

ENTRANCE IN TO JERUSALEM



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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Visit stsymeon.com

✠ April 13, 2014 ✠

Palm Sunday

The Triumphal Entrance
of Our Lord into Jerusalem

Hieromartyr Artemon of Syria (303)

St. Martyrius, Archbishop of Jerusalem (486)

"It has not yet come –
this glorious and holy day ...
But it is coming, as the
Feast of Feasts, as the
celebration of celebrations,
the King and Lord of Sabbaths
is coming ... *Don't you feel this,
dear brothers .and sisters?*
Don't your hearts tremble with
joy, you children of the earth
where there isn't a single
Orthodox soul who wouldn't
respond to your Paschal
greeting with, 'Indeed He is
risen!'?..."

- St. Alexander Hotovitsky

Hieromartyr

Holy Week

- ✠ This Evening - 5:00pm ~ First Bridegroom Matins
- ✠ April 14/15 - Holy Monday & Tuesday ~ 6:30pm Bridegroom Matins
- ✠ April 16 - Holy Wednesday 6:30pm Holy Unction
- ✠ April 17 - Holy Thursday 10:00am The Mystical Supper Liturgy
6:30pm The 12 Passion Gospels



Holy Friday ✠ April 18 - 10:00am The Royal Hours

✠ 4:00pm Vespers – Shroud to the Tomb

➤ Note: Fasting Meal - potluck - between services

✠ 7:00pm - Lamentations at the Tomb

✠ *Youth All Night Vigil at the Tomb* ✠



✠ Holy Saturday ~ April 19 ~ 10:00am Divine Liturgy of The Blessed Sabbath

✠ Holy PASCHA ✠ Saturday, April 19 at 11:30pm

➤ Blessing of Baskets and Paschal Meal to follow

✠ Pascha Sunday April 20 ~ 3:00pm Paschal Agape Vespers

✠ Bright Monday April 21 ~ 10:00am Paschal Liturgy

w/ Procession



St. John Chrysostom – Glory in the Cross

+ "Although we praise our common Lord for all kinds of reasons, we praise and glorify Him above all for the Cross. It fills me with awe to see Him dying like one accursed. It is this death for people like ourselves that Paul constantly regards as the sign of Christ's love for us. He passes over everything else that Christ did for our advantage and consolation and dwells incessantly on the Cross. The proof of God's love for us, he says, is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners. Then in the following sentence he gives us the highest ground for hope: If, when we were alienated from God, we were reconciled to Him by the death of His Son, how much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life! It is this above all that made Paul so proud, so happy, so full of joy and exultation, when he wrote to the Galatians: 'God forbid that I should glory in anything but the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.' What wonder, indeed, if Paul rejoices and glories in the Cross, when the Lord Himself spoke of His passion as His 'glory.' Father, He prayed, the hour has come, glorify Thy Son."

Christ's suffering on the Cross for the Sake of our Salvation

~ Abbot Nikon of Russia (+1963), Letters to Spiritual Children

✠ "God is Love." Through love for fallen humanity, the Lord did not resist making the greatest sacrifice. God the Father sent His Son to suffer crucifixion; God the Son was obedient even unto death on the Cross; God the Holy Spirit does not disdain to enter man's sinful soul to cleanse and save it. What more could the Lord do for our salvation? "I do not desire," said the Lord, "the death of a sinner, but that he should turn to Me and live." God so loved the world, that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

This means that salvation is given freely to all those who believe in Christ and who ask Him to save them from sin and from eternal torments. In return for repentance from sin, the Lord promises forgiveness and mercy, and if we should ask for something, we will surely receive it, for this is the word of the Lord Himself. The whole world is created by the word of God; by His word the world is preserved in order and does not revert to a state of chaos. This same word promises the forgiveness of sin and eternal life in return for faith and repentance. This word is confirmed by the Incarnation of the Son of God (the Word of the Gospels) and His sufferings on the Cross.

