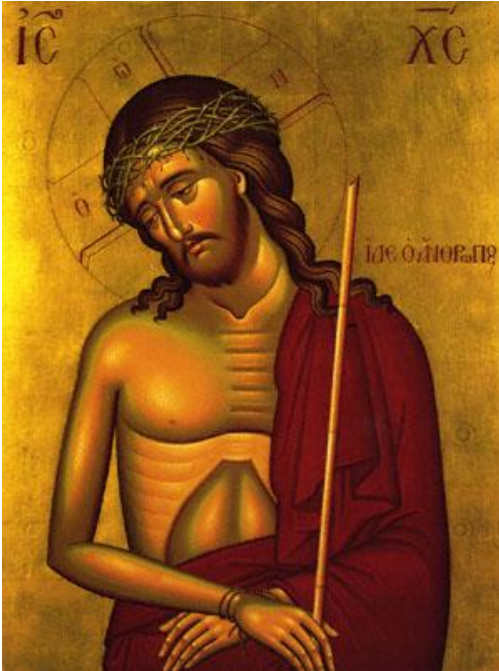


Holy Week Services

HOLY WEEK

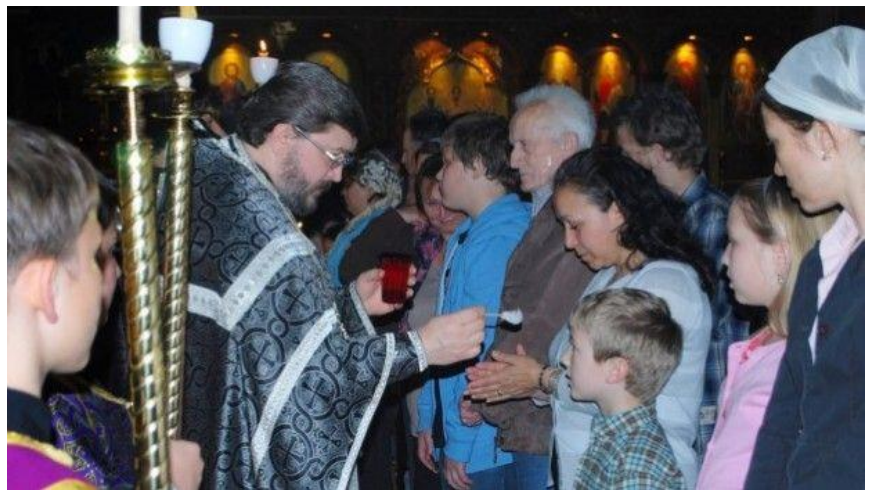


The Bridegroom Service - The hymn we sing on the evenings of Palm Sunday, Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday and in some churches, on Holy Wednesday, comes from Scripture. On Palm Sunday, we sing this hymn as our priest carries this icon of Christ during a procession while we kneel.

Behold the Bridegroom comes in the middle of the night and blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching; And unworthy is he whom He shall find heedless (not paying attention). Beware, therefore, O my soul, lest (for fear that) you be given up to death and shut out from the Kingdom. He who is found negligent (forgetful) shall be judged unworthy. Wherefore rouse yourself (wake up) and cry: Holy, Holy, Holy are You, our God, through the protection of the Heavenly Hosts save us. Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church. The Church is the Bride and each of us is a servant. The Bridegroom service warns us to

be ready for Christ's Second Coming by preparing our souls – living the Christian life as Jesus taught. He wants all people to join Him in Heaven. When Jesus tells stories about the Wedding Feast, He is talking about Heaven.

Holy Unction is a Mystery (Sacrament) of the Church offered on Holy Wednesday evening, for the healing of both physical and spiritual illness, including the forgiveness of sins. The service consists of seven prayers, seven epistle readings and seven gospel readings. The priest will also call upon the “*healing*” saints to join in our prayers. Jesus continues to heal people today through the oil of unction, the prayers of the saints, and the prayers of our friends, just as He did in the Gospels.



After the first prayer, before the first epistle reading, listen for the names or descriptions of the healing saints.

St. James (Iakovos), first Bishop of Jerusalem and son of Joseph, betrothed to the Virgin Mary; the Saint of Myra (St. Nicholas); St. Demetrios; St. Panteliemon; the Holy Unmercenaries (Cosmas & Damian); pours forth streams of healing... as learned in wisdom Divine, and as the friend of Christ (St. John the Evangelist); O Refuge to the world (The Theotokos, Mother of God), Cyrus, John, Thaleleus & Tryphon, Panteleimon & Hermolaus, Samson & Diomidis, Mokius & Aniketos.

Go to www.abbamoses.com to find these saints.

The Vespereal Liturgy of Holy Thursday is an extra-special Liturgy because we are with Jesus and the Disciples at the first Holy Communion. This occurred at the meal Jesus shared with His disciples the day before the Passover (John 13:1). Jesus gave bread and wine to His Disciples and told them to "do this in remembrance of me." At this liturgy a second square of Prosporo (bread used in the Liturgy) – called "the Lamb" - is cut, consecrated (blessed) by the Holy Spirit and becomes Holy Communion. This Lamb is set aside to dry, then Father places it in the Tabernacle on the altar table in the sanctuary. Whenever Father needs to take communion to someone at home or in a nursing home, or who is sick or dying, he adds wine to a piece of the dried "Lamb," Holy Communion. (There is no leftover Communion because the priest must eat and drink the remaining Communion at the end of each Liturgy.)



