

The Apostle

The Monthly Magazine of St Aidan's Orthodox Church,
Henderson Street, Levenshulme, Manchester M19 2JX

Dear friends

Before Pascha

Nobody should be under any illusion that the journey to Pascha is anything other than extremely demanding. In the approach to Great and Holy Week, we do well to remember that we are treading on the Way of the Cross, way of Sorrows. The services are long and often quite mournful. The aim is not to present a divine drama as a spectacle but rather

to challenge us every step of the way. Am I the one that shouts: "Hosanna," or in truth as a sinner, the one that shouts: "Crucify Him?" Both are true, but perhaps we tend to emphasise the first and not the second acclamation. As Thomas Merton wrote, there are indeed no innocent bystanders. However, the purpose of these services is not to make us feel depressed, but rather to



confront us with our true selves so that we might change. This is the positive aspect of Great and Holy Week, to come out of these services reborn to our true God-intended selves in a deeper and enduring spirit of repentance.

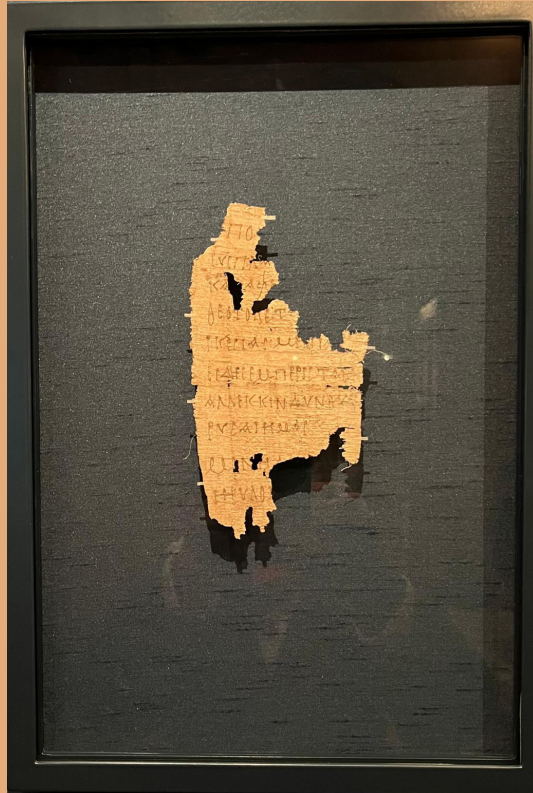


After Pascha

In a sense, there is no such thing as “after Pascha”. Aside from the fact that Pascha as a liturgical observance lasts 50 days until Pentecost; every day of our Christian lives is a continuous Pascha. We run the race of discipleship to attain to the imperishable wreath of the crown of glory. Having learnt the truth of the need for continual repentance, we find, as we go forward daily in the power of the Holy Spirit, that we are continually being raised up - insofar as we can, by the transformative grace of God, practice humility and love for all. Christ has led; and there we must follow to an empty tomb; not just His tomb but our empty tomb as well. The old wine gives way to the new: death to life, despair to hope, egotism to sacrificial love. To quote St. Augustine, “We are an Easter people and ‘Alleluia!’ is our song”.

- Fr Gregory

*On exhibition in John Rylands Library
Manchester, until September*

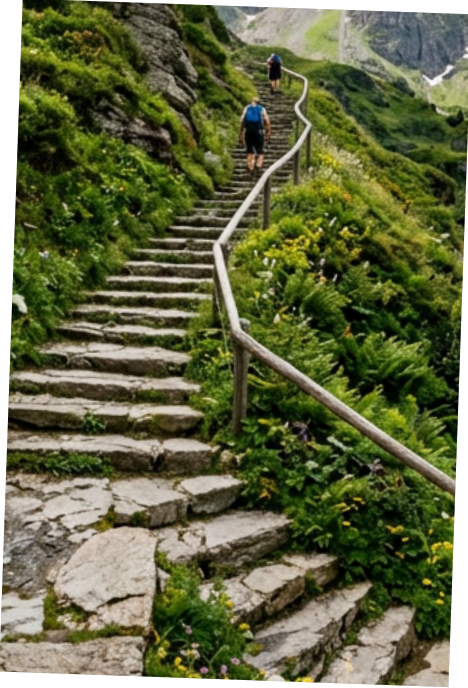


The earliest known prayer that refers to Mary as Theotokos:

**“Beneath thy compassion we take refuge
O Theotokos**

**Do not despise our petitions in time of trouble
But rescue us from dangers
Only Pure, only Blessed one.**

Holy Week: The Final Ladder To Passion, Burial & Resurrection



In Apostle's last volume I suggested that Lent as unfolding in the liturgical book of Triodion is a six-steps ladder preparing the faithful, week after week, for the Holy Week and its culmination: Christ's Resurrection. These six steps, it was explained, are distinct virtues, one for the six Lenten weeks apiece: something to focus on in the relevant week, something to carry forward for the remaining. Self-restraint/gradual harnessing of passions, charitable forgiveness,

repentance as choice of lifting our and the Lord's Cross, humility as a choice to imitate His Utter Humility, resistance against evil thoughts so that we do not end up cast out from Him like Adam and Eve, longsuffering/empathy as expressions of firm faith for the eternal "things to come" are the spiritual foundations upon which the faithful, individually and as a local body of Christ, coach themselves week after week in Lent.

Holy Week 2026 is "ante portas"! And it may also be "read" as a six-days "revision" of our Lenten study before the crucial "Resurrection exams". Day after day, the Lenten ladder is repeated in a starker, bolder way as Lenten weeks' impersonal virtues (individual spiritual goals), are now seen in and measured by Christ and His Old Testament harbingers. For example, first Lenten week's theme of temperance is repeated on Holy and Great Monday with the commemoration of the "all-good Joseph", patriarch Jacob's 11th and favourite child. Joseph, after being sold as a slave in Egypt

by his envious brothers, resisted against committing adultery with his master's wife (temperance!), for which he was slandered by her and unfairly imprisoned for a decade. Nevertheless, after deciphering king Pharaoh's dream of the seven skinny cows devouring the seven fat ones, he was appointed head of all Egypt (like Minister for Agriculture) and soon unresentfully secured for his father and his brothers' families a good life in Egypt before a seven-year's drought and famine devastated their homeland Canaan and beyond. This way, Joseph is brought forward to remind us of what Jesus suffered and is to suffer again in the current year's Holy Week; also one virtue of many WE need to focus on (TEMPERANCE!) to get appropriately prepared to imitate and worthily meet Him in the Holy Chalice of the night of His Resurrection after having experienced glimpses of His suffering for us all.

Below is a handy table juxtaposing Lenten weeks with Holy Week days, one after the other, with some characteristic hymns underlining similarities and motivating us to live Holy Week by our suffering Lord's side – not as observers or, God forbid, Judases. In case any

of us (the author included) have failed to fully ascend the Lenten ladder by getting stuck on any of its steps (or not even starting with it), gracious Lord gives us His Holy Week to catch up with. We may feel ashamed that we are huffing and puffing to get in line with those who diligently started from Clean Monday and carried on immaculately. But here's the Lord's parable of the vineyard labourers of the 1st, 3rd even the 11th hour, who all received an equal reward. For as St John Chrysostom points out in his Paschal sermon, "the Lord accepts the last even as the first; He gives rest unto him who comes at the eleventh hour, even as unto



him who has wrought from the first hour. He shows mercy upon the

last, and cares for the first; and to the one He gives, and upon the other He bestows gifts. And He both accepts the deeds, and welcomes the intention, and honours the acts and praises the offering”.

May He give us this spirit so that all together, yet again this year, happily hear his voice: “Wherefore, enter you all into the joy of your Lord; and receive your reward, both the first, and likewise the second. You rich and poor together, hold high festival. You sober and you heedless, honour the day. Rejoice today, both you who have fasted and you who have disregarded the fast. The table is full-laden; feast ye all sumptuously. The calf is fattened; let no one go hungry away!” Amen!