You believe all this. How is it that you are in despair over your salvation? How can you allow the thought to enter your head that the Lord will send you trials, here or at death, beyond your strength to endure? No, absolutely not! Your disposition, sickness, despondency, acidie and all the rest are from the Evil One. Don't let him take you in hand. Chase away all these thoughts by calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in the manner of the Publican; give thanks to the Lord for everything, for His love towards mankind, for His longsuffering in the face of your sins, for His mercy toward you and toward everyone, for your illness. Give thanks for everything. Give yourself over to His will and to His mercy, and you will find peace. You are suffering because of your lack of faith. You are so concerned with yourself, with your own sins; you don't think enough about God's love. You must, on the contrary, first remember God's merciful kindness, His suffering on the Cross for the sake of our salvation, and afterward about your sins. Your sins should be the means of arousing you not to despair, but to the prayer of the Publican.

✠ If you wish to find peace of soul, happiness and sure salvation, humble yourself beneath the mighty hand of God and He will raise you up. This means: accept all that happens to you as from the hand of God and not from men, for indeed, nothing which occurs to us can happen without God's will. People and circumstances are only God's tools, and often they do not understand what they are doing. The Lord Jesus Christ told everyone that His forthcoming sufferings on the Cross were not the work of people - the Pharisees, scribes, Pilate, Judas; they were only instruments: "The Cup which My Father hath given Me, must I not drink it?" The cup of suffering was given to Jesus Christ not by men but by the Father in Heaven for the redemption of fallen man. And to all of us who desire to be saved, it is the Lord Who will give us the cup of suffering, and not people. If the Lord suffered for us, then how, tell me, can we not suffer for our countless sins which, moreover, we do not even see. One must beg the Lord, "Grant me to see my own transgressions." If we receive this gift of seeing our sins, if we feel their weight and recognize the full irreconcilability of God with sinful man, the necessity of seeking forgiveness for these sins from the Lord and the cleansing of our leprous soul by the power of God - then we will fall before the Lord; we will weep before Him like the sinning woman and will cry out from our whole soul like the Publican: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner, forgive my sins, cleanse my leprous soul, do not deprive me of Thy Heavenly Kingdom, do not give me into the hands of my enemies - the demons." Humble yourself before God; that is, like the Wise Thief say from your whole heart: "I have received as I deserve according to my deeds. Remember me, O Lord, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom." Do not be like the other thief who railed at everyone, cursed, blamed others for his sufferings, and in this way only made his situation worse and perished. The Lord has done everything for our salvation; He wants salvation for all sinners-- and we must toil for our own salvation, force ourselves to live (i.e., think, feel) the way our Lord Jesus Christ did and how He taught in the Gospel.

Why Did Christ Suffer Crucifixion?

By His Eminence Metropolitan Panteleimon of Koroneia, Greece, March 24, 2014

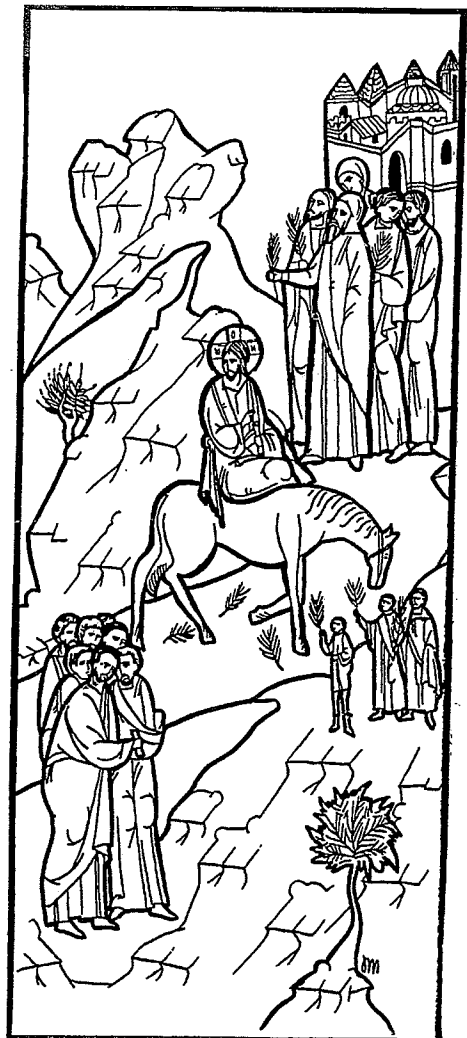
"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our infirmities, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are — yet He did not sin" (Heb. 4:15).

