

Holy Saturday
Deliverance and the Descent into Hell
The Climax of Christ's Mission
Resurrection of the Dead

April 14, 2012
Holy Saturday
Revision B

GOSPEL: Matthew 28: 1-20
EPISTLE: Romans 6:3-11

Today's Gospel lesson is used in Western churches as the Gospel for Easter Sunday; the last few verses (Matthew 28:16-20) are generally used for Trinity Sunday in the West, which is the Sunday after Pentecost. In the Orthodox Church, the narrative of the Resurrection (today's Gospel) plus the Lord's commission to evangelize the earth (Matthew 28:16-20) are used for Holy Saturday. Easter Sunday (i.e. Pascha in the Orthodox Church) then becomes a victory celebration of light triumphing over darkness and the Sunday after Pentecost becomes All Saints Sunday.

Today's Epistle lesson is used in the West either for Easter or in late June.

The study of Holy Saturday gives us great insight into the extent of the mercies of God, and how He gives everyone ample opportunity to be part of His Kingdom. This includes people who had never heard of Christ during their lifetime, or who were very remote from Israel during the Old Testament. As the Apostle Peter wrote, the Gospel was preached to the dead in Hades (1 Peter 4:6), and this will happen again. Many were given an opportunity that they never had, which illustrates the mercy of God.

The Descent Into Hell

To understand the Orthodox perspective on Pascha, it helps to understand the events of Holy Saturday -- when the Lord Jesus descended into hell. The Apostle Paul mentioned that Christ descended into hell (i.e. Hades); by doing so He led captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8-9). In writing this, Paul quoted from David (Psalm 68:18), indicating that Old Testament prophecy had predicted this. David used the words "to God the Lord belong escapes from death" (Psalm 68:20). Other psalms also address Christ's Descent into Hell as follows. "He has looked out from the height of His sanctuary; the Lord looked upon the earth from heaven; to hear the groaning of the fettered ones, to loosen the sons of the slain" (Psalm 102:19-20 LXX). "And He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their bonds apart. Let them acknowledge to the Lord His mercies, and His wonders to the children of men. For He broke to pieces the brazen gates, and crushed the iron bars" (Psalm 107:14-16 LXX). The Apostle Peter also addressed Christ's Descent into Hell when he wrote of Christ "preaching to the demons in prison" (1 Peter 3:19), and preaching to the dead (1 Peter 4:6).

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From an Old Testament prophetic point of view, Holy Saturday is a very important day. Three major feasts existed under Mosaic Law where attendance was mandatory: Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14-17). Ignoring these feasts resulted in one being cut off from Israel (Numbers 9:10-14). Within these feasts were certain days being proclaimed a Sabbath -- no matter which day of the week it fell on. Of the first three days of Passover in 30 AD, Good Friday (the 14th of Nisan) was not a Sabbath, Holy Saturday (the 15th of Nisan) was both a Sabbath and the weekly Sabbath and Paschal Sunday (the 16th of Nisan) was not a Sabbath. The 14th of Nisan was the day of the slaying of the Passover lamb, and was the day Jesus was crucified. The 16th of Nisan was the day of the offering of the First-Fruits of the barley harvest and was the day of the Lord's Resurrection. Between these two days was the Sabbath of the 15th of Nisan. By being set aside as a Sabbath, the Mosaic Law taught that this was a very important and holy day.

In "leading captivity captive", Paul was referring to raising the righteous out of captivity in Hades where they had been held captive awaiting their redemption. There are many references to this in the Psalms, but the references are difficult to put in their context. A very interesting reference is the early historical account called The Gospel of Nicodemus.¹

This work can be traced to Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, both prominent members of the Sanhedrin (Matthew 27:57-60, Mark 15:42-46, Luke 23:50-53, John 19:38-42) who had performed the burial rite for Jesus. Joseph was described as a "rich man" (Matthew 25:57) and Nicodemus was referred to in this work as a toparch (ruler of several cities, compare John 3:1) and the third richest man in Jerusalem. Interesting aspects of "The Descent into Hell" are quotes from the Psalms that are otherwise difficult to place in context. (See Appendix G for a summary of the Gospel of Nicodemus.)

The Gospel of Nicodemus is not a "Gospel" in the sense of the four Gospels of the New Testament, but is a historical account of the death and resurrection of Christ. It has two parts: Part I: "The Acts of Pilate" and Part II: "The Descent into Hell". There are three versions of each part: Part I has two Greek versions and one Latin version; Part II has one Greek version, two Latin versions. These different versions probably resulted from copying efforts at various times and places. Thus, one cannot use it word for word like Scripture but one can treat it as a historical source like Josephus' writings. Some of the imagery and quotes from Scripture found in the Gospel of Nicodemus are also used in the Orthodox Liturgy for Pascha. Thus it's applicability.

¹ Roberts and Donaldson, "The Gospel of Nicodemus", Ante-Nicean Fathers, vol. 8.

The Psalms picture mankind as bound in darkness and fettered behind brazen gates and iron bars (Psalm 107:14-16, 102:19-20 LXX). David also wrote, "Lift up your gates, you princes, and be lifted up, you everlasting doors; and the king of glory shall come in" (Psalm 24:7). These ancient doors (Hebrew: *olam*: long duration, antiquity) have very little meaning aside from the events of Holy Saturday. Two distinct images are described here. The darkness, the brazen gates and the iron bars refer to Hades, while the everlasting doors can also refer to the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:1-2), who barred man's entrance into heaven, and which Jesus dealt with at His Ascension.

The Church Fathers on the Descent into Hell

The Church Fathers present a viewpoint and a perspective that is not common today. They speak of the repentance of those in Hades who, in ignorance, never knew God. Not all were rescued from Hades by the Lord's descent, as the heretics claimed, but there was an opportunity to choose. Those who lived an evil life were not rescued, but those who tried to live a good life, but never had an opportunity to know God, received an opportunity.

Clement of Alexandria wrote at length about the Lord's descent into hell, and stated² that Christ preached the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles in Hades. Of those in Hades, he distinguished some as "righteous according to the Law", but lacking in faith and some as "righteous according to philosophy", but lacking in faith and further needing to abandon idolatry. Some had sinned in ignorance without clearly knowing God. People in Hades obtained the same opportunity as those in this life, either choosing repentance or confessing that their punishment was just, because they didn't believe.

"The Lord preached the Gospel to those in Hades. Accordingly the Scripture says, 'Hades says to Destruction, We have not seen His form, but we have heard His voice' (Clement's paraphrase of Job 28:22). It is not the place that heard the voice, but those who have been put in Hades, and have abandoned themselves to destruction, as persons who have thrown themselves voluntarily from a ship into the sea. They, then, are those that hear the divine power and voice. Who in his senses can suppose the souls of the righteous and those of sinners in the same condemnation? Do not the Scriptures show that the Lord preached the Gospel to those that perished in the flood, to those kept 'in prison'" (1 Peter 4:6)?

"Christ also exerts His might because it is His work to save. He did this by drawing to salvation those who became willing, by the preaching³ of the Gospel, to believe on Him, wherever they were. The Lord descended to Hades to preach the Gospel to all. All who believe shall be saved, even the Gentiles, on making their profession there. God's punishments are saving and disciplinary, leading to conversion, and choosing rather the repentance than the death of a sinner (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11). Souls, who had been darkened by passions, when released from their bodies, are able to perceive more clearly, because they are no longer obstructed by the flesh".

"Further the Gospel says, 'that many bodies of those that slept arose' (Matthew 27:52), plainly as having been translated to a better state. There took place, then, a universal movement and translation⁴ through the economy of Christ".

"Those who lived rightly before the Law were classed under faith (Romans 3:29-30; 10:12), and judged to be righteous. It is evident that those, who were outside of the Law, having lived rightly, though they are in Hades (1

² Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VI, 6.

³ To those in Hades, the preaching of John the Baptist after his beheading prepared them for the coming of Christ as well as the people alive on the earth.

⁴ Clement is probably quoting the following, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (John 5:24-25). We may think that this is referring to the Second Coming of Christ, but we may want to reconsider in the light of Holy Saturday.

Peter 3:19), on hearing the voice of the Lord, turned and believed. We remember that the Lord is “the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24).

“People obtained the same dispensation in Hades, so that even there, all the souls, on hearing the proclamation, might either exhibit repentance, or confess that their punishment was just, because they didn’t believe. This was not the exercise of arbitrariness. Those who had departed before the Advent of the Lord, who didn’t have the Gospel preached to them, and had no ground for believing or not, needed the opportunity to obtain either salvation or punishment. It is not right that these should be condemned without trial, and that those alone who lived after the Advent should have the advantage of the divine righteousness. But to all rational souls it was said from above, ‘Whatever you have done in ignorance, without clearly knowing God, if, on becoming conscious, he repent, all his sins will be forgiven him’ (Acts 3:17-19, 17:30). ‘Behold, I have set before your face death and life, that you may choose life’ (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19). God says that He set, not that He made, in order to offer the comparison of choice. In another Scripture He says, ‘If you listen to Me, and are willing, you shall eat the good of the land. But if you do not listen to Me, and are not willing, the sword shall devour you; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken these things’” (Isaiah 1:19-20).

“Again, David expressly says, ‘My heart was glad, and My tongue rejoiced, and My flesh shall still rest in hope. You shall not leave My soul in hell, nor will You give Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to Me the paths of life, You will make Me full of joy in Your presence’ (Psalm 16:9-11 LXX; Acts 2:26-28). As, then, the people were precious to the Lord, so also is the entire holy people, and he who is converted from the Gentiles. Rightly the Scripture says, that ‘the ox and the bear shall come together’ (Isaiah 11:7). The Jew is designated by the ox, from the animal under the yoke being reckoned clean, according to the Law; for the ox both parts the hoof and chews the cud (Leviticus 11:3-9). The bear designates the Gentile, which is an unclean and wild beast. He who is converted from among the Gentiles is formed from a beast-like life to gentleness by the word; and, when once tamed, is made clean, just as the ox. For example, the prophet says, ‘Jackals and ostriches, and all the beasts of the field, shall bless me’ (Isaiah 43:20). Of the number of unclean animals, the wild beasts of the field are known to be of the world. Those who are wild with respect to faith, polluted in life, and not purified by righteousness, which is according to the Law, are called wild beasts. But changed from wild beasts by the faith of the Lord, they become men of God. For some the Lord exhorts, and to those who have already made the attempt he stretches forth His hand, and draws them up. ‘The Lord does not dread the face of anyone, nor does He bow to greatness; for He has made small and great, and cares alike for all’ (Wisdom 6:7). David says, ‘The heathen are fixed in the destruction they have caused; their foot is taken in the snare which they hid’ (Psalm 9:15 LXX). ‘But the Lord was a refuge to the poor, a help in season also in affliction’ (Psalm 9:9 LXX). Those, then, that were in affliction had the Gospel seasonably proclaimed. Therefore it said, ‘Declare among the heathen his pursuits’ (Psalm 9:11 LXX), that they may not be judged unjustly”.

“If, then, He preached the Gospel to those in the flesh that they might not be condemned unjustly, how is it conceivable that He did not also preach the Gospel to those who had departed this life before His Advent? ‘The righteous

Lord loves righteousness; His countenance beholds uprightness' (Psalm 11:7 LXX). 'But he that loves wickedness hates his own soul'" (Psalm 11:5 LXX).

Gregory the Great stated⁵ emphatically that Christ did not rescue everyone from Hades at His descent, as the heretics stated. He only rescued those who exhibited a life of faith and who in deeds did not deny Him. Someone, who had separated himself from God by evil living, cannot be drawn to God after death.

"Some had said that Christ, when He descended into hell, saved all who there acknowledged Him as God, and delivered them from the pains due to them. I desire that we should think very differently. When He descended into hell, He delivered through His grace those only who both believed that He should come and observed His precepts in their lives. It is evident that after the Incarnation of the Lord no one can be saved, even of those who hold His Faith, who don't have the life of faith. Since it is written, 'They acknowledge that they know God, but in deeds they deny Him' (Titus 1:16). John says, 'He that says that he knows Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar (1 John 2:4). James also, the brother of the Lord, writes saying, 'Faith without works is dead' (James 2:20). Are believers now saved without good works, while the unbelieving and reprobate without good action were saved by our Lord descending into hell? If so, then the lot of those who never saw the Incarnation of the Lord was better than that of these who have been born after the mystery of His Incarnation. But it is stupid to say or think this, and the Lord Himself testifies to His disciples, 'Many kings and prophets have desired to see the things which you see, and have not seen them'" (Matthew 13:17; Luke 10:24).

"Considering, therefore, all these things; and do not hold anything but what the true faith teaches through the Catholic Church. The Lord, in descending into hell, rescued from infernal duration those only whom while living in the flesh He preserved through His grace in faith and good conduct. He says in the Gospel, 'When I shall be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to myself' (John 12:32); He means all that are elect. One could not be drawn to God after death who had separated himself from God by evil living".

Chrysostom went off on a bit of a tangent in commenting on this. He began with how inappropriate the tears were in Joppa. "If the Emperor were to send and invite some one of us to the palace, would it be right, I ask, to weep and mourn? Angels are present, commissioned from heaven, sent from the King Himself to call their fellow servant (Tabitha); and say, do you weep? Do you not know what a mystery it is that is taking place, how awesome, how worthy of hymns and praise? Like the spectacle of the Emperor as he comes in state to take possession of the city is the soul having left the body and departing in company with angels. Think what the soul must then be! In what amazement, what wonder, what delight! Why do you mourn?"

Chrysostom also suggested⁶ not just that we pray for the dead, but also that alms be given in their name. Consider, he said:

"A man has lost all the labor of a whole life: not one day has he lived for himself, but only to luxury, to debauchery, to covetousness, to sin, to the devil. Shall we not bewail this man? Shall we not try to snatch him from his perils? For

⁵ Gregory the Great, Epistle to George the Presbyter, VII, 15.

⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XXI,

it is, yes, it is possible, if we will, to mitigate his punishment, if we make continual prayers for him; if for him we give alms. Has he no alms-deeds of his own to exhibit? Let him have at least those of his kindred, which are done for him. The more sins he has to answer for, the greater need he has of alms; not only for this reason, but because the alms have not the same virtue now, but far less. It is not the same to have done it himself, versus to have another do it for him. Even this pertains to the mercy of God: widows, like the widows in Joppa (Acts 9:36-41) standing around and weeping know how to rescue, not indeed from the present death, but from that which is to come. Many have profited even by the alms done by others on their behalf”.

John of Damascus stated⁷ that Christ, as the Sun of Righteousness, brought light to those in Hades just as He did for those in Galilee and elsewhere.

“The soul, when it was deified, descended into Hades, in order that, just as the Sun of Righteousness rose for those upon the earth, so likewise He might bring light to those who sit under the earth in darkness and shadow of death (Matthew 4:16, Luke 1:79). He brought the message of peace to those upon the earth, of release to the prisoners and of sight to the blind. He became to those who believed the Author of everlasting salvation and to those who did not believe a reproach of their unbelief; so He might become the same to those in Hades. He did this that every knee should bow⁸ to Him, of things in heaven, and things in earth and things under the earth (Philippians 2:10). After He had freed those who had been bound for ages, immediately He rose again from the dead, showing us the way of resurrection”.

Hilary of Poitiers pointed⁹ out that Christ was never absent from Paradise even while He descended into Hades. Bodily fear did not touch Him, and He promised the thief a home in Paradise, even while He was dying on the Cross.

“Christ’s Divine Nature, with such power, could not be shut up within the confines of the nether world, nor even subjected to fear of it. When He descended to Hades, He was never absent from Paradise, just as He was always in Heaven when He was preaching on earth as the Son of Man. He promised His martyr a home there, and held out to him the transports of perfect happiness. Bodily fear cannot touch Him, Who reaches down as far as Hades, but by the power of His nature is present in all things everywhere. The abyss of Hell and the terrors of death cannot lay hold on the nature, which rules the world, boundless in the freedom of its spiritual power, confident of the raptures of Paradise. The Lord, Who was to descend to Hades, was also to dwell in Paradise. Separate, if you can, from His indivisible nature a part, which could fear punishment; send the one part of Christ to Hades to suffer pain, the other, you must leave in Paradise to reign. The thief said, ‘Remember me when You come in Your Kingdom’ (Luke 23:42). It was the groan he heard, I suppose, when the nails pierced the hands of our Lord, which provoked in him this blessed confession of faith. He learned the Kingdom of Christ from His weakened and stricken body! He begs that Christ

⁷ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, III, 29.

⁸ We sometimes think that Paul was referring to the Second Coming. But John of Damascus applied Paul’s words to Holy Saturday, which would seem to fit the context better (Philippians 2:10).

⁹ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, X, 34.

will remember him when He comes in His Kingdom. Did Christ fear as He hung dying on the cross? The Lord promised him, 'Today, shall you be with Me in Paradise'. The thief confessed Christ in His Kingdom as He hung on the cross, and was rewarded with Paradise from the cross. You who impute to Christ the pain of punishment and the fear of death, will fail to enter Paradise and His Kingdom".

Rufinus of Aquilea stated¹⁰ that Christ's descent into hell was like a baited hook to catch the prince of this world, where the hook was Christ's Divinity and the bait was His human flesh. It was like a king going to a prison to liberate the prisoners. Christ's descent into hell was foretold in many places in the Psalms. Rufinus describes many places in the Psalms and elsewhere that refer to Holy Saturday. Without the understanding of the Church, it is easy to miss most of these references in the Scriptures.

