

JOURNEY

THROUGH HOLY WEEK





As Orthodox Christians, we believe that our salvation comes through the holy resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We spend a lot of time in church services during Holy Week, leading up to this great mystery. In these services, we remember and participate in the last days of Jesus Christ's earthly life. The purpose of this guide is to shed light on your journey through Holy Week's services and to help you understand what is happening in them and what they mean for us as Christians.



Shed light
on your
journey

During the week, we hear stories from Holy Scripture that teach us about who Jesus is, who we are, and how we can live to grow closer to Christ. If we learn about the depth and meaning of these services, we can enter into the saving mystery of His resurrection on Pascha Sunday with a fuller and more loving commitment to the resurrection that happens inside each of us.

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Journey through Holy Week

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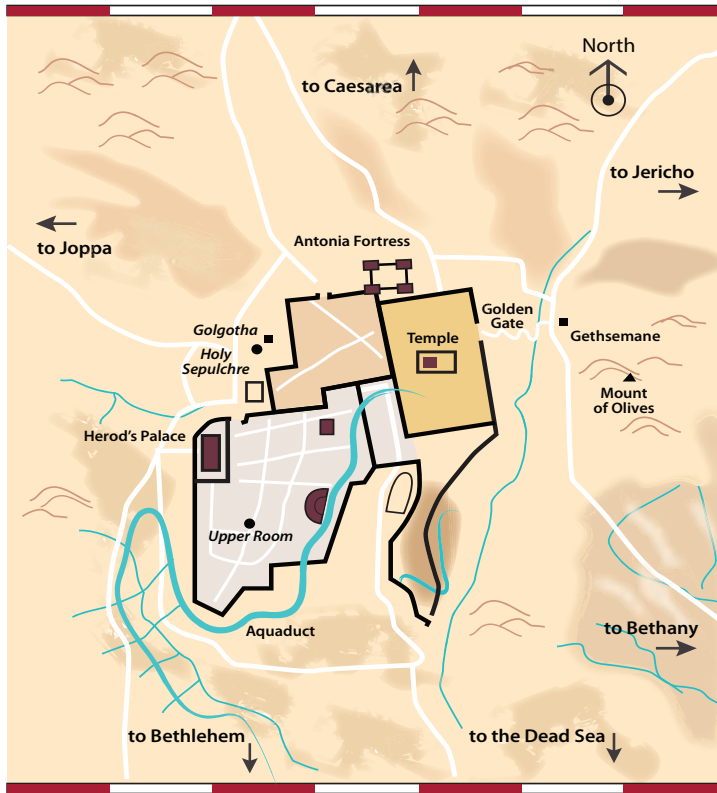
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ROAD TO RESURRECTION



The Jerusalem of the time of Jesus has mostly been lost, but traditions and archaeology help tell us roughly when and where the events of Holy Week might have happened. Each of the four Evangelists tells the story of Jesus Christ's last days in a slightly different order, and the Church's schedule of services doesn't precisely follow Jesus in "real time." The timeline below summarizes Jesus's last days from the entry into Jerusalem to the resurrection. During the Gospel lessons this week, listen for the places shown on the map.

Legend	
	Walls in the time of Jesus
	Roads
	Rivers
	Mountains
	Upper Room Traditional locations
	Gethsemane Known locations

Saturday In Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. He stays there with His good friends.

Sunday Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph and drives the sellers from Temple. He goes back to Bethany that night.

Monday Jesus returns to Jerusalem and teaches and heals there. He also encounters the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Tuesday Jesus continues to teach in the Temple, drawing the anger of the Jewish leaders.

Wednesday A woman anoints Jesus with expensive perfume while He is at the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany. Judas begins to plot to betray Jesus.

Thursday Jesus and His disciples share the Passover meal in the Upper Room and then go to the garden at Gethsemane. There, Jesus is arrested and taken to back to the city, where He is tried and beaten at the hands of the Sanhedrin (council of Jewish leaders).

Friday In the morning, the Sanhedrin turns Jesus over to the Romans. Jesus appears before Pilate, who has Him flogged, mocked, and finally crucified. Jesus dies, and Joseph of Arimathea places His body in the tomb; this is considered the first day in the tomb.

Saturday Jesus enters Hades and conquers death—second day in the tomb.

Sunday Jesus rises from the dead early in the morning, and the women find His tomb empty—third day in the tomb.



SATURDAY OF LAZARUS

Jesus wept (John 11:35).

Why did He weep? He was sad for a reason that would sadden many of us, too. His friend Lazarus had died. On what we call the “Saturday of Lazarus,” we find Jesus at a very human, emotional place. This story takes us from sadness to joy and leads us into the hope for an even greater joy.

Lazarus was the brother of Jesus’s close friends Mary and Martha. When Lazarus dies of sickness, Jesus Christ feels and expresses the real human emotion of sadness. When Martha asks Jesus why He did not keep her brother alive, He reminds her to believe so she may “see the glory of God” (John 11:40). Even though His sadness is real, Jesus knows that something greater is coming.

Jesus’s tears show that He is human, but His next move shows that He is God. It says much more about all other human beings, too. He calls Lazarus to “come forth” and rise from the dead. Lazarus’s sisters are overjoyed, of course. When someone we love dies, who doesn’t wish that God would bring that person back to us?

When Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, He gives Mary and Martha what their hearts desired more than anything else at that moment—another chance at life, a new life for their brother. For Lazarus, Jesus undoes the highest pain that we all must face: death.

We remember the raising of Lazarus on the weekend between Great Lent, which ended the night before, and Holy Week, which begins the evening of Palm Sunday. But at a practical level for us, Holy Week begins here, with a real human family and the resurrection of a real human being, a person like any of us. Holy Week will end with Pascha Sunday, with the resurrection of our Lord. Putting the two together brings hope to the rest of the human family.

