

Christ is risen!

What is the meaning of Pascha?

Holy Week, 2017



What is the meaning of Pascha? Why is it the feast of feasts? Many people do not know.

Because of this, this is the hardest week of the year for me. It is not because of services twice a day, for 2 weeks, or the other things that may make me physically tired. It is because we are preparing to celebrate the redemption of the human race, and grace will be given liberally to all, but many do not “get it”. They are concerned with getting their Pascha basket blessed, or coming late at night to the one service they attend all year, or having communion, with no preparation, or self-inspection, or fasting, or desire to be transformed from death to life. I will say things from my heart to them, and some will have blank faces, and be unmoved. Joy is not full unless it is shared, fully, by everyone. So, my joy is always tempered because not everyone who holds a candle and brings a basket to church knows the meaning of Pascha, and orders their entire life by it.

I want you to be “moved” by Pascha. I want it to change EVERYTHING in your life.

What are we celebrating on Pascha? The word means “Passover”, and we use it to refer to the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, the God-man, Jesus Christ, instead of that silly, untheological word which is derived from the name of a Babylonian fertility god.

Jesus Christ is our Passover, the final Passover. There is no need for another Passover, because He conquered sin and death for us. He took on our humanity, which was broken, and inclined to sin, and unable to be in the presence of God because of our impurity. There is a beautiful hymn, which I recently gave a homily about¹. I will reproduce it here. It explains what happened in the incarnation:

Today is revealed the mystery hidden from before time began,
and the Son of God becometh the Son of man,

that, taking upon Himself that which is below Him,

He might bestow upon me that which is more sublime.

Of old Adam was deceived, and, desiring to become a god, he failed;

but God becometh man, that He might make Adam a god.

Let creation be glad! Let nature dance!

For the archangel standeth in fear before the Virgin and offereth her his “Rejoice!”, the antidote to grief.

O our God Who art become man in the lovingkindness of Thy mercy, glory be to Thee!

(Doxasticon for the feast of Annunciation, the composition of Theophanes, in Tone II)

The “mystery” is God, and His plan to create us in His image, and to give us Himself as a gift – for us to share in His knowledge and purity and perfection – to have union with Him. Another mystery is how we sin so easily, and this sin makes it impossible for us to reach perfection (even if the sin is forgiven, because sin fundamentally corrupts our nature).

The Son of God became man to make human nature better, and make it capable of perfect life. This is expressed by saying that He made Adam “a god”. This is scriptural. It is in the Psalms, and was even quoted by Christ². God is totally free. We were made to be totally free – to always be ABLE to choose good, and not even desire anything evil, and to know the hidden things of God, which are only revealed to the pure in heart. This is what it means to be a “god”. This is the meaning of the “Rejoice!” in the hymn. This is a very big Rejoice! - a mysterious Rejoice! Because of the incarnation, man, who is held fast by sin and cannot know God, can be freed from sin and death, and become a god!

The Protestants do not understand what Jesus did. Most think that He took on a punishment intended for us, because “the wages of sin is death”, and by dying instead of us, he appeased God’s righteous justice and anger. This is bizarre.

He came that we “might have life, and might have it abundantly”. He came to lead us from darkness to light. He came so that the broken things in our nature would be fixed. That is what the hymn above is teaching, in the lines:

”...that, taking upon Himself that which is **below** [human nature, full of sin] Him, He might bestow upon me that which is **more sublime** [that man may be forgiven his sin, eradicate his sin, and become a god].”

The greatest tragedy of human existence was the sin of Adam and Eve. That sin polluted human nature, and made it impossible for anyone to reach perfection. However, we were born for perfection! How could it be otherwise, since the Holy Trinity stated plainly His intentions when He created man: “Let us make man in our own image”³. God is perfect, and holy, and free. If we are made in His image then we must be like Him, since we all know that a parent brings forth a child who is like him.



Sin is slavery. It is the exact opposite of freedom. Jesus Christ came to save us from sin. To do this, He became one of us, and changed our nature, so that we could conquer sin and death. He did not die in our place – he died so

that death would die! We say this plainly in the Paschal Troparion, which we sing hundreds of times in the Paschal season:

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

It is impossible to feel Pascha in the heart *without* feeling death. Only those who know the purpose and meaning of their life and are aware of their sins and struggle against them with all of their strength can feel Pascha.

We are creatures who do things that are “dead”. Sin is dead. Anger is dead. Lust is dead. We should have a deep longing in our heart to put away all things in our life that are dead. Those things are cold, and dark. God is warm, and He is light. With baptism, we are made capable of becoming all warmth and all light, with no coldness or darkness in us at all. This is because Jesus Christ conquered darkness and coldness – death.

On Pascha, we do not celebrate a historical event, but an ongoing reality that is unfolding within ourselves. The Lord said as He was beginning His ministry that “the Kingdom of heaven is within you”⁴. We are coming closer to the full understanding of this reality every day – but only if we struggle to follow the commandments.

I invite you to join me in celebrating and praising God, that our darkness will not remain darkness, and our cold hearts not remain cold, and our sins will not only be blotted out, but that we will increase in knowledge and purity such that we will not sin or desire to sin.

This is the meaning of Pascha. **Christ is risen! Truly He is risen!**

I covet your prayers. I am always treading water, but I want to swim! I pray for everybody I see in the parish and in my prison ministry, and a good deal more that I no longer see, for known and unknown reasons, every day. Please remember me in your prayers.

In Christ,

Unworthy Priest Seraphim, who prays for you his unworthy prayers.

¹ [The Mystery before time began explained, and how man can become a god explained - in one hymn. \(mp3 format\)](http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/theotokos_2017+mystery-hidden-from-before-time-began_doxasticon.mp3)
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SYNOPSIS: Exegesis of a Doxastikon (theological hymn of praise about the Theotokos and the incarnation) for the feast of the Annunciation, which was sung on the Eve of the Saturday of Lazarus. This hymn links the two feasts, and all the great feasts. It is the "mystery hidden from before time began", and explain exactly what the incarnation accomplished. We never think of the Theotokos without the incarnation, and what the incarnation consisted of and what it accomplished - sinful man can become a god! We explain this audacious, but scriptural transformation - from a deceived man, a failure, to a god. This hymn is one of the best examples, but still only one of hundreds which explain the incarnation and salvation to the faithful who read the services and are zealous to hear the hymns, interrupting their daily routines in order to hear about the bread from heaven. 2017-04-07

² Psalm 81:6 (Sept) I said: Ye are gods, and all of you the sons of the Most High.

John 10:34 KJV Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?

³ Genesis 1:26-27 KJV And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. (27) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

⁴ Luke 17:20-21 KJV And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: (21) Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.