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# **OUR WORSHIP**

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## **NEW LIFE PUBLICATIONS**

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# The Church is *People* — God's People

Above all, the Church is a **worshipping community of believers** who share a common faith, hope and love for God. The collective experience and aspirations of God's People are revealed through the Church's

## WORSHIP

The Church's **liturgical, festal and sacramental worship** gathers God's People into a united community which

- **affirms** its common faith in God's transforming love for us;
- **shares** its faith and fears, joys and sorrows through fellowship; and
- **publicly** proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ while rendering thanks to God for His many blessings.

## THE LITURGICAL CYCLE

The Church possesses a cycle of worship services which

- revolves around the celebration of the Church's most important service, the Eucharistic Divine Liturgy;
- enables us to set aside a certain portion of each day to praise and thank God, and
- serves as a constant reminder that in all things God must be glorified.

## THE MOST COMMONLY CELEBRATED LITURGICAL SERVICES INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

### THE DIVINE LITURGY

The Divine Liturgy, during which the faithful gather to hear the Word of God and to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, is the highlight of the Church's worship. All worship finds its reference point in the Eucharistic Liturgy.

### COMPLINE AND NOCTURNS

Are night services serving as reminders that God must be praised at all times. Nocturns (the Midnight Service) are rarely served in parish settings.

### VESPERS

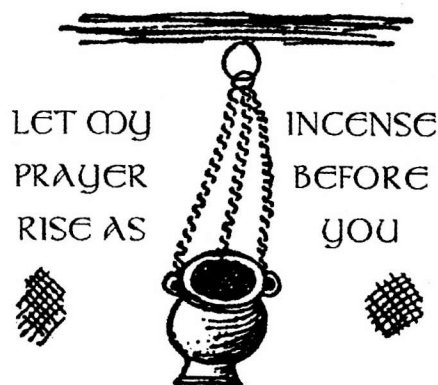
Begins the liturgical day. This evening service

- Reminds us of the coming of Christ into the world as the "Light who enlightens all," and
- Relates the most important elements of God's plan for the salvation of His people.

### MATINS (ORTHROS)

Is the Church's morning service. At Matins we:

- Proclaim the glory of Jesus Christ,
- Learn, through the various hymns, more about God's plan for His People, and
- Prepare most directly for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.



### THE HOURS

Are short services consisting of prayers and readings primarily taken from the Old Testament book of Psalms. There are four Hours:

- The First Hour (6 AM) is often celebrated after Matins.
- The Third (9 AM) and Sixth Hours (Noon) are often prayed before the Divine Liturgy
- The Ninth Hour (3 PM) may be celebrated before Vespers.

Each of the Hours carries with it a particular theme, thereby reminding us of the many deeds Jesus Christ accomplished for our salvation.

Other lesser Hours called the **Mesoria** or **Inter-Hours** and the **Typica** may be served during the Fasts.

# THE DIVINE LITURGY

is the central act of Christian worship.

Far from being a *symbolic reenactment* of the life of Jesus Christ, the Divine Liturgy is:

- the **gathering of God's People** who enter into a common union through the celebration of their faith and hope in the love of God;
- **our invitation** into the very Kingdom of God;
- a **reality** - not a *symbol* - through which we enter into God's presence, and
- the manifestation and revelation, here and now, of the Kingdom to come.

The most common form of the Divine Liturgy, which is celebrated on most Sundays and Feast Days of the Church year, is the **Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom**.

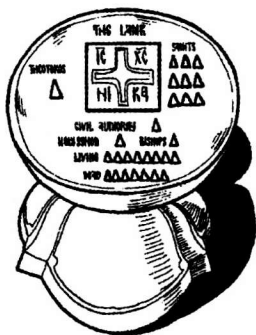
The Divine Liturgy may be divided into three main parts.

## THE RITE OF PREPARATION

At a side table, known as the *Table of Oblation*, the priest

- Recites prayers of personal preparation while vesting, and
- Prepares the bread and wine for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. The priest cuts a cube of bread, referred to as the *Lamb*, from a larger loaf known as a *prosphora*. He places this bread on the *diskos* in commemoration of Jesus Christ. It is the *Lamb*, which will later become the Body of Christ and offered to the faithful in Holy Communion.

Around the Lamb the priest places smaller particles of bread in prayerful remembrance of the saints, the living and the faithful departed. In current practice, the Rite of Preparation, which is sometimes called the *Proskomidia* or *Prothesis*, takes place prior to the public portion of the Divine Liturgy.



## THE EUCHARIST

The word Eucharist is taken from the Greek word *eucharisto*, which means *thank you*. The Eucharist is also referred to as **Holy Communion**. The word *communion* is derived from the words *common* and *union*. Hence the Eucharist — the ultimate meaning of offering thanks to God — places us in a *common union* with God and others.

## THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

The public portion of the Divine Liturgy begins with a time of assembly:

- The priest proclaims that we are being gathered as "*the kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*"
- A series of litanies and antiphons, consisting of psalm verses and other hymns, is sung.
- A procession with the Gospel Book takes place as the faithful are invited to "*worship and fall down before Christ, who is risen from the dead.*"
- Several hymns known as troparia and kondakia, which announce the theme of the day, are then sung,
- followed by the *Trisagion* ("Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us"), sung in worship of the Trinity.

**The highlight of the Liturgy of the Word is the proclamation of the Scripture.**

- The **Epistle Reading** is taken from one of the New Testament letters written to the early Christian communities. Before the Epistle and the Gospel responsorial psalms are sung by the faithful.
- The **Gospel Reading**, which highlights a particular teaching or event in the life of Jesus Christ, is taken from the gospels of Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.
- During the **sermon or homily**, the priest continues to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ by reflecting upon the scriptural readings and applying them to our lives.

In the Liturgy of the Word, then, we encounter Jesus Christ in His Word and in the gathering of His Kingdom.

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## THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST is the very heart of the Divine Liturgy.

Having prayed for our daily needs and received spiritual nourishment through the proclamation of the Word of God, we now turn our attention to the celebration of the **Eucharist**.

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### THE GREAT ENTRANCE

During the Great Entrance we sing the ***Cherubic Hymn*** in which we

- Liken ourselves to the angels, who surround the throne of God in adoration, praise and worship; and
- Are invited to *"lay aside all earthly cares so that we may receive the King of all..."*

As the Cherubic Hymn is being sung, the clergy and servers process from the Table of Oblation, on which the bread and wine were prepared during the Rite of Preparation, to the Holy Table. Our gifts of bread and wine — which will shortly be changed into the Body and Blood of Our Lord, Jesus Christ — are carried in procession as the priest prays for the salvation of all.

**The Great Entrance is followed by a litany and prayer in which we ask God to accept our offerings, and**

### THE PEACE and the SYMBOL OF FAITH

The priest turns to the faithful and imparts a blessing. The faithful are then invited to *"love one another so that with one mind we may confess the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."* In the early Church the faithful exchanged the Kiss of Peace at this time. If several clergy are serving together, they exchange this sign with one another. In some parishes the people do the same with the words *"Christ is in our midst... He is and ever shall be."* The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is then recited by the faithful as a public expression of their common Faith.