"The object of the mystery of the Incarnation was the divine virtue of the Son of God, as a hook, concealed beneath the form of human flesh. He being 'found in fashion as a man' (Philippians 2:8), lured the Prince of this world to a conflict, offering His flesh as a bait. His divinity underneath caught him and held him fast with its hook, through the shedding of His immaculate blood. He, Who knew no stain of sin, has destroyed the sins of all, of those, at least, who have marked the doorposts of their faith with His blood (Exodus 12:7-14). As a fish seizes a baited hook, it not only does not take the bait off the hook, but is drawn out of the water to be itself food for others. So He, Who had the power of death, seized the body of Jesus in death, not being aware of the hook of Divinity enclosed within it, but swallowed it and was caught. The bars of hell being broken apart, he was drawn out as it were from the abyss to become food for others. Ezekiel foretold this under the same figure, saying, 'I will draw you out with My hook, and stretch you out on the earth. The plains shall be filled with you, and I will set all the fowls of the air over you'¹¹, and I will satiate all the beasts of the earth with you' (Ezekiel 29:4-5, 32:3-8). David also says, 'You have broken the heads of the great dragon. You have given him to be meat to the people of Ethiopia' (Psalm 74:13-14). Job in like manner says in the person of the Lord speaking to him, 'Will you draw forth the dragon¹² with a hook, and will you put your bit in his nostrils?'" (Job 41:1-2)

"It is with no loss of His Divine nature that Christ suffered in the flesh, but His Divine nature through the flesh descended to death. By the infirmity of the flesh He might affect salvation. He was not detained by death according to the law of mortality, but, in his resurrection, He opened the gates of death. It is as if a king were to proceed to a prison, and to go in and open the doors, undo the fetters, break in pieces the chains, the bars, and the bolts. Bringing forth and setting at liberty the prisoners, He restored to light and life those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death (Matthew 4:16, Isaiah 42:7 LXX). The king, therefore, is said indeed to have been in prison, but not under the same condition as the prisoners who were detained there. They were in prison to be punished, He to free them from punishment".

¹⁰ Rufinus of Aquilea, A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed, 16-17, 28, 30.

¹¹ We often apply these words from Ezekiel to the Second Coming of Christ, and not to Holy Saturday.

¹² The "dragon" that Job referred to was probably a large dinosaur.

“That Christ descended into hell is also foretold in the Psalms, ‘You have brought Me also into the dust of the death’ (Psalm 22:15). Again, ‘What profit is there in my blood, when I shall have descended into corruption?’ (Psalm 30:9) Again, ‘I descended into the deep mire¹³, where there is no bottom’ (Psalm 69:2). Moreover, John says, ‘Are You He that shall come (into hell, without doubt), or do we look for another?’ (Matthew 11:3, Luke 7:20) Also Peter says that ‘Christ being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the Spirit which dwells in Him, descended to the spirits who were shut up in prison; who in the days of Noah believed not, to preach unto them’ (1 Peter 3:18-20). What He did in hell is declared by this. Moreover, the Lord says by the Prophet, as though speaking of the future, ‘You will not leave my soul in hell, neither will You suffer Your Holy One to see corruption’ (Psalm 16:10). In prophetic language he speaks of the descent into hell as actually fulfilled, ‘O Lord, You have brought my soul out of hell; You have saved me from them that go down into the pit’” (Psalm 30:3 LXX).

“It is said then in the Psalms, ‘I laid me down and slept, and rose up again, because the Lord sustained me’ (Psalm 3:5). Again, ‘Because of the wretchedness of the needy and the groaning of the poor, now will I arise, says the Lord’ (Psalm 12:5). In another place, ‘Because You have turned and quickened me, and brought me out of the deep of the earth again’ (Psalm 71:20 LXX). He is also spoken of, ‘He became as a man without help, free among the dead’ (Psalm 88:4-5). It is not said ‘a man’, but ‘as a man’. In that He descended into hell, He was ‘as a man’; but He was ‘free among the dead’, because He could not be detained by death. Therefore in the one nature, the power of human weakness; in the other, the power of divine majesty is exhibited. Hosea also speaks clearly of the third day, ‘After two days He will heal us; but on the third day we shall rise and shall live in His presence’ (Hosea 6:2). This he says in the person of those who, rising with Him on the third day, are recalled from death to life. They are the same persons who say, ‘On the third day we shall rise again, and shall live in His presence’. But Isaiah says plainly, ‘Who brought forth from the earth the great Shepherd of the sheep’ (Hebrews 13:20, Isaiah 63:11). Then, that the women were to see His resurrection, while the Scribes and Pharisees and the people disbelieved, this Isaiah also foretold. ‘You women, who come from beholding, come, for it is a people that has no understanding’ (Isaiah 27:11 LXX). The Canticles also foretold the women who went to the sepulcher after the resurrection, and sought Him without finding; for example Mary Magdalene, who came to the sepulcher before it was light. Not finding Him, they said, weeping, to the angels who were there, ‘They have taken away the Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him’ (John 20:13). The Canticles foretold, ‘On my bed I sought Him, Whom my soul loves; I sought Him in the night, and found Him not’ (Song of Solomon 3:1). Of those who found Him, and held Him by the feet (Matthew 28:9), it is foretold, ‘I will hold Him Whom my soul loves, and will not let Him go’” (Song of Solomon 3:4).

¹³ Ancient dungeons had dirt floors that might never dry out. To be imprisoned in a dungeon meant to dwell in deep mire that included human waste.

Ignatius of Antioch addressed¹⁴ 1st Century heretics that stated that Christ was crucified in appearance only¹⁵. Christ was truly crucified and descended into Hades alone, but arose accompanied by a multitude.

“He really, not merely in appearance, was crucified, and died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. By those in heaven I mean such as are possessed of incorporeal natures. By those on earth, the Jews and Romans, and such persons as were present at that time when the Lord was crucified. Those under the earth are the multitude that arose along with the Lord. The Scripture says, ‘Many bodies of the saints that slept arose’ (Matthew 27:52), their graves being opened. He descended, indeed, into Hades alone, but He arose accompanied by a multitude. He tore apart that means of separation which had existed from the beginning of the world, and cast down its partition-wall”.

Leo the Great stated¹⁶ that it was the heretics of his day that taught differently about Christ’s descent into hell and His Resurrection. They didn’t believe in the Incarnation, and therefore they had a problem with Christ’s body resting in the Tomb while His soul descended into Hades.

“I am surprised that any intelligent Christian should have difficulty as to whether Christ descended to the realms below. His flesh rested in the tomb; since it truly died and was buried, so it was truly raised the third day. The Lord Himself had announced to the Jews, ‘destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’ (John 2:19). Where the evangelist adds this comment: ‘But this He spoke of the temple of His body’ (John 2:21). The prophet David also had predicted, speaking in the person of the Lord and Savior, ‘Moreover my flesh also shall rest in hope; because You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor give Your Holy One to see corruption’ (Psalm 16:9-10). From these words surely it is clear that the Lord’s flesh, being buried, both truly rested and did not undergo corruption, because it was quickly revived by the return of the soul, and rose again. Not to believe this is blasphemous enough, and is undoubtedly part of the doctrine of Manichaeus and Priscillian, who, with their blasphemous conceptions, pretend to confess Christ, but only in such a way as to destroy the reality of His incarnation, death and resurrection”.

Athanasius of Alexandria stated¹⁷ that the “gates” and “everlasting doors” (Psalm 24:7) were those between heaven and earth that barred man from entrance to heaven. Thus Athanasius distinguished these gates from the gates of hell.

“The devil, the enemy of our race, having fallen from heaven, wanders about our lower atmosphere, and there bears rule over his fellow-spirits, as his peers in disobedience. Not only does he work illusions by their means, in them that are deceived, but tries to hinder them that are going up. About this the Apostle says, ‘According to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that

¹⁴ Ignatius, Epistle to the Trallians, IX.

¹⁵ This heresy originated with Simon Magus and his followers, and was very widespread by the middle of the 1st Century. For details, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

¹⁶ Leo the Great, Letter to Turribius, XV, 18.

¹⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, On the Incarnation of the Word, XXV, 5-6. See also: Hippolytus, Fragments from Commentary on Psalm 24, Part I Exegetical. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xxxiii, 13. Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, I, xi, 41.

now works in the sons of disobedience' (Ephesians 2:2). The Lord came to cast down the devil, clear the air and prepare the way for us up into heaven. As Paul said, we enter 'Through the veil, that is to say, His flesh' (Hebrews 10:20). This must be by death. By what other kind of death could this have come to pass, than by one that took place in the air, I mean the cross? Only he that is perfected on the cross dies in the air. Thus it was quite fitting that the Lord suffered this death.

Thus being lifted up, He cleared the air of the malignity both of the devil and of demons of all kinds. As He says, 'I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven' (Luke 10:18). He made a new opening¹⁸ of the way up into heaven as He says once more, 'Lift up your gates, O princes, and be lifted up, you everlasting doors' (Psalm 24:7). It was not the Word Himself that needed an opening of the gates, being Lord of all; but we needed it, whom He carried up by His own body. As He offered it to death on behalf of all, so by it He once more made ready the way up into the heavens.

Parables from the Old Testament for Holy Saturday

There are fifteen Readings from the Old Testament prescribed for Holy Saturday, listed below, that give us some perspective regarding the significance of Holy Saturday for the Church. There are three major sections to this Study on Holy Saturday as follows:

1. The Climax of Christ's Mission
2. Deliverance and Baptism with the Epistle Reading, Romans 6:3-11
3. Resurrection of the Dead with the Gospel Reading, Matthew 28: 1-20

Discussion on these 15 Readings is distributed among the three major sections of the Study for Holy Saturday according to the following Table. Two of the parables have been moved to the section on Good Friday Lamentation for subject matter continuity.

Parables from the Old Testament for Holy Saturday

Reading	Reading	Subject	Location
1	Genesis 1:1-13	The Creation	Climax Christ's Mission
2	Isaiah 60:1-16	The Gathering of the Elect	The Resurrection
3	Exodus 12:1-11	Christ -- The Passover Sacrifice	Good Friday Lamentation
4	Jonah 1:1-4:11	The Belly of the Sea Monster	Deliverance
5	Joshua 5:10-15	The Captain of the Lord's Host	Climax Christ's Mission
6	Exodus 13:20-15:19	Crossing the Red Sea	Good Friday Lamentation
7	Zephaniah 3:8-15	The Remnant	The Resurrection
8	1 Kings 17:8-24	Elijah Raises the Widow's Son	The Resurrection
9	Isaiah 61:10-62:5	The Garment of Salvation	The Resurrection
10	Genesis 22:1-18	Isaac Prefigures Christ	Deliverance
11	Isaiah 61:1-9	Christ Preaches the Gospel	Climax Christ's Mission
12	2 Kings 4:8-37	The Shunammite's Son	The Resurrection
13	Isaiah 63:11-64:5	The Second Coming	The Resurrection
14	Jeremiah 31:31-34	The New Covenant	Climax Christ's Mission
15	Daniel 3:1-30 plus Song of the Three Children 1:1-65	The Children in the Furnace	Deliverance

¹⁸ Thus Psalm 24 refers to both the descent into Hades and to the Ascension.

The Climax of Christ's Mission

Christ's mission in becoming incarnate from the Virgin Mary was not a spur-of-the-moment decision; it had been planned before the Garden of Eden. Peter stated that Christ was "foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Peter 1:20). Paul spoke of Christ's works that "were finished from the foundation of the world" (Hebrews 4:3). This is a mystery, hidden in God, that was revealed to mankind slowly over the ages (Romans 16:25-26, Ephesians 3:8-13). Part of this mystery was the Lord's purpose to make His grace available to everyone, including those in Hades. The "busting-out" of those in Hades was thus the climax of a mission that had been planned for a long time.

In Western tradition, little attention has been given to Holy Saturday. As a result, "Easter" in the West doesn't have the same depth of meaning as Pascha in the Orthodox Church.

Irenaeus stated that the Lord preached His Advent to those in hell also. Those who directed their eyes toward His light prior to His Advent were in much the same condition as the Gentiles after His Advent. We would despise the Grace of God if we would say that they have no opportunity to repent.

"The Lord descended¹⁹ into the regions beneath the earth, preaching His Advent there also, and declaring the remission of sins received by those who believe in Him. Now all those believed in Him who had hope towards Him, that is, those who proclaimed His Advent, and submitted to His dispensations. This included the righteous men, the prophets, and the patriarchs, to whom He remitted sins in the same way as He did to us, which sins we should not lay to their charge, if we would not despise the grace of God. These men did not impute to us Gentiles our transgressions; so also it is not right that we should lay blame on those who sinned before Christ's coming. For 'all men come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23), and are not justified of themselves, but by the Advent of the Lord, — they who earnestly direct their eyes towards His light. It is for our instruction that their actions have been committed to writing, that we might know, in the first place, that our God and theirs is one".

"God was patient²⁰ regarding the state of slumber in which men lay just as He aroused His sleeping disciples at His passion. On their account 'He also descended into the lower parts of the earth' (Ephesians 4:9), to behold with His eyes the state of those who were resting from their labors. In reference to this, He declared to His disciples, 'Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see and hear what you see and hear'" (Matthew 13:16).

"It was not merely for those who believed on Him in the time of Tiberius Caesar that Christ came, nor did the Father exercise His providence for the men only who are now alive. He came for all men altogether, which from the beginning, according to their capacity, in their generation have both feared and loved God, practiced justice and piety towards their neighbors, and have earnestly desired to see Christ, and to hear His voice".

¹⁹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xxvii, 2.

²⁰ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xxii, 1-2.

Irenaeus also wrote²¹ that following His Descent into Hell, breaking the brazen gates and iron bars, He then ascended to heaven, from which He came, and opened the doors of heaven.

“The prophets spoke of His having slept, and of His having risen again because the Lord sustained Him (Psalm 3:5). David commanded the principalities of heaven to set open the everlasting doors, that the King of glory might go in (Psalm 24:7), proclaiming beforehand His resurrection from the dead through the Father’s power, and His reception into heaven. They expressed themselves thus, ‘His going forth is from the extremity of heaven, and his circuit to the *other* end of heaven; and no one shall be hidden from his heat’ (Psalm 19:6 LXX). Thus they announced His being taken up again to the place from which He came down, and that there is no one who can escape His righteous judgment”.

Gregory Thaumaturgus, speaking of the conversation of Jesus with John the Baptist before His baptism, spoke²² of how Jesus convinced John to proceed. John had said that he needed to be baptized by Him, and was reluctant to proceed (Matthew 3:13-15). One aspect of Jesus’ explanation was His need to descend into hell on behalf of the dead there.

“It is fitting for me to ascend the cross, to be pierced with its nails, and to suffer after the manner of that nature which is capable of suffering. I must heal sufferings by my suffering, and, by the tree, cure the wound that was inflicted upon men by the tree. It is fitting for me to descend even into the very depths of the grave, on behalf of the dead who are detained there. It is fitting for me, by my three days’ dissolution in the flesh, to destroy the power of the ancient enemy, death. It is fitting for me to kindle the torch of my body for those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death”.

Methodius stated²³ that Christ’s baptism by John was a mystery that prophesied of His descent into hell.

“He showed the world a mystery, rising superior to the natural elements in the Jordan, and thus exhibiting, in signs beforehand, the descent of our Lord into Hades, and His wonderful deliverance of those who were held fast in corruption. All things yielded and succumbed to that divine image which prefigured you”.

John Chrysostom linked²⁴ Paul’s words, “He descended into the lower parts of the earth” (Ephesians 4:9) with his words, “He became obedient even to death” (Philippians 2:8, 9). On both occasions, Paul was speaking of Christ’s humility.

“From His ascending, he implies His descent, and by ‘the lower parts of the earth’, ‘death’, according to the notions of men. As Jacob also said, ‘Then shall you bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave’ (Genesis 32:48). Again, ‘Lest I become like them that go down into the pit’ (Psalm 143:7), that is like the dead. Why does he descend upon this region? Of what captivity does he speak? Of that of the devil; for He took the tyrant captive, the devil, I mean, and death, the curse, and sin. Behold His spoils and His trophies”.

²¹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xxxiii, 13.

²² Gregory Thaumaturgus, “On the Holy Theophany”, Four Homilies, IV, Dubious or Spurious Writings, Part II, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 6.

²³ Methodius, Oration Concerning Simeon and Anna, IX.

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XI, vv. 4:8-12.

“He descended into the lower parts of the earth, beyond which there are no other; and He ascended up far above all things, to that place, beyond which there is no other. This is to show His divine energy, and supreme dominion. It did Him no injury that He came down into the lower parts of the earth, nor was it any hindrance to His becoming far higher than the Heavens. So that the more a man is humbled, so much the more is he exalted”.

In reviewing the history of the Advent of Christ, Athanasius of Alexandria mentioned²⁵ that the gatekeepers of hell shuddered at the descent of Christ to their realm.

“We know that He, the Only-begotten Son of God, at the Father’s bidding came from the heavens for the abolishment of sin, and was born of the Virgin Mary. He conversed with the disciples, and fulfilled the Economy according to the Father’s will, and was crucified. He died and descended into the parts beneath the earth, and regulated the things there. The gatekeepers of hell saw Him (Job 38:17 LXX) and shuddered. He rose from the dead the third day, and conversed with the disciples, and fulfilled the whole Economy. When the forty days were full, He ascended into the heavens, and sits on the right hand of the Father. He is coming in the last day of the resurrection in the glory of the Father, to render to everyone according to his works”.

Giving us more insight into Christ’s mission in becoming Incarnate are four Readings from the Old Testament. They will be covered in the following order:

1. 1st Parable from the Old Testament: Genesis 1:1-13 "The Creation"
2. 5th Parable from the Old Testament: Joshua 5:10-15 "The Captain of the Lord’s Host"
3. 11th Parable from the Old Testament: Isaiah 61:1-9 "Christ Preaches the Gospel"
4. 14th Parable from the Old Testament: Jeremiah 31:31-34 "The New Covenant"

1st Parable from the Old Testament: Genesis 1:1-13 “The Creation”

There are many parallels between Genesis 1 and John 1, and the Reading prescribed for Pascha is John 1:1-17. Just as Holy Saturday and Pascha go together hand-in-hand, so these two Readings go hand-in-hand. Athanasius of Alexandria wrote²⁶ of this connection as follows, where the testimony of Creation has benefit to those who never heard of Christ, but are inclined to see the hand of the Creator in His works.

“Creation testifies of its Creator and is itself a revelation of God, especially in the order and harmony pervading the whole. God being good and loving to mankind, but having His being beyond all created existence, mankind was likely to miss the way to the knowledge of Him. For this cause God, by His own Word, gave the universe the order it has in order that men might be enabled to know Him by His works even though He is by nature invisible and incomprehensible. Even in human works, the artist is known by his works even when he is not seen”.

²⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *De Synodis*, Part I, 8.

Athanasius of Alexandria, *De Synodis*, Part II, 30.

²⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Prolegomena* III, 35.

“For the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). “Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made” (Romans 1:20).

Seeing a revelation of God can be dependent on the condition of one’s heart, however. The people accompanying Paul at his conversion didn’t see what he saw (Acts 9:3-7). The wisdom of this world and the heretics of the ages have seen the Creation but have misinterpreted it, accepting the ideas of Plato and others who state that matter is uncreated and therefore co-eternal with God. A modern rephrase of this would state that matter or its equivalent energy is uncreated in conjunction with the First Law of Thermodynamics.

If matter is uncreated, God then becomes either a mechanic working on matter external to Himself, or a material god, if matter was part of His essence. The heretics supposed that Christ was a secondary god and a part of creation, not the Creator Himself. The Church Fathers were adamant about the Father and the Son being co-operators in creating the heavens and the earth out of nothing, and the words of the Nicene Creed were chosen very carefully to reflect this.

Gregory of Nazianzus stated²⁷ that in creating the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1), God first created the heavenly and angelic powers out of an invisible nature. This was a work fulfilled by His Word, and perfected by His Spirit. Then when His first creation was in good order, He conceived a second world, material and visible. This is a compound of earth and sky, and all that is in the midst of them — an admirable creation indeed, when we consider the harmony and the unison of the whole.

When God spoke during the six days of Creation, the Father addressed the Son, saying, “Let there be light”, as the Spirit moved over the waters (Genesis 1:2-3). Basil the Great stated²⁸ that God spoke and creation appeared instantaneously as a vast nature and an elaborate system. Thus David quotes the Father addressing the Son, “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands” (Psalm 102:25, Hebrews 1:10).

The Son is called “the brightness of His Glory and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3), and “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). In this regard, Christ said, “I and My Father are one”, and “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 10:30, 14:9). It is then to Christ, the Image of God, that the Father said, “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26). The Son then created man with both a visible nature (i.e. from matter) and an invisible nature (i.e. his soul) as He breathed into him the breath of life. Man was created as part earthly and part heavenly, and able to live in either realm. Clement of Alexandria stated²⁹:

“The other works of creation He made by the word of command alone, but man He framed by Himself, by His own hand, and breathed into him what was peculiar to Himself”.

²⁷ Gregory of Nazianzen, Oration on the Theophany, 38

²⁸ Basil the Great, Hexaemeron I:6, V:6, V:10

²⁹ Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor I, 3

Gregory of Nyssa linked³⁰ the Creation to the Resurrection of the Dead, and one of the major themes for Pascha is a return to Paradise for those who had been expelled.

“It is helpful in understanding the Creation to also understand the end of time, since the end must be like the beginning. He who admits a beginning of motion surely does not doubt also as to its having an end, and vice versa. We must use the same faith as to the Word of God when He foretells the necessary stoppage of existing things. Those who deny the Creation often deny the Resurrection. The resurrection promises us nothing else than the restoration of the fallen to their ancient state. The grace we look for is a certain return to the first life, bringing back again to Paradise him who was cast out from it”.

In John 1 as in Genesis 1, one of the themes is the subject of light versus darkness. The initial state described for the earth was darkness. “Darkness was over the surface of the deep” as the Spirit of God moved over the surface of the waters (Genesis 1:2).

On the first three days of Creation, the following occurred:

- Day One: Separation of light from darkness.
- Day Two: Separation of waters above the horizon from waters below the horizon.
- Day Three: Separation of dry land; sprouting of vegetation.

On each of these three days, there was not yet any embodied light. That didn’t occur until the creation of the sun, moon and stars on Day Four. One might ask how Christ could separate the light from the darkness if there was no (embodied) light yet. What was He separating?

John gives the answer, “In Him was life and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:5). The darkness spoken of here takes on an evil dimension as the forces of darkness. John mentions this again “Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

Darkness is spoken of throughout Scripture as the eternal abode of the ungodly. For example, speaking of Cain, Balaam, Korah and others: for them, “The gloom of darkness is reserved forever” (Jude 13, 2 Peter 2:17). Those who are judged unrighteous at the Last Judgment are said to be “cast into the outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30), where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

A similar situation will occur at the end of time, where there will be no sun or moon because the Glory of God will illumine everything (Revelation 21:23, Isaiah 60:19, 20). At that time, the light and the darkness will already be separated.

Even today, “We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against the rulers of the darkness of this age” (Ephesians 6:12). In doing so, we have become sons (and daughters) of light and are not of the darkness (1 Thessalonians 5:5, John 12:35-36). In fact, we have been delivered out of darkness into the light of God (1 Peter 2:9, Ephesians 5:8, Colossians 1:13).

³⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, On the Making of Man, 23, 17.

John Chrysostom stated³¹ that all men receive “light” from God, but some close their eyes to it. Their “darkness” arises from their own wickedness. This has direct bearing on Christ’s purpose in descending into Hades. There were those in Hades who had responded to His Light, but who didn’t have the opportunities of those living in Israel.

“If He ‘gives light to all men that come into the world’ (John 1:9), how is it that so many continue unenlightened? Not all have known the majesty of Christ. How then does He give light to all men? He gives light to all as far as in Him lies. But if some, willfully closing the eyes of their mind, would not receive the rays of that Light, their darkness arises not from the nature of the Light, but from their own wickedness, who willfully deprive themselves of the gift”.

When the Lord created Adam and Eve, not only were they created in the Image of God, but God commanded light to shine out of darkness (2 Corinthians 4:6) through them. John Chrysostom comments³² on this to say that Christ Himself became Light at the Incarnation to restore the light in men.

“Where did He command light to shine out of darkness? In the beginning and in prelude to the creation; for He says, ‘Darkness was on the face of the deep. And God said, let there be light, and there was light’ (Genesis 1:2, 3). Then, He said, ‘Let it be, and it was’; but now He said nothing, but Himself became Light for us. He did not say, ‘has now commanded light’, but ‘has Himself shined’ (2 Corinthians 4:6). Therefore, we do not see tangible objects by the shining of this light, but we see God Himself through Christ. Of the Spirit, he says, ‘But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory even as from the Lord Spirit’ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Of the Son He says, ‘That the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them’ (2 Corinthians 4:4). And of the Father, He says ‘He that said Light shall shine out of darkness shined in your hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ’” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Paul also spoke of the work of Creation as having been the work of Christ, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit:

“But to the Son, He says ‘You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands’” (Hebrews 1:8, 10; Psalm 102:25).

Also to the Colossians: “By Him (Christ) all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, lordships, principalities or authorities. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16, also Revelation 4:11).

5th Parable from the Old Testament: Joshua 5:10-15 "The Captain of the Lord's Host"

“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, ‘Are You for us or for our adversaries?’ So He said, ‘No, but *as* Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come’. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped,

³¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, VIII,

³² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, VIII, 3.

and said to Him, ‘What does my Lord say to His servant?’ Then the Commander of the Lord’s army said to Joshua, ‘Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand *is* holy’. And Joshua did so” (Joshua 5:10-15 LXX).

Entering the Promised Land: Overview

On Holy Saturday, 30 AD, many were entering the Promised Land as Christ led captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8). Others of us still face the great wilderness of this life, full of scorpions and adders. Joshua’s encounter with Christ at Jericho gives us some illumination about our present situation.

As Joshua led the people into the Promised Land, the Lord spoke to him, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you” (Joshua 5:9). As they celebrated their first Passover in the Promised Land, the manna ceased as suddenly as it started (Joshua 5:12).

Manna was God’s special provision to get His people through the wilderness (Exodus 16:35, Numbers 11:7). Jesus called the manna “bread from heaven” and said that the “true bread from heaven is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:32-33). He then went on to say, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world” (John 6:51). Here He is speaking of the Lord’s Supper, which is God’s special provision for the wilderness of this life.

Once we have arrived in the Promised Land at the Second Coming, the manna will not be necessary and we will drink of the fruit of the vine new with our Lord (Matthew 26:29). At that time, everyone will know the Lord (Jeremiah 31:34), and everywhere will be holy ground. And we will all join the saints and angels in worshipping the captain of the host of the Lord.

There is dual imagery here. The manna ceased when Israel entered the Promised Land. But yet, manna is also an image of the Eucharist, which we need to carry us through the wilderness of this life³³. Just as the manna was called “Angels’ food” (Psalm 78:25), so the Eucharist is called “heavenly food”. In both cases the people of God ate this food in anticipation of the heavenly rest that they were heading for. The manna and the Eucharist both speak about the future Kingdom of God.

Israel was commanded to eat the Passover lamb with their loins belted, with their sandals on their feet, with their staff in their hand (Exodus 12:11). John Chrysostom stated³⁴ that we also look for our Exodus, and we need to be ready. We have an encampment in the desert, where the encampment is our body (2 Corinthians 5:1). We are on our journey home and we do not lay up any treasure in the desert. If the thief should come, we must in a moment arise and depart for our Exodus. Quoting the Lord: “Watch, for you know not at what hour the thief comes” (Matthew 24:42-43) thus the Lord calls the thief death. Assisting us are the same forces that assisted Israel in her Exodus, and opposing us are the same forces that opposed them.

“We too have our encampment (Revelation 20:9), and we dwell in the desert; for a desert indeed without virtue, is the earth now, even more desolate

³³ For more information on the “bread of heaven”, see the Study for the Feeding of the 5000 at the 8th Sunday After Pentecost at Mark Kern, The Whole Counsel of God, St. Athanasius Press, 2004, p. 129.

³⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXIII, Moral.

than that wilderness. Why was that desert so terrible? Was it not because it had scorpions in it, and cobras (Deuteronomy 8:15)? ‘A land’, it is said, ‘which none passed through’ (Jeremiah 2:6). Yet that wilderness is not as barren of fruits as is this human nature. At this instant, how many scorpions, how many cobras are in this wilderness, how many serpents, how many ‘offspring of vipers’ (Matthew 3:7) are these through whom we at this instant pass! Yet let us not be afraid; for the leader of this our Exodus is not Moses, but Jesus”.

The Day of First-Fruits

Table 1 shows where the “Day of First-Fruits” fits into the celebration of the Passover. It was the “day after the Sabbath” when Jesus rose from the dead³⁵.

The manna, the food the Israelis ate during their 40-year stay in the Sinai wilderness, ceased on the Day of First-Fruits. On the 14th of Nisan, they observed the Passover. On the next day, the 15th, a Sabbath, they ate some of the produce of the land. The next day, the manna stopped (Joshua 5:11-12). In 30 AD, the 14th of Nisan was the day Jesus was crucified, and the 15th of Nisan was Holy Saturday. The day the manna stopped was the 16th of Nisan, or the day Christ rose from the dead.

Both the first year, and virtually every year since, the central theme preceding and following the Day of First-Fruits was the celebration of the fact that they had been delivered from Egypt. Also, being in the middle of the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, they were in the midst of eating unleavened bread for seven days. Further, the barley crop was ripe, but as yet not harvested.

Table 1
Dates of the First Three of the Seven Set Feasts

Feast	Date	Sabbath?	Other Names
The Day of the Lord's Passover	14 Nisan	No	Preparation Day Mark 15:42. This was the day Jesus was crucified.
The Feast of Unleavened Bread	15 Nisan to 21 Nisan	15 Nisan and 21 Nisan	Called the Feast of the Passover in the New Testament; e.g. John 13:1, Luke 2:41
The Day of First-Fruits	16 Nisan	No	Called the “day after the Sabbath” (of 15 Nisan) Leviticus 23:10-14. This was the day Jesus rose from the dead.

According to Paul, Jesus was “the First-Fruits of those that are asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). As such, He is the barley sheaf that was waved before the Lord in celebration that the harvest is at hand (Leviticus 23:9-14). Later, Paul makes it clear that the harvest, of which Jesus Christ is the First-Fruits, is all “those who are His at His coming” at the end of the age (1 Corinthians 15:23, 24). Since the Day of First-Fruits was not a Sabbath day, the actual

³⁵ For more discussion on the implications of this, see the Study for Holy Thursday Morning.

harvesting of the barley could begin on this same day. And so the Lord's harvest began this day, also.

Consider some Old Testament passages relating to the death of Old Testament believers (e.g. Genesis 37:35, 42:38, Job 14:13, 19:25, Psalms 16:10, 49:15, 88:3, 89:48). Old Testament believers expected to be in the grave, or Sheol, to await the coming of their Redeemer. They realized, however, that

- (1) Their Redeemer lived (Job 19:25) and
- (2) He would not abandon their soul to Sheol (Psalms 16:10).

Jesus referred to Lazarus (the poor man) as being in "Abraham's bosom", not heaven, or with the Lord, while the rich man, who had no compassion on Lazarus, was in "Hades" and in torment (Luke 16:22-26). From these and other passages, it seems that there were two parts to "the grave" (or Sheol): one for the righteous (i.e. Abraham's bosom), and one for the unrighteous, containing flames (Luke 16:24). Between the two was a great chasm so that no one can cross (Luke 16:26).

This transition of believers from Sheol (Abraham's bosom) to heaven occurred at the Resurrection. This is what Paul referred to as the Lord leading captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8, Psalm 68:18). This transfer was the beginning of the harvest of which the First-Fruit sheaf was a promise or declaration. Since that day, the anticipation of the harvest has been going on, with each believer's death being one more stalk that is added. At the end of the age comes the grand finale of the harvest (Revelation 14:14-20) where first all the "tares" are gathered (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43) and bundled and prepared to be burned.

Jesus said that it was written in the Scriptures that the Christ was to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day (Luke 24:44-46, 1 Corinthians 15:4 see also Luke 24:26, 27; John 20:9). There are numerous references to Christ's suffering (Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, etc.), but few references, apart from First-Fruits, to Christ rising precisely on the third day³⁶. Jesus used Jonah's three days in the belly of the sea monster as an illustration of His three-day burial. But to make this connection before Christ was incarnate took some keen insight. The Day of First-Fruits was to be taken unmistakably as a resurrection prophecy; this can be seen by connecting the "history lesson" (Deuteronomy 26:1-11) to the First-Fruit sheaf offering. In the "history lesson", the predominant theme is the resurrection of the Israeli nation from the point of certain death by (1) a mighty hand, (2) an outstretched arm, (3) awe-inspiring terror, (4) signs, and (5) wonders or miracles. And in the First-Fruit sheaf one is celebrating the resurrection of the seed that was buried in the ground.

At the time of the Day of First-Fruits, Israel was in the midst of eating unleavened bread for seven days, and eating unleavened bread implies a new and different life-style³⁷ (1 Corinthians 5:8). Thus, Paul says, "so we too might walk in newness of life." It is this "walking in newness of life" that baptism is all about.

"Walking in newness of life" is not just following a bunch of rules and gutting it out. At the time that the Israeli army entered Canaan, the manna ceased on the Day of First-Fruits (Joshua 5:11-12). The reason it ceased was because God had made provision for them to walk in

³⁶ Hosea speaks of Christ reviving His saints after two days, and raising them up on the third day (Hosea 6:2).

³⁷ For more discussion on the Day of First-Fruits, refer to the Study for Holy Thursday Matins in Mark Kern, The Whole Counsel of God, St. Athanasius Press, 1996, 1998, 2004.

a newness of life. They were now at a point where they could begin to draw from the land that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; that is, the Kingdom of God. Today, once we have “appealed to God for a good conscience” (1 Peter 3:21) in baptism; the resources of the Kingdom of God are available to enable us to, in fact, walk in newness of life.

Joshua Meets Christ

After crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land, but before getting to Jericho, Joshua met a man standing opposite him with a drawn sword in His hand. Not recognizing the man, Joshua asked if He were for them or against them. The Man replied “No, rather I indeed come now as Captain of the host of the Lord” (Joshua 5:14). Joshua fell on his face and bowed down and said, “What has My Lord to say to His servant?” The Captain of the Lord’s host said, “Remove your sandals from your feet for the place where you are standing is holy. And Joshua did so.”

Some might say that the Captain of the Lord’s host is the archangel Michael, since Michael is “the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people Israel” (Daniel 12:1). But yet the archangels don’t ask to be worshipped; and even go out of their way to prevent people from worshipping them, as did the angel who revealed Revelation to the Apostle John (Revelation 19:10, 22:9). On that occasion, John fell down to worship the angel, but the angel said “see that you do not do that. I am your fellow servant and of your brethren the prophets. Worship God!” We would conclude that the “Captain of the Lord’s host” is Christ!

Christ called the place where He was standing “holy ground”, and this has major implications. The Scriptures refer to things, animals, and people as being holy, but always by association with a Holy God. Made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, Ephesians 4:24), His people were to be holy as He is holy (Leviticus 19:2), and they are to be partakers of His Holiness (Hebrews 12:10). Consequently, the Tabernacle and all its furnishings and utensils were anointed with holy oil (Exodus 40:9) in preparation for the Presence of God dwelling there (Exodus 29:43-46, Numbers 7:89). Holy clothing was worn by the priests (Exodus 28:2) in serving God, and holy water was used by the priests in performing the judgments of God both for discernment in concealed sin (Numbers 5:17ff) and for removing uncleanness (Numbers 19:9). The offerings to the Lord were also holy, whether animal or vegetable (Exodus 29:33, Leviticus 2:3, 6:25). Therefore, for the ground to be holy (Joshua 5:15), the Presence of the Lord was there, just as it was at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:4). Similarly, the camp of Israel was not allowed to become defiled (Deuteronomy 23:14, Numbers 5:2-3) because the Tabernacle and the Presence of God were in its midst. The Commandments, Statutes and Judgments of the Lord were similarly holy (Romans 7:12, Psalm 19:7-10) because they represented the Word of God for His people (Deuteronomy 4:8, Leviticus 18:26-28, Psalm 105:42). All this carries over into the New Testament, where the people of God “are not called to uncleanness but in holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:7). Ambrose stated³⁸ that the Church is the holy ground, fruitful with sanctity and fertile with virtues. Christ in us is like the burning bush, consuming our thorns, showing us Grace.

³⁸ Ambrose of Milan, Epistles, LXIII, 41-42.

Cyprian noted³⁹ a mystery shown by Joshua, whom he calls Jesus⁴⁰. He who was instructed to remove his shoes (Joshua 5:13-15) was not the Bridegroom. He who kept His shoes on was to be the Bridegroom. The same was true of Moses at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:2-6).

