

THE ORTHODOX MESSENGER

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The Resurrection of Christ and the Rise of Christianity

IT WAS THE WOMEN disciples of Jesus who first heard the Gospel of new life from within the tomb. As prominent New Testaments scholars...point out, the discovery of the tomb by a group of women—the holy Myrrhbearers—is a very convincing piece of evidence for the veracity of the canonical Gospels' account of the initial discovery of the empty tomb. This is because the witness of women was not binding according to the Law in first century Judaism. The early Church would not have imaginatively given the privilege of discovering the empty tomb to witnesses who unfortunately were thought to be unreliable. In fact, according to Luke 24:11, the apostles initially thought that their words were “an idle tale.” (Did the apostles ever get anything right until they saw the Risen Lord and began to believe in Him?) With the *kerygmatic* proclamation of the angel from within the tomb, we are introduced into the Good News that has changed the world once and for all: “Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, Who was crucified. He has risen, He is not here; see the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him, as He told you” [Mark 16:6-7]. This sets the stage for the appearances of the Risen Christ to His disciples.

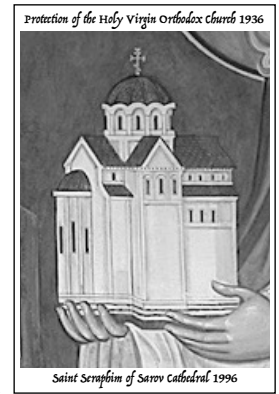
SOMETHING HAS TO ACCOUNT for the evident transformation of Christ's disciples. They are portrayed in the Gospels in a painfully unflattering manner, based not only on their obtuseness during the ministry of Christ, but also on their cowardly failing to remain with Him in the hour of His suffering and death. They literally abandoned their Master, and Peter openly denied even knowing Him. But in a very short span of time, those very disciples were transformed into apostles who would carry the Gospel to the “ends of the earth.” At the very heart of that Gospel was that Jesus had overcome death itself by His Resurrection, thus inaugurating a new creation and the promise of eternal life with God: “But God raised Him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it” [Acts 2:24]. The disciples were crushed by the brutal and “cursed” death of their Master, and together with Him of their hope that Jesus was the

Messiah. They were found to be hiding behind closed doors for “fear of the Jews” [John 20:19].

For them, the messianic movement centered in Jesus was as dead as He apparently was lying in the tomb. A crucified, dead and buried Messiah was not only meaningless, but completely incoherent from the Jewish perspective. Something of great significance must have happened to make any sense of the disciples' newfound faith, boldness and, finally, willingness to give their own lives for what they would proclaim to the world. Conspiracies and/or collective hallucinations are inept explanations that are now treated as more or less eccentric theories. (Most of these “theories” cancel each other out, so one is left with one choice or another).

In their desire to maintain objectivity, but to also make some sense of the evidence provided to them, historians and scholars must face this historically unprecedented and baffling mystery of the origins of the Christian movement. For all of the “data” tells us that this movement should never have even started! When they carefully examine the evidence and try and come to some conclusions as to the foundational cause of this new faith centered in Jesus of Nazareth—a condemned criminal put to death by the authority of the Roman Empire in the relatively remote and insignificant area of first century Judea—these very historians and scholars must provide a convincing alternative theory if they are not willing to accept the claim that Jesus was raised from the dead. A fair question then forms itself naturally: taking into account the beliefs of first century Judaism concerning the possibility of a crucified Messiah, issues of “life after death,” and the Jewish belief in the resurrection from the dead at the end of time; just how convincing are any of those alternative theories? Perhaps that is why some major New Testament scholars, such as E. P. Sanders, without committing themselves to an active faith in the Resurrection of Christ, are at least conceding that the disciples of Christ were convinced that they saw Him alive following His death on the cross. And that they then acted on that conviction.

...I do not believe that Christians should attempt to



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compel faith in Christ by a careful gathering of the evidence concerning Christ's resurrection from the dead. This is not a courtroom trial. And Christian faith is not based upon the "jury's" verdict. A commitment to Christ as the Crucified and Risen One who has "trampled down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life" begins with faith, based on trusting the witness of the apostles of Christ—a witness that they were prepared to die for. This trust slowly begins to transform each Christian so that that faith is a living and personal faith. As that faith matures, all Christians may reach a point when they can make their own the words of the Apostle Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me" [Galatians 2:20]. Yet, the Christian claim is that God acts within human history, that He enters into the time and space of our world to create, sustain and redeem us as the Lord of history Who has prepared a glorious future for us. The ultimate manifestation of that divine activity within the world is revealed in the Incarnation of the eternal Son of God. And His death and Resurrection from the dead fulfills the promises of God as He remains faithful to His faithless people throughout history. This historical aspect of our Christian faith means, to repeat again, that any

historical evidence that can disprove the Resurrection of Christ would immediately and definitively undermine that faith. But no such evidence exists. On the contrary, it points us toward the genuineness and authenticity of those very claims—incredible and "unbelievable" that they may initially appear. —*excerpt from an article by Fr. Steven Kostoff*

