



SYNAXARIA OF THE PENTECOSTARION

by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos

SUNDAY of PASCHA

On the Holy and Great Sunday of Pascha, we celebrate the life-bearing Resurrection of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ.

Verses

Christ descended to do battle with Hades alone;
He ascended after taking many spoils of victory.

Synaxarion

We call the present Feast “Pascha,” which means “Passover” in the Hebrew language; for this is the day on which God originally brought the world into existence from non-being. It was on this day that He conveyed the people of Israel across the Red Sea and snatched them out of the hands of Pharaoh; on this day also, descending from Heaven, He came to dwell in the Virgin’s womb. And now, after snatching the whole of mankind from the depths of Hades, He has raised it up to Heaven and restored to it the ancient dignity of incorruption. But when He descended to Hades, He did not resurrect all, but only those who chose to believe in Him. He freed the souls of the Saints from all the ages who were being forcibly held by Hades, and allowed all of them to ascend to Heaven. For this reason, rejoicing exceedingly, we celebrate the Resurrection with splendor, offering an image of the joy in which our nature abounds through the tender mercy of God. Likewise, demonstrating the destruction of enmity and our unity with God and the Angels themselves, we give each other the customary kiss of peace.

The Resurrection of the Lord took place in this manner. While the soldiers were guarding the tomb, around the middle of the night an earthquake occurred; for an Angel came down and removed the stone from the door of the sepulchre. On beholding this, the guards fled, and thus the women were

afforded their opportunity at the end of the Sabbath, that is, around the middle of Saturday night. The Resurrection was made known first to the Mother of God, who sat opposite the tomb with Mary Magdalene, as St. Matthew says. But in order that the Resurrection should not be a matter of doubt, on account of the familiarity of the Lord's Mother, the Evangelists say: He appeared first to Mary Magdalene. It was she who saw the Angel on the stone and, stooping down to look, saw the Angels inside the tomb; these Angels announced the Resurrection of the Lord. For "He is risen," they said, "He is not here; behold the place where they laid Him." Therefore, on hearing these words, she ran to the most ardent among the Disciples, Peter and John, and told them the glad tidings of the Resurrection. As she was returning with Mary, Christ encountered them, saying: "Rejoice!" For it was fitting that the sex which first heard the words, "in pain thou shalt bring forth children," should be the first to hear this joy. Overcome with love, they approached and touched His immaculate feet, wishing to recognize Him more precisely. The Apostles came to the tomb; and Peter stooped down to look inside the tomb and departed, while John went inside and looked more searchingly, and touched the linen clothes and the napkin.

Mary Magdalene returned with other women at dawn so as to confirm with greater certainty what had been seen. Standing outside, she lamented, but when she stooped to look inside the tomb, she saw two Angels shining with radiance, reproving her, as it were, and saying: "Lady, why weepest thou, whom seekest thou? Seek ye Jesus of Nazareth, Who was crucified? He is risen; He is not here." And at once they arose in fear, seeing the Lord. Turning round, she saw Christ standing; thinking Him to be the gardener (for the tomb was in a garden), she said: "Sir, if thou hast borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." When she beckoned again to the Angels, the Savior said to Magdalene: "Mary." And she, perceiving the sweet and familiar voice of Christ, wanted to touch Him. But He said: "Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father, as thou thyself dost reason, still supposing Me to be a man; but go to My brethren, and tell them all that thou hast seen and heard." Magdalene did this. As day dawned again, she came to the tomb with the other women. Those who were with John and Salome arrived at sunrise; and, to put it simply, the women came to the tomb in different groups, among them being the Theotokos; for she is the one whom the Gospel calls Mary, the mother of Joses; this Joses was a son of Joseph. It is, however, unclear at what hour the Lord arose: some say that it was at the first cockcrow, others that it was when the earthquake occurred, and others suggest different times.

After these events, some of the guards went and reported to the high priests what had happened; the latter, putting money in their hands, per-

sueded them to say that Christ's Disciples had come by night and stolen Him. In the evening of the same day, when the Disciples had gathered together through fear of the Jews and the doors were securely shut, Christ came to them—for His body was incorrupt—and greeted them with the customary greeting, "Peace." On seeing Him, they rejoiced exceedingly, and when Christ breathed on them they received the energy of the All-holy Spirit more perfectly.

This is how the Lord's Resurrection took place on the third day. The evening of Thursday and the day of Friday (for this is how the Hebrews measure the period of twenty-four hours) are one day. The night of Friday and the whole of Saturday are another period of twenty-four hours; this is the second day. The night of Saturday and the day of Sunday are another period of twenty-four hours; this is the third day.

To Him be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.

