

## Fire & Light

### St. Symeon Orthodox Church

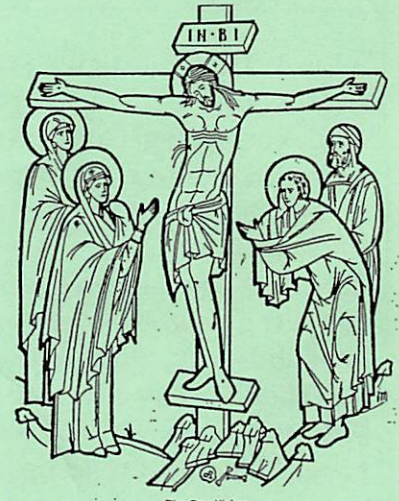
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April 9, 2017

## Palm Sunday

The Triumphal Entry  
of Our Lord into Jerusalem



The Crucifixion

Newly Revealed Martyrs Sts. Raphael, Nicholas & Irene of Mytilene (1463)

## Holy Week 2017

- ✠ This Evening - 5:00pm ~ First Bridegroom Matins
- ✠ April 10/11 - Holy Monday & Tuesday ~ 6:30pm Bridegroom Matins
- ✠ April 12 - Holy Wednesday 6:30pm Holy Unction
- ✠ April 13 - Holy Thursday 10:00am Mystical Supper Liturgy  
6:30pm 12 Passion Gospels

### ✠ Holy Friday Services ✠ April 14

- 10:00am Royal Hours
- 4:00pm Vespers - Shroud to the Tomb
- 7:00pm - Lamentations at the Tomb

✠ All Night Vigil at the Tomb ✠

- ✠ Holy Saturday ~ The Blessed Sabbath April 15 ~ 10:00am Divine Liturgy
- ✠ Holy PASCHA ✠ Begins Saturday, April 15 at 11:30pm



## Bright Week

- ✠ Pascha Sunday April 16 ~ 3:00pm Paschal Agape Vespers
- ✠ Bright Monday April 17 ~ 10:00am Paschal Liturgy w/ Procession
- ✠ Bright Wednesday - April 19 ~ 6:30pm Bright Wednesday Vespers



✠ **God resurrected us** - together with Christ as man - who once were dead in sins, slain by our sins. He not only makes us worthy of resurrection with the Lord Jesus Christ, but He also puts us on the same level with the resurrected Christ in the heights of Heaven, above the whole realm of incorporeal spirits. Brethren, God did not come to earth for the sake of some petty, inconsequential thing, but for something completely unique, something greater than great. When an earthly king visits a place in his country, the benefit of his visit is felt long after. **The Lord, the King, visited mankind on the earth and the benefit of that visit will be felt to the end of time.** That visit means life instead of death for us, glory instead of shame, closeness to God instead of estrangement, and blessing instead of a curse. In other words, **that visit means our resurrection from the dead**, and our eternal reign in the heavens with Christ.

~ St. Nikolai of Serbia (1956)

## Hymns of Lazarus and Palm Sunday

O Lord, Thou didst give Thy disciples signs of Thy divinity,  
While concealing Thy majesty from the crowd through humility:  
To Thy disciples Thou didst predict the death of Lazarus,  
Revealing Thy knowledge of future things.  
But in the presence of the crowd at Bethany,  
Thou didst ask, "Where is my friend buried?"  
For Thou, in Thy compassion for us,  
Didst take upon Thyself our ignorance.  
Then, Thou didst raise up a man who had been dead four days.  
Through him, Thou hast finally revealed Thy divine power to all.  
O Almighty Lord, glory to Thee!

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Thy voice destroyed the kingdom of hell, O Lord  
Thy powerful word raised from the tomb the one who was four days dead.  
Lazarus became the saving first-fruits of the world's regeneration.  
All things are possible for Thee, O Lord and King of all!  
Grant Thy servants cleansing and great mercy!

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As Thou didst tell Martha, O Lord,  
"I am the Resurrection and the Life."  
Thou hast sealed Thy words through Thy mighty deeds:  
Thou hast called Lazarus forth from hell!  
I am dead in my passions; raise me also, O Lord, in Thy tender love for man!