The High Priest of the Old Testament entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem once a year to offer a sacrifice of atonement. Christ is the Great High Priest, who "entered without seed and exited without corruption" (Elias Meniatis) from the womb of the Panagia and offered the sacrifice of Himself on the Cross. Not to satisfy Divine Justice. God the Father is not a strict and uncompromising judge, Who seeks to punish sinful man and punishes him in the person of His incarnate Son, but He is an affectionate Father. And the God-man Lord as man hungered and thirsted and hurt and was crucified. Why? The Apostle Peter answers this for the faithful: "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). To "follow in His steps" means, among other things, to not be indignant against God in the difficulties of life and to not despair because Christ is by my side. "Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb. 2:18). He has guaranteed for this the eternal symbol of His love - the Cross - that unites us with God. Therefore, by experiencing and overcoming our personal Cross we walk through Christ towards the Father. "We hold to the Cross as our sail and so we can set upon the journey without fear" (St. Syncletike).

The Kingdom of Christ

Spring fragrances fill the air as Jesus bids farewell to the fertile, green hills of Galilee. The relative calm of His thirty-three years will come to an unnatural and abrupt halt as He enters the holy city of Jerusalem, first as victor then as victim. Over 2 1/2 million pilgrims will see Him triumphantly thread His way through the serpentine streets of the old city into their lives on the arch of a donkey's back, a prophetic symbol of peace. The delirious crowds will give the itinerant preacher a Messiah's welcome, holding branches of palm and shouting: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"

Jesus, however, is immune to all the tumult. He knows all too well that the joyful sounds of "Hosanna!" will soon be replaced by the cruel screams of "Crucify Him!" Those who now glibly honor Him will shortly spew out vile epithets against Him. Even His most trusted intimates will betray, abandon and deny Him, leaving Him to face an agonizing death alone.



Two thousand years have passed since that time. Now we stand in

the place of our predecessors holding palm branches, chanting hymns and hailing our King. Let us pause for a moment and reflect on the nature and character of the Kingdom which Christ brings us today.

First of all, the kingdom that He offers is not of this world (John 18:36). It cannot be found within the coordinates of time and space, nor can any history or science book even begin to affirm its reality. Instead, it exists beyond all human categories of thought, befuddling any attempts to describe it. It is such an awesome mystery that no description, not even one by people of faith, can even come close to describing the essence of it. Those who come nearest its truth are inarticulate children, who paradoxically penetrate its deepest reaches!

But as to its reality, we of the Church are not in doubt. Although the mind cannot contain it, much less conceive of it, there is a way by which it can be known - through a loving heart. In the words of Jesus, "the kingdom of heaven is within you" (Luke 17:21). If we but descend into the depths of our hearts, there we will find the treasure house of heaven, to use the thought of Saint Isaac of Syria. What a profound mystery! As we descend into the depths of our being, we ascend to the heights of heaven. Have not many of us, at one time or another, ascended the ladder to God's kingdom during some privileged moment of deep inner prayer or worship?

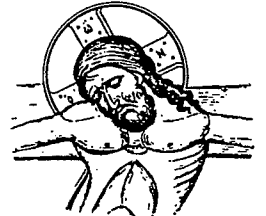
Secondly the kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of peace. Christ came to build such a kingdom, not with weapons but with love. Isaiah the prophet calls Him the "Prince of Peace." Saint Paul says "Christ is our peace." When the Lord of peace reigns in our hearts, we, too, experience this peace. The absence of this peace, on the other hand, is a sure sign that He is far from us, or rather, we are far from Him. Also, when families live with endless bitterness and divisive anger, they, too, are living outside the kingdom of peace. And if we hold palm crosses in our hands and have no peace within ourselves or with those around us, then we don't know Christ either. We haven't allowed Him to reign in our hearts.

