

HOLY WEEK AND PASCHA AT HOME: A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES



Adaptation by the Diocesan Department of Christian Education
of Presvytera Jennifer Moore's "Holy Week and Pascha at Home Resource Guide"
for use in the Diocese of New York and New Jersey
Orthodox Church in America
April 2020

CHRIST IS IN OUR MIDST! HE IS AND ALWAYS SHALL BE!

He is in our midst in plague and health, in poor and plenty, in our church and in our homes. And there He shall be during Holy Week, whether we participate in our church building or in our homes. But you know that already. You know that because our hierarchs, our clergy, our lay leaders, and our brothers and sisters in Christ are encouraging each other with their words. We know we ARE the Church, and we ought to be encouraged and consoled by that. However, should we not be able to be together to worship during Holy Week, we should also know that it is okay to experience that loss. It is okay to grieve the absence of the rhythm and normalcy of worshipping together in our parish communities. It is a beautiful thing to yearn to be with Christ in His temple with our church family! The unfortunate truth is, of course, that it will not be so this year. Holy Week is difficult. As Orthodox Christians we spend about a 40-hour week at services if we attend every service. This is hard enough with the sights, the smells, the sounds immediately before us, but it will be harder when we are in the comfort of our own homes. So how is it that we can keep ourselves and our children attentive to live-streamed services during the pinnacle of our Church year? How can we solemnly focus in our homes?

Here are some ideas collected for you from many resources of our Orthodox communities.

For the Whole Week

- Prepare a place.

Make the sign of the Cross and choose an area in your home to dedicate to celebrating your Holy Week. Be creative! It may be a table in your prayer corner or near your screen for live-streaming services. Make it an open place everyone in the home can visit all week long.

Here's what you can do:

Clean: Take the time to clear it, spray it, wipe it, and make it shine.

Set: Hang up a Cross from your home in the middle. Fill the space around the Cross with icons. Keep a copy of the Bible there and your service texts. Place a candle there that can burn safely during services. And make a special spot to put turned off devices.

Dedicate: Make the sign of the Cross each time you enter this place, and thank the Lord for it.

- Follow along with the services and readings at OCA.org
- [Watch and learn all about the icons for Holy Week](#)
- [Time Capsule Activity](#) for children

Lazarus Saturday -- Saturday, April 11th

- Before Lazarus Saturday, learn the *Troparion of the Feast* (theme song) and sing along during a live-streamed liturgy.

*By raising Lazarus from the dead before Thy Passion,
Thou didst confirm the universal resurrection, O Christ God.
Like the children with the palms of victory,
we cry out to Thee, O Vanquisher of death:
“Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord!”*

- A [video](#) by St. Herman of Alaska Orthodox Church, Gradyville, PA
- If you have one, put your icon in a place of honor where you can see it during the liturgy. If not, you can [print one!](#)

If you print it, laminate it and save it for next year to place in your icon corner for the feast day. Decorate! Adorn with flowers, leaves, vines, tissue paper/fabric flowers. Whatever you find beautiful will be a beautiful offering to God.

- [This lovely, short podcast episode for younger children explores the "why"s of Lazarus Saturday, with a timely discussion on how Christ feels about death.](#)
- [Engage children with this packet from Orthodox Pebbles, containing a craft idea, an explanation of the icon, discussion points, and even more resources.](#)
- Go on a walk or hike to find “the symbols of victory” to hold during the Palm Sunday liturgy. Lazarus Saturday is the day we receive pussy willows and palms in church, or fold palm crosses after the Greek tradition, and some Arabic traditions decorate candles with flowers. These are special and beautiful traditions that have been adapted for cultural climates and fauna. Today, go on a walk and find a suitable symbol. It could be a fern leaf, pussy willows, wildflowers, a tree branch, etc.

Palm Sunday -- Sunday, April 12th

- Bring out or [print this icon](#) of The Entrance of Our Lord into Jerusalem. Decorate with yesterday's adornments!
- Wear bright, festive colors! It is a triumphant day!
- The Troparion of the Feast is the same as yesterday's. Sing along!
- Wave your symbols of faith that you collected yesterday, any time that you hear "Hosanna in the Highest!" or "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!"
- [A video to understand the feast of Palm Sunday \(and Lazarus Saturday!\) better.](#)
(Fine for children, but best for older children/teens/adults)
- It's a Great Feast! Fish and Oil can be enjoyed today!