If Jesus can raise His friend Lazarus, He can do the same for all of us. And we believe that He will. After a week of persecution and suffering, He accomplishes His own resurrection, but only after raising His friend. Together, the raising of Lazarus and the holy resurrection of Christ show us that we will all be raised.

This is why we begin our journey through Holy Week with the raising of Lazarus. It reminds us of our hope for the completion of our journey. Jesus Christ brings the miracle to one man, and then He lives through it Himself, making the resurrection and eternal life possible for every one of us.

Raising of Lazarus

- The shortest passage in the Bible is John 11:35.
- Icons are not afraid to remind us of reality. In this icon, one of the people closest to the tomb of Lazarus holds a cloth over his nose and mouth to protect himself from any foul smells coming from the tomb. Even the story in the Bible mentions this—read John 11:39.



In many churches, after the Divine Liturgy on the Saturday of Lazarus, children are invited to make crosses out of palm branches. These crosses will be distributed the following day, Palm Sunday. It is a chance for children to make a special contribution by giving a gift to the whole church.

PALM SUNDAY

Picture your favorite professional athlete, actor, or singer cruising down the main street of your town in a stretch limousine. Can you see the adoring fans cheering, waving banners, jostling to get closer? This is what we hear as we enter the town of Jerusalem with Jesus on Palm Sunday. Think of the movie stars on the red carpet in Hollywood; the Jewish people of Jerusalem lay down palm branches as a carpet. They have high hopes for their “star,” wishing that Jesus would become a powerful king who would free them from their harsh suffering under the Romans. They hope that Jesus will be the promised king who will restore the nation of Israel to its former glory, as it was during the time of Kings David and Solomon.

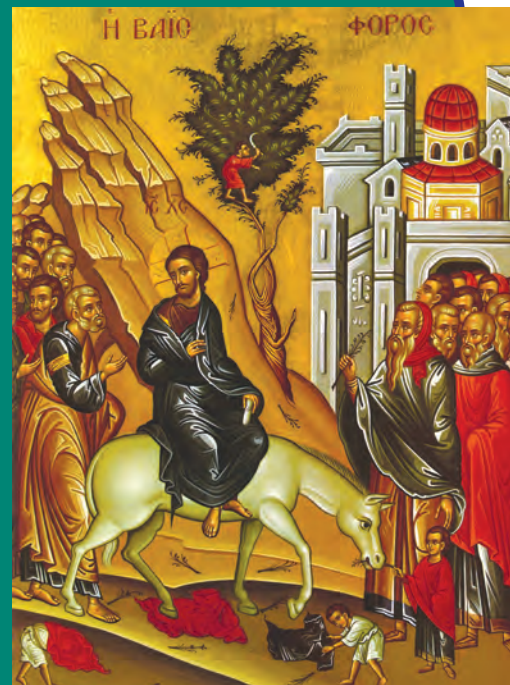
Now picture your celebrity driving an old, dented car instead of waving from a limo. Christ doesn’t have an old car, but He does ride into town the common person’s way: on a donkey. His fans in Jerusalem expected to see their king riding high on a proud stallion. But Jesus chooses to ride a donkey—a humble beast of burden, an animal of peace—to show that the people should not expect an earthly kingdom. His kingdom is, and will be, like nothing on earth.

When we enter

Jesus chooses to ride a humble animal

the church on Palm Sunday, we enter Jerusalem with Christ. And because we enter with Him, we also will “suffer” with Him, and this service begins His suffering and betrayal. To suffer with Him does not mean that we should feel pain. Instead of pain, we suffer with hope for and joy in the coming resurrection, which gives this suffering a purpose and meaning.

If you look around the church, you may notice that it is decorated with palm branches. Each person receives a palm cross at the end of the service. There are many customs, too: some churches will also distribute branches of bay leaves, flowers, or pussy willows. All of these remind us of the people who waved palm branches to welcome Jesus and laid them at His feet as He entered Jerusalem.



Entry into Jerusalem

- Icons frequently use “shorthand” to describe places, events, and ideas. The small group of buildings in background represents the whole city of Jerusalem.
- What are the children in the icon doing? How might they describe Jesus’s entry into the city to their friends?



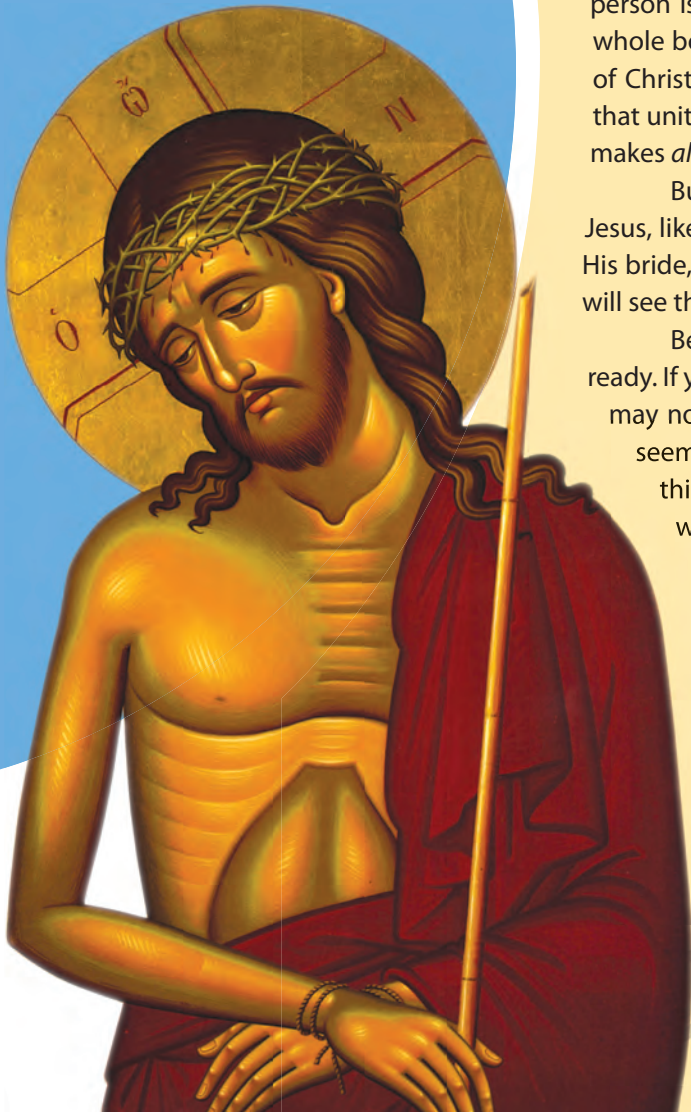
A hymn we sing on both Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday reminds us why we carry palm branches and what the raising of Lazarus means for all of us:

“To confirm the general resurrection before your passion, you resurrected Lazarus from the dead, O Christ our God. Therefore imitating the children, carrying the symbols of victory, we cry out to you the Victor over death: Hosanna in the highest; blessed are you, the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”

What are the Bridegroom Services?

Christ the Bridegroom

- Read Isaiah 53:3–6. How does this passage describe what you see in the icon?
- Some Bridegroom icons have the words “Behold the man!” next to Jesus. Read John 19:1–5 to find out why.



WATCH. GET READY. BE READY.

It should sound to you like something big, something important, is happening, and we had better not miss it. Getting ready for the coming of Jesus Christ is what we should be doing our whole lives. On the first three evenings of Holy Week, we get ready for Christ, who is our Bridegroom. We are reminded of our responsibility to keep our eyes open and on Christ.

When we hear the word “bride,” we imagine a pretty, smiling woman in white. But “bride” has a greater meaning in the Church. We don’t come to the Church to be individual brides. In the Church, no person is alone; each of us is an important part of the whole body. When we come together like this, this body is the “bride of Christ.” The Church, the bride, is preparing for the wedding feast that unites her to Christ and makes her complete. So, uniting to Christ makes *all* of us complete.

But why do we call Jesus a bridegroom? The answer is simple: Jesus, like a bridegroom in a wedding, is willing to give everything for His bride, the people of God, the Church. By the end of Holy Week, we will see that Jesus gives up His life for His followers.

Because the Church is the bride, we each play a part in getting ready. If you have ever seen a bride preparing for her wedding day, you may notice that she is very busy. Her upcoming wedding probably seems to be the only thing on her mind. It may seem like the only thing she talks about. Almost everything she does involves her wedding and her groom.

Like the busy bride, we must keep our Bridegroom, Christ, on our minds as much as we can. If we are busy, we must be busy living a life that brings us closer to Him. We show Jesus our love by preparing for Him. The stories we hear in each of the Bridegroom Services remind us of what this preparation means.

**We show
Jesus our love
by preparing
for Him**

Palm Sunday Evening: The First Bridegroom Service

When we enter the church on the evening of Palm Sunday, we greet the icon of Christ the Bridegroom, which will remain at the front of the church for the three days of Bridegroom Services. It shows us who the Bridegroom is and who we are preparing to meet. How does He look? This is a somber icon, reminding us that we are entering into the harshest days of Jesus Christ's earthly life. The challenges and betrayals will lead to His arrest, trial, and death on a cross.

On Sunday evening, we focus on two stories that connect us to the past (the Old Testament) and the future (our own lives). We remember Joseph the Patriarch, whose story is in the Book of Genesis. We see Joseph as a "prototype" of Jesus Christ, showing the same steadfast love that Jesus Christ offers in His last earthly days. Joseph was innocent and righteous, but his brothers betrayed and mistreated him. He had enough faith that God loved him, that he "reassured and comforted" his brothers (Genesis 50:19–21). We all know how difficult it is to reassure and comfort someone who mistreats us. Joseph offers his brothers the same type of forgiving love that Jesus Christ shows when He asks His Father to forgive those who crucify Him. In the end, God rewards Joseph because forgiving love is the Way. Joseph's story reminds us that our Bridegroom is the one who forgives, loves, and rewards us if we do the same.

During this service, we also hear Christ curse the fig tree. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Christ walked past a fig tree that didn't have any fruit, and He cursed it to never bear figs again. This story is not just about a tree. When the fig tree stands before Christ and gives Him nothing, it symbolizes any person or group of people who does not receive Christ and His teachings. The tree fails to give fruit. Often we as people fail to "bear fruit": we don't live as we should. Each of us needs to care for our soul as if it is a garden, so our faith is *living, breathing, and doing*.

When Christ curses the tree, it withers and dies, showing His divine power over life. Therefore, our Bridegroom is not just sad, as He may appear in His icon; He is triumphant and powerful, as well as loving and forgiving.

Bridegroom Hymn

Behold the Bridegroom
comes in the middle of the
night. Blessed is the servant
whom he shall find watching.
Unworthy is the one whom he
shall find heedless. Beware,
then, O my soul, not to be
borne down with sleep, lest
you be given up to death and
be shut out from the Kingdom.
Wherefore, rouse yourself
crying out: "Holy, holy, holy
are you, our God."

Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts



One part of the Presanctified Liturgy that is longer than it is during other services is the Litany for the Catechumens. Traditionally, Holy Week is a time of intense preparation for catechumens, or learners, who are getting ready to join the Church by receiving the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation (anointing with oil) on Pascha. This was especially true during the early centuries of the Church, when many people became Christians as adults rather than as children. Today, catechumens take up their crosses, as shown in the photo, because Jesus commanded it; read Luke 9:23–26.

After completing the prayers for catechumens, however, the priest does something that seems surprising and confusing: he tells them to get out! “All catechumens, depart,” he repeats again and again. The second part of the service, the Liturgy of the Faithful, is intended only for Church members who are ready to receive communion. Don’t be surprised when no one leaves, though: this part of the tradition generally isn’t practiced today.

How many times will you attend a church service this week? In the early days, Christians couldn’t get enough! They came to hear God’s word and share communion as often as they could, even on days when the Church knows that celebrating the Divine Liturgy is too festive for the season. The Divine Liturgy is only for Sundays during Lent because it is such a joyous time of offering gifts to God. But the full celebration is too much of a contrast with the solemn time of fasting and repentance of Great Lent.

Because fasting and the spiritual struggles of Lent are hard work, the people need to be nourished. Therefore, the food from the “banquet” of the Divine Liturgy is also shared during the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts on certain weekday evenings during Great Lent and, depending on the parish’s schedule, on one or more days during the early part of Holy Week. On the Sunday before, the bread that is to be part of the Presanctified service is offered up along with the bread and wine to be used for Holy Communion during the Divine Liturgy. The priest then places a few drops of the consecrated wine onto the bread, and then he places these sanctified gifts in a tabernacle (box) on the altar table until they are needed during the week.

During the Presanctified Liturgy, the priest silently brings out the body and blood of Christ with great reverence. He covers his head with the aer (cloth) to show respect, and all of the people kneel and keep their heads down.

Holy Monday Evening:

The Second Bridegroom Service

The service of Monday evening helps us to understand the imagery of the bride and bridegroom. We hear about the ten virgins waiting for the coming of their bridegroom. This warns us to be ready for an important moment, and to have what we need prepared and waiting. Five of the women bring oil to light their lamps, but the other five forget to bring their oil. When the forgetful five leave to go buy more oil, the bridegroom arrives. The forgetful ones miss the wedding feast because “the door was shut” (Matthew 25:10). How many of us have gone somewhere, realized that we have forgotten something important, and been disappointed that we miss out on some fun because of it?

We must remember Jesus Christ every day and keep our “oil” nearby. Our oil is our good works and prayerful attitude. So within us are the miracle and the mystery: as we get ready and show love for others, we actually get closer to the very one we are preparing to meet. If we think of Christ and watch for Him, we will find Him in our lives. Christ tells us that He visits us through other people. “I was hungry and you fed me... Even as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me.” This is because every human being is created “in the image and likeness of God.” Every time another person crosses our path, we have an opportunity to serve Christ by serving one of His children. We are waiting and watching for Him, but if we really pay attention to Him, we will realize that we are not waiting and watching for something that will happen; it happens all the time, all around us. We can become closer to Christ every day if we look for Him every day.

On Holy Monday evening, we also hear one of the most powerful stories in the New Testament. Certain Jewish leaders, who were enemies of Jesus, confront Him and try to trap Him with His ideas. But Jesus outsmarts them, skillfully answering their questions and making them look foolish, which only enrages them more. Then Jesus turns the tables on the Jewish leaders, calling them hypocrites because they tell people to observe traditions without following them themselves. These events set the stage for the Jewish leaders’ plot to have Jesus arrested for trying to overthrow the Roman rulers in Jerusalem.

Placed at the beginning of Holy Week, this story teaches us two things. First, it teaches us that Jesus had enemies who were willing to have Him falsely accused of crimes, even using His own words against Him. Second, it teaches us that we must be careful about behaving like the enemies of Jesus, saying one thing and doing another.

The door was shut



Holy Tuesday Evening:

The Third Bridegroom Service

When we face something bad, we want to turn away from it and turn toward the good. Turning away from harmful activities and thoughts—and then turning toward Jesus Christ—is the focus of Holy Tuesday’s Bridegroom Service. This service reminds us that we must make a decision to turn our lives toward Christ and live in His way instead of living sinfully. Many of us probably say, “I’m really not that bad.” That’s correct. In fact, we are very *good*, but our lives don’t always reflect our true goodness.

None of us is alone in either sinfulness or goodness. On Holy Tuesday, we hear about the sinful woman in the Gospel of Luke, which helps us learn what we must do to choose a life of goodness over one of sin. This woman sits at Jesus’s feet, weeps for her sins, and anoints Him with oil. When she meets Jesus, she sees a better way to live, and wants to change. This change is her repentance, and when she turns toward Christ with all her heart, He accepts and forgives her. We don’t call this woman “sinful” because she is *more* sinful than anyone else is. We call her sinful because she realizes and confesses her sins, and then she chooses to turn to Christ. She has the courage to decide that she must change. We should call her the “repentant woman,” emphasizing the change that she makes for good. She is meaningful for us not because she sins, but because she repents of her sins.

Sitting nearby, a Pharisee (a Jewish religious leader) complains that Jesus accepts the woman. When he looks at her, he sees only her sins, instead of seeing a whole person with a desire for good; this is *his* sin. Do we ever look at others and decide they are not acceptable to God? When we judge someone, we see only his or her unattractive actions, instead of a reflection of God. Often, the sin in our hearts distorts our vision of others.

So when we judge and separate ourselves from others, we separate ourselves from Christ.

