

THE NARTHEX

The believers were first called Christians at Antioch
ACTS. 9:26

February - March 2012

The Orthodox Church of St. Dunstan Poole-Bournemouth
The Antiochian Orthodox Deanery of The United Kingdom and Ireland
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East
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ARE YOU READY YET?

One of the most powerful images used to explain the relationship between Christ and his Church is that of a marriage. The Book of the Apocalypse (never read in the Orthodox Church lectionary) has the words, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." [Apoc.21:2]. The city is identified further on as the bride, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." [verse 9]. Earlier on, in chapter 19, the revealing angel says to the writer, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." The book itself (and of course, the whole Bible, therefore) ends with the Spirit and the Bride calling on Christ to come, not just to consummate the marriage of God and his people but to bring the whole of human experience to its fulfilment.

This is what we pray for every day in the Lord's Prayer and what we look forward to each time we recite the Nicene Creed - the final coming of Christ in glory for Judgement on the world but with vindication for the faithful.

Planning a marriage takes a great deal of preparation: catering, guest lists, venues... we might add to the list. And on the day itself, if invited, we must dress appropriately, as expected. Anyone who has been married or helped plan for one, or even just been a guest, will know what I mean. But you and I have been invited to the *marriage supper of the Lamb*. Are you ready, yet?

The spiritual implications of this invitation are brought out repeatedly in the gospels. In His parables and in his teaching on the Kingdom of God, Our Lord invites us to be ready to respond to the invitation. It is, at heart, the very mission of His Church on earth to issue the invitation; that is what, in part, we are here for.

There is a curious spiritual link between the central Paschal Mystery in Christianity, our own baptism and the Second Coming of Christ. We think of them in this time-bound world, as three separate themes. In fact, they are all one. Christ's death and resurrection is the consummation of His marriage with his Church. We enter into that New Covenant of marriage when we are baptised. And it is only Time that separates us from that experience of heaven itself.

As we approach Pascha once more through the wilderness of the Great Fast, we are reminding ourselves, still bound in time, of this invitation. You might recall that Holy and Great Week starts with Palm Sunday and then...the Bridegroom Services, Matins for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. The Hymns and readings of those days bring to our attention the Parousia, the Second Coming of Christ. Our Lord is presented to us with the words, 'Behold, the Bridegroom Cometh at midnight and blessed is the servant whom He shall find awake...' Once again, we see the theme of being ready for the marriage yet, at the same time, the icon for those days is none other than the 'Man

of Sorrows' - the Christ who suffers and dies for His Church. At one and the same time we both celebrate liturgically His Passover (Pascha) through death to resurrection and remember the future coming in glory as well. Remembering the future seems at first a paradox - the future is something that has not yet happened. Yet it has, for we have been baptised into this mystery, as St. Paul says, our life is hid with Christ in God. [See: Col.3:1-4]

Once again ('again and again,' as we say in the Liturgy) we act out in symbols on earth the heavenly mysteries. What we pass through in Holy Week is nothing less than the echoes of the very first Pascha of Christ in Jerusalem and, at the same time, a foretaste of the wedding supper of the Lamb itself.

For this reason, aware of the utter solemnity of that event, we can see the terrible seriousness of Great Lent and the obvious question - are you ready, yet?

In origin, the Great Fast was the time when the catechumens prepared for their baptism. Having been betrothed through instruction, exorcism, confession and fasting, the candidates prepared for their 'marriage' and participation in the Lamb's wedding supper. Having died and been raised through baptism, they partook for the very first time of the heavenly table by right. [See: Hebrews 13:10] It was not long before the longstanding members of the Church fasted alongside them by way of encouragement and the profound spiritual value of the season was