### There are three different "forms" of the Divine Liturgy:

- **The Liturgy of Saint James of Jerusalem** is considered to be the most ancient form of the Liturgy used today. It is rarely celebrated, usually on the feasts of Saint James, the Brother of the Lord (October 23 and the Sunday after Christmas).
- **The Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great** is celebrated on the Sundays of the Great Fast, the feast of Saint Basil (January 1), the eves of the Nativity and Theophany, Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday.
- **The Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom** includes prayers brought by the saint from his home in Antioch. It is the form which is celebrated on most Sundays and feast days.

A fourth Liturgy, known as the **Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts**, traditionally has been ascribed to Saint Gregory Dialogos, the Pope of Rome. This Liturgy is a Vesper Service at which the Eucharist, consecrated on the preceding Sunday, is distributed. Originally prescribed for all weekdays in the Great Fast, it is now served on the Wednesdays and Fridays of the Fast and the first three days of Holy Week.

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# THE EUCHARISTIC ANAPHORA

The central prayer of the Liturgy is the Anaphora or Prayer of Oblation. It is introduced by a brief dialog between the clergy and the people; Then the priest begins the prayer:

- Acknowledging how right it is to give thanks to the Lord for His gifts to us of life and eternal life;
- Thanking God for accepting this Liturgy from us, though He has the praise of the angels, singing: "Holy, holy, holy Lord of Sabaoth! Heaven and earth are filled with Your glory. Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!"

## THE VERY BODY AND BLOOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

We believe that our gifts of bread and wine become the actual Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. That which we receive in the Eucharist is not just a "symbol" of His Body and Blood, nor do we partake of it simply as a "memorial meal."

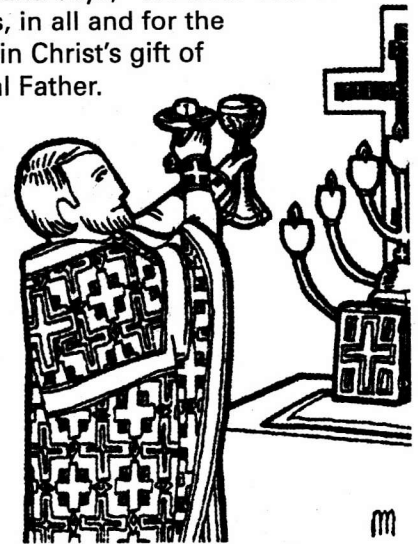
Through the ages, attempts have been made to explain the changing of our gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ through a variety of philosophical arguments. Eastern Christians accept this change through faith.

- In the Gospels Jesus Christ tells us that the bread and wine are indeed His Body and Blood. This is obvious in His words: "This is my Body...This *is* my Blood." Jesus did *not* say, "This symbolizes my Body" or "This *stands for* my Blood."
- It is the Holy Spirit who brings about the change. We believe that the "Holy Spirit works in strange ways" and that "the ways of God are not the ways of humankind." It is not possible to explain divine, infinite things in human, finite terms.
- Our Faith is the source of our belief. That which has just been explained is reasonable and, for those who place their faith, hope and trust in Christ, there is no reason to doubt the very presence of Christ's Body and Blood.

Being firmly rooted in our Faith in Christ, there is no need for human philosophies as a means of explaining that which, in fact, is beyond human understanding.

The priest then recounts all that Our Lord has done for us in His plan of salvation. He concludes by relating the events surrounding the last or mystical supper on the eve of Christ's death by restating the Words of Institution which Jesus spoke as He instituted the Eucharist: "Take, eat, This is my Body... Drink of this, all of you! This is my Blood..."

Finally, remembering all that He has done for us, He raises the Holy Gifts and says, "We offer You Your own of what is Yours, in all and for the sake of all." We join in Christ's gift of Himself to His eternal Father.



## THE EPICLESIS

The priest implores the Holy Spirit to descend upon these Gifts and to change them into the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ so that they may be for us *"for the cleansing of the soul, for the remission of sins, for the fellowship of Your Holy Spirit, for intimate confidence in You, and not for judgment or condemnation."*

## THE COMMEMORATIONS

After the Epiclesis several prayers are recited during which we pray for believers of all ages. The Virgin Theotokos is commemorated, as are the saints, the living and the departed. The Anaphora ends with our solemn "Amen," joining our faith and prayer to that of the priests at the Holy Table.

## ARE WE "WORTHY" TO RECEIVE THE EUCHARIST?

One sometimes hears that the Eucharist should be received only rarely, even only once a year, because we are "unworthy" to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. This belief is contrary to the spirit of the Divine Liturgy and, in fact, to the teaching of Christ Himself.

- First of all we acknowledge that nothing we do can make us truly worthy to receive Christ in the Eucharist. We are sinners, allowed to receive Christ's Body and Blood *"for the forgiveness of sins"* and *"unto life everlasting."* The Eucharist is not a reward.
- While we must prepare to receive the Eucharist, we should not assume that our preparation, not even Confession, "makes" us worthy.

- During the Cherubic Hymn, the priest prays, *"No one who is bound by the desires and pleasures of this life is worthy to approach You..."* The Liturgy points out that God, through His love and endless mercy, makes us worthy to approach Him. The Eucharist is God's freely-given Gift to us; we must, however, accept it in all humility and faith, and with a repentant spirit.

- The priest gives us Holy Communion using our baptismal name, *"The servant of God, N. receives..."*, a reminder that it is by virtue of our Baptism, not our personal "goodness," that we share in the Eucharist.

- Receiving the Eucharist only once each year was set as a *minimum*, not a *norm*. This concept finds its origin in that period of Church history when few received Holy Communion. As a *minimum*, an annual reception of the Eucharist was decreed, but this was never intended to be the *norm*. The Liturgy is, in essence, a meal; in day-to-day terms, no one prepares a meal for people who have no intention of partaking of it.

It is, then, God who makes us worthy to approach the Eucharistic meal "in faith and love."

## THE PREPARATION FOR HOLY COMMUNION

The Anaphora is followed by a litany and three prayers — one of them being the Lord's Prayer — in which we ask God to make us worthy to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Following these prayers, the priest calls us to ready ourselves to share in this Mystery: *"Holy Things to the holy!"* We respond by singing, *"One is holy, one is Lord: Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen."*

Several actions now take place before we receive the Eucharist:

- **THE FRACTION AND MINGLING** – The consecrated Lamb is divided in parts and placed in the chalice to which hot water is added. The union of the life-giving Body and the warmed precious Blood reminds us that we receive the living, resurrected Christ when we partake of the Eucharist.
- **THE PRAYER BEFORE COMMUNION** - Both clergy and laity recite this prayer: *"I believe, O Lord, and I confess that You are the Christ the Son of the living God, who came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the first ..."* In this prayer we acknowledge that we are in need of the healing power which the Eucharist brings to our lives. We seek God's forgiveness and ask him to make us worthy of His heavenly kingdom.
- **THE COMMUNION OF THE CLERGY** - The priest, deacon and other clergy approach the Holy Gifts, saying *"Behold, I approach my immortal King and my God."* Then they partake of the Eucharist.

