THE FEAST OF FEASTS ~ 2026

OUR JOURNEY TO PASCHA

OUR JOURNEY TO PASCHA — SUNDAYS OF LENT

Sunday of Orthodoxy

"Orthodoxy is what Christ taught, the apostles preached and Fathers kept."
- St. Athansius the Great

On the first Sunday of Lent, we celebrated the restoration of the holy and venerable icons. On that beautiful day, everyone joined in a procession around the temple, joyfully carrying and displaying their cherished icons from home. We venerated these sacred images in honor of the holy men and women of God who suffered and gave their lives for the truth of the Gospel, so that we might come to know Christ.

Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas

"The light of Christ illumines all."
- St. Gregory Palamas

Known as the champion of the Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."

Sunday of St. John Climacus

"Humility is the only virtue that no devil can imitate. If pride made demons out of angels, there is no doubt that humility could make angels out of demons"
St. John Climacus.

The author of the Ladder of Divine Ascent, teachings us to stay on the ladder of our spiritual life.

Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross

"For the Cross is the salvation of the Church; the Cross is the boast of those who hope in it; the Cross is reconciliation of enemies to God and conversion of sinners to Christ."
St. John Chrysostom

On the third Sunday of Holy Lent, the Orthodox Church commemorated the Precious and Life-Giving Cross of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Services included a special veneration of the Cross, which prepared the faithful for the commemoration of the Crucifixion during Holy Week. In the midpoint of Lent, the Cross helps us to remain strong in our faith, continue our fast, and look forward to the Feast of Feasts.

Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt

Having been a sinful woman, you became a Bride of Christ through repentance. Having attained the angelic life, you defeated demons by the weapon of the Cross; therefore, O most glorious Mary you are a Bride of the Kingdom. — Kontakion

Stresses the importance of seeking repentance.

SUNDAYS OF ALMSGIVING

"COME, LET US PURIFY OURSELVES BY ACTS OF CHARITY..."

At St. Nektarios Church, the five Sundays of the Great Fast have served as focal points, harnessing the collective giving spirit of our faithful parishioners. Each Sunday was been dedicated to the collection of funds to support a particular philanthropic ministry.

MARCH 1 — **ST. ANASTASIA MEDICAL ASSISTANCE**
A ministry of the parish which provides aid to members of the community with serious financial needs, requiring immediate action, as a result of significant medical issues.

MARCH 8 — **CHILD OF GOD ACADEMY & FEEDING PROGRAM**
A ministry of the parish assisting the Metropolis of Kenya to support the Academy which provides education, food and clean water to orphans and disadvantage children in the slums of Nairobi.

MARCH 15 — **PHILOPTOCHOS - HELLENIC COLLEGE/HOLY CROSS**
A national Philoptochos commitment to support our theological school that prepares students for the holy priesthood or for lay vocations in which they can put their faith into action.

MARCH 22 — **PHILOPTOCHOS - SHELTER HEALTH SERVICES**
To keep maintaining the waiting room at the Shelter Health Service that Philoptochos renovated couples years ago. In case needed any renovations, fresh coat of paint, fixtures, etc.

MARCH 29 — **HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASKFORCE**
Made up of vetted service providers agencies that work with victims every day in Mecklenburg County.

THROUGH YOUR GENEROSITY, OVER $6,500 WAS RAISED TO SUPPORT THOSE IN NEED

In His Service During Lent Beyond wine, oil, and prosfora.

Members of Young at Heart
Cleaning liturgical item under the tent

Members of the Flower Ministry
Adorning the icon of the Theotokos for the weekly Small Compline with Akathist Service

Preparing 600 yellow carnations for distribution on the Veneration of the Cross and preparing the tray with the Holy Cross

SATURDAY OF HOLY, RIGHTEOUS FRIEND OF CHRIST, LAZARUS

A Day of Worship, Witness, Fellowship, and Service

The Church commemorates the miracle of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ when he raised Lazarus from the dead after he had lain in the grave four days. The Church bears witness to the power of Christ over death and exalts Him as King before entering the most solemn week of the year, Holy Week. At the conclusion of the morning services, congregants were able to venerate the relic of St. Lazarus and be anointed. Following the Divine Liturgy, members of our Young at Heart hosted a brunch for all. Adults and youth offered their time and talent to prepare the more than 1000 Palm Crosses needed for the next day.

The members of the Philoptochos spent the afternoon setting up for their annual Palm Sunday Luncheon.

PALM SUNDAY

Palm Sunday, one of the most joyous feasts of the year, is the commemoration of the Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem following His glorious miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. Having anticipated His arrival and having heard of the miracle, the people went out to meet the Lord and welcomed Him with displays of honor and shouts of praise.

We commemorate the **only day,** in the earthly life of our Lord when he was publicly offered "perfect praise" and proclaimed as the Messiah by those uniquely qualified to offer it…the children (Mark 10:13-16). Thus, the children cried out . . .***"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"***

At St. Nektarios, we too offer displays of honor and shouts of praise. These uplifting moments are followed by the blessing of the Palm Crosses. This year our Palm Sunday procession took place indoors due to inclement weather. Children lined the center aisle waving their long strips of palms. At the Narthex entrance, the procession paused as Fr. Panayiotis read the Holy Gospel account of our Lord's entry into Jerusalem. The palms are the "symbols of victory" as it says in the hymn for the feast day (see below), which is sung repeatedly throughout the service. This victory is not only our Lord's victory over death, but also any personal victory over one's sinful passions, which was the hope and purpose of Lent.

". . . Therefore, like the children of old, we also carry symbols of victory, and to You, the Victor over death, do we cry out: Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

The Bridegroom Services

Beginning on the evening of Palm Sunday and continuing through the evening of Holy Tuesday, the Church observes the Service of the Bridegroom. With His Eminence Metropolitan Sevastianos' visit on Palm Sunday, we were honor that he was able to remain with us for the service that night.

