

Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross
Medford, New Jersey

2024

Our Daily Paschal Reader: Holy Saturday, May 4 – Pascha, May 5:, Reading #1: The Spiritual Witness of the Saints of Gaza: St. Dorotheus of Gaza - *“This is the Day of Resurrection” – Part 1*



A Commentary on an Easter Hymn of St. Gregory of Nazianzus (Oration 1: On Pascha) - Part 1

by St. Dorotheus of Gaza

This is the day of resurrection...

Let us offer our own selves,
the possession most precious to God and closest to Him.
Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image,
recognizing our value, honoring the Archetype,
knowing the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.

As usual, I am happy to say a few words about the song we sing, so that you will not be too taken up with the melody, but that your minds will be in harmony with the meaning of the words. What were we singing just now? **“This is the day of resurrection, let us offer ourselves.”**

The Israelite of old, coming together for their festivals according to the Law offered God gifts such

as incense, burnt offerings, first-fruits, and the like. St. Gregory invites us as well to celebrate this feast in God's honor as they did, and exhorts us to do so by saying, "**This is the day of resurrection,**" a day of divine assembly, the day of Christ's Passover. What is this "Passover" of Christ? The Israelites kept the Passover when they came out of Egypt. Easter, the Passover which we are now keeping and which the Saint commends to our celebration, is enacted in the soul, which comes out of the spiritual Egypt, that is, from sin. When the soul passes over from sin to virtue, then it celebrates the Passover of the Lord. As Evagrius says: "The Passover of the Lord is the passage away from evil."

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Bright Monday, May 5: Our Daily Paschal Reader – Reading #2: The Spiritual Witness of the Saints of Gaza: St. Dorotheus of Gaza - "*This is the Day of Resurrection*" – Part 2

Good morning:

Christ is risen!

We will continue our **Daily Reader through the Paschal Season** and this week will hear more from St. Dorotheus of Gaza's "**Commentary on an Easter Hymn of St. Gregory of Nazianzus (Oration 1: On Pascha)**

Part 2

by St. Dorotheus of Gaza

Today, Easter Day, is therefore the "Passover" of Christ, a day of brilliant festival, the day of Resurrection, the day of His nailing sin to the Cross, of His dying and being raised to life—all for our sakes. Let us offer ourselves as sacrificial gifts and offerings to the Lord, who has no desire for senseless animals. "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure" (Heb 10:5-6). And in Isaiah, the Lord says: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" (Is 1:11). But the Lamb of God was sacrificed for us, according to the Apostle who says, "Christ our Paschal Lamb is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor 5:7), to take away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29), and has become "a curse for our sake" according to the Scriptures: "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" in order to "redeem us from the curse of the Law" (Gal 3:13). That we may receive from Him "the position of sons" (Gal 4:5), we ought on our part some time to offer him a gift that will please Him. And what sort of gift ought we offer to Christ in order to please Him on the day of his Resurrection, if he does not desire the sacrifice of senseless animals?

The Saint in his teaching tells us the answer, for after saying, "**It is the Day of Resurrection,**" he adds, "Let us offer up its first-fruits, which is ourselves." The Apostle too instructs us: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1).

Bright Tuesday, May 7: Our Daily Paschal Reader – Reading #3: The Spiritual Witness of the Saints of Gaza: St. Dorotheus of Gaza - “This is the Day of Resurrection” – Part 3

This is the day of resurrection...

Let us offer our own selves,
the possession most precious to God and closest to Him.
Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image,
recognizing our value, honoring the Archetype,
knowing the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.

[St Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 1 – “On Pascha”]

What sort of gift ought we offer to Christ in order to please Him **on the day of his Resurrection**, if he does not desire the sacrifice of senseless animals?

St. Gregory in his teaching tells us the answer, for after saying, **“It is the Day of Resurrection,”** he adds, “Let us offer up its first-fruits, which is ourselves.” The Apostle too instructs us: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1).

How then ought we to make an offering of our bodies as a “living sacrifice to God?” By no longer following our physical desires and our own ideas,” (Eph 2:3), but “walking in the spirit and not fulfilling the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16. “For this is to mortify our earthly members” (Col 3:5). This is what is meant by a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God.

But why a living sacrifice? Because an animal destined for sacrifice, by the very fact that it becomes a sacrificial victim, dies. But the saints who offer themselves to God, offer themselves alive, every day—as David says, “For your sake we are put to death all the day long, we are considered as sheep for the slaughter” (Ps 44:22).¹³ St Gregory says, “Let us offer ourselves as first-fruits [of the Resurrection]”, that is, let us sacrifice ourselves, let us die to ourselves all the day long, as did all the saints, for the sake of Christ our God. How did they put themselves to death? By not loving the world or what is in the world (1 Jn 2:15) —as it says in the Catholic Epistles, “By rejecting the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life” (1 Jn 2:16), that is, the love of pleasures, the love of money and of vainglory, and taking up the Cross and following Christ and crucifying the world to themselves and themselves to the world (Mt 16:24). About this the Apostle says, “Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24). This is how the saints put themselves to death.

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Bright Wednesday, May 8: Our Daily Paschal Reader – Reading #4: The Spiritual Witness of the Saints of Gaza: St. Dorotheus of Gaza - “This is the Day of Resurrection” – Part 4

This is the day of resurrection...

Let us offer our own selves,
the possession most precious to God and closest to Him.
Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image,
recognizing our value, honoring the Archetype,
knowing the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.

[St Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 1 – “On Pascha”]

St. Dorotheus of Gaza

St. Gregory says, “Let us offer ourselves as first-fruits [of the Resurrection]’, that is, let us sacrifice ourselves, let us die to ourselves all the day long, as did all the saints, for the sake of Christ our God.”

But how did they offer themselves up? By not living for themselves, but reducing themselves to servitude to God's commandments and putting away their own will for the sake of the command and love of God and their neighbor. As Saint Peter says, “Behold we have given up everything and followed you” (Mt 19:27). He had no possessions, riches or gold or silver, he only had his net and that was very old, as said St John Chrysostom (Homily 7 in Romans; Cassian, Conf. 30). But, as he also said, he did give up all his own aspirations, all desire of having the things of this world, and it is clear that had he had riches or power, he would have despised them and taken up his cross to follow Christ according to the word, “I live, yet no longer I, but now Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). This is how the saints offered themselves up, putting themselves to death, as we were saying, in regard to all their passionate desires and doing their own will and living solely for Christ and his commandments.

So then for us! Let us offer ourselves as St Gregory teaches us. For he wants us to be “God's most precious children.” Truly man is, of all visible creatures, the most precious. All other things the Creator brought into being by His word alone, saying, “Let it be”—and there it was; “Let there be the earth” and it was made, “let there be the waters’ and so forth (Gen 1:3). But man he fashioned and formed with his own hands; and he established all the rest of creation for the service and comfort of man whom he set up as ruler and let him enjoy all the delights of paradise (Gen 2). And what is even more astonishing! When man fell from there through his own fault, God called him back again through the blood of his only begotten Son, so that of all the visible creatures man should be the most precious. And not only the most precious, but also “the most closely related,” for he said, “let us make man to our own image and likeness” (Gen 1:26), and again, “God created man in his own image and likeness and breathed into his person the breath of life” (Gen 2:17).

Bright Thursday, May 9: Our Daily Paschal Reader – Reading #5: The Spiritual Witness of the Saints of Gaza: St. Dorotheus of Gaza - “This is the Day of Resurrection” – Part 5

This is the day of resurrection...

Let us offer our own selves,
the possession most precious to God and closest to Him.
Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image,
recognizing our value, honoring the Archetype,
knowing the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.
[St Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 1 – “On Pascha”]

St. Dorotheus of Gaza

Our Lord himself, having made Himself a home among us, took up the person of a man, the body of a man, the mind of a man—in short, he became a man in everything except sin. He became our neighbor as a man, as it were, made Himself the same as us. This was beautifully and graciously expressed by St. Gregory in saying that man was the most precious and nearly related to God. Then he adds, even more clearly, “Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image.” How can we do that? Let us learn from the Apostle who says, “Let us purify ourselves from all defilement both of flesh and of spirit” (2 Cor 7:1). Let us make clean and clear the likeness as we received it. Let us separate from it the dirt of sin, so that it may appear in all its beauty through the virtues.

