



# Fire & Light

## St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ April 5, 2015 ✠

## Palm Sunday

### The Triumphal Entrance of Our Lord into Jerusalem

Martyrs Theodoulos & Agathopodes at Thessalonica (303)



The Crucifixion



## Holy Week 2015

- ✠ TONIGHT - 5:00pm ~ First Bridegroom Matins
- ✠ April 6 / 7 - Holy Monday & Tuesday ~ 6:30pm Bridegroom Matins
- ✠ April 8 - Holy Wednesday 6:30pm Holy Unction
- ✠ April 9 - Holy Thursday 10:00am Mystical Supper Liturgy  
6:30pm 12 Passion Gospels

✠ **Holy Friday Services** ✠ April 10 - 10:00am Royal Hours

- 4:00pm Vespers – Shroud to the Tomb

- 7:00pm - Lamentations at the Tomb

✠ *Youth All Night Vigil at the Tomb* ✠



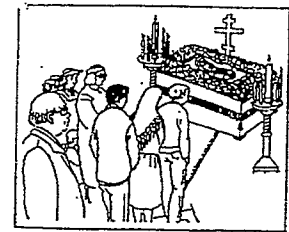
✠ Holy Saturday ~ April 11 ~ 10:00am Divine Liturgy - The Blessed Sabbath  
(Cleanup help after Liturgy is appreciated)

✠ **Holy PASCHA** ✠ Begins Saturday, April 11 at 11:30pm

✠ Pascha Sunday April 12 ~ 3:00pm Paschal Agape Vespers

✠ Bright Monday April 13 ~ 10:00am Paschal Liturgy w/ Procession

✠ Bright Wednesday – April 15 6:30pm Bright Week Vespers



## The Services of Great and Holy Week

**PALM SUNDAY** - This Sunday is ranked as one of the Twelve Great Feasts of the year. From the writings of Saint Methodios of Patara we know that this feast was already celebrated with great solemnity in the third century. This celebration too is a pre-festival of Pascha; we see the Lord coming voluntarily to His Passion, meekly riding upon the foal of an ass. But the Fathers see much more in the feast than just this. For instance in the fact that the Savior rode on the foal (colt) and not on the ass itself, they see an indication that God's love, which hitherto had only been made known to the Jewish Church, the mother, would now be preached to the nations, the gentiles. Saint Ambrose of Milan says that the Gospel records that no man had ever before ridden on the colt,



because no man before Christ had called the nations (all peoples) into the Church. Saint Mark's Gospel emphasizes this attribution, by stating that the colt was "bound before the gate outside," i.e. outside the Church. It was found at the "meeting of the ways," because those outside the Church are in the certain possession of none. It is the Apostles who loose him and bring him to Christ, just as it would be they who brought the gentiles to Christ, loosing them from the bonds of their sins. Palm Sunday summons us to behold our King the Suffering Servant. Filled with infinite love for the Father and the Holy Spirit, and for creation, in His inexpressible humility Jesus accepted the infinite abasement of the Cross. He was wounded for our transgressions and made Himself an offering for sin (Is. 53). In the fleeting moments of exuberance that marked Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the world received its King. The King who was on His way to death to accomplish the mission for which the Father sent Him. As one of the Hymns of the Lity proclaims:

The Son and Word of the Father, like Him without beginning and eternal, has come today to the city of Jerusalem, seated on a dumb beast, on a foal. From fear the cherubim do not gaze upon Him; yet the children honor Him with palms and branches, and mystically they sing a hymn of praise: "Hosanna in the highest, Hosanna to the Son of David, who has come to save from error all mankind."



**HOLY MONDAY, TUESDAY & WEDNESDAY** - On this day we particularly remember the **Righteous Joseph the All-Comely**, the son of the Patriarch Jacob. He is seen as a prototype of the Savior. He was hated by his brothers, as Christ was by His contemporaries, and they contrived to do away with him; he was sold for thirty pieces of silver as was Christ; he was thrown into a dry well, just as Christ was laid in a tomb. But he rose to rule over the Egyptians, as the Savior rose and rules over sin. Lastly he provided his brothers and relatives with grain lest they starve, just as the Savior grants us, the Orthodox Christians, His relatives, the Heavenly bread in the Eucharist, Holy Communion. Also commemorated on this day is the event of the cursing of the fig tree (Mt. 21: 18-20). The fig tree is symbolic of Israel become barren by her failure to recognize Christ and His teachings...It's meaning should not be lost on anyone in any generation. This episode makes it clear that nominal Christianity is not only inadequate but...despicable and unworthy of God's Kingdom. Those who belong to Christ ought to live and walk in the Spirit, and the Spirit will bear fruit in them: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-25).