Similarly, Ambrose of Milan, in speaking of Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church, contrasted⁴¹ Him with Moses and Joshua. Both Moses and Joshua were asked to remove their shoes in His Presence.

“Moses was not the Bridegroom, for to him came the word, ‘Loose your shoe from off your foot’ (Exodus 3:5), that he might give place to his Lord. Nor was Joshua, the son of Nun, the Bridegroom, for to him also it was told, saying, ‘Loose your shoe from off your foot’ (Joshua 5:15), lest, by reason of the likeness of his name, he should be thought the spouse of the Church. None other is the Bridegroom but Christ alone, of Whom John the Baptist said, ‘He Who has the bride is the Bridegroom’ (John 3:29). They, therefore, loose their shoes, but His shoe cannot be loosed, even as John the Baptist said, ‘I am not worthy to loose the strap of His sandal’” (John 1:27).

Justin Martyr, in his argument with the Jewish philosopher, Trypho, over the words “Let Us make” (Genesis 1:26), used⁴² the account of Joshua with the Captain of the Lord’s Host to strengthen his case. Trypho agreed that the “Captain of the Lord’s host” was God; he had difficulty believing that God became flesh by the Virgin Mary.

“Do not change the force of the words I quoted, and repeat what your teachers assert. They say either that God said to Himself, ‘Let Us make,’ just as we, when about to do something, sometimes say to ourselves, ‘Let us make’. Or they say that God spoke to the elements: the earth and other similar substances of which we believe man was formed. I shall quote again the words narrated by Moses himself, from which we can indisputably learn that God conversed with someone who was numerically distinct from Himself, and also a rational Being. These are the words: ‘And God said, Behold, Adam has become as one of us, to know good and evil’ (Genesis 3:22). In saying, therefore, ‘as one of us’, Moses has declared that there is a certain number of persons associated with one another, and that they are at least two. I would not say that the dogma of that heresy which is among you is true, or that the teachers of it can prove that God spoke to angels, or that the human frame was the workmanship of angels⁴³. But this Offspring, which was truly brought forth from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures, and the Father communed with Him. The Scripture by Solomon has made this clear, that He whom Solomon calls Wisdom, was begotten as a Beginning before all His creatures and as Offspring by God (Proverbs 8:22-31). He has also declared this same thing in the revelation made to Joshua the son of Nun, where the Lord, after He revealed Who He was, said to Joshua, ‘Behold, I give into your hand Jericho, and its king, and its mighty men’” (Joshua 5:13-6:2).

³⁹ Cyprian, *Treatises*, XII, ii, 19.

⁴⁰ In Hebrew, the name for Jesus and Joshua are the same name.

⁴¹ Ambrose, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, III, x, 71.

⁴² Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 62.

⁴³ This heresy originated with Simon Magus and his followers, and was very widespread by the middle of the 1st Century, especially among the Jews. For details, see Mark Kern, *Simon Magus the Heresiarch*, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

According to early Christian tradition⁴⁴, there were a number of “theophanies” or appearances of the Son of God prior to His Incarnation. Included in these appearances are the following:

1. He rained down fire on Sodom from the Father in heaven (Genesis 19:24).
2. He wrestled with Jacob all night (Genesis 32:24).
3. He was a Guest of Abraham, where they discussed the judgment of Sodom (Genesis 18:2-3, 22-33).
4. He spoke with Moses at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:2-6).
5. Moses wrote of Him as “That Prophet” Who was to come (Deuteronomy 18:15).
6. Joshua saw Him as “The Captain of the Lord’s Host” (Joshua 5:13-15) and worshipped Him.
7. Samuel knew Him as the “Anointed of God”, and then named the priests and kings as the anointed (1 Samuel 12:1-5).
8. David knew Him as “The Beloved” (Psalm 45:6-17).
9. Solomon spoke of Him as “The Beginning” and as “Wisdom” (Proverbs 8:22-31, 9:1-10).
10. Isaiah knew Him as “The Branch from Jesse” (Isaiah 11:1, 10).
11. Zechariah wrote of His coming on Palm Sunday (Zechariah 9:9).
12. Daniel wrote of Him as the Son of Man coming to the Father (Daniel 7:13-14), and as the “Stone cut out of the mountain without hands” (Daniel 2:34-35).
13. Jeremiah wrote of living under His shadow among the Gentiles (Lamentations 4:20).

John Cassian mentioned⁴⁵ that our feet are shod as we go out into the world to preach the Gospel (Ephesians 6:15). But yet many people in his day removed their shoes to approach the holy mysteries (i.e. the Eucharist) in imitation of Joshua.

“But though lawfully enough they make use of these sandals, as permitted by the Lord’s command, yet they never allow them to remain on their feet when they approach to celebrate or to receive the holy mysteries. They think that they ought to observe in the letter that which was said to Moses and to Joshua, the son of Nun, ‘Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground’” (Exodus 3:5).

11th Parable from the Old Testament: Isaiah 61:1-9 "Christ Preaches the Gospel"

There are two parts to this Reading: one having to do with the Anointing of Christ in His humanity to preach the Gospel, and the other having to do with the end of the age.

The Anointing of Christ: Isaiah 61:1-3

The Anointing of Christ saw its fulfillment early in Jesus’ three-year ministry, beginning with His Baptism by John the Baptist. Following His Baptism, Jesus returned “in the power of the Spirit to Galilee” (Luke 4:14) and read from Isaiah 61:1-2 for the Public Reading of the Scriptures during the Synagogue worship in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-19). This Reading was part of the Old Testament lectionary for that day. After reading it, He proclaimed, “Today this Scripture

⁴⁴ Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, V, iii, 20.

⁴⁵ John Cassian, The Institutes of the Coenobia, I, 9.

is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). However, this proclamation was too much for Nazareth and they tried to throw the Lord off a cliff (Luke 4:29).

The passage that Jesus read is messianic throughout (Messiah means anointed one): “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because the Lord has anointed Me.” (Isaiah 61:1). In this passage, Messiah will:

- Bring the Gospel to the afflicted, heal the broken hearted, proclaim liberty to captives and restore the sight of the blind (Isaiah 61:1 LXX)
- Proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of God’s vengeance (Isaiah 61:2)
- Comfort all who mourn (Isaiah 61:2-3)
- The people of God will rebuild the ancient ruined cities (Isaiah 61:4)
- Gentiles will be their servants (Isaiah 61:5)
- They will be priests of the Lord and they will eat the strength of the Gentiles (Isaiah 61:6 LXX)
- They will inherit the land a second time, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads (Isaiah 61:7 LXX)
- Their seed will be blessed of God and known all over the earth (Isaiah 61:8-9)

There are six items included in the (shortened) Reading Jesus read in the Nazareth synagogue and most of them relate to the Feast of Trumpets⁴⁶. What made this reading all the more powerful is that Jesus stated after He read it: “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21). The six items that He read are:

I am the Messiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me.” Messiah means “Anointed One.” In saying that this Scripture was fulfilled in their ears, Jesus meant that He claimed to be Messiah. The villagers found this hard to believe (Luke 4:22ff).

Preaching the Good News (Gospel) to the Poor: The rich generally have difficulty receiving the Good News. An example is the rich young (synagogue) ruler that Jesus asked to sell all that he had to obtain treasure in heaven. The burden of their wealth makes it difficult for them to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The poor, however, receive it much easier. The Beginning of the Indiction is the proclamation of the Good News to the poor. So it was with the preaching of the Twelve and the Seventy: largely to the poor.

Send Out the Downtrodden Forgiven: Luke’s Gospel quotes the Septuagint text of Isaiah 61 word for word except for this phrase. The Septuagint reading of this phrase is “heal the brokenhearted.” The word “send out” in Luke’s Gospel is the Greek word *apostollo* from which comes the word apostle. The Twelve and the Seventy Apostles and others like them throughout the centuries have been sent out forgiven. Cyril of Alexandria stated⁴⁷ that the words “heal the brokenhearted” referred to those “whom Satan had broken by the rod of spiritual violence”.

Proclaim Release to the Captives: This refers to those saints of all ages held captive in Hades awaiting the coming of Messiah. When Christ rose from the dead, He led captivity captive

⁴⁶ The Feast of Trumpets refers to the Second Coming of Christ, and it is celebrated in the Church on September 1st as the Beginning of the Indiction, or the preaching of the Church. For more details, see Mark Kern, The Meaning and Prophetic Significance of the Hebrew Feast Days, St Athanasius Press, 3rd edition, 2009.

⁴⁷ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 4.

(Ephesians 4:8, Psalms 68:18) and plundered Hades. Celebration of this event is a part of the Pascha sunrise service in the Orthodox Church⁴⁸

Proclaim Recovery of Sight to the Blind: Many people are unable to see what is going on around them. This was true of the villagers in Nazareth who tried to throw Jesus off a cliff shortly after He read these passages (Luke 4:28-30). This was also true of the Pharisees who had such difficulty with Jesus' healing of a blind man on the Sabbath (John 9:1-34). Jesus spoke to them afterward: "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind" (John 9:39). The problem here is the blindness caused by sin (John 9:41).

Proclaim an Acceptable Year of the Lord: In the Mosaic Law, every seventh year "the Land shall have a Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the Lord; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard" (Leviticus 25:4). After seven Sabbaths of years, or seven times seven, the fiftieth year was the Year of Jubilee. If the seventh year was a Sabbath to the Lord, the fiftieth was more so.

Beginning each year in the Church calendar⁴⁹, we ask that this be an acceptable year of the Lord. As Paul said, after quoting a Messianic passage from Isaiah 49:8, "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Ambrose of Milan pointed out⁵⁰ that just as the Son sent the Holy Spirit to the Church after His Ascension, so the Holy Spirit had earlier sent the Son in His humanity to save man. Just as the Holy Spirit anointed the Son, so the Holy Spirit anointed the Prophets and Apostles also.

"In the former book⁵¹ we have shown by the clear evidence of the Scriptures that the apostles and prophets were appointed, the latter to prophesy, the former to preach the Gospel, by the Holy Spirit in the same way as by the Father and the Son. Now we add what all will rightly wonder at, and not be able to doubt, that the Spirit was upon Christ; and that as He sent the Spirit (John 16:7), so the Spirit sent the Son of God. The Son of God says, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me, etc.' (Isaiah 61:1 LXX). He says in the Gospel, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears' (Luke 4:21), that He might point out that this was written of Himself. Rightly did He say 'upon Me', because He was speaking as the Son of Man. As the Son of Man He was anointed and sent to preach the Gospel".

Irenaeus pointed out⁵² how the Trinity was involved at the anointing of Jesus at His baptism.

"In the Name of Christ is implied, He that anoints, He that is anointed, and the unction itself with which He is anointed. It is the Father who anoints, but the

⁴⁸ For more discussion on this, see the Study for the Pascha Gospel Reading.

⁴⁹ The occasion of "The Beginning of the Indiction" contains much of the imagery of the Old Testament Feast of Trumpets. The Church Lectionary proclaims the Messiah and preaches the good news (Gospel) to the poor. Those broken by Satan will be healed and the bishops will be sent out to do the Lord's work. The Church will remember the Lord's victory over sin, death and Hades in leading captivity captive, and those, whose sin is forgiven, will have the eyes of their heart opened. This is the preaching of the Church.

⁵⁰ Ambrose of Milan, On the Holy Spirit, III, i, 1-2.

See also Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, II, ix, 74-79.

⁵¹ See Ambrose of Milan, On the Holy Spirit, II, xii.

⁵² Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, xviii, 3.

Son who is anointed by the Spirit, who is the unction, as the Word declares by Isaiah. ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed Me’ (Isaiah 61:1), pointing out both the anointing Father, the anointed Son, and the unction, which is the Spirit”.

Irenaeus also stated⁵³ that Christ did not speak of Himself (John 14:9-11, 12:44-45), but spoke because of His anointing by the Holy Spirit. This also applied to the Apostles who followed Him.

“‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me’ (Isaiah 61:1). That is the Spirit of whom the Lord declares, ‘It is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaks in you’ (Matthew 10:20). Again, giving to the disciples the power of regeneration into God, He said to them, ‘Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matthew 28:19). God promised, that in the last times He would pour Him [the Spirit] upon His servants and handmaids that they might prophesy. Therefore He descended upon the Son of God, Who had been made the Son of man, becoming accustomed in fellowship with Him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of God. He worked the will of the Father in them, and renewed them from their old habits into the newness of Christ”.

Irenaeus further stated⁵⁴ that while the Holy Spirit rested on Jesus’ humanity, He did not need to rest on His Deity. Since we, on the other hand, were bound and mourned from being led captive by our own sins, He was anointed to free us. We are saved as we receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

“Inasmuch as the Word of God was man from the root of Jesse, in this respect did the Spirit of God rest upon Him, and anoint Him to preach the Gospel to the lowly. But inasmuch as He was God, He did not judge according to glory, nor reprove after the manner of speech. ‘He did not need that any should testify to Him of man, for He Himself knew what was in man’ (John 2:25). He called all men that mourn; and granting forgiveness to those, who had been led into captivity by their sins. He loosed them from their chains, of whom Solomon says, ‘Everyone shall be bound with the cords of his own sins’ (Proverbs 5:22). Therefore the Spirit of God descended upon Him, the Spirit of Him who had promised by the prophets that He would anoint Him. So we, receiving from the abundance of His unction, might be saved. Such, then, is the witness of Matthew that Jesus and was anointed by the Spirit from the Father at His baptism” (Matthew 3:16-17).

Tertullian compared⁵⁵ the anointing of the High Priest, Aaron, with our baptism. A physical act of anointing generates a spiritual effect on our lives.

“When we have come up from the baptismal font, we are thoroughly anointed with a blessed unction, which is a practice derived from the old discipline, where on entering the priesthood, men were anointed with oil from a horn, ever since Moses anointed Aaron (Exodus 39:1, Leviticus 8:12, Psalm

⁵³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, xvii, 1.

⁵⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, ix, 3.

⁵⁵ Tertullian, *On Baptism*, III, ii, 7.

133:2). Aaron is called⁵⁶ ‘Christ’ (Leviticus 4:5, 16 LXX), from the ‘chrism’, which is the ‘unction’; which, when made spiritual, furnished an appropriate Name to the Lord, because He was ‘anointed’ with the Spirit by God the Father. As written in the Acts: ‘Truly they were gathered together in this city against Your Holy Son whom You⁵⁷ have anointed’ (Acts 4:27). Thus, too, in our case, the unction runs on the body, but profits spiritually; in the same way as the act of baptism itself is on the body, in that we are plunged in water, but the effect is spiritual, in that we are freed from sins.

John of Damascus also applied Isaiah’s words (free the prisoners, sight to the blind, etc.) to those in Hades awaiting the coming of Christ. In doing so, he distinguished⁵⁸ between two meanings of the word “corruption”. The first applied to Christ because He was truly human and was subject to death. The second did not apply to Him because He was not allowed to decay in His humanity. After His Resurrection, neither meaning applied to Him. At His descent into Hades in His deified soul, He released the prisoners and gave sight to the blind (Isaiah 61:1) for those who had been bound for ages.

“The word corruption has two meanings. It signifies all the human sufferings, such as hunger, thirst, death, that is, the separation of soul and body. In this sense we say that our Lord’s body was subject to corruption. He voluntarily accepted all these things. But corruption means also the complete resolution of the body into its constituent elements, and its utter disappearance, which is spoken of by many as destruction. The body of our Lord did not experience this form of corruption, as the prophet David says, ‘You will not leave my soul in hell, neither will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption’” (Psalm 16:10).

“Saying that our Lord’s body was incorruptible, in the first sense of the word, before His resurrection, is impious. If it were incorruptible it was not really, but only apparently, of the same essence as ours, and what the Gospel tells us happened, viz. the hunger, the thirst, the nails, the wound in His side, the death, did not actually occur. But if they only apparently happened, then the mystery of the dispensation is an imposture and a sham, and He became man only in appearance, and not in actual fact⁵⁹, and we are saved only in appearance, and not in actual fact. But God forbid, and may those who say so have no part in salvation. But in the second meaning of the word ‘corruption’, we confess that our Lord’s body is incorruptible, that is, indestructible, for such is the tradition of the inspired Fathers. Indeed, after the resurrection of our Savior from the dead, we say that our Lord’s body is incorruptible even in the first sense of the word. Our Lord by His own body bestowed the gifts both of resurrection and of subsequent incorruption even on our own body, He Himself having become to us the First-Fruits both of resurrection and incorruption. As Paul says, ‘This corruptible must put on incorruption’” (1 Corinthians 15:53).

⁵⁶ In the LXX, Aaron and his successors were called “the anointed priest”.

⁵⁷ Luke testifies further of Christ’s anointing (Acts 10:38). Similarly, for a priest to serve in the Temple, he had to have been “anointed” (Leviticus 4:18).

⁵⁸ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, III, 28-29.

⁵⁹ This heresy originated with Simon Magus and his followers, and was very widespread by the middle of the 1st Century, especially among the Jews. For details, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

“His soul, when it was deified, descended into Hades, in order that, just as the Sun of Righteousness rose for those on the earth, so likewise He might bring light to those who sit under the earth in darkness and shadow of death. He brought the message of peace to those on the earth, and release to the prisoners and sight to the blind. He became to those who believed, the Author of everlasting salvation and to those who did not believe, a reproach of their unbelief. He might become the same to those in Hades that every knee should bow to Him, of things in heaven, and things in earth and things under the earth. After He had freed those who had been bound for ages, immediately He rose again from the dead, showing us the way of resurrection”.

Contrast of This Age to the End of the Age: Isaiah 61:4-9

Isaiah wrote, “They shall build the old waste places, they shall raise up those that were before made desolate, and shall renew the desert cities, *even* those that had been desolate for *many* generations. Strangers shall come and feed your flocks, and aliens *shall be your* plowmen and vine-dressers. But you shall be called priests of the Lord, the ministers of God: you shall eat the strength of nations, and shall be admired because of their wealth. Thus shall they inherit the Land a second time and everlasting joy shall be upon their head! For I am the Lord who loves righteousness, and hate robberies of injustice; and I will give their labor to the just, and will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring in the midst of peoples; everyone that sees them shall take notice of them, that they are a seed blessed of God” (Isaiah 61:4-9).