David, in his prayer about this beauty [power] says, “Lord, by Your will, give reality to my beauty” (Ps 29:8). Let us therefore, purify our own likeness [to God]. God wants this from us, as He gave it “not having spot or wrinkle, or any such blemish” (Eph 5:27). “Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image, recognizing our value.” Let us try to understand something of the great good by which we have been honored; let us try to understand something of the likeness to which we were created. Let us not despise the great gifts He has given us for no other reason than His goodness, not for any worth of ours. Let us be convinced that we are made to the image of the God who made us. “Let us honor our Archetype.” Let us not wantonly insult the Archetype to which we were created. What man intending to paint the Emperor would be bold enough to lay on moldy colors in his picture, and so dishonor the Emperor, and be punished? Would not all the colors he used be precious and brilliant and worthy of the imperial portrait? Sometimes even gold leaf is used in pictures of emperors; and great care is taken to portray as accurately as possible the royal robes he is wearing, so that anyone seeing the portrait may grasp the whole character of the emperor and may consider that he all but saw the emperor himself, the very exemplar [from which it was painted]. Likewise, we should not dishonor our model. We were created in the image and likeness of God, so let us make that likeness clean and precise, worthy of our Exemplar (our Archetype). If the man who dishonors the portrait of the emperor—a visible being of our own race though he is—is punished, what ought we to suffer for despising the likeness of God in us and not, as St Gregory says, “giving back to the Image that which is according to the image”? Let us, therefore, give honor to our Exemplar, our Archetype.

Bright Friday, May 10: Our Daily Paschal Reader – Reading #6: The Spiritual Witness of the Saints of Gaza: St. Dorotheus of Gaza - “This is the Day of Resurrection” – Final Section – Part #6

This is the day of resurrection...

Let us offer our own selves,
the possession most precious to God and closest to Him.
Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image,
recognizing our value, honoring the Archetype,
knowing the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.
[St Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 1 – “On Pascha”]

St. Dorotheus of Gaza

“Let us come to know the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.”

The power of the mystery of Christ lies in this: By sin we have effaced what belongs to his likeness in us and so we were put to death, as the Apostle says, “by our sins and our transgressions” (Eph 2:1). God, having made us like Himself and having compassion on His own creation and His own likeness, became man for our sakes and Himself accepted death in our stead in order to lead us, who were dead, back again to the life from which we had fallen away.

When He mounted the holy cross, He nailed to the cross that sin for which we were thrown out of Paradise, and “led captivity captive” as it is written (Eph 4:8; Ps 68:18).

What does it mean: “leading captivity captive”? In consequence of the fall of Adam, our enemy captured us and held us in his power. From then on the souls of men, on leaving the body, went to hades, because they were shut out from paradise. Christ, therefore, when he was lifted high on the holy and life-giving cross, snatched us by His own blood from the captivity by which the enemy had enslaved us through our fall. In other words, He seized us again from the hand of the enemy and, as it were, made us His own captives by defeating and casting down the one who had captured us before. This is the reason why he is said to have “led captivity captive.”

This is the power of the mystery; this is why Christ died for us: to lead us, who, as the saint says, were dead back to life. We were, therefore, snatched from hades through the loving kindness of Christ, and now it is within our power to go back into paradise. Our enemy no longer has tyrannical power over us as he did at first; no longer does he hold us as his slaves.

The one thing is – we must be attentive and keep ourselves from sin in every one of our actions. For, as I have said many times before, every sinful action we take puts us once again under the power of the enemy, since of our own free will we cast ourselves down [before him] and enslave ourselves [to him]. For is it not a shameful thing and a great misery, if—after Christ has delivered us from hell through his blood and after we know this to be true—we go back again and cast ourselves into hell? Are we not worthy of worse and more pitiable punishment?

May God, who loves us, have pity on us and give us the childlike simplicity to understand this and help ourselves, that we may find a little mercy [waiting for us] on the day of judgment.

Bright Saturday – St. Thomas Sunday, May 11-12: Our Daily Paschal Reader – Reading #7 – In Preparation for the Best Hymns of Pascha – Oration 1 by St. Gregory of Nazianzus

Yesterday we heard the last of our readings from the Spiritual Fathers of Gaza – **St. Dorotheus of Gaza's** reflection entitled, "**Commentary on an Easter Hymn of St. Gregory of Nazianzus.**"

St. Dorotheus's discourse written in the late 500s is considered the first commentary on St. Gregory's sermon – his first as a priest (Oration 1), delivered on Pascha, 362.

Here's some background on **St. Gregory**:

<https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2024/O1/25/100298-saint-gregory-the-theologian-archbishop-of-constantinople>

St. Gregory was ordained in 361 by his father, Gregory, but suddenly left his father and their community after his ordination before the original offering of this Sermon.

In delivering this upon his return in 362, the Sermon celebrates Christ's resurrection, cements Gregory's reconciliation with his father and the congregation – and already articulates major themes in his theology and spirituality (Sister Nonna Harrison).

This week we'll hear some of the best known hymns of Pascha, several of them developing themes which were first expressed in this Sermon.

ORATION 1

On Pascha and on His Slowness

1 It is the day of resurrection and an auspicious beginning. **Let us be made brilliant by the feast and embrace each other. Let us call brothers even those who hate us** (Is 66:5), and much more those who have done or suffered anything out of love for us. **Let us concede all things to the resurrection. Let us grant pardon to each other**, I who have been tyrannized by the good tyranny—for I add this now—and you who have tyrannized me well, if you blamed me in anything for my slowness, since perhaps it is better and more honorable than the quickness of others. For it is good both to draw back from God a little, like great Moses of old (Ex 4:33) and Jeremiah later (Jer 1:6), and to run readily toward the one who calls, like Aaron (Ex 4:27), and Isaiah (Is 6:8), provided both are done piously, the first because of one's own weakness and the second because of the power of the one who calls.

2 A mystery anointed me. I drew back a little from the mystery, long enough to examine myself. And I enter with a mystery, bringing this good day as an ally for my cowardice and weakness, that he who today is risen from the dead may also make me new by the Spirit, and clothing me with the new human being¹ may give to the new creation,¹ to those born according to God (John 1:13), a good molder and teacher, one who willingly both dies with Christ and rises with him (Rom 6:8).

3 Yesterday the lamb was slaughtered, and the doorposts were anointed, and the Egyptians lamented the firstborn, and the destroyer passed over us, and the seal was awesome and venerable, and we were walled in by the precious blood. Today we have totally escaped Egypt and Pharaoh the harsh despot and the burdensome overseers, and we have been freed from the clay and the brick-making. And nobody hinders us from celebrating a feast of exodus for the Lord our God and keeping feast "not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Cor 5:8), bringing nothing of the Egyptian and godless dough (Ex 12:34).

4 Yesterday I was crucified with Christ, today I am glorified with him; yesterday I died with him, today I am made alive with him; yesterday I was buried with him, today I rise with him. But let us make an offering to the one who died and rose again for us. Perhaps you think I am speaking of gold or silver or tapestries or transparent precious stones, earthly matter that is in flux and remains below, of which the greater part always belongs to evil people and slaves of things below and of the ruler of this world" (John 14:30). Let us offer our own selves, the possession most precious to God and closest to him. Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image, recognizing our value, honoring the Archetype, knowing the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.

5 Let us become like Christ, since Christ also became like us; let us become gods because of him, since he also because of us became human. He assumed what is worse that he might give what is better. He became poor that we through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). He took the form of a slave (Phil 2:7), that we might regain freedom (Rom 8:21). He descended that we might be lifted up, he was tempted that we might be victorious, he was dishonored to glorify us, he died to save us, he ascended to draw to himself us who lay below in the Fall of sin. Let us give everything, offer everything, to the one who gave himself as a ransom and an exchange for us (Matt 20:28, 16:26). But one can give nothing comparable to oneself, understanding the mystery and becoming because of him everything that he became because of us.

6 He offers you, as you see, a shepherd, for this is what the good shepherd (Note: Gregory is speaking of his father, Gregory the Elder) who lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:15) hopes and prays and asks for you who are under his authority. And he gives you himself double instead of single and makes the staff of his old age a staff of the spirit and adds to the inanimate temple a living temple (the church that both Gregory and his father built). To this most beautiful and heavenly edifice he adds one of any old kind and stature, yet to him most precious, which he completed with many sweats and labors. If only one could say it was also worthy of such labors! All that is his he gives to you. What magnanimity, or, to speak more truly, what love for his children! He gives you grey hairs, youth, the temple, the high priest, the testator, the heir, the discourses you have desired. And these discourses are not such as are haphazard and poured into the air and stop at the ear but are those the Spirit writes and engraves on tablets of stone, or indeed of flesh (2 Cor 3:2-3), not scratched onto the surface or easily effaced but inscribed into the depth, not with ink but with grace.