This brings us to the third great quality of the Kingdom of Christ; it is both almighty and eternal. Its greatest power is seen in the ethical and moral changes that it effects in our lives. Listen to this account of a 35 year old alcoholic atheist living in Russia: "I was a wasted individual. My eyes saw nothing - the people, the sky. Nothing. Death had arrived. Though I still moved my legs and was able to speak, already I was a corpse, a vile creature, and not a man. There was no way out, no hope. A profound darkness fell. After all sorts of terrible experiences, vile deeds, great bouts of drunkenness, debauchery and decay, a bit of sunshine peeped through. I met a priest. He baptized me. Little by little, day by day my abominations died out. My soul resurrected! The first sign of Christianity in me - resurrection from the dead! I believed, having experienced resurrection from the dead - here in this life, in this world. Everything cleared up, and joy began to abide in me, a serene joy, the joy of the resurrection of the soul. And this power continues in me still. Now I have a family of my own...I am an artist, and my work has become more perfect and significant." Such is the power of the Kingdom of Christ. It can take a dead man and morally bring him back to life.

The kingdom, then, which Christ offers us has these characteristics: its place is in a loving heart and not a thinking mind, its reign is peaceful and it is almighty and it endures forever. Wonderful though this may sound, there is an obstacle. How may we, whose hands are filled with iniquity, breach its seemingly impenetrable walls and live forever with Christ? There is only one way - we must repent! The Israelites when they saw their king coming, spread their garments on the road for Him to pass over. In like manner we must divest ourselves of the garments of sin and throw them at the feet of Christ, who this week goes to the Cross for us. As Christ passes before us, let the palm crosses we hold symbolize our desire to enter this kingdom and reign with Christ forever.

KALO PASCHA!

+ + +



AS WE ENTER HOLY WEEK LET US PONDER...

How Jesus washed the disciple's feet, and by this act taught them humility and love for one another...

How Jesus had to tell His disciples that one of them would betray Him...

How in Gethsemane He fell down and prayed three times: "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; but - Thy will be done."

How this was all for you and me; because of our sins and for our salvation...

How He found His disciples asleep in the Garden...

How we are lazy and neither watch nor pray, and, because of this, as soon as temptation comes, we abandon Christ...

How they slandered Him and mocked Him and spat on Him and struck Him in the face...

How the Lord endured all this without anger and in silence...

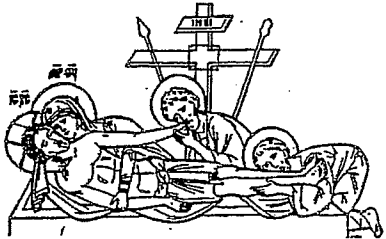
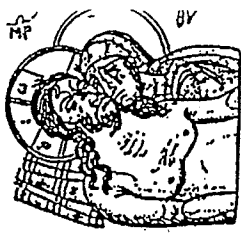
How Peter denied Christ before the servants three times...

How today some Christians, from fear of the world, deny Christ and pretend that they are not Christians, that they do not know the commandments of the Lord, and that the Lord is no concern of theirs...

How Pilate questioned, and the Lord kept silent...

How He was flogged and mocked by the Roman soldiers when they put a crown of thorns on His head and put a scarlet robe on Him...

Saint Nicholai on the Humility of Christ



The humility of our Lord Jesus Christ is a matter for as great wonder as are His miracles, together with His resurrection - that Wonder of wonders. Clothing Himself in the cramped human body of a slave, He became the Servant of His servants...

