

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

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Christ is Risen! Al Maseeh Qam! Christos Voskrese!



Volume 8 Issues 17

Holy Pascha-The Resurrection of Our Lord-Easter Sunday

April 28, 2019



Today, we celebrate the true Pascha, or Passover, of our Lord. This is the passing over from death to life, from bondage to freedom, from darkness to light, from suffering to healing. We are now reveling in the light of His glorious resurrection. The brightness of these days is our participation in this "true life" that St. Gregory speaks

of. We can see it all around us in nature. St. Gregory goes on to list many things in nature that reveal to us this new life springing up in his homily on Pascha. He says that everything is "conspiring together, rejoicing together, for the beauty of this feast."

Everything all around us is hymning Christ who has sprung up from the tomb in order to bestow life on the whole world. He begins, "Now the heaven shines more brightly, the sun stands higher and glows more golden; now the moon's orb is more radiant, the chorus of stars gleams more clearly. Now the sea's waves make their peace with the shores, the clouds with the sun, the winds with the air, the earth with the plants, the plants with our eyes. Now the springs gush forth with a new sparkle; now the rivers flow more abundantly, released from

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****Holy Pascha - Easter Sunday****

****The Resurrection of Our Lord****

Epistle: Acts 1: 1-7

Gospel: John: 1: 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 the 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.*

Behind Closed Door by Fr. Stephen Freeman

The phrase, "behind closed doors," has become synonymous in English with things being done in secret – generally of an unsavory or nefarious sort. Institutions speak of an "open door policy," and promise "transparency" to those from the outside.

Closed doors have always had a sense of secrecy about them. Sometimes the secrecy hides the darkness of evil, other times it protects us from the wonder of the holy.

The stories of Christ's resurrection are filled with closed doors. It is a common phrase in the resurrection narratives: "the doors being shut for fear of the Jews."

The disciples had lost their leader and teacher and they feared that they themselves would become victims. That fear led them to flee. It led St. Peter to deny that he even knew Christ. It led them all to hide behind closed doors.

Closed doors occur even earlier. The first

doors known in the stories of Scripture are the gates of Paradise. Adam and Eve, having broken God's only commandment to them, are forced to leave Paradise.

The gates of the garden are shut and an angel is set at the gate to guard against their re-entry. More than the story of our first parents – it is the story of man.

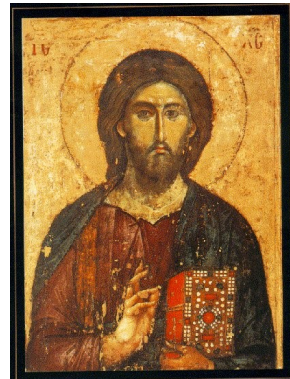
The gates represent the brokenness of our communion with God. We exist – we have life – but

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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 worshipping with us today and invite you down to the church hall for our social hour.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Lillian, Meg, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Peg, Christopher, Jackie, Karoline, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Andrea, Samuel, Anatoly, the homeless, the hungry, those victims of abuse and violence, and those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Christ is Risen. Al Maseeh Qam

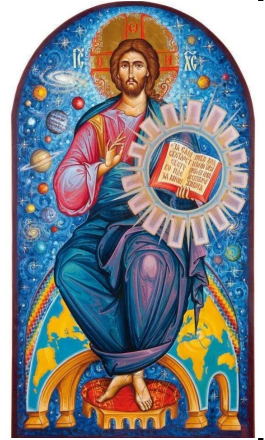
We wish to thank all who donated their time and talents in serving at the altar, singing at the services, cleaning the church, keeping the lawn mowed, and offering financial support for this Joyous Feast of Feasts-The Pascha of the Lord-Easter Sunday. The following is current list of flower donations for Easter:
+In Memory of the Departed Members of the Abraham Family by Catherine and Lorraine Abraham.

+In Memory of Elia and Mary Baida, Abraham and Atina Saleem, Marth Saleem Shoemaker, Sam and Korena Saleem, Michael Saleem (killed in action WW II), Scandera and Ron Howland by Tamam Baida.

+In Memory of George, Anna and Fred Moses by Martha Ann Moses

+In Memory of the Departed Members of the Isaac Family by George Isaac.

+In Memory of Stephen, Gerald, Patricia, Catherine, Mary Stefan, Anna, and Trifon, and the Health of Katie by Paula Tucker.



Behind Closed Doors, cont'd from p.1)

our life is somehow cut off, "shut out" of its right and proper communion: we stand outside the Garden.