7 So these things are given you by this venerable Abraham, this patriarch, this honored and respected head, this dwelling place of every good, this standard of virtue, this perfection of priesthood, who today is bringing to God the willing sacrifice, his only son, the one born of the promise (Gen 22:2). But as for you, offer both to God and to us a willingness to be shepherded well,

abiding in a place of verdure and nurtured by waters of rest (Ps 23:2), knowing the shepherd well and being known by him, and following when as a shepherd and a free man he calls you through the door, but not following a stranger (John 10:7-8) who trespasses into the front courtyard as a thief and a conspirator, nor hearing a strange voice that would steal the flock by stealth and scatter it away from the truth in mountains and deserts and chasms and places that the Lord does not visit, and lead it away from the sound faith, that is faith in Father and Son and Holy Spirit, the one divinity and power—to this teaching my sheep have always listened, and may they always listen—and whose falsified and corrupted words would lead it captive and tear it away from the first and true Shepherd. From these words may we all be far, both shepherd and flock, as from toxic and deadly grass, as we are led to pasture and lead to pasture, that we all may be one (John 17:21) in Christ Jesus, now and unto the repose hereafter. To him be glory and sovereignty unto the ages. Amen.

Monday, May 13 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – *The Paschal Canon and St. John of Damascus: Ode 1 – This is the Day of Resurrection*

Starting this week, we'll focus on the best known and loved hymns from the Paschal Service that we'll continue to sing until Ascension.

The first group – sung initially during the Matins of Pascha (once we have returned to the church after the procession) – is called the "**Paschal Canon**" and is attributed to **St. John of Damascus** (675-749) who, as we will see, developed themes from the **Orations (Sermons)** of **St. Gregory Nazianzus**.

Here's a link to learn more about St. John:

<https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2024/12/04/103473-venerable-john-of-damascus>



St. John of Damascus (from the Princeton University Chapel)

The **Canon** form – presented during Matins – the singing of nine sections of the Bible known as **odes**, or **canticles**. Here are the Biblical texts:

1. The Song of Moses: Exod. 15: 1-19
2. The Song of Moses: Deut. 32: 1-43 [Note: This Ode is usually not sung]
3. The Song of Hannah: i Kings. [1 Sam.] 2:1-10
4. The Prayer of Habakkuk: Hab. 3:1-19
5. The Prayer of Isaiah: Isa. 26:9-20
6. The Prayer of Jonah: Jonah 2:3-10
7. The Prayer of the Three Holy Children: Dan. 3:26-56 (LXX - Septuagint)
8. The Song of the Three Holy Children: Dan. 3:57-88 (LXX)
9. The Song of the Mother of God (the Magnificat): Luke 1:46-55, and the Song of Zachariah (the Benedictus): Luke 1:68-79

It may sound a little confusing, but each section of the Canon is built around an individual **Biblical Ode** whose initial hymn - called the **irmos** – sets the pattern for the rest of the **troparia in that unit**.

The Paschal Canon

[Note: The following commentary on **St. John of Damascus and the Paschal Canon** comes from Andrew Louth, “John the Poet,” in: **St. John Damascene – Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology**. Louth attributes the insights to **St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain** (originally published in 1836).]

Ode/Irmos I

This is the day of resurrection.
Let us be illumined, O people.
Pascha, the Pascha of the Lord.
For from death to life and from earth to heaven has Christ our God led us,
as we sing the song of victory.

Troparia

Let us purify our senses and we shall see Christ
shining in the unapproachable light of His resurrection.
We shall clearly hear Him say:
Rejoice, as we sing the song of victory.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.
earth
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice.
Let the whole world, visible and invisible, keep the feast.
For Christ is risen, our eternal joy.
Christ is risen from the dead...(3x).

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Nicodemus points out how the **irmos** is constructed by John from two passages from **St. Gregory Nazianzus's two homilies for Pascha, Oration 1 (on Pascha and on his slowness)** and the last, **Oration 45 (On Holy Pascha)**.

From the first homily, John takes the opening words: “

"This is the day of resurrection, . . . let us be illumined."

From the last homily, John takes, **"Pascha, the Pascha of the Lord;** in fact, as Nicodemus points out, in St. Gregory's original homily, his words are: **"The Lord's Pascha, Pascha, and again I will say Pascha, to the honor of the Trinity."**

John also takes from Gregory the explanation of the word **pascha**, derived not from the Greek word, **paschein**, to suffer, but from the Hebrew, **pesach**, **"passover,"** referring to the passing over from Egypt to Canaan, but spiritually **"from things below to things above and to the land of promise"** (Oration 45:10). This makes the link with the first ode, Moses' song of deliverance after crossing the Red Sea (Exod. 15: 1-19). A few words and an idea from Gregory provide John with the materials for his first irmos, which sets the tone for the whole Canon.

According to Nicodemus, the first of the troparia is based on the notion that humankind is a twofold being, with both bodily and spiritual senses: a theme close to John's heart. More precisely, Nicodemus finds in Gregory's last homily the notion that the paschal sacrifice is offered **"for the purification of the senses"** (Oration 45:14). Only if purified can we see Christ **"shining in the unapproachable light of His resurrection."**

For the second troparion, Nicodemus again refers us to Gregory Nazianzus, this time his homily on the Theophany, where he quotes Psalm 95:11: **"Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad"** (Oration 38 - 1:4) and to the last homily for the rejoicing of the whole cosmos, seen and unseen.

The whole universe, seen and unseen, refers either to the angels and human kind, or perhaps, Nicodemus suggests, even to the inanimate elements. John, in common with other Fathers such as St. Maximus the Confessor, affirms the truly cosmic dimension of Christ's victorious resurrection.

The tone of triumph and rejoicing that runs through these troparia chimes in well with the theme of the biblical ode they accompany, the **Song of Moses**:

'I will sing to the Lord for gloriously has He been glorified;
the horse and the rider he has thrown into the sea.
The Lord is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation"
(Exod. 15: 1-2).

These are themes that are fresh in the memories of those who hear and sing this Canon, for the **Song of Moses** is part of the **Vespertine Liturgy of Holy Saturday**.

Biblical Ode 1
(Exodus 15:1-21)

15 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:

“I will sing to the Lord, for gloriously has He been glorified;
the horse and rider He has thrown into the sea.

2

The Lord is my strength and my song,
and He has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise Him,
my father’s God, and I will exalt Him.

3

The Lord is a warrior;
the Lord is his name.

4

“Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he cast into the sea;
his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea.^[b]

5

The floods covered them;
they went down into the depths like a stone.

6

Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power—
your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy.

7

In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries;
you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble.

8

At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up,
the floods stood up in a heap;
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

9

The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake,
I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them.
I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.’

10

You blew with your wind, the sea covered them;
they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

11

“Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in splendor, doing wonders?

12

You stretched out your right hand,
the earth swallowed them.

13

“In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed;
you guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

14

The peoples heard, they trembled;
pangs seized the inhabitants of Philistia.

15

Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed;
trembling seized the leaders of Moab;
all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away.

16

Terror and dread fell upon them;
by the might of your arm, they became still as a stone
until your people, O Lord, passed by,
until the people whom you acquired passed by.

17

You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession,
the place, O Lord, that you made your abode,
the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands have established.

18

The Lord will reign forever and ever.”

19 When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea,
the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea
on dry ground.

20 Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women
went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. 21 And Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the Lord, for gloriously has He been glorified;;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.”

**Tuesday, May 14 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – The Paschal Canon and St. John of Damascus:
Ode 3 – “The Fount of Incorruption”**

Good morning:

Christ is risen!

Here are some insights about **St. John of Damascus** from the Vespers for his feast on December 4:



What shall I call you, divine sweetly-speaking John:
most radiant star,
one whose sight is illuminated by the lightning flash of the Trinity?
You entered into the dark cloud of the Spirit;
You were initiated into the ineffable mysteries of the Divine;
Like Moses you made things clear in the beautiful language of the Muses.
Intercede that our souls may be saved.