Before Thy voluntary passion, O Lord,  
Thou didst foretell the universal resurrection to all:  
In Bethany, by Thine almighty power,  
Thou didst raise Lazarus who was dead four days.  
Thou didst give sight to the blind, for Thou art the Giver of Light!  
Thou hast entered the Holy City with Thy disciples, seated on the colt of an ass, fulfilling the Scriptures.  
The children of the Hebrews met Thee in thanksgiving:  
Blessed is He Who comes, and will come again, in the Name of the Lord!

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Come forth, all ye nations!  
Come forth ye peoples!  
Behold, the King of Heaven comes to Jerusalem, sitting on a humble colt as though upon a throne!  
O unbelieving and adulterous generation;  
Come and see the One Whom Isaiah foretold!  
For our sake, He has come in the flesh.  
He takes the new Zion, chaste and pure as His Bride!  
He will crush the evil council like a vessel of clay!  
See how the young and innocent children gather, singing praises as at a marriage feast.  
Let us join them in the angel's hymn:  
Hosanna in the highest!  
Blesses is He that comes, and will come again, in the Name of the Lord!

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### "Repent Today" from the Elders - *Evergetinos*

- ✠ One voice should constantly ring in the ears of man:  
"Today, I may be called home."
- ✠ One Elder said that when his thoughts whispered to him:  
"Forget today and repent tomorrow," he would snap back and say,  
"No, I will repent today and leave tomorrow to the will of God."
- ✠ Brother, do not say to yourself that "today" I will commit sin and tomorrow I will repent," for you cannot be sure about the next day; concern for the morrow belongs only to God.



## **Obedient unto Death** - Bp. Kallistos Ware {The Orthodox Way, p. 104f}

Christ's Incarnation is already an act of salvation. By taking up our broken humanity into himself, Christ restores it and, in the words of a Christmas hymn, 'lifts up the fallen image'. But in that case why was a death on the Cross necessary? Was it not enough for one of the Trinity to live as a man on earth, to think, feel and will as a man, without also having to die as a man?

In an unfallen world the Incarnation of Christ would indeed have sufficed as the perfect expression of God's outgoing love. But in a fallen and sinful world His love had to reach out yet further. Because of the tragic presence of sin and evil, the work of man's restoration was to prove infinitely costly. A sacrificial act of healing was required, a sacrifice such as only a suffering and crucified God could offer.

The Incarnation, it was said, is an act of identification and sharing. God saves us by identifying himself with us, by knowing our human experience from the inside. The Cross signifies, in the most stark and uncompromising manner, that this act of sharing is carried to the utmost limits. God incarnate enters into all our experience. Jesus Christ our companion shares not only in the fullness of human life but also in the fullness of human death. 'Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows' (Isa. 53:4) — all our griefs, all our sorrows. 'The unassumed is unhealed': but Christ our Healer has assumed into himself everything, even death.

Death has both a physical and a spiritual aspect, and of the two it is the spiritual that is the more terrible. Physical death is the separation of man's body from His soul; spiritual death, the separation of man's soul from God. When we say that Christ became 'obedient unto death' (Phil. 2:8), we are not to limit these words to physical death alone. We should not think only of the bodily sufferings which Christ endured at His Passion — the scourging, the stumbling beneath the weight of the Cross, the nails, the thirst and heat, the torment of hanging stretched on the wood. The true meaning of the Passion is to be found, not in this only, but much more in His spiritual sufferings — in His sense of failure, isolation and utter loneliness, in the pain of love offered but rejected.

