teaching about vigilance. The virgins take their lamps to wait for the bridegroom, Christ, to come. The five wise virgins have enough oil in their lamps because they had prepared themselves; they were admitted. The five foolish ones had no oil as they had not prepared themselves, when they returned it was too late. The bridal chamber is used as a symbol not only of the Tomb of Christ but also of the blessed state of the saved on the Day of Judgement. We must be prepared at all times. St. Seraphim of Sarov explained that our preparation is not complete unless we have done it for the right reason. Good works alone will not prepare us, it is “good works” done to acquire the Spirit of God that will lead us into the Kingdom.

Parable of the Talents

In the times of the Gospel, a talent denoted a very large sum of money. A talent corresponded to sixty minas. A mina equaled a hundred dinarii. During the earthly life of the Saviour, an ordinary worker earned one dinarius a day

In the Parable of the Talents we are instructed to use our God-given gifts in the service of God. The Parable tells the story of a master who entrusts his property to his three servants and in accordance to the abilities of each man, each servant received a talent. One of the three received five talents, the second servant received two talents, and the third servant received one talent. The servants were sent out to make use of their talents. When they returned home the master asked his three servants for an accounting of the talents he had entrusted to them. The first and the second servants explained that they each put their talents to work and doubled the value of the property with which they were entrusted. These servants were rewarded by the master. However, the third servant had not utilized his gift and merely hid his talent. His master, seeing he had not done anything with his talent cursed him and took away from him the one talent he had been given and gave it to the one who had been given five.

In preparing to leave this world, Christ charged His disciples to continue His work and to see to their own personal salvation and the salvation of others. To enable His followers to labor successfully, He gave them essential spiritual gifts - talents - to each according to his strength. As we see in the parable of the talents a man's spiritual strength is determined by how well he has learned to overcome his own will and do God's will. Whoever has acquired greater strength also receives greater gifts



Tuesday

Matthew 22:15-23:39 (Bridegroom Matins Gospel)

6th Hour and Vespers Ezekiel 1:21-2:1 ~ Exodus 2:5-10 ~ Job 1:13-22

Matthew 24:36-26:2 (Gospel)

Holy Wednesday: Day of Repentance and Forgiveness.

About the feast

On the Wednesday before His death, Christ was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the Leper. When He came the house He was not

received with traditional honor of washing of feet or being kissed in welcome.. A sinful woman came to hear the words of Christ and with tears of repentance broke open an Alabaster bottle filled with spikenard, a very expensive bottle and oil,. She anointed our Lord 's feet kissed and washed them with her hair. The other disciples were angry saying this was a waste and the oil could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Christ accepted her offering saying it was in anticipation of His death. Her repentance and love for Christ is in contrast to the decision of one of the apostles, Judas Iscariot, to betray his Teacher for thirty pieces of silver. The one inherited the Kingdom and the other, by his own will, perished. The one believed in Christ and shared in His glory... the other abandoned Christ and perished in dishonor! The one had hope in redemption and resurrection and the other one only saw misery and despair.

This Gospel story gives us hope and at the same time serves as a serious warning to all people. It lets sinners, non-believers, and wretched ones hope that forgiveness is still possible, that the Lord is waiting for their repentance and is ready to forgive any sins or failures. The Lord addressed the elders of the nation with the following words, *Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you*" (Matthew 21:31). Yet, it's also a warning to all people who think that they are close to the Lord, that they are the Lord's favorite disciples, and who take the liberty to look down on apparent sinners. Harlots and other sinners can repent and go into the Heavenly Kingdom, while religious people who do not have the spirit of love and compassion can be cast away by Christ who came to save his lost sheep. On this night the inspiring and wonderful "Hymn of Kassiane" which is chanted, *reminding us one more time, before "it is too late," that we may be forgiven if we truly repent of our sins.*

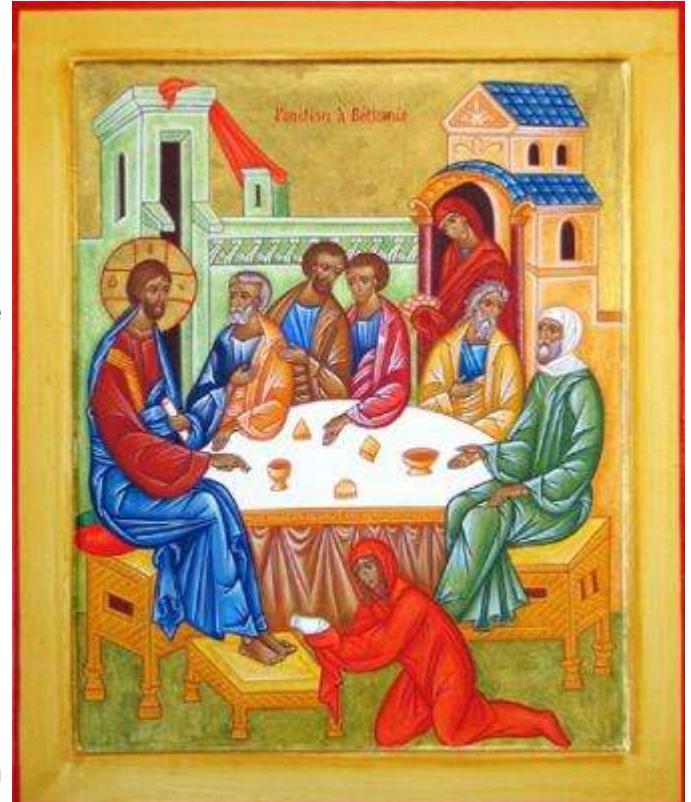
We are also reminded of this lesson as we approach for Holy Communion:

"...who, at all times and in every hour, in heaven and on earth, is worshipped and glorified, Christ our God, the good, the long suffering, the abundant in mercy, and the great in compassion, who loves the righteous and has mercy on the sinners of whom I am chief; who does not wish the death of the sinner but rather that he returns and lives, who calls all to salvation for the promise of the blessings to come."