Ode/Irmos 3

Come, let us drink,
not miraculous water drawn forth from a barren stone,
but a new vintage from the fount of incorruption,
springing from the tomb of Christ.
In Him we are established.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

Now all is filled with light:
heaven and earth and the lower regions.
Let all creation celebrate the rising of Christ.
In Him we are established.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

Yesterday I was buried with You, O Christ.
Today I arise with You in Your resurrection.
Yesterday I was crucified with You.
Glorify me with You, O Savior, in Your kingdom. [Christ is risen... is sung 3 times)

The **Biblical foundation of Ode 3 is the Prayer of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10/ 1 Kings 2:1-10 LXX)** - which is included at the end of this reflection).

The reference to the **“new drink or vintage”** is possibly meant to recall that when Eli, finding Hannah in the Temple, accused her of being drunk, she replied, **“I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord”** (1 Kings 1:15).

More immediately it relates to the water Moses struck from the rock during the desert wandering:

“And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?” 11 **Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly**, and the congregation and their animals drank. (Num. 20:10-11),

but this is **“incorruption's source,”** echoing (or more probably the origin of) the communion hymn during Easter: **“Receive the body of Christ, taste the Fountain of Immortality, Alleluia.”**

“In Him we are established” is a reference to the beginning of Hannah's song: **“My heart is established in the Lord”** (1 Kings 2:1).

The first troparion returns to the cosmic theme, introduced in the Ode 1. With the Resurrection, light has come, not just to heaven and earth, but also to the region beneath the earth, Hades,

which was redeemed by Christ's descent there on Holy Saturday. Here we have a first allusion to the theme of the icon of the Resurrection, in which Christ is seen, breaking the gates of Hades, and bringing out those imprisoned there, beginning with Adam and Eve.

The second troparion, as Nicodemus points out, is derived from a passage in Gregory's first homily: **"Yesterday I was crucified with Christ, today I am glorified with Him; yesterday I died with Him, today I am given life with Him; yesterday I was buried with him, today I am raised with Him."** But John has altered the order, unhistorically placing burial before crucifixion. The reason, Nicodemus suggests, is that John is concerned with what happens to us, with whom resurrection precedes glorification.

This sharing with Christ in burial and crucifixion has three references, Nicodemus suggests:

- 1) to our ascetic burial with Christ through the Lenten Fast;
- 2) to Christ's identification with us in the Incarnation; and
- 3) to those baptized during Easter night.

Biblical Canticle 3: The Prayer of Hannah
(1 Samuel 2:1-10; LXX 1 Kings 2:1-10)

2 And Hannah prayed and said:

"My heart rejoices (is established) in the Lord;
My horn is exalted in the Lord.
I smile at my enemies,
Because I rejoice in Your salvation.

2

"No one is holy like the Lord,
For there is none besides You,
Nor is there any rock like our God.

3

"Talk no more so very proudly;
Let no arrogance come from your mouth,
For the Lord is the God of knowledge;
And by Him actions are weighed.

4

"The bows of the mighty men are broken,
And those who stumbled are girded with strength.

5

Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
And the hungry have ceased to hunger.
Even the barren has borne seven,
And she who has many children has become feeble.

6

"The Lord kills and makes alive;
He brings down to the grave and brings up.

7

The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
He brings low and lifts up.

8

He raises the poor from the dust
And lifts the beggar from the ash heap,
To set them among princes
And make them inherit the throne of glory.
“For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s,
And He has set the world upon them.

9

He will guard the feet of His saints,
But the wicked shall be silent in darkness.
“For by strength no man shall prevail.

10

The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces;
From heaven He will thunder against them.
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth.
“He will give strength to His king,
And exalt the horn of His anointed.”

**Wednesday, May 15 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – The Paschal Canon and St. John of Damascus:
Ode 4 - “Standing in Holy Vigil”**

As we continue to think this week of the Paschal Canon and the spirituality creativity of St John of Damascus in weaving together elements of the Scriptures and phrases from St Gregory of Nazianzus it is interesting to consider this opening line in Fr Andrew Louth’s book, *“St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology”*:

“Originality means to remain faithful to the originals.”

Zissimos Lorenzatos

Ode 4/Irmos 4

The inspired prophet Habakkuk now stands with us in holy vigil.
He is like a shining angel who cries with a piercing voice:
Today salvation has come to the world,
for Christ is risen as all-powerful.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

Christ our Pascha has appeared as a male child,
the son that opens a virgin womb.
He is called the Lamb as one destined to be our food,
unblemished for He has not tasted of defilement,
and perfect for He is our true God.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

Christ, the crown with which we are blessed,
has appeared as a yearling lamb.
Freely He has given Himself as our cleansing paschal sacrifice.
From the tomb He has shown forth once again,
our radiant sun of righteousness.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

David, the ancestor of God, leaped and danced before the ark which prefigured You.
Now let us, the holy people of God,
seeing the fulfillment of all figures,
rejoice in piety, for Christ is risen as all-powerful.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead (3 times).

+

The fourth ode is the Prayer of Habakkuk (Hab. 3:1-19). But, as is often the case in the canons, the reference is more immediately to where Habakkuk was standing when he made his prayer, which is found in

Habakkuk 2:1 –

“I will stand on my watch, and get up on a rock” (LXX).

But, as Nicodemus notes, John arrives at this reference by way of the opening of St. Gregory of Nazianzus’s last homily (Oration 45). Gregory opens by quoting Habakkuk’s words about standing at his watch, and says what he sees today, that is the day of Pascha: a vision of a man raised on the clouds, looking like an angel, with his clothes shining like lightning, crying out in a loud voice,

“Today salvation has come for the world. . . .
Today, Christ is risen from the dead, let us be raised with him.”

The first troparion dwells on Christ our Pascha, sacrificed for us (cf. 1 Cor. 5 : 7). The paschal lamb was to be “without blemish, male, a year old” (Exod. 12: 5); John glosses this with Exodus 34:19, about the male that opens the womb belonging to God. He also recalls another passage from Gregory's Easter homily: “for us the lamb is eaten.”

With these references, John puts together his troparion, meditating on Christ's sacrifice.

The second troparion continues this theme, laying stress on the voluntary nature of Christ's sacrifice. Again, John draws on Gregory's Easter homily, where he says of Christ as the paschal sacrifice: “a year old, like the sun of righteousness, setting out from there [heaven], circumscribed in his visible nature, and returning to himself, and the “blessed crown of goodness,” being on every side equal to Himself and alike; and not only this, but also as giving life to the circle of the virtues, gently mingled and mixed with each other, by the law of love and order.” Here are all John's themes for this troparion. There is also a play on words, as Nicodemus points out, in that the word translated “good” in the troparion, is pronounced exactly like the word Christ (*christos/chrestos*).

The last troparion refers to David dancing before the ark (2 Kings 6:16-19). David celebrated what was simply a shadow of what was to come; Christians celebrate the fulfillment. “Full of God, let us rejoice”: for this Nicodemus refers to a passage in Gregory's homily for the Theophany: “Let us celebrate, not as for a pagan festival, but divinely, not in a worldly manner, but in a manner that transcends the world” (Oration 38).

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Biblical Canticle 4: The Prayer of Habakkuk (3:1-19)

2

O Lord, I have heard Your speech and was afraid;
O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years!
In the midst of the years make it known;
In wrath remember mercy.

3

God came from Teman,
The Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah
His glory covered the heavens,
And the earth was full of His praise.

4

His brightness was like the light;
He had rays flashing from His hand,
And there His power was hidden.

5

Before Him went pestilence,
And fever followed at His feet.

6

He stood and measured the earth;
He looked and startled the nations.
And the everlasting mountains were scattered,
The perpetual hills bowed.
His ways are everlasting.

7

I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction;
The curtains of the land of Midian trembled.

8

O Lord, were You displeased with the rivers,
Was Your anger against the rivers,
Was Your wrath against the sea,
That You rode on Your horses,
Your chariots of salvation?

9

Your bow was made quite ready;
Oaths were sworn over Your [b]arrows. Selah
You divided the earth with rivers.

10

The mountains saw You and trembled;
The overflowing of the water passed by.
The deep uttered its voice,
And lifted its hands on high.

11

The sun and moon stood still in their habitation;
At the light of Your arrows they went,
At the shining of Your glittering spear.

12

You marched through the land in indignation;
You [c]trampled the nations in anger.