Later mystagogical teaching about the use of doors during an Orthodox service echo this estrangement. The priest praying before the closed doors at Vespers is sometimes said to represent Adam weeping before the closed gates of Paradise.

Our own lives are filled with closed doors – places from which we have been evicted – places into which we may not enter – places that represent secrets and broken relationships. Closed doors have gained an infamous character for good reason.

I can recall as a child standing outside closed doors while adults carried on arguments ("away from the ears of children"). I have stood outside closed doors as I understood responsible adults to be lying. There have been closed doors of wealth, class, education, ethnicity and dialect.

Most people, in most places, have a profound sense that there is somewhere they do not belong. I can think

of few things as painful as a door, slammed and locked in the midst of an argument.

From the point of view of Christ's resurrection – the doors are slammed and locked from the other side. The gates of Hades are not closed by God, but by those who would keep God out. The gates Christ smashes are the gates that would refuse entry to the Light of Life.

Even the gates of Paradise are closed only for our protection. It is not the joy of Paradise or any pleasure that God would deny us – only our own efforts to approach to Tree of Life in a manner that did not involve our repentance, and therefore our salvation. To have become an immortal sinner would to have been to become like the demons.

But at Pascha, Christ confronts the doors of fear. Interestingly, he does not smash these doors. He simply appears within. He does not ask His disciples to first overcome their fears so that He may come to them. He comes to them and their fears are overcome.

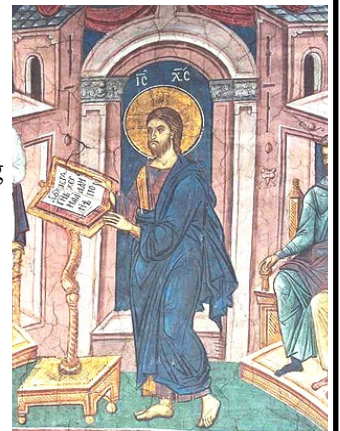
We cannot do what we must do unless He comes to us.

Thus the New Testament image becomes: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20).

It is not God who has closed the doors – it is God who knocks and who appears inside, though they be closed.

We live in a world of locked and closed doors. Only a loving and resurrected God could overcome such obstacles. Glory to God who appears behind closed doors and sets the prisoners free.

Christ is Risen. Indeed He is Risen.



the bonds of winter's ice. Now the meadow is fragrant, the shoots burst forth, the grass is ready for mowing, and the lambs skip through the rich green fields... All things sing God's praise, and give Him glory with wordless voices. For God receives my thanks for all these things: so each of their songs becomes our hymn, for I make their hymnody my own!... Now is the world's spring, the spiritual spring, spring for our souls, spring for our bodies, spring visible, spring invisible."

What powerful words that express even the creation's response to the Pascha of our Lord. There are two Paschas that we celebrate.

The first is our Lord's and the second is our own. But these are not mutually exclusive either. Our Passover from death to life is made possible by Christ's glorious resurrection. We are those in the tombs whom Christ has come to free and release. We are Adam and Eve that are being yanked out of the slumber of death. It is in these radiant days that we must continue to shine forth the glory of Christ's resurrection by a radiant life. We become part of this new creation.

What we also feast is our own passing from the tyranny of sin and death to victory and joy in the Kingdom. Just as we learn to fast and prepare ourselves to meet Christ during the sojourn of the Great Fast, so must we learn how to truly feast.

Feasting is not just about eating meat and dairy products. True Christian feasting especially at Pascha is to offer ourselves to Christ in this new creation where we have died with Christ and become partakers of Him in His resurrection.

Thus our feasting becomes a continual offering of ourselves to Christ. It is a feast of renewal where we put off the old man, and walk in newness of life (Eph. 4:22).

"Let your old person become new! Celebrate the renewal of your soul!" says St. Gregory, stressing to us how we can continue to feast the resurrection. He urges us to, "Put restraints on everything that is the source of death, train all your members, develop a hatred for all the evil fruit of the tree... This is the way a human person is renewed, this is how the Day of Renewal should be honored: with this kind of finery, with a banquet such as this!... Bring this as your offering to the festival: be

changed for the better... Scripture does not wish you to remain always as you are, but to be constantly in motion, beneficially in motion, even 'a new creation' - if you are a sinner, turning towards the good, and if you are upright, holding to your course."

So we see that we must continue in this paschal victory during this whole season and into all of our life. Pascha should be a beginning rather than an end. We are so accustomed in our culture to spend all of our energy on our preparation for an event and then when the event occurs, we relax and "take a break." Well, within the life of the

Church where we participate in Christ Himself every feast, every Liturgy is a beginning, a renewal, a rebirth into Christ.