Holy Week begins now with Bridegroom Matins...

- In the late afternoon, bring out or [print this icon](#) of Christ The Bridegroom.
- Begin learning the special hymns for the Bridegroom Matins service.

Troparion of the Bridegroom:

*Behold, the Bridegroom comes at midnight;
and blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching,
and again, unworthy is the servant whom He shall find heedless.
Beware, therefore, O my soul, do not be weighed down with sleep,
lest you be given up to death and lest you be shut out of the Kingdom.
But rouse yourself crying: Holy, Holy, Holy, art Thou, O Our God!
Through the Theotokos have mercy on us!*

Sung by Archangel Voices: [Video](#)

[A video \(slightly different translation\) by Fr. Apostolos Hill](#)

- In the evening, participate in the Bridegroom Service via live-stream.
Sing the Troparion of the Bridegroom three times together!
Allow your young children to process with your icon and leave it in a place of honor for tomorrow's service.

Holy Monday -- Monday, April 13th

- Today, learn about the Parable of the Ten Virgins, where we get the imagery of Christ as the Bridegroom.

[A short audio book for kids](#)

A longer podcast for adults: [Fr. Thomas Hopko on Christ the Bridegroom](#)

A short reading: [The Bridegroom Matins](#)

- Learn the hymn, “Thy Bridal Chamber”

*Thy bridal chamber I see adorned, O My Savior,
and I have no wedding garment that I may enter.
O Giver of Light, enlighten the vesture of my soul, and save me.*

Hear it sung by [St. Michael the Archangel Church, Louisville, KY](#)

- In the evening, participate in the Bridegroom Service via livestream.
Sing the Troparion and the Exapostilarion three times each!

Holy Tuesday -- Tuesday, April 14th

- Today the Bridegroom service focuses on the woman, Kassiani, who anointed Christ's feet with oil. She was a sinful woman but acknowledged her sinfulness and poured out expensive myrrh to anoint the Master. Spend some time today cleaning your icons and especially the icon of Christ. If you have rosewater, use it to sweeten the smell. Be careful with your hand-painted icons!
- Continue practicing your hymns today, and sing along as you participate in the live-stream service.
- Listen carefully to hear the Hymn of Kassiani (the last hymn in the Aposticha section) and follow along.

*The woman had fallen into many sins, O Lord,
yet when she perceived Thy Divinity,
she joined the ranks of the myrrh-bearing women.
In tears she brought Thee myrrh before Thy burial.
She cried, "Woe is me, for I live in the night of licentiousness.
Shrouded in the dark and moonless love of sin.
But accept the fountain of my tears,
O Thou Who didst gather the waters of the sea into clouds.
Bow down Thine ear to the sighing of my heart,
O Thou who didst bow the heavens in Thine ineffable condescension.
Once Eve heard Thy footstep in Paradise in the cool of the day,
and in fear she ran and hid herself.
But now I will tenderly embrace those pure feet
and wipe them with the hair of my head.
Who can measure the multitude of my sins,
or the depth of Thy judgments, O Savior of my soul?
Do not despise Thy servant in Thine immeasurable mercy.*

Sung by [St. Tikhon's Monastery Choir](#)

- Today is a good day to start planning your Pascha basket! It's a wonderful thing to look forward to. [Here is a helpful graphic and article on how to put a traditional basket together](#)

We won't be able to bring our baskets to church this year for a blessing, but here is a [prayer for the blessing of Paschal foods](#).

Holy Wednesday -- Wednesday, April 15th

- Holy Unction is often served today, but perhaps your priest will have the service at a later date when everyone can come. If you have holy oil or even holy water, anoint each other making the sign of the Cross on each person's forehead.
 - Tonight is the final Bridegroom service! Sing the hymns you have learned during the service.
 - We have somberly eased into the week with these beautiful Bridegroom Matins services. Beginning tomorrow, Holy Thursday, services begin to increase and things get harder. Rest today, pray, and prepare to focus on the services to come.
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Holy Thursday -- Thursday, April 16th

- Bring out or [print this icon](#) of The Last Supper.

Holy Thursday begins with the Vespers Liturgy which celebrates the institution of the Eucharist. Participate in the live-streamed liturgy and note the differences from Sunday morning liturgies!

- To celebrate the institution of the Eucharist, make prosphora as a family.

[Here is a video Fr. Matthew Moore made about making prosphora.](#)

- Holy Thursday is a perfect day to dye eggs and make your preparations for Pascha!

