

# ✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

April, 2012 - Volume XVII, Issue 4

---

St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church - A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese

---

## *From a sermon of Saint Bede the Venerable*

*died 735AD  
feast day - May 27*

*Inside:*

<i>Lumen Christi. . . . .</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>St. Alexandra. . . . .</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Holy Week. . . . .</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Calendar. . . . .</i>	<i>7</i>

The Resurrection of our Lord and Savior has consecrated the vigil of this most sacred night for us, dearly beloved, as we have heard from the Gospel reading. Rightly do we celebrate this night with watching and hymns, out of love for Him who, out of love for us, willed to spend it in the sleep of death and to be raised from the dead. As the Apostle says, *He died for our transgressions and rose to make us righteous.* [Romans 4;25; I Co. 15:3].

He revealed this by the times at which He died on the Cross and rose from the dead. He brought the mystery of His victorious passion to fulfillment about three o'clock in the afternoon, when day was already declining toward evening and the rays of the sun were becoming cooler after the midday heat. This is a clear suggestion that He had submitted to the gibbet of the Cross in order to take away the wicked deeds by which we fell away from divine light and love into the night of this estrangement from Him. He rose on the morning of Sunday, which is now called the Lord's day, clearly teaching that He would bring us, once we had been raised up again from the death of our souls, into the light of everlasting bliss.

The evangelist says, *On the Sabbath evening which was growing on toward the dawn of Sunday*, when the customary order of time would have the evening darkening into night, rather than growing on toward dawn. Speaking mystically, the evangelist was striving to suggest the great dignity this most sacred night acquired from the glory of our Lord's victory over death. Our Lord, the author and controller of time, he who rose from the dead during the final part of the night, surely caused the whole of it to be festal and bright by the light of his resurrection.

From the beginning of the world's creation until this time, the course of time was so divided that day preceded night, according to the order of its primeval making. On this night,



because of the mystery of our Lord's Resurrection, the order of time was changed. He rose from the dead during the night, and on the following day He showed the effect of His Resurrection to His disciples. Having shared a feast with them, He proved the truth of His power as they wondered and rejoiced. Most properly was night joined to the light of the following day, and the order of time so settled that day would follow night. It was once appropriate that night follow day, for by sinning the human race fell away from the light of paradise into the darkness and hardships of this age. It is appropriate that day follow night now, when through faith in the Resurrection we are led back from the darkness of sin and the shadow of death to the light of life by Christ's gift.

Wherefore, dearly beloved, we who have come to know that this special night has been illumined by the grace of our Lord's Resurrection must also take particular care lest any least part of it become dark in our hearts. All of it should become light as day for us, especially now when we are keeping vigil with the devotion of worthy praise, and are awaiting with a pure and sober conscience the feast of Easter Sunday when we have completed this vigil...

Thus when the last trumpet arouses the entire human race, and summons it before the tribunal of the just Judge, the sign of our Judge with which we were made holy may separate us from the lot of the condemned, and the vigil in which we have awaited His coming may separate us from the punishment due to those who are negligent. When the latter have received fitting chastisement, He Himself will lead us into the dwelling place of heavenly peace which He promised us from of old, He who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God throughout all ages of ages. Amen.

## *Lumen Christi*

In our electrified age, it is difficult to imagine total darkness. Only when we have power outages during storms do we have some sense of what it must have been like in past ages when no candles or oil lamps or bonfires were lit. At the Paschal Vigil - despite the light of city street lamps, automobiles, exit lights required by law, and the glow from battery-powered cell phones and digital watches - we begin with darkness that represents the world following the Crucifixion, the darkness known by Christ's followers before they had learned of the Resurrection.

