

Pascha and Bright Week 2015

[Holy Saturday \(2015\)](#)

Posted on [April 11, 2015](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

We come to the full circle of this eight day week. We experience the resurrection of Lazarus and the death of Christ on the Cross – knowing both to be signs of the Kingdom of God and the universal resurrection. We experience baptism in this week in which we ourselves put on Christ, overcoming death so that we can live with Christ.



St. Paul in his letter to the Romans says:



“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is

freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.” (Romans 6:3-9)

On Holy Saturday we already begin to experience the victory of Christ. The Kingdom of heaven is breaking into this world, our world. In Genesis 1, it is on Saturday that God creates humans. It is on Holy Saturday that God recreates humanity, descending into Hades to free humankind from the ravages of death.

A week ago on Saturday, with Christ resurrecting Lazarus, we begin anticipating the resurrection of the dead at the end of time. With Christ’s death on the cross we experience the fulfillment of God’s plan to conquer evil by love. As we sing in the Church’s liturgy:

“Those who buried themselves with Christ by baptism into death

And risen with him, sing praises and cry out, saying:

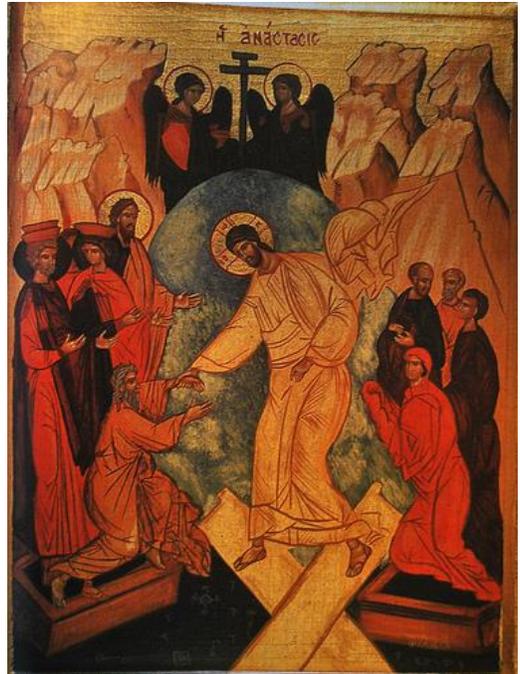
'Where is your victory, O Death? Hades where is your sting?

For the Lord is risen, the Life and Resurrection."

([Archbishop Hilarion Alfeyev](#), [CHRIST THE CONQUEROR OF HELL](#), p 150)

And so on Holy Saturday we in anticipation of life in the world to come celebrate the resurrection of our Savior. Already we proclaim the resurrection Gospel lesson from Matthew 28.

"Only God can save. In order to save man, he voluntarily 'lowered himself not only to mankind itself, but to the very depths of human fallenness, to the very last degree of disintegration – unto death itself.' For death is inextricably tied with sin: it enslaves a person to sin and engulfs one in one's own self-interest, forcing one to fight for one's own survival, often sacrificing the lives of others. Not being involved in sin, the incarnate God took on death, a result of sin, breaking the vicious cycle of sin and death. 'In a world in which the battle for survival at the price of others has become a law, he showed death for others as the highest revelation of love. When this highest manifestation of love was accomplished by God himself, a truly new life entered the world.' ([John Meyendorff](#))" (Archbishop Hilarion Alfeyev, [CHRIST THE CONQUEROR OF HELL](#), p 186)



Christ, the incarnate God, comes to earth precisely to save humanity from the power of sin.

*"Searching for fallen Adam but not finding him on Earth, the incarnate God entered the depths of hell to redeem him. This image is reminiscent of the parable of the lost sheep and the drachma. As in many hymns of the **octoechos**, the universal character of Christ's redemption—not for one category of people but for all of mankind and every human being – is stressed. They also speak of Christ's resurrecting the dead, described as an 'emptying' of hell by the risen Lord..."* (Archbishop Hilarion Alfeyev, [CHRIST THE CONQUEROR OF HELL](#), p 188)

Christ comes for the salvation of the world. He dies on the cross so that we might each and all might receive the forgiveness of our sins and inherit life in the world to come. We celebrate this salvation in Holy Week in and through baptism and the Eucharist.