Christ forgives the repentant woman because she looks at her sins. The Pharisee is *not* forgiven because he does not think he needs it; he is too busy judging someone else to see his own sins. When others judge us, it can hurt. But remember the example of the woman: she keeps her focus on Jesus and does not argue with the Pharisee. She ignores his judgment because Christ’s presence and forgiveness is more important.

When the Pharisee judges the woman, Jesus silences him and forgives the woman. Jesus’s loving forgiveness silences the judgments of others.

So how do we repent? We examine our words and actions, and we ask ourselves how we may be turning away from Christ. Are we trying to live a life like His? He lifts people up and shows them light. We can do this for the people in our lives. But if we push others down or fall into despair ourselves, we bring darkness. And in the dark, we cannot see what is beautiful in ourselves or in other people. Do we gossip or judge? Do we remember Christ daily? Do we treat ourselves with care and respect? Do we notice the needs of others? When we realize that we don’t always live like Christ, we know we must turn toward Christ, to repent and change our ways for the better.

When we examine ourselves, we must see that we have the potential to turn to the better way. The repentant woman weeps for her sins when the Source of the better way is sitting in front of her. She knows she can change to a better and fuller life. Holy Tuesday’s service should bring us the joy and hope of knowing that we *can* change our lives to reflect our true goodness.

Turn
toward
Christ



HOLY WEDNESDAY: HOLY UNCTION

If you have ever had a cold or the flu, you probably know that when you're sick, you are just not *yourself*. In fact, if you become very ill, it can be very hard to even imagine or remember what it feels like to be your normal, healthy self. Have you ever broken a bone, sprained an ankle, or injured yourself? If so, maybe you couldn't do some of the simple things that you would have normally taken for granted. You needed help. You wanted to be whole again. You needed healing.

Not being ourselves and needing help from others are two problems that we bring with us to church on Holy Wednesday, when we receive the Sacrament of Holy Unction. This tradition of anointing with blessed oil is recorded in the Epistle of James. We believe that when we are anointed, Jesus Christ restores our wholeness both physically and spiritually.

We need this sacrament of healing in two ways: as individual Christians and as a community of Christians, the Body of Christ.

Just like having the flu makes you feel like less than yourself physically, being spiritually sick also makes you less than yourself. All of us are spiritually sick, but what does this mean? Our imperfections and sins, when we "miss the mark," are our ailments. If we were to be ourselves as God intended us to be, then we would glorify him in everything we do. Most of us do not succeed in this. When we tend to be lazy, want more for ourselves than for others, or forget to be thankful, we are not being ourselves. Inside, our souls are divided and broken instead of whole, healthy, and complete. These are some of our sicknesses. Every one of us must visit the spiritual hospital that is the Church, to ask the Lord to heal us inside and help us become whole and healthy human beings.

It is impossible to think about an individual's spiritual

healing without remembering how tightly connected we all are to one another. No matter how spiritually sick or well we are, all of our actions affect everyone around us. No sin is the story of just one person. The good news is that all of an individual person's *positive* actions also affect the people around him or her. The point is that the sacrament of Holy Unction heals our sickness and brokenness both as individuals and as the whole body of Christian people.

Remember what it is like to have a broken or sprained bone: you need help from others with simple tasks like opening doors or even tying your shoes. As the Body of Christ, we all need one another. But the body is broken. In our broken state, we forget this. We put ourselves before others; we think we are better than others; we don't always treat each other with respect; we may hurt other people without meaning to. All of these things happen because we need to be healed of our spiritual sicknesses.

The Sacrament of Holy Unction restores the whole Body of Christ to fullness, reconnecting people to one another. We can treat each other with the respect that all people, who are all created in the image and likeness of God, deserve. When this happens, we can actually see each other in a new light. We may actually look different to each other if we are striving for our brokenness to be healed. Holy Unction can restore the Body of Christ to fullness and togetherness.

Jesus
restores our
wholeness



HOLY THURSDAY MORNING



Christ Washing the Apostles' Feet

- In the Gospel of John, there is no story of the Last Supper as we usually think about it. Instead, at a supper before Jesus's betrayal, Jesus washes the feet of the disciples. The icon shows Jesus washing Peter's feet. Read John 13:6–9 to see how Peter reacts.
- Washing the feet of another person was one of the most extreme forms of humility at the time of Jesus, something that usually a servant or a slave would do for a guest in a home. What do you think Jesus wanted to say about Himself by washing the feet of His disciples?



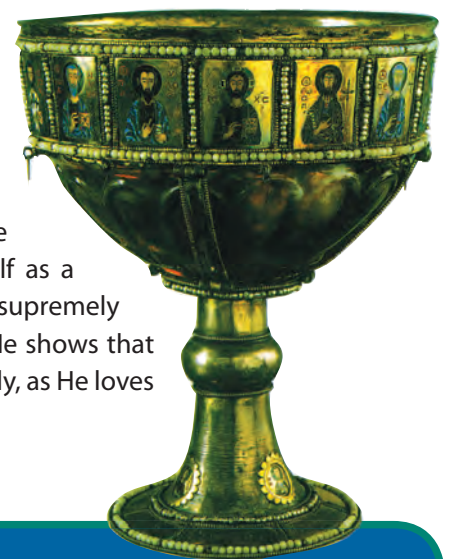
On the morning of Holy Thursday, Christ shares salvation with us, uniting us to Him and to each other in one sacramental moment. We join Him in the upper room, where He offers the first Eucharist. Imagine sitting at the table with your beloved teacher and friend, Jesus. It is the Passover meal, a sacred tradition that you have observed year after year, a time to thank God for freeing His people from slavery in Egypt. But this time is different because Jesus says, "Take, eat, this is my body of the new covenant.... Drink from it, all of you, this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

We hear this at every Divine Liturgy, but what does it *mean*? What did it mean the first time, at this Passover meal?

