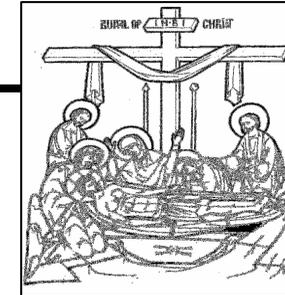


An Explanation of the Holy Week Services



The Liturgy of Holy and Great Saturday is that of Saint Basil the Great. It begins with Vespers. The Old Testament readings tell of the most striking events and prophecies of the salvation of mankind by the death of the Son of God. The account of creation in Genesis is the first reading. The sixth reading is the story of Israel's crossing of the Red Sea and Moses' song of victory - over Pharaoh, with its refrain: 'For gloriously is He glorified'. The last reading is about the Three Children in the fiery furnace of Babylon, and their song of praise with its repeated refrain: 'O praise ye the Lord and supremely exalt Him unto the ages.' In the ancient church the catechumens were baptized during the time of these readings. The Epistle which follows speaks of how, through the death of Christ, we too shall rise to a new life. After the Epistle, the choir chants, like a call to the sleeping Christ: 'Arise, O Lord, Judge the earth, for Thou shalt have an inheritance among all the nations... The deacon carries out the Book of the Gospels, and reads the first message of the resurrection from Saint Matthew. Because the Vespers portion of the service belongs to the next day (Pascha) the burial hymns of Saturday are mingled with those of the resurrection, so that this service is already full of the coming Paschal joy.

After the Liturgy the faithful take their meal, observing the strict fast, to strengthen them to keep watch the rest of the day and evening. The world awaits the proclamation of His Resurrection.

(taken from www.monachos.net)

SYNAXARION OF THE GREAT FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

On the Great and Holy Sunday of Pascha, we celebrate the Life-giving Resurrection of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ: *Pascha*, which, translated from the Hebrew, means *Passover*.

For this is the day on which God created the world from nothingness. On this day, He delivered the Israelites from Pharaoh's hands and led them through the Red Sea. On this day, he descended from heaven and took His dwelling in the Virgin's womb; now drawing forth mankind held in Hades, He raised them to heaven and brought them to the first-created honor of incorruption. ...While the soldiers guarded the tomb, at midnight the earth quaked, for the angel of the Lord had descended and rolled the stone from the entrance of the tomb, and the soldiers [set to guard the tomb] were so frightened that they fled. The women came to the tomb very early in the morning on the day following the Sabbath — that is to say at midnight on Saturday. Therefore, late on the first day of the Resurrection, the Mother of God was there together with St Mary Magdalene, who was sitting near the tomb according to St Matthew. The Evangelists say that He first appeared to St Mary Magdalene [rather than His Mother]...so that there would be no doubts or suspicions concerning the truth of the Resurrection.

It was St Mary Magdalene who saw the angel upon the stone; then bowing down, she saw the other angels inside. The angels announced the Lord's Resurrection to her and said, 'He is risen! He is not here! Behold the place where they laid Him' (Mark 16:6). Hearing this, the women turned to run and announce the Resurrection to the most fervent of the Apostles, that is, to St Peter and St John. But when they returned, they met Christ Himself, Who said to them, 'Rejoice' (Matthew 28:9). *Translated from Romanian; Synaxarion of the Lenten Triodion and Pentecostarion, pp. 163-166 (Rives Junction, Mi.: HDM Press, 1999).*

*Christ
Is Risen!*



*Truly He
Is Risen!*

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As we approach the great solemn days of Holy Week, we bring to mind how our Lord Jesus Christ was betrayed and seized, tortured and crucified, died and was buried, and arose from the dead. The services of Holy Week, beginning with Lazarus Saturday, show us in symbols, readings and chants the account of our Savior's love and sacrifice 'unto death, even the death of the cross' for our sake (Phil. 2:8).