Isaiah lived in Northern Israel in the years just prior to the conquest of (the Ten Tribes of) Israel by Assyria. About 135 years later, (the remaining two Tribes of) Judah would also be conquered by Babylon and led into exile. For Isaiah to say, “They shall inherit the Land a second time, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head” (Isaiah 61:7 LXX), he is not speaking of a return from captivity, but a much greater event. “The Land” refers to the Promised Land, where the “first inheritance” occurred after the Conquest by Joshua. Thus, Isaiah has switched from speaking of Christ’s “anointing” at His Advent and is now speaking of His Second Coming.

Gone at this time will be the evil, which was common to Israel both prior to and following the rejection of Christ. Tertullian elaborated⁶⁰ on the “day of retribution” (Isaiah 61:2) as something subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem in c. 70 AD.

“It is for these deserts of yours that Ezekiel announces your ruin as about to come: and not only in this age — a ruin which has already⁶¹ befallen — but in the ‘day of retribution’ (Isaiah 61:2), which will be subsequent. None will be freed from this ruin but he who shall have been frontally sealed with the passion of the Christ whom you have rejected. Thus it is written: ‘The Lord said to me, Son of man, you have seen what the elders of Israel do, each one of them in darkness, each in a hidden bed-chamber. Because they have said, ‘The Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the earth’” (Ezekiel 8:12).

⁶⁰ Tertullian, An Answer to the Jews, I, vii, 11.

⁶¹ That is, at the destruction of Jerusalem in c. 70 AD and in c. 135 AD.

Characteristic of the things of this age are “robberies of burnt offerings” (Isaiah 61:8), which the Lord hates. John Cassian referred⁶² to these “offerings” as our offices and our actions, which benefit our flesh but do nothing for the Lord. To this the Lord says, “Cursed is he that does the work of the Lord fraudulently” (Jeremiah 48:10). Paul refers to this as “Your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1), and Moses said, “Let the balance be just and the weights equal, the bushel just and the sextarius⁶³ equal” (Leviticus 19:35).

Pope Gregory the Great elaborated⁶⁴ on this, saying that when sin is mixed with showing mercy, it can no longer be called mercy.

“It is one thing to show mercy on account of our sins; another thing to sin on account of showing mercy. It can no longer be called mercy, since it cannot grow into sweet fruit, being embittered by the poison of its pestiferous root. The Lord through the prophet rejects even sacrifices themselves, saying, I the Lord love judgment, and I hate robbery in a whole burnt offering (Isaiah 61:8 LXX). Again He has said, ‘The sacrifices of the ungodly are abominable, which are offerings of wickedness’ (Proverbs 21:28). Such persons also take from the indigent what they give to God”.

In words attributed⁶⁵ to Clement of Rome, “Let us ‘not be as the foolish, but as the wise’ (Matthew 25:1-13), in all the self-restraint of the fear of God, that God may be glorified in everything through our Lord Jesus Christ, through our chaste and holy behavior. ‘Whether we eat, or drink, or do anything else, let us do it as for the glory of God’ (1 Corinthians 10:31). Let ‘all those who see us acknowledge that we are a blessed seed’ (Isaiah 61:9). Let them recognize us as ‘sons of the living God’ (Hosea 1:10, Romans 9:26), in everything — in all our words in purity, in humility. We do not copy the heathen in anything, nor are believers like other men, but in everything they are estranged from the wicked”.

14th Parable from the Old Testament: Jeremiah 31:31-34 "The New Covenant"

“Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day when I took hold of their hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; for they abode not in my covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. For this is my covenant, which I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, says the Lord, I will surely put my laws into their mind, and write them on their hearts. And I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. They shall not at all teach every one his *fellow* citizen, and every one his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and their sins I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34 LXX).

This Reading from Jeremiah covers not just the New Covenant, but also the transition to the New Covenant and life in the Kingdom of God following the Second Coming. All this was set in motion by Christ’s victory over death on Holy Saturday. To understand this, it is helpful to begin by backing up and looking at the purpose of the Law (the Old Covenant) as given at Mt.

⁶² John Cassian, First Conference of Abbot Theonas, III, xxi, 22.

⁶³ A sextarius was a measure of liquid capacity, about half a liter.

⁶⁴ Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule, III, 21.

⁶⁵ Clement of Rome, “Two Epistles Concerning Virginitiy”, II, 6, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7.

Sinai. We will also look at what constituted the Law, and how it was used as a “Creed” in the 1st Century synagogue worship. When Christ came, He said that He came to fulfill the Law; therefore we will look at the Law from Abraham’s viewpoint and the Law in the light of Grace. The pillar and central focus of the Law is the love of God.

Since Christ is our Great High Priest, there is of necessity a change in the Law (Hebrews 7:11-12). We will look at the New Covenant spoken of by Jeremiah during the Age of the Church. Since the Law has a spiritual dimension to it (Romans 7:14), we will look at the Law as it relates to the Holy Spirit. Finally, we will conclude with the place of the Law in the Kingdom of God at the Second Coming.

1) What Constituted the Mosaic Law?

The central pillar of the Mosaic Law was the love of God. Jesus referred to this as the “Greatest Commandment” of the Law and stated it in these terms:

- You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matthew 22:37), and
- You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39).

Jesus called these two parts “the first” and “the second”, where the second is like the first (Matthew 22:39). But these words did not just fall out of the sky; they had been an integral part of the Mosaic Law from the beginning (Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:12, 30:6, Leviticus 19:18). Israel was instructed to teach this to their children diligently (Deuteronomy 6:7). They were instructed to bind them into phylacteries on their foreheads (Deuteronomy 6:8) and write them on the door posts of their houses (Deuteronomy 6:9).

Breaking down the Mosaic Law into more detail, it consisted of Commandments, Statutes, Judgments and Testimonies. The core of the Law was the “Greatest Commandment”, and on this hangs all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:37-40). Tertullian stated⁶⁶ that Adam and Eve were aware of this in the Garden of Eden, and that if they had obeyed it, they would not have fallen. Thus the Gentiles had the Law prior to Moses. Until the coming of Christ, when the Law would be written on men’s hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34), the Lord commanded that the Law should be written in stone on Mt. Ebal (Deuteronomy 27:1-8). Without the Holy Spirit resident in men’s bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) as a teacher of all things, the text of the Law served as medicine for an obstinate people who were forgetful and ungrateful, and who were prone to fall into idolatry.

An outline of the Mosaic Law is as follows, comprising Commandments, Statutes, Judgments and Testimonies. All features of these parts of the Law are aimed at instructing the people of God in loving the Lord and in loving their neighbor.

Commandments.

- The Ten Commandments, which give details of the Greatest Commandment (Deuteronomy 5:6-21)
- Atonement for sin in anticipation of the work of Christ (Leviticus 4, Leviticus 5, Numbers 15)

⁶⁶ Tertullian, Answer to Jews, I, iii, 2.

- Separation from the world; no intermarriage with Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7:1-11, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)
- Tithes and Alms to guard against greed (Deuteronomy 26, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15)
- The year of remission to teach forgiveness (Deuteronomy 15:1-18, Mark 11:25, James 2:13)
- Manna to teach about real food (Deuteronomy 8:1-10, John 6:31-58)
- Blessings for those who obey; curses for those who don't (Deuteronomy 28, Matthew 25:14-46)

Statutes.

- The Major Festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles to teach about the Kingdom of God.
- Portions for the priests (Leviticus 6:14-30, Leviticus 7, Leviticus 10:12-20, Numbers 18:8-24, 1 Timothy 5:17-18)
- Duties of the priests before God in the House of God (Exodus 27-30, Leviticus 10:8-11)
- Maintain holiness and avoid uncleanness (Leviticus 20, Numbers 19, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, 1 John 2:6)
- Evenhandedness for Jew and Gentile (Numbers 15:14-16, Leviticus 19:33-34, Ephesians 2:11-22)

Judgments. The Judgments represent “case law” that resolved some uncertainty on how to interpret the Mosaic Law. Some examples are the question of inheritance brought by the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-11), and the question of working on the Sabbath during the 40 years in the wilderness (Numbers 15:32-36). Difficult cases were brought to the Levitical judges in Jerusalem for a decision, and if the Levitical judges had difficulty, they brought the case before the Lord Himself in the Holy of Holies for a decision (Deuteronomy 17:8-13, Deuteronomy 19:15-21, Numbers 28:21, Deuteronomy 1:17). These cases foreshadowed a time when “They shall not at all teach every one his *fellow* citizen, and every one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord’, for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them” (Jeremiah 31:34 LXX).

Testimonies. The Testimony or Witness (i.e. singular) was the Ark of the Covenant that was kept in the Holy of Holies, and upon which the Lord dwelt between the Cherubim (Numbers 7:89). Things associated with the Presence of God are also referred to as part of the Testimony. For example, there is the Ark of the Testimony, the Tent (or Tabernacle) of the Testimony (Numbers 1:53), the Veil of Testimony (Leviticus 24:3), and the Tablets of the Testimony (Exodus 31:18) which were in the Ark (Deuteronomy 10:5). The Testimonies or Witnesses (i.e. plural) are the recorded deeds and mercies of God among His people coming from His Presence on the Ark of the Testimony. Part of the Mosaic Law was teaching future generations what the Lord had done (Deuteronomy 6:20-25).

2) The Purpose of the Law of Moses

The purpose of the giving of the Law was to lead the people of God to Christ (Romans 10:4). As such, the Law was our tutor or pedagogue⁶⁷ until Christ, that we might be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24). Adam knew major aspects of the Law. Tertullian expressed⁶⁸ this as follows,

“In this law given to Adam, we recognize in embryo all the precepts which afterward sprouted forth when given through Moses. That is, you shall love the

⁶⁷ A pedagogue was a trustworthy slave who was charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys.

⁶⁸ Tertullian, Answer to Jews, I, iii, 2.

Lord your God from your whole heart and out of your whole soul; you shall love your neighbor as yourself, etc.”

John Cassian added⁶⁹ that how else could Abel have known to offer to God a sacrifice of the firstlings of his flock using their fat (Genesis 4:4), unless he had been taught by the Law (Exodus 13:12, Leviticus 3:7-10)? How could Noah have distinguished what animals were clean and what were unclean (Genesis 7:2), when the commandment of the Law (Deuteronomy 14) had not yet made a distinction?

Circumcision was the sign of the Covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-14), and Israel needed to embrace circumcision of the flesh in order to participate in the things of God (Exodus 12:43-49). Moses repeatedly admonished Israel to circumcise their heart (Leviticus 26:41, Deuteronomy 30:6), and so did the Prophets (Jeremiah 4:4, 9:26, Ezekiel 44:7). This pointed to Christ, Who is the end of the Law for everyone who believes (Romans 10:4), and Who also applied the Law to address the condition of men’s hearts (Matthew 5:17-48). Tertullian stated⁷⁰:

“Since both circumcision and un-circumcision were attributed to the same God, both lost their power in Christ, by reason of the excellence of Faith. Of that faith it has been written, ‘And in His name shall the Gentiles trust’ (Isaiah 42:4 LXX), and of that faith ‘which works by Love’ (Galatians 5:6). By this saying he also shows that the Creator is the source of that grace. Whether he speaks of the love, which is due to God, or that which is due to one’s neighbor, in either case, the Creator’s grace is meant; for it is He who commands it as the Greatest Commandment. This implies that the Law would lead him, who circumcised the flesh under the Old Covenant, to circumcision of the heart”.

Knowledge of the Law by faith brought Abraham to Christ. Jesus said of Abraham, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56). As a result, Abraham is referred to as “The father of all those who believe” (Romans 4:11). Those who obey the Law as Abraham did are now sons of Abraham and heirs according to the promise and are blessed with the believing Abraham (Galatians 3:7, 9, 29).

One might say, “The Law is not made for a righteous person” (1 Timothy 1:9). The Law was very versatile and was designed both for those who had a heart of faith and for those who were stiff-necked. Abraham did not need the details of the Law because his heart was right. The Early Church taught⁷¹ that God bound Israel for the hardness of their hearts, that by sacrificing, resting, and purifying themselves, etc., they might come to the knowledge of God, who ordained these things for them. The Mosaic Law bridged a gap until the coming of Christ when the Law would be written on men’s hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and the Holy Spirit would take up residence in men’s bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

⁶⁹ John Cassian, Conferences I, viii, 23.

⁷⁰ Tertullian, Contra Marcion II, v, 4.

Tertullian, Contra Marcion II, v, 13.

⁷¹ Apostolic Constitutions VI, iv, 20

John Chrysostom stated⁷² that the Law saves us by exposing sin and bringing us to the realization of our need for faith. Instead of excluding us from the Promises, it aids us in obtaining them.

“Having exalted Faith, and having proved its claims, that the Law may not be considered superfluous, Paul sets this side of the doctrine right also in his letter to the Galatians (Galatians 3:15-25). He proves that the Law was given with a purpose, and very profitably. ‘It was added because of transgressions’; that is to say, that the Jews might not live carelessly, and plunge into the depth of wickedness. The Law was placed upon them as a bridle, guiding, regulating, and checking them from transgressing, if not all, at least some of the commandments. The Law was a great advantage until the Advent of Christ”.

“The Law is not contrary to the promises of God (Galatians 3:21). If we had our hope of life in the Law, and our salvation depended on it, we might object to Faith superseding the Law. But if the Law saves you, by means of Faith, though it brings you under the curse, you suffer no harm from it, in that Faith comes and sets everything right. Had the promise been by the Law, you had reason to fear lest, separating from the Law, you should separate from righteousness. But if it was given in order to convince all and to expose their individual sins, far from excluding you from the promises, it now aids you in obtaining them”.

“The Jews were not even conscious of their own sins, and in consequence did not even desire forgiveness. The Law was given to probe their wounds that they might long for a physician. The words ‘confined under sin’ (Galatians 3:22) means ‘convinced’ and the conviction held them in fear. You see then, the Law was given to implement the promises. Had the Law not been given, all would have been wrecked on wickedness, and there would have been no Jews to listen to Christ. But now being given, it has affected two things. 1) It has schooled its followers in a certain degree of virtue, and 2) it has pressed on them the knowledge of their own sins. This especially made them more zealous to seek the Son; for those who disbelieved, they did so from having no sense of their own sins. As Paul shows, ‘Being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God’” (Romans 10:3).

The giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai was a very dramatic event, where God spoke directly to all His people for the first time, and this made a lasting impression on the people of God. The appearance of the mountaintop looked like it “burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens” (Deuteronomy 4:11). This was an awesome spectacle, accompanied by the thunder, the lightning, the smoke and the very loud trumpet sound (Exodus 19:16), in addition to the earthquake (Psalm 114:4), all of which Basil the Great attributed⁷³ to the angels that surround the Throne of God. Moses reminded Israel not to forget these spectacular events (Deuteronomy 4:10), and so did the Psalmist (Psalm 104:32). Not only did God speak to His people personally from the midst of the fire (Deuteronomy 4:36), but Moses walked up the mountain right into this fire (Exodus 24:16-18).

⁷² John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chap 3, vv. 19-21.

⁷³ Basil, On the Spirit, Ch. 14

The Law is still useful today, especially for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). Tertullian stated⁷⁴:

“Plainly we assert that the Law has deceased in one sense that its burdens, which not even the fathers were able to sustain, have wholly ceased. Such parts, however, as relate to righteousness not only permanently remain reserved, but even amplified, in order that our righteousness may be able to excel above the righteousness of the scribes and of the Pharisees”.

Early Apostolic teaching warned⁷⁵ people about speaking evil of the Law. This continues to our day, where the prayers in many of the Orthodox services ask:

- (1) Blessed are You, O Lord, teach me Your commandments.
- (2) Blessed are You, O Sovereign Lord, let me understand Your commandments.
- (3) Blessed are You, O Holy One, enlighten me with Your commandments.

There is a progression outlined here, beginning as catechumens and finishing with true enlightenment. First we learn; then we understand; and finally we are enlightened. As the Holy Spirit burns within us, we can also hear God speaking to us from the fire within us if we have a heart to listen.

a) The “Greatest Commandment” as a Creed

The “Greatest Commandment” of the Law was also used as a Creed⁷⁶ in the Synagogue worship, and it was one of the first things children learned in school. Thus, in questions with the Jewish leaders (Mark 12:28-34), there was no argument about what was the Greatest Commandment. This was so fundamental to the Mosaic Law that it was obvious. In their rejection of Christ, and later in their rejection of His Apostles, the nation of Israel turned the love of God as expressed in the “Creed” into a nationalistic zeal. The Apostle Simon the Zealot had even been a member of this political party of the “Zealots” before he was called as an Apostle. Toward the end of the Age of Israel in c. 70 AD, the “Zealot” party was largely responsible for the destruction of Israel⁷⁷ in their zeal to rid themselves of the Romans.

The Mosaic Law defined keeping the Greatest Commandment as being “circumcised in heart” (Deuteronomy 30:6, 10:16). If the people obeyed the Lord and kept this commandment (and its corollaries), the Lord promised to bless them above all the nations of the earth. He would open for them His good storehouse to bless them so that they could lend to and evangelize the nations (Deuteronomy 28:1, 2, 12). To the nationalistic “Zealots”, however, all they could see were materialistic aspects of their nation.

In Mark’s account, Jesus prefaced His response with the introduction to the Creed used in the Synagogue worship, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). After reciting the Greatest Commandment, Jesus concluded, “There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31). In Matthew’s account, Jesus summarized the Greatest Commandment by saying, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40).

⁷⁴ Tertullian, On Monogamy IV, vi, 7.

⁷⁵ Apostolic Constitutions, VI, iv, 19.

⁷⁶ Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994, pp. 245, 101-104.

⁷⁷ For more details of this, see the Study for Holy Monday evening.

On one occasion, a lawyer (that is, one skilled in interpreting the Mosaic Law) asked Jesus “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25) Jesus asked him what the Law said; the lawyer replied with the “Greatest Commandment”. Jesus answered, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live” (Luke 10:28). That is, you will have eternal life. Wishing to justify himself, the lawyer replied, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus then proceeded with the story of the Good Samaritan to illustrate the second part of the Greatest Commandment. This example illustrates someone trying to get by with the minimum, and not someone like Abraham, who loved the Lord with all his heart, soul and strength.

b) Christ Fulfilled the Law

When Christ came, He stated, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. Assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one yod⁷⁸ or one piece of a Hebrew letter⁷⁹ will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17-18).

