

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

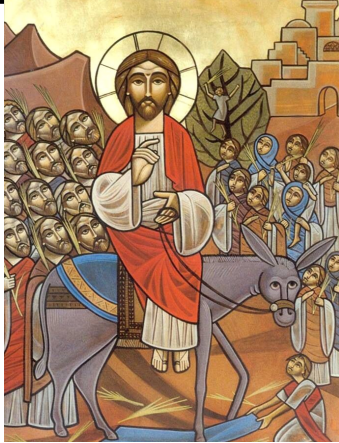
Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!



Volume 10 Issue 457

Palm Sunday-Our Lord's entry into Jerusalem

March 28, 2021



Human beings are blessed with the ability to focus on what is most important. So much of what we do at work or school, for example, requires that we tune out distractions and give our minds to the task before us.

St. Paul reminds us that we especially need to do so in the Christian life by giving our minds to what is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, virtuous, and

praise worthy. Palm Sunday is a time that we all need this reminder as we enter into the mystery of our salvation as Jesus Christ journeys to His cross, descent into Hades, and glorious resurrection.

Nothing about this week comes naturally or easily to us. We understand wanting our enemies to suffer, but not freely suffering for their sake. We understand religious people judging others with self-righteousness, but not loving sinners to the point of dying on their behalf. We understand wanting our side to win, but not that true victory comes by laying aside all that looks like power in this world. We think that we understand a remote God in the heavens who does not understand how hard life is down here, not One who hangs on a cross, occupies a tomb, and descends to Hades.

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6th Sunday of Lent Palm Sunday
* The beginning of Holy Week *

Epistle: Philippians 4:4-9

Gospel: John 12: 1-18

St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and teachings of the Church.

We worship God in Trinity -
Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

We are dedicated to living out Christ's commandment to, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

The Journey of Holy Week

In the Orthodox Church the last week of Christ's life is officially called Passion Week. In popular terminology it is called Holy Week. Each day is designated in the service books as "great and holy."

There are special services every day of the week which are fulfilled in all churches. Earthly life ceases for the faithful as they "go up with the Lord to Jerusalem" (Matins of Great and Holy Monday). Each day of Holy Week has its own

particular theme.

The theme of Monday is that of the sterile fig tree which yields no fruit and is condemned. Tuesday the accent is on the vigilance of the wise virgins who, unlike their foolish sisters, were ready when the Lord came to them. Wednesday the focus is on the fallen woman who repents.

Great emphasis is made in the liturgical services to compare the woman, a sinful harlot who is saved, to Judas, a chosen

apostle who is lost. The one gives her wealth to Christ and kisses his feet; the other betrays Christ for money with a kiss.

On each of these three days the Gospel is read at the Hours, as well as at the Vespers when the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is served. The Old Testament readings are from Exodus, Job, and the Prophets. The Gospel is also read at the Matins services which are called the Bridegroom Services because

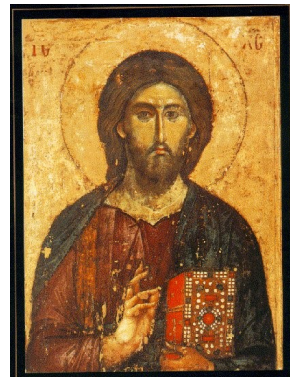
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our pastor, please call Fr.

Matthew at
607-280-
1586

Glory be to
Jesus Christ.
Glory be
Forever.





Troparion to St. George

As the deliverer
of captives
and defender
of the poor,
healer of the infirm
and champion of kings,
victorious great
martyr George
intercede with Christ
our God
for our souls
salvation.

News and Notes

We welcome all who are worshiping with us today. Because of COVID-19, our social hour has been canceled until we receive further instructions from the Department of Health.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

Please keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Louise, George, Evan, Ryan, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Laura, Elizabeth Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Pat, Kathleen, Terena, Loretta, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

St. Andrew on Palm Sunday

In his humility Christ entered the dark regions of our fallen world and he is glad that he became so humble for our sake, glad that he came and lived among us and shared in our nature in order to raise us up again to himself.

And even though we are told that he has

now ascended above the highest heavens – the proof, surely, of his power and godhead – his love for man will never rest until he has raised our earthbound nature from glory to glory, and made it one with his own in heaven.

So let us spread before his feet, not garments or soulless olive branches, which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither, but ourselves, clothed in his grace, or rather, clothed completely in him.

We who have been baptized into Christ must ourselves be the garments that we spread before him. Now that the crimson stains of our sins have been washed away in the saving waters of baptism and we have become white as pure wool, let us present the conqueror of death, not with mere branches of palms but with the real rewards of his victory.