Service of Holy Unction

The sacrament of Holy Unction is celebrated in larger parishes on Holy and Great Wednesday evening.

Actually this holy service can be celebrated any time during the year, especially when one is ill. However, because of our need for forgiveness and spiritual healing, it is often offered Great Lent or during Holy and Great Week for the **remission of our sins.**



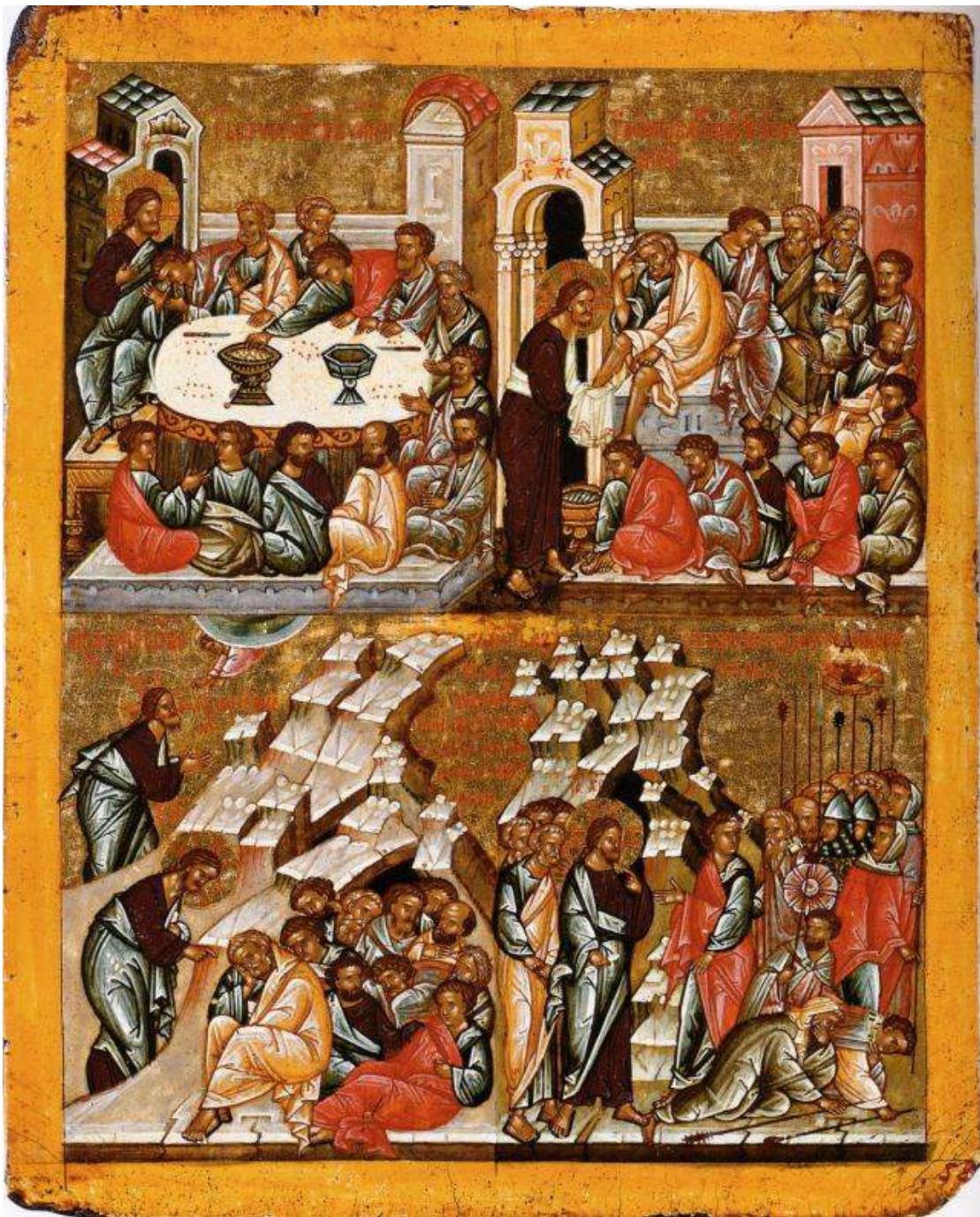
Wednesday

John 12:17-50 (Bridegroom Matins Gospel)

6th Hour and Vespers– Ezekiel 2:3-3:3~Exodus 2:11-22~Job 2:1-10

Matthew 26:6-16 (Gospel)