A bonfire is made outside the church (as at the tomb of Christ, outside the city walls of Jerusalem); new fire is lit from flint and the Paschal candle is lit from this fire (the light of the Resurrected Christ). The candle is marked with the year as this prayer is said: *Christ yesterday and today; the Beginning and the End; Alpha and Omega; His are the times and ages; to Him be glory and dominion through all the ages of eternity. Amen.* Five grains of incense are placed on the candle (representing the wounds inflicted on the body of Our Lord at His Crucifixion) with these words: *Through His glorious wounds may Christ the Lord guard and preserve us. Amen.* As the candle is lit from the new fire, the priest prays: *May the light of Christ, gloriously rising, scatter the darkness of heart and mind.*

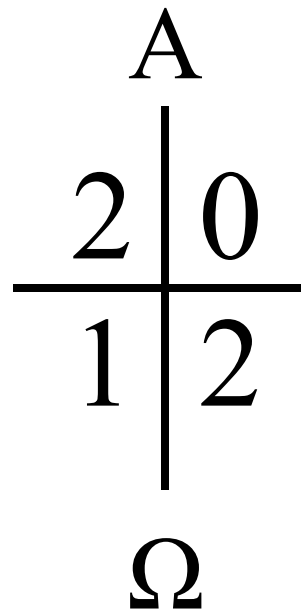
The Paschal candle is then carried in procession into the church (the world) as we sing, *The light of Christ. Thanks be to God.* Gradually the darkness is dispelled as the candles of the worshipers are lit from the Paschal candle's flame. We are reminded that it is only Christ who can pierce through the darkness of our hearts and of this world.

This ceremony and the great chant called the *Exultet*, which is sung at every Paschal Vigil upon entering the church are very ancient. The first Christians, continuing the practice of their Jewish heritage, included a ceremonial lighting of lamps in their worship. It is not surprising that this would take on special significance at the yearly observance of the night of the Resurrection. The historian Eusebius (260-340) speaks of this practice in the third century and also tells of how the Emperor (St.) Constantine, in the fourth century, placed lighted tapers throughout the city of Milan, turning night into day, for the Paschal Vigil. St. Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395) speaks of the "radiant light" of the Paschal Vigil, and St. Jerome (d. 420), St. Bede (d. 735) and many others refer to the lighting of a Paschal candle.

This special candle required a special chant to mark its significance and the *Exultet* is the chant which has survived from ancient times. The text, which includes praise for the "work of the bees" in creating the wax, is thought to date from the 5<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest extant manuscripts which include this chant are in the *Bobbio Missal* of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and the *Missale Gothicum* and the *Missale Gallicanum Vetus* of the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

As we keep watch during the Paschal Vigil, awaiting the yearly celebration of our Lord's Resurrection, may the light of the risen Christ shine in our hearts when we hear the words of the *Exultet*:

*Now let the Angelic host of heaven rejoice: let the divine mysteries rejoice; and for the victory of the mighty King let the trumpet of salvation sound forth. Let the earth also be glad, illumined by the*



*rays of this great brightness, and enlightened by the splendor of the eternal King let her know that she hath put away the darkness of the whole world.*

## *St. Alexandra*

*Feast Day ~ April 21*



**T**he wife of a ruler - whether president, prime minister, king or emperor - can lead a difficult life. She is expected to be diplomatic at all times, to be unmoved by the criticisms given her husband, to be a gracious hostess, and to support worthy charitable causes. She is constantly scrutinized for her attire, her demeanor in public, and the opinions which she only rarely expresses. We would say that the wife of a ruler would have to be a saint!

**I**n the first centuries of the Christian Church, there was such a woman and she was truly a saint. St. Alexandra was the wife of the Emperor Diocletian, who has been remembered in all the centuries since his death as the most cruel persecutor of Christians that the world has known.

**D**iocletian had risen to power through military service, and while he continued to be engaged in numerous military conflicts, Alexandra went about her public tasks with dignity and gained the respect of the people. The Emperor first appointed a co-ruler, Maximian, and they divided territory and responsibilities between them. Later (in 293), a tetrarchy was formed with Constantius (who was married to Maximian's daughter, Theodora) and Galeria (whose wife was Valeria, the daughter of Diocletian and Alexandra) joining the other two in responsibility for the Empire.