Let us go together to meet Christ on the Mount of Olives. Let our souls take the place of the welcoming branches as we join today in the children’s holy song: *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel. Behold the King of Glory.*

Holy Week, continued from p.1

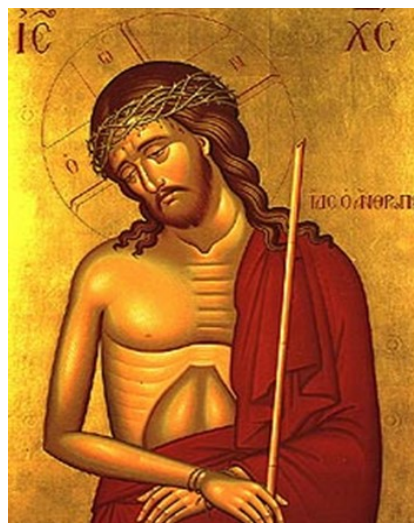
the general theme of each of these days is the end of the world and the judgment of Christ. It is the common practice to serve the Bridegroom services at night. *Behold, the bridegroom comes in the middle of the night and blessed is the servant whom he shall find watching, and unworthy the servant whom he shall find heedless. Take care then, O my soul, and be not weighed down by sleep that you will not be given over unto death and be excluded from the Kingdom. But rise up and call out: Holy, Holy, Holy art Thou O God, by the Theotokos have mercy on us* (Troparion of the First Three Days).

The vigil on the eve of Holy Thursday is dedicated exclusively to the Passover Supper which Christ celebrated with his twelve apostles. The main theme of the day is the meal itself at which Christ commanded that the Passover of the New Covenant be eaten in remembrance of Himself, of His body broken and His blood shed for the remission of sins.

In addition, Judas’ betrayal and

Christ’s washing of His disciples feet is also central to the liturgical commemoration of the day.

At the vigil of Holy Thursday, the



Gospel of Saint Luke about the Lord’s Supper is read. At the Divine Liturgy the Gospel is a composite of all the evangelists’ accounts of the same event. The hymns and the readings of the day also all refer to the same central mystery.

The liturgical celebration of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday is not merely the annual remembrance of the institution of the sacrament of Holy Communion. Indeed the very event of the Passover Meal itself was not merely the last-minute action by the Lord to “institute” the central sacrament of the Christian Faith before His passion and death. On the contrary, the entire mission of Christ, and indeed the very purpose for the creation of the world in the first place, is so that God’s beloved creature, made in His own divine image and likeness, could be in the most intimate communion with Him for eternity, sitting at table with Him, eating and drinking in His unending kingdom.

Thus, Christ the Son of God speaks to His apostles at the supper, and to all men who hear His words and believe in Him and the Father who sent Him. In a real sense, therefore, it is true to say that the body broken and the blood spilled spoken of by Christ at His last supper with the disciples

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(Homily on Palm Sunday-Christ's entry into Jerusalem, cont'd from p.1)

There are times when what has been cloudy and confused becomes bright and clear, when what has been hidden is made manifest for all to see. Today is one of those times. For Jesus Christ, who revealed that He is the resurrection and the life by raising His friend Lazarus from the dead, now enters Jerusalem as the long-awaited Messiah to the welcoming cheers of the crowd.

But even before He gets to Jerusalem, the forces of darkness had decided to kill Christ because they could tell that someone who could raise the dead was a threat to their power; for He was neither a conquering general nor a Pharisee-like interpreter of the Law; and those nationalistic religious leaders had no use for a Messiah who did not serve their schemes of domination.

On Palm Sunday, it becomes clear that the Savior Who enters Jerusalem today is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is the Passover

Lamb whose death and resurrection will conquer death itself. Mary, Lazarus' sister, performed a prophetic act when she anointed Christ with the same kind of costly ointment that was used to anoint the bodies of the dead. This Messiah, this One who is truly anointed to save His people and the whole world, will be rejected by the leaders of the Jews and crucified under the authority of the Romans. And when He is lifted up upon the Cross, He will draw all who believe in Him— Jew, Gentile, male, female, rich, poor, all nations, classes, and races—to the life of a Kingdom that transcends this world and our petty divisions.

Jesus Christ will not reign as a soldier, a politician, or a rich man, but as a Suffering Servant, a slaughtered lamb, a despised victim of torture and capital punishment. The crowds are right on Palm Sunday to welcome Him as a conquering King in Whom God's promises will be fulfilled. But they misunderstand what kind of King He is and how He will conquer. For He rules from a cross and an empty tomb; instead of killing Roman soldiers, He kills death by allowing Himself to be killed; in the place of a magnificent stallion fit for a king, He rides a humble donkey that would impress no one.

The crowd is right, "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel." They shout "Hosanna," which is a plea for God's salvation to come upon the earth. And it does through the Lord's death

and glorious resurrection. But that's not what the crowds expected; it's apparently not what the disciples or anyone else anticipated. For it goes against all our preconceived notions of what it means to be successful, to be powerful, to rule upon the earth, and to be respectable and religious.

And it's still a very hard lesson for us to accept, for there is too much of the world in all of us and the demons never work harder than when we are trying to grow closer to Christ. That's why we need to follow St. Paul's advice to focus on what is truly holy this week, to rejoice always, and to "let your gentleness be known to all men." As St. Paul wrote, "The Lord is at hand" which is never more true than on this feast as He enters Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowds.