Reading of the Passion Gospels

Holy Thursday evening we hear all the details of Christ's life during His last few days - Judas' betrayal of Christ to the Sanhedrin / Jewish rulers while He prayed in the Garden, Jesus' trial, crucifixion and burial. The four Gospel stories are divided into 12 readings. If you can read, follow along in a service book. After the fifth Gospel reading, we kneel while our priest carries Christ hanging on a large Cross. Listen to what he says. He begins with:

Today is hung upon the Tree (Cross), He Who suspended the land in the midst (middle) of the waters.

The Old Testament prophets spoke about the Messiah and a tree. In Genesis 1 we read,

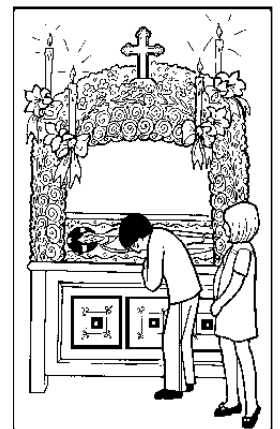
Then God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters."... And God called the firmament Heaven... Then God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear" ... And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas."



The Entombment – Taking Down from the Cross

Great and Holy Friday is the saddest day of Holy Week. Taking Jesus down from the Cross helps us express our sadness and sorrow over Christ's death on the cross.

When we enter the church, we see Jesus' dead body hanging on the cross. We also see an empty "Tomb" (kouvouklion, in Greek) decorated with flowers. During the Gospel reading, we learn that Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate's permission to bury Jesus' body. At that point in the reading, the priest or his helpers remove the body of Christ from the big cross and wrap it in a large white sheet. Either during the remaining Gospel reading or when it ends, our priest takes Jesus' wrapped body into the Sanctuary.



Later in the service, Father carries the Epitaphios in a procession and lays it in the Tomb/kouvouklion. The Epitaphios is a beautiful large embroidered or painted icon showing Joseph and Nicodemus placing Jesus in the Tomb, with the Theotokos, the Apostle John and the Myrrhbearing women watching or just Jesus lying on the tomb. At the end of the service, we approach the Tomb, make the sign of the cross and bow to Christ. We venerate (kiss) the Epitaphios just like other icons. In some churches and in monasteries we make a full prostration, bowing down and touching our heads to the floor, before we kiss the Epitaphios.

Vesperal Liturgy (St. Basil’s) of the First Resurrection on Holy Saturday Morning - Some very exciting things happen during this Liturgy. We hear the story of Jonah in the large whale and the 3 youths – Sidrach, Misach & Abdenago – in the fiery furnace. We can sing the refrain to the Hymn of the Three Youths - *Praise you the Lord and exalt Him forever.*

After the Epistle reading, our priest, now wearing white vestments, walks throughout the Church tossing bay leaves (or other greenery) and joyfully chants that Jesus is in Hades freeing all the Righteous people (Those waiting to be set free. We see them in the Resurrection icon – “The Descent into Hades.”) He changed his vestments from purple to white and the altar covers, too. These are signs of the first Resurrection – freeing the people in Hades.



Matins and Paschal Liturgy When we come to Church late Saturday evening, the Church is very quiet and dark. The only light comes from a few flickering candles. At midnight, the church is very dark. At midnight, our priest comes out of the Sanctuary singing *Come receive the Light from the Light that is never overtaken by night and glorify Christ Who is risen from the dead.* We all light our candles from his. At some churches, the priest, while holding the Gospel and the Pascha candle, reads the Gospel of the Resurrection in front of the Beautiful or Royal Doors. At other churches, he leads a procession outside the Church and reads the gospel there. In both situations we sing loudly and with great excitement: *Christ is risen from the dead, by death trampling down upon death and to those in the tombs, bestowing life.* The Church is full of bright candlelight! The priest's white vestments seem to glow! The Cross and the Tomb of Jesus are to the side as reminders of what happened to Jesus this week. The Church seems bigger and brighter. The Matins and Liturgy of Pascha begin. This is the happiest service of the year and we are glad to be part of it!

Agape Vespers - The Resurrection Vesper Service

The Gospel reading - John 20:19-25 - is read in as many languages as there are people who can read it - English, Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, Russian, Albanian, Arabic, German and more. We do this to show that Christianity is for all people. The “Good News” (the meaning of word “gospel” in Greek) that Jesus died and rose from the dead is for the entire world because God loves all people alike. In the Gospel reading, we hear that Jesus appears to the confused and frightened disciples in a room with locked doors. If you want to hear “Christ is Risen” in 250 languages, go to Pascha Polyglotta -

<http://www.srbigham.com/en/index.html>.

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