LENT		HOLY WEEK		
WEEK	THEME	DAY	THEME	
1st	Passion temperance; self-restraint	Holy & Great Monday	Joseph the all- good	(Jacob’s 11th child, sold in Egypt as a slave, he resisted his Egyptian master’s wife’s immoral advances) - The by-the-Lord cursed and withered fig tree
2nd	Forgiveness as an act of charity	Holy & Great Tuesday	The parable of the Ten Virgins	The parable of the Ten Virgins (Virginity out of self- restraint is useless if not combined with charity) Secondarily: The parable of the talents (To him who knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin. James, 4, 17)

LENT	HOLY WEEK		
WEEK	THEME	DAY	THEME
3rd	<p>Repentance as a choice to follow Jesus lifting our crosses</p> <p>(Prodigal son parable)</p>	Holy & Great Wednesday	<p>The harlot who anointed the Lord with myrrh (Harlot, in the scriptures, is not only a “she” but a “he” too; it is anyone alienating themselves from God. The prodigal is a harlot too, for, before repenting, he led a life together with other harlots, professionals and non-alike)</p>
4th	<p>Humility as a choice of complete imitation of His Utter Humility</p> <p>(Publican & Pharisee parable)</p>	Holy & Great (Maundy) Thursday	<p>The Holy Basin (Jesus washes His disciples’ feet) The Mystical Supper Lord’s prayer after the Mystical Supper Judas’s betrayal</p>
5th	<p>Battling devil’s evil thoughts</p> <p>(Good Samaritan parable)</p>	Holy & Great (Good) Friday	<p>The awesome, holy, and saving Passion of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ (The Good Samaritan shoulders the lost sheep and offers Himself an eternal sacrifice for its salvation) The saving confession of the grateful Robber crucified with Him (The half-dead man of the Good Samaritan’s parable is saved)</p>

LENT		HOLY WEEK	
WEEK	THEME	DAY	THEME
6th	Alms, Longsuffering, Lazarus's rising from the dead (Rich man and Lazarus parable)	Holy & Great Saturday	The burial of the divine Body and the descent into Hades of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, through which He recalled our human race from corruption and passed it over into life eternal (Jesus takes Lazarus's place in Hades to "baptise" all humans' souls incarcerated therein with His Divine Light, evangelise Life in God's Light, purge them and invite them to join Him in Paradise)



Bread & Water, Wine and Oil

An Orthodox Experience of God

By Father Meletios Weber (Ancient Faith, 2007)

Bread & Water, Wine & Oil 🍷🍞

AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE OF GOD



Archimandrite Meletios Weber 🙏

This rather profound book about “Life as Mystery” and “The Mysteries of the Church” begins by pointing out that: “In everyday English, the word ‘mystery’ implies a puzzle to be solved, a conundrum to be unraveled.... In the East, on the other hand, a mystery is an area where the human mind cannot penetrate, where the heart alone makes sense—not by knowing but by being...Having arrived, all you can do is gaze and wonder; there is nothing to solve” [p. 9].

“Everyday substances—oil,

water, bread, wine—together with simple actions—offering, blessing, washing, anointing—are the means by which God intervenes in our lives... These interventions, in which God does all the work and our ... contribution is to be prepared and present, color and shape our lives beyond the extent that would be possible in any human encounter... The Mysteries lead us deeper and deeper into the Mystery which is the presence of God Himself” [p. 10].

“We are all ‘in training’ spiritually, and the rhythm of feasts and fasts of the Orthodox Church allows us to intersperse rigorous periods of training with other times that are more relaxed. Lent and Holy Week together constitute the training period par excellence of the Church, with its own unique qualities and opportunities. This period is preceded and followed by weeks when we do not fast at all. However, the opposite of fasting is never self-indulgence, and feasting certainly need never be an occasion of decadence” [p. 72].