"Any time is right for salvation by baptism: whether it is day, night, a particular hour, or an instant. But the best time is one that shares the spirit of new birth. What time could be more suitable than the day of Easter? For that is the day that commemorated the Resurrection—and it is baptism that

facilitates our own resurrection. On the day of the Resurrection, therefore, let us receive the grace of resurrection.” (St. Basil the Great – d. 379AD, [ON FASTING AND FEASTS](#), p 42)

[Pascha – The Resurrection of Christ \(2015\)](#) Posted on [April 12, 2015](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)



Today we celebrate the Holy [Pascha](#), the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. It is the basis of every Feast and sacrament in the Orthodox Church. [St Gregory Palamas](#) (d. 1359AD) writes:

“The sacred feast and holiday that we are keeping is the first to commemorate our recall and re-creation according to grace, for on it all things began to be made new, enduring precepts began to

be brought in instead of temporary ones, the spirit instead of the letter, the truth instead of shadows.

Today, a new world and a mysterious paradise have been revealed, in which and from which a new Adam came into being, re-making the old Adam and renewing the universe. He is not led astray by the deceiver, but deceives him, and bestows freedom on those enslaved to sin through his treachery.”

To this point in the quote, we understand St. Gregory perfectly, but then he makes a surprising, even puzzling the comment:

“Today a paradoxical book has been made ready on earth, which in an indescribable way can hold, not the imprint of words, but the living Word Himself; not a word consisting of air, but the heavenly Word; not a word that perishes as soon as it is formed, but the Word who snatches those who draw near Him from perdition; not a word made by the movement of a man’s tongue, but the Word begotten of God the Father before all ages.”

What book is St. Gregory talking about? It is a wonderful image – a book that holds the Word of God. But what does this have to do with Pascha?

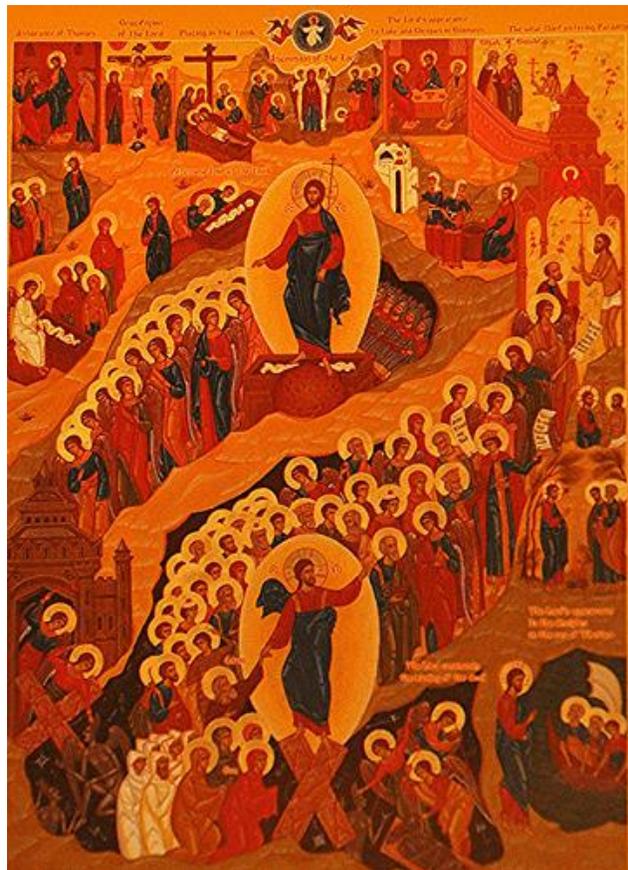
“Today the living tabernacle of God not made with hands appears, the inspired human ark of the true bread of life sent down from heaven for us (cf John 6:32ff) . . . Thus Christ took sin’s prisoners to live with Him for ever, justifying them by faith in Him, but He bound the prince of sin with inescapable bonds, and delivered him to eternal fire without light. Today, as prophesied, out of the ‘stem of Jesse’ a rod has come forth (cf Isa 11:1), from which a flower has grown which knows no wilting. This rod recalls our human nature, which had withered and fallen away from the unfading garden of delight, makes it bloom again, grants it to flourish for ever, brings it up to heaven, and leads it into paradise.” ([THE HOMILIES](#), p 334)



