

There are many books by leading Orthodox theologians and scholars on all aspects of the Orthodox Church and this leaflet series provides some basic information in the hope that it might prompt further enquiry.

**LEAFLETS IN THIS INTRODUCTION TO
ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY SERIES:**

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All text in these leaflets is mine except where indicated, therefore any errors of fact or in grammar are mine. I should be grateful to have those errors pointed out so that corrections can be made.

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"The Orthodox Church.....has preserved unadulterated the first and most ancient ecclesiastical tradition and teaching, has avoided innovations and personal interpretations of the Holy Scriptures and dogmas of the faith, and is administered according to the ancient synodical system under local bishops in collaboration with the faithful and successive groups of both local and broader episcopal synods, of which the highest is the Ecumenical Synod, that of the Orthodox worldwide. The basic administrative canons, the details of which are regulated according to local needs, have been determined by the seven ecumenical synods. The Church is not managed by regional states in which it resides, although it collaborates in good works when asked to do so.

Within the entire Orthodox Church there is absolute cooperation in goodwill and mutual respect. Perchance minor human problems are addressed successfully through the application of the evangelical spirit."

*Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople, from
"Encountering the Mystery."
ISBN 978-0-385-51813-0*

Orthodox Community of Archangel Michael
and Holy Piran, Cornwall.
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Οἰκουμενικὸν Πατριαρχεῖον.
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Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Constantinople.

Fr.N.07.15

Introduction to Orthodox Christianity: Great - Holy Week & Pascha

ΜΕΓΑΛΗ ΕΒΔΟΜΑΣ ΠΑΣΧΑ



*"We praise your saving passion
O Christ,
and your resurrection we glorify."*

From the Paschal Orthros praises.

General notes. According to the method of calculating Holy Pascha, the latter will from time to time coincide with the observance of Western Easter, or it may be a week or number of weeks after. In our Orthodox churches, there may be dark hangings to emphasize the solemnity of the Holy Week commemorations. The vestments of the clergy retain the darker Lenten colours (purple in Greek tradition, black in Russian).

The services of Holy Week begin with the Orthros (Matins) of Monday taking place on Palm Sunday evening (anticipated – something which happens throughout the week). Services mentioned below are those normally taking place in parish churches. The richness of these services of Holy Orthodoxy can only be hinted at in this pamphlet.

Pascha (Passover) is the Scriptural and more ancient name for this chief Christian festival and was in fact familiar in Britain in early times as evidenced by the Venerable Bede's reference to this title in his Ecclesiastical History of England.

Palm Sunday evening begins Great and Holy Week when, as well as on **Monday** and **Tuesday** evenings, the Orthros service of the following day is served, each often referred to as the "Bridegroom Service", since common to the hymns of these three days is:- "Behold! The bridegroom comes at midnight and blessed is the servant whom he shall find watching...." A special icon is brought into the nave of the church showing Christ – the Bridegroom – in his passion.

The Orthros Gospel readings are:

Sunday - Matthew 21:18-43.

Monday - Matthew 22:15-46 & 23:1-39.

Tuesday - John 12:17-50.

On **Wednesday** evening we commemorate the woman who was a sinner and who anointed Christ's feet as he sat at the house of Simon. This woman who poured the precious ointment on Jesus, is the image of love and repentance which unite us with Christ. Again, although other services may take place, that which is most commonly held is the Anointing Service at the conclusion of which the Mystery (sacrament) of Holy Anointing (unction) takes place when the Priest says for each as they are anointed: "Holy Father, Physician of our souls and bodies, have mercy, forgive and save your servant(name)".

In this service there are seven readings from the Letters of the New Testament together with seven Gospel readings.

Thursday has two services. First, in the morning is a Vespers Liturgy (Divine Liturgy connected to the evening service of Esperinos or Vespers), within which are commemorated four events – Our Lord's washing of the disciples feet, the institution of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper, the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the betrayal of Christ by Judas.

The readings at this service are:

Exodus 19:10-19

Job 38:1-21 & 42:1-5 Isaiah 50:4-11

1 Corinthians 11:23-32

Composite Gospel reading: Matthew 26:2-20; John 13:3-17; Matthew 26:21-39; Luke 22:43-45; Matthew 26:75 & 27:1-2.

The evening of **Thursday** celebrates the Holy and Redeeming Passion of the Lord. It is often referred to as the service of the Twelve Passion Gospels. After the reading of the fifth of these Gospel passages, the cross is carried in procession through the church to a central point and the icon figure of Christ is placed upon it. At the close of the service and before leaving church the faithful approach and with reverence kiss the icon of the crucified Christ.

Great and Holy Friday also has two services. In the late morning (noon) it is the Taking down from the Cross (in some places preceded by the Imperial Hours). At a point during the reading of the Passion narrative the priest pauses and the icon of Christ is reverently taken down from the Cross & placed in the Ieron (Sanctuary). Then, shortly before the close of this service the Epitaphios, a cloth embroidered to represent the dead Christ is carried to a special flower decorated stand set up in the middle of the church and when the service is ended each person comes to the Epitaphios to kiss it before quietly leaving.

The readings at this service are:

Exodus 33:11-23 Job 42:12-17

Isaiah 52:13-15; 53:1-12 & 54:1

1 Corinthians 1:18-31; 2:1-2

Composite Gospel reading: Matthew 27:1-38; Luke 23:39-43; Matthew 27:39-54; John 19:31-37 & Matthew 27:55-61

The **Friday** evening service is known as the Lamentations since, after the first section of the Orthros (of Saturday) three sets of chants occur at the Epitaphios during which the myrrh bearing women are recalled and the Epitaphios and people are sprinkled with sweet smelling rose water. A procession with the Epitaphios takes place and then it is placed on the Holy Table (altar) remaining there until Ascension Day. Those present, at the end of the service, come to the now empty tomb and take away with them flowers from its decoration.

The readings are:

Ezekiel 37:1-14

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 and Galatians 3:13-14

Gospel: Matthew 27:62-66

The service on **Saturday** morning is a Vespers Liturgy of Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (379) and commemorates the Harrowing of Hades.

The readings are:

Genesis 1:1-13

Jonah 1:1-16, 2:1-11, 3:1-10, 4:1-11

Daniel 3:1-23

Romans 6:3-11

Gospel: Matthew 28:1-20

During the late evening of **Saturday** the services in preparation for and to celebrate the Glorious Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ take place, beginning with the brief "mid-night" prayers, then the outdoors candle-lit proclamation of the resurrection Gospel, followed by Orthros prayers and the Divine Liturgy of Holy Pascha. The custom of blessing and distributing coloured eggs takes place. A Paschal soup is often served with other food for break fast after the service.

Readings are:

Gospel: Mark 16:1-8 (at the outdoors proclamation)

Acts of the Apostles 1:1-8

Gospel: John 1:1-17

During **Sunday** the Day of Resurrection a short Vespers – the Vespers of Love takes place often late morning or early afternoon, with the appointed Gospel passage – John 20:19-25 – read in different languages to emphasize the universal message of Christ's resurrection.

This is often followed by a festive meal – frequently a barbecue.