It means *life*. We say "food is life" because it keeps our bodies going. In the Eucharist, the gifts of food—bread and wine—are sanctified and consecrated. They become a gift of everlasting life, the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The change is not physical, but mystical. The "qualities of as the materials they were created to be, but through blood of our Lord. When we receive Him into ourselves bodily and spiritually, we allow Him to live inside us; we make it more possible to live our lives in Him. We also call the Eucharist "communion" because we partake together. To bring Christ in and to live a life in Him is to live in loving communion with others.

**We allow
Him to live
inside us**

In the upper room, Jesus does something else that surprises His disciples: He washes their feet. To wash someone's feet is an act of great humility. Coming from their beloved teacher, guide, and Lord, the disciples do not know how to receive this action. Why does He do it? Christ washes their feet for the same reason that He is crucified; He offers himself as a humble servant who, as God Himself, also is supremely strong. When He washes His disciples' feet, He shows that He loves each of them intensely and personally, as He loves each of us.



The Mystical (Last) Supper

- Many icons have a red cloth hanging in background to remind us that the event is taking place indoors.
- Read John 13:21–26. In the icon, find each person the passage describes. Who is the person closest to Jesus, and what is he doing?

HOLY THURSDAY EVENING



We enter into Christ's darkest hours, when in His final earthly days, He is betrayed and gives Himself up to be crucified. We spend a lot of time listening to twelve Gospel accounts of these events.

We go with Jesus to the garden of Gethsemane, where His prayer shows us that He is completely human and completely obedient to His Father. He knows that He is going to die, which brings Him intense pain. He

first asks His Father to take the pain away, but then says "not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36). Because He is really human, it really hurts that He must be unjustly crucified. Because He is a *perfect* human, He obeys out of love for His Father and for the rest of us, whom He saves by His crucifixion and resurrection. All of us can relate to the prayer to "make it go away" when we have to deal with something painful. It's okay to pray this, but Christ shows us the next step—accepting and trusting God's will.

The hymns we hear focus on a great contrast. Christ, who is our God, is treated as a lowly criminal. Each phrase of the hymn compares ideas of Christ's glory with details of His suffering:

Today is hung upon the tree, He who suspended the land in the midst of the waters.

A crown of thorns crowns Him, who is the 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 the Jordan.

He was transfixed with nails, the Bridegroom of the Church.

He was pierced with a spear, the Son of the Virgin.

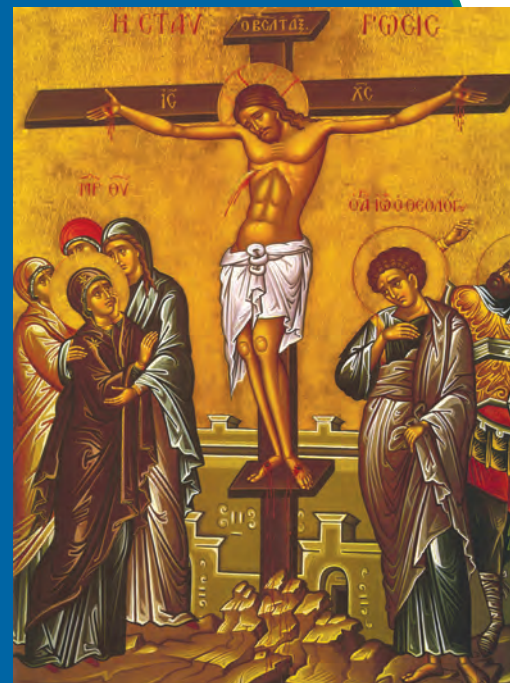
We worship your passion, O Christ. Show us also your glorious resurrection.

This can be a long service, with lots of standing still, lots of trying to pay attention to the readings. Try to focus on the stories, listening or reading along, because the whole story is about each and every one of us. It's okay to feel a little antsy or tired. It's okay if your feet hurt. Let those hurting feet stand *with Christ* in His physical and emotional pain on this day. Remember that He endured our every human pain and discomfort, walking obediently through it during these last days of His earthly life.

His prayer shows us that He is completely human and obedient

Crucifixion

- The plaque at the top of the cross has Greek letters that abbreviate "The King of Glory." Read Psalm 24:7–10 and John 18:33–37. How do these two passages relate to one another and to the cross?
- There is a small skull in the earth below the cross, at the very bottom of the icon. It reminds us that Jesus was crucified at "the place of the skull," Golgotha. A tradition teaches that this is the skull of Adam, the first human.
- Read Matthew 27:54 to see what the centurion (Roman army officer) is saying. According to Orthodox tradition, his name is Longinus. He is a saint of the Church, and his feast day is October 16.



HOLY FRIDAY AFTERNOON



Epitaphios

- Mary Magdalene is the woman wearing a red cloak. A tradition says that when she saw the body of Christ lying on the ground, she threw her arms in the air and cried, “Who will let these things be heard by all the world? I shall go alone to Rome to the Caesar. I shall show him what evil Pilate has done.”
- When the Gospels tell the story of the burial of Jesus, they name Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and a group of women. The stories do not mention the presence of the Virgin Mary (who is about to kiss Jesus’s face) or John (the person touching Jesus). Check for yourself: read Matthew 27:59; Mark 15:46, Luke 23:53; and John 19:39–40.

When we come to church on the afternoon of Holy Friday, we are attending the burial of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Every image and object we see, every step we take, is part of our solemn mourning for the death of Christ. We remember the very devoted man who took down the body of Christ from the cross, Joseph of Arimathea. After Joseph removed the body of Jesus, he anointed it with oil, and then he “wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb.”