HOLY THURSDAY



§*The Mystical Last Supper*

§*Christ washing the Feet of the Disciples In Humility*

§*Prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane*

§*The Betrayal of Christ with a Kiss by Judas*

Holy Thursday ~ Christ's Washing of the Disciples' Feet

About the Feast

Jesus Christ, knowing He would be betrayed that night, came with His twelve disciples to a room which had been prepared for the Passover by Peter and John. When they were seated at the table, Christ said, *"I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God."* Then, He rose, laid aside His garments, and girded Himself with a towel to begin to wash the disciple's feet. (This was a custom in this dry land, however it was usually done by a servant and none of the disciples were willing to wash each other's feet.) After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel. When He came to Simon Peter, Peter said to Him, *'Lord, are You washing my feet?'* Christ answered and said to him, *'What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.'* Peter said to Him, *'You shall never wash my feet.'* Christ answered him, *'If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.'* Simon Peter replied, *'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.'* Christ said to him, *'He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.'* When He had washed their feet, and taken His garments He resumed His place at the table. He said to them *"Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."* (John 13:12-16). By this example, the Lord demonstrated not only His love for His disciples but also taught them humility, that is, not to consider it beneath oneself to serve someone even though he may be of lesser status.

In cathedrals with Bishops or monasteries with Abbots, the remembrance of the washing of the feet is reenacted. The Bishop/Abbot stands before his 12 priests, takes off his vestments, wraps a towel around his waist, goes down on his knees in front of them and begins to actually wash each of the priests' foot. In anticipation of this the priests are only wearing a sandal, but still the

Bishop kneels down before them, takes the foot in hand and actually washes and dries the foot. This is a very humbling experience for those who are having their feet washed; this is their superior, the person who is held higher than all of them, and yet he bows before them.

In the Icon

Christ is washing the feet of Simon Peter who is pointing to his head and asking that it be washed as well.

Judas is the disciple in front away from the others.

Holy Thursday Readings

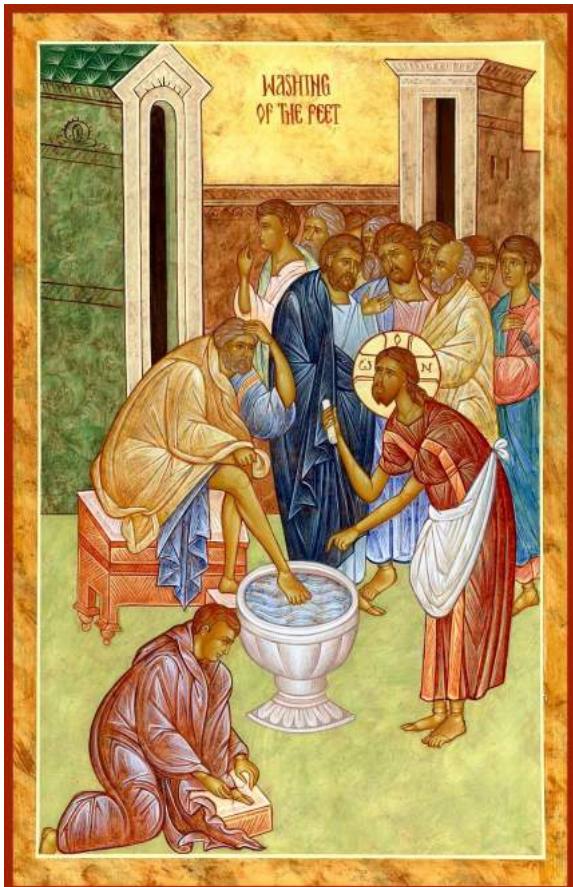
Luke 22:1-39 Matins

Jeremiah 11:18-12:5; 12:9-11, 14,15 First Hour

Exodus 19:10-19 ~ Job 38:1-23; 42:1-5 ~Isaiah 50:4-11 Vespers

Corinthians 11:23-32 Liturgy

Matthew 26:2-20; John 13:3-17; Matthew 26:21-39; Luke 22:43-44;
Matthew 26:40 –27:2 (one continuous Gospel) Liturgy



Holy Thursday—The Mystical Last Supper

About the Feast

After the eating the Old Testament Jewish Passover, Jesus Christ established on this evening the sacrament of Holy Communion. Therefore, the occasion is called in the Orthodox Church the "Mystical Supper." Jesus Christ took bread, blessed it, broke it in pieces, and giving it to the disciples said, "*Take, eat; this is My Body, which is broken for you for the remission of sins;*" He took a cup of wine; and when He had given thanks to God the Father for all His mercy to the race of mankind, He gave it to the disciples saying "*Drink of it, all of you; for this is My Blood of the New Covenant, Which is poured out for you for the remission of sins.*" These words indicate that under the appearance of bread and wine the Saviour taught His disciples that it was His own Body and own Blood which on the next day He would give up to suffering and death for our sins. How the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of the Lord is a mystery, incomprehensible even to the angels, and is therefore called **Mystical**.

After giving the Eucharist to the apostles, the Lord gave the commandment to always perform this sacrament. He said, '*Do this in remembrance of Me*' (I Cor. 11:25). This sacrament is performed by us now in the Divine Liturgy.

During the sacramental Mystical Last Supper, the Saviour revealed to the apostles that one of them would betray Him. They were very sorrowful and bewildered. Looking at one another, in fear they began to ask after one another, "Is it I, Lord?" Judas said, "Is it I, Master?" The Saviour quietly said to him, "You have said it." Peter beckoned to John who lying close to the breast of the Saviour, and said, "Tell us of whom He speaks." John, asked the Saviour quietly "Lord, who it is?" Christ quietly answered, "It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I shall have dipped it." So when He had dipped the morsel in a dish with salt, He gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, and said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly."