### HOW TO PREPARE TO RECEIVE THE EUCHARIST

The tradition of the Church warns that we should prepare ourselves before receiving the Eucharist by:

- **Acknowledging our sinfulness** and sincerely desiring God's forgiveness
- **Seeking His guidance** in changing our lives; and
- Offering fervent prayer while **fasting for a period of time** before the Liturgy.

In addition, we should be reconciled with God and others through the **Mystery of Repentance** on a regular basis — as often as recommended by our Father Confessor — and participate in the other services which prepare us for the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy.

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## THE COMMUNION OF THE FAITHFUL

After the clergy have received Holy Communion, the priest brings forth the chalice and invites the faithful to partake as well *"for the remission of sins and life everlasting."*

Food is essential for a healthy life. No one would think of eating only once a month or once a year — in fact, that would be downright ridiculous. By the same token, the Eucharist is essential for proper spiritual health. Christ's Body and Blood is that food which, from the very beginning of our Christian life, is essential for a healthy spiritual life.

So important is the regular and frequent reception of the Eucharist that Christ once said, *"I am the bread of life ... This is the bread that comes down from heaven for a man to eat and never die. I myself am the living bread... if anyone eats this bread he shall live forever. ... Let me solemnly assure you, if you do not eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you have no life in you"* (John 6: 48, 50-51, 53).

Hence, just as we must regularly eat our daily meals for continued physical health, so too we must regularly eat of Christ's heavenly food for continued spiritual health.

### Who May Receive?

Sharing in the Eucharistic table is the ultimate sign of the Church's unity in faith and love. This is why anyone from another Church tradition who does not share our common faith should not approach for Communion. Likewise those who are conscious of seriously violating the Christian way of life should not approach before asking for the forgiveness of their sins in the Mystery of Repentance.



### After Communion — The Divine Liturgy swiftly concludes with:

- **Thanksgiving:** In two hymns, a litany and prayer we express our joy and gratitude that we have been made sharers in the Eucharistic banquet.
- **Dismissal:** The priest comes out of the holy place for the final prayers of blessing. He may present the hand cross to be kissed and/or distribute the antidoron or blessed bread, the remainder of the Prosforas offered by the faithful which was not consecrated. Although not the Eucharist, it serves as a reminder that Christ is the nourishment of the life we have received in Him. All are welcome to receive this bread, even if they have not partaken of the Eucharist.

### The Eucharistic Liturgy is

- The **common action** of God's people, by which He alone is praised, worshipped and glorified;
- The very **revelation of God's** eternal, timeless and spaceless Kingdom in this world of time and space;
- The ultimate way to say **thank you** to God for all He has done for us;
- A deepening of our **common union** with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- The **basis of our daily lives**, when we allow the Liturgy to affect all that we do; and
- The ultimate **transformation of our individual actions** into common actions by which the Lord God is continually praised henceforth and forevermore.

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# GREAT VESPERS begins our celebration of Sundays and Feast Days

The Church's liturgical day begins at sundown rather than at midnight, following ancient practice. Hence the celebration of Vespers on the eve of a Sunday or Feast Day, in reality, marks the beginning of the liturgical day. It begins our preparation for the fulfillment of Sunday — the reception of the Eucharist at the Divine Liturgy.

## Great Vespers opens with our glorification of the Creator...

Psalm 103, or selected verses from it, is chanted. The priest may incense the icons, the worshippers and the entire church building.

*"Bless the Lord, O my soul! Blessed are You, O Lord.*

*O Lord, my God, You are very great!*

*Blessed are You!*

*How glorious are Your works, O Lord,*

*In wisdom have You made them all!*

*Glory to You, O Lord, who have created all!"*

Psalm 103 recalls all the blessings of creation: the clouds, the wind, the earth and the waters, and all living creatures.

Following the psalm, the priest, intones the Great Litany, placing before us the needs we encounter in our world. Our response to each petition — *"Lord, have mercy!"* — reflects how all creation naturally looked to God *"to give them their food in due season."* Believers become the voice of creation, asking for His protection upon the world.

## During this introductory portion of Vespers, we

- Glorify God as Creator
- Are reminded of the beauty and magnificence of God's creation
- Reaffirm that we were personally created to live in union with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and
- Act as the voice of creation, asking for God's great mercy upon the world

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## ... and our reflection on the Fall of humankind.

**After the initial act of Creation, humanity separated itself from God. Pride — and the desire to exist apart from Existence itself — brought about sin and, ultimately, death.**

The Kathisma Psalms of the day (or selected verses from them) follow. As we listen, we reflect upon our separation from the Creator, while affirming our hope in the coming of the promised Savior, Jesus Christ.

*"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.*

*For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly will perish.*

*Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice in Him with trembling.*

*Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.*

*Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God.*

*Salvation belongs to the Lord; Your blessing be upon Your people."*



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## We recall God's Old Covenant with His People ...

The priest offers the evening incense, recalling the worship of the Old Testament temple in Jerusalem. While he incenses the church we sing several psalms beginning with Psalm 140:

*"Lord, I call upon You: hear me! Hear me, O Lord!*

*Lord, I call upon You: hear me!*

*Receive the voice of my prayer when I call upon You: Hear me, O Lord!*

*Let my prayer rise as incense before You,*

*And let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice. Hear me, O Lord!"*

**God alone is our only hope in the midst of a fallen creation; hence, we stand before Him in prayer, hoping that our supplications will rise as pure-burning incense.**

## ... and proclaim His New Covenant in Jesus Christ

The theme of our chants moves to the New Covenant as we sing several stichera (verses) on the subject of the day's feast. On Saturday evening, these verses glorify Christ's victorious resurrection - the singular event which restores our relationship to God - while urging us to accept the Savior, Jesus Christ, as the One who comes to reunite creation with its Creator. Here is but one of the many hymns which are chanted at this time:

*"All has been enlightened by Your resurrection, O Lord.*

*Paradise has been opened again.*

*All creation, praising You, always offers You a song."*

## Thus far at Great Vespers we

- glorify God for His loving and mighty act of creation
- reflect upon our sinfulness in turning away from God and living apart from Him as the Source of Life; and
- proclaim our desire for salvation through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who comes to reconcile creation with its Creator.



## Jesus Christ, the Light of the world!

Vespers celebrates the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior. He is the One who enters our world as a Light to all, pointing out the path of salvation.

The priest processes out of the holy place with the censer. Standing before the royal doors of the iconostasis, he proclaims, *"Wisdom! Let us attend!"* We are invited to turn from our sinfulness, commit ourselves to God, and cling to Christ as the fulfillment of our prayers and longings by singing the ancient hymn, *O Gladsome Light*.