NEW MEDIA EPIDEMIC

Spiritual life...requires what is traditionally called *recollection*, the capacity to turn all one's faculties inward, away from the world, there in one's heart to unite and consecrate them to God in meditation and prayer. Recollection is the stage of preparation for prayer that precedes concentration. But as we have seen, the **new media** [cell phones, tablets, internet, etc] push man's faculties in the opposite sense, always outwards toward the world. They are dispersed by a stream of discordant nagging that cuts the soul in pieces, and destroys the unity and identity of the inner man. The new media encourage strongly two elements of ancestral sin: (1) the loss of the inner unity of the faculties, which once were united in knowledge of God and doing His Will, dispersing them among physical objects and their representations (thoughts, memories, and images), or the desires and passions that they arouse; (2) the resulting division, chopping up, and inner dispersion, which, according to St Maximus the Confessor, "breaks human nature into a thousand fragments." As other holy ascetics have said, the intelligence [attention/nous] is then constantly distracted, floating, erring, and wandering here and there in a state of permanent agitation, quite the opposite of the deep peace it experienced in its former contemplation. The thoughts that once were united and concentrated become manifold and multifarious, spreading out in a ceaseless flow. They divide and disperse, leaking out in every direction, dragging and dividing the whole being of man in their wake. This leads St Maximus the Confessor to speak of: "the scattering of the soul amongst outer forms according to the appearance of sensory things," for the soul becomes multiple in the image of this sensory multiplicity...which is simply an illusion... Stirred up and excited by a multitude of passions, they pull in many directions, often opposed, at once, and make of man a being divided at every level. This process of the fall of man, described by the Church Fathers of Late Antiquity, continues today faster than ever, driven on by the new media. They offer such a rich and speedy flow of temptations that they multiply the sensory objects that attract the senses... —*Jean-Claude Larchet, from his latest book*

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **MANY THANKS** to all who made Holy Week and Pascha so wonderful: the many faithful who came to services, those who cleaned every day, those who decorated the church, those who sang and served, the ushers and sacristans, the scripture readers, those who prepared the Hall and the Paschal BBQ, those who came from far and wide to be here. As Matushka Esther remarked: “our parish has so many talented people.” Amen to that.
- **WE OFFER OUR** condolences to the Basch and Dean families on the repose of Lucy Dean, Vicky’s mother on Bright Monday. There is always sadness when someone departs this life, but, in this case especially, there is great hope and assurance in that Lucy confessed and communed on Pascha day, and reposed exactly eighteen years after her own mother died. The Bright Week funeral will be on Friday, May 3 at 10 AM, with the burial in Colma. Bright Week funerals are comprised mostly of Paschal hymns.
- **ON TUESDAY, May 7,** we will visit the cemeteries to sing memorial and Paschal hymns at the graves. I will begin at Pleasant Hill Cemetery in Sebastopol at 10 AM, then move on to Forestville by 10:45 AM, then Healdsburg by 11:45–Noon, then Windsor by 1:30 and conclude at Santa Rosa Memorial at 2:30 PM. The blessing of graves the week after Bright Week is called “Radonitsa” the “Day of Rejoicing.” During Holy Week and Bright Week we do not serve memorial services (excepting funerals) so that we may focus on Christ’s passion and glorious resurrection. The Tuesday following Thomas Sunday is the day designated on which we begin to sing memorials. —Fr. Lawrence
- **WE OFFER CONDOLENCES** to Carl and Eleni on the repose of his mother, Imogene Marie Collard, born September 7, 1925 in Michigan, reposed April 18 in Healdsburg; buried in Ukiah on Friday, May 3. May the Lord grant her rest, and consolation to the family.
- **THE REDWOOD EMPIRE FOOD BANK** is held on the second Wednesday each month—May 8. Volunteers, please arrive around 5 PM to help set up. This Food Bank is an important way in which our parish does outreach to the community. Come and participate.
- **I WILL BE** in Southern California for a Diocesan Clergy Retreat from May 21–23. We are very blessed to have as our speaker for this retreat Archimandrite Maximos (Constas). From May 21–June 4 I will be in Phoenix to lead a one day choir workshop at our OCA Parish of St. John the Theologian in Tempe on Saturday, June 1. On Sunday, June 2 I will have the joy of serving with Bishop Daniel at his parish of Sts. Peter and Paul, and then on Monday will enjoy a brief visit to the Monastery of St. Paisius. —Fr. Lawrence
- **OUR SAINT SERAPHIM** week is coming up, June 10–14. See Gloria Collins for more information.
- **ON SUNDAY, MAY 26,** a bride and groom from out-of-town will be married in St. Seraphim Cathedral at 2:15 PM (a couple from St. Timothy in Fairfield). On the same day, at 3 PM, the Hall and grounds have been rented for a 50th birthday party.
- **LOOKING AHEAD:** Matins for Leave-taking of Pascha will be celebrated on Tuesday, June 4. Vigil for the Feast of Ascension will be celebrated on Wednesday, June 5 at 6:15 PM, and the Divine Liturgy for Ascension on Thursday, June 6, at 9 AM. Let’s plan ahead so as many as possible can come to together for these holy days to celebrate the work of salvation of our Savior.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