In the Icon

We see Judas turned away from the table, his hand is holding money, he does not have a halo as he has already betrayed Christ. Next to Christ is Apostle John who asks Christ if he is the one who will accidentally betray Him. The wine chalice and the plate for the host are in front of Christ as He offers, His body and His blood (Holy Communion) for the first time.



Thursday Evening—The Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane and The Betrayal of Christ

Entering the garden of Gethsemane, Christ said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go yonder and pray." Taking with Him Peter, James, and John, He went deep into the garden, and He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then, He said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch with Me." And going a little farther, he fell on His face and prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as Thou wilt." Having prayed thus, Jesus Christ returned to the three disciples and found them sleeping. He said to them, "So you could not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation." Again, for the second time, He went away and prayed. And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy, and they did not know what to answer Him. So, leaving them again, He went away and prayed for the third time saying the same words. And there appeared to Him an angel from Heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling from His brow to the ground. And when He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and said, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand." While He was still speaking, Judas, the betrayer, came with a great crowd with lanterns, and torches, and weapons. It was a band of soldiers and some officers sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to seize Jesus Christ. Judas spoke with them, "The One I shall kiss is the man; seize Him." He came up to Jesus at once and said, "Hail, Master!" And he kissed Him. Jesus Christ said to Him, "Friend, why are you here? Would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?" These words of the Saviour were for Judas the last appeal to repentance. Then, Jesus Christ knowing all that was to befall Him came forward to the throng and said to them, "Whom do you seek? "From the crowd they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." The Saviour answered, "It is I." From these words, the soldiers and officers drew back and fell to the ground. When they had recovered from fear and rose, they tried in confusion to seize the disciples of Christ. The Saviour again said, "Whom do you seek?" They said, "Jesus of Nazareth." "I told you that I am He," answered the Saviour. "So, if you seek Me, let those men go." So the band of soldiers and the officers seized and bound Jesus Christ. The apostles wanted to defend their Teacher. Peter having a sword drew it, and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. But Jesus Christ said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath, for all who take the sword shall perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? How then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so? Shall I not drink the cup (of suffering) which the Father has given Me for the salvation of people?



**On Thursday Evening, (The Matins for Friday) The 12 Passion Gospels are read,
telling the story of Christ's Suffering and Death**

The death of Christ had been sought by the religious leaders in Jerusalem from the earliest days of His public ministry. The formal charges made against Him usually fell into the following two categories:

1) violation of the Law of the Old Testament, e.g., breaking the Sabbath rest;

2) blasphemy: making Himself equal with God.

He spoke plainly. He said that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. He chastised the scribes and Pharisees for reducing religion to a purely external affair.

It was the second formal charge; however, that became the basis for His conviction.

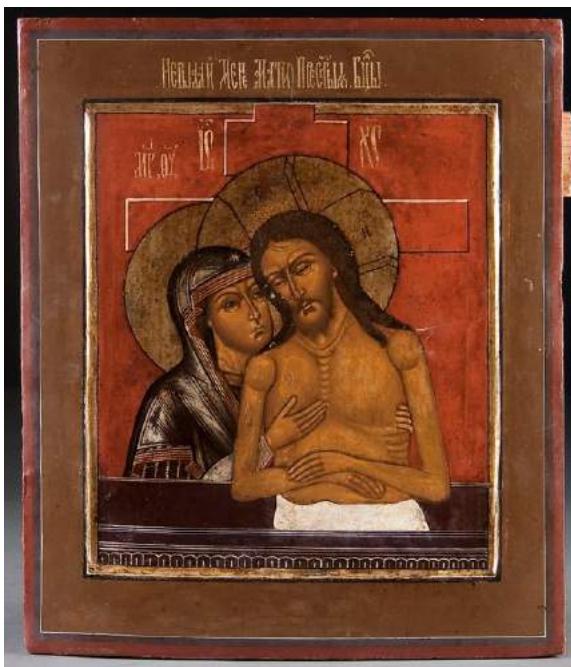
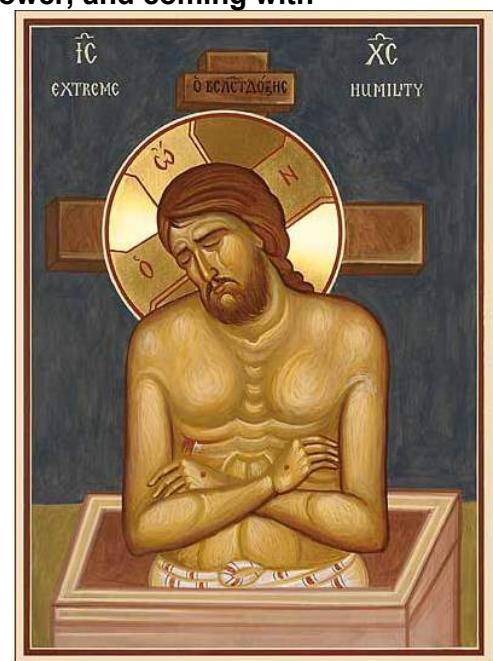
Christ's conviction and death sentence required two trials: religious and political. The religious trial was first and took place during the night immediately after His arrest. After considerable difficulty in finding witnesses for the prosecution who actually agreed in their testimony, Caiaphas, the high priest, asked Jesus the essential question: "Are you Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

