

# Rector's Letter, April, 2019

Dear brothers and sisters:

On the evening of Sunday, April 21, we mark the beginning of Holy Week, remembering and sharing in our Lord's journey to the Cross and the Tomb before his resurrection. You can find the schedule of services included in the calendar, and on a separate flyer. It's worth thinking through the significance of the different days and services:

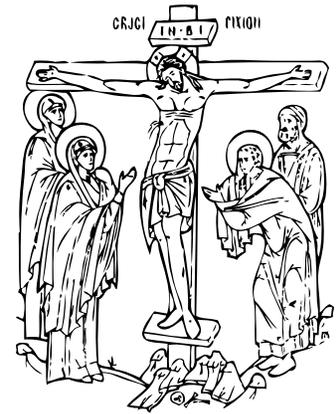
**Great and Holy Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday** are dedicated to the Bridegroom: "Behold the Bridegroom comes at midnight, and blessed is the servant whom he shall find watching...." The Bridegroom Matins services are held on the evening *before* each of these days, and serve to focus our attention on what is to come, reminding us that we need to watch and pray every day of our life, because we do not know the day or the hour when we will meet the Lord.

**Great and Holy Thursday** is devoted to the Mystical Supper. "Mystical" has nothing to do with New Age or magic. "Mystical" literally means "hidden"—so we are celebrating the hidden reality behind the Supper which the Lord celebrated with his disciples before his betrayal, and also the reality behind the Supper that we share in the Divine Liturgy. We can only see bread and wine, but our Lord tells us, "This is my Body broken for you...." Matins of Holy Thursday

is observed on *Wednesday evening*, and we celebrate Vespers and Liturgy on Thursday morning. At this Liturgy, not only do we remember how our Lord first told us to "do this in remembrance of me," but also we consecrate and prepare the Reserved Sacrament, which is kept in the Tabernacle on the Altar throughout the year, to distribute to the ill and shut-ins who cannot come to church.

**Great and Holy Friday** begins the Three-Day Passion. On Thursday evening, we celebrate Matins with twelve Gospel readings, taking us from the Last Supper to the garden where our Lord spent the night in suffering prayer, from his betrayal to his unjust trial to his crucifixion and death. It is solemn, awe-inspiring, and the absolute center of our faith. It is also long and demanding on soul and body—be prepared! The next morning we have Royal Hours of Holy Friday, a time for quiet reflection on the Lord's crucifixion. It is much simpler than Matins, but also beautiful. Especially if a long evening service is a challenge for you, consider making Royal Hours a focal point in your week.

With Vespers on Holy Friday, we make a transition to the Tomb of our Lord. By now, the



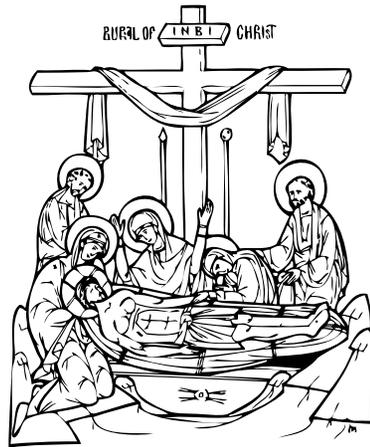
Tomb is set in the middle of the church and decorated with flowers. The Shroud of the Lord is brought out for veneration at this service.

### Great and Holy Saturday

is devoted to the mystery at the heart of our salvation: the day our Lord lay dead in the Tomb. It seemed an utter defeat, but actually it was the moment of everlasting victory: our

Lord descended into Hades, the realm of the dead, broke down its gates and brought out all its prisoners. When the Lord seemed most helpless, he was actually most active. So with Matins on Friday evening, we hear words mixing sorrow and joy. The entirety of Psalm 118/119 is chanted (the same one quoted at the funeral service: “Blessed are you, O Lord, teach me your statutes!”), interspersed with hymns meditating on the meaning of the Cross, the Tomb, and the Resurrection. We also carry the Shroud in procession around the Church, like in a funeral procession.

Vespers and Liturgy of Holy Saturday quietly marks the first celebration of the Resurrection. We hear readings from the Old Testament, all showing how it was necessary for our Lord to suf-



fer and die, to rise again on the third day. At the end of them, we change all the dark coverings and vestments to our brightest white and hear the first Gospel reading of the Resurrection, with the command from our Lord: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18).

We still await the full day of **Pascha** to begin! We gather again before the Tomb in almost complete darkness Saturday night, and hear some of the same hymns from Matins of Holy Saturday. At their end, the Shroud is taken up and placed on the Altar, where it remains in honor until the Paschal Season ends.

