

*Today is hung upon the Tree,
He Who did hang the land
in the midst of the waters.*

*A Crown of thorns crowns Him
Who is King of Angels.*

*He is wrapped about
with the purple of mockery
Who wrapped the Heavens
with clouds.*

*He received buffetings
Who freed Adam in Jordan.*

*He was transfixed with nails
Who is the Bridegroom of the Church.
He was pierced with a spear
Who is the Son of the Virgin.*

*We worship Thy Passion, O Christ.
Show also unto us
thy glorious Resurrection.*

From the Ninth Hour of Holy Friday

**Sunday 13 April 2014 is
Palm Sunday**

Matins Gospel: Matthew 21:1-11;
15-17

Epistle: Philippians 4:4-9

Gospel: John 12:1-18

Apolytikion:

Buried with You through Baptism,
Christ our God, we have been
granted immortal life by Your
Resurrection, and we sing Your
praises, crying: Hosanna in the
highest! Blessed is He who comes
in the name of the Lord.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Matthew 21:18-43; Matthew 24:3-35
Aristarchus, Pudens, & Trophimus of the 70; Thomais the Martyr of Alexandria

Tuesday: Matthew 22:15-46; 23:1-39; Matthew 24:36-51; 25:1-46; 26:1-2
Martyr Crescens; Hieromartyr Leonidas

Wednesday: John 12:17-50; Matthew 26:6-16;
Virgin Martyrs Agape, Chionia, & Irene

Thursday: 1 Corinthians 11:23-32; Matthew 26:1-20; John 13:3-17; Matthew 26:21-39; Luke
22:43-44; Matthew 26:40-75; 27:1-2
Hieromartyr Symeon; Makarios, Abp. of Corinth

Friday: 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; Matthew 27:62-66
John the Righteous; Euthemios the Enlightener of Karelia

Saturday: Matthew 27:62-66; Romans 6:3-11; Matthew 28:1-20
Martyr Paphnutius; George the Confessor



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

13 April 2014

Our Most Precious Gift

Today, as we celebrate Palm Sunday, we enter into the most holy time of the Church's year. And today we hear the account from Saint John's Gospel of how Jesus was anointed by Saint Mary of Bethany.

Yesterday, on Lazarus Saturday, we commemorated how Jesus Christ had raised Lazarus from the dead, thus providing us with a foretaste of His own resurrection. Today's Gospel places us in Bethany again, where Christ had gone to visit Mary and Martha and Lazarus. And we are told that Mary brought in a jar of very costly ointment, pouring it on Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair, to the irritation of Judas Iscariot who saw this as a waste of money.

The Church gives us this reading as we enter Holy Week because, as Christ Himself says, Mary is anointing Him for burial. Her action is a prophetic gesture, showing who He really is and prophesying the death that He is about to undergo. But this is also an action that reveals the tender devotion that Jesus Christ evokes in His followers. In anointing His feet with precious ointment, Mary was giving to Christ the most costly thing she had. She was, in effect, pouring out her whole life before Him.

As we enter Holy Week, this Gospel challenges us to bring our whole lives to Christ, and to allow His suffering and death to touch us in the depths of our hearts so that we too will be able to respond to Him with our whole lives.

In loving this Body, that is, the Church, bring water for His feet and kiss His feet, not only pardoning those who have become enmeshed in sin but by your grace giving them harmony and putting them at peace. Pour ointment on His feet, that the whole house wherein Christ reclines at table may be filled with the odour of your ointment, that all at table may be pleased with your perfume. In other words, pay honour to the least.

Saint Ambrose of Milan



Great and Holy Week

During the services of Holy Week we become eyewitnesses to and participants in the events of Christ's Passion and Death, which culminate in His great victory over death in the Resurrection. During the first three days, we have the services of **Bridegroom Matins** (held on the evening before) in which Christ speaks to us about the signs that will precede the last days, warning us of the judgment that is to come.



On **Sunday night**, the service focuses on the Patriarch Joseph (Genesis 37 and 39-40) whose innocent sufferings prefigure the Passion of Christ. They also commemorate the barren fig tree that was cursed by Christ (Matthew 21:18-20), a symbol of the judgment that awaits us if we do not bear the fruits of repentance.