*"O Gladsome Light of the holy glory of the immortal Father,  
Heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ!  
Now that we have come to the setting of the sun, and behold the  
light of evening:*

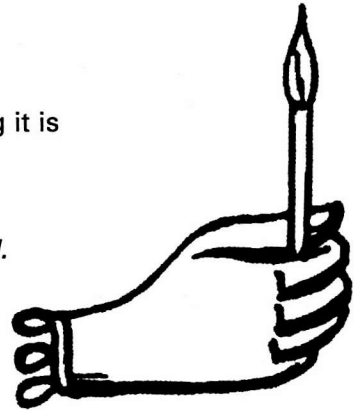
*We praise God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
For meet it is at all times to worship You with voices of praise.  
O Son of God and Giver of Life.  
Therefore all the world glorifies You!"*

**Jesus Christ, the Gladsome Light of the Father, reunites us to life with and in the Trinity.**

Following O Gladsome Light, our praises continue with:

† **The Prokimenon of Vespers** (a Responsorial Psalm) — On Saturday evening it is

*"The Lord is King! He is robed in majesty!  
The Lord is robed, He has girded Himself with strength.  
For He has established the world so sure that it shall never be moved.  
Holiness befits Your house, O Lord, forevermore."*



† **Old Testament Readings** — On feasts three selections proclaim the Old Testament prefigurations of the day's feast.

† **Two litanies and prayers** asking for God's guidance in following His commandments in the evening ahead.

† **The Aposticha** — A series of hymns glorifying the theme of the day, such as this from Saturday evening:

*"With tears the women reached Your tomb,  
Searching for You, but not finding You.  
They wept with wailing and lamented:  
Woe are we! Our Savior, the King of all,  
How were You stolen?  
What place can hold Your life-bearing Body?  
An angel replied to them:  
'Do not weep, but go and proclaim that the Lord is risen,  
Granting the world joy, as the only compassionate One!'"*

On feast days there may be a procession with the icon of the feast and additional prayers here (Liti).

† **The Canticle of Saint Simeon** — This scriptural hymn reminds us that our lives have been fulfilled and made whole and complete by the coming of Christ our Savior:

*"Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace,  
According to Your Word;  
For my eyes have seen Your salvation,  
Which You have prepared before the face of all people:  
A Light to enlighten the Gentiles  
And to be the glory of Your people, Israel."*

† **The closing prayers** — The Trisagion Prayers and one or more troparia. The troparia reflect the theme of the day or feast being commemorated. Finally the priest says the Dismissal.

### **GREAT VESPERS IN OUR LIVES**

The Divine Liturgy, as we have seen, is the very manifestation of the Kingdom of God here on earth. We lay aside all earthly cares in order to offer ourselves, each other, and our whole life to Christ God. Great Vespers prepares us for this experience by reminding us from whence we came — *"out of darkness into His marvelous light"* — the marvelous light as lived and expressed in the Divine Liturgy.

Active participation in Vespers is a moving worship experience. It is an excellent way to begin the Lord's Day and to prepare for the Eucharistic Liturgy.

## **GREAT VESPERS traces God's plan of salvation for His People.**

### **It enables us to**

- Experience the goodness of the Creator and His creation;
- Recall the Fall by which we cut ourselves off from our Creator through sinful pride and, ultimately, death; and
- Publicly proclaim the coming of the Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the Light by which all creation is renewed, refreshed and reconciled to God.

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# MATINS (ORTHROS)

Having begun the observance of the Lord's Day at Vespers, we enter into the first light of the resurrection.

At Matins, the Church's prayer at dawn, we are like the women bearing spices, who came early to the tomb and were overjoyed to hear for the first time the Gospel of the resurrection. Like them, we see in the rising sun the sign of the New Day of endless rejoicing. Christ is risen and we, like those to whom He appeared, worship Him.

## Matins (Morning Prayer) ...

... is served just before the Divine Liturgy in some churches. Matins is sometimes tied to Vespers to make a **Vigil**. In the past, during night-long Vigils, psalms would be chanted through the night. Five loaves of bread along with wheat, wine and oil would be blessed at the end of Vespers to sustain the faithful during the long night of prayer. These gifts may be used later at Matins or after the Divine Liturgy to refresh us in our prayers and praises.

During the reading of the six opening psalms the temple is darkened, a reflection of the spiritual darkness in which human persons dwell. Wearing an epitrichion, the priest stands praying before the closed Royal Doors.

After the Psalms, we sing the announcement of the mystery of Christ:

*"God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us!  
Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!"*

The first light of day reminds us of Christ's first manifestation, at the Jordan. It looks forward to His coming in power in the Kingdom of God.

Then the troparia of the day are sung. On Sundays we use a resurrection hymn in one of the eight tones (melodies) of the Church.

## We celebrate the resurrection...

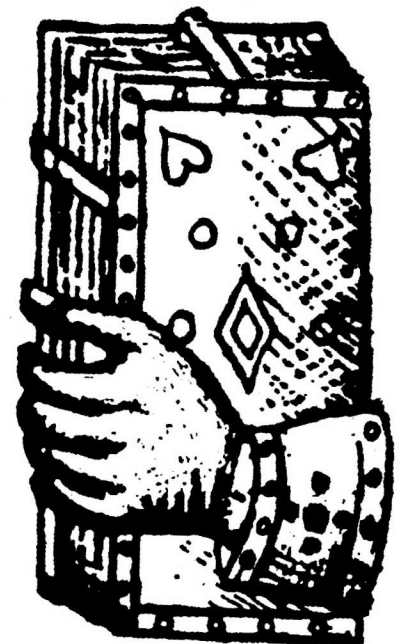
The priest, now vested in epitrichion and phelonion (outer vestment), comes through the Royal Doors with a lighted taper and censer. We sing the Polyeleon (Verses in celebration of God's Great Mercy). All the lights of the temple now shine brightly while the faithful joyfully sing the Resurrection Verses and the priest censes the entire temple.

*Everything works together in this section to bring us into the reality of the joy of the resurrection:*

- *The incense reminds us of the sweet smelling spices the women brought to honor Christ.*
- *Lighted tapers signify the Light of the resurrection.*
- *The procession around the temple recalls the mission of the women to "go quickly and tell the disciples that He has been raised from the dead" (Matthew 28:7).*

After the "Prokimenon" (Responsorial Psalm) comes the dramatic climax to our glorification of Christ. With awe, we read the **Gospel of the Resurrection!**

We read the Holy Gospel not as ancient history nor as fable. As we hear the Word of the Gospel, the Risen Christ is indeed in our midst and the Spirit of God testifies to His divine and saving power over sin and death. Faith in the Gospel enables us to "see" that Jesus has "destroyed death by death."



Having beheld the resurrection of Christ, let us worship the Holy Lord Jesus, the only sinless one. We venerate Your Cross, O Christ, and Your holy resurrection we praise and glorify. For You are our God, and we know no other than You!

After hearing the Gospel of victory over death, what can we do but rejoice? We sing the verse above and various post-Gospel hymns. Then we offer intercessions to the Risen Lord who is in our midst to hear our prayers and to receive our praises.