Of all things that there are for a man to learn, humility is the hardest. The Lord Jesus therefore expressed His teaching on humility in the clearest possible terms, both in words and in deeds, so that no-one could possibly doubt the incalculable and inescapable importance of humility in the act of man's salvation. This is why He appeared in a mortal human body such as Adam's had become as a punishment for his sinful fall. He, the sinless Lord and Creator of the bright and resplendent cherubim, clothed Himself in the thick, coarse garb of a condemned prisoner. Is this not, in itself, a sufficiently clear lesson on the humility that sinful men must learn? The Lord reiterated this lesson by His birth in a shepherd's cave rather than at a king's court, by His keeping company with despised sinners and the poor, by His washing the feet of His disciples, His voluntary taking His Passion upon Himself and finally, on the Cross, by His drinking the most bitter cup of suffering to the dregs. Men, however, have found the teaching on humility the hardest to grasp and make their own. Even Christ's disciples themselves, who had been with their meek and humble Lord every day, were unable to understand His meekness and make His humility their own. Their preoccupation with themselves and their own status, glory and reward became evident even at the most fateful moments, when these things should have been furthest from their thoughts. But these weaknesses showed themselves at such moments by God's permission, so that succeeding generations should see all the weakness, sinful fallenness and nothingness of human nature.

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto Him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldst do for us whatever we desire. And He said unto them, What would ye that I do for you? They say unto him, Grant us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. These were the thoughts and desires that were obsessing these two disciples on the very eve of the great tragedy their teacher was to undergo! This is the hardened, coarse human nature that the Lord, the Healer, was seeking to soften and deify! After so much emphasis on His part that *the first shall be last, and the last first*, after so much re-iterated teaching on fleeing from worldly glory and eminence, after so great an example of submission to the will of God, and lastly, after the terrible foretelling of His final humiliation and undeserved suffering -- these two disciples, both of them among the chief of them, condemn themselves by seeking of the Lord their own personal reward and glory! ... But on what basis should we accuse these two brothers? All this came about in order to reveal the deep corruption of human nature. James and John's seeking of the glory without the suffering is sought by all Adam's descendants - always the glory without the suffering. Whenever the Lord spoke of His future glory, He always spoke also of the suffering that would precede it. But His Apostles, as all other men, wanted to leap over the suffering straight into the glory. ... And it was the Lord's desire that not one of His disciples' weaknesses should be remain unrevealed, that so the whole human race might be helped. He came as the Physician and the Fount of healing.

Let Us Purify our Senses that We May See Christ

Fr. Alexis Trader

Seeing is believing. But what does it mean to see? Most of the work of seeing takes place not through the eyes, but throughout the mind that conjures up distance and difference from light reflecting and refracting in thousands of ways. And to make sense out of light's perpetual dance, the human brain needs to allocate immense resources to the visual cortex. And yet, the light pouring forth from the tomb of Christ and renewing the vision of the faithful is of another order, beyond sense and beyond thought, and hence, as radical as it may sound to all of us under the sway of physical reductionism, beyond the human brain. And yet, it is more real than any thing we could possibly perceive or conceive. To the rationalist, it doesn't make a lot of sense, just like the equation $3=1$ doesn't seem quite right except in the presence of the Triune God where the created laws of logic come to an end. For those who have beheld the resurrection of Christ, however, everything changes, for all things are filled with light, heaven, and earth, and the places beneath the earth. Such souls believe, for they have seen. How many, though, have beheld the Resurrection of Christ?

Saint Symeon the Theologian in a beautiful homily on this subject writes the following, "Most people believe in the Resurrection of Christ, but very few are they that have a clear vision thereof. Those who do not behold it cannot even worship Christ Jesus as Holy and Lord. As Scripture says, 'No one can say the Lord Jesus except by the Holy Spirit,' and, elsewhere, 'God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.'" A vision or understanding of Resurrection is attained through worshiping Christ in His truth with one's entire spirit and through the Holy Spirit saying the prayer Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me from the depths of the soul. This prayer, when said with humility, when said with love, when said with desire, and when the Spirit so wills, creates new vision, new perception, new thought, which are beyond all vision, perception and thought, and through which and in which the believer is to behold the Resurrection of Christ.