John Chrysostom mentioned⁸⁰ three ways in which Christ fulfilled the Law.

1. He transgressed none of the precepts of the Law, and thus “fulfilled” the Law by keeping it perfectly. There are a number of occasions where the Scripture states⁸¹ this.
2. He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:3-4). “Since the Law⁸² was laboring to make man righteous, but didn’t have power, He came and brought in the way of righteousness by faith, and so established that which the Law desired; and what the Law could not do by letters, this He accomplished by faith. On this account He said, ‘I am not come to destroy the Law’” (Matthew 5:17).
3. He upgraded the Law to what was the original intent, and Chrysostom called this the “future code of laws”. “Do not murder” became “Do not even be angry” (Matthew 5:21-22); “Do not commit adultery” became “Do not even lust in your heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

Some people try to keep the Law without loving the Lawgiver. Paul addressed this by quoting from the Law⁸³, “Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the Law shall live by that righteousness” (Romans 10:5). These words of Moses were also quoted by Nehemiah and Ezekiel in a negative context where the people hadn’t kept the Lord’s statutes and judgments and were suffering or were about to suffer the consequences (Nehemiah 9:29, Ezekiel 20:11, 13, 21).

Paul continued by quoting Moses loosely again to say that the righteousness of faith does not involve heroic efforts to bring Christ down from heaven or up from the abyss. It is not difficult, and is really very simple; it is near you in your mouth and in your heart (Romans 10:6-8). The full text of this, as written by Moses reads, “For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe

⁷⁸ A “yod” is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, about the size of an apostrophe.

⁷⁹ This refers to the projection of one Hebrew letter that distinguishes it from another. It would be equivalent in English letters to the dot of an “i” or the crossing of a “t”.

⁸⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XVI, 3-4.

⁸¹ For example Matthew 3:15, John 8:46, John 14:30, Isaiah 53:9.

⁸² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XVI, 3-4.

⁸³ That is, from Leviticus 18:5 which reads, “And you shall keep My statutes and My judgments which a man shall do them and he shall live by them.”

it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea that you should say ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it that we may observe it?’ The Word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it” (Deuteronomy 30:11-14). Moses went on to say that the Lord’s people had a choice. If they loved the Lord and walked in His ways, they would have life and prosperity; if they were drawn away to worship other gods, they would have death and adversity (Deuteronomy 30:15-17).

Paul clarified Moses’ words, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. With the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness⁸⁴, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation” (Romans 10:9-10). We note that Paul said, “With the heart man believes,” and not just with the head man believes.

Under the Old Covenant people did this also. Contained within the details of the sacrificial statutes and festivals was Jesus as the Lamb of God who would be raised on the third day. This is why Moses added, “That you may observe it” (Deuteronomy 30:12, 13, 14). Paul omitted “observing it,” since the sacrifice of the Lamb of God had by then been made once for all. In Moses’ day, the Law continually pointed forward to the Lamb of God. Thus Paul and Moses both taught righteousness by faith, but from different viewpoints in time. “Now the righteousness of God apart from the Law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets” (Romans 3:21).

John Chrysostom stated⁸⁵ that the end of the Law was that man might be justified, but Christ gave a fuller accomplishment of this through faith.

“What was the object of the Law? To make man righteous! But it had not the power, for no one fulfilled it. This then was the end of the Law and to this it looked throughout; and for this all its parts were made: its feasts and commandments, and sacrifices, and all besides, that man might be justified. But this end Christ gave a fuller accomplishment through faith. Do not be afraid then, he says, as if transgressing the Law in having come over to the Faith. You transgress the Law when you do not believe Christ. If you believe in Him, then you have fulfilled it also, and much more than it commanded. You have received a much greater righteousness.”

The Jews opposing Paul not only ridiculed Grace as too easy, but even stressed that it was not possible to be justified by faith. Chrysostom went on⁸⁶ to refute the notion that Grace is easy and cheap while there is a virtue manifested in works. Included in faith is a requirement for a wakeful soul that does not yield to listlessness.

“Thus when one begins to believe, there are thoughts which confuse and make havoc of the minds of most men, and it takes a soul of some vigor to shake them thoroughly off. This is a soul that takes in things beyond expectation, and does not stumble at appearances.”

Some people have tried to keep the Law without honoring the Lawgiver. The result is usually the Law being perceived as a rigid rulebook unrelated to the Lawgiver. For example, the

⁸⁴ It is easy to confuse “righteousness” and “salvation”, where the issue is “faith” versus “works”.

⁸⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XVII, v. 4.

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XVII, v. 6.

Jewish leaders were seeking the death penalty for Jesus because He healed people on the Sabbath (John 5:9-10). Doing good had been the intent of the Sabbath as a time for rest and concentration on the things of God⁸⁷. One who loves and honors the Lawgiver can see this. The Jewish leaders, however, could only see the letter of the Law that demanded the death penalty for anyone “breaking” the Sabbath rest laws (Exodus 31:13-17). The zeal of the Jewish leaders for the letter of the Law was very strong. After all, God gave it!

By not seeking the righteousness of faith that Moses (and Paul) taught, they were seeking to establish their own righteousness (Romans 10:3). But what did their righteousness produce? They ignored the details of the Law when it conflicted with their personal agenda (John 7:45-52, 12:9-19; 11:43-53; Matthew 26:3-5). The ultimate example of this is the crucifixion of the Lawgiver.

Early Christian teaching included⁸⁸ a greater emphasis on the Law than is present today. The emphasis was on the details of the Law as demonstrating the Grace of Christ. The original intent was to give the people a way that they could express love for God. But when they turned that opportunity into idolatry, then it became a commandment and a “hard collar” regarding exactly how God was to be worshipped.

“He nowhere has dissolved the Law, but fulfilled it. He says, ‘One yod, or one piece of a Hebrew letter, shall not pass from the Law until all is fulfilled’ (Matthew 5:18). He says, ‘I come not to dissolve the Law, but to fulfill it’ (Matthew 5:17). Moses himself was at once the lawgiver, the high priest, the prophet, and the king; Elijah, the zealous follower of the prophets, was also present at our Lord’s transfiguration in the mountain. They were witnesses of His incarnation and of His sufferings, as the intimate friends of Christ, but not as enemies and strangers. Thus it is demonstrated that the Law is good and holy (Romans 7:12), as also the prophets.”

“Now the Law is the Decalogue, which the Lord spoke to them with an audible voice (Exodus 20:1, Deuteronomy 4:15), before the people made that calf (Exodus 32:1-4) which represented the Egyptian Apis. The Law is righteous, and therefore is it called the Law, because judgments are made according to the Law of nature. This Law is good, holy, and lays no compulsion on things positive. He says, ‘If you will make me an altar, you shall make it of earth’ (Exodus 20:24). It does not say, ‘Make one’, but, ‘If you will make’. It does not impose a necessity, but gives room to their own free liberty. God does not stand in need of sacrifices, being by nature above all want. But knowing that, Abel, Noah and Abraham, not out of requirement, but moved of themselves by the law of nature, offered sacrifice to God out of a grateful mind. So He permitted the Hebrews, not commanded, if they wanted to offer sacrifice. If they offered from a right intention, He showed Himself pleased with their sacrifices. Therefore He says, ‘If you desire to offer, do not offer to me as to one that stands in need of it, for I stand in need of nothing; for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof’” (Psalm 50:12).

“But later this people became forgetful of that, and called on a calf as God, instead of the true God. To him they ascribed the cause of their coming out of Egypt, saying, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, which have brought you out of the

⁸⁷ For example, see Luke 6:6-11, Exodus 20:10-11, 31:15, Numbers 10:10, Leviticus 24:5-9, Ezekiel 20:12, 20.

⁸⁸ Apostolic Constitutions VI, iv, 19-20.

land of Egypt' (Exodus 32:4). When these men had committed wickedness with the 'similitude of a calf that eats hay' and denied God who had visited them by Moses (Exodus 4) in their afflictions, and had done signs with his hand and rod, then was God angry, as being ungratefully treated by them. He bound them with bonds which could not be loosened, with a mortifying burden and a hard collar, and no longer said, 'If you make', but, 'Make an altar', and sacrifice perpetually. You are forgetful and ungrateful. Offer burnt offerings therefore continually, that you may be mindful of Me. Since you have wickedly abused your power, I lay a necessity upon you for the time to come, and I command you to abstain from certain meats. I ordain to you the distinction of clean and unclean creatures, although every creature is good, as being made by Me. I appoint to you several separations, purging, frequent washings and sprinklings, several purifications, and several times of rest. If you neglect any of them, I will determine that punishment which is proper to the disobedient; that being pressed and galled by your collar, you may depart from the error of polytheism".

"Laying aside that idolatry, they may be mindful of, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord' (Deuteronomy 6:4). They may run back again to that Law, which I inserted in the nature of all men. 'There is only one God in heaven and on earth, and it was important for them to love Him with all their heart, all their strength, and all their mind' (Deuteronomy 6:5), and to fear none but Him. They were not to admit the names of other gods into their mind, nor to let their tongue utter them out of their mouth. He bound them for the hardness of their hearts, that by sacrificing, resting, and purifying themselves, and by similar observances, they might come to the knowledge of God, who ordained these things for them".

John Chrysostom stated⁸⁹ that while the Old Covenant sounds very much like the New Covenant, there is a difference in sense. The first is like a model of the reality of the second. The first is like lessons for children and mortals; the second, for grown men and angels.

"The words in the first covenant⁹⁰ are used as types, in the second as realities, preserving a sameness of sound, though not of sense. Just as in patterns and figures, the shape of a man scratched with white lines upon a black ground is called a man as well as that which has received the correct coloring. In the case of statues, the figure, whether formed of gold or of plaster, is alike called a statue, though in the one case as a model, in the other as a reality".

"Do not then, because the same words are used, suppose that the things are identical. In the sense that aspects of the First Covenant were models, they did not differ from the truth; but in that they merely preserved the outline, they were less than the truth. The First Covenant was lessons for children, the Second for high-minded full-grown men; the first Laws were made as for mortals, the latter as for angels".

Irenaeus noted⁹¹ that the New Covenant and the Old Covenant have much in common, and have the same author, but that the New Covenant is greater than the Old Covenant.

⁸⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XIV, 1-2.

⁹⁰ That is sanctification, baptism, sacrifice, temple, circumcision and grace.

⁹¹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, ix, 1-2.

“One and the same householder produced both covenants, the Word of God, who spoke with both Abraham and Moses, and who has restored us to liberty, and has multiplied that grace which is from Himself”.

“He declares, ‘For in this place is One greater than the temple’ (Matthew 12:6). But the words *greater* and *less* are not applied to those things which have nothing in common between themselves, and are of an opposite nature, and mutually exclusive. They are used for those things of the same substance, and which possess properties in common, but merely differ in number and size; such as water from water, and light from light, and grace from grace. Greater, therefore, is that legislation which has been given for liberty than that given for bondage; and therefore it has been diffused, not throughout one nation, but over the whole world”.

c) Abraham and the Law

Paul had said, “Therefore the Law has become our pedagogue⁹² until Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). The life of Abraham illustrates this, since justification always has been by faith, and the Law, by itself, cannot dictate conditions of the heart. “For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4). “Yet we know that the Law *is* good if one uses it lawfully. Knowing this; the Law is not made for a righteous person. It is made for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, etc.” (1 Timothy 1:8-9).

Old Testament and New Testament writers alike used the life of Abraham as the model of a righteous life and a close walk with God. He was called “The friend of God” (2 Chronicles 20:7, James 2:21-24), and because of his faith, Israel inherited the Promised Land. The Church, with Christ as Head, has inherited the blessing of Abraham in the promise of the Holy Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:14). By faith Abraham obeyed and he had the vision to wait for the city which has foundations, whose craftsman and maker is God (Hebrews 11:8-10). Abraham believed God and the belief (i.e. faith) was reckoned to him as righteousness. He is called the father of all who believe, and the heir of the world (Romans 4:11-13). Thus Abraham exemplifies the Grace of God. Abraham received faith according to grace (Romans 4:16), just as all who since him have received faith.

Abraham did not need the details of the Law because his heart was right. In light of this, Irenaeus wrote⁹³,

“The righteous fathers had the meaning of the Decalogue written in their hearts and souls; that is, they loved the God who made them, and did no injury to their neighbor. There was therefore no occasion that they should be cautioned by prohibitory mandates, because they had the righteousness of the Law in themselves”.

The Early Church taught⁹⁴ that the purpose of all the details of the Mosaic Law was as medicine for an obstinate people who were forgetful and ungrateful, and who were prone to fall into idolatry, like the Golden Calf, at any moment. For these people and others like them the

⁹² A pedagogue was a trustworthy slave who was charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys.

⁹³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, xvi, 3.

⁹⁴ *Apostolic Constitutions*, VI, iv, 20-21

details of the Law were necessary and He bound them with bonds, a burden and a hard collar. When Christ came in the flesh, He did not take away the Law but the bonds and the collar”.

d) The Law and Grace

John Chrysostom pointed⁹⁵ out that the Lord had said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Chrysostom continued, “But His commandments and the sum of them are, ‘You shall love the Lord your God, and your neighbor as yourself’. To love God is to love one’s neighbor, ‘For if you love Me’, He said, ‘O Peter, feed My sheep’ (John 21:16, 17). But to love one’s neighbor works a keeping of the commandments. With reason does He then say, “On these hang all the Law and the Prophets”.

Sometimes overlooked in Paul’s famous argument of Law vs. Grace are Paul’s statements: “Therefore the Law is holy and the Commandment is holy, just and good” (Romans 7:12). “For we know that the Law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14). “I agree with the Law that it is good” (Romans 7:16).

On the other hand, Paul argues, “I am fleshly, sold under sin” (Romans 7:14). “I delight in the Law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Romans 7:22, 23).

The guiding principle of the Mosaic Law was the “Greatest Commandment”, which focused on the love of God. The use of the “Greatest Commandment” as a creed in the synagogues in the 1st Century, was in itself in obedience to one of the commandments (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Taken as a whole, the Law contained all the elements of Grace as described with the advent of Christ as Messiah in the New Testament, and the Law pointed toward the work that Christ accomplished (Galatians 3:24). The intent of the Law was that God might cause His people to know that man shall not live by bread alone, but man shall live by every word coming out of the mouth of God (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4). The expectation of the Law was Christ, and the Prophets understood this. Jeremiah wrote of this and Paul quoted Jeremiah in addressing the Hebrews:

“Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day when I took hold of their hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; for they abode not in my covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. This is my covenant, which I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, says the Lord, I will surely put my laws into their mind, and write them on their hearts. And I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people” (Jeremiah 31:31-33 LXX, Hebrews 8:8-12).

The Law aimed at establishing faith and the condition of man’s heart, and the command was to circumcise their hearts (Deuteronomy 10:16, Colossians 2:11) as well as their flesh. But the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out (Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:16-18). In anticipation of the Lamb of God, He commanded that offerings for sin should be established using the blood of bulls and goats (Compare Hebrews 9:13) for sins done in ignorance (Leviticus 4), and using the blood of a lamb for sins done willfully (Leviticus 5). These offerings had to be performed

⁹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXI.

repeatedly, because sin was repeated (Hebrews 7:26-28). It took a vision to see the end result of Christ's one sacrifice, where He became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Following the Law with all one's heart and soul was not supposed to be difficult, as testified by both Moses and Jesus. "This commandment which I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. For the Word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart that you may do it" (Deuteronomy 30:11-15). Jesus said the same thing: "My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). With the coming of the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29-36), the Holy Spirit is now resident within us (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19-20) and Law is written on our hearts. Our illumination regarding the things of God has greatly increased, and the writing of the Law on Mt. Ebal (Deuteronomy 27:1-8) along with the offerings for sin is unnecessary. But this doesn't mean that the Mosaic Law is useless now that Grace has taken its place.

Men under Grace have a greater responsibility than do men under the Law; because more has been given, more is expected (Luke 12:48, Matthew 25:29). John Cassian stated⁹⁶,

"How can those men be partakers of the grace of the gospel who disregard the fulfillment even of the lighter commands of the Law, to the easy character of which the words of the lawgiver bear testimony?"

Jesus had said something similar. In His discussion about fulfilling, but not deleting the Law, He said:

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19-20).

Irenaeus stated⁹⁷ that while the Law had been given for bondage to Israel, its scope has been widened for those under Grace that we might have greater love for our Father.

"He has increased and widened those laws, granting to men, by means of adoption, to know God the Father. We love Him with the whole heart, while we abstain not only from evil deeds, but even from the desire after them. But He has also increased the feeling of reverence; for sons should have more veneration than slaves, and greater love for their Father. We shall give account to God not of deeds only, as slaves, but even of words and thoughts. We have truly received the power of liberty, in which condition a man is more severely tested, whether he will reverence, fear, and love the Lord".

The Law is very useful today, especially for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). In both Orthodox Vespers and Matins, we pray

1. Blessed are You, O Lord, teach me Your commandments.
2. Blessed are You, O Sovereign Lord, let me understand Your commandments.
3. Blessed are You, O Holy One, enlighten me with Your commandments.

⁹⁶ John Cassian, Conferences III, 21, 5

⁹⁷ Irenaeus, Against Heresies IV, xvi, 5

The Law teaches us that man “does not live by bread alone, but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3). As the Holy Spirit burns within us, we can also hear God speaking to us from the fire within us if we have a heart to listen.

3) The New High Priest and the Changing of the Law

Paul had a long discussion in Hebrews about the effects of Christ’s coming as our Great High Priest (Hebrews 5:5). Because of a change in the priesthood, there must also be a change in the Law (Hebrews 7:12). John Chrysostom pointed out⁹⁸ how this changed things.