With hearts ablaze, each of us makes a personal response to the resurrection. First the priest and then the faithful venerate the Gospel Book from which we just heard the Glad Tidings that our Savior is Risen from the Dead.

### THE CANONS

Now the Canons (Odes or special Hymns) are sung. These songs of the God-fearing of the Old Testament are used to declare that God has fulfilled His long-awaited promises in Christ, the Lord of Life.

Here if there is a Vigil, the priest and faithful may partake of the bread and wine. On Feast days our foreheads may be signed with Holy Oil as a sign of the healing and illumination that comes from the saving power of the Risen Christ. After each of the faithful has been blessed, the priest blesses everyone with the Gospel book, enters the sanctuary through the Royal Doors, and closes them.

At the beginning of Matins we heard, "God is the Lord..." Now we hear another exclamation from in front of the Royal Doors, "Holy is the Lord our God!" This declaration intensifies our sense of awe, for the Almighty power of God has been revealed to us in the glorious resurrection of Christ.

### THE PRAISES

The Church can never stop praising the greatness of God nor wondering at the mystery of the Resurrection. So we now sing one of the great Hymns of Light. This hymn leads into the Psalms of Praise (148-150) with special verses. Then the Royal Doors are opened once again and we sing the Great Doxology (or Hymn of Praise at the break of dawn). The Day has now come! The Light of Christ, risen from the dead, now shines forth in the world. We are now sent forth with this Light to bear it into the whole world!

### The Canticle of Mary



A dramatic moment happens after the 8th Ode, when the Deacon or Priest who will cense the whole temple stops in front of the icon of the Mother of God on the iconostasis. "The Theotokos and Mother of the Light," he intones, "Let us magnify her in song!" Then the **Canticle of Mary** is sung in veneration of the Theotokos. The Mother of God is worthy of the highest honor, for she was the willing means by which the "Light of Light" and "true God of true God" assumed our human nature to deify it by His grace.

# THE HOLY MYSTERIES

The sacraments are "Holy Mysteries" that are to be experienced more than to be explained.

- The Mysteries cannot be reduced to a set number of ritual actions, though they are rites of the Church
- The Mysteries cannot be reduced to channels of supernatural power, though they are means of the work of the Holy Spirit
- The Mysteries cannot be reduced to doctrine, though they express the Church's teachings.

The Holy Mysteries are nothing less than the realization in this time and place of the eternal Kingdom of Christ.

By "realization" we mean:

- **Manifestation**, since in the Mysteries, the reality of the Kingdom of God is revealed to us; and
- **Transformation**, since in the Mysteries the healing, saving, and uniting work of the Kingdom of God is made real in and among us.

In general the Holy Mysteries involve...

- a **physical means**, such as water, bread and wine, or oil;
- and also **spiritual power**, a divine blessing of the Kingdom.

However, in the Holy Mysteries, the "physical" and the "spiritual" are **not separated**, but joined together.

In the Mysteries, what is physical and visible is **not destroyed** ...

... **but restored** to its proper and original function: the function of relating us to the spiritual and invisible.

In the Holy Mysteries:

- water cleanses,
- words recover power to declare the truth,
- the union of a man and a woman makes "one flesh,"
- bread feeds body and soul, and
- oil soothes.



All the Holy Mysteries are rooted in the ministry of Jesus who proclaimed in word and action that the Kingdom of God had "come near" (Mark 1:14):

1. **Baptism** — by His Baptism, Jesus "sanctified" the waters of the earth so that once again they are cleansing and life-giving.
2. **Chrismation** — by promising the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, Jesus showed that all human persons could become vessels of the divine Spirit.
3. **Repentance** — by declaring again and again "Your sins are forgiven," Jesus recovered the power of words to restore us to God and to reconcile us to one another.
4. **The Eucharist** — at the Mystical Supper on the night He "gave himself up for the life of the world," Jesus promised that bread and wine would be changed in the Eucharist to become His very Body, the Bread of Life, and His very Blood, poured out for the world..
5. **Holy Unction** — by healing physical illnesses as well as casting out demons, Jesus showed that the healing and saving power of God applies to our bodies as well as our souls
6. **Ordination** — by calling disciples, Jesus demonstrated that the Holy Spirit would work through those set apart to serve the Church
7. **Marriage** — Jesus affirmed that the marriage of a man and a woman could be "holy" and a sign of Life in the Kingdom.

## Living the Sacramental Life

Jesus described the Kingdom of God as a seed.

- How is it implanted and nurtured in us?
- How does the seed grow, so that everything in our lives becomes a "means of grace"?
- How does the seed mature so that we see the whole world as a "sacrament" of God?
- How does the seed grow and make us partakers of the Kingdom of God?

The answer is ...

**by our regular and faithful participation in the Sacramental Life of the Church!**

Through the "leaven" of the Holy Mysteries:

- our lives are filled with the Life of God
- the world is transformed into God's Kingdom
- reality is transfigured to reflect the radiance of the Glory of God

## The Mysteries of Initiation, or Holy Illumination

At the end of the baptismal service, the priest washes the oil and Chrism from the baptized saying, "You are baptized, You are illuminated, You have been chrismated. You are sanctified. You are washed in the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

**These words sum up the amazing action of God in baptism.**

**Holy Illumination consists of:**

- **Exorcism** (turning away from the devil, we unite ourselves to Christ and the faith of the Church)
- **Anointing** (we are restored, renewed, and recreated in soul and body by the "oil of gladness")
- **Immersion** (in the baptismal water, we are "buried" with Christ in the water and raised to New Life)
- **Clothing** (we are now clothed in a white robe, having "put on" the righteousness of Christ)
- **Chrismation** (in this "sealing" with Holy Chrism is our "personal Pentecost," the gift of the Holy Spirit)
- **Procession** (carrying candles and led by the priest, we begin our lifelong walk with the Lord while the faithful sing, "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ...")
- **Holy Communion** (our bond with Christ and His Body, the Church, is fully realized as we share in the communion in the Body and Blood of Christ)
- **Ablution** or washing (as the Holy Chrism is washed off, we pray for God to preserve us in the faith and life of Christ).
- **Tonsuring** (strands of our hair are cut as a sign of the offering of all of ourselves to God)

## Practical Stages of Growth in the "Sacramental Life"

1. Our "Everyday Time" is interrupted now and then by "Church Times"
  - We **go to Church** on Sundays and feast days whenever we can.
2. We become more involved in worship and prayer
  - We start attending services regularly
  - We attend Vigil on Saturday evenings
  - We celebrate the feasts.
  - We begin a daily discipline of prayer
3. We live by **two** calendars: our "Everyday Calendar" and our "Church Calendar."
  - At first, one of the calendars will dominate.
  - Gradually we begin to put the two calendars together through
    - daily prayer
    - regular attendance
    - seeking to do the will of God at all times.
4. Our calendars are **integrated as one**.
  - We become aware of how the "Church Time" penetrates the "Everyday Time"
  - Our "Church Time" informs and brings hope of the Kingdom to our "Everyday Time"

## The Mystery of Repentance

In the Holy Mystery of Repentance or Confession God has provided for a concrete means for us to return to Him, to be renewed in His Image, and to grow in His grace.