The name of the service is from the figure of the Bridegroom in the parable of the Ten Virgins found in Matthew 25:1-13. Christ is the divine Bridegroom of the Church. We are instructed of our need for spiritual vigilance and preparedness, watching and waiting for the Lord, who will come again to judge the living and the dead. The troparion (hymn of the service) conveys this expectation:

"Behold, the Bridegroom cometh in the middle of the night, and blessed is that servant whom He shall find watching; and again unworthy is he whom He shall find heedless. Beware, therefore, O my soul, lest thou be overcome with sleep, lest thou be given up to death, and be shut out from the Kingdom. But rouse thyself and cry: Holy, Holy, Holy art Thou, O God, through the Mother of God, have mercy on us."

Holy Wednesday Holy Unction

On Great and Holy Wednesday, the Sacrament of Holy Unction is conducted. It is offered for the healing of soul and body and for forgiveness of sins. At the conclusion of the service, the clergy anoint the body with oil. The grace of God, which heals infirmities of soul and body, is called down upon each person.

The biblical basis for the Sacrament is found in James 5: 14-16:

"Is any among you are sick, let him call for the presbyters of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."

Holy Thursday

In the morning at the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil, two pieces of Prosfora representing Lambs are consecrated. The first is for that service. The second piece of Prosfora Lamb is for the Reserved Sacrament which is used especially to give communion to the sick during the next year.

At St. Nektarios, a congregant offers flour to be placed around the oil that is blessed during the Holy Wednesday Unction Service. This flour is then used to make the Prosfora to be used during the Thursday morning Liturgy.

At the evening Passion Service from the 12 Gospel reading, several events are commemorated: the washing of the disciples' feet, the institution of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper, the agony in the garden of Gethsemane, the betrayal of Christ by Judas, and our Lord's crucifixion.

During the procession, we hear from the Antiphon,

"We worship Your Passion, O Christ. Show us also Your glorious Resurrection."

After the Procession of the Cross of Christ, the congregation prayerfully and solemnly comes forward to light a candle at the Cross and venerate the icon of the crucified Christ.

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

Holy Friday Morning and Afternoon

In the morning, the services of the Royal Hours are observed, a time of solemn celebration and narration of the Passion of Christ. The afternoon vespers, called *Apokathelosis* or *Removal from the Cross*, are a continuation of the Royal Hours. During this service, the icon of the Body of Christ is removed from the Cross. Then, icon is wrapped with a white sheet, mimicking the actions of Joseph of Arimathea.

The youth from the Afternoon Holy Friday retreat assisted in *taking the icon of the body of Christ from the cross. The icon is taken into the altar until* the clergy later processed with the Epitaphion (embroidered icon depicting the Body of Christ), to take the "Body of Christ" to the kouvouklion/bier. The chanters approached the Kouvoukion to chant the somber Aposticha of Great Vespers, "O Thou who puttest on light like a robe, when Joseph, Nicodemus brought Thee down from the Tree . . ."

Holy Friday Evening

On the center of the solea stands the beautifully adorned Kouvouklion (carved bier) holding the Epitaphion (icon of Christ's crucified body). This is the Matins of Holy Saturday and serves as the funeral service for Christ. The theme for this evening is Christ's fulfilment of the Sabbath law by resting in the tomb, and his descent into Hades. Among the more notable features of this service is the singing of the encomia, hymns popularly known as "Lamentations". These are grouped in three distinct stanzas, each consisting of short hymns intercalated with the verses of Psalm 118.

At the end of the Great Doxology the Kouvouklion is processed out of the nave and around the exterior of the church, followed by the faithful holding candles. The procession finishes on the main portico, where the Kouvouklion is held aloft by our bearers while the faithful pass under it to re-enter the nave. At the completion of the service the Epitaphion is removed from the Kouvouklion and placed on the altar which represents the Tomb of Christ.

Holy and Great Saturday

During the Orthros Service our catechumens and families were gathered under the tent to be baptized or chrismated into the Orthodox Faith. This service was full of the coming Paschal joy as they proceeded into the temple for the Divine Liturgy and to receive their first Holy Communion.

After the reading of the Epistle, the priests followed the custom of the tossing of laurel and flower petals, saying:

"Arise, O God, and judge Thou the earth: for Thou shall take all heathen to Thine inheritance".

Parishioners brought in baskets with their Paschal meal to break the fast after midnight. Baskets were blessed at the end of the service.

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

Midnight Resurrection Service

Before midnight, the congregation gathers in the softly lit temple. A few minutes before midnight, the room goes dark. Then the Fathers emerge, carrying candles and singing, "***Come, receive the light from the eternal life, and glorify Christ, who has risen from the dead."***

The acolytes then receive the flame from the Fathers, and each in turn shares it with the people at the end of each pew, until every candle is lit and the sanctuary glows with the radiant joy of Pascha. The Holy Gospel of the Resurrection is read. And we joyously proclaim that Christ is Risen!

At the conclusion of the service, we receive red eggs and gather in the Spiritual Life Center for a bowl of soup to break the fast, celebrating our Risen Lord together.

Agape Vespers

Also called Vespers of Love, this service continues the celebration of Pascha. At this service the Gospel reading (John 20:19-25) depicts the first appearance of the risen Lord to his disciples and is recited in as many languages as are known by those present in our parish. This symbolizes that the glorious resurrection of Christ is proclaimed to all the nations of the world.

AGAPE PICNIC FOR THE FEAST OF FEASTS

THANK YOU TO ALL FOR THE TIME AND TALENT PICTURED THROUGHOUT OUR JOURNEY TO PASCHA