Saint Symeon continues, "That most sacred phrase which is daily on our lips does not say, 'Having believed in the Resurrection of Christ,' but, 'Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ, let us worship the Holy Lord Jesus, the only sinless One.' How then, does the Holy Spirit exhort us to say, 'Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ,' which we have not seen, as though we had seen it, when Christ has risen once for all a thousand years ago, and even then without anyone seeing it? ... The Resurrection of Christ takes place in each of us who believes, and that not once, but every hour, so to speak, when Christ the Master arises in us, in splendid raiment and flashing forth rays of incorruption and Divinity. For the light-bearing Advent of the Spirit reveals to us, as in early morning, the Master's Resurrection, or, rather, it grants us to see the Risen Lord Himself... Those to whom the Risen Christ has revealed Himself, to them has He assuredly become manifest spiritually; He has shown Himself to their spiritual eyes. When this happens to us through the Spirit, He raises us from the dead and gives us life. He grants us to see Him, Who is immortal and indestructible, and not only that, He grants us clearly to know Him who raises and glorifies us with Himself, as all of Divine Scripture attests."

Saint Symeon here is speaking about the fruits of unceasing prayer, of always calling out on the Lord Jesus. Ever invoking His name, ever humbling oneself, ever fulfilling the Lord's commandments of selfless love, the Risen Lord appears to the soul in all His glory, a glory whose brilliance no human eye can bear and whose splendor no human mind can grasp. The loving Lord knows this, so He provides new eyes, He provides a new mind, like a new heaven and a new earth, all we need to provide is our heart, all we need to offer is our will, then we too together with all those who have pleased God will chant, "Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ" and our words, like theirs, will be true.

For Holy Week – Wisdom of the Holy Fathers

✠ We were enemies of God through sin, and God had appointed the sinner to die. There must needs therefore have happened one of two things; either that God, in His truth, should destroy all men, or that in His loving-kindness He should cancel the sentence. But behold the wisdom of God; He preserved both the truth of His sentence, and the exercise of His loving-kindness. Christ took our sins 'in His body on the tree, that we by His death might die to sin, and live unto righteousness' (I Pet. 2:24).
St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures

✠ "You should continually keep in mind the great humiliation which the Lord took upon Himself in His ineffable love for us: how the divine Logos dwelt in a womb; how He took human nature upon Himself; His birth from a woman; His gradual bodily growth; the shame He suffered, the insults the vilification, ridicule and abuse; how He was scourged and spat upon, derided and mocked; the scarlet robe, the crown of thorns; His condemnation by those in power; the outcry of the unruly Jews, men of His own race, against Him: 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him' (Jn. 19:15); the cross, the nails, the lance, the drink of vinegar and gall; the scorn of the Gentiles; the derision of the passers-by who said: 'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross and we will believe you' (cf. Mt. 27:39-42); and the rest of the sufferings which He patiently accepted for us: crucifixion; death; the three-day burial; the descent into hell. Then keep in mind all that has come from these sufferings. See to what a height of glory the Lord's human nature was raised up by God's justice through these sufferings and humiliations."
St. Mark the Ascetic

✠ Adam received the sentence, 'Cursed is the ground in your labors; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you' (Gen. 3:17,18). For this cause Jesus assumes the thorns, that He may cancel the sentence; for this cause also was He buried in the earth, that the earth which had been cursed might receive the blessing instead of a curse.
St. Cyril of Jerusalem

✠ For by the sacrifice of His own body, He both put an end to the law which was against us, and made a new beginning of life for us, by the hope of resurrection which He has given us. For since from man it was that death prevailed over men, for this cause conversely, by the Word of God being made man has come about the destruction of death and the resurrection of life; as the man which bore Christ saith: For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive: and so forth. For no longer now do we die as subject to condemnation; but as men who rise from the dead we await the general resurrection of all, 'which in its own times He shall show,' even God, Who has also wrought it, and bestowed it upon us.
St. Athanasius the Great

✠ For what principle did the Blood of His Only-Begotten Son delight the Father, Who would not receive even Isaac, when he was being offered by his father, but changed the sacrifice, putting a ram in the place of the human victim? Is it not evident that the Father accepts Him, but neither asked for Him nor demanded Him; but on account of the Incarnation, and because humanity must be sanctified by the Humanity of God, that He might deliver us Himself, and overcome the tyrant, and draw us to Himself by the mediation of His Son, Who also arranged this to the honor of the Father, Whom it is manifest that He obeys in all things? So much we have said of Christ; the greatest part of what we might say shall be revered with silence.
St. Gregory the Theologian, Second Oration on Pascha