St. Gregory's quote begins with words which apply to Pascha so well and give us a wondrous glimpse into the Feast of the Resurrection. The surprise is that actually he is talking about the [Nativity of the Mother of God](#) – she is the book upon whom the Word will be written. The words are about a completely different Feast and yet so beautifully show how all of our Feasts are centered in Christ and in His resurrection. All of our Feasts celebrate the new Adam, the new creation and the reopening of Paradise to humankind.

On this day we commemorate Christ's descent into Hades where He confronts the personified Death and Satan, humanity's enemies. However, in the Orthodox Church, we do not celebrate only an "objective" event of Christ's descent into Hades and His resurrection from the dead. Pascha is also something we experience in our own lives. [St. Macarius of Egypt](#) however also personalizes this descent, for St. Macarius says Christ descends into our hearts, and into the death and hell in each of us to liberate us from that as well.

"When you hear that the Lord in the old days delivered souls from hell and prison and that he descended into hell and performed a glorious deed, do not think that all these events are far from your soul. . . . So the Lord comes into the souls that seek Him, into the depth of the heart's hell, and there commands death, saying: 'Release the imprisoned souls which have sought Me and which you hold by force.' And he shatters the heavy stones weighing on the soul, opens graves, raises the true dead from death, brings the imprisoned soul from the dark prison. . . . Is it difficult for God to enter death and, even more, into the depth of the heart and to call out dead Adam from there? . . . If the sun, being created, passes everywhere through windows and doors, even to the caves of lions and the holes of creeping creatures, and comes out without any harm, the more so does God and the Lord of everything enter caves and abodes in which death has settled, and also souls, and, having released Adam from there, [remains] unfettered by death. Similarly, rain coming down from the sky reaches the nethermost parts of the earth, moistens and renews the roots there and gives birth to new shoots." (Macarius of Egypt in Archbishop Hilarion Alfeyev's [CHRIST THE CONQUEROR OF HELL](#), pp 73-74)



[2015 Paschal Greetings](#)

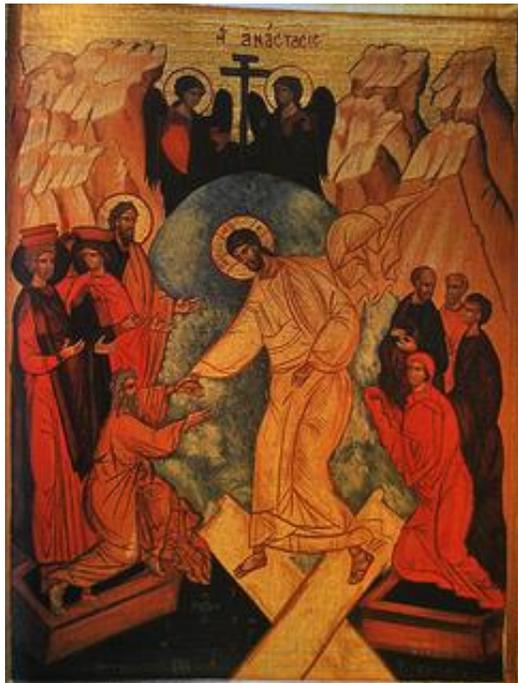
Posted on [April 13, 2015](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The image of the Passover in the Old Testament is one of people setting off on a journey. The people are instructed to eat unleavened bread as a sign that the journey is hurried – they haven't even time to let the bread rise. Rather, they are to eat with their shoes on and ready to start traveling at once. The travel is urgent!