“Another distinctive feature of Orthodox life is ‘physical’ prayer...

In the writings of the saints of the Church we are often reminded that prayer actually involves our bodies in many ways. In the West there is a tendency to regard prayer as a mental exercise, to use imagination and thought to attempt to reach God using mental powers. In the Orthodox tradition this is not so. The Fathers recognise the inability of the human mind to help much in this process, given its fallen state and its divorce from the heart. For Orthodox, prayer is actually a matter of going deeper and deeper into the body, not of trying to escape it." [p. 76]

"As a Church, we look forward to resurrection, not just to immortality. The body is going with us as we get closer and closer to God, even though it is bound to undergo transformation, sometimes drastic transformation along the path. It is no accident then that our bodies take part in the Holy Mysteries since they are intimately involved with our salvation. For these reasons, physical prayer becomes more and more important as we grow in awareness of our relationship with God" [p. 77].

"Orthodoxy is nothing less than a relationship with God. At a profound and instinctive level, the Orthodox Church recognizes itself as the Body of Christ. With that in mind

Orthodoxy is the expression of the way God interacts with His people. In other words, Orthodoxy is the way God relates to the Church as the Body of Christ, the way He relates to each individual within it, and conversely a way by which people may interact and interrelate with God" [pp. 29-30].

In Part 2, Chapter 11, "The Mystery of Confession and Forgiveness" Father Meletios reflects that: "If Holy Communion is at the center of this life-giving experience [of God], the mystery of confession finds us at the outermost layers of our Christian life. Here we as individuals stand as outsiders seeking admittance, or rather readmittance, into the kingdom of heaven. Confession... only makes real sense in terms of eternal life and the ways of the kingdom. In this as in every other mystery of the Church we see the kingdom emerging into our fallen dimension. This is yet another example of the [drive] of God's eternity into our time" [Part 2, p. 147].

This book review has covered only 8 pages in this challenging book. Take a look at it on the bookstall and consider (as I will) reading much more of it.

- Father Emmanuel

A Guide to Holy Week and Pascha in the Orthodox Church

The Services of Great and Holy Week are many and a rich source of salvation in our lives through the power and operation of the Holy Spirit. Through them we become more closely conformed to Christ through whom we receive the death destroying life of Pascha from the Father. Here follows a very short guide to the services we shall celebrate this year.

On Great and Holy Monday and Tuesday we serve the Bridegroom Matins. This puts our hearts in readiness to receive Christ the Bridegroom who will come perhaps when we least expect. We must always be prepared to greet him by watchfulness and prayer.

On Great and Holy Wednesday evening we serve the Unction Service of Healing. Hearing the 7 gospels and imploring the healing grace of Christ we are anointed and made whole.

On Great and Holy and Thursday at the Liturgy we celebrate our Lord's Institution of the Eucharist in the Vespereal Liturgy. (*NOTE: We serve all Vespereal Liturgies in the evenings*).

On Great and Holy Friday at Matins we proclaim the 12 Passion Gospels. In this service the holy and life-giving cross is installed in the nave. (This service is served on Holy Friday morning). At Vespers (mid-afternoon) we take down the image of our Lord from the Cross and place it in a white shroud in the altar. Shortly afterwards the burial epitaphion is solemnly processed into the nave where the icon of the crucified Christ is venerated with great devotion. At Matins later in the same evening, we sing the solemn but joyful funeral chant for our Lord and process with his icon in the epitaphion outside the Church. The people walk under the epitaphion as they come into Church to signify that through the cross they have passed from death to life. They then venerate the gospel book and receive a flower from the epitaphion (venerated at the end of the service).

Great and Holy Saturday sees the beginning of the Paschal Vigil - We begin to celebrate the resurrection victory of Christ our God and particularly see this as a fulfilment of the great promise of redemption in the Law and the Prophets proclaimed in the Old Testament Readings. The vestments are all changed from purple to white/gold at the beginning of the Paschal Vigil. Baptisms and /or chrismations often take place in this service after the Vespereal part.