On **Monday night**, the texts focus on the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), which provide the general theme for these first three days. We are told that the Bridegroom will come in the middle of the night, and "blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching, but unworthy is he whom He shall find in slothfulness."

On **Tuesday night**, we commemorate the sinful woman who anointed Christ's feet (Matthew 26:6-13; Luke 7:36-50) who provides us with an example of repentance and of transformation from a life of sin to a life of faith and obedience. Her faith is contrasted to the loss of faith that is shown by Judas, who not only betrays Christ, but who is also unwilling to repent of his sin.

On **Wednesday** of Holy Week the sacrament of the Anointing of the sick is celebrated, and all present are usually anointed, for we are all in need of spiritual healing.

The services of **Holy Thursday** take us into the Mystery of Christ's Passover. In the morning, with the Liturgy of St Basil the Great, we enter with Him into the upper room, where He establishes His New Covenant by instituting the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper. In the evening, we commemorate the undeserved sufferings of Jesus as we listen to the service of the Twelve Gospel Readings.

On **Holy and Great Friday**, the Royal Hours and Vespers are usually held in the morning. Towards the end of Vespers, the priest removes the Body of Christ from the Cross, wraps it in white linen and places it on the altar. He then takes the *Epitaphion*, the cloth on which the Body of Christ is painted or embroidered, from the altar and this is carried in procession before being placed in a sepulchre which represents Christ's tomb. On Friday evening, we keep watch at Christ's tomb. The service begins with lamentations, and we remember those died before Christ's coming in the flesh. The theme is not so much that of mourning, but rather of watchful anticipation, confident that He has now descended to the dead in order to conquer the power of hell and release those who are held captive in the tombs.

On **Holy and Great Saturday**, Vespers is normally held in the morning, followed by the Liturgy of St Basil. This was originally part of the vigil for Pascha, and the texts are already full of the joyful anticipation of the Resurrection. In the Gospel reading we hear of the Myrrhbearing women who come to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body, only to discover that He is Risen and that they are to share the news with the Apostles. To symbolise their joy, the priest scatters bay leaves and rose petals around the Church.

Finally, towards midnight, the Church gathers us together to celebrate the Pascha of the Lord with Matins and the Divine Liturgy. The Church is in darkness at the beginning of the service as we await the Light of Christ who conquers death.

Palm Sunday

Today, as we celebrate Palm Sunday and enter into Holy Week, we commemorate Jesus Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, showing His identity as King and Ruler of all. By entering Jerusalem on a donkey, Christ comes to us in a new way, and sets off the chain of events that will inaugurate His Kingdom.

With this triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem, we see Him revealed not simply as a teacher, but as the King who is welcomed by His subjects. However, He does not simply come as some general King "out there," but He comes to each of us personally. Just as the children welcomed Him into Jerusalem, so we are challenged to welcome Him into our hearts, to respond to Him with love and obedience, and to allow Him to reshape our desires according to His will.

Moreover, our King comes to us in meekness and humility, riding on a donkey. Unlike an earthly King, He comes to proclaim a Kingdom that is "not of this world" but which will still have an impact on the world. He comes to teach us the power of humility and the strength of love, a teaching that will find its ultimate expression in His death on the Cross, a death that is ultimately the supreme victory over death.



He who sits upon the throne of the cherubim, for our sake sits upon a foal; and coming to His voluntary Passion, today He hears the children cry 'Hosanna!' while the crowd replies, 'O Son of David, make haste to save those whom Thou hast created, blessed Jesus, since for this cause Thou has come, that we may know Thy glory.'

From Matins for Palm Sunday

Many indeed are the wondrous happenings of that time: God hanging from a cross, the sun made dark and again flaming out; for it was fitting that creation should mourn with its Creator. The temple veil rent, blood and water flowing from His side: the one as from a man, the other as from what was above man; the earth shaken, the rocks shattered because of the rock; the dead risen to bear witness to the final and universal resurrection of the dead. The happenings at the sepulchre and after the sepulchre, who can fittingly recount them? Yet no one of them can be compared to the miracle of my salvation. A few drops of blood renew the whole world, and do for all men what the rennet does for the milk: joining us and binding us together.

Saint Gregory the Theologian