### Confession is not...

- a way of earning the right to "take communion"
- a counseling session to "work on" our problems
- a private telling God we are sorry so He will not be so angry at us
- a means of "wiping the slate clean" when we have no intention of changing our lives

### Confession is...

- a bringing of what is happening in our lives to the Light of God's cleansing grace
- a correction of self-deception and self-righteousness
- a liberation from the pretense of pride
- an opening of our whole being to the healing grace of God
- a part of our preparation for the reception of the Holy Eucharist.

In Confession, we stand before the icon and the priest stands alongside us.

- We make the sign of the cross and venerate the icon.
- The priest invites us to confess our sins openly to Christ as a Savior of kindness not as a Judge of vengeance.
- We confess our own sins, not anyone else's.
- We confess openly and genuinely, knowing that nothing is hidden from the Lord who knows our need for mercy better than we ourselves.
- We try to answer the priest's questions without excusing or justifying ourselves.
- The priest may offer some spiritual guidance to guide us to grow in the Grace of God.
- To conclude the priest places the epitrichion over our head and prays that "the Lord Jesus Christ through His grace and love for mankind will forgive us our sins."
- We depart firmly trusting that through this Holy Mystery, God has forgiven our sins and we are released, restored, and cleansed.

Above all, it is the chief means of **reconciliation** with God and **restoration** to His Church.

Confession *renews us* in the image of God, in the purity of our baptism, and in the process of our deification, our communion in Christ with the Holy Trinity

As we take the opportunity that the Holy Mystery of Confession offers us, we grow in our self-understanding and in the virtues of humility and mercy.

St. John Chrysostom said, "*Let us accept from God the repentance that heals us.*" Thus we learn by confession that repentance, the earnest desire to turn our life around, is one of the greatest blessings that God gives his faithful. We find by regular confession that repentance is indeed a holy and saving medicine.

## The Mystery of Holy Crowning

For the baptized faithful, the marriage service is not merely an exchange of human vows. In the Holy Mystery of marriage the Church blesses the union of man and woman, making it "sacramental" and empowering each one to be sanctified by the other as they give themselves to each other.

The mystery of Christian marriage is represented in these elements:

- **Pledge of Lasting Commitment** represented by the exchange of rings at the betrothal.
- **Crowns** representing God's call to the couple to realize His Kingdom in their home through mutual sacrifice
- **Procession** connecting marriage to ordination, recalling the couple's priesthood in the domestic church
- **Common Cup** recalling the Eucharist, the source of their strength
- **Mutual Submission** proclaimed in the Epistle reading (Ephesians 5:21-33)
- **Transformation** announced in the Gospel reading (John 2:1-11).

Couples considering marriage should consult their priest early and receive the necessary instruction from him on how they might take part in the Holy Mystery of Marriage and continue to live their life together as a sacramental union in Christ.

## CHRIST STANDS WITH THE SICK AND THE DEPARTED

As the sick sought the healing touch of Jesus, those who are ill seek the blessing of the Church. Praying for people suffering through accidents, chronic illnesses or surgeries, the Church makes present the consoling touch of Christ.

Of special importance are prayers of the **Mystery of Holy Unction**. In anointing the sick, we pray for the healing of both body and soul. We see that body and soul go together in the prayer of anointing:

*"Heal your servant from the infirmities of body and soul which possess him (her)  
And enliven him (her) through the grace of Your Christ."*

While it is bad to be sick in body, it is worse to suffer the illness of the soul, therefore we pray for the healing of the forgiveness of sin in this Mystery and in all our prayers for the sick.

The Church's ministry of blessing continues with the **Funeral Service** in which we pray for "eternal rest and blessed repose" of the departed. From then on, our **Memorial Prayers** are a living connection with those who have gone before us, and a source of mutual sharing of divine blessings back and forth across the chasm of death.

## Blessings for the Blessed Life

As the incarnation of the eternal Word of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary proves and the Holy Mysteries disclose, we should make no separation between the material and the spiritual.

- The **material** is a means of conveying the spiritual.
- The **spiritual** is a means of blessing the material.
- **All of reality** is "sacramental" — imbued with the divine energies, the dynamic works of the Spirit of God.

The Church possesses numerous rites and rituals so that every aspect and part of our earthly life may be shown to be sanctified and made holy with the eternal life of the heavenly Kingdom. The Church has prayers for blessing of meals, homes, fields, herds, wells, fishnets, every conceivable means of transportation...and even bees and bee-hives. To these the Church also has additional prayers for such features of our life in the modern world, such as bridges, ambulances, and railway cars.

The prayer for the Blessing of a Fire Engine illustrates the Church's sense of God's presence in every aspect of our lives:

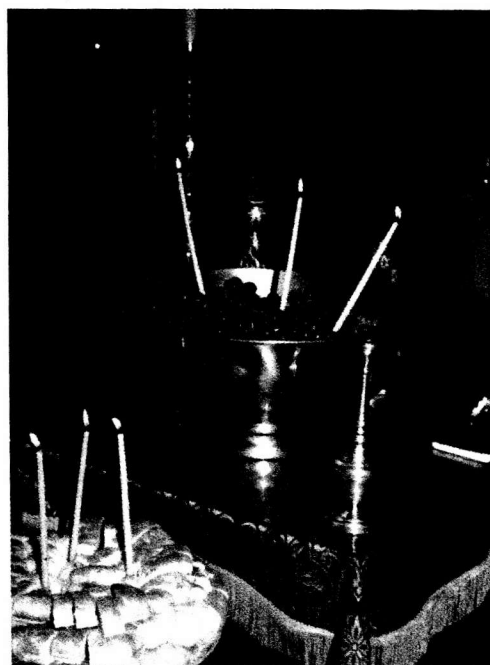
*"Pour out your blessings on this Fire Engine, that as it is used in faith and fervent prayer against the ravages of fire, it may issue forth streams of water to extinguish the roaring flames..."*

We see in this prayer that God's active concern for human welfare does not stop with the soul but encompasses our life in the physical body and its needs.

Yet as we pray for the Fire Engine, we also pray that we would not get so caught up in matters of the body that we forget the more important things of the soul:

*"Let those who experience Your protection against the fear and dangers of fire turn away from sin with all their heart..."*

An example of how the church and the home are connected in our worship is the **blessing of homes** that takes place after the Blessing of the Waters on the Theophany (Epiphany).



# FEASTS AND FASTS

The Church year revolves around a cycle of *feasts* and *fasting seasons*.

The feasts are not just commemorations of past events. Rather, they are our personal participation in events which still continue to happen. Christ's resurrection, for example, is not a past event, frozen in time and space; it is an event in which we share directly through our Baptism.