In Holy Week, what had been cloudy becomes clear;

the truth is out in the open and we cannot ignore it any longer. Jesus Christ is the Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. He is our Champion, our Savior, our King, yet in His humility and love, the incarnate Son of God suffers on the cross as the lowest of the low in order to bring us to the heights of heaven and the joy of life eternal through His empty tomb. And this week we journey with Him to that cross, becoming participants in His passion.

Like Lazarus, we sit at table with Him. Like Mary, we anoint Him for burial. Like those gathered in Jerusalem, we welcome Him with palms and praises. Like the disciples, we eat the Passover with Him; like His mother Mary the Theotokos, the other faithful women, and the Apostle John, we kneel before His

cross. Like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, we bury Him. And like the stunned myrrh-bearers and the doubting apostles, we will marvel at the unspeakable joy of His resurrection. For what looks like complete failure is actually total triumph, as we will see in the early hours of next Sunday.

Holy Week is the climax of Jesus Christ's life and of ours, too. For He goes to the cross for us; He dies and rises for our salvation, to bring us into the unending joy of eternal life, to defeat our ancient foe. So it's time to lay aside our usual distractions, excuses, and obsessions, and enter into the passion of our Lord by worshiping Him in the services of the church, as well as in every thought, word, and deed this week. If we are unable to

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(Homily on Palm Sunday, from p.3)

the services, then we can all pray at home, read the Bible passages for Holy Week, and give less attention to the world and more to God.

It's time to embrace the great mystery of our salvation, of our Savior's infinite love and mercy, and thus share already in the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven. Holy Week is the time to enter into the Light that shines brightly even from the terror of the cross and the darkness of the tomb. Yes, our Savior has endured all these evils for us purely out of love; and He will soon rise over them triumphantly.

On Palm Sunday, it is clear who Jesus Christ is: The Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. How will we respond to Him as He goes to the cross for us?

Hopefully, with the fear of God and faith and love, we will draw near and not abandon or disregard Him. Yes, that will take intentional focus and the discipline to turn away from temptations, distractions, and unholy thoughts that become obstacles along our path. Nonetheless, we must follow St. Paul's guidance to "Be anxious for nothing" and allow "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding...[to] guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

* * * *

was not merely an anticipation and preview of what was yet to come; but that what was yet to come—the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven—came to pass precisely so that men could be blessed by God to be in holy communion with him forever, eating and drinking at the mystical table of His kingdom of which there will be no end.

Thus the "Mystical Supper of the Son of God" which is continually celebrated in the Divine Liturgy of the Christian Church, is the very essence of what life in God's Kingdom will be for eternity.

Matins of Holy Friday are generally celebrated on Thursday night. The main feature of this service is the reading of twelve selections from the Gospels, all of which are accounts of the passion of Christ. The first of these twelve readings is Jn 13.31–18.1. It is Christ's long discourse with his apostles that ends with the so-called high priestly prayer. The final gospel tells of the sealing of the tomb and the setting of the watch (Mt 27.62–66).

The twelve Gospel readings of Christ's passion are

placed between the various parts of the service. The hymnology is all related to the sufferings of the Saviour and borrows heavily from the Gospels and the prophetic scriptures and psalms. The Lord's beatitudes are added to the service after the sixth gospel reading, and there is special emphasis given to the salvation of the thief who acknowledged Christ's Kingdom. The Hours of Holy Friday repeat the Gospels of Christ's passion with the addition at each Hour of readings from Old Testament prophecies concerning man's redemption, and from letters of Saint Paul relative to man's salvation through the sufferings of Christ.

The first service belonging to Holy Saturday—called in the Church the Blessed Sabbath—is the Vespers of Good Friday. It is usually celebrated in the mid-afternoon to commemorate the burial of Jesus. Before the service begins, a "tomb" is erected in the middle of the church building and is decorated with flowers. Also a special icon which is painted on cloth depicting the dead Savior is placed on the altar table. In English this icon is often called the winding-sheet.

Vespers begins as usual with hymns about the suffering and death of Christ. After the entrance with the Gospel Book and the singing of Gladsome Light, selections from Exodus, Job, and Isaiah 52 are read. An epistle reading from First Corinthians (1.18–31) is added, and the Gospel is read once more with selections from each of the four accounts of Christ's crucifixion and burial. The prokeimena and alleluia verses are psalm lines, heard often already in the Good Friday services, prophetic in their meaning:

They divided my garments among them and for my raiment they cast lots (Psalm 22.18).

After more hymns glorifying the death of Christ, while the choir sings the dismissal song of Saint Simeon, the priest vests fully in his dark-colored robes and incenses the winding-sheet which still lies upon the altar table. Then, after the Our Father, while the people sing the troparion of the day, the priest circles the altar table with the winding-sheet carried above his head and places it into the tomb for veneration by the faithful. The Matins of Holy Saturday are usually celebrated on Friday night. The Praises glorify God as "the Resurrection and the Life," and marvel at his humble condescension into death. As the reading progresses the Praises are gradually more concentrated on the final victory of the Lord's Resurrection.