“If the priesthood changed from the Levitical priesthood to the Melchizedek priesthood in the 1st Century, ‘of necessity there is also a change of the Law’ (Hebrews 7:12). The Levitical priesthood had dealt with ‘a law of a fleshly commandment’ (Hebrews 7:16). Included in this Law were procedures to anoint the flesh (Exodus 28:41), wash the flesh (Numbers 19:7-10), purify the flesh (Numbers 19:9, Leviticus 14:9), shave the flesh (Leviticus 13:33, 14:8-9), bind upon the flesh (Deuteronomy 6:8), cherish the flesh (Deuteronomy 13:6), rest as to the flesh (Exodus 31:14-15). These procedures were weak and unprofitable (Hebrews 7:18) because they made nothing perfect (Hebrews 7:19). Paul pointed out (Romans 8:3) that it was not the Law itself that was weak, but we were because of our flesh”.

With the change in the Law, the Law of God is written on our hearts, and it is within us (Jeremiah 31:33). Also within us is the Holy Spirit, Who teaches us to discern all things (1 Corinthians 2:10-16). For example, He teaches us that circumcision needs to be applied to the heart to be made perfect (Romans 2:29). Thus, the Law is not thrown out, it is just changed and refined (Matthew 5:18). Adultery applies not just to the fleshly act, but also to the thought (Matthew 5:27-28). Murder applies not just to killing the flesh, but also to hate (Matthew 5:21-24).

Our High Priest teaches us that, “The true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24). At the Presentation of Jesus⁹⁹ in the Temple as an infant (Luke 2:22-38), the changeover began. No wonder, at age 33, on the day after Palm Sunday, Jesus drove the moneychangers, etc., out of the Temple. Quoting Isaiah, He said, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations (Isaiah 56:7). But you have made it a den of thieves” (Mark 11:17). He had done this same thing three years earlier, just as He began His public ministry. In describing this, the Apostle John stated that the disciples then remembered that it was written, “Zeal for Your house has consumed Me” (John 2:13-17, Psalm 69:9).

As a result of this, we now have a “greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands; that is, not of this creation. Our High Priest entered the Most Holy Place once for all, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood. Through the eternal Spirit, He offered Himself without spot to God that He might cleanse our conscience from dead works to serve the Living God” (Hebrews 9:11, 12, 14).

⁹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XIII, 2.

⁹⁹ The “Presentation of Jesus” is celebrated on February 2nd as one of the Twelve Major Feast Days in the Orthodox Church.

John Chrysostom interprets this imagery as follows. The more perfect tabernacle is His human body (where Paul refers to our human bodies as tabernacles also -- 2 Corinthians 5:1). The Most Holy Place where He entered to appear in the presence of God for us (Hebrews 9:24) is heaven, where heaven is veiled off from curious bystanders. His flesh also was a veil hiding the Godhead. In this imagery, Christ did not become a high priest; He came as the High Priest.

The Law today can be illustrated by addressing our love for God, which is the ultimate basis for both the “Greatest Commandment” and our ultimate salvation. The love of God as seen in His Church is not a static situation, but is always growing. We can either grow toward being perfected in Christ or we can grow cold. An example of growing cold can be seen from John’s vision while he was in exile on Patmos (Revelation 1:9). He wrote to the Church in Ephesus that they had left their first love (Revelation 2:4). In other words, they had grown cold in their love toward God and their brethren. In contrast to this, John wrote in his Epistle that we can and should be perfected in love. This begins with faith: “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us” (1 John 4:16).

For love to be perfected we need a continuing vision of Christ; this was true under the Old Covenant as well as the New Covenant. “No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us” (1 John 4:12). Love for one another is the result or the evidence of the continuing vision of Christ. Keeping His Commandments is one of the tools for achieving that result. “Whoever keeps His Word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him” (1 John 2:5). Keeping His Commandments does not imply a mere lip service to the Ten Commandments, although the Ten Commandments are a good place to start in our culture. It seems curious that there is such strong opposition from our culture today toward any public display of the Ten Commandments. Keeping His Commandments rather implies living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, which is tone of both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant (Matthew 4:4, Deuteronomy 8:3). Our bodies are a Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), and we have the Law written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33, 2 Corinthians 3:3). Therefore we do not need to make great efforts to go somewhere or do something to find out what God would have us do at any moment (Deuteronomy 30:11-15, Romans 10:5-13).

Keeping His Commandments is part of a process of striving for righteousness. It is like faith versus works (James 2:24-26). Without both, one has neither. If one says he has faith, but he consistently has no works to demonstrate what his faith consists of, the real issue is that he doesn’t really have faith at all. Without striving for righteousness, one does not have the love of God, and vice versa. “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:6-9). We all sin (Romans 3:23); therefore we all need to confess our sins as part of our striving for righteousness. A study of the lives of the saints is helpful for us in that we see examples of people who struggled in their striving for righteousness, and who exhibited the love of God as a result.

In our striving for righteousness, it is also helpful to see where the battlefield is. It is our own desires that we need to fight. James, the Lord's brother, said, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God.' God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. Sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:13-15). It is the things that come from our own hearts that really defile us (Matthew 15:18-20). Thus the striving forces us to concentrate on the plank in our own eyes, rather than looking for specks in the eyes of others (Matthew 7:3). The Law, especially as amplified by the Lord (Matthew 5:48) can be helpful to us in our striving for righteousness.

As a result of the change in the Law that started when Christ arrived, mankind has returned to the original intent of the Law, which was holiness and a faith like that of Abraham.

4) The New Covenant During the Age of the Church

There is a connection between the Law and the Grace of the Holy Spirit. Historically, the day of the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai was also the same day¹⁰⁰ as the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost following the Resurrection of Christ. These two events are related because the Law is spiritual (Romans 7:14) and needs to be understood spiritually. When Christ came, He stated, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one yod¹⁰¹ or one piece of a Hebrew letter¹⁰² will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17-18).

Prior to that, the Lord had said to His disciples, "If you love Me, keep My commandments. I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever — the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:15-17). Thus, keeping the Lord's commandments goes hand in hand with the help of the Holy Spirit. In the same breath, He said to keep His Commandments and to receive the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is called "The Helper" meaning one called alongside to help (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), and Jesus described the role of the Holy Spirit again later in this conversation after the Last Supper (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit in us is a key element in the coming together of "the city with solid foundations whose craftsman and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). With the Holy Spirit at work in us, we are described as containing treasure in earthenware vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). The exterior of our human frailties may be rough, but God has chosen to dwell there.

From this point of view, the question of Jesus' disciples just before He ascended is very timely, "Lord will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). The answer was no; the city's not ready yet! The treasure in the earthenware vessels still needs some work.

¹⁰⁰ For details on this, see the Study for the Sunday of Pentecost.

¹⁰¹ A "yod" is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, about the size of an apostrophe.

¹⁰² This refers to the projection of one Hebrew letter that distinguishes it from another. It would be equivalent in English letters to the dot of an "i" or the crossing of a "t".

Isaiah prophesied about the coming of the Holy Spirit, and spoke of the Gentiles as being involved. He said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘In a favorable time I have answered you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you’” (Isaiah 49:8). The help referred to is the Lord’s guidance to springs or fountains of water (Isaiah 49:10, John 7:37-39) which represents the Holy Spirit. Gentiles will be part of this, “Behold, they shall come from afar; and these will come from the North and the West, and these from the land of Persia (Isaiah 49:12 LXX). The Church Fathers have interpreted the reference to Persia as referring to the Magi coming to visit the infant Jesus. In this day of salvation, the Lord will comfort His people (Isaiah 49:13) and have compassion on them (Isaiah 49:10, 13), as a nursing mother does her child (Isaiah 49:14-15). Thus we receive the Comforter (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, Acts 9:31, Romans 8:15) with baptism and the newly baptized receive the pure milk of the Word (1 Peter 2:2).

5) The Place of the Law with the Help of the Holy Spirit

Immediately prior to mentioning the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). And “He who has My Commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me” (John 14:21). And “He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me” (John 14:24). We sometimes dissociate “The Commandments” from the Grace of the Holy Spirit as if we’re beyond the elementary principles of Christ (Hebrews 6:1-8). We sometimes don’t notice that Paul had said, “Therefore the Law is holy, and the Commandment holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12). Also, “For we know that the Law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14); and “I agree with the Law that it is good” (Romans 7:16).

Paul stated, “Therefore the Law was our pedagogue¹⁰³ until Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). As a pedagogue, the Law was intended to teach us to love God. But the Law, by itself, cannot dictate conditions of the heart. “For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4).

The Evlogetaria, that is sung during Sunday Matins, illustrates the interaction of the Law with the Holy Spirit. As the cantor describes the work of the Holy Spirit during the Resurrection, the congregation responds by asking the Lord to teach us His Statutes. If we understand the Lord’s statutes, and are enlightened by them, we will also understand what the Holy Spirit is doing in our midst! The Evlogetaria goes as follows:

Refrain: Blessed are You, O Lord, teach me Your statutes.

Cantor: The company of the angels was amazed, when they beheld You numbered among the dead. Yet You, O Savior, destroyed the power of death, and with You raising up Adam and releasing all men from Hell.

Refrain: Blessed are You, O Lord, teach me Your statutes.

Cantor: Why, O women disciples, do you mingle sweet-smelling spices with your tears of pity? The radiant angel within the sepulchre cried to the Myrrh-Bearing women. ‘Behold the grave and understand; for the Savior is risen from the tomb’.

Refrain: Blessed are You, O Lord, teach me Your statutes.

¹⁰³ A pedagogue was a trustworthy slave who was charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys.

Cantor: Very early in the morning the Myrrh-Bearing women ran lamenting to Your tomb. But an angel came toward them saying: ‘The time for lamentation is passed; do not weep; but announce to the Apostles the Resurrection’.

Refrain: Blessed are You, O Lord, teach me Your statutes.

Cantor: The Myrrh-Bearing women mourned; as bearing ointments they drew near Your tomb, O Savior. But the angel spoke to them, saying, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? In that He is God, He is risen from the dead’.

John Chrysostom pointed¹⁰⁴ out that when the Lord said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15), “His commandments and the sum of them are, ‘You shall love the Lord your God, and your neighbor as yourself’. Therefore to love God is to love one’s neighbor, ‘For if you love Me’, He said, ‘O Peter, feed My sheep’ (John 21:16, 17). But to love one’s neighbor works a keeping of the commandments; with reason, then, does He say, ““On these hang all the Law and the Prophets””.

John Chrysostom went on to say¹⁰⁵ that the problem the disciples had, as Christ’s Passion approached, was actually a lack of love for God. True love for God would not have displayed sorrow and cowardice. Their despondency, at His words about going to the Cross, displayed a lack of faith and a lack of love for God. The hearing of His Commandments is a proof of love for God.

“It is not enough merely to have the Law; we need also an exact keeping of it. But why does He frequently repeat the same thing to them? (John 14:15, 21, 24) I think that He alluded to their despondency; for He had uttered many wise sayings to them concerning death, saying, ‘He that hates his life in this world shall save it unto life eternal’ (John 12:25). And, ‘Unless a man take his cross and follow Me, he is not worthy of Me’ (Matthew 10:38). He is about to say other things besides, rebuking them, ‘Do you think that you suffer sorrow from love? Not sorrowing would be a sign of love’. Because He wished all along to establish this, as He went on He summed up His discourse in this same point; ‘If you loved Me you would have rejoiced, because I go to My Father’ (John 14:28), but now you are in this state through cowardice. To be thus disposed towards death is not for those who remember My commandments; for you ought to be crucified, if you truly loved Me, for My word exhorts you not to be afraid of those that kill the body. These both the Father and I love”.

“He that won’t hear these sayings not only does not love Me, but neither does he love the Father. If this is the sure proof of love, the hearing the Commandments, and these are of the Father, he that hears them loves not the Son only, but the Father also. ‘I don’t speak without the Father, nor say anything of Myself contrary to what seems good to Him””.

6) The Mosaic Law as Being Spiritual

Paul spoke of the Law as having a spiritual dimension to it. “Therefore the Law is holy, and the Commandment holy, just and good” (Romans 7:12). Also, “For we know that the Law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14); and “I agree with the Law that it is good” (Romans 7:16). The heart of

¹⁰⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXI.

¹⁰⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXV, 3.

the Law is the “Greatest Commandment”, which centers on love, and love is the greatest of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 13:13).

The Mosaic Law defined keeping the Greatest Commandment as being “circumcised in heart” (Deuteronomy 10:16). If the people obeyed the Lord and kept this commandment (and its corollaries), the Lord promised to bless them above all the nations of the earth. He would open for them His good storehouse to bless them so that they could lend to and evangelize the nations (Deuteronomy 28:1, 2, 12).

Some people today feel that the Ten Commandments aren’t applicable anymore; they say we’re under Grace not Law because of the New Covenant (Romans 6:14). Yet does this mean that we don’t need to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength and our neighbor as our self?

We still need to apply the love of God to our lives. The Lord stated that, “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19). The Lord went on to describe how we need to take the precepts of the Law to heart and apply them to our thoughts and intentions as well as to our deeds (Matthew 5:21-48).

The usefulness of the Law is as a tutor or pedagogue¹⁰⁶ to get us started in the right direction (Galatians 3:24, 25). As we grow in the Faith and can distinguish the Holy Spirit speaking to us, we don’t need the Law anymore, because it is written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 10:16-17). John Chrysostom stated¹⁰⁷,

“The Law is not the adversary but the fellow worker of Grace. But if when Grace is come, the Law continues to hold us down, it becomes an adversary. If it confines those who ought to go forward to Grace, then it is the destruction of our salvation. If a candle which gave light by night¹⁰⁸ kept us, when it became day, from the sun, it would not only cease to benefit us, but would injure us. So does the Law if it stands between the greater benefits of Grace and us. Just so a tutor or *pedagogue* makes a youth ridiculous, by retaining him with himself, when time calls for his departure”.

7) Our Relationship with God Following the Second Coming

Some things that we see as being extremely important in this life will not be very important after the Second Coming. One of these is the Mosaic Law! Paul referred to this, saying:

“We know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that, which is in part, will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And

¹⁰⁶ A pedagogue was a trustworthy slave who was charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys.

¹⁰⁷ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chap 3, v. 25.

¹⁰⁸ For example, if one is living in the midst of a great deal of sin or darkness, one may benefit from the light of a candle.

now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love” (1 Corinthians 13:9-13).

There are some things included in the Mosaic Law that have an eternal dimension to them, such as our salvation and deliverance from death. One example of this is the Passover, celebrated as Pascha in the East, and as Easter in the West. There is an eternal dimension to Passover, which will be celebrated forever. Athanasius of Alexandria, referring¹⁰⁹ to the Passover, said that we should not keep the Feast in this life after an earthly manner, but with the angels in heaven. Just as Israel’s forty years in the wilderness speak of the forty-day fast prior to Pascha -- to be purified and freed from defilement – so this life itself is a preparation for life in the Kingdom of God when Christ returns.

“Wherefore let us not celebrate the Feast after an earthly manner, but as keeping festival in heaven with the angels. Let us glorify the Lord, by chastity, by righteousness, and other virtues. Let us rejoice, not in ourselves, but in the Lord, that we may be inheritors with the saints. Let us keep the Feast then, as Moses. Let us watch like David who rose seven times, and in the middle of the night gave thanks for the righteous judgments of God. Let us be early, as he said, ‘In the morning I will stand before You, and You will look upon me; in the morning You will hear my voice’ (Psalm 5:3). Let us fast like Daniel (Daniel 9:3); let us pray without ceasing, as Paul commanded (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Let all of us recognize the season of prayer, but especially those who are honorably married; so that having borne witness to these things, and thus having kept the Feast, we may be able to enter into the joy of Christ in the kingdom of heaven. But as Israel, when going up to Jerusalem, was first purified in the wilderness, being trained to forget the customs of Egypt, the Word by this typifying to us the holy fast of forty days, let us first be purified and freed from defilement. So that when we depart hence, having been careful of fasting, we may be able to ascend to the upper chamber (Luke 14:15) with the Lord, to sup with Him; and may be partakers of the joy which is in heaven. In no other manner is it possible to go up to Jerusalem, and to eat the Passover, except by observing the fast of forty days”.

Chrysostom tied¹¹⁰ the mystery of the Passover to the mystery of the Lord’s Table, just as the Passion and the Cross are mysteries. The Lord’s Table was appointed in the fullness of time as the rituals of the Law were passing away. The Twelve had been prepared by Jesus’ teaching to be able to understand this.

“Why was it that He ordained this sacrament then, at the time of the Passover? That you might learn from everything, both that He is the lawgiver of the Old Testament, and that the Passover foreshadows the Lord’s Table. Therefore, I say, where the type is, there He puts the truth”.

“He gives thanks, to teach us how we ought to celebrate this sacrament, to show that He comes willingly to the passion, and to teach us that whatever we may suffer to bear it thankfully. If the type was a deliverance from such bondage, how much more will the truth set the world free, and will He be delivered up for the benefit of our race. He did not appoint the sacrament of the Lord’s Table before this, but only when the rites of the Law were to cease. Thus the very chief of the feasts He brings to an end, removing them to another most awesome table.

¹⁰⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letter VI, 12.

¹¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXII, 1.

He said, ‘Take, eat, This is my body, Which is broken for many’” (1 Corinthians 11:24).

“He calls it blood of a New Testament, that of the promise, the new Law. Do you see how He removes and draws them off from Jewish customs? Just as you did that, He said, in remembrance of the miracles in Egypt, so do this likewise in remembrance of Me. That was shed for the preservation of the firstborn, this for the remission of the sins of the whole world. For, ‘This is my blood, which is shed for the remission of sins’” (Matthew 26:28).

“But this He said, indicating thereby, that His passion and His cross are a mystery, by this too again comforting His disciples. As Moses said, ‘This shall be to you for an everlasting memorial’ (Exodus 12:14), so He too, ‘in remembrance of Me’, until I come. Therefore also He said, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover’ (Luke 22:15), that is, to deliver you the new rites, and to give a Passover, by which I am to make you spiritual”.

“He Himself drank of it; lest on hearing this, they should say, What then? Do we drink blood, and eat flesh, and then be perplexed? When He began to speak concerning these things, many were offended at His words (John 6:60-66). Therefore lest they should be troubled, He first did this Himself, leading them to the calm participation of the mysteries. Therefore He drank His own blood. On this account He said, ‘Do this’, that He might withdraw them from the other (i.e. the slaying of lambs). If this works remission of sins, as it surely does work it, the other is now superfluous”.