Jesus, who had remained silent to this point, now responded directly:

"I am; and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" Mark 14:62

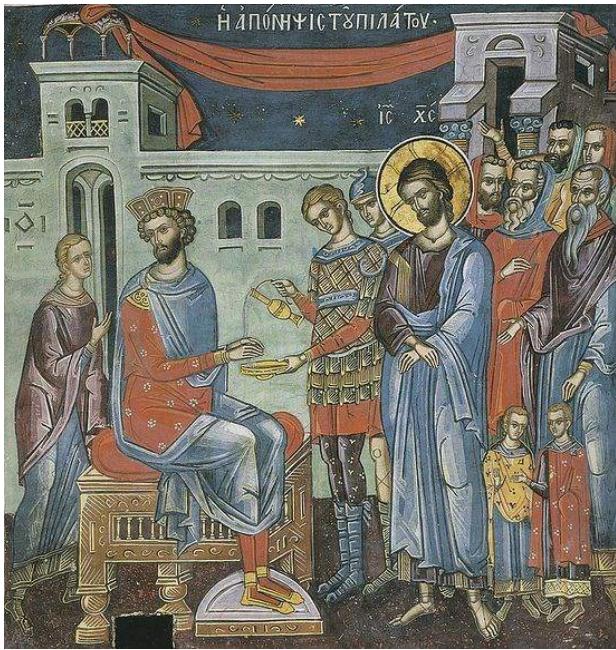
Twelve Passion Gospels

1. St. John 13:31 thru Ch. 18:1
2. St. John 18:1-29
3. St. Matthew 26:57-75
4. St. John 18:28 thru Ch. 19:16
5. St. Matthew 27:3-32
6. St. Mark 15:16-32
7. St. Matthew 27:33-54
8. St. Luke 23:32-49
9. St. John 19:38-42
10. St. Mark 15:43-47
11. St. John 19:38-42
12. St. Matthew 27:62



Jesus Christ after having been condemned to be crucified, was handed over to the soldiers. Again, they beat, insulted, and mocked Him. They mocked Him as a king with a robe and a crown of thorns.

And Christ spent this time in loneliness, knowing what was in store for Him, abandoned by every one except the Mother of God, who stood silently by, as she had done throughout her life, participating in His tragic ascent to the Cross; she who had accepted the Annunciation, the Good Tidings, but who also accepted in silence Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce her heart

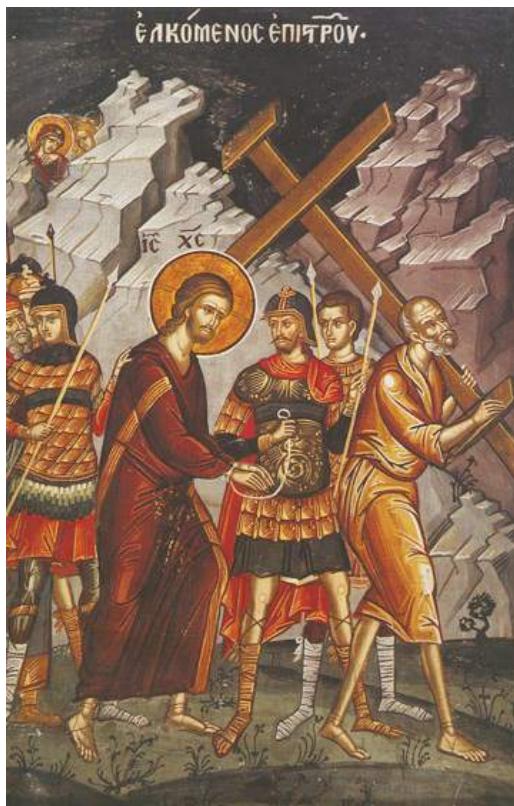
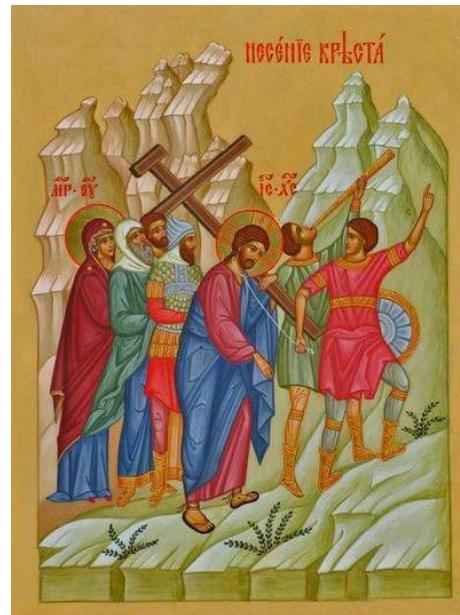


Christ stands before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, Pilate asks the crowds gathered

who should be released? The crowd answers Barabbas. Pilate is not faithful or courageous enough to go against their wishes. Instead he takes a basin and washes his hands of the matter. As Pontius Pilate sits on the judgment seat, his wife sent a message to him, saying, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him". *According to many authors, Pilate's wife was later converted to Christ, and, according to some evidence, she was executed as a Christian.*

Having been beaten and whipped, Christ's body was weakened and yet the soldiers had Him carry the cross to His crucifixion as was the practice at that time. It was done so that all could see the guilty one and further humiliate Him.