The Gospels are understandably reticent in speaking about this inward suffering, yet they provide us with certain glimpses. First, there is Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he is overwhelmed by horror and dismay, when he prays in anguish to His Father, 'If it is possible, let this cup pass from me' (Matt. 26:39), and when His sweat falls to the ground 'like great drops of blood' (Luke 22:44). Gethsemane, as Metropolitan Antony of Kiev insisted, provides the key to our whole doctrine of the Atonement. Christ is here confronted by a choice. Under no compulsion to die, freely he chooses to do so; and by this act of voluntary self-offering He turns what would have been a piece of arbitrary violence, a judicial murder, into a redemptive sacrifice. But this act of free choice is immensely difficult. Resolving to go forward to arrest and crucifixion, Jesus experiences, in the words of William Law, 'the anguishing terrors of a lost soul. . . the reality of eternal death'. Full weight must be given to Christ's words at Gethsemane, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death' (Matt. 26:38). Jesus enters at this moment totally into the experience of spiritual death. He is at this moment identifying Himself with all the despair and mental pain of humanity; and this identification is far more important to us than His participation in our physical pain.

A second glimpse is given us at the Crucifixion, when Christ cries out with a loud voice, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matt. 27:46). Once again, full weight should be given to these words. Here is the extreme point of Christ's desolation, when he feels abandoned not only by men but by God. We cannot begin to explain how it is possible for One Who is Himself the living God to lose awareness of the divine presence. But this at least is evident. In Christ's Passion there is no playacting, nothing is done for outward show. Each word from the Cross means what it says. And if

the cry 'My God, my God. . .' is to signify anything at all, it must mean that at this moment Jesus is truly experiencing the spiritual death of separation from God. Not only does He shed His blood for us, but for our sakes he accepts even the loss of God.

'He descended into hell' (Apostles' Creed). Does this mean merely that Christ went to preach to the departed spirits during the interval between Great Friday evening and Pascha morning (see 1 Pet. 3:19)? Surely it has also a deeper sense. Hell is a point not in space but in the soul. It is *the place where God is not*. (And yet God is everywhere!) If Christ truly 'descended into hell', that means He descended into the depths of the absence of God. Totally, unreservedly, He identified Himself with all man's anguish and alienation. He assumed it into Himself, and by assuming it He healed it. There was no other way He could heal it, except by making it His own.

Such is the message of the Cross to each one of us. However far I have to travel through the valley of the shadow of death, I am never alone. I have a companion. And this companion is not only a true man as I am, but also true God from true God. At the moment of Christ's deepest humiliation on the Cross, He is as much the eternal and living God as He is at His Transfiguration in glory upon Mount Tabor. Looking upon Christ crucified, I see not only a suffering man but suffering God.

Christ's death upon the Cross is not a failure which was somehow put right afterwards by His Resurrection. In itself the death upon the Cross is a victory. The victory of what? There can be only one answer: *The victory of suffering love*. 'Love is strong as death... Many waters cannot quench love' (Song of Songs 8:6-7). The Cross shows us a love that is strong as death, a love that is even stronger.

St John introduces His account of the Last Supper and the Passion with these words: 'Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end' (13:1). 'To the end' — the Greek says *els telos*, meaning 'to the last', 'to the uttermost'. And this word *telos* is taken up later in the final cry uttered by Christ on the Cross: 'It is finished', *tetelestai* (John 19:30). This is to be understood, not as a cry of resignation or despair, but as a cry of victory: It is completed, it is accomplished, it is fulfilled.

What has been fulfilled? We reply: The work of suffering love, the victory of love over hatred. Christ our God has loved His own to the uttermost. Because of love He created the world, because of love He was born into this world as a man, because of love He took up our broken humanity into Himself and made it His own. Because of love He identified Himself with all our distress. Because of love He offered Himself as a sacrifice, choosing at Gethsemane to go voluntarily to His Passion: 'I lay down my life for my sheep. . . No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself (John 10:15, 18). It was willing love, not exterior compulsion, that brought Jesus to His death...

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**Concerning the constant abiding with God, St. Anthony teaches:** "Let your soul abide with the Lord at all times, and let your body abide on earth as a statue. Always stand upright before the face of the Lord. Let the fear of God always be before your eyes; and in like manner, remembrance of death, repulsion of everything worldly. Die every day that you may live; for whoever fears God will live forever. Be constantly vigilant so not to fall into laziness and idleness. Abhor all that is worldly and distance yourself from it or else it will distance you from God. Abhor all that will bring ruin to your soul. Do not deviate from God for the sake of transient things. Do not accept the example of one weaker than yourself rather from the one who is more perfect. Before all else continually pour out prayer, give thanks to God for all that would befall you. If you would fulfill all that is commanded, you will receive the inheritance 'What the eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart what God has prepared' " (1 Corinthians 2:9).