**T**he year 299 was the beginning of much torment for Christians. Diocletian and Galeria sacrificed to the Roman gods and sought a prediction for the future. The pagan priests, attempting to find portents in the entrails of slaughtered animals, claimed that they were unable to predict the future because of the Christians in the imperial household. There was an immediate order for all associated with the royal household to sacrifice to the gods and letters were sent to all military commanders demanding that the army be purged of Christian soldiers. It was in this purgation that George - who had been a high-ranking, decorated member of the military - declared himself a Christian and was imprisoned and tortured.

**W**hen Alexandra heard of disturbances among the military forces and in the prisons, she thought it her royal duty to

investigate in case there was something she could do to alleviate any unpleasantness. What she found changed her life. She met the former soldier, George, in his prison cell after he had endured severe torture. Alexandra found that he was strangely calm, despite apparent pain, and she asked to speak with him about his motivation. The man who was to become a revered saint of the Church quietly told the empress about our Savior, his teachings about love, his miracles of healing, his Crucifixion and his Resurrection from the dead. Alexandra was mesmerized and her heart was opened to see the truth of Christianity. When George was sentenced to be beheaded, the Empress professed her belief in Christ to her husband.

This was not what Diocletian wished to hear. He was angry with his wife for being “taken in” by the Christian sectarians. He was shocked by her willingness to give up the traditional religion of Rome and embarrassed by her public proclamation.

In some versions of St. Alexandra’s life, this is where the story ends. She was ordered to be imprisoned and also beheaded but she died of natural causes in her cell two days before the execution of St. George. In other accounts, exile is given as Alexandra’s punishment and she retreated to Syria to live. She was banned from the imperial palaces and public duties but was able to quietly practice her new-found faith.

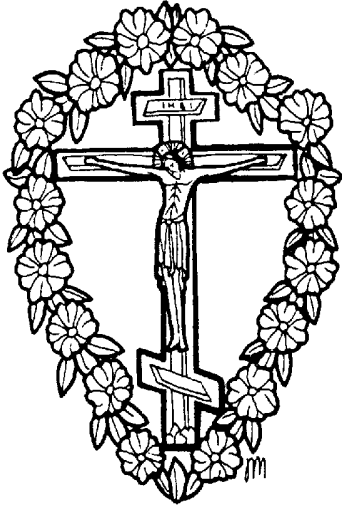
Diocletian increased his persecution of Christians as well as adherents of other religions, particularly the Manicheans (who had sympathizers in Persia, Rome’s arch enemy). In Antioch, a deacon refused to sacrifice to the Roman gods and had his tongue cut out before being killed; a newly-constructed church in Nicomedia was torn down, the Scriptures burned and the liturgical vessels stolen by the government. Galeria was even more fervent than Diocletian in his hatred for Christians and everything bad that occurred (such as two fires in an imperial palace) was blamed on them. Tortures and executions were increased.

Diocletian resigned as Emperor in 305 and retired to his homeland of Dalmatia. There he tended to his garden, living in his palace in what is now the city of Split, Croatia until his death in 311. One of the great ironies of history is that the mausoleum which Diocletian, the great persecutor, built for himself in this palace was later turned into a Christian cathedral.

Meanwhile, in the ever-changing political landscape of the Roman Empire, Galeria also died and the new Emperor, Maximinus, wanted Valeria for his wife. She refused and so he



banished her to live with her mother in Syria. Soon Licinius and Constantine were emperors.



**B**y this time an edict of toleration for Christians had been published and Alexandra and Valeria felt safe in returning to Nicomedia. But Licinius - who had co-signed the Edict of Milan with St. Constantine - did not honor his agreement and ordered that the former empresses should be beheaded as common criminals, enemies of the state because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

**L**ike the soldier whose courage in the face of torture and death had inspired her eleven years earlier, St. Alexandra received the crown of martyrdom in the year 314. Her body and that of her daughter were thrown into the sea to prevent veneration of her relics by other Christians. We honor St. Alexandra on April 21 (or on April 23). May she intercede for all who are persecuted for their faith, for all who are married to rulers, and may holy Alexandra pray for us.

