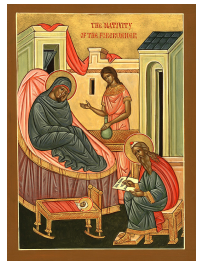


THE FORERUNNER
The Nativity of St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church
 420 Laura Street, Philipsburg, PA 16866
 V. Rev. Fr. C. Michael Simerick, Acting Rector
 Contact Fr. Michael directly at 814-375-1343
<http://nativityofstjohn-oca.org>



John Conkey-Council President; Tom Demchak-Vice-President; Judy Everly-Secretary; Mike Conkey-Treasurer
Members: Sonya Brennish, George Sura, Ivan Switala

APRIL 2019
SPECIAL PASCHA EDITION

Service & Activity Schedule

Sat., April 20 – Lazarus Saturday
 Divine Liturgy – 10:00 a.m.
 Vespers of Palm Sunday – 5:00 p.m.

Sun., April 21 – Palm Sunday
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.
 Blessing of palms and pussy willows
 Fellowship Hour – Ammerman & Donovan

Holy Wed., April 24 – Presanctified Lit.- 6:00 p.m.

Holy Thursday, April 25
 Vespers of St. Basil – 10:00 a.m.
 Matins with Passion Gospels – 6:00 p.m.

Holy Friday, April 26
 Royal Hours – 9:00 a.m. - Decorate tomb
 Vespers & placing of winding sheet – 3:00 p.m.

Holy Saturday, April 27
 Vespers of St. Basil – 10:00 a.m.
 Nocturne – 11:30 p.m.

Sun., April 28 – Holy Pascha
 Resurrection Matins – 12:00 a.m.
 With procession (weather permitting outside)
 Followed by Divine Liturgy
 Blessing of Paschal Foods
 Agape Vespers – ~~1:00 p.m.~~ followed by
 Fellowship Agape Meal at the Rectory
now 11:00 AM

Readers:

Mark Ammerman, John Conkey,
 Mike Conkey, Tom Demchak,
 Doug Donovan, George Sura,
 Andrew Tocimak

Altar Servers:

Acolyte John Blake
 Ivan Switala

Reader's Schedule

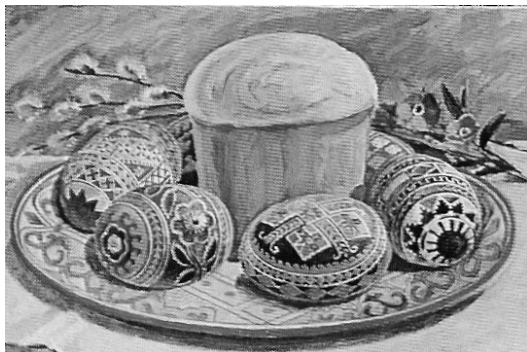
	<i>Hours</i>	<i>Epistle</i>
4/21	John Conkey	John Conkey
4/28	Holy Pascha	

Notable Feasts/Services in April

4/20	Lazarus Saturday
4/21	Palm Sunday
4/24	Holy Wednesday
4/25	Holy Thursday
4/26	Holy Friday
4/27	Holy Saturday
4/28	Holy Pascha

Birthdays

Jack Foster	April 2
Elaine Chutko	April 5
Elaine Cardinal	April 24
Ivan Switala	April 24



From the Desk of Father Michael

Brothers and Sisters, glory be to Jesus Christ!

Our holy mother, the Church, has prepared us well over these nearly eleven weeks. We were five weeks in preparation for Lent, and this Friday, April 19, will complete six weeks of the holy Lenten season. Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday set the stage for our Lord's final journey during Holy Week, His trek to Jerusalem where He will be apprehended, falsely accused and judged, humiliated, beaten, crucified, killed and buried as predicted by the prophets and by our Lord's own revelation. However, also predicted and confirmed by our Lord's own admission, He would resurrect on the third day creating a pathway to eternal life for all humanity.

We are surrounded by many who know nothing about our efforts and what we have experienced over these past many weeks, and are also ignorant of what we will witness during Holy Week and Pascha.

Let us pray for them and take full advantage of what our Savior has called us to commemorate (remember together) in His holy Church during Holy Week and the celebration of the Feast of Feasts—Pascha. Let us pray that God not only fill our hearts and minds with joy during this holy Feast, but that we might be empowered to testify to believers and non-believers alike of all that God has accomplished for all of us that we might inherit eternal life.