The Orthros of Holy Monday is sung on the previous Sunday evening as the Orthros of Tuesday and Wednesday are sung on the previous evenings. These Orthros services are called the Service of the Bridegroom (Ἀκολουθία τοῦ Νυμφίου). The name comes from the well-known Parable of the Ten Virgins. It is not without significance that the Kingdom of God is compared to a

bridal feast and a bridal chamber. The Christ of the Passion is the divine Bridegroom of the Church. The Fathers relate the aforementioned Parable to the Second Coming and remind us of the need for spiritual vigilance and preparedness, by which we are enabled to keep the Divine commandments and receive the blessings of the age to come. In the Holy Tuesday services we hear the Parables of the Ten Virgins and the Ten Talents. The themes here are inevitability of the Second Coming, stewardship, watchfulness, accountability and judgment. On Holy Wednesday the Church places before us the example of two figures: the sinful woman who anointed the head of Jesus shortly before the Passion (Mt. 26: 6-13) and Judas, the disciple who betrayed the Lord. The former acknowledged Jesus as the Lord, while the latter severed himself from the Master. The one was set free, while the other became a slave. We are confronted with the truth that sin is more than breaking rules and transgressing commandments. It is the willful rejection of a living communion and relationship with God. It is separation, alienation, a way of death. As we hear in one of the hymns of the Holy Wednesday Orthros:

While the sinful woman brought oil of myrrh the disciple came to an agreement with the transgressors. She rejoiced to pour out what was very precious, he made haste to sell the One Who is above all price. She acknowledges Christ as Lord, he severed himself from the Master. She was set free, but Judas became the slave of the enemy. Grievous was his lack of love. Great was her repentance. Grant such repentance also unto me, O Savior Who has suffered for our sake, and save us.

**PRESANCTIFIED LITURGIES** - The Presanctified Liturgy, which is really the Vespers service with Communion, is celebrated on the first three days of Great Week - Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. There is no Anaphora, that is, the prayers of consecration are not offered at this Liturgy since the Holy Gifts have been consecrated at the Divine Liturgy on the previous Sunday or Saturday. These three presanctified liturgies of Holy Week manifest vividly the spirit of joyous-sorrow (χαρμολύπη) which characterizes the Lenten Season and Great Week.

**HOLY WEDNESDAY EVENING** - The sacrament of Holy Unction (Εὐχέλαιον) is celebrated with special solemnity for the healing of the spiritual and bodily infirmities of the faithful. The borders between the sickness of the body and sickness of the soul are not always strictly defined, therefore Holy Unction is conferred upon all the faithful for the healing of *soul and body*. Christ took our infirmities and bore our diseases (Mt. 8:17). He has overcome the world and has given us access to imperishable life. While we pray for physical healing, we also pray for spiritual power so that the trials of sickness may be borne with courage, hope and fortitude. This Sacrament on Holy Wednesday also serves as a preparation for Holy Communion on Holy Thursday morning.

**HOLY THURSDAY** - Great Thursday is the day of the institution of the **Mystery of Holy Communion**, the day of the *Mystical Supper*, and so whereas on the three previous days, Presanctified Liturgies were served, on this day the full liturgy of Saint Basil the Great combined with Vespers is celebrated. In the evening we celebrate the Orthros of Holy Friday. This is a specially adapted Orthros service in which there are twelve Gospel readings concerning the Passion of our Lord and Savior, interspersed with hymns chanted by the choir. Between the fifth and sixth Gospel readings the faithful kneel as a procession with the Cross upon which the icon of the body of Christ is affixed passes by. The Cross will be set up in the center of the Church for the faithful to venerate. This procession is rooted in an ancient practice of the Church at Jerusalem. Fourth century documents tell us that it was the custom to display the true Cross of Christ at the Church of the Resurrection on Great Friday. The most celebrated hymn of this Service of the Twelve Gospels, as the Orthros of Holy Friday is commonly known is the hymn of the fifteenth antiphon: "Σήμερα κρεμάται ἐπὶ ξύλου..." ---Today He who hung the earth upon the waters is hung upon the Tree (Cross)..." For this reason this Orthros is also referred to as the Service of the Crucified One---'Ἡ Ἀκολουθία τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου.