Our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to carry the Cross. This calling is illustrated in the following sayings of our Lord: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Matt. 16:24). In this icon you can see the Mother of God as she follows her Son to Golgotha. follows her son.



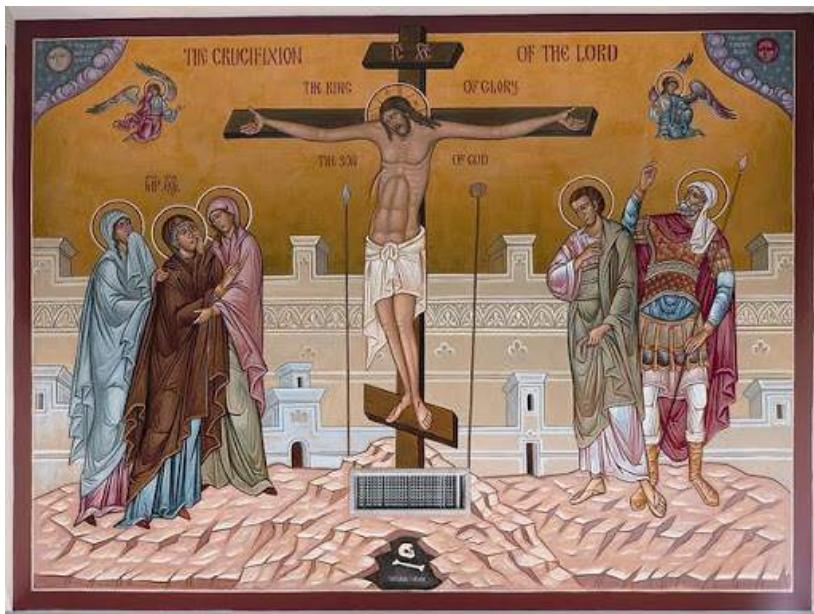
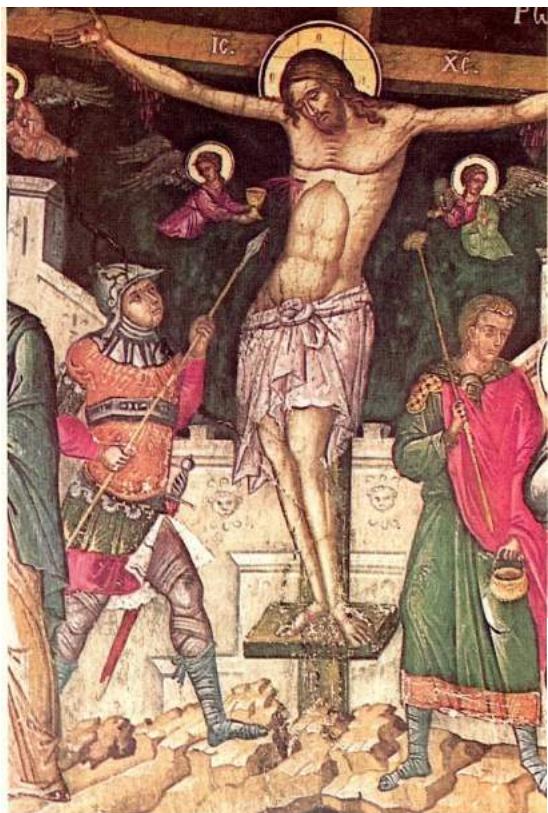
A great multitude of people followed Him. The road was hilly. Exhausted by beating and lashing, worn out by spiritual suffering, Jesus Christ could

hardly walk and several times fell from the weight of the cross. When they went out of the city gate where the road began to go uphill, Jesus Christ was unable to continue carrying the cross. The soldiers came upon a man who was compassionately watching Christ. It was *Simon, a Cyrenian*,

returning from work in the country. The soldiers seized him and compelled him to carry the cross of Christ.

On Great and Holy Friday, Christ died on the Cross.

He gave up His spirit with the words: "**It is finished**"; He had accomplished the work for which His heavenly Father had sent Him into the world. He became a man in the fullest sense of the word. He accepted the baptism of repentance from John in the Jordan River. He assumed the whole human condition, experiencing all its alienation, agony, and suffering, concluding with the lowly death on the Cross. As the end approached, He cried: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" This cry indicated His complete identification with the human condition. He had totally embraced the despised, forsaken and smitten condition of suffering and death - alienation from God. Yet, it is important to note that Jesus' cry of anguish from the Cross was not a sign of His loss of faith in His Father. The words which He exclaimed are the first verse of Psalm 22, a messianic Psalm. The first part of the Psalm foretells the anguish, suffering and death of the Messiah. The second part is a song of praise to God. It predicts the final victory of the Messiah.



The sword which pierced
Christ's side and the sponge
with vinegar given to him when
he called out, "I thirst"

Standing next to the cross as Christ is crucified are His mother, and the two Marys, on the right are Apostle John and the Centurion, Longinus a Roman soldier who served in Judea under the command of the Governor, Pontius Pilate. When our Savior Jesus Christ was crucified, Longinus and his soldiers stood at the base of the Cross, they were eyewitnesses of the final moments of the earthly life of the Lord, and of the great and awesome portents that appeared at His death. These events shook the centurion's soul. Longinus believed in Christ and confessed before everyone, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Mt. 27:54).

