mane, His trial by Jewish religious leaders and Ro-
man authorities, His beatings and mocking, and 
crucifixion and death on the Cross. This service is 
long, with twelve readings from the Gospels re-
counting the events, but its content is dramatic and 
moving.

After the reading of the fifth Gospel comes the 
procession with the icon of the Crucified Christ 
around the church.

HOLY OR “GOOD” FRIDAY

In the morning, the four “Royal Hours” are read. 
These services consist of hymns, psalms, and read-
ings from the Old and New Testaments, all related 
prophetically and ethically to the Person of Christ.

Usually in mid-afternoon, Great Vespers is 
chanted. During this service, we hear the story 
of the Crucifixion, but with attention paid to the 
death of Christ, the work of Joseph of Arimathea 
to secure the body of Christ from Pilate, His re-
moval from the cross, and His burial.

At one point in the reading, the Body of Christ 
is removed the cross, wrapped in a white cloth 
and is brought into the sanctuary. Following the 
reading, the priest carries the icon of the Epitaphi-
ous through the church and places it in the Sephul-
chre (the kouvouklion), which has been decorated 
with flowers.

GOOD FRIDAY EVENING - THE LAMENTATIONS

On Holy Friday evening, we sing the Orthros 
of Holy Saturday, consisting of psalms, hymns and 
readings, dealing with the death of Christ. During 
the Orthros, the congregation will join in chanting 
the Lamentations, hymns of praise to the Lord and 
relating His ultimate triumph over death. During 
this service the Epitaphios icon is carried in pro-
cession around the church. In some parishes the 
entire flower-bedecked Sepulcher, symbolizing 
the Tomb, is carried in the procession.

GREAT HOLY SATURDAY MORNING

On Holy Saturday morning, the Vesperal Divine 
Liturgy is celebrated. In this Liturgy, the Resurrection 
of Christ is celebrated and the triumph over death is 
proclaimed in the hymns and the readings from the 
Old and New Testament. There is a strong theme of 
baptism in this liturgy, because in the ancient Church, 
the catechumens would be baptized in this evening 
vigil of Pascha.

At midnight Saturday, the life-giving Resurrection 
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is celebrated. Be-
fore midnight, the Odes of Lamentation of the previ-
ous day are repeated. The Orthros of the Resurrection 
begins in complete darkness. The priest takes light 
from the vigil light and gives it to the faithful, who are 
holding candles. The priest sings, “Come, receive light 
from the unwaning light, and glorify Christ, who arose 
from the dead.” Just a short while later, the priest reads 
the resurrection story from the Gospel of Mark (16:1-8) 
and leads the congregation in singing the Resurrec-
tion Hymn, Christ is risen from the dead, trampling 
death by death, and to those in the tombs bestowing 
life.” Following, the Orthros service continues and 
leads into the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

THE AGAPE VESPERS

At some point on Sunday afternoon the faithful 
gather once more for Great Vespers, With lighted can-
dles they sing, “Christ is risen.” The people greet one 
another with the salutation, “Christ is risen”, which is 
answered, “Truly He is risen”. In the Great Vespers, the 
Gospel according to John (20:19-25) is read in various 
languages, proclaiming the Good News of Resurrec-
tion all over the universe without discrimination. The 
fruit of faith in the Resurrection of the Lord is love in His 
Name; therefore, this day is called “Sunday of Agape.”

For the next forty days, the Orthodox Church com-
memorates the Resurrection of Christ.

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2. LENT AND EASTER

Faith and Life is a new pamphlet series 
that provides an introduction to a wide range 
of spiritual and theological issues. Drawing 
from the beauty and wisdom of Orthodox 
Christianity, the series addresses the challenges 
of contemporary life and offers guidance to 
help you grow in your relationship with God 
and in your commitment to His will for your 
life. The series is a collaborative effort of the 
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Departments 
of Church and Society, Communications, 
Internet Ministries, Outreach and Evangelism, 
Religious Education, and Youth and Young Adult 
Ministries.

A Holy Week
Examines the major themes and meanings of each day of 
Holy Week and serves as a wonderful introduction to the 
varying services that take place during the Great and Holy 
Week.

Fasting
Provides an overview on the Biblical roots, practice, and 
theological significance of fasting in the Church and how it 
is an important part of our growth in the Orthodox Christian 
faith.

Dating of Easter (Pascha)
In The Orthodox Church
Explains how the date of Easter is calculated each year and 
why Western Christians usually celebrate Easter earlier than 
Orthodox Christians.

For additional resources, visit


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Holy Week

SATURDAY OF LAZARUS

An interlude between Great Lent and Holy Week, the Church names this day the “Saturday of Lazarus” in remembrance of the resurrection of Lazarus told in the Gospel of John (11:1-45) and its promise of universal resurrection for all men. The Church connects this celebration, by anticipation, with the Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem.

PALM SUNDAY

Palm Sunday celebrates the glorious and brilliant feast of the Entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem (John 12:1-18). Zechariah had prophesied the entrance of the Messiah into Jerusalem, saying: “Rejoice greatly ... O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, the King comes 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. The contemporary Jews associated this prophecy with the expected Messiah. This action of Christ testifies to His nature as Messiah, but with the definite declaration that His Kingdom was not of this world. The main road leading to Jerusalem was covered with palm trees. The multitudes, with palm branches in their hands, spread their cloaks on the road as a show of respect, crying out “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord.” A custom of distributing branches of palms to the people in the Church prevails to this day.

During the remainder of Holy Week, the Church advances its liturgical life by about twelve hours, celebrating morning services the night before, and evening services in the morning.

On Palm Sunday evening, the Church celebrates the Orthros (Matins) of Holy Monday, in the first of four “Bridegroom Services.” Christ is called the “Bridegroom” because in His Passion, He gives His life for His Bride, the people of God, the Church, just as a husband will sacrifice everything for his wife and family.

From Holy Monday to Holy Wednesday, some parishes will not celebrate this service, and replace it with the Sacrament of Holy Unction. In Orthodox thought, healing is connected to repentance, confession, and the remission of sins by the Lord. Holy Unction is the for cleansing sins and renewing the body and the spirit of the faithful. Holy Unction is one of the seven Sacraments of the Church, and it has its origin in the practice of the early Church as recorded in the Epistle of James (5:14-15). At the end of the service, the priest anoints the people with Holy Oil.

In the Orthros of Holy Thursday, the Church remembers the washing of the disciples’ feet, the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the Prayer of Christ at the Last Supper as recorded in the Gospel of John, and the betrayal.” Some parishes will not celebrate this service, and replace it with the Sacrament of Holy Unction.

HOLY THURSDAY

In the morning, the Vesperal Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great is celebrated. At this Divine Liturgy, the Church commemorates the institution of the Holy Eucharist by the Lord at His Last Supper with His disciples. Here, Christ presented bread and wine as His body and blood, which form the core of the new covenant between God and His people, the Church.

In the evening, in the Orthros of Holy Friday, the Church recalls the Passion of the Lord, from His betrayal by Judas Iscariot, His agony and arrest at Gethe-