## *Holy Week at St. Gregory's*

**Palm Sunday, April 8** - *Matins at 9AM, blessing of Palms, Procession and Solemn Mass with the Passion Gospel of St. Matthew at 9:30AM.*

**Monday and Tuesday, April 9 and 10** - *Vespers at 7PM, Mass at 7:30 with the Passion Gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke.*

**Wednesday, April 11** - *Vespers at 7PM, Mass with the Blessing of Oils and Unction at 7:30PM.*

**Maundy Thursday, April 12** - *Vespers at 7PM; Mass with Foot Washing, Procession to the Altar of Repose and Stripping of the Altar at 7:30PM. Tenebrae following Mass.*

**Good Friday, April 13** - *Liturgy with the Passion according to St. John, Veneration of the Cross, Solemn Collects and Mass of the Pre-sanctified beginning at 12 Noon.*

**Holy Saturday, April 14** - *Confessions 7:30 - 8:30 PM; Paschal Vigil with the lighting of the Paschal Fire and Blessing of the Paschal Candle, reading of the Prophecies, Litany of the Saints, Blessing of the Font and the First Mass and Lauds of Easter beginning at 9PM. Paschal feast following the Liturgy.*

**Easter Day, April 15** - *Mass at 11AM.*

*Christ is Risen - Indeed He is Risen! Christos anesti - Alethos anesti! Al Massiah qam - Haqqan qam!*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>April 2012</h1>						<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>
<b>1</b> Passion Sunday; St. Melito of Sardis, BC, 177	<b>2</b> St. Mary of Egypt, Penitent	<b>3</b> St. Sixtus I, PM, 127	<b>4</b> St. Isidore of Seville, BCD, 636	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b> Seven Sorrows of the BVM; St. Notker, C, 912 <i>Lenten Supper &amp; Stations of the Cross at 6:30pm</i>	<b>7</b> St. Tikhon of Moscow, BC, Patron of the Western Rite, 1925  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>8</b> Palm Sunday	<b>9</b> Monday in Holy Week  <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i>	<b>10</b> Tuesday in Holy Week  <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i>	<b>11</b> Wednesday in Holy Week  <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i>	<b>12</b> Maundy Thursday  <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i>	<b>13</b> Good Friday  <i>Liturgy at Noon</i>	<b>14</b> Holy Saturday  <i>Mass at 9pm</i>
<b>15</b> Pascha  <i>Mass at 11AM (No Matins)</i>	<b>16</b> Monday in the Octave of Easter	<b>17</b> Tuesday in the Octave of Easter	<b>18</b> Wednesday in the Octave of Easter	<b>19</b> Thursday in the Octave of Easter; St. Alphege of Canterbury, BM, 1012	<b>20</b> Friday in the Octave of Easter	<b>21</b> Saturday in the Octave of Easter St. Alexandra, M, 314  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>22</b> Low Sunday: First Sunday after Easter; Ss. Soter, 174 & Caius, 296, Bb, Mm	<b>23</b> St. George, Patron of the Antiochian Archdiocese, M, 303	<b>24</b> of the Octave of St. George; St. Mellitus, BC, 624	<b>25</b> St. Mark the Evangelist, 1 <sup>st</sup> c.; of the Octave of St. George	<b>26</b> of the Octave of St. George; Ss. Cletus, 89 & Marcellinus, 304, BbMm	<b>27</b> of the Octave of St. George	<b>28</b> of the Octave of St. George; St. Vitalis of Milan, M, 3 <sup>rd</sup> c.  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>29</b> Second Sunday after Easter; of the Octave of St. George	<b>30</b> Octave Day of St. George					