After the Crucifixion and Burial of the Savior, Longinus stood watch with his company at the Sepulcher of the Lord. These soldiers were present at the All-Radiant Resurrection of Christ. The Jews bribed them to lie and say that His disciples had stolen away the Body of Christ, but Longinus and two of his comrades refused to be seduced by the Jewish gold. They also refused to remain silent about the miracle of the Resurrection.

Icons of the Crucifixion

The icons of the crucifixion tell the story of Christ's suffering and death. By reading the icon you can see everything the way it happened. Christ is hanging on the cross in the center, He is the most important part of the icon. Christ was crucified on a hill outside of Jerusalem, He was placed on a cross along with two other robbers. Crucifixion was a common method of capital punishment among the Romans. According to the Gospels, the accusation against Christ or the "crime" he had committed was written on a board above his head; INRI this stands for "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews". Christ was stripped of his clothing and nailed to the cross, where he hung in agony for six hours before he died. Christ is surrounded by both angelic and earthly onlookers, His mother, the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene and Mary Cleopa Apostle John and Longinos, the Centurion or Roman soldier. At the foot of the Cross, we find the skull and bones of Adam, the First Man. Tradition tells us that Golgotha was called the Place of the Skull because the bones of Adam had been brought and buried there by the descendants of Noah. When the Lord died, a great earthquake split apart the rocks, and the blood of the Lord flowed down from the Cross and on to the bones of Adam, indicating the redemption of fallen human nature made possible to the whole human race.



Taking Down From the Cross

Apostle John is kissing Christ's hand, the Mother of God holds His head. The two men who bury Jesus Christ had not publicly associated with him before. Joseph of Arimathea was indeed a disciple, but he was so *secretly because he feared the Jews*. And Nicodemus, though not actually called a "disciple," nevertheless had *visited Jesus at night* and had affirmed at that time that Jesus was a teacher come from God. Thus, these are two of the people referred to earlier, who were secret believers, "for they loved praise from men more than praise from God" Now, at Jesus Christ's death, they are no longer under this condemnation; they have passed from hiding in the darkness to coming into the light. In revealing their love and respect for Christ, they had nothing to gain and everything to lose. This action makes the extent of their dissent evident to their fellow Jewish leaders. Their request for the body was also a very courageous act. The Romans would often leave the body on the cross for days, although they might allow family to take down a body for burial, they would not do this in the case of treason. Thus, Joseph had no claims on the body and, depending on how Pilate viewed the case, would have been putting himself in considerable danger. But Pilate had clearly said three times that Jesus was innocent, which may account for his allowing Joseph to take the body. In addition, by allowing Jesus to have a decent burial Pilate would be able to anger the Jewish leadership. Nicodemus purchased a large amount of spices and a cloth to wrap Christ in. Joseph offered his new tomb for Christ to be laid. Since it was the Sabbath, they only laid Him in the tomb, with the intention of coming back to give Him a

proper burial. The tomb was closed with a heavy stone and guarded by soldiers to ensure no one was able to steal his body and claim he had been resurrected.



Great and Holy Friday Vespers and Burial of Christ

Holy Friday Morning Royal Hours are read in the morning of Holy Friday. These services consist of hymns, psalms, and readings from the Old and New Testaments, all related prophetically and ethically to the Person of Christ.

Holy Friday Vespers (Afternoon) Vespers (*sung Friday afternoon*) are a continuation of the Royal Hours. During this service, the removal of the Body of Christ from the Cross is commemorated with a sense of mourning for the terrible events which took place. Once more, excerpts from the Old Testament are read together with hymns, and again the entire story is related. The priest then chants a mourning hymn: "When Joseph of Arimathea took Thee, the life of all, down from the Tree dead, he buried Thee with myrrh and fine linen...rejoicing. Glory to Thy humiliation, O Master, who clothes Thyself with light as if it were a garment." The priest then carries the shroud on which the Body of Christ is painted or embroidered around the church before placing it on top of the Sepulcher, or tomb which has been prepared in the center of the church. We are reminded that during Christ's entombment, He descends into Hades to free the dead of the ages before His Incarnation.

Holy Friday Evening - The Lamentation

(*Matins of Saturday morning sung by anticipation, on Friday evening.*)

This service is filled with psalms, hymns, and readings that tell about the death of Christ, in contrast to His divinity, and in expectation of His Resurrection. One of the hymns relates: "He who holds all things is raised up on the Cross and all creation laments to see Him hang naked on the Tree." The thoughtful and well-written *Odes*, sung by the choir, compare the Compassion of God and the cruelty of man, the Might of God and the moral weakness of man. The *Odes* picture all Creation trembling when witnessing its Creator hung by His own creatures: "Creation was moved...with intense astonishment when it beheld Thee hung in Golgotha." The *Odes* remind us of the vision of Isaiah, who saw Christ, "the unwaning light of the manifestation," and cried aloud, "The dead indeed shall arise and all those on earth shall rejoice." During this service, the Body of Christ is carried in procession around the church following the Hymns of Praise. We no longer lament the sufferings of the Crucified One; we now lament chiefly for our own sins because we are far from God. So these services should have a rather personal meaning of repentance and of strong faith in God.