[To try traditional onion skin dyeing technique](#)

For red egg dye, you can look on Amazon or at your local Greek store (if they are open!)

[I like the dye from Legacy Icons](#)

Learn about the [Ukrainian Art of Pysanky!](#)

[Photos](#) of Pysanky!

- Learn about the Miracle of the Red Egg!

If you want to purchase the book, [The Miracle of the Red Egg by Elizabeth Crispina Johnson](#)

[A free reading of the same book](#)

[A short article](#)

- It's a great day to make Kulich or Pascha Bread! A recipe is [here](#).

For the BEST recipe: Ask your Baba!

- Thursday Night Matins is quite a long service and includes the Twelve Gospel readings telling of our Lord's Passion. Be especially patient with your children and easy on yourself here! There is much to see in the service, but a video will not have the same sensory impact.

- Watch the candles be lit after each Gospel reading! You might see twelve candles. Light your own candles along with the live-stream service. For little ones, use LED candles. You'll need twelve! [Here's one example.](#)
- After the 5th Gospel Reading, kneel while this hymn, *He Who Hung the Earth* (Antiphon XV), is sung:

Today, He who hung the earth upon the waters is hung upon the tree. (3 times)
The King of the Angels is decked with a crown of thorns.
He who wraps the heavens with clouds is wrapped in the purple of mockery.
He who freed Adam in the Jordan is slapped on the face.
The Bridegroom of the Church is affixed to the Cross with nails.
The Son of the Virgin is pierced by a spear.
We worship Thy Passion, O Christ. (3 times)
Show us also Thy Glorious Resurrection!

[Video](#) of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, Yonkers, NY

- After the 8th Gospel Reading, kneel while this hymn, *The Wise Thief* (Exapostilarion) is sung 3 times:

*The Wise Thief didst Thou make worthy of paradise in a single moment, O Lord:
 By the wood of the Cross, illumine me as well, and save me!*

Sung by:

[St. Mary's Cathedral, Minneapolis, MN](#)

[Archangel Voices](#)

[Children](#)

Holy Friday -- Friday, April 17th

- [Icon!](#) You know what to do! Today's appropriate icon would be The Crucifixion or The Extreme Humility icon.
- Today is the most solemn day of the Church year, with strict fasting, as it is the day when our Lord was crucified. We hear the very last moments of Christ's life. Many people will fast from technology, television, and even conversation that is not purposeful, etc. Have some time for solitude. It is not easy to do this during this time of sheltering-in-place, but try your best to be quiet, gentle and prayerful today, remembering our Lord's suffering on the Cross.
- The first service of the day is the Royal Hours of Great and Holy Friday. This is a very simple service with readings from the Psalms, the Prophets, the Epistles, and the Holy Gospels.
- We traditionally decorate Our Lord's Tomb together today. We decorate His tomb to show an inexpressible love that only the beauty of God's own hand-made flowers can represent. Decorate a table with flowers that awaits the [icon of The Lamentation](#).
- The second service of the day is Vespers of Holy Friday, The Burial of Christ. We take the most precious body of Christ down from the Cross and place it in a new tomb. Allow the children to process with the icon and place it on the table with flowers.
- Listen to the beautiful hymn, *The Noble Joseph*, as the priest processes with the icon of the Burial Shroud to the awaiting new tomb in the center of the church:

*The noble Joseph, when he had taken down Thy most pure body from the tree,
wrapped it in fine linen and anointed it with spices and placed it in a new tomb.*

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

The Angel came to the Myrrh-bearing Women at the tomb and said:

Myrrh is fitting for the dead, but Christ has shown Himself a stranger to corruption.

Sung by [Archangel Voices](#)

- The third and final service of Holy Friday, served in the evening, is the Matins of Holy Saturday, or the Lamentations Service. The women come to the tomb bearing spices. Listen to the hymns tonight and hear how they have changed from the afternoon to the evening. This afternoon we were mourning with a grave sound, and tonight we are already hoping in the Resurrection. The tones are bright!
- As you watch the live-streamed service, allow the children to process with the icon of The Lamentation around your home! These ancient traditions unite us to the whole Church, both on earth and in Heaven, with our heartfelt love and humble efforts. Whether it is a procession in church or a procession at home, the Lord knows that we are worshipping Him with all that we have and all that we are

Holy Saturday -- Saturday, April 18th

- The [icon for today](#) is The Harrowing of Hades.