...our responsibility, but also our God-given prerogative, is to be co-healers and co-saviors with Christ. To be a Christian has never meant to sit back, pray, and hope God will act; to be a Christian has always meant to become transparent for God to work through our hands and feet and mouths and bring healing grace to the downtrodden and suffering of this world. St. Paul captures this image best when he writes: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). True Christianity is restless and uncomfortable Christianity, fashioned after Him who never slumbers nor ceases working out our salvation (cf. Psalm 120:4). —*Fr. Stelyios Muksuris*

Christian joy is aware of the pain and tragedy of life, but it is equally aware of the promise of salvation brought to man and confirmed on Easter. This spirit of life and joy radiates from within a person. Christ speaks of this when He says: “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven.” This joyful radiance, sustained by the Liturgy and the Feasts (They are in many ways the same thing), and made possible by the Resurrection, is Christianity. —*George Koulomzin*

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

MAY 2019

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|---|--|--|--|--|---|
| April 28 – PASCHA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 AM, Matins and Liturgy • 11 AM, Clean up • 1 PM, Paschal Vespers and Potluck BBQ | 29 – Bright Monday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Paschal Matins and Divine Liturgy (Archbishop Benjamin here) • Agape Meal to follow | 30 – Bright Tuesday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 PM, Paschal Vespers | 1 – Bright Wednesday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In SF at Holy Trinity, Divine Liturgy at 10 AM</i> | 2– Bright Thursday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 PM, Paschal Vespers | 3 – Bright Friday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 PM, Paschal Vespers | 4 – Bright Saturday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Paschal Divine Liturgy • 5 PM, Great Vespers |
| 5 – Thomas Sunday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • Noon, Agape Meal | 6 | 7 – Radonitsa <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blessing of Graves 10 AM, Sebastopol 10:45, Forestville 11:45, Healdsburg 1:30, Windsor 2:30, Santa Rosa | 8–St. John the Theologian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy • 5 PM, Food Bank • 6 PM, Vespers | 9 <i>Feast Day of St. Nicholas Parish in Saratoga</i> | 10 | 11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Great Vespers |
| 12 – Myrrhbearing Women <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Sun School • Noon, Agape Meal | 13 | 14 [Fr Lawrence in SF for meetings all day] | 15 [Fr Lawrence in SF for meetings all day] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 PM, Vespers | 16 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 PM, Parish Council Meeting | 17 | 18 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 AM, Baptism of Elizabeth Tennyson, daughter of Peter and Natasha • 5 PM, Great Vespers |
| 19 – Paralytic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Sun School • Noon, Agape Meal | 20 | 21 No Vespers <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px; text-align: center;"> <i>Fr Lawrence and Dcn John at Clergy Retreat in Alhambra</i> </div> | 22 – Mid-feast No Services today | 23 | 24 | 25 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Great Vespers |
| 26 – Samaritan Woman <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Sun School • Noon, Agape Meal • 2 PM, <i>Wedding</i> • 3 PM, <i>Hall Rented for Birthday Party</i> | 27 | 28 | 29 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 PM, Vespers | 30 | 31 <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px; text-align: center;"> <i>Fr Lawrence in Phoenix until Tuesday</i> </div> | June 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Great Vespers |