Royal Hours –

- 1st | Zachariah 11:10-13 | Galatians 6:14-18 | Matthew 27:1-56
- 3rd | Isaiah 50:4-11 | Romans 5:6-11 | Mark 15:16-41
- 6th | Isaiah 52:13-54:1 | Amos 8:9-12 | Hebrews 2:11-18 | Luke 23:32-49
- 9th | Jeremiah 11:18-12:5, 9:11, 14-15 | Hebrews 10:19-31 | John 18:28-19:37

Vespers

Exodus 33:11-23 | Job 42:12-17 | Isaiah 52:13-54:1

I Corinthians 1:18-2:2

Matt. 27:1-38; Luke 23:39-43; Matt. 27:39-54; John 19:31-37; Matt. 27:55-61

HOLY AND GREAT SATURDAY

In the understanding of the Church, sorrow is not replaced by joy; **it is transformed into joy.** (Our sorrow of Holy and Great Friday proceeds into the joy of Pascha) This distinction indicates that it is precisely **within death** that Christ continues to triumph. On Pascha we sing that Christ is ". . . trampling down death by death". This phrase gives great meaning to Holy Saturday. Christ's repose in the tomb is an "active" repose. He arises from the dead to descend into Hades and bring Adam to life once again. This is the victory: the dead are given life. The tomb is no longer a forsaken, lifeless place. By His death Christ tramples down death. The traditional icon used by the Church on the feast of Pascha is an icon of Holy Saturday: the descent of Christ into Hades. It is a painting of theology, for no one has ever seen this event. It depicts radiant Christ, standing on the shattered gates of Hades. With arms outstretched He is joining hands with Adam and all the other Old Testament righteous whom He has found there. He leads them from the kingdom of death. By His death He tramples death.

But the pivotal point of the service occurs after the Entrance, when fifteen lessons from the Old Testament are read, all centered on the promise of the Resurrection, all glorifying the ultimate Victory of God, prophesied in the victorious Song of Moses after the crossing of the Red Sea ("Let us sing to the Lord for gloriously has He been glorified"), the salvation of Jonah, and that of the three youths in the furnace.

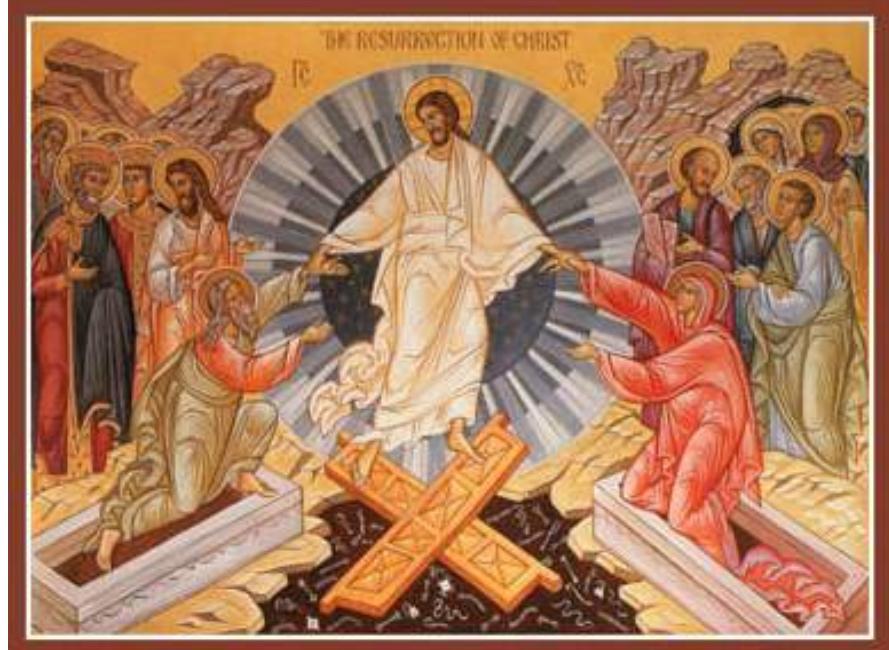
During the special verses sung after the epistle, "Arise O God and judge the earth," the dark Lenten vestments are put aside and the clergy vest in the bright white ones, so that when the priest or deacon appears with the Gospel, the Light of Resurrection is truly made "visible to us. The "Rejoice" with which the Risen Christ greeted the women at the grave is experienced as being directed to us.

The Liturgy of St. Basil continues in this white 'and joyful light, revealing the Tomb of Christ as the Life-giving Tomb, introducing us into the ultimate reality of Christ's Resurrection, communicating His life to us, the children of fallen Adam.

IN THE ICON

The radiance from Christ shines down into Hades, the gates are broken, the keys, nails and chains used to hold those in Hades have been broken underfoot. In His left hand He holds a scroll, the symbol of His preaching in Hades. He pulls Adam and Eve from their tombs. Looking on, around Him are King David and King Solomon, in their robes, St. John the Baptist, Moses with the tablets, Prophets and other righteous who had died. Having seen the Lord Jesus Christ they recognize whom they have prophesized and foretold of.

Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.



THE HOLY RESURRECTION OF CHRIST ~ PASCHÀ

¹ In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. ² And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. ³ His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: ⁴ And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. ⁵ And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. ⁶ He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. ⁷ And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. ⁸ And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word. ⁹ And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. ¹⁰ Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me **Matthew 28:1-10**