SPECIAL NOTE;

Let us keep the fast, and be the Church gathering in these last days prior to Holy Pascha that the solemnity of our commemorations make possible our experience of our Lord's eternal salvation acts.

LAZARUS SATURDAY, PALM SUNDAY, AND HOLY WEEK COMMEMORATIONS

Our Church began preparation for Pascha on March 11, and the 40-day period of Lent proper will terminate on Friday evening, April 19. The two days that follow, Saturday, April 20, termed in the liturgical language of the Church Lazarus Saturday, and Palm Sunday, April 21, bear a special significance. Although these days are not a part of Lent and strictly speaking are not counted in the days of Holy Week, they vividly express two major themes. These themes characterize the entire Paschal season—Christ's power over death, which was emphasized by His raising Lazarus, and the inauguration of His Kingdom, revealed by His being proclaimed as King and Messiah in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Holy Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday have within the liturgical development of Holy Week a very definite purpose. They place all its celebrations into the perspective of End; they remind us of the eschatological meaning of Pascha. So often the Holy Week is considered one of the "beautiful traditions" or "customs." We admire the beauty of its services, the pageantry of its rites and, last but not least, we like the fuss about the paschal table. Then, when all this is done, we resume our normal life.

But do we understand that when the world rejected its Savior, when "Jesus began to be sorrowful and very heavy . . . and his soul was exceedingly sorrowful even unto death," when He died on the Cross, "normal life" came to its end and is no longer possible? For "normal" men who shouted, "Crucify Him!" who spat at Him and nailed Him to the Cross hated and killed Him precisely because He was troubling their normal life. It was indeed a perfectly "normal" world that preferred darkness and death to light and life. By the death of Jesus, "normal" world, "normal" life were irrevocably condemned, or rather, they revealed their true and abnormal nature: their inability to receive the Light and the terrible power of evil in them—"Now is the judgment of this world." (John 12:31)

The Pascha of Jesus signified its end to "this world" and it has been at its end since then. This end can last for hundreds of centuries; this does not alter the nature of time in which we live as the "last time." "The fashion of this world passeth away. (I Corinthians 7:31)

Holy Thursday commemorates the Last Supper at which Christ initiated the sacrament of Holy Communion. The liturgical worship services of this day clearly define the two loves expressed at the Last Supper: Christ's love for mankind revealed in His willingness to sacrifice His life for us and that of Judas who was willing to sacrifice the Son of God for the world and the things of this world.

Holy Friday commemorates the crucifixion, death, and burial of our Lord and Savior. The liturgical hymns of this day remind us that the sorrow of Christ's death is twofold: firstly, that we all bear the guilt of that crucifixion inasmuch as we are all sinners and secondly, when mankind killed the author of life, all possibility of mankind to be saved without participating in Christ's death and resurrection (Holy Baptism) was also lost. The culmination of the daily services takes place Friday evening with a procession around the church by the faithful commemorating Christ's descent into Hades.

Holy Saturday emphasizes as its theme Christ's entombment. However, we are asked to contemplate on this day the great paradox—death by embracing the Creator of life began the process of its own annihilation. Late Saturday evening the Resurrectional Matins is celebrated with the climax of the service being the procession around the church commemorating Christ's resurrection. The Divine Liturgy of Pascha follows immediately after this service.

Pascha is the greatest feast day in the Orthodox Church! The resurrection of Christ is the central element on which all other truths in the Church depend. Therefore, on Pascha and throughout the weeks that follow until the Feast of Ascension, the Orthodox faithful will greet each other with the salutation with which the angel greeted the three women who first visited Christ's tomb on that glorious morning some 2,000 years ago, "Christ is risen!" and with the reply being "Truly He is risen!"

The above was excerpted from the book, *Holy Week*, by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann.

LAZARUS SATURDAY AND PALM SUNDAY

Much has been written and will be written regarding the meaning of these two commemorations that separate Lent from Holy Week and bring to our attention (our spiritual consciousness) the ultimate purpose for which Christ came--to abolish death and to inaugurate His kingdom. By raising Lazarus, Jesus demonstrated His power over death, precipitating His ultimate victory over death by His own resurrection for our salvation. His triumphant entry into Jerusalem which He orchestrated, where the crowd proclaimed Him king, revealed His intent to have His kingdom known and proclaimed. However, it is also clear that Jesus never intended for His kingdom to be understood as a kingdom of this world. When our Lord stood before Pilate, He said to Him "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence." (John 18:36).