# AN EXPLANATION OF THE HOLY WEEK SERVICES OF THE HOLY ORTHODOX CHURCH

*Continued - Adapted from Orthodox Christian Witness, 1996*

## HOLY AND GREAT FRIDAY

Great Friday is the most solemn day of Holy Week. In awe and trembling, we stand before the Cross upon which our Savior died and we see the image of Him dead, lying in our midst, on the Epitaphios (the Winding Sheet). During the Service of Matins, commonly known as the Service of the **12 Passion Gospels**, which by anticipation is chanted on Thursday evening, we hear some of the most compunctionate hymns of the ecclesiastical year. The hymnography begins with the solemn announcement, "The rulers of the people have assembled against the Lord and His Christ!" We also sing:

### Fourth Tone

By Thy precious Blood, Thou hast redeemed us from the curse of the Law. By being nailed to the Cross and pierced with a spear, Thou hast poured forth immortality for men. O our Savior, glory to Thee!

After the fifth Gospel reading, the Cross is brought in procession and placed in the center of the church, as we sing:

### Antiphon XV - Tone 6

**Today He Who hung the earth upon the waters is hung on the Tree. The King of the Angels is decked with a crown of thorns. He Who wraps the heavens in clouds is wrapped in the purple of mockery. He Who freed Adam in the Jordan is slapped on the face. The Bridegroom of the Church is affixed to the Cross with nails. The Son of the Virgin is pierced by a spear. We worship Thy Passion, O Christ! Show us also Thy glorious Resurrection!**

### At the Praises - Tone 3

Israel my first-born son, has committed two evil deeds. He abandoned Me, the Fountain of Living Water; and dug himself a broken well. He crucified Me upon the wood; And asked for Barabbas and released him. Heaven was amazed at this; And the sun hid his rays. But you, O Israel, were not ashamed; But delivered Me to death. Forgive them, O Father! For they know not what they do.

### Tone 3

**Every member of Thy holy Flesh endured dishonor for us: Thy head, the thorns; Thy face, the spitting; Thy cheeks, the buffetings; Thy mouth, the taste of vinegar mingled with gall; Thine ears, the impious blasphemies; Thy back, the scourge; Thy hand, the reed; Thy whole Body, extension upon the Cross; Thy joints, the nails, Thy side, the spear. By Thy Passion Thou hast set us free from passions. In Thy love for man Thou didst stoop down to raise us up. O Almighty Savior, have mercy on us!**

*The Synaxarion* and the Kontakion of this day sum up the history and the significance of the sacred events that came to pass for our eternal salvation :

When Friday dawned, Jesus was sent bound from Caiaphas to Pontius Pilate, who was then Governor of Judea. Pilate interrogated Him in many ways, and once and again acknowledged that He was innocent, but to please the Jews, he later passed the sentence of death against Him. After scourging the Lord of all as though He were a runaway slave, he surrendered Him to be crucified.

Then Jesus was handed over to the soldiers, was stripped of His garments, was clothed in a purple robe, was crowned with a wreath of thorns, had a reed placed in His hand as though it were a scepter, was bowed before in mockery, was spat upon, and was buffeted in the face and on the head. Then they again clothed Him in His own garments, and bearing the cross, He came to Golgotha, a place of condemnation, and there, about the third hour, He was crucified between two thieves. He was blasphemed by those who were passing by, was mocked by the high priests, and by the soldiers was given vinegar to drink mixed with gall. About the ninth hour, He cried out with a loud voice saying, "It is finished." And the Lamb of God "which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) expired on the day when the moon was full, and at the hour when, according to the Law, there was slain the Passover lamb, which was established as a type of Him in the time of Moses.