After Vespers, the Baptisms and Chrismations, we read from the Acts of the Apostles. Pascha marks the beginning of the new Israel of God, the Church. We then serve the Night Office which prepares us to enter into the joy of the Paschal victory. Afterwards we process around the temple, enter and celebrate the resurrection with "Christ is Risen!" in many languages - concluding with the famous Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom. There then follows Paschal Matins and the Paschal Liturgy. *You should not go home at this point but rather stay for the Liturgy.*

The Agape Party follows the morning Paschal Liturgy. There are no other services on Sunday later in the day. You may need to sleep in!

- Fr Gregory, Fr Emmanuel, Fr Daniel, Fr Stavros & Fr Deacon Alexey



from a Paschal homily by Melito of Sardis

There was much proclaimed by the prophets about the mystery of the Passover: that mystery is Christ, and to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

For the sake of suffering humanity he came down from heaven to earth, clothed himself in that humanity in the Virgin's womb, and was born a man. Having then a body capable of suffering, he took the pain of fallen man upon himself; he triumphed over the diseases of soul and body that were its cause, and by his Spirit, which was incapable of dying, he dealt man's destroyer, death, a fatal blow. He was led forth like a lamb; he was slaughtered like a sheep. He ransomed us from our servitude to the world, as he had ransomed Israel from the hand of Egypt; he freed us from our slavery to the devil, as he had freed Israel from the hand of Pharaoh. He sealed our souls with his own Spirit, and the members of our body with his own blood.

He is the One who covered death with shame and cast the devil into mourning, as Moses cast Pharaoh into mourning. He is the One that smote sin and robbed iniquity of offspring, as Moses robbed the

Egyptians of their offspring. He is the One who brought us out of slavery into freedom, out of darkness into light, out of death into life, out of tyranny into an eternal kingdom, who made us a new priesthood, a people chosen to be his own for ever. He is the Passover that is our salvation. It is he who endured every kind of suffering in all those who foreshadowed him. In Abel he was slain, in Isaac bound, in Jacob exiled, in Joseph sold, in Moses exposed to die. He was sacrificed in the Passover lamb, persecuted in David, dishonoured in the prophets. It is he who was made man of the Virgin, he who was hung on the tree; it is he who was buried in the earth, raised from the dead, and taken up to the heights of heaven. He is the mute lamb, the slain lamb born of Mary, the fair ewe. He was seized from the flock, dragged off to be slaughtered, sacrificed in the evening, and buried at night. On the tree no bone of his was broken; in the earth his body knew no decay. He is the One who rose from the dead, and who raised man from the depths of the tomb..

Reflection -

Crossing the Threshold of Pascha

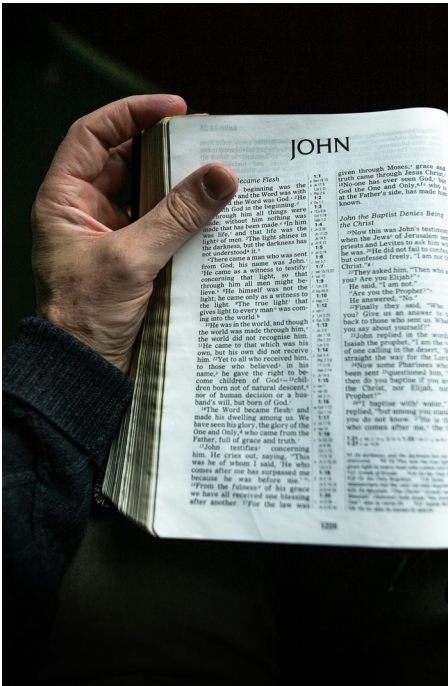
Pascha has always felt, for me, like stepping onto holy ground, a moment when the heart recognises that something in the world is shifting, even before the light breaks through. In the quiet before midnight, I often feel the weight of my own life most clearly: the sorrows I carry, the hopes I barely name, the longing for renewal. And then, almost without noticing the exact moment, that heaviness softens. The darkness feels less final. The first "Christ is Risen" reaches me like a hand from beyond the veil, steady and familiar, reminding me that death is not an ending but a passage into God's life. Each year, I'm struck by how gentle that passage feels. It isn't dramatic or distant, it's a quiet turning of the heart, a small step toward the Kingdom that Christ has already opened for us. And I know I'm not alone in that experience. At church, I see the same movement in others: the softening of faces in candlelight, the way we breathe together as the church fills with the hymn of the Resurrection, the shared sense that something in us is being lifted. Pascha gathers