13

You went forth for the salvation of Your people,
For salvation with Your Anointed.
You struck the head from the house of the wicked,
By laying bare from foundation to neck. Selah

14

You thrust through with his own arrows
The head of his villages.
They came out like a whirlwind to scatter me;
Their rejoicing was like feasting on the poor in secret.

15

You walked through the sea with Your horses,
Through the heap of great waters.

16

When I heard, my body trembled;
My lips quivered at the voice;
Rottenness entered my bones;
And I trembled in myself,
That I might rest in the day of trouble.
When he comes up to the people,
He will invade them with his troops.

17

Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—

18

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19

[d]The Lord God is my strength;
He will make my feet like deer's feet,
And He will make me walk on my high hills.

Thursday, May 16 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – The Paschal Canon and St. John of Damascus:
Ode 5 - “Let us bring a hymn instead of myrrh”



Ode 5/Irmos 5

Let us arise at the rising of the sun and bring to the Master a hymn instead of myrrh,
and we shall see Christ, the sun of righteousness,
who causes life to dawn for all.

Response: Christ is risen from the dead.

Troparia

The souls bound in the chains of hell, O Christ,
seeing Your compassion without measure,
pressed onward to the light with joyful steps,
praising the eternal Pascha.

Response: Christ is risen from the dead.

Let us go with lamps in hand to meet Christ,
who comes from the tomb like a bridegroom.
And with the festive ranks of angels,
let us celebrate the saving Pascha of God.

Response: Christ is risen from the dead... (3 times)

The fifth ode, the **Prayer of Isaiah** (Isa. 26:9-20), begins, **“By night my spirit watches for You, O God”** (Isa. 26:9 LXX). John's mind naturally goes to the myrrh bearing women, the first witnesses of the Resurrection. The watching by night of the vigil, in which this canon is sung, is related to women coming to the sepulcher “in the early dawn” (Luke 24:1).

Isaiah's prayer closes by celebrating the redemption of the dead: **"The dead shall arise. Those in the tombs shall awake. All those on earth shall greatly rejoice"** (Isa. 26: 19).

We heard this affirmation clearly expressed in **Irmos 5 of the Matins Canon for Holy Saturday** (sung again during the Nocturns Service on Pascha night):

Isaiah saw the never-setting light of Your compassionate manifestation to us as God, O Christ.

Rising early from the night he cried out:

"The dead shall arise. Those in the tombs shall awake.

All those on earth shall greatly rejoice."

This theme is picked up in the troparia, the first of which returns to the theme of the redemption of Hades; John sees those who were bound pressing forward to Christ, as they are depicted in the icon of the Resurrection. The theme of rejoicing is tied to that of a wedding banquet, a favorite symbol of the coming of the Kingdom in the Gospel parables. Christ's tomb becomes a bridal chamber, from which he emerges as in the verse of the psalm (Ps. 18/19:6):

The bride He has made His own is the Church.

Biblical Cantic 5: The Prayer of Isaiah (26:9-19)

By night my spirit watches for You, O God, for Your commands are a light upon the earth.

Learn righteousness, you who dwell on the earth.

The ungodly man ceases; he will not learn righteousness on the earth;

he will not do the truth;

let the ungodly man be taken away, that he may not see the glory of the Lord.

O Lord, Your arm is exalted, but they did not know it.

But when they know it, they shall be ashamed, for jealousy will seize an untaught people; and now fire will devour the adversaries.

O Lord, our God, grant us peace, for You render everything to us.

O Lord, our God, possess us;

O Lord, we know no other besides You; we name Your name.

The dead will not see life; neither will physicians raise them.

Therefore You brought evils upon them, O Lord, on the glorious ones of the earth.

O Lord, I remembered You in my hard circumstances.

Your chastening to us was a small affliction.

As a woman with child is in pain and cries out in her pangs, when she draws near the time of her delivery,

so we become Your beloved because of Your fear, O Lord.

We have been with child, we have been in pain, and we have given birth.

We brought forth the spirit of Your salvation on the earth..

But the inhabitants of the world shall fall.

The dead shall arise. Those in the tombs shall awake.

All those on earth shall greatly rejoice, for your dew is a healing for them, but the land of the ungodly shall come to an end.

**Friday, May 17 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – The Paschal Canon and St. John of Damascus:
Ode 6 - “Descending to the depths of the earth”**

Ode 6/Irmos



You descended, O Christ, to the depths of the earth..

You broke the everlasting bars which had held death's captives,
and like Jonah from the whale on the third day,
You arose from the grave.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

You arose, O Christ, and yet the tomb remained sealed,
as at Your birth the Virgin's womb remained unharmed;
and You have opened for us the gates of paradise.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

O my Savior, as God You brought Yourself freely to the Father,
a victim living and unsacrificed,
resurrecting Adam, the father of us all,
when You rose from the grave.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead...(3x)

+

The sixth Ode is the Prayer of Jonah from the belly of the whale. The Lord's reference to the "sign of Jonah," the prefiguring of His death and resurrection after three days by Jonah's three days in the whale (Matt. 12:

29-30), provides the obvious link between the Ode and the Resurrection, the subject of the the Paschal canon. Jonah himself says, "**I went down into the earth, whose bars held me fast eternally**" (Jonah 2:7 (LXX)), thus comparing his fate with descent into Hades. It is this that John picks up here: for Christ went down into the "deepest parts of the earth" and shattered the bars that held fast those in Hades. Again, in this Irmos, it is the theme of the Resurrection icon to which John returns.

The first troparion draws a parallel between Christ's rising from the sepulcher without breaking the seals and His being born from the Virgin Mother of God without harming her virginity, her *virginitas in pareu* (Mary's perpetual virginity) which the Fathers saw prefigured in the gate of the Temple in Ezekiel's vision, which "shall remain shut, . . . for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it" (Ezek. 44: 2), as Nicodemus points out. By passing through what remains sealed, Christ has opened for us the gates of Paradise.

The second troparion again draws on Gregory's second Easter homily (Oration 45), this time a passage in which Gregory is comparing Christ's sacrifice with sacrifices of the Old Covenant. These latter were not useless, a mere shedding of blood, "but the offering, Christ, who is great and unsacrificed, if I may speak thus, in regard to his first (divine) nature, has been intermingled with the sacrifices of the law and was a purification not for a small part of the inhabited earth or for a short time but for all the world and throughout the ages" (45:13). John picks up Gregory's reference to cosmic salvation with his reference to "all Adam's race."

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Biblical Canticle 6: The Prayer of Jonah (2:2-10)

2

And from the belly of the sea creature, Jonah prayed to the Lord his God, and said:

3

"I cried out in my affliction to the Lord, my God,
And He heard my voice:
Out of the belly of Hades, You heard the cry of my voice.

4

You cast me into the depths of the heart of the sea,
And rivers encompassed me;
All Your surging waters and Your waves passed over me.

5

And I said, 'I have been driven away from Your sight;
Shall I again look with favor toward Your holy temple?'

6

Water is poured over me to my soul;
The lowest depth encircled me;
My head plunged into the clefts of the mountains.

7

I went down into the earth, whose bars held me fast eternally;

Yet, let my life ascend from corruption, O Lord, my God.

8

When my soul was failing from me, I remembered the Lord.

May my prayer be brought to You, into Your holy temple.

9

Those who follow vanity and lies forsake their own mercy.

10

But with a voice of thanksgiving and praise,

I will sacrifice to You.

As much as I vowed, I shall offer up to You,

To You, the Lord of Deliverance.”

Saturday, May 18 - Sunday, May 19:– Our Daily Paschal Reader – The Paschal Canon and St. John of Damascus: *Ode 7 - “We Celebrate the Death of Death”*

Ode 7/Irmos 7



He who saved the three young men in the furnace
became incarnate and suffered as a mortal man.
Through His sufferings He clothed what is mortal in the robe of immortality.
He alone is blessed and most glorious:
the God of our fathers.

Response: Christ is risen from the dead.

Troparia

The godly women hastened to You with myrrh, O Christ.
In tears they had sought You as a dead man,
but in joy they worshipped You as the living God
and proclaimed the mystical pascha to Your disciples.

Response: Christ is risen from the dead.

We celebrate the death of death and the overthrow of hell,
the beginning of another life which is eternal,
and in emulation we sing the praises of its source.
He alone is blessed and most glorious: the God of our fathers.

Response: Christ is risen from the dead.