**HOLY FRIDAY** - This day, the day of the Savior's crucifixion, is a strict fast day. We should spend this day quietly, keeping fast, avoiding unnecessary diversions traveling or activity. On Holy Friday morning the faithful gather to decorate with flowers the "kouvouklion" or Tomb of Christ in which the Epitaphios (the special cloth on which an icon of the Body of Christ is embroidered or painted) will be placed. When all is prepared we begin the Service of the **Great Hours** (*Αἱ Μεγάλαι Ὁραὶ*). The general themes of the Hours are: the coming of Christ, the True Light (1<sup>st</sup> hour); the descent of the Holy Spirit (2<sup>nd</sup> hour); the Passion of and crucifixion of Christ (6<sup>th</sup> hour); the death and burial of Christ (9<sup>th</sup> Hour). We display the icon of the "Extreme Humility" at this time. This icon depicts the crucified dead body of Christ upright in the Tomb with the Cross in the background. Following the Hours we begin the service of Great Vespers with great solemnity. This service concludes the remembrance of the events of the Lord's Passion, and leads us towards watchful expectation as we contemplate the mystery of the Lord's descent into Hades, the theme of Holy Saturday. This service is often called the Apokathelosis (Ἀποκαθήλωσις---**literally the Un-nailing**) because the Body of Christ is removed from the Cross during the concluding verses of the Gospel lesson. The figure is wrapped in a linen cloth and brought into the sanctuary and placed upon the Holy Table. At the Aposticha Hymns we conduct a procession of the Epitaphios which is carried around inside the Church by the priest who places it in the Tomb, censes it, and scatters rose petals upon it. He then places the Gospel and a sponge and liturgical spear upon it. The faithful then come forward to venerate it. Afterwards they return to their homes until evening when the Orthros of Great Saturday will be celebrated.

**HOLY SATURDAY** - The Saturday is the Great Sabbath; it is the day on which God rested, and is the only Saturday of the year on which we fast strictly. On Great Saturday our focus is on the Tomb of Christ. This is no ordinary grave. It is not a place of corruption decay and defeat. It is Life-Giving, a source of power, victory and liberation. In the Orthros of Holy Saturday, celebrated on Friday evening, we sing the 'Εγκώμια-- **Encomia**, also known as the **Lamentations**( 'Επιτάφιος Ὁρῆνος). The Lamentations are in the form of a large number of poetic verses divided in three long stanzas sung antiphonally by two groups of the faithful. As one stanza ends the other begins with different music. These are some of the most moving and beautiful expressions of love and praise for Christ our Savior who endured death for our sake. All creation - angels, prophets, men, birds, the noblest from the animals, the stars—all that is in heaven and all that is on the earth, ache together and are shaken from the depths of their hearts upon seeing Life being buried. And yet already there are the first tremors of joy because we know that Life has been liberated - Christ has broken the power of death. The high point of the Service is the procession with the Tomb and Epitaphios around outside the Church. The faithful follow the Epitaphios holding candles. During the Procession the faithful sing "Ἅγιος ὁ Θεός -- **Holy God**". The procession returns to the interior of the Church. The faithful pass under the Epitaphios as it is held aloft, expressing our belief that we have already passed from death to life (John 5:24). The Epitaphios is removed from the Tomb by the priest and taken into the Altar and placed upon the Holy Table where it will remain until the Feast of the Apodosis or Leavetaking of Pascha. The flowers from the Tomb are distributed as a blessing to the faithful at the conclusion of the service.

On Holy Saturday Morning the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great is celebrated with Vespers as on Holy Thursday, but on this occasion fifteen Old testament readings are appointed. Between the Epistle and the Gospel reading, an anthem, "**Arise O God, and Judge the Earth...**" is sung. During this hymn the whole church is scattered with laurel or bay leaves and flower petals as a proclamation of the springtime of the Resurrection, a sign of victory and an expression of joy.

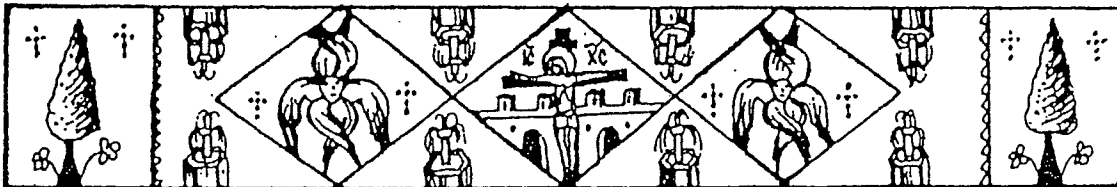
**THE GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA** - Around 11:00 p.m. the faithful gather once again in the Church for the Resurrection Orthros and Paschal Canon. During this service the Church is kept dimly lit, and according to ancient custom, at the end of the service all the vigil lamps, candles, etc. are extinguished, except for the "Sleepless Lamp" upon the Holy table. The Church is plunged into total darkness and silence. The priest takes the Paschal candle and lighting it from the Vigil Lamp of the Holy Table he turns and brings the Light to the people through the opened Holy Gate singing "Δεῦτε λάβετε φῶς...**Come ye and receive the Light...**" The acolytes spread the Light among the people. Taking the Gospel Book, banners, icons, and candles the whole congregation exits the Church to a place outside the doors. The Second Morning Gospel of the