us, not as perfect people, but as people who are learning to hope again.

And perhaps that is what stays with me most: the way Pascha reminds us that we are already walking toward God's Kingdom, even when we feel lost or tired. Christ meets us long before we reach the gate. He meets us in our grief, in our joy, in our ordinary days, and in the quiet courage of showing up together as a parish family. The light that breaks the dark at Pascha is not only a promise for the end of life, it is a promise for now, for every step we take, and for the life we are learning to share in Him.



Chronology of the Gospel of John



the Holy Trinity: "No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained" (1st chapter, verse 18).

Even the author himself makes it explicitly clear that: a) the visible purpose of his writings is to persuade his readers that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son and Word of God, and b) the intended purpose is the inheritance of eternal Life through this faith-conviction: "And these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (chapter 20, verse 31).

Besides, he admits that he did not record in his gospel all that Jesus did or said, because he neither had such a purpose nor could humanly do it: "And there are many other things that Jesus did, Which, if it be written in each one, I think the world itself is not to contain the books to be written" (Chapter 21, verse 25).

Below it is a chronological list of Jesus's activity according to John, which, hopefully, may prove useful in our reading along this Eastertide and others to come! Possible questions/queries may find

It is, perhaps, well known that during Eastertide, daily read Gospel passages are drawn from the Gospel according to John the Theologian.

This gospel is "peculiar". In what sense? It is not, like the other three, a detailed narration of the events of Jesus' public activity, from His Baptism to His Ascension. On the contrary, it is articulated on relatively few events (most of them not recorded in the rest gospels), during which Jesus explains, analyses and reveals the mystery of

their answer, and our knowledge of Jesus's public activity become firmer and more sensible! Following Jesus step by step, we go back in time and "become" one of His true followers-Disciples; what an honour! Besides, it is useful to know the "when" and "why" of His teachings and miracles, the context within they were delivered and performed.

Following His teachings (especially those comprising the 1st of the 12 gospels of the Passion Service) and applying them to our daily life makes us even worthier. For as He said "Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity" (Matthew, 7, 21-23). Who have they been? Only Him knows, except one we all know: Judas!

Happy Eastertide!

- Fr. Stavros

TIMELINE

Day 1

- *Pharisees' question to John the Baptist if he is the Messiah (since he has already baptized Jesus Christ and since Jesus Christ has fasted for forty days and has returned to the world)*

Day 2 and 3 (after the first)

- *Calling of the first disciples (John the Baptist's former students as well as Philip and Nathanael)*

Day 4 (3rd according to the excerpt, probably after the call)

- *Miracle in the Wedding in Cana of Galilee (First Miracle in Galilee)*
- *Few days (after the miracle of Cana) Jesus, the Theotokos and His disciples short stay in Capernaum*

1st Easter of Public Activity of Jesus

- *Expulsion of sellers and money changers from Solomon's Temple*
- *Many signs by Jesus to credit His actions*
- *Conversation with Nicodemus*

After the 1st Easter of public activity of Jesus & before the imprisonment of the Forerunner

- *In Judea Jesus's disciples baptize more than the Forerunner*
- *The Pharisees (Jews) envy Him, thus Jesus departs for Galilee*
- *On the way to Galilee, he converses*

with a Samaritan woman in Sychar

- *He stays there for two days and then leaves for Galilee*

Two days after Sychar

- *He arrives at Galilee (Capernaum) where He encounters the*
- *His compatriots' doubt, despite them having seen the signs*
- *He had recently done in Jerusalem*
- *He heals the son of a royal official (second miracle in Galilee)*

Shortly after

Feast in Jerusalem (Pentecost?)