## THE FEASTS

- remind us that God sanctifies time as well as people and things;
- enable us to participate fully in the Church's experience of the events which mark the life of Christ, His Mother and the saints; and
- are literally celebrations which should be observed in festive style not only liturgically, but also in the home

## THE GREATEST FEAST OF THE CHURCH YEAR IS PASCHA, THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Just as all of the Church's liturgical services revolve around the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, so too the Church's festal cycle revolves around Pascha, the joyous celebration of Christ's resurrection. All things find their meaning in the risen Christ. Hence, Pascha is known as the ***Feast of Feasts***.

### THE FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH

Pascha — the celebration of the resurrection of Christ — is the most important worship experience of the year. This is because Christ's resurrection is the *foundation of our faith* as Christians.

Jesus Christ took on our human nature so that He might free us from death, "*the last enemy*" (1 Corinthians 15:26). The risen Christ leads us "*from death to life, from earth to heaven,*" as we sing in the Paschal hymns. He invites humanity to receive in Him the forgiveness of sins and to share in His eternal victory.

### THE SCRIPTURES SAY...

"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain... If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

1 Corinthians 15:14,17

"... in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. The First-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive."

1 Corinthians 15:20-22

### THE FATHERS SAY...

"Let no one weep for his sins, for forgiveness has shone forth from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Savior's death has set us free. He that was held prisoner by it has destroyed it. By descending into Hell, He made Hell captive. He embittered it when it tasted of His flesh... O Death, where is your sting? Hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen and you are overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave. For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the First-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To Him be glory and dominion unto ages of ages."

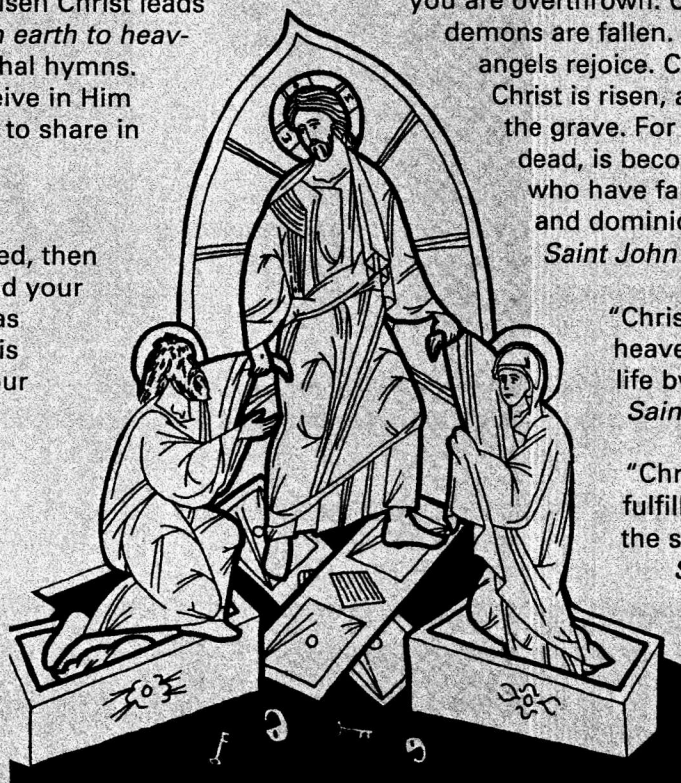
Saint John Chrysostom

"Christ, the divine man from heaven, purchases humanity's life by His death."

Saint Cyril of Alexandria

"Christ's resurrection is the fulfillment of God's plan for the salvation of others."

Saint Anastasius of Sinai

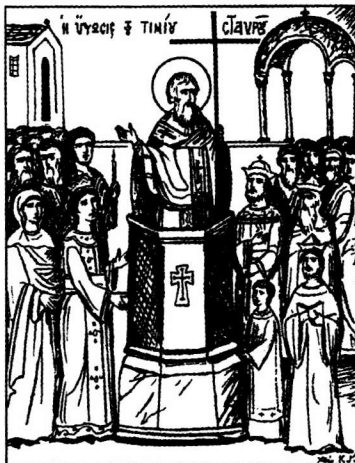


## THERE ARE SEVERAL OTHER FEASTS OF OUR LORD

### The Universal Exaltation of the Cross

**September 14**

Commemorates the discovery of Christ's cross by Saint Helena in the fourth century. After this discovery, the cross was publicly venerated by the faithful.



### The Nativity of Our Lord

**December 25**

is the celebration of Christ's birth. Christ empties Himself of His divine glory to become like us in all things

### The Holy Theophany

**January 6**

Commemorates the baptism of Christ and the revelation of the Holy Trinity to the world.

### The Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem

**the Sunday before Pascha**

is celebrated in remembrance of Christ's triumphal entrance into the Holy City after He had raised Lazarus from the dead. This feast is also referred to as Palm Sunday



### The Ascension of Christ

**Forty days after Pascha**

Recalls Christ's return to His heavenly Father after His resurrection. We also proclaim our faith in Christ's Second Coming on this Feast.



### Pentecost

**Fifty days after Pascha**

commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, thereby enabling them to publicly proclaim the risen Christ to all. This feast, often called "the birthday of the Church," also commemorates the revelation of the Holy Trinity to humanity.

### The Transfiguration

**August 6**

Recalls Christ's revelation of His Divinity to three of the apostles when, on Mount Tabor, He appeared in His divine radiance.

**We also remember how Jesus' family fulfilled two religious traditions of His time ...**

- **The Circumcision of Christ**, January 1, recalls the naming of Jesus, as was foretold by the angel.
- **The Encounter of the Lord**, with Simeon, February 2, on the occasion of His presentation in the Temple.

## ON THESE GREAT FEASTS WE CELEBRATE THE VIRGIN MARY, THE THEOTOKOS

- **THE NATIVITY OF THE MOTHER OF GOD**, September 8, celebrates Mary's birth.
- **THE ENTRANCE OF THE THEOTOKOS INTO THE TEMPLE**, November 21, commemorates the holiness of Mary, who was to become the Temple of God.
- **THE ANNUNCIATION**, March 25, recalls the proclamation to Mary that she was to become the Mother of God
- **THE DORMITION**, August 15, commemorates the death and glorification of Mary.

### *We also remember...*

- **The Protection of the Holy Virgin**, October 1, celebrating her intercession for the world.



**In addition to Pascha and the feasts of Christ and His Mother, we observe several feasts in honor of the saints.**

In fact, every day of the Church year is dedicated to the memory of particular events and saints. Some of these feasts are especially popular among the faithful and are usually celebrated in parish churches.