Even lifeless creation mourned the death of the Master, and it trembled and was altered out of fear. Yet, even though the Maker of creation was already dead, they pierced Him in His immaculate side, and forthwith came there out Blood and Water. Finally, at about the setting of the sun, Joseph of Arimathea came with Nicodemus (both of them had been secret disciples of Jesus), and they took down the all-holy Body of the Teacher from the Cross and anointed it with aromatic spices, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth. When they had buried Him in a new tomb, they rolled a great stone over its entrance.

Such are the dread and saving sufferings of Jesus Christ commemorated today, and in remembrance of them, we have received the Apostolic commandment that a fast be observed on every Friday.

#### Kontakion - Tone 8

Come, let us all sing the praises of Him Who was crucified for us; for Mary said when she beheld Him on the Tree: Though Thou dost endure the Cross, Thou art my Son and my God!

On this day, a day of mourning and strict fasting, the service of the "**Royal Hours**" is celebrated. At each Hour, beside the psalms, prophecies from the Old Testament, an Epistle and a Gospel are read, centered on the suffering and crucifixion of Christ.

The solemn **Vespers of Great Friday** is chanted in the afternoon around the 9<sup>th</sup> hour, the time of our Lord Jesus' death. Again all the readings remind us of the suffering Christ and His glory. After the Entrance, lections are read in which the Prophet Isaiah speaks of "the Lamb led to the slaughter," and an Epistle of St. 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. At the singing of the Glory verse, the Icon of the Body of our Savior is taken down from the Cross and placed in the Sanctuary, just as the noble Joseph took our Lord's body from the Cross and placed it in the grave:

#### Tone 5

Joseph together with Nicodemus, took Thee down from the Tree, Who clothed Thyself with light as with a garment...How shall I bury Thee, O my God? How can I wrap Thee in a shroud? How can I touch Thy most pure Body with my hands? What songs can I sing of Thy Exodus, O Compassionate One? I magnify Thy Passion. I glorify Thy burial and Thy Holy Resurrection, crying, O Lord glory to Thee!

Then, after the Lord's Prayer, during the singing of the beautiful solemn hymn, "**The Noble Joseph**", the procession exits from the Sanctuary, with the priest and servers bearing the **Epitaphios**, their heads uncovered, proceeded by the deacon with censer and servers with candles. **All kneel with head bowed low before the image of our dead Savior.** A tomb stands in the middle of the church, with flowers and candles around it. On it the Epitaphios is laid reverently and censed all round by the priest. We sing "Come, let us bless Joseph of eternal memory...Give me this Stranger...", while all come forward on bended knees to venerate the Life-Giving Tomb.

# THE BEST OF TIMES

Archpriest Andrei Tkachev, March 15, 2017, Pravoslavie, ru

I was strolling through Moscow once on a Lenten evening. There were a lot of people in the churches. This warmed my heart. And although the forty times forty churches were largely lost under the Bolsheviks (even twenty times twenty sounds fantastic), thank God, there are many churches within the Garden Ring. And I repeat, these churches are not empty, and that's putting it mildly. The smaller ones are even chock full. More and more people come to the churches. People of both sexes and all ages come. They whisper something of their own and repeat something learned by heart from a prayer book. They follow the service, bringing their requests, or, in general, repent of their sins. It's their business—theirs and God's. He hearkens to their whispers and thoughts, and He answers. If He didn't answer they wouldn't come. That's something that just occurred to me.

Indeed, no one beats us for prayer, and no one cheers us on. No one beats, I repeat, or cheers us on. Both one and the other have happened in history, and we will briefly speak about that. Today our churches are filled exclusively with those who have come to God themselves. Themselves! Neither from fear, nor for perks. Usually they've been taught nothing, feeling their way along to the Source of Life. Themselves! By intuition. We must appreciate this.

