



THE RESURRECTION

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HISTORY OF THE FEAST

The feast of the Resurrection or Pasch (Passover) came from the feast of the Jewish Passover which commemorated the deliverance of the Jews from Egyptian bondage. For the first Christians, the Pasch came to symbolize another Passover, the Passover of Jesus, from life to death and then from death to life.

For the Christians, the paschal lamb of the Jews prefigured Jesus Christ, who, like an innocent lamb, offered himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. That is why he is called the “paschal lamb” or simply the “Pasch”.

At first, the Apostles and first Christians celebrated the Christian Pasch with the Jews. It was a sad feast and linked with fasting because it was, for them, the anniversary of Christ’s death.

In the 2nd century the practice of celebrating the joyous Pasch in honour of Christ began to be practiced. This Pasch was kept on the Sunday after the Jewish Passover.

In the 4th century, the Council of Nicea decreed that all Christians must celebrate the feast of the Pasch on the same day, that is, on the Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox of March 21, and not according to the Jewish custom.

During the 4th and 5th centuries, the celebration of the Pasch was extended from one day to a whole week, called “Bright Week,” in contrast to the week before Easter which was called “Great” or “Passion” week.

MATINS OF THE RESURRECTION

This is the great hymn of glory in honour of Christ the victor. It was composed by St. John Damascene and is based on the paschal sermons of the Fathers of the Church.

The content of the Matins is profoundly dogmatic, its form highly poetic, and its tone joyful and victorious.

The sticheras of the Resurrection form a powerful hymn of joy in honour of the risen Lord. In the last stichera we sing: “This is the day of the Resurrection. Let us be enlightened in triumphal celebration and embracing one another, let us say ‘Brothers and sisters, even to those hating us, let us forgive all things

because of the Resurrection, and let us sing: Christ is risen from the dead, by death He conquered death, and to those in the graves He granted life.”

TROPAR

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling death by death, and to those in the tombs, giving life.

KONDAK (Tone 8)

Though You went down to the grave, immortal Lord, you destroyed the power of Hades and rose victorious, Christ our God. You who said, “Rejoice” to the myrrh bearing women, give peace to Your apostles and offer resurrection to the fallen.

THE RESURRECTION ICON (THE DESCENT INTO HADES)

In traditional iconography, the actual moment of the Resurrection of Christ was never depicted. The Gospels and Church Tradition are silent about that moment and do not say how Christ arose. Neither does the icon show it.

The action of the event takes place in the depths of the earth, in hell, shown as a gaping black abyss. In the centre of the icon is the figure of the Saviour. He appears in hell not as its captive, but as its Conqueror and Deliverer, as the Master of life. He is surrounded by a radiant mandorla with rays issuing from the centre of the mandorla. His garments are not those in which He is portrayed during his lifetime. They are brilliant white.

The darkness of hell is filled by the light of these Divine rays. Christ tramples underfoot the two crossed boards of hell’s doors that He has pulled down. In many icons, below the doors, in the black abyss, the cast down figure of the prince of darkness, Satan, is seen. The power of hell is destroyed. This is symbolized by the keys, nails, and so forth.

Christ raises Adam from the grave with His right hand and Eve with His left hand. By this he frees Adam’s soul and with it the souls of all those who wait for His coming with faith. This is why, to the right and left of this scene are shown two groups of Old Testament saints, with prophets at the front. On the left are kings David and Solomon in royal robes and crowns and in front of them, John the Forerunner (Baptist). On the right are the prophets. Seeing Him, they at once recognize Him as the One whom they had foretold.

By freeing the old Adam, and with him, the whole of humankind, He laid the foundation of a new life for all humankind. The spiritual raising of Adam is a symbol of the coming resurrection of the body, the first-fruit of which was the resurrection of Christ.

In the upper section of the icon, the two peaks of rock remind us that “the earth shook and the rocks were split” (Mt. 27:51) after the death of Christ. The dividing of the rocks also reminds us of the dividing of the waters of the Red Sea as the Israelites traveled from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land.

WHAT CAN I DO AT HOME OR IN MY CLASSROOM?

- Prepare the Easter basket and take it to church to be blessed.
- Attend services during Holy Week and Easter.
- Process with the Resurrection icon to the icon corner and venerate it. Decorate the corner with flowers. Sing the Tropar “Christ is risen from the Dead trampling death by death and to those in the tombs granting life”.
- Explain the symbolism of the icon.