Those who witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus were deeply moved by the experience and wasted no time in telling others what they had seen. The raising of Lazarus which was noised about led to inspiring many who greeted Jesus as He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and to cry out and say "Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord." (John 12:13).

Why did so many who were moved by the resurrection of Lazarus and proclaimed Jesus king of Israel on Palm Sunday join several days later with the leaders of Israel in seeking His crucifixion? Although we are appalled at their actions, when we more carefully scrutinize their motives, we find that frequently they are not that different from many of us. They were seeking tangible solutions to their problems. They wanted quick fixes! Christ healing their infirmities, making it possible for them to avoid physical death or to be restored to this life again, if physical death suddenly overtook them, was found to be most pleasing. That Christ should establish a kingdom of Israel that would subordinate the other kingdoms of the world to their rule was a dream come true.

However, as we have determined earlier, Jesus came to make possible the universal resurrection of all mankind at the end of this age. He also came to establish His heavenly kingdom, which will be ushered in permanently only at the end of this world as we know it.

Those who are riveted to their life in this world find this message disconcerting. It is not an accident that many Orthodox Christians find the message of our holy Church via the teachings of Christ and the holy fathers depressing and for them out of touch with reality. They find more pleasing the message of the churches that are flourishing today that preach social/economic agendas and are tied to finding political/scientific solutions to our many problems. Are we not to attempt to make this world a better place by every good means possible? The answer is “Of course we are”, but our main responsibility as mandated by Christ our Savior is to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven.

In order to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, we must be baptized and live our lives in full participation in Christ’s holy Church, the only place on earth we can experience God’s kingdom to come, albeit only partially, here and now. We must take full advantage of our life in this world that through our holy Church we prepare ourselves for the world to come.

The resurrection of Lazarus was accomplished by Our Lord to remind us of our physical death that we must all face. We are warned by our holy Church that our physical demise must always be on our hearts and minds, thus helping us to focus on what is truly needful so that we not experience the death of the soul at the last awesome judgment. Holding the palms in our hands today must serve to remind us that we proclaim to be citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven and to dedicate ourselves fully to the responsibilities of Christ’s kingdom revealed in this world via His holy Church.

Let us make a pledge to Christ our God this Sunday that we will not be like those of old who gloried in the resurrection of Lazarus and on Palm Sunday proclaimed Christ as king and abandoned Him several days later. It will not be difficult to determine whether the pledge we make today is genuine and if we remain steadfast to it. If we spend more time concerned about our physical wellbeing, not contemplating our physical death which reminds us of the death of the soul, and neglect the healing of our soul through the medicines provided by God in His holy Church, this should strongly indicate that we are more concerned about our physical life than the death of our soul. If we determine that we have spent more time, talent, and treasure on our concerns for this world and the things of this world, it should not be a mystery to us that our citizenship of this world means more to us than our citizenship in Christ’s kingdom.

O Lord, we pray that these holy commemorations open our hearts and minds to the mysteries of Your salvation plan and that by the power of the Holy Spirit, they might transform us and heal us that we might be found worthy of Your kingdom and life eternal.

THE LORD’S RESURRECTION, CHRIST’S VICTORY MADE OURS

Brothers and sisters, for we who are Orthodox Christians, Pascha is understood, proclaimed, and celebrated as the Feast of Feasts. All that we believe, and hope for regarding our salvation, is posited in the commemoration of our Lord’s resurrection. Each year, by preparing for this holy event during Lent and accompanying our Lord to His suffering, death, and resurrection during Passion Week, we recommit ourselves to His service and strengthen our faith in the fulfillment of His promise. Our Lord came not only to save us from the jaws of spiritual death but also to inaugurate on our behalf a new kingdom not of this world. We who have been made citizens of this new kingdom via our baptism look forward to abiding with Him forever in that kingdom at the end of time.

The following are quotes from the fathers, saints and theologians of our Church with regard to the meaning of our Lord’s passion, death, and resurrection:

HOLY FRIDAY

“My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?”. This saying is a quotation of the first verse from Psalm 22. Jesus probably was reciting the psalm in its entirety. The psalmist goes on to say that he is ‘scorned by men and despised by the people’ (22:6). He is near death, and those around him started to divide His garments.