This is the bright and saving night, sacred and supremely festal.
It heralds the radiant day of the resurrection
on which the timeless light shown forth bodily from the tomb for all.

Response: Christ is risen from the dead... (3 times)

+

The seventh ode is the Prayer of the Three Young Men from the burning fiery furnace (Daniel 3:26-56 LXX), where King Nebuchadnezzar had condemned them. The angel of the Lord appeared to them (whom the King saw as a fourth man “like a son of God” - Dan 3:92 LXX), and made the center of the furnace like a “whistling wind of dew” (Dan. 3: 50 (LXX)). For the Fathers, the angel of the Lord was the Word of God, so John sees the saving of the three young men as an earlier act of salvation by the Word, who later became incarnate, and through suffering gives human kind incorruption.

The first troparion returns to the myrrh-bearing women, only this time, as Nicodemus points out, they are understood in the light of the Song of Songs: “your anointing oils” (*Note: The word translated “myrrh” in the Canon and the word for “anointing oils” are the same in Greek*) are fragrant, your name is oil poured out; therefore your maidens love you. Draw me after you, let me run after the fragrance of your oils' (Song of Songs 1: 3). They are seeking with tears the one they love. Finding Him risen as God, they take the good tidings to his disciples.

The second troparion continues this meditation: the women were seeking a corpse, but discovered the death of death.

The final troparion returns to celebration of the night, the night of salvation, the night of the Resurrection. Nicodemus again refers to a passage from Gregory's second Paschal homily in which Gregory contrasts yesterday, 'beautiful' with its celebrations with candles and fires, with today, which is

“more beautiful and more illustrious, inasmuch as yesterday’s light was a forerunner of the great light’s rising, and as it were a kind of pre-festal gladness. But today we celebrate the resurrection itself, not as still hoped for but as having already occurred and gathering the whole world to itself” (Oration 45).

Nicodemus comments on how the Church begins the day in the evening, so that the day moves from darkness to light.

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***Biblical Canticle 7: The Prayer of the Three Young Men
Daniel 3:26-36 LXX***

(Note: *This section is from the Greek Septuagint, which uses the names Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach) and Azariah (Abednego) in place of the Hebrew-Babylonian forms.]

Azariah stood and offered this prayer; in the midst of the fire he opened his mouth and said:

"Blessed are You, O Lord, God of our fathers, and worthy of praise; and Your name is glorified for ever.

"For You just in all that You have done to us,
and all Your works are true and Your ways right, and all Your judgments are truth.

"You have executed true judgments in all that You have brought upon us and upon Jerusalem, the holy city of our fathers, for in truth and justice You have brought all this upon us because of our sins.

"For we have sinfully and lawlessly departed from You, and have sinned in all things and have not obeyed Your commandments; we have not observed them or done them, as You have commanded us that it might go well with us.

"So all that You have brought upon us, and all that You have done to us, You have done in true judgment.

"You have given us into the hands of lawless enemies, most hateful rebels, and to an unjust king, the most wicked in all the world.

"And now we cannot open our mouths; shame and disgrace have befallen Your servants and worshipers.

"For Your name's sake do not give us up utterly, and do not break Your covenant, and do not withdraw Your mercy from us, for the sake of Abraham Your beloved and for the sake of Isaac Your servant and Israel Your holy one, to whom You didst promise to make their descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the sand on the shore of the sea.

"For we, O Lord, have become fewer than any nation, and are brought low this day in all the world because of our sins.

"And at this time there is no prince, or prophet, or leader, no burnt offering, or sacrifice, or oblation, or incense, no place to make an offering before You or to find mercy.

"Yet with a contrite heart and a humble spirit may we be accepted, as though it were with burnt offerings of rams and bulls, and with tens of thousands of fat lambs; such may our sacrifice be in Your sight this day, and may we wholly follow You, for there will be no shame for those who trust in You.

"And now with all our heart we follow You, we fear You and seek Your face.

"Do not put us to shame, but deal with us in Your forbearance and in Your abundant mercy.

"Deliver us in accordance with Your marvelous works, and give glory to Your name, O Lord!

"Let all who do harm to Your servants be put to shame; let them be disgraced and deprived of all power and dominion, and let their strength be broken.

"Let them know that You are the Lord, the only God, glorious over the whole world."

Now the king's servants who threw them in did not cease feeding the furnace fires with naphtha, pitch, tow, and brush. And the flame streamed out above the furnace forty-nine cubits, and it broke through and burned those of the Chaldeans whom it caught about in the furnace. But the angel of

the Lord came down into the furnace to be with Azariah and his companions, and drove the fiery flame out of the furnace, and made the midst of the furnace like a moist whistling wind, so that the fire did not touch them at all or hurt or trouble them.

Then the three, as with one mouth, praised and glorified and blessed God in the furnace, saying:

“Blessed are You, O Lord, God of our fathers, and to be praised and highly exalted for ever;
And blessed is Your glorious, holy name, and to be highly praised and highly exalted for ever;
Blessed are You in the temple of Your holy glory, and to be extolled and highly glorified for ever.
Blessed are You in the temple of Your holy glory, and to be extolled and highly glorified for ever.
Blessed are You, who sit upon the cherubim and look upon the deeps, and to be praised and highly exalted for ever.
Blessed are You upon the throne of Your kingdom, and to be extolled and highly exalted for ever.
Blessed are You in the firmament of heaven, and to be sung and glorified for ever.”

**Monday, May 20 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – The Paschal Canon and St. John of Damascus:
*Ode 8 - “The Feast of Feasts, Holy Day of Holy Days”***

Ode 8/Irmos 8

This is the chosen and holy day,
first of sabbaths, king and lord of days,
the feast of feasts, holy day of holy days.
On this day we bless Christ forevermore.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

Come on this chosen day of the resurrection,
let us partake of the new fruit of the vine.
Let us share in the divine rejoicing of the kingdom of Christ,
praising Him as God forevermore.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

Lift up your eyes, O Zion, round about and see.
Your children like divinely shining stars assemble from the North, the South, the East, and the West
to bless Christ in you forevermore.

Refrain: Most holy Trinity, our God, glory to You.

Father almighty, Word and Spirit, one nature in three persons,
surpassing essence and divinity.
In You have we been baptized,
and You we bless forevermore.

+

The Song of the Three Young Men is a song in which all creation is called on to praise God. This gives John the cue for these verses, which develop this theme of praise. The irmos is drawn from Leviticus 23: 36, which speaks of the “eighth day [as] a chosen and holy day for you”; St. Gregory the Theologian’s second Easter homily, which praises Pascha as “the feast of feasts and the festival of festivals” (Oration 45:2), and a passage from his homily on “New Sunday” (the Sunday After Pascha) where he says that “the queen of seasons leads the way in the procession for the queen of days, showering from her own treasure every exquisite and delightful gift” (Oration 44:10).

The first troparion starts with a reference to the “fruit of the vine,” of which Jesus said to his disciples at the Last Supper, “I shall not drink again, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt. 26: 29). The Father’s kingdom is the Resurrection, says Nicodemus, following the interpretation of St. John Chrysostom.

The second troparion picks up more directly the theme of the Ode, seeing people coming from

the four corners of the earth to praise Christ. The final troparion recalls the Lord's final command in Matthew's Gospel (28:19) to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Trinity. It is worth noting that the Irmos and all the troparia end by praising God or Christ "to the ages," which underlines the eschatological nature of the Resurrection.

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The Song of the Three Young Men: Dan. 3:57-88 (LXX)

57

Bless the Lord, all works of the Lord.

58

Bless the Lord, you heavens,

59

Bless the Lord, you angels of the Lord.

60

Bless the Lord, all waters above the heaven.

61

Bless the Lord, all powers.

62

Bless the Lord, sun and moon.

63

Bless the Lord, stars of heaven.

64

Bless the Lord, all rain and dew.

65

Bless the Lord, all winds.

66

Bless the Lord, fire and heat.

67

Bless the Lord, winter cold and summer heat.

68

Bless the Lord, dews and snows.

69

Bless the Lord, nights and days.

70

Bless the Lord, light and darkness.

71

Bless the Lord, ice and cold.

72

Bless the Lord, frosts and snows.

73

Bless the Lord, lightnings and clouds.

74

Let the earth bless the Lord.

75

Bless the Lord, mountains and hills.

76

Bless the Lord, all things that grow on the earth.

77

Bless the Lord, you springs.

