



A Holy Week Guide

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church - Saturday, March 30- April 8, 2018

As we approach Holy Week and prepare to follow our Lord to Golgotha and beyond, here is a guide to the services and other events that we'll have during the course of the week at St. Nicholas, with a brief explanation of their meaning.

Lazarus Saturday: Orthros at 8am & Liturgy at 9am. (The Canon of St. Lazarus is read on the previous evening at 6pm). The momentum of Holy Week begins here, with a foretaste of the Lord's Resurrection. Christ raises Lazarus from the dead, and we celebrate this remarkable event with a Liturgy and joyful hymns. A traditional pancake meal follows.

Palm Sunday: Orthros 9am & Liturgy 10am (Great Vespers of Palm Sunday the previous evening at 5pm). The triumphant, yet humble, entry of our Lord into Jerusalem, shortly before His passion. We join the crowds in Jerusalem, waving palm branches in a joyful procession at the end of Liturgy. A potluck meal with fish, celebrating the joyful feast, follows the Liturgy. At the same time, on this day we are aware that the crowds will turn on our Lord in less than a week, no longer crying out "Hosanna," but rather, "Crucify Him!"

A note about times during Holy Week: From Sunday evening through Saturday morning, the services are all done about 12 hours early. It's as if time itself is turned upside-down by the Lord's Passion: we do morning services (like Orthros) in the evening, and evening services (like Vespers or Presanctified Liturgy) in the morning. Thus, Sunday evening's Bridegroom Orthros is actually Orthros of Great and Holy Monday, and so on.

Sunday evening: Bridegroom Orthros of Great and Holy Monday at 6:00pm. After the joyful atmosphere of Palm Sunday, the services now have a much more somber tone. As with all Orthros services, we stand in stillness before the throne of God during the reading of the 6 Psalms at the beginning. Later, we carry the "Bridegroom" icon of the Lord in procession, recalling the parable of the Ten Virgins, which describes the Lord as a bridegroom coming at midnight. We also hear about Joseph the Patriarch's betrayal by his brothers, which foreshadows the Lord's betrayal, and we hear the Gospel passage describing the withering of the fig tree.

Monday morning: The Hours of Great and Holy Monday at 9:00am. Unlike other times during the year, the Hours of the first few days of Holy Week feature the continuous reading of a Gospel. We will read St. Mark's Gospel in its entirety, beginning this morning.

Monday evening: Bridegroom Orthros of Great and Holy Tuesday at 6:00pm. Monday and Tuesday's Orthros services, while not including a procession as on Sunday, still have the singing of the "Behold the Bridegroom..." Monday also has the Gospel reading of the Parable of the Ten Virgins. We are prompted to ask ourselves, "will He find us alert and prepared to meet Him when He comes?"

Tuesday morning: The Hours of Great and Holy Tuesday at 9:00am. The reading of St. Mark's Gospel continues during the Hours.

Tuesday evening: Bridegroom Orthros of Great and Holy Wednesday at 6:00pm. Tuesday's Orthros especially focuses on Judas' betrayal of the Lord, and the contrast between Judas' hardness of heart and the softness of heart found in the sinful woman in the Gospel who anointed the Lord's feet and washed them with her tears. We sing the beautiful *Hymn of Kassiani*, which describes this sinful woman's act of repentance and love for Christ.

Wednesday morning: Hours at 9:00am, followed by Presanctified Liturgy at 10:00am. The reading of St. Mark's Gospel is concluded during the Hours. On this day we continue to ponder Judas' betrayal of Christ. We sing the Hymn of Kassiani a second time at this Presanctified Liturgy.

Wednesday evening: Holy Unction Service at 6:00pm. While the Mystery of Holy Unction can be celebrated throughout the year according to need, it is prescribed to be done on this evening as part of our preparation for Pascha. Having prepared ourselves through confession and fasting, we receive this Sacramental anointing for the purpose of both physical healing for those needing it, and spiritual healing for us all.