This is why we feast Pascha for forty days and then await the coming of the Holy Spirit. We begin to enter into Kingdom time where we begin to see all of our life transformed into the presence of the Holy Trinity. Our sin, death, impossible situations, disappointments, struggles, losses, start to shine somehow with the light of Christ who shone forth from the tomb. This is where the light of Pascha begins to dawn in our hearts.

St. Macarios of Corinth developed this idea and we find in a wonderful paraphrase of one of his homilies elaboration on this theme.

"When you hear that Christ descended into hell in order

to deliver the souls dwelling there, do not think that what happens now is very different. The heart is a tomb and there our thoughts and our intellect are buried, imprisoned in heavy darkness.

And so Christ comes to the souls in hell that call upon Him, descending, that is to say, into the depths of the heart; and there He commands death to release the imprisoned souls that call upon Him, for He has power to deliver us. Then, lifting up the heavy stone that oppresses the soul, and opening the tomb, He resurrects us - for we were truly dead - and releases our imprisoned soul from its lightless prison... What was the purpose of His descent to earth except to save sinners, to bring light to those in darkness and life to the dead?" So let us feast Christ's resurrection continually for today Christ is risen and "not one dead remains in the tombs." Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!



Why do we say Pascha for the Resurrection

Pascha means passage. The Pascha of the Jews people is their passage from Egypt, the land of slavery, to the Promised Land. Christian Pascha is people's passage from sin to righteousness through the death and resurrection of Christ. That is, through your faith in this death and its efficacy. In our liturgical life, we do not make a distinction between Good Friday and Pascha Sunday. It is three mutually-completing parts. You transcend the duality between Christ's death and resurrection in the services because you do not recall the death and linger there. You constantly leap from the Savior's crucifixion to his resurrection.

It is worth pointing out that if Orthodox Christians mention the death of the Teacher in prayer, they immediately speak of the resurrection. Hear the tones and words of the resurrection in the prayer of Good Friday.

Some say that the Western Church focuses on the Lord's passion and the Eastern Church on the resurrection. This is not true. In both churches there is a complete balance between the two events for the simple reason that the resurrection is also present in the passion. Therefore believers who examine the texts of the passion and the resurrection agree that there is no difference between the Eastern Church and the Western Church in this, even if Christians in the West pay more attention to the Lord's passion in popular practice.

In our liturgical practices, Pascha is from Good Friday to Sunday and if "Pascha" means passage, then all of it is the passage of the Lord from death to life. It is striking to me that, in the Orthodox Church, if you are a practicing believer you greet your friend with "Christ is risen" and he responds "indeed He is risen" for the forty days after Pascha. Every practicing Orthodox child knows to greet his friends from Pascha until the Thursday of the Ascension by saying "Christ is risen."

If an Orthodox person dies between Pascha and Ascension, a paschal funeral is held, with chants and praises of the resurrection. The priests do not wear black robes in the prayer and in the text and music you can't distinguish the funeral prayers from wedding prayers. All of us, in

life and death, are brides of Christ.

Do you truly believe on account of this that you are risen from the dead? Have you believed that partaking of the Lord's body every Sunday is your resurrection or do you still feel that sin keeps you in death? Is the resurrection only a commemoration of the Savior or has it become your true life? Is Pascha a feast or the reality of your soul? Are you a person of Pascha? The unbeliever Nietzsche wrote, "Show me Christians risen from the dead and I will believe in their Savior." Do you not wish to challenge Nietzsche and demonstrate to the fullest that even as you

are alive, you have been enlightened by the light of Christ?

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The Resurrection of Christ the Redeemer is the completion of the Great Work for the redemption of mankind from enslavement to Satan and corruption; the power of sin is destroyed and Death itself is abolished. The Resurrection of Christ grants every one the right to call himself a child of God; it is the return of Paradise lost, the threshold of the Holy of Holies of immortal life and communion with God. St. Paul tells us that if there had been no Resurrection then our Christian faith would have been deprived of any foundation or value: 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 Cor. 15:14, 17).

The Holy Orthodox Church triumphs, exults and rejoices, magnifying and extolling Christ's glorious Resurrection, the great and wonderful manifestation of Divine Love and Forgiveness and the beginning of everlasting life. On this Feast of Feasts, the Holy Church exults in her love for her beloved Bridegroom, Who rose from the tomb for our salvation, and summons us, Her faithful children, to this eternal Feast of angels and men. This greatest feast, illuminated by the light from on high, is a divine prefiguration of the general resurrection of all those who have died from the beginning of time. And this is so because, as the Paschal Hymn so triumphantly proclaims: Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!