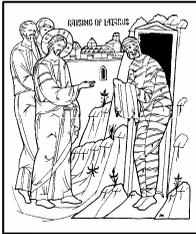
On Palm Sunday we shall stand with branches in our hands and listen to the 'Hosannas,' like the multitudes in Jerusalem, welcoming 'Him Who cometh in the Name of the Lord,' and, like the children, waving palms and shouting for joy. In the Gospels of the first three days of Passion Week we shall hear Christ's final teachings to his disciples and the people; His stern rebukes to the proud, self-righteous Pharisees and scribes; His prophecy of His resurrection and second coming. In the house of Simon the Leper, where Jesus was having a meal, we shall see the sinful woman enter to anoint His head and feet in love and repentance, and we shall contrast her to Judas, the disciple whose greed incited him to betray his Master for a paltry sum of money. Then we shall follow Jesus to the 'upper chamber' where He and his disciples partook of his Mystical Supper, that is, the first celebration of the Eucharist of his Most Holy Body and Blood, and then to the Garden of Gethsemane. There our Lord and God Jesus Christ prayed in agony.

Concerning our Savior's prayer before his Passion, Saint John Chrysostom says:

By saying, 'If it be possible, let it pass from me,' He showed His humanity; but by saying, 'Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt,' He showed His virtue and self-command, teaching us even when nature pulls us back to follow God. (Homily 83 on the Gospel of Matthew)

Together with Christ's grieving Mother and John, the disciple He loved best, and with the other women, we shall stand watch by His Cross. We shall follow as His body is carried to the grave in the garden, and there leave his Body to rest till the Resurrection's glorious morning.

This is why through all Passion Week's mournful services there runs the strain of bright hope of forgiveness, of triumph over sin and death, and of our Savior's victory over Satan, Hades, and mortal corruption.

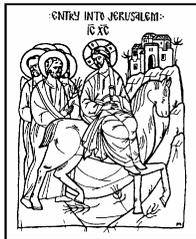


LAZARUS SATURDAY

On this Saturday we remember how our Lord Jesus Christ raised His friend Lazarus from the dead. He knew *Lazarus* was grievously ill, but He waited till he died before He answered Martha and Mary's call for Him. Jesus knew that His own death on the Cross was near. He knew how terrified and bewildered His disciples would be, how they might doubt that He was indeed the Christ. Only after four days did He bring Lazarus back to life, so that His disciples would see that He had power over life and death and was indeed 'the Resurrection and the Life.' It was this miracle that prepared Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem and gave us the certain assurance of the physical resurrection of all the dead.

PALM SUNDAY

This day celebrates Christ's triumphal entry into the holy city of Jerusalem. When the people heard of His coming, great crowds rushed to the city gates to meet Him. They spread their cloaks on the road and strewed palm leaves in His path. Children waved green boughs and all sang, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!' At Palm Sunday Matins, after the Gospel lection about the entry into Jerusalem, the priest blesses palm leaves or other appropriate branches, which the people hold during the canon. Palm Sunday is one of the twelve great feasts of the Church.



GREAT AND HOLY MONDAY

The week of our Savior's Passion begins with Holy and Great Monday. The first three days of Holy Week recall Christ's last teachings with His disciples. These teachings inspire the readings and hymns. The Psalms remind us how the coming and sufferings of Christ were awaited and foretold in the Old Testament. The Gospels tell of His life in the world; His teaching and miracles prove that He was indeed the Son of God, who of His own free will suffered for our sake though He was without guilt.

On Holy and Great Monday the Church tells us the parable of the barren fig tree. It is the symbol of those who think only of outward goodness which does not come from the heart. The Gospel also tells about Christ's prophecies about the fall of Jerusalem, wars and tribulations, and the end of the world.



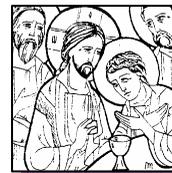
GREAT AND HOLY TUESDAY

On Holy and Great Tuesday we listen to our Savior's replies to the wily questions of the Pharisees and scribes, who tried to trap Him; we hear His stern rebukes of their envy and deceit. The parables of the Ten Virgins and of the Talents remind us how we should always keep watch over our conscience and use in God's service any gift or talent we have received from Him. The Gospel then tells Christ's prophecy of His second coming and the Last Judgment. It ends with the awful warning: 'Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified.'