78

Bless the Lord, seas and rivers.

79

Bless the Lord, you whales and all creatures that move in the waters.

80

Bless the Lord, all birds of the air.

81

Bless the Lord, all beasts and cattle.

82

Bless the Lord, you sons of men.

83

Bless the Lord, O Israel.

84

Bless the Lord, you priests of the Lord.

85

Bless the Lord, you servants of the Lord.

86

Bless the Lord, spirits and souls of the righteous.

87

Bless the Lord, you are holy and humble in heart.

88

Bless the Lord, Ananiah, Azariah, and Mishael.

Tuesday, May 21 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – The Paschal Canon and St. John of Damascus: *Ode 9 – “Shine, Shine, O New Jerusalem”*

Ode 9/Irmos 9

Shine! Shine! O new Jerusalem!
The glory of the Lord has shone on you.
Exult now and be glad, O Zion.
Be radiant, O pure Theotokos, in the resurrection.

Troparia

How divine! How beloved!
How sweet is Your voice, O Christ!
For You have faithfully promised to be with us to the end of the world.
Having this as our anchor of hope, we the faithful rejoice.

O Christ, great and most holy Pascha,
O Wisdom, Word, and Power of God:
Grant that we may more perfectly partake of You in the never-ending day of Your Kingdom.

The final ode consists of the two New Testament odes, the ***Song of the Mother of God (the Magnificat – Luke 1:46-55 and the Song of Zachariah)***, the father of St John the Forerunner (also known as the ***Benedictus – Luke 1:68-79***). The opening word—“**Shine, Shine or Enlightened, be enlightened**” (*Photizou, photizou*)—very likely contains a reference to baptism, the sacrament of *photismos*, or enlightenment (as it is frequently called in the Fathers: John himself mentions this aspect of baptism in Expos. 82. 37), which was anciently celebrated as part of the Paschal Vigil.

The beginning of the Irmos is from Isaiah 60:1:

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

interpreted as looking beyond the end of the exile (its historical reference) to the lasting redemption of the Resurrection.

It is an occasion for dancing and rejoicing. The word for “rejoice” is cognate with that used in the Magnificat (“my spirit rejoices in God my Savior (Luke 1:44) which leads John to call on the “all-pure Mother of God” to rejoice in the Resurrection.

The first troparion is an ecstatic recalling of the promise of Christ, recorded at the end of Matthew, already alluded to in the last troparion of the previous Ode:

And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Mt 28:20).

The final troparion John draws from the conclusion of Gregory's second Paschal homily:

But, O Pascha, great and holy and purifier of all the world, I will speak to you as to a living being. O Word of God and light and life and wisdom and power! For I rejoice in all your names” (Oration 45:30).

And calling upon the Pascha, John prays to **“more perfectly partake of You in the never-ending day of Your Kingdom.”**

The canon begins acclaiming the **“day of resurrection,”** which foreshadows the **“day without evening” of the Kingdom.**

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Biblical Ode 9:

The Song of the Mother of God–The Magnificat

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

47

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48

for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.

For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;

49

for he who is mighty has done great things for me,

and holy is his name.

50

And his mercy is on those who fear him

from generation to generation.

51

He has shown strength with his arm,

he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,

52

he has put down the mighty from their thrones,

and exalted those of low degree;

53

he has filled the hungry with good things,

and the rich he has sent empty away.

54

He has helped his servant Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

55

as he spoke to our fathers,

to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.”

The Song of Zechariah
Luke 1:68-79

68

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people,

69

and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,

70

as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

71

that we should be saved from our enemies,
and from the hand of all who hate us;

72

to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,
and to remember his holy covenant,

73

the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, 74 to grant us
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,

75

in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

76

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

77

to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,

78

through the tender mercy of our God,
when the day shall dawn upon us from on high

79

to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Wednesday, May 22 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – “On Holy Pascha” by St. Gregory the Theologian

This is the second of St. Gregory’s Orations (Sermons) on Pascha and his last.

It is also one of his longest so today I’ve only featured a few sections – those that have been previously mentioned throughout the Paschal Canon.

Section 22, however, is of particular interest because St. Gregory asks the important question:

To whom was the blood (of Christ) poured out for us, and why was it poured out?

Was it paid to the devil or to God the Father?

His conclusion is that:

It is clear that the Father accepts him, though he neither asked for this nor needed it, because of the divine plan, and because the human being must be sanctified by the humanity of God, that God might himself set us free and conquer the tyrant by force and lead us back to himself by the mediation of the Son, who also planned this to the honor of the Father, to whom it is manifest that he yields all things.

**ORATION 45
On Holy Pascha**

1) "I will stand on my watch:" says the wondrous Habakkuk (Hab. 2:1); and I also will stand with him today, by the authority and vision given me by the Spirit, and I will look steadily and observe what will be seen and what will be spoken to me. I have stood and looked steadily, and behold a man mounted upon the clouds, and he was very exalted; and his appearance was like the appearance of an angel; and his raiment was like the brightness of lightning (Matt 28:3) and he was lifting up his hand toward the east and shouting in a great voice (Rev. 19:17). His voice was like the voice of a trumpet; and those surrounding him were as a multitude of the heavenly hosts, and he said, "Today salvation has come to the world, to things visible and to things invisible. Christ is risen from the dead; rise with him. Christ has returned to himself; return. Christ is freed from the tomb; be freed from the bonds of sin. The gates of hades are opened, and death is destroyed, and the old Adam is put aside, and the new is fulfilled. If anyone in Christ is a new creation, (2 Cor 5:17), be made new." He said these things, and those surrounding him gave praise in song, as indeed they also did before, when Christ was manifested to us through his birth here below:

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will among humankind" (Luke 2:14).

With them I also say these things among you; and if only I could also receive a voice of angelic rank, and it would resound to all the ends of the earth.

2) The Lord's Pascha, Pascha, and again I will say Pascha, to the honor of the Trinity. It is to us the feast of feasts and festival of festivals, as far exalted above all—not only those that are merely

human and crawl on the ground but also those that are of Christ himself and are celebrated for him—as the sun is above the stars. Beautiful indeed yesterday were our splendid array and procession of lights, in which we were united both privately and publicly, almost every sort of people and every rank, lighting up the night with plentiful fires (the Paschal Vigil).

This is a symbol of the great light, both the heavenly light that makes fire signals from above, shining on the whole world in its own beauty, and equally the light above the heavens, in the angels—the first nature illumined after the First and springing from it—and equally in the Trinity, by which every light has been produced, divided off from the undivided light and honored. Yet today is more beautiful and more illustrious, inasmuch as yesterday's light was a forerunner of the great light's rising, and as it were a kind of pre-festal gladness.

But today we celebrate the resurrection itself, not as still hoped for but as having already occurred and gathering the whole world to itself. Let different persons therefore bring forth different fruits for this occasion and bring festal gifts, either small or greater, of things spiritual and dear to God, as far as each has the power. For the gifts of angels, those first and intelligible and pure beings who behold and testify to the glory above, can scarcely attain the feast's rank, if indeed the whole song of praise is also accessible to them. But we will contribute a discourse, the most beautiful and most honorable thing we have, especially when singing the praises of the Word for a good deed done for reason-endowed nature. I will begin from this point. For I cannot bear, when offering a sacrifice of words about the great sacrifice and the greatest of days, not to run back to God and from there make my beginning. And purify for me your mind and hearing and reasoning, all you who feast on such things—since the discourse is about God and things divine—that you may depart truly filled and not empty. But it will be at the same time very full and very concise, so as neither to distress you by its deficiency nor be unpleasant due to satiety.

22) Now then, we will examine an issue and doctrine overlooked by many but in my view very much to be examined. **To whom was the blood poured out for us, and why was it poured out**, that great and renowned blood of God, who is both high priest and victim? For we were held in bondage by the Evil One, sold under sin, and received pleasure in exchange for evil. But if the ransom is not given to anyone except the one holding us in bondage, I ask to whom this was paid, and for what cause? If to the Evil One, what an outrage! For the robber would receive not only a ransom from God, but God himself as a ransom, and a reward so greatly surpassing his own tyranny that for its sake he would rightly have spared us altogether. But if it was given to the Father, in the first place how? For we were not conquered by him. And secondly, on what principle would the blood of the Only-begotten delight the Father, who would not receive Isaac when he was offered by his father but switched the sacrifice, giving a ram in place of the reason-endowed victim (Gen 22:10-13)?