Then all candles are put out, and a fresh light is lit while the priest begins the hymn, “Your Resurrection, O Christ our Savior, the angels in heaven sing. Enable us on earth to glorify you in purity of heart!” After three times, the Royal Doors open, everyone’s candle is lit from that original flame, and we go out in procession, singing the same hymn.



After three times around the church, we stop at the doors to hear a Gospel account of the Resurrection and exchange the Paschal Greeting: "Christ is risen!" "Indeed, he is risen!" When we re-enter the church, all is filled with light, the Tomb is put away, and we pull out all the stops for the Paschal Vigil. Eventually, we come to the Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom, which sums up our joy and hope before we celebrate the Liturgy. After the Liturgy, we bless the baskets we have brought, full of festive food and drink, and then we enjoy our paschal breakfast, sometimes called an "Agape Meal," literally, "Love Feast."

Pascha is far too big a feast to fit into just one night, so we pry our eyelids open and gather again for Paschal Vespers at noon on Sunday, which is short and sweet and bubbling with joy. The joy overflows into **Bright Week**, which we observe with Divine Liturgy on Bright Monday. We hear some of the same hymns from the Paschal Vigil, but we also have a special procession, stopping at the four sides of the church to hear four Gospel accounts of the Resurrection.

We could go on: Thomas Sunday, the Myrrhbearing Women, the Ascension, Pentecost.... But this is plenty for one month. Come and see!

Yours in Christ,



## **Around the Parish**

Many years to **Dakota Luke Stankiewicz and Zella Ann Phillips**, who were illumined through Holy Baptism last month!

**Our parish is honored to host one of the Connecticut Deanery's Lenten Vespers**, on the Fourth Sunday of Great Lent, April 7, at 4 PM. Please mark the date on your calendar; we will be asking for your support in hosting this event. Please speak with Sarah Massaro (860-828-4781), who is coordinating our hospitality.

We are blessed with a stunning **new Crucifixion icon** (or Golgotha) for our church. Funded by donations towards our Tomb and Crucifixion icon project, we purchased icons of the Crucifixion, the Theotokos and St. John the Theologian. These all parallel the current large Golgotha that stands at the front left of our church. John Barone has crafted a cross and stand for them, which now is placed to the front right, next to our shrine to St. Herman. Our older Crucifixion icon is very difficult to maneuver, so it will be left in place while the new one will be brought to the center of the church for Great and Holy Friday.

This is only the first step in the project, with the **Tomb still to be built** to match this Crucifixion icon. On Holy Friday, the Shroud or Plaschanitsa of the Lord is reverently placed on the Tomb until the Paschal vigil. We are grateful to all who have contributed to this project, and we welcome and honor each new donation.

Please remember that every member of this parish has a responsibility to participate in **Holy Confession — at least once during Great Lent**. In addition to the regularly scheduled time for Confession following Saturday Vespers, Confessions are also heard every Wednesday, 4:45–5:45 PM. Please do not let the days slip away. If the scheduled times cannot work, then please make an appointment with Fr. Joshua.

One of the traditions of Great Lent is the **remembrance of the departed**. On Friday, April 5, we will commemorate the departed at the conclusion of Friday vespers. **Please bring the names of those you wish to have commemorated at the services.**

Saturday, April 13, is our **parish clean-up** day in preparation for Holy Week and Pascha. We plan to start by 9 AM. All are welcome to help beautify the church inside and out.

**Passion Week or Holy Week begins on April 22**, and leads to the Three-Day Passion: Holy Friday, Holy Saturday, and Pascha, the Day of Resurrection. You can find all the services for this week through Bright Monday in the flyer enclosed with this newsletter.

Our customary day for the **Blessing of Graves** is St. Thomas Sunday, May 5, with a rain date of Sunday, May 12. If you would like to **bless a grave at another cemetery** during this Paschal season, please speak with Fr. Joshua to arrange a time.

We are planning once again to deliver **Easter baskets to ten families in need** in our church neighborhood. Using our Charity Fund, the parish fills each basket with fun and useful items for school children. Please give generously to support the Charity Fund to support this and all our efforts this year.

At the entrance of our church are **Children's Worship Bags** to help our young children learn, grow and pray together with Jesus during Divine Liturgy. Borrow a bag to share with your child and return it at the end of the service. The bags were prepared by members of the Growth and Outreach Committee for children to enjoy weekly.

## **Beyond our Parish**

The following **Lenten services in the Connecticut Deanery** can be added to your calendar, all beginning at 4 PM on Sundays:

- ❖ 5th Sunday of Great Lent, April 14, Three Saints, 26 Howard Ave, Ansonia: Annual Unc-tion Service.
- ❖ Palm Sunday, April 21, All Saints, 205 Scarborough Street, Hartford: Bridegroom Matins of Holy Monday.