Healing of the Paralytic by the Bethesda pool on Saturday

Teachings

- *Shortly before the 2nd Easter of public activity Jesus Fed the five thousand men with five loaves and two fish*
- *Teaching about heavenly bread in a synagogue in Capernaum*

After the 2nd Easter of Jesus's public activity– Shortly before the feast of Tabernacle (lasting seven days, end of September-beginning of October)

- *Jesus in Galilee, not Judea, because the Jews wanted to kill Him*
- *Feast of Tabernacles after the 2nd Easter of the public activity of Jesus Jesus teaches, on the fourth day of the seven-day feast of Tabernacles, in the Temple about the meaning of the Sabbath holiday and, in general,*

the observance of the Law

Jesus teaches, on the last day of the seven-day feast of Tabernacles, about the coming of the Holy Spirit

- *One day after the feast of Tabernacle and/or a few days after*
- *Jesus in the Temple and Jerusalem*
- *The incident with the adulterous woman*
- *Jesus' Teachings and Testimonies About Himself*
- *Attempt to stone Him (1st)*
- *Healing of the congenital Blind by the Siloam pool*
- *Teaching about the Good Shepherd*
- *Consecration Feast (Hannukah) (winter before the Passion: December 21-29)*

Jesus in the Temple and Jerusalem

- *Jesus' Teachings and Testimonies About Himself*
- *Attempt to stone Him (2nd)*

Between Hannukah and a little before Passion

- *Jesus departs from Jerusalem and stays near the Jordan, where John began baptizing*
- *Resurrection of Lazarus*
- *Decision to kill Him by the Jewish Council (Sanhedrin)*
- *Jesus takes refuge in the city of Ephraim, located near the Jordan Desert and about 30 km in a straight line from Jerusalem*

- *Six days before Easter of the 3rd year of Jesus's public activity*
- *Bethany Supper (about 8 km from Jerusalem), incantation of Jesus by Mary, sister of Lazarus*

Five days before Easter of the 3rd year of Jesus's public activity

- *Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem*
- *Two days before Easter of the 3rd year of Jesus's public activity*
- *Jesus washes His disciples' feet*
- *Last Supper*
- *Latest Teachings to the disciples*
- *Jesus's Prayer to His Father*
- *Gethsemane agony*
- *Peter denying Jesus three times*

One day before Easter of the 3rd year of Jesus's public activity

- *Interrogation by Pilate*
- *Crucifixion*
- *Deposition from the Cross*
- *Burial*

One day after the Passover of the 3rd year of Jesus's public activity

- *Resurrection from the dead*
- *Morning: Jesus's appearance to Mary Magdalene in the garden, where the Tomb was*
- *Evening: Jesus's appearance in a room at the presence of ten of the twelve Disciples (Judas had already committed suicide; Thomas, for an unknown reason, was absent)*

Eight days after Jesus's Resurrection

- *Jesus's appearance to Thomas and the rest of His disciples (2nd appearance in front of His disciples)*

A few weeks after Jesus' Resurrection and before His Ascension

- *Jesus's appearance to seven of His Disciples in the Sea of Tiberias (3rd appearance in front of His Disciples)*
- *Miraculous fishing of 153 large fish*
- *Peter's Restoration to the Apostolic Office*



A Light for All to See

God gave me a love for drawing and painting as a child, but when I drifted from the faith in my early teens, that part of me faded and was replaced by interests that were influenced by society.

Since returning to the Church, I've experienced healing through God's grace, and that love for creating has been restored.

In May 2025, I began wood carving and have loved the process of getting better at this skill. I try to carve the saints and ask for their prayers to guide my tools!

- Moses (Matthew)



**St. Gregory
the Theologian**



**St. Gregory
the theologian**