It is clear that the Father accepts him, though he neither asked for this nor needed it, because of the divine plan, and because the human being must be sanctified by the humanity of God, that God might himself set us free and conquer the tyrant by force and lead us back to himself by the mediation of the Son, who also planned this to the honor of the Father, to whom it is manifest that he yields all things. This much we have said of Christ, and the greater part will be revered by silence. But the bronze serpent is hung up to oppose the biting serpents (Num 21:9) not as a representation (“a type”) of the one who suffered for us but as a contrast (“the antitype”). It saves those who look at it not because they believe it is alive but because it has been killed and kills with

itself the powers subject to it, being destroyed as indeed it deserved. And what is a fitting funeral oration for it from us? "Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?" (1 Cor 15:55) By the cross you have been overthrown, by the giver of life you have been put to death. You are without breath, dead, motionless, without activity, even if you keep the form of a serpent lifted high on a pole.

23) Let us sacrifice ourselves to God, or rather offer sacrifice every day and in every movement. Let us accept all things for the Word. By sufferings let us imitate his suffering, by blood let us exalt his blood, let us willingly climb up on the cross. Sweet are the nails, even if very painful. For to suffer with Christ and for Christ is preferable to feasting with others.

24) If you are Simon of Cyrene, take up the cross and follow (Mark 27:32). If you are crucified with him as a thief (Luke 23:40-43), come to know God as kind-hearted; if he was counted among the lawless because of you and your sin (Is 53:11-12), become law abiding because of him. Worship the one hanged for you even if you are hanging; gain something even from the evil, purchase salvation by death. Come into paradise (Luke 23:43) with Jesus so as to learn from what you have fallen. Contemplate the beauties there; leave the murmurer to die outside with his blasphemies. And if you are Joseph from Arimathea (Luke 23:50-53), ask for the body from the crucifier; let that which cleanses the world (1 John 1:7) become yours. And if you are Nicodemus, the nocturnal worshipper of God, bury him with scented ointments (John 19:39). And if you are a certain Mary or another Mary or Salome or Joanna, weep at daybreak. Be first to see the stone removed (Mark 16:1-4) and perhaps the angels and Jesus himself. Say something, hear his voice. If you hear, "Do not touch me (John 20:17)," stand far off, have reverence for the Word, but do not be sorrowful. For he knows those by whom he was seen first. Keep the feast of the resurrection; help Eve, the first who fell, and her who first greeted Christ and made him known to the disciples. Become Peter or John; hasten to the tomb, running against each other, running together (John 20:2-4), competing in the good competition. And if you are beaten in speed, win in zeal, not just peeping into the tomb but going inside. And if like Thomas you are left behind when the disciples have assembled to whom Christ manifests himself, when you see (John 20:24-25) do not disbelieve; and if you disbelieve, believe those who tell you. If you cannot believe then either, believe the prints of the nails (John 20:27-28). And if he descends into Hades (1 Pet 3:19), go down with him. Know also the mysteries of Christ there: what is the saving plan, what is the reason for the twofold descent, to save everyone absolutely by his manifestation, or there also only those who believe.

30) But, O Pascha, great and holy and purifier of all the world, I will speak to you as to a living being (The Pascha to a which Gregory refers here is Christ Himself). O Word of God and light and life and wisdom and power! For I rejoice in all your names. O offspring and movement and imprint of the Great Mind! Apprehended as Word and contemplated as human, you uphold all things, binding them by the word of your power! Accept now this discourse, not as firstfruits but perhaps as a completion of the fruit we offer, as a thank-offering and at the same time a supplication, that we may suffer nothing beyond the necessary and sacred things pertaining to us; and stop the body's tyranny over us—you see, Lord, how great it is and how burdensome; or what you decree, if we are to be purified by you. But if we are to be released worthily as we desire, and received in the heavenly tabernacle, perhaps also there we will make acceptable offerings to you on your holy altar, O Father and Word and Holy Spirit, for to you belong all glory, honor and sovereignty, to the ages of ages. Amen.

Thursday, May 23 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – “The Paschal Stichera or Verses – Let God Arise”

The texts and images from the Scriptures (especially the Psalms) and the writings of St. Gregory the Theologian that come together as “**The Paschal Stichera**” are sung during the **Matins of Pascha** – shortly after the procession’s return to the church.

The opening lines come from **Psalm 68**. In the **Revised Standard Version (RSV)**, the notes begin: “This is the most difficult of the psalms to interpret, and there is no general agreement either as to its meaning as a whole or in many of its details. Some scholars regard it as merely a collection of unrelated fragments.”

But as Orthodox Christians we hear the opening words,

**Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered.
Let those who hate Him flee from before His face.** (v. 1)

as a powerful proclamation of Christ’s resurrection.

For those aware of the Exodus and the travels of Moses and the Jewish people in the wilderness, perhaps they also hear an anticipation of this proclamation in the similar words offered when the Ark of the Covenant was moved and God’s presence was felt to be in motion:

35 And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, “**Arise, O Lord, and let Your enemies be scattered; and let those that hate You flee before You**” (Numbers 10:35).

The selected verses from **Psalms 68 and 118** highlighted below in bold are used throughout the Paschal season as opening texts.

My favorite part comes at the end when we repeat a reworking of the opening lines of St. Gregory the Theologian’s first Sermon – “**On Pascha**”/**Oration 1**:

This is the day of resurrection
Let us be illumined by the feast
Let us embrace each other.
Let us call “Brothers” even those who hate us, and forgive all by the resurrection,
and so let us cry:

Christ is risen from the dead.
Trampling down death by death.
And upon those in the tombs bestowing life. (thrice)

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The Paschal Stichera/Verses

**Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered.
Let those who hate Him flee from before His face.**

Today, a sacred Pascha is revealed to us.
A new and holy Pascha.
A mystical Pascha,
A Pascha worthy of veneration.
A Pascha which is Christ the Redeemer.
A blameless Pascha,
A great Pascha,
A Pascha of the faithful,
A Pascha which has opened for us the gates of Paradise,
A Pascha which sanctifies all the faithful.

As smoke vanishes so let them vanish.

As wax melts before the fire.
Come from that scene, O women, bearers of glad tidings,
And say to Zion:
Receive from us the glad tidings of joy,
of Christ's resurrection.
Exult and be glad,
And rejoice, O Jerusalem,
Seeing Christ the King,
Who comes forth from the tomb like a bridegroom in procession (Psalm 18:6).

So the sinners will perish before the face of God. But let the righteous be glad.

The myrrh-bearing women.
At the break of dawn.
Drew near to the tomb of the Life-giver.
There they found an angel sitting upon the stone.
He greeted them with these words:
Why do you seek the living among the dead?
Why do you mourn the incorrupt amid corruption?
Go, proclaim the glad tidings to His disciples.

This is the day which the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24).

Pascha of beauty,
The Pascha of the Lord,
A Pascha worthy of all honor has dawned for us.
Pascha!

Let us embrace each other joyously.
Pascha, ransom from affliction!
For today as from a bridal chamber
Christ has shown forth from the tomb
and filled the women with joy saying:
Proclaim the glad tidings to the apostles.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever,
and unto ages of ages. Amen.

This is the day of resurrection (St. Gregory the Theologian, Oration 1)

Let us be illumined by the feast

Let us embrace each other.

**Let us call "Brothers" even those who hate us, and forgive all by the resurrection,
and so let us cry:**

Christ is risen from the dead.

Trampling down death by death.

And upon those in the tombs bestowing life. (thrice)

Friday, May 24 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – “*The Hymn of Light: In the Flesh..*”

My mother, Mary, was not a trained singer, but she loved to sing. And she discovered – thanks to the encouragement of our pastor, Fr. Paul Lazor – that she especially loved and was very good at singing with him in our parish, Holy Trinity Church, New Britain, Conn.

They would most frequently sing together during weekday Divine Liturgies and funeral and memorial services.

I especially remember her simplified and beautiful solo version of today’s Paschal hymn - “**In the Flesh...**” which is sung during the Paschal Matins Service, following the Canon and before the Paschal Stichera (“Let God Arise...”)

And I still hear her singing it on every Paschal night.

The Song of Light:

In the flesh You fell asleep as a mortal man, O King and Lord.
You rose on the third day,
raising Adam from corruption and destroying death:
O Pascha of incorruption,
the salvation of the world!