So for us every year we keep Pascha as a supremely urgent journey which begins with our seeking forgiveness of one another and then plunging us into Great Lent. And, whether we keep Lent strictly or not, often it seems like a long journey. Week after week

we persevere. The services are long – if we are fasting, we tire more easily. The Lenten services take of our precious time. Patience can wear thin – a form of Lenten road rage emerges as we impatiently judge those around us who annoy us.



This year, we had a number of people join our community in the sojourn. Our numbers increased as we worked our way toward Pascha. We have asked God to sojourn with them and us: "Let God arise" and lead us toward the Kingdom, despite threats and enemies in the world. We move as did ancient Israel through a hostile world seeking the promise of the Kingdom of Heaven.

We remind ourselves every year of the destination – Pascha, the resurrection of Christ. And we recognize that though the destination is clear, the sojourn continues. Daily we carry the Cross always moving toward God. We walk with Christ, beginning at His tomb, which is also our baptismal font. We are buried with Christ in baptism, and then raised with Him to a new life. Through His Cross, joy has come into all the world.

May God bless you and strengthen you to continue the sojourn. Rejoice constantly on the road to God's Kingdom.

Ultimately, the suffering of this world is nothing when compared to the glories of the world to come.

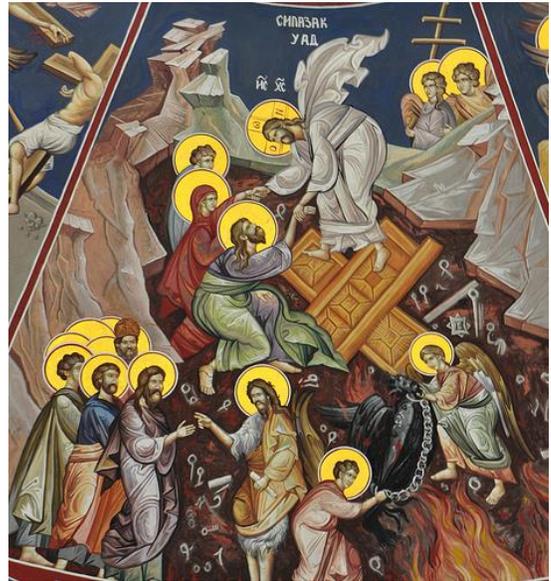
Christ is risen!

[Bright Monday \(2015\)](#) Posted on [April 13, 2015](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

Christ is risen! Truly He is risen!

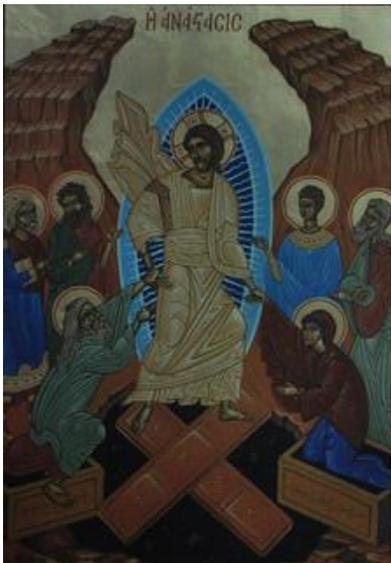
Pascha is not simply a onetime event, even if a spectacular divine resurrection from the dead! Pascha is what we live daily and in eternity: humanity permanent united to God. Even death itself cannot break that union.

“The purpose and the entire mission of the incarnate Word is prompted by God’s love for the world, an unconditional love willing to risk the death of the only Son on the cross (John 3:16). Christ lived and died for the sake of the world. ‘In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him’ (1 John 4:9). The eternal Word became flesh, he taught and healed, that the intimate unity and love between the Father and the Son might be shared with those who turn to the Son and to his saving work with faith and love (John 17:20-26). The life of the believer is intended to be an unceasing Pascha of love in union with the Father and the Son. ‘If one loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him’ (14:23).” (Theodore Stylianopoulos, [ENCOURAGED BY THE SCRIPTURES](#), pp 6-7)



[Bright Tuesday \(2015\)](#) Posted on [April 14, 2015](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!