Resurrection is read and then the Priest leads the faithful in singing "Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη.....**Christ is Risen!**" It is a local custom in some places to recite in dialogue form verses 7-10 of Psalm 23 (24) before opening the doors. As the congregation reenters the Church they find it empty, but now full of light just as the Women found the Tomb empty, for Christ had risen, but radiant because the Tomb has become the source of our Resurrection! The Paschal Canon is sung: "Ἀναστάσεως ἡμέρα...**It is the Day of Resurrection...** The Paschal Orthros is continued through its conclusion and then immediately is begun the joyous Paschal Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom in which "Christ is Risen" is sung many times. The Paschal Homily of Saint John Chrysostom is read and the faithful, having communed of the Body and Blood of Our Risen Savior, depart with joy singing Christ is Risen!

The same day (about 3:00 p.m.- Sunday) the faithful gather at the Church for a festive Paschal Meal and rejoice with one another, greeting all with "Christ is Risen!" To which the reply is given "Indeed He is Risen!" Later that afternoon, about 3:00 p.m., we celebrate the **Agape Vespers** with a Gospel reading telling the first half - (to be completed on the following Sunday) - of the doubting of Thomas. This Gospel is read in as many languages as can be mustered, to emphasize that the Good News of the Resurrection is for all peoples. The Holy Gate and two side doors leading into the Sanctuary remain open throughout Renewal Week or Bright Week (a fast-free week) as the week after the Sunday of Pascha is called. Only on Saturday evening do we close these doors, but the Feast of Pascha is kept for forty days, during all which time hymns of the Resurrection are chanted daily.

These are only a few of the high points of the coming Great and Holy Week. We cannot hope to adequately explore or exhaust the spiritual depths and riches of these holy days in these few words, for these blessed days are not to be studied but experienced. May our Lord and God and Risen Savior Jesus Christ grant us all to complete our Paschal journey and be found worthy to behold His Glorious and Life-Giving Resurrection! Kalo Pascha!

(Compiled from various sources)



## **From the Fathers...For Lent and Always**

✚ The life of a Christian on earth is a **chain of suffering**. It is necessary to fight against your own body, against the passions and evil spirits. Our hope lies in this fight. Our salvation is from God. Having put reliance on Him, we must bear with patience this time of struggle.

**St. Ignatius Brianchaninov**

✚ **In the battle with vanity**, cling to the Gospel and example of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Do not rely on yourself, but on the Lord, not only in important matters, but even in seemingly insignificant ones. Without the Lord, we are unable to do anything truly good for ourselves, and even that which initially seems good will turn out to be harmful if we have not asked the Lord for help or prayed about it.

**Elder Nikon (+1963)**

✚ **Every adversity and affliction**, if not accompanied by patience, produces double torment; for a man's patience casts off his distress, while faint-heartedness is the mother of anguish. Patience is the mother of consolations and is a certain strength which is usually born of largeness of heart. It is hard for a man to find this strength in his tribulations without a gift from God, received through his ardent pursuit of prayer and the outpouring of his tears.

**St. Isaac of Syria (7<sup>th</sup> C)**

✚ **The Lord does not force us** to be saved for fear that an enforced salvation might become repulsive; because we appreciate and love only that which we have grown to love, for which we have fought, with which we have become intimate, which has become our treasure, our nature. And such are the Christian virtues, such is the Kingdom of God; we have to become acquainted with it, to learn to love it wholeheartedly, to assimilate it here on earth, to implant it in our hearts in such a way that it should penetrate entirely into our soul and leave no room for all-destructive and all-flattering sin.