firmly established in the mind of the Church. This cyclical renewal of our experience of the life in Christ is important to us whilst still in this world - events, temptations and the very vicissitudes of life all get in the way like weeds in a garden and now the 'weeding' has to begin. However, we do not plunge suddenly into a strange and radical way of life. The liturgical cycle introduces the idea gradually and we enter the fast itself by ordered steps: Fast-Free Week, a normal week, Meatfare Sunday and Meat-free Week, Cheesefare Sunday and then the Fast itself. Meanwhile, the liturgical readings, especially the gospels on Sundays, lead our minds to the essential idea of the season: Repentance. There is so much to be said about that one word but if I were to define repentance from our Orthodox perspective, I would say that in essence it means acquiring the mind of Christ - that is, the continuous turning from what we have received from a fallen world that by grace we may be transfigured in the likeness of God. There is a popular saint in western Christianity (who will remain discretely nameless) who, at the end of his life said, "I am not aware of any sin on my part that I have not redeemed through confession and repentance." From our viewpoint- and the mind of Christ - this appears as spiritual pride at the very least; a kind of presumption that the creature cannot sustain before the Creator. Contrast this with the Orthodox saint, Sisoës the Great (5th Cent.) "Surrounded at the moment of his death by his brethren, at that minute when he was as if conversing with unseen beings, the brothers' asked him, 'Father, tell us, with whom are you conversing?' Sisoës answered, 'They are angels who have come to take me, but I am praying them to leave me for a short time, in order to repent.' At this the brothers, knowing that

Sisoës was perfect in the virtues, protested, 'You have no need to repent, father.' Sisoës replied, 'Truly, I do not know if I have even begun to repent.' Paradoxically, it is the knowledge of ones own imperfection before God that is the very beginning of spiritual perfection - just as the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

Fr. Chrysostom



**Annual General Meeting of
the Bournemouth Poole
Orthodox Christian
Foundation**

**Tuesday 14th February
7.00pm**

At the Church

Although only the Directors and Members will be able to vote on any resolutions, anyone from the congregation is welcome to attend. The annual accounts will be presented and a report made on progress so far. Ideas for future fund-raising etc. will also be discussed.



Prayer during the Great Fast

**O Lord and Master of my life!
Take from me the spirit of sloth,
meddling, lust of power and idle talk.**

[Prostration]

**But give rather the spirit of chastity,
humility, patience and love to Thy
servant.** [Prostration]

**Yea, O Lord and King! Grant me to
see my own sins and not to judge my
brother, for Thou art blessed unto
ages of ages.**

[Prostration]

O God be gracious to me, a sinner.[
12 times with bows]

The Prayer is repeated once again with one prostration at the end.

Remember!

**Fasting without prayer is just
a diet, and prayer with
charity is hypocrisy.**

SERVICES

Vespers is normally served on Saturday's at 5.00pm in the Saints of Britain chapel Fr. Chrysostom is available for Confession afterwards. The Proskomedie and Orthros are served before the Liturgy at 9.30am

FEBRUARY

Sun 5th The Publican and the Pharisee. Start of the Triodion
Orthros 9.30am Divine Liturgy
10.30am [Fast Free Week]

Sun 12th The Prodigal Son
Orthros 9.30am Divine Liturgy
10.30am

Sun 19th The Last Judgement
Meatfare Sunday Romanian
Liturgy 11.00am (subject to
change - listen for
announcements)

Mon 20th Meat-Fast begins

Sun 26th The Expulsion of Adam
Cheesefare (Forgiveness)

Sunday Orthros 9.30am
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Mon 27th THE GREAT FAST
begins

MARCH

Sun 4th First of Gt. Lent -
Sunday of Orthodoxy Orthros
9.30am Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 11th Second of Gt. Lent - St.
Gregory Palamas Orthros
9.30am Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 18th Third of Gt. Lent
Veneration of the Cross
Romanian Liturgy 11.00am
(subject to change - listen for
announcements)

25th Fourth of Gt. Lent and
Annunciation to Our Lady (fish,
wine and oil) Orthros 9.30am
Divine Liturgy 10.30am