



GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA (EASTER)

April 16

THE GOSPEL READING

John 1:1-17

[The Word is God]

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John bore witness to him, and cried, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.'") And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.



GREEK ORTHODOX
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THE SERMON

In the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1), and everything was created through His Son — all things were made through Him. Nothing came to existence apart from Him (John 1:3). All things in heaven and on earth, whether visible or invisible, were created through the Son and for Him. He is before everything, and all things exist in Him (Colossians 1:16-17).

As the Lord created all things, He recreates everything through His Resurrection. God said, “let there be light” at the beginning of creation, and those words were spoken through His Son, Who is the Word. God, Who commanded the Light to shine out of darkness, now expresses His glory in our hearts through the Resurrection of Christ. We can now come and receive the divine Light that never ends and illumines the eternal Day, as we glorify Christ, Who is Risen from the dead.

Christ is risen from the dead, by death trampling down upon death, and to those in the tombs, He has granted life! We chant today, “Arise and shine!” Arise and shine, O new Jerusalem, for the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. O pure Mother of God, rejoice, celebrating the Resurrection of Christ your Son! All of the Church’s hymns express the beauty and the joy of the New Creation, the new horizon that opens up for the world and our lives through the Incarnation and Resurrection of our Savior. There is always hope. There is always joy since sorrow no longer exists in Christ. In whatever life circumstances we find ourselves in, there can be a new beginning because Christ is risen, and we belong to the Risen Christ.

Jesus was crucified. He died and was buried on Friday, before the setting of the sun, which was the first of the three days in the grave. During the silent rest in the tomb on Saturday, the Sabbath of the Lord, Christ went to the realm of the shadow of death. He did not enter that realm as One bound to it, but, on the contrary, as the Triumphant One who conquers death and provides a way back from the expulsion of Adam and Eve for the benefit of all. Jesus Christ conquered and still conquers because He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Christ’s victory is famously conveyed by the Greek Christogram ICXC NIKA (ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΝΙΚΑ), which means “Jesus Christ Conquers.”

It was still dark early in the morning on Sunday, the third day. Jesus strips Hades of its power and resurrects humanity by His Resurrection. In the Church’s hymns for today, we proclaim, “Today a sacred Pascha has been revealed to us . . . Pascha of delight . . . With joy, let us embrace one another. Pascha, the ransom from sorrow! Today from the sepulcher, Christ emerged resplendently as from a bridal chamber.”

The Resurrection of our Lord is fundamental for Christians. The Resurrection makes our faith become a living reality with the ability to transform the world and deify us. It is not an ideology or a mere system of ethics and morality. Our faith lives, renews our hearts

and minds, and establishes communion between each one of us and the living God. It is the path to Paradise, the entrance of the Kingdom, the dawning of the Day that never ends.

Today, we come together with the joyous and triumphant declaration that the tomb is empty, and Christ is risen. This is the foundation of our lives. This is the essence of our faith, our hope, and our love. His victory over sin and death is at the core of our lives as Christians. Christ is unique — He is risen, and no one else has ever risen from the dead by their own power and authority, never to die again. Only the Son of God was born of the Virgin and rose from the dead. His Resurrection confirms everything He taught — He is the way, the truth, and the life. Nobody comes to the Father but through Him. He is the Risen Son of God. He is God the Son.

The Lord Jesus Christ came to take our human nature upon Himself in order to heal it, transform it, transfigure it, and deify it. Therefore, His life, death, and Resurrection affect us directly. In His Incarnation, He took our flesh. He took all of our nature and united it with the divine nature. In His life and death, our lives and suffering are transformed and given meaning.

His Resurrection is our resurrection. The divine, uncreated Light permeates us and gives us the sure hope of a new life — the eternal life. His Light shines in the darkness. It offers true guidance to each and every one of us. The Apostle Paul tells us that “we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so, we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). Christ is also called the last Adam. As the first human being, Adam eventually turned from God and fell, bringing the consequences of sin and death to humankind. Jesus took on Himself the sin of humanity on the Cross, resurrecting Adam and all of us. The first Adam sought to carry out his own selfish desire. But Jesus said, not my will, but Your will, O Father, be done.

Humanity’s greatest plague was death. After the Fall, death was inescapable. Like Adam, we often miss the mark. Through repentance however, Christ forgives our sins. Death no longer has power over us. We now live in grace and truth. His anguished cry on the Cross, “It is finished,” is our assurance of peace because Christ is risen, and Truly He is Risen.

Pascha is a new start for all of us, as the Lord renews all things. He says, “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5). Therefore, we start the Liturgy of the Paschal eve with the reading from Saint John’s Gospel, which begins with “In the beginning.” Christ is both the beginning and the new beginning of this world. As He is the Creator and the fulfillment of all of God’s promises, He saves the world and reunites all of creation with Him. Through the Resurrection, we become children of God.

In the Paschal sermon, Saint John Chrysostom compellingly exclaims: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons have fallen. Christ is risen, and angels rejoice.

Christ is risen, and life rules. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave.” Brothers and sisters, let us open ourselves to God’s truth, to the freedom and love only He can provide. Let us allow His Resurrection to give purpose to our lives, not just today, but every day. The Resurrected Christ is here with us, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.