**St. John of Kronstadt**

✚ **When you give alms** to one who begs of you and who, apparently, is not deserving of, does not require your charity--owing to which your heart grudges him the alms giving--repent of this; for the Divine holy Love also bestows His blessings upon us, even when we have a sufficiency of them already. Love for your neighbor ought to say, "Even though he has something, still it will do no harm if I add to his prosperity (although, to tell the truth, a few pence will not greatly add or amend his fortunes). God gives to me, why then should I not give to the needy?" **Had you only received gifts from God in accordance with your merits, you would have been a beggar yourself.** God is bountiful to you, not in accordance with your merits, and you yourself wish that He should be more bountiful. Why then, having plenty, do you not wish to be generous yourself to your brethren.

**St. John Chrysostom**

✚ **Let us attend to ourselves**, brethren, let us learn self-control while we have time. Why do we neglect ourselves? Let us be doing something good all the time so that we may find help in the time of trial. **Why do we fritter away our lives?** We are always hearing a great deal about the spiritual life and we don't care about it, we even despise it. We see our brethren snatched away from our midst and we don't abstain [from passion and excess] even when we know that in a little while we too shall be near death.

**St. Dorotheos of Gaza**

✚ **The person who fears the Lord has humility** as this constant companion and, through the thoughts which humility inspires, reaches a state of divine love and thankfulness. For he recalls his former worldly way of life, the various sins he has committed and the temptations which have befallen him since his youth; and he recalls, too, how the Lord delivered him from all this, and how He led him away from a passion-dominated life to a life ruled by God. Then, together with fear, he also receives love, and in deep humility continually gives thanks to the Benefactor and Helmsman of our lives.

**St. Maximus the Confessor**

## For Holy Week – Wisdom of the Holy Fathers

He [Christ] stretched out His hands on the Cross, that He might embrace the ends of the world; for this Golgotha is the very center of the earth. It is not my word, but it is a prophet who has said, 'You have wrought salvation in the midst of the earth' (Ps. 74:12). He stretched forth human hands, who by His spiritual hands had established the heaven; and they were fastened with nails, that His manhood, which bore the sins of men, having been nailed to the tree, and having died, sin might die with it, and we might rise again in righteousness. 'For since by one man came death, by One Man came also life' (Rom. 5:12,17); by One Man, the Saviour, dying of His own accord: for remember what He said, 'I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again' (John 10:18).  
St. Cyril of Jerusalem

✘ 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 was shaken, the rocks shattered because of the Rock; the dead risen to bear witness of the final and universal resurrection of the dead. The happenings at the Sepulchre, and after the Sepulchre, who can fittingly recount them? Yet not 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 milk: joining us and binding us together.  
St. Gregory the Theologian

✘ On this Great Day, Christ is called from among the dead which he had emulated. On this day he repelled death's sting, laid low the gloomy confines of hell, and granted freedom to the souls. On this day, risen from the tomb, He appeared to people for whom he had been born, had died, and been awakened from the dead, so that we, having been reborn and escaped death, might be resurrected with Him, the Resurrected One. On this bright glorious and great day, the angelic hosts, filled with joy, sing a song of victory.  
St. Gregory the Theologian

✘ "To those who keep the Feast in purity, the Passover is heavenly food; but to those who observe it profanely and contemptuously, it is a danger and reproach. For it is written, 'Whoever shall eat and drink unworthily, is guilty of the death of our Lord' (I Cor. 11:27). Wherefore, let us not merely proceed to perform the festal rites, but let us be prepared to draw near to the divine Lamb, and to touch heavenly food. Let us cleanse our hands, let us purify the body. Let us keep our whole mind from guile; not giving up ourselves to excess, and to lusts, but occupying ourselves entirely with our Lord, and with divine doctrines; so that, being altogether pure, we may be able to partake of the Word (cf. II Pet. 1:4)."

St. Athanasius the Great

✘ "People who trust solely in the apparent righteousness of the outward way of their life are like the foolish virgins (cf. Mt. 25:1-12), who did indeed preserve their outward virginity, yet in spite of this were not admitted to the marriage-feast; they also had some oil in their vessels, that is, they possessed some virtues and external achievements and some gifts of grace, so that their lamps remained alight for a certain time. But because of negligence, ignorance and laziness they were not provident, and did not pay careful attention to the hidden swarm of passions energized within them by the evil spirits."  
St. Mark the Ascetic

✘ "A lamp, even if it is filled with oil and possesses a wick, remains totally dark if it is not lighted with fire. So it is with the soul in appearance adorned with all virtues, if it does not have a light and the Grace of the Holy Spirit it, is extinguished and dark." As the great Apostle also says: "But by the Grace of God I am what I am."  
St. Symeon the New Theologian