Christ is real. His death is real. To reach up and carry His weight down, is real. We respect Joseph’s act of love and devotion, and we respect the realness of Christ’s death on the cross on this day. During the Gospel reading, when we hear the death once again, the icon of the body of Christ is removed from the cross. The priest wraps the icon in white linen.

This man was God himself

After Joseph took down the body of Christ, he prepared it for burial and carried the body to a new tomb. The priest represents this by carrying the Epitaphios icon, a beautiful cloth icon showing Christ’s body being prepared for burial, around the church and placing it in the *kouvouklion*, which symbolizes the tomb of Christ. During the procession, we hear the hymn:

When Joseph of Arimathea took You, the Life of all, now dead, down from the cross, he buried You in fine linen, after anointing You with myrrh. He yearned with desire, humbly contained by awe, rejoicing, he cried out to You: Glory to Your condescension, O merciful God!

Notice that the priest chants to God, who *condescended* to die on the cross. This means that our all-powerful Lord and Creator decided to do something He didn’t have to do—to become a man and die like a man, out of love. Joseph held a dead *man* in his arms, but we never forget that this man was God Himself.



HOLY FRIDAY EVENING



Holy Friday evening is filled with melodies and customs that are hundreds of years old. Bright, colorful flowers decorate the tomb of Christ. There is a long procession around the church. We hold candles as we sing familiar hymns. These are the things we hear, see, smell, and do during this evening's service.

We begin by descending with Christ into the tomb, where He was buried. In Hades—the place where the dead go—He rescues Adam, Eve, and all of humanity



from eternal death. On Holy Friday evening, the Giver of Light is in this place of darkness; the Giver of Life is in this place of death. We must remember this as we hear and sing a series of hymns.

At one point, we sing a conversation between a mother and her innocent son who has been killed. What does this mother say? "O, my most sweet springtime! O, my son beloved, where does your beauty go?"

Her son responds, "Do not lament, mother. I suffer the passion to free Adam and Eve."

Have you ever heard a mother call her child "sunshine"? Mary, the Mother of God, calls her Son "springtime." And her Son, Jesus, says, "Don't worry, mother. I know what I'm doing."

Part of Christ's funeral is the procession around the outside of the church. We walk behind the tomb of Christ,

which holds the Epitaphios. We light our way with candles and we sing the Trisagion hymn: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us."

We stop a few times during our walk around the church, and the priest intones or sings petitions. We respond with "Lord, have mercy." At the end of the procession, the *kouvouklion* may be held high for us to pass underneath on our way back into the church. This symbolizes our passing from death to life.

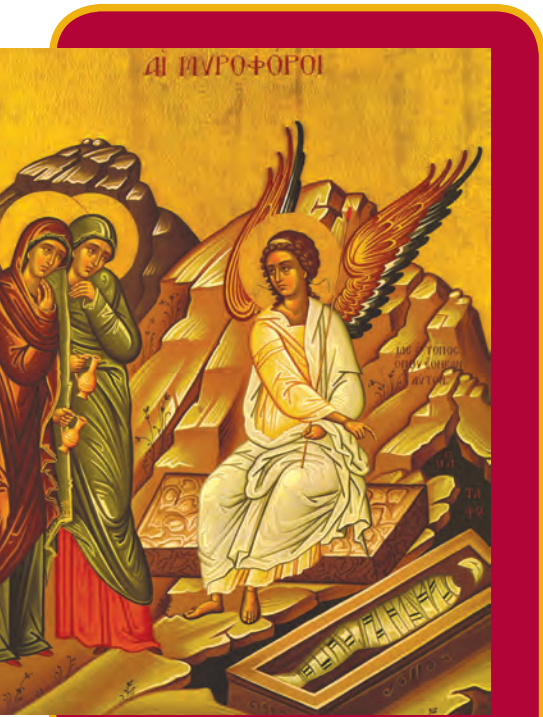
In the church, the priest brings the Epitaphios into the altar, circles the table with it three times, and lays it on the holy altar table. It will stay here until the Feast of the Ascension, forty days after Pascha.

You may notice that the priest is wearing brightly colored vestments, which show joy. What is joyful about being at the funeral of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Aren't we in mourning?

We experience here something called "joyful sadness" (in Greek, *charmolype*, χαρμολυπη). How can we be joyful and sad at the same time? We know how tragic and unjust it is for anyone to die, especially Christ. But we also know that His death will lead to His resurrection, and to the resurrection of us all. We know that when Christ enters the place of death, Hades, He has filled it with life. He has taken its power and transformed death from a tragic end into a joyful beginning.

As we shift from sorrow into joy, we hear one of the most exciting Old Testament prophecies. God shows the prophet Ezekiel a valley of "very dry bones." At the Lord's command, Ezekiel speaks to the bones, and they rejoin into bodies and are covered with flesh. He then speaks to them, and then they begin breathing and stand up. God promises to put His Spirit in them, and they will live again. On the night that Christ confronts death, we learn that we are all made for life.

Shift from
sorrow
into joy



The Empty Tomb

- It was customary for people to go to a tomb to mourn the loss of a loved one for many days after a death. They would anoint the body with fragrant spices and perfumes, such as myrrh, to hide any odors. The women in this icon are carrying small jars containing those perfumes.
- Imagine what the women felt when they found the tomb open and the grave empty. Read Mark 16:6-7 to find out what they were told.

HOLY SATURDAY MORNING

Christ has been crucified and buried. His eleven remaining disciples—remember that Judas, who betrayed Jesus, has killed himself—are scattered and feeling defeated. Their beloved teacher, Messiah, Lord, and friend has been taken from them. The women in mourning bring myrrh to Christ’s tomb, wanting to care for His body by anointing it according to the Jewish custom. And then the most *incomprehensible* thing happens. What do they find in His tomb? Nothing! No body to anoint. He was dead—they saw Him die. Joseph took His dead body down and put it in a tomb sealed with a rock. How do those women feel? What do they do? They rush to announce this incredible news to anyone and everyone they can.