The celebration of Pascha is indeed an act of faith. Yet it has its foundation in the material universe. Physicist [John Polkinghorne](#) reflects on the physical reality of the risen Christ. For those with a scientific bent, Polkinghorne offers a scientist’s take on the resurrection.

“If we regard human beings as psychosomatic unities, as I believe both the Bible and contemporary experience of the intimate connection between mind and brain encourage us to do, then the soul will have to be understood in an Aristotelian sense as the ‘form,’ or information-bearing pattern, of the body. Though this pattern is dissolved at death, it seems perfectly rational to believe that it will be remembered by God and reconstituted in a divine act of resurrection. The ‘matter’ of the world to come, which will be the carrier of this reembodiment, will be the transformed matter of the present

*universe, itself redeemed by God beyond its cosmic death. That resurrected universe is not a second attempt by the Creator to produce a world **ex nihilo** [out of nothing] but it is the transmutation of the present world in an act of new creation **ex vetere** [out of old]. God will then truly be ‘all in all’ (1 Cor*

15:28) in a totally sacramental universe whose divine-infused 'matter' will be delivered from the transience and decay inherent in present physical process. Such mysterious and exciting beliefs depend for their motivation not only on the faithfulness of God, but also on Christ's resurrection, understood as the seminal event from which the new creation grows, and indeed also on the detail of the empty tomb, with its implication that the Lord's risen and glorified body is the transmutation of his dead body, just as the world to come will be the transformation of this present mortal world." ([BELIEF IN GOD IN AN AGE OF SCIENCE](#), pp 22-23)

[Bright Wednesday \(2015\)](#)

Posted on [April 15, 2015](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

While we know from the New Testament that not all Jews believed in the resurrection ([Matthew 22:23](#); [Acts 23:8](#)), there is much evidence that belief in the resurrection was part of the normal prayer life of many Jews at the time of Christ. David Instone-Brewer offers a prayer from the [Eighteen Benedictions](#) Palestinian version written about 70CE:

"You are powerful, humbling the proud;

Strong, and judging the violent;

Alive forever, raising the dead;

Making wind blow and dew fall;

Sustaining the living, reviving the dead.

Like the fluttering of an eye,

Make our salvation sprout.

Blessed are you Lord, reviving the dead."

([TRADITIONS OF THE RABBIS FROM THE ERA OF THE NEW TESTAMENT](#), p 98)

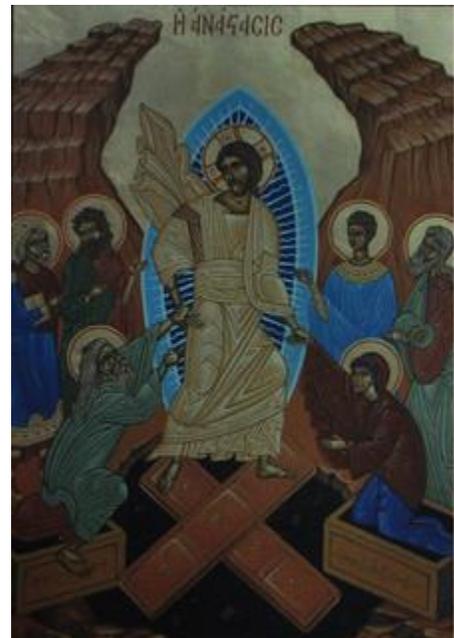
Christianity believes God fulfilled all of His promises and prophecies offered in the Old Testament in Jesus Christ our Lord.