Those who have cared for children especially will note the way Christ is grabbing the wrists of Adam and Eve! They can neither pull away nor be snatched from His hands!

[Take a look at it! Here is an explanation of the icon.](#)

- We start the day with Vespers Divine Liturgy, which is the first resurrection service. This service commemorates Christ's descent into Hades and breaking the bonds of the captives. The 15 Old Testament readings, which in many churches are read by parish youth, tell the stories of the Prophets who foretold the coming of the Son of God.
- When the choir sings "Arise, O God; judge the earth, for to Thee belong all the nations!", [make a joyful noise!](#) This means the locks and chains are falling from our forefathers and mothers! Ring bells! Stomp on the floor! Notice the coverings and vestments in the church changing from dark to light! This is not just for children -- The Harrowing of Hades is serious business!

Sung by [St. Symeon Orthodox Church, Birmingham, AL](#)

- For the rest of the day, prepare for Pascha! Make your Pascha basket. Finish your baking and cooking while remembering the joy of the morning. Make/decorate/find a candle for tonight's Resurrection Service! For little ones, the LED candles used on Holy Thursday are perfect. Death has already been defeated, but the Earth awaits the Good News!
- Practice singing "Christ is Risen"

*"Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death,
and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!"*

[Christ is Risen](#) sung by St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, McKinney, TX

Midnight -- Holy Pascha -- Sunday, April 19th

- The Pascha Liturgy! Here it is! Dear ones: Come receive the light! It is the candle's flame that represents the light of the Good News, the Joy of the Resurrection! Light your Paschal candle.
- As you participate in the liturgy, sing Christ is Risen together! Sing it in all the languages you know. Learn some new languages [here!](#)
[Video](#) of "Christ is Risen" Around the World!
- [Hear](#) or [Read](#) the Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom. At this particular time, we feel the sting of death while we grieve those taken from us, and battle against the forces of disease, death, and despair that are at work in the world. But the sting of death is temporary, because CHRIST IS RISEN! Hope has been restored!
- Sing "Let God Arise", the climatic song of victory!

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 to 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!"

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!

Pascha of beauty, the Pascha of the Lord, A Pascha worthy of honor has dawned for us. O Pascha! Let us embrace each other joyously! Pascha, ransom from affliction! For today, as from a bridal chamber, Christ has shone 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! Let us be illuminated by the feast! Let us embrace each other! Let us call Brothers even those that 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!" (3x)

Sung by Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church, Buffalo, NY [listen here](#)

- Sing “The Angel Cried”, the most beloved hymn to the Mother of God!

The Angel cried to the Lady full of Grace:
Rejoice, O pure virgin! Again I say rejoice!
Your son is risen from his three days in the tomb.
With himself he has raised all the dead. Rejoice, rejoice, O ye people.
Shine! Shine! Shine! O new Jerusalem, the Glory of the Lord has shone on you.
Exult now, exult and be glad, O Zion!
Be radiant, O pure Theotokos, in the Resurrection of your Son!

[Listen here to children](#) of Holy Virgin Mary Orthodox Cathedral, Los Angeles

- Enjoy the Paschal Agape Meal together. As St. John Chrysostom says in the Paschal Sermon that you have just heard ... whether you came at the first hour or the final hour, feast! Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!
- Practice greeting each other with “Christ is Risen!” and replying “Indeed He is Risen!”
- Call your loved ones, FaceTime, or Zoom chat with them and greet them. Sing “Christ is Risen” together! Sing! Sing! Sing with all your strength, and let the world know that God is with us!
- Decorate your home with Pascha Decorations:
[Free Printable Picture](#)
[Free Printable Banner](#)
- [For children, listen to some beautiful Pascha books!](#)
- This afternoon’s service is the [Agape Vespers](#).
- In many parishes, the Gospel is read in different languages to represent the Good News flowing over all the Earth. This year there may not be many people to read in different languages. Do a group chat to read the Gospel in as many languages as possible.

The Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. John 20: 19-25

Glory to Thee O Lord, Glory to Thee!

At that time, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

Glory to Thee O Lord, Glory to Thee!

The Agape Vespers service echoes the joy of Pascha night, propelling us into Bright Week with the resounding chorus of the Great Prokeimenon:

“Who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God Who does wonders!”

Sung by [St. Symeon Orthodox Church, Birmingham, AL](#)

CHRIST IS RISEN! INDEED HE IS RISEN!