Thursday morning: Vesperal Divine Liturgy of Great and Holy Thursday at 10:00am & Washing of the Feet at Noon. While every Liturgy commemorates the Mystical Supper (we say "Mystical" because it's timeless and eternal, and there's nothing "last" about it!), this one does so in a special way as we remember how our Lord instituted the Eucharistic celebration just before His crucifixion. At this Liturgy the reserved Gifts are consecrated, to be used throughout the coming year when communion is brought to someone sick or homebound. After the Liturgy we do the **Rite of the Washing of Feet**. Just as the Lord, following the Mystical Supper, girded Himself and washed His disciples' feet, so the priest, representing our Lord, washes the feet of men of the parish, representing the disciples.

Thursday evening: Orthros of Great and Holy Friday (The 12 Passion Gospels) at 6pm. This very solemn service features 12 Gospel readings, all of which describe the events of the Lord's betrayal, suffering, crucifixion, and burial. In the middle of the service, there is a procession as the people kneel (or make a full prostration), while the priest carries a large wooden cross as did Simon of Cyrene, who helped the Lord carry His cross. Meanwhile he sings the haunting hymn that begins, "Today He who hung the earth upon the waters is hung upon a tree..".

Friday morning: Royal Hours & Typika of Great and Holy Friday at 9:00am. We keep vigil before the Cross of our Lord, along with the Theotokos and St. John the Beloved disciple. Holy Friday is traditionally a very strict fasting day. People dress in black or dark colors as for mourning, and a sober, quiet atmosphere is kept in the home as far as possible. Following the Royal Hours, the ladies of the parish decorate the bier (or tomb) with flowers, in preparation for the later services of the day.

11:00am will be Pre-Baptism Prayers.

Friday afternoon: Vespers of Great and Holy Friday (Unnailing Vespers) at 3pm. This Vespers service commemorates Joseph of Arimathea lovingly taking our Lord's body down from the Cross and preparing it for burial in his own tomb, as the priest does so with the icon on the cross in the church.

Friday evening: Orthros of Great and Holy Saturday (Lamentations) at 7:00pm & All-Night Psalm-reading Vigil. During this service we sing the Lamentations, together with the Myrrh-bearing women, weeping in sorrow before the body of our crucified Lord, yet already anticipating the Resurrection. Meanwhile Christ has descended into Hades to preach to those held captive there and set them free! Candles are lit and held by all the people during the Lamentations and procession of the bier. Following the service, all are invited to take a turn reading the Psalms as we keep an all-night vigil at the Lord's Tomb.

Saturday morning: Vespereal Divine Liturgy of Great and Holy Saturday at 10:00am. Sometimes referred to as the "First Resurrection," this glorious Liturgy commemorates the "harrowing of Hades," when Christ begins to liberate those held captive by death. The mournful purple of the Lenten season is replaced with bright coverings, and there is a triumphant procession with the scattering of bay leaves, representing victory. We already feel Pascha in the air!

Saturday night: Paschal Vigil beginning at 10:30pm, followed by Divine Liturgy. We begin with the Midnight office, in which the church is completely darkened. Then the light of Christ bursts forth from the tomb, and everyone's candle is lit from the priest's candle, while we sing "Come receive the light..." We process around the church, like the Myrrh-bearing women rushing to the Lord's tomb, and when we arrive we find...that Christ is risen! During the Liturgy, we hear the Paschal Sermon of St. John Chrysostom, and the people participate by repeating the refrains, "it was embittered!" (about Hades) and "indeed He is risen!" Following the Liturgy we receive the traditional red eggs (thanks to our ladies), bless the Paschal foods and baskets, and break the fast together.

Sunday of Pascha: Agape Vespers at 12 noon. This bright and festive Vespers service continues our celebration of the Lord's resurrection. We read the Gospel in as many languages as possible (a sign-up sheet will be available). Following the service, our celebration continues with a picnic meal (please bring food to share) and activities for children.

Bright Week: see calendar for service times. We preserve our Paschal joy by praying the uniquely exuberant Paschal services throughout Bright Week, including the Paschal Office, which we can use at home to replace our usual morning and evening prayers. Copies of the Paschal Office will be available.

May our hearts yearn for Christ and delight in His love as we follow Him to the Cross and beyond, as He leads us to the joy of Pascha!