Now, in our church on Holy Saturday, we know that this is the day in between Christ’s crucifixion and His resurrection. Just as on Holy Monday, we are again in a state of “watchful expectation.” Inside Christ’s tomb, a miracle is taking place. The mourning of death is being transformed into the joy of everlasting life that His resurrection will bring. We venerate the icon of Christ in the depths of Hades, holding the hands of Adam and Eve and freeing people from death. We remember victory over death when the priest scatters bay leaves or flower petals through the church. (Bay leaves used to be woven into wreaths for Olympic winners, so they symbolize victory.)

We remember victory over death

In the Old Testament, certain events point to the death, three days in the tomb, and resurrection of Christ. This is why we call them “prophecies”—they remind us that Christ’s death and resurrection has *always* been God’s plan of loving salvation. On Holy Saturday, we read these prophecies. One example is the story of Jonah, who was swallowed into the belly of a fish for three days and then spit out. Another is a story from the book of Daniel about three young men who were thrown into a fiery furnace because they refused to worship the king. Even in the furnace, they continued praising God and singing, “Praise ye the Lord and exalt him forever.” Because of their faithfulness, they were not burned. We sing this hymn on Holy Saturday to connect these young prophets to our Lord’s three days in the tomb.



HOLY SATURDAY EVENING



**Come
receive
the light**

This is the Day of all Days, the Feast of Feasts: Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, victorious over death and sin once and for all—for all of *us*. We come to the church late at night, but it is actually a morning service we will be celebrating. It is the Orthros and Divine Liturgy celebrating our Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead.

The church is darkened to remind us that at this time, Jesus is in the tomb and transforming death to life for all. The light will come with the morning, the day of new and eternal life.

Midnight signals morning, and at this moment, a single light comes forth from the sanctuary. As the priest carries this candle to us, he sings, "Come receive the light from the unwaning light, and glorify Christ, who has risen from the dead." This is the most joyful moment of our day, week, and year as Orthodox Christians.

"Christ is risen!" the priest proclaims, and we respond, "Truly He is risen!" We sing the hymn of His resurrection many times, to stay in this moment of new life and new joy. The tomb of Christ is pushed to the side, and the cross is empty.

In the Gospel reading, Mary Magdalene and the other women are amazed when they find an empty tomb. Where is He? He was buried. He is alive! The angel tells them, "You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here; see the place where they laid Him. But go tell His disciples and Peter" (Mark 16:6–7).

We continue by celebrating the rest of the Divine Liturgy. We may think to ourselves, "Wow, this sounds just like any other Sunday liturgy." What we must learn here is that Pascha Sunday's liturgy, and every liturgy, is a celebration of the resurrection of Christ. On Pascha, His resurrection grants us eternal life. On this day, our hymns, traditions, and symbols help us glorify and worship Him. From here, we carry Pascha with us, in every liturgy and every moment of our lives. We live in the light of the resurrection and eternal life.



The Resurrection

- Another name for this icon is the Descent into Hades.
- Jesus is pulling Adam out of his tomb. One tradition says that Jesus told Adam, "Arise! Get up!"
- Some Resurrection icons show a figure tied up and in darkness, representing death. The broken locks and chains remind us that Jesus destroyed the power of death over human life.



PASCHA SUNDAY



After the great feast of our Lord's resurrection, He does not leave us. In the quiet of the morning, we remember that Jesus visited His disciples after His resurrection, to bring them peace, to bestow on them the Holy Spirit, and to send them out in His name. This is our celebration of the Agape Vespers service. "Agape" means love, and this is a love that goes out to all nations and all people. We read a passage from the Gospel of John in many languages to show that the good news of Christ's saving resurrection is for all people in the world.

The
good news
is for all
people

Christ is risen!



In addition to the universal traditions of the Church, such as lighting candles, the customs of many Orthodox Christian cultures contribute to the celebration and joy of the Paschal feast.

Eggs are a part of the festivities in many cultures because, like Christ's tomb, they open to release new life.

- In the Greek tradition, eggs are hard-boiled and dyed red, the color of life and of Christ's blood. They are distributed, with a blessing, after the Paschal liturgy.
- Later, during the traditional breakfast, people of all ages challenge one another to a contest. They knock the eggs together, saying "Christ is risen," and the person with the last unbroken egg is considered lucky.
- In other countries, such as Romania and the Ukraine, eggs are hand-decorated with elaborate designs.
- In Serbia, the first egg dyed and decorated is set aside and designated the "protector of the house."

Light and illumination play such a big role in the services of Holy Week and Pascha that many customs have developed around them.

- In Greece, the flame for the Paschal candles is flown in from Jerusalem, where it was lit at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.
- Parents or godparents may give richly decorated candles to their children and godchildren.
- Some people take their lit candles home with them after services—no matter whether they walked to church or drove there in a car.
- At home, they will light a vigil lamp to preserve the flame throughout the whole year, if possible. They may also use the candle to mark a cross on the doorframe.



In many traditions, but especially in Slavic countries such as Russia, people load baskets with a variety of special foods and bring them to the church to be blessed:

- Breads—such as conical Finnish or Russian paska cheese pastry, cylindrical Russian kulich, and twisted Greek tsoureki—abound because they rise and because they are filled with milk, eggs, and butter, which were avoided during Great Lent.
- Wine, cheese, meat, butter, and various pastries and sweets are other rich foods that celebrate the goodness of life.



Truly He is risen!



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