

Pascha 2025 Message of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III



By the mercy of God, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and all Palestine,

To the fullness of the Church, grace, mercy, and peace from the All-Holy and Life-Giving Tomb of the Risen Christ.

“Though Thou didst descend into the tomb, O Immortal One,

Yet didst Thou destroy the power of Hades;

And Thou didst rise again as victor, O Christ God,

Proclaiming ‘Rejoice!’ to the Myrrh-bearing women,

And granting peace unto Thine Apostles,

Thou who bestowest resurrection upon the fallen.”

(Kontakion of the Sunday of Pascha)

With unspeakable and full joy, with thanksgiving and doxology unto our all-good God, the Holy Church of Christ celebrates, on this “saving and radiant night,” the mystery of the Resurrection from the dead of its Founder, our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ. It celebrates the wondrous truth that the Son and Word of God, who “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1), “was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). As Saint Athanasius the Great declares, in Him came to be “a union of two dissimilar things by nature: Godhead and manhood” (PG 77, 571A). In the flesh which He assumed, by the good pleasure of the Father and out of His supreme love for mankind, He willingly accepted death on our behalf—even the death of the Cross under Pontius Pilate.

His “God-breathed blood” was poured forth “outside the gate” (Hebrews 13:12), near unto us, and He was buried in this very tomb, wherein at this hour the Divine Eucharist is celebrated by Holy Sion, “the first to receive remission of sins through the Resurrection.” He was crucified and buried, “and He was numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). “The sepulchre was made sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch” (Matthew 27:66).

Yet death had no dominion over Him, for “He remained in the tomb in the flesh, yet in Hades with the soul as God, in Paradise with the thief, and on the throne with the Father and the Spirit—filling all things, He who is infinite.” The devil imagined that he had taken a mere mortal to consume along with those he had held captive since the ages, but he was deceived: “He encountered God hidden in human nature,” according to Saint John Chrysostom (PG 57, 25). He “remained immortal and unassailable by death because of His divinity, being the impassible power of the Father,” and “as God, quickened His own body,” as Saint Cyril of Alexandria teaches (PG 76, 1212 & 3120). He shattered the gates of death and the seals of the tomb, and arose from the dead on the third day as conqueror of death. “Hades was embittered, embittered and mocked, embittered and abolished. It took a body and encountered God. Christ is risen from the dead, and is become the firstfruits of them that slept” (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:20). He despoiled Hades of its captives and led them again into Paradise—first among them, the grateful thief who made confession with the words: “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy

kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

This supernatural mystery hath God revealed unto mankind by many signs. “And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it” (Matthew 28:2). He said unto the Myrrh-bearing women: “I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay” (Matthew 28:5-6).

This angelic vision was sealed by the divine and human presence of the Risen Christ Himself, in His incorrupt, glorified, and deified body, bearing the marks of the nails in His hands and feet, and of the spear in His side. The Risen Lord met the Myrrh-bearing women and greeted them, saying, “All hail” (Matthew 28:9).

“In the evening of the same day, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled,” (John 20:19). He came into their midst, “and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, He shewed unto them His hands and His side... He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them” (John 20:21-23). He turned Thomas’s doubt into steadfast faith (John 20:26-27). Likewise, He blessed the Eucharistic bread on the way to Emmaus with Luke and Cleopas (Luke 24:30). “And He stood in the midst of them... and said unto them, Behold My hands and My feet... a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have... and they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And He took it, and did eat before them” (Luke 24:39-43). “He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days” (Acts 1:3), “until the day in which He was taken up... and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). And so, before the eyes of His disciples, He ascended into the heavens, and seated at the right hand of God the Father the human nature which He had taken upon Himself, and deified it. Thus was fulfilled the divine dispensation for our salvation.

And from the throne of His glory, at the right hand of the Father, He sent—as He had promised unto His disciples—another Comforter. He sent from the Father His Holy Spirit, the light and power of His divinity. Through the Twelve, He “gathered together all nations into one net,” and through them He established the Church, and made it firm in the world, that it might fulfil His work of ministry, reconciliation, unity, and salvation for mankind. The Church preaches, catechizes, baptises, performs the divine mystery of the Holy Eucharist, and imparts His holy Body and Blood “for the remission of sins, and for life everlasting.”

This very work is carried out upon the Holy Places by the Mother of all the Churches, Holy Sion, each and every day, and especially now in this hour, at the life-giving Tomb of Christ, from whence He rose. From this sacred place, it blesses Her flock scattered over all the earth, and the pious pilgrims who have hastened hither “from the west, and from the sea, and from the north, and from the east,” exclaiming together:

“Christ is risen from the dead; we worship His holy Resurrection on the third day.”

✠ THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

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