‘A company of evil doers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet - I can count all my bones - they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them and for my raiment they cast lots’ (Ps. 22:16-18) ... ‘I will tell of your name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise You: You who fear the Lord, praise Him! ... ‘For He has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and He has not hid His face from Him, but has heard, when He cried to Him. From You comes my praise in the great congregation; My vows I will pay before those who fear Him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live forever’ (Ps. 22:22-26) ...

The Scriptures were fulfilled, the mission completed, at the very moment when He ‘breathed His last.’ St. John of Damascus writes that ‘every action of Christ and all His working of miracles were truly very great and divine and wonderful, but of all things the most wonderful is His honorable cross.’ For by the cross, he continues, all things are set aright. Sin is destroyed, death is overcome, and resurrection is bestowed. What Christ accomplished with death on the cross is made manifest in His Resurrection.” Veselin Kesich, *The Passion of Christ*, B#62A, pp. 78-79, 81.

HOLY SATURDAY

THEN YOU SHALL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD, WHEN I HAVE OPENED YOUR GRAVES ... AND BROUGHT YOU UP FROM YOUR GRAVES

Human death did not belong to the Divine order of creation. It was not normal or natural for man to die...Man’s mortality is the stigma or ‘the wages’ of sin (Rom. 6:23). Many Christians today have lost this Biblical conception of death and mortality and regard death rather as a release, a release of an immortal soul out of the bondage of the body...This conception of death...is utterly alien to the Scriptures... Death is not a release, it is a catastrophe (Cf. Ps. 6:5)... The only reasonable answer could be given, from the human point of view to the quest (Cf. Ezekiel 37) about the dry bones: No, the dry bones will never live again.

But the Divine reply was very different from that ... The Spirit of God is the Giver of Life. And the Prophet could witness a marvelous restoration. By the power of God the dry bones were brought together again ... The explanation of this vision goes along with the vision itself. Those bones were the house of Israel, the chosen People of God. She was dead, by her sins and apostasy, and had fallen into the ditch which she made herself, was defeated and rejected, lost her glory, and freedom, and strength ... The prophecy has been accomplished. The promised deliverance came one day. The promised Deliverer, or Redeemer, the Messiah, came ...

The prophecy of Ezekiel is read in the Orthodox Church at Matins on Great Saturday, at that glorious office at which believers are invited to keep a watch at the grave of the Lord, at that Sacred and Holy Grave out of which Life sprang abundantly for all creation ... The faithful are called to contemplate and to adore this mystery of the Life-bearing and Life-bringing tomb.

Archpriest Georges Florovsky. *Creation and Redemption*. B#47. pp. 11-14.

PASCHA, THE HOLY DAY OF RESURRECTION

“WE WERE BURIED WITH HIM THROUGH BAPTISM INTO DEATH...EVEN SO WE ALSO SHOULD WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE

Baptism is the Cross. What the Cross then, and Burial, is to Christ, Baptism has been to us, even if not in the same respects. For He died Himself and was buried in the flesh, but we have done both to sin ...Here he hints, along with the duty of a careful walk, at the subject of the Resurrection ...For if you have shared in Death and Burial, much more will you share in the Resurrection and Life ...After the Resurrection to come had been set before us, he demands of us another, a new conversation, which is brought about in the present life by a change in habits.” St. John Chrysostom. *Homily X on Romans V. B#55, p. 405.*

“HE IS NOT HERE, BUT IS RISEN! THE FAITHFUL WOMEN

Mark how He Himself sends good tidings to His disciples by these women, bringing that sex, which was most dishonored to honor, as I have often said, and to good hopes; and healing that which was diseased. Perchance some one of you would wish to be like them, to hold the feet of Jesus; you can even now, and not only His feet and His hands, but even hold the sacred head, receiving the awful mysteries with a clear conscience. Not only here, but also in that day you shall see Him, coming with that unspeakable glory and the multitude of the angels, if you are disposed to be humane; and you shall hear these words...also ... ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world’ (Matt. 25:32) ...So that, if you are emulous of these women, change the ornaments you wear, and clothe yourselves instead with almsgiving.” St. John Chrysostom. *Homily LXXXIX on Matthew XXVII, 3. B#54, p. 527*

May the joy of this Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, derived from the spiritual insights we have received regarding the Lord’s salvation plan for us fulfilled in His death and resurrection, permeate our hearts and minds in this season and throughout the year. Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!