The more commonly celebrated saints' feasts include:



**Saint Nicholas of Myra,**  
December 6

**The Maternity of Saint Ann,**  
December 9

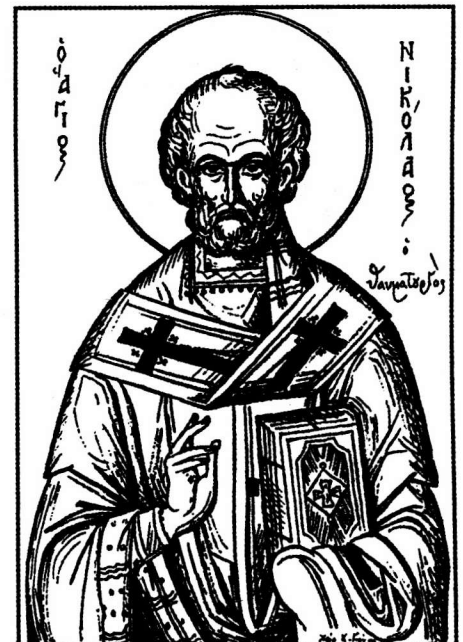
**Three Holy Hierarchs** (Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom), January 30

**Birth of Saint John the Baptist,**  
June 24

**Saints Peter and Paul,** June 29

**Prophet Elias,** July 20

**Beheading of St. John the Baptist,**  
August 29



Parish churches usually also celebrate the **Name-day of their Patron Saint** with special observances.

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# FOCUS ON THE SPIRIT: FASTING

An important part of the Church's worship is *fasting*. Fasting is an ancient and universal practice of abstinence from all or certain foods.

For us, fasting is *not*

- An exercise of self-punishment
- A matter of matter of keeping Church "laws"
- A means of displaying our religious piety
- A way to acquire physical benefits or spiritual powers.

**Fasting is a means of self-discipline.**

**In fasting ...**

- We gain strength over the passions, our wayward impulses and impure desires.
- We prove to ourselves that "*Man does not live by bread alone*" (Matthew 4:4), but true life consists of and depends on the life-giving, grace-bestowing Word of God.
- We grow in the grace of repentance, turning our whole lives away from evil and commending our whole selves to God.
- We prepare for the worthy reception of the precious gifts of God given in the Eucharist and in the great Feasts such as Pascha.

There are many things, including food, which are within our control. Many times we allow such things to control us instead. Our lives become imbalanced in order to put aside such preoccupations and to allow us the time and spirit to look more deeply within ourselves, the Church prescribes times of fasting.

Fasting is *not merely refraining from certain foods*. St. John Chrysostom asks "*What good is fasting from food if we do not fast from sins? What good is it to be careful not to eat meat and yet be unconcerned about the violence we are doing to the poor? What gain have we if we avoid wine but still are drunk with pleasures?*"

Fasting often results in a clarity of mind and a warmth of heart. Fasting helps us concentrate on the will of God and develops compassion for the plight of our neighbor.

## Four Special Seasons

We observe four seasons of special attention to the spiritual life:

- **The Great Fast and Holy Week** — from the Monday after Forgiveness (Cheesefare) Sunday through Lazarus Saturday and then with renewed intensity in Holy Week until Pascha;
- **Nativity Fast** — November 15 through December 24 (abridged in some traditions);
- **Holy Apostles' Fast** — From the Monday after All Saints Day to the Feast of Saints Peter & Paul, June 29;
- **Dormition Fast** — August 1 to the Feast of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God, August 15.

In addition we fast on:

- **Every Wednesday and Friday** (except in fast-free weeks, such as the week after the Nativity, the Bright Week after Pascha and certain other weeks) to remember the betrayal and death of Christ;
- **The Eve of the Theophany** (Epiphany) January 5;
- **The Beheading of the Forerunner and Baptist**, John, August 29;
- **The Exaltation of the Cross**, September 14.

## Is Fasting Just Another Obsession?

Anything good can be perverted to its opposite. That's why fasting is a matter to be worked out with one's spiritual advisor and should be practiced together with the Sacrament of Repentance.

Fasting should free us up to concentrate on more important matters than food and drink. These include works of charity and caring.

If you are concentrating more on food and food preparation in the Lenten seasons, you might ask yourselves what purpose your fasting is achieving.

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# The Great Fast: a time of “bright sadness”

With Adam we lament over the loss of Paradise even as we anticipate the brightness of the resurrection of Christ, the New Adam.

The great **Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian** sets the tone and mood:

“O Lord and Master of my life  
Take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power and idle talk.  
But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love  
to Your servant.  
Yea, O Lord and King  
Grant me to see my own fault and not to judge my brother  
For blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. Amen”

**Four Sundays before the Great Fast** give directions to our turn around from one spirit to another:

- **Sunday of Pharisee and Publican** — humility, the necessary attitude of repentance
- **Sunday of the Prodigal Son** — return to the Father, the goal of repentance
- **Sunday of the Last Judgement** ("Meatfare") — the urgency of repentance
- **Forgiveness Sunday** ("Cheesefare") — the essential condition of repentance: our willingness to forgive

**The first Sunday in the Great Fast** is the **Sunday of Orthodoxy**, celebrating the restoration of icons as fitting objects of veneration for they are windows into the Life of the Kingdom. On each of the following Sundays during the Fast, we celebrate a hero of the ascetical struggle of repentance such as St. Gregory Palamas, St. John Climacus, and St. Mary of Egypt.

In the middle of the Great Fast, on the **Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross**, a lavishly decorated cross is brought into the center of the Temple. We venerate the cross as the means by which we attain the Life of the Kingdom. Through the cross of repentance and dying to our old self, the "Old Adam" is crucified in us so that our new self might be raised to live together with the Risen Christ, the "New Adam," in purity and holiness (Ephesians 4:22-24).

**On weekdays during the Great Fast** we fast even from the Divine Liturgy, for the Liturgy is always a celebration of the joy of the Risen Christ and the participation in His Eternal Kingdom. We receive spiritual nourishment for our ascetic struggle in the "wilderness" by means of the Eucharist at the **Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts**.

The events of the Great and Holy Week rush from darkness toward the brightness of the resurrection.

- As a prelude to Holy Week, the **raising of Lazarus** shows Jesus' power over death and stirs up his enemies against him.
- The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on **Palm Sunday** begins the week. The "Hosannas" praising Jesus as the successor to King David will soon be turned into shouts of "Crucify Him!"
- From **Monday through Wednesday**, the Scripture readings urge us to prepare for the coming of the "Bridegroom," the coming King.
- On **Holy Thursday**, we "sit at table" with the Lord and all His disciples in the Eucharistic Banquet of the Kingdom of God, the eternal Kingdom realized and fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ our Lord
- On **Holy Friday**, we read twelve Gospel selections about the suffering and death of Christ up to the sealing of the tomb.
- On the eve of Pascha, the Tomb of Christ is set up in the middle of the Temple and we venerate a special icon of the dead Savior called the Holy Shroud (Epitaphios or Plaschanitsa).

At midnight on **Pascha**, in the darkness of the tomb we share the Light of Christ's resurrection and process around the Temple. We enter into a Temple now brightly adorned with the Glory of the Risen Christ. We sing:

*"Come all ye faithful, Let us venerate Christ's Holy Resurrection.  
For behold through the Cross joy has come into all the world...  
For by enduring the Cross for us, He has destroyed death by death."*

## God's Business

Some things are meant to be shared openly... things like the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But other things are meant to remain hidden. When it comes to personal prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, the Lord Himself said that we best keep our practices to ourselves (Matthew 6:16-18). Practicing our piety "in secret" helps us avoid pretense and pride. God knows where our hearts are and that is all that matters in the spiritual life.

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# Notes