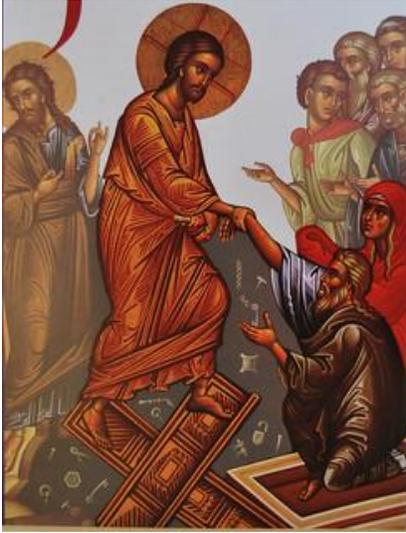
Christ is risen! Truly He is risen!

[Bright Thursday \(2015\)](#)

Posted on [April 16, 2015](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

It is the resurrection of Christ which brings His disciples to understand there is a first Adam, a flesh and blood human, and a last Adam, Christ who is the first firsts of a new creation ([1 Corinthians 15:42-50](#)). The first Adam created to have dominion over the earth became dominated by death. The second





Adam, the new man, Jesus Christ, used His own death to destroy death and establish his lordship over the living and the dead.

“The resurrection of Christ, therefore, opens up a whole new reality of existence, equivalent to the existence which Adam represents. In the event, Adam’s sin has been an existence dominated by sin and death. In contrast, the existence embodied by the resurrected Christ is one where death has expended its sting and is now stingless ([1 Cor 15.54-57](#)). Between them Adam and Christ span the whole history from ‘first’ to ‘last.’ But where the effectiveness of the first is marked by universal death, the effectiveness of the last really begins from Christ’s resurrection.” (James Dunn, [THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL THE APOSTLE](#), p 242)

Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!

[Bright Friday \(2015\)](#)

Posted on [April 17, 2015](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

The celebration of Pascha is the celebration of salvation.

*“The Greek word for salvation, **soteria**, has two possible etymologies, which give rise to tow different nuances of meaning.*

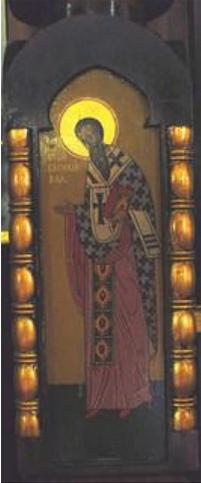
*According to the first etymology, the word comes from the ancient Greek verb **saoo/soo**, which later became **sozo**, meaning I make something sound ... I bring it to its wholeness, its integrity.*

*The second etymology derives the word from the noun **soter**, which indicates the agent of the verb **sozein**, whereupon **soteria** is the action or the result of this agency, deliverance, or liberation from some threat, from a difficult situation, danger, or disaster.”* (Christos Yannaras, [AGAINST RELIGION](#), p 63)

In Orthodoxy, we celebrate both meanings of the word salvation. Christ saves, liberates, delivers us from the power of sin and death. In raising humanity from the dead, Christ restores us to wholeness, gives us health by uniting us to divinity.

Christ is Risen! Truly, He is Risen!





Bright Saturday (2015)

Posted on [April 18, 2015](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

[St Basil the Great](#) (d. 379AD), whose liturgy we celebrate on the Sundays of Great Lent, says humans were driven from paradise by Satan and it is only in connection with Satan that humans encounter mortality.

“... our ancient home ... from which the man-slaying demon drove us, selling mankind into slavery by his allurements, here, I say, you will see the first origin of man and death, which immediately seized upon us and which had been begotten by sin...”

Sin leads to death, and it is death which spread to all humanity (Romans 5:12). However, in the resurrection we find ourselves saved by God who created us and loves us. We again encounter the many

dimensions of salvation.

“Now, what is the difference between being saved and being delivered? Properly speaking, those who are weak need safety, but those who are held in captivity need deliverance.” ([EXEGETIC HOMILIES](#), pp 84, 167)

Humanity weakened by sin and by separation from God needs the safety of God to protect us from the ravages of sin and death. Salvation is God freely giving us this safety from destruction. Salvation is also God delivering us from captivity in Hades, where Death and Satan held us captive. Christ descends into death and raises the dead by His own resurrection.

Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!