There was a time when all sorts of activists and Komsomol members recorded those entering the Church; this is known. Perhaps some have partially forgotten, or some know absolutely nothing about these times, but it must be known. It must! There were times when they crucified priests on the Royal Doors, and “communed” them with molten tin, when they gouged out their eyes “for Christ,” or simply hung them out of satanic wickedness... This all happened. Then it was a little lighter, but not kinder. We must remember those times when it was fearful just to enter a church. They weren't hanging anyone, but... They weren't slamming their fingers in doors, but... But careers, problems at work, housing lines, a little of this, a little of that... You're a believer? Come to church tomorrow. And tomorrow would stretch into a decade. They would get married at night, baptize their children in secret, confess while on vacation in the South where nobody knows them. This all happened, and it's a sin to forget it. And now we have none of that, and thank God for it! Go to church—no one will hit you. No one will take your name down for denunciation to the authorities, and no one will be kicked out of college. And are we thankful to God for our times when it's possible to be baptized without fear, when we can get married openly, and fearlessly remove your cap around a church? Are we grateful?

But there is a second extreme, when it's “profitable” to believe. Just imagine getting paid extra for going to church: at work it's a common thing to get paid more. They say: whoever is a believer in Christ gets paid extra in such and such an amount. Or they increase students' scholarships, or, maybe they add points to tests for “faith.” And legally so. For the sake of Christ. Imagine—it's a nightmare! Just imagine—a person is compelled by incentives to believe in something that he doesn't believe in in his heart. It's a real horror, and there's no other horror that can be compared with it! And thank God we don't have this either.

We mustn't give Orthodox Christians absolute power. In the case of absolute power, we torment the whole world with our "cans" and "cannots" and arouse terrible hatred towards ourselves, which no one can cope with. It's not for us to build the world on the ground, but to vivify it with meaning, and honesty, and an ascetical spirit. We are to vivify the world, not to govern the world. One of the ancient apologists wrote that Christians themselves vivify the world, as a soul, not violently ruling the world. In ruling the world, we quickly cease being Christians. The mayor in Gogol said to one of his counterparts: "At least I'm solid in the faith!" That is, I go to church, and I've never seen *you* in church. They are both thieves, but one of them boasts in his Orthodoxy. Is such an Orthodoxy as the mayor's to our liking? Obviously not. And if we were paid for prayer, then the churches would be filled with a crowd of other people coming just for the sake of money, and not for the sake of Jesus. **I am grateful to God that no one pays us for going to church. I'm also grateful to God that no one beats anyone in the face (for now) as they enter a church. Both are good.**

Chase us out! We won't disappear! True, we may be reduced to a miniscule number, which would be heartbreaking, but within this number will remain a few George the Trophy-Bearers, who, by definition are few. But where will the rest of the people go? Those who differ in no way from "A" to "Z" and understand nothing of dogma, but believe only by the feeling in their hearts—where will they go? There are millions of them! But if you (the imaginary "you") want to gather mankind en masse into Orthodoxy, then know that it's a phantom. It's a criminal illusion. Those who became Orthodox "for the company" will hand us over at the first convenient opportunity.

We do not need quantity, but quality. From quality will come quantity. It's not going anywhere. However, there will be only failures from a historical perspective due to the empty quantity. But I'm genuinely glad that no one beats me (you, him, and them) for going to church. But I'm also glad that no one pays me extra to go to church and pray, or gives me any preferences in the communal apartment, or boosts my tests scores. If this happened, I would first want to rebel against dragging idle bystanders into the Church by the promise of earthly privileges—not even blessings, but just benefits.

**So, friends and foes, our times, in my humble opinion, are the best times. They don't pay us for Orthodoxy, but they don't knock our teeth out for it either. What more could we want? After all, the churches are full—full with those who are not threatened for praying in a holy place, and, at the same time, who have nothing to gain from it. Is this not grace? Truly it is the best of times.**

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### **On Burdening One's Ancestors ~ St. Paisios the Athonite 1924-1994**

It is a very sad thing those people who live a sinful life constantly adding more weight to the souls of their departed ancestors. For, these souls are burdened with guilt for having been the cause of their birth and of them living estranged from God and the fact that eternal hell awaits them after the small hell of their present life, which they live in sin.

*(Epistles p. 196, Fourth Epistle)*