GREAT AND HOLY WEDNESDAY

On Great Wednesday the Church commemorates the act of contrition and love of the sinful woman who poured precious myrrh-oil on our Savior's head, and, though she did not know it, 'prepared Him for burial.' And in contrast we hear of the dark act of Judas, whose greed led him to betray his Master. All the readings and hymns of the day warn us to beware of greed and love of money, which even tempted a disciple of Christ.

On Holy Wednesday night the Orthodox Church administers the sacrament of Holy Unction for the bodily and spiritual health of the participants.

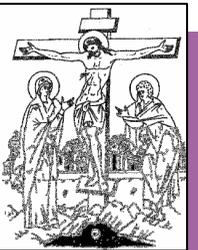


GREAT AND HOLY THURSDAY

The Gospels of Holy and Great Thursday tell how our Savior and His disciples came to Jerusalem to celebrate His last feast of the Passover, how He washed their feet. They tell the account of that Mystical Supper when our Lord ordained the Mystery of His Most Holy Body and Blood 'for the remission of sins and life everlasting.' They speak of Christ's instruction to the Apostles, and how He told them that they would all forsake Him that night; they speak of Peter's rash promise that he would always remain faithful; of Christ's vigil in the garden; of how He was seized and led away to the high priest's court; of the scene in the courtyard; of Peter's three-fold denial and his grief; of the high priest's mocking questions; and of how our Savior Christ God, wearing the crown of thorns, beaten and insulted by the soldiers, was led before Pilate.

The readings and hymns of Matins dwell on Judas' betrayal, on 'the dark night' which settled in his soul. We pray that we may keep ourselves from greed and deceit, and be made pure by partaking of the holy Mysteries of Christ's Body and Blood.

The whole narration of our Lord's Passion is given at the Matins of Holy and Great Thursday. It is commonly called 'the Service of the Twelve Gospels.' The whole story of the Passion is read from the four evangelists and is divided into twelve parts. The hymns speak of Judas' betrayal; of the cruelty of the Jews; of our Savior's infinite patience and meekness; of the awe of all creation when the Lord of all was nailed to the Cross between two thieves.



HOLY AND GREAT FRIDAY

Great Friday is the most solemn day of Holy Week. In awe and trembling, we stand before the Cross on which our Savior died and we see the image of Him dead, lying in our midst, on the Epitaphios.

The solemn Vespers of Great Friday is celebrated in the afternoon at the time of our Lord Jesus' death. Again all the readings remind us of the suffering Christ and His glory. After the entrance, lessons are read in which the Prophet Isaiah speaks of 'the Lamb led to the slaughter,' and an Epistle of Saint Paul on the power and wisdom of the Cross; again a Gospel is read describing our Lord's trial before Pilate, His Crucifixion and burial.

HOLY AND GREAT SATURDAY

Holy and Great Saturday is a reverent vigil at the tomb of the Son of God, slain for our sins. By anticipation, the Saturday Matins is held on Friday evening.

The priest and the choir chant the 'Lamentations' with the verses of the 118th Psalm: 'Blessed are the blameless in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.' Each verse of the Psalm is followed by a verse of the Lamentations. It is like a long poem depicting the Angels in Heaven and all creatures on earth overwhelmed by the death of their Creator, and their gratitude at being freed from death's power by Christ.

After the Lamentations, the Resurrection hymns are sung. At the end of the Great Doxology of Matins, the priest raises the Shroud, which is then taken by four pall-bearers, the deacon walks in front, the people follow, all carrying candles, accompanied by the choir chanting, 'Holy God, Holy and Strong, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us.' This represents the burial of Christ. Then, the glorious prophecy of Ezekiel is read about the dry bones of Israel, out of which arose 'an exceeding great host' quickened to life by the breath of God. Then follows Saint Paul's Epistle about Christ our Passover, and the Gospel about the sealing of Jesus' tomb.