The mystery of the Lord’s Table translates us to Eternity. As we gather around the Lord’s Table, in a mystical way we do so in the presence of the saints who have gone before us. If the Lord’s Table in this life is the type, the Great Supper that Jesus referred to in a parable (Luke 14:15-24, Matthew 22:1-14) is the reality. All are invited, but not all choose to come.

At the Last Supper, Jesus said, “I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom” (Matthew 26:29). Was He referring to some time after the Second Coming, or to this present age? John Chrysostom stated that Christ’s statement refers to this present age, where the Church is “His Father’s Kingdom”. Chrysostom used¹¹¹ this text as proof of the Resurrection, where the Apostles were witnesses to Jesus drinking wine with them prior to His Ascension.

“When Christ instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper before His Crucifixion, He said, ‘I will not drink of the fruit of this vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom’ (Matthew 26:29). When did He drink after He was risen again? The common men made this an infallible test of His having risen again. The Apostles also persuaded them concerning the resurrection saying, ‘We who ate and drank with Him’” (Acts 10:41).

“To show that they would see Him clearly risen again, that He would be with them once more, and that they themselves would be witnesses to the things that are done, both by sight and by act, He said, ‘Until I drink it new with you’. You will bear witness, for you shall see me risen again”.

“But what does the word ‘new’ refer to? It refers to a new and strange manner, not having a passable body, but now immortal, incorruptible, and not

¹¹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXII, 2.

needing food. It was not then for hunger that He both ate and drank after the resurrection, for neither did His body need these things any more, but for the full assurance of His resurrection”.

“Why did He not drink water after He was risen again, but wine? To pluck up by the roots another wicked heresy, in which there are some, who use water in the mysteries (i.e. the Eucharist). To show that both when He delivered the mysteries, He had given wine, and that when He had risen and was setting before them a meal without mysteries, He used wine, He said, ‘of the fruit of the vine’. A vine produces wine, not water”.

Jeremiah had said, “Everyone shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them” (Jeremiah 31:34). Jerome stated¹¹² that this refers to the Second Coming of Christ. In that future kingdom, there will be those who are greater than others as a result of keeping the Law and teaching others to do so also. The mansions that Christ is preparing also reflect this, and this is described in both Old Testament and New Testament. Similarly, the ranks of the heavenly powers reflect the fact that there are some creatures in heaven that are greater than others.

“The context of this passage clearly shows that the prophet is describing the future kingdom. But how can there possibly be in it a least or greatest, if all are to be equal? The Lord had treated the laborers hired at the 1st hour with the same wage as those hired at the 11th hour (Matthew 20:1-16). The secret is disclosed in the Gospel. ‘Whoever shall do and teach, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall teach, and not do, shall be least’ (Matthew 5:19). The Savior taught us at a feast to take the lowest place, lest, when one greater than us came, we should be thrust with disgrace from the higher place” (Luke 14:10-11).

“The place and the mansions which Christ says He would prepare for the Apostles are of course in the Father’s house, that is, in the Kingdom of Heaven, not on earth, where for the present He was leading the Apostles. At the same time one must regard the sense of Scripture. “I go to prepare a place for you, for there are many mansions in My Father’s house” (John 14:2); that is to say, each individual prepares for himself a mansion through his own works. The preparation is therefore not His, but ours. This view is supported by the fact that it profited Judas nothing to have a place prepared, since he lost it by his own fault. We must interpret in the same way what our Lord said to the sons of Zebedee, one of whom wished to sit on His left hand, the other on His right. “My cup indeed you shall drink. But to sit on My right hand, and on My left hand, is not Mine to give, but it is for them for whom it has been prepared of My Father” (Matthew 20:23)

“If there are not many mansions, how is it taught in the Old Testament correspondingly with the New, that the chief priest has one rank, the priests another, the Levites another, the door-keepers another, the sacristans¹¹³ another? How is it that in the book of Ezekiel, where a description is given of the future Church and of the heavenly Jerusalem, the priests who have sinned are degraded to the rank of sacristans and doorkeepers? (Ezekiel 44:10-14) Why do we read that in the kingdom of heaven there are Archangels, Angels, Thrones, Dominions,

¹¹² Jerome, “Against Jovinianus”, II, 27-28, Treatises.

¹¹³ Sacristans were keepers of a room that was used to store vestments.

Powers, Cherubim and Seraphim, and every name which is named, not only in this present world, but also that which is to come? (Ephesians 1:21, Romans 8:38) A difference of name is meaningless where there is not a difference of rank. An Archangel is of course an Archangel to other inferior angels; and Powers, and Dominions have other spheres over which they exercise authority. This is what we find in heaven and in the administration of God”.

John Chrysostom stated¹¹⁴ that the New Covenant is far better than the Old Covenant, but there is a danger of neglect on our part. We shouldn’t need the written word to receive the grace of the Spirit; but if we don’t profit even after receiving the written word, we bring down upon ourselves increased punishment.

“That you may learn that the New Covenant was far better, hear what He said, ‘I will make a new covenant with you, putting my laws into their mind, and in their heart I will write them’ (Jeremiah 31:33), and, ‘they shall be all taught of God’ (Isaiah 54:13, John 6:45). Paul too, pointing out the same superiority, said that they had received a Law ‘not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart’ (2 Corinthians 3:3). But over time they were shipwrecked, some with regard to doctrines, others as to life and manners; there was again need that they should be put in remembrance by the written word”.

“Reflect then how great an evil it is for us, who ought to live so purely, as not to need written words, but to yield up our hearts, as books, to the Spirit. Now that we have lost that honor, and have need of these, we fail also in employing even this second remedy. If it is bad to stand in need of written words, and not to have brought down on us the grace of the Spirit; consider how heavy the charge of not choosing to profit even after this assistance. If rather we should treat what is written with neglect, as if it were cast forth without purpose, and at random, we will bring down upon ourselves punishment with increase”.

¹¹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, I, 1-2.

Deliverance

Epistle Lesson - Romans 6:3-12 – Deliverance By Baptism

The Epistle lesson for Holy Saturday emphasizes deliverance. This Reading is also used for the Baptismal Service in the Orthodox Church. The main points in the Epistle Reading are:

- We were baptized into Christ's death (Romans 6:3)
- We were buried with Him through baptism into death (Romans 6:4)
- Just as Christ was raised, so we should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4)
- If we were united in the likeness of His death, so we shall be in His resurrection (Romans 6:5)
- We are no longer slaves of sin (Romans 6:6)
- Death no longer has dominion over Him (Romans 6:9)
- Likewise we are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11)

In the Scriptures, Egypt is often used figuratively as a model of slavery and sin. For example, the Lord delivered Israel from "the house of slavery" (Deuteronomy 5:6, 7:8; Exodus 20:2). And Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin in Egypt (Hebrews 11:25). Holy Saturday speaks of us as being delivered from this slavery also, and the Old Testament Readings from Exodus bring out this imagery quite well.

The word in Galatians 6:5 translated *united* (Greek: *sumphutos*) means to *grow up together with* as a plant grows up together with other plants. Thus we grow up together with Christ in the likeness of His death. John Chrysostom explained¹¹⁵ this section as follows:

"Baptism is the Cross for us. What the Cross then, and burial, is to Christ, that Baptism has been to us, even if not in the same respects. He died Himself and was buried in the Flesh, but we have done both to sin. Wherefore Paul does not say, planted together (i.e. united) in His death, but in *the likeness of His death*. Both the one and the other is a death, but not of the same subject. The one is of the Flesh, that of Christ; the other is of sin, which is our own. Do you believe that Christ died, and that He was raised again? Believe then the same of yourself"

Chrysostom said¹¹⁶ that there are actually two deaths for us that are involved here.

"The one is done by Christ in Baptism, and the other it is our duty to effect by earnestness afterwards. That our former sins were buried came because of His gift. But the remaining death to sin after baptism must be the work of our own earnestness; however, we find God here also giving us considerable help".

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¹¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, X, v. 6:3.

¹¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XI, v. 6:5.

The Day of First-Fruits – Effects of Christ’s Resurrection on Deliverance

The Day of First-Fruits was outlined earlier in conjunction with the Conquest of Canaan, when Joshua met Christ as the Captain of the Lord’s Host. See the 5th Parable from the Old Testament: Joshua 5:10-15. Here we address the impact of the Day of First-Fruits on baptism.

There are two aspects of the Day of First-Fruits to our lives today. One has to do with the harvest (of which Jesus Christ was the first) which concludes at the end of the age. The other has to do with our walk in this present age.

Referring to the harvest, Paul states that if Jesus Christ is not raised, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and those who have fallen asleep (Old Testament believers included) have perished. They are still in Sheol (1 Corinthians 15:16-18). However, since Jesus Christ was in fact raised, and as a First-Fruit of those who are asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20); therefore, we also shall be raised up (2 Corinthians 4:14, Ephesians 2:7, Romans 6:8, 9). We shall also be present together with all believers when Jesus Christ returns on the throne of His father David and rules the earth with justice (Isaiah 9:6, 7), and with the strength of an iron rod (Revelation 12:5).

Referring to our walk in this present age, the Day of First-Fruits is related to baptism. Paul stated, “Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

Part of the liturgy for the Day of First-Fruits involved a “history lesson” on the events of the Exodus (Deuteronomy 26:1-11). There is a spiritual application of this “history lesson”. Just as Israel was raised from certain death to become a great, mighty nation and to live in a land flowing with milk and honey by means of:

- (1) a mighty hand,
- (2) an outstretched arm,
- (3) awe-inspiring terror,
- (4) signs, and
- (5) wonders; so, too, the Kingdom of God today.

That the Kingdom of God today consists of an uncountable multitude is well attested to (Revelation 7:9, Hebrews 12:1). That these believers belong to a Kingdom flowing with milk and honey (i.e., uncountable riches) is witnessed by Paul (Ephesians 1:18-23, Colossians 1:27, 2:2-3). And that our Lord works by means of a mighty hand, an outstretched arm, awe-inspiring terrors, signs, and wonders is found by merely reading through the book of Acts.

What then is the connection to baptism? Baptism implies burial. Since the charges against us (our sins, guilt, etc.) have been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14); and since by faith we have accepted this, God’s provision, we have identified ourselves into Christ’s death (Romans 6:3-4). Baptism proclaims this by burying the new believer in water. But baptism does not end in the water. The new believer emerges from the water just as Christ emerged from the grave and just as the Israeli nation emerged from certain death.

But just a “resurrection experience” is not the only point of baptism either; it is a means to an end. At the time of the Day of First-Fruits, Israel was in the midst of eating unleavened bread for seven days, and eating unleavened bread implies a new and different life-style¹¹⁷ (1 Corinthians 5:8). Thus, Paul says, “so we too might walk in newness of life.” It is this “walking in newness of life” that baptism is all about.

This “walking in newness of life” is not just following a bunch of rules and gutting it out. At the time that the Israeli army entered Canaan, the manna ceased on the Day of First-Fruits (Joshua 5:11-12). The reason it ceased was because God had made provision for them to walk in a newness of life. They were now at a point where they could begin to draw from the land that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; that is, the Kingdom of God. So today with the new believer, once he has “appealed to God for a good conscience” (1 Peter 3:21) in baptism; the resources of the Kingdom of God are available to enable him to, in fact, walk in newness of life.

The Lord had said that the Levites were the First-Fruits of Israel. “Behold, I have taken the Levites from the midst of the children of Israel, instead of every male that opens the womb from among the children of Israel: they shall be their ransom, and the Levites shall be mine. For every first-born *is* mine; in the day in which I smote every first-born in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to myself every first-born in Israel: both of man and beast, they shall be mine” (Numbers 3:12-13 LXX).

Ambrose of Milan also emphasized¹¹⁸ that the Levites were the First-Fruits of Israel:

“We know that the Levites are not reckoned among the rest, but are preferred before all, for they are chosen out of all. They are sanctified like the First-Fruits and the firstlings which belong to the Lord, since the payment of vows and redemption for sin are offered by them”.

Similar to the Levites, we have been made a kingdom of priests to God the Father and to Christ (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6, 20:6), as a result of Christ’s Resurrection. This was the intent at the time of the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:5-6) and it has been realized by the fulfilling of the Law by Christ regarding the Day of First-Fruits.

1) Comments from the Church Fathers on First-Fruits

Christ is the First-Fruits as our Great High Priest (Hebrews 8). As His fellow priests, we are part of the crop that followed. Ambrose stated¹¹⁹ that Christ, our First-Fruits, has the same nature as the remaining fruits:

“Now the First-Fruits are undoubtedly of the same nature and kind as the remaining fruits, the first of which are offered to God as a petition for a richer increase. They are a holy thank-offering for all gifts and as a kind of libation of that nature which has been restored”.

Referring to the manner of the Resurrection, Paul wrote, “What you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain -- perhaps wheat or some other *grain*. But God gives it a

¹¹⁷ For details, see the Study for Holy Thursday, in the section titled, “Spiritual Application of the Feast of Unleavened Bread”.

¹¹⁸ Ambrose of Milan, Duties of the Clergy I, 50, 259.

¹¹⁹ Ambrose of Milan, Decease of His Brother Satyrus II, 91.

body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body” (1 Corinthians 15:37-38). Referring to this, Chrysostom emphasized that Christ rose with the same body that died, and that this is the First-Fruits:

“Here¹²⁰ his discourse no longer regards the resurrection, but the manner of the resurrection: what is the kind of body which shall rise again; is it the same kind, or better and more glorious. He takes both from the same analogy, intimating that it will be much better. But the heretics, considering none of these things, say, ‘One body falls and another body rises again’. It is not one substance that is sown, and another that is raised, but the same substance improved. Otherwise neither will Christ have resumed the same body when He became the First-Fruits of them that rise again. As some of the Corinthians heretics were saying (1 Corinthians 15:12), He threw aside the former body, although it had not sinned, and took another”.

Chrysostom continued¹²¹ to say that this is a motivation for a life of virtue, because we are a new creature:

“Christ now leads them on from what has been actually done for them; wherefore also he added, ‘If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation’ (2 Corinthians 5:17). ‘He has been born again by the Spirit. So that for this cause, he says, we ought to live to Him. Not only because we are not our own (1 Corinthians 6:19), nor only because He died for us (1 Corinthians 5:15), nor only because He raised up our First-Fruits (1 Corinthians 15:20-23), but because we have come to another life. See how many just grounds he urges for a life of virtue”.

Chrysostom continued¹²² to address the attitude we should have. If we are a new creation and are citizens of heaven, we should act as citizens of heaven even while on earth.

“This is the language of a right-minded child, not to be riveted to things that are seen, neither to account things present some great matter; but to hasten to our Father, and to long for the things to come. This springs out of a good conscience, and a soul set free from things that are on earth. Paul himself was longing after this every day: wherefore he also said, that ‘even we ourselves, who have the First-Fruits of the Spirit, groan, waiting for an adoption, the redemption of our body’ (Romans 8:23). For he who has this fondness can neither be puffed up by the good things of this life, nor abashed by its sorrows; but as though dwelling in the very heavens, is freed from each sort of irregularity”.

“‘Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven’ (Luke 11:2). Behold a most excellent train of thought! He asks that we long for the things to come, and hasten towards our life there; till that may be, even while we live here, we are eager to show the same conversation as those above. You must long for heaven, and the things in heaven. However, even before heaven, He asks us make the earth a heaven and to do and say all things, even while we are continuing in it, as having our conversation there; insomuch that these too should be objects of our prayer to the Lord. There is nothing to hinder our reaching the perfection of the

¹²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XLI, 3.

¹²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XI, 4.

¹²² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XIX, 7.

powers above, because we inhabit the earth; but it is possible even while abiding here, to do all, as though already placed on high”.

John of Damascus spoke¹²³ of Christ as the First-Fruits of man’s compound nature (i.e. the flesh animated with the intelligent and rational soul), yet without confusing or mixing Divinity and humanity.

“After the assent of the holy Virgin, the Holy Spirit descended on her, according to the word of the Lord which the angel spoke, purifying her, and granting her power to receive the divinity of the Word, and likewise power to bring forth. She was then overshadowed by the hypostatic Wisdom and Power of the Most High God, the Son of God Who is of like essence with the Father as of Divine seed. From her holy and most pure blood He formed flesh animated with the spirit of reason and thought, the First-Fruits of our compound nature; not by procreation but by creation through the Holy Spirit. Not developing the fashion of the body by gradual additions but perfecting it at once. The divine Word was not made one with flesh that had an independent pre-existence. But taking up His abode in the womb of the holy Virgin, He unreservedly in His own subsistence took on Himself through the pure blood of the eternal Virgin a body of flesh animated with the spirit of reason and thought. Thus He assumed to Himself the First-Fruits of man’s compound nature, Himself, the Word, having become subsistence in the flesh. So that He is at once (human) flesh, and at the same time flesh of God the Word, and likewise flesh animated, possessing both reason and thought. Wherefore we speak not of man as having become God, but of God as having become Man. Being by nature perfect God, He naturally became likewise perfect Man. He did not change His nature nor make the dispensation an empty show, but became, without confusion or change or division, one in subsistence with the flesh, which was conceived of the holy Virgin, and animated with reason and thought, and had found existence in Him. He did not change the nature of His divinity into the essence of flesh, nor the essence of flesh into the nature of His divinity. He did not make one compound nature out of His divine nature and the human nature He had assumed”.

Gregory of Nyssa defined¹²⁴ some of the terms such as “First-born among brethren”, which he applied to Baptism, that we might inherit the Holy Spirit. The term, “First-born from the dead”, he applied to the Resurrection and stated how the First-Fruits is the same as the First-born from the dead. By being the First-Fruits of the dead, He implanted in our nature the power of rising again from the dead. Then He ascended to heaven and in Himself presented all humanity to its God and Father.

“The inspired apostle on four occasions employs this term, calling Him, ‘first-born of all creation’ (Colossians 1:15); another time, ‘the first-born among many brethren’ (Romans 8:29); again, ‘first-born from the dead’ (Colossians 1:18). On another occasion he employs the term absolutely, without combining it with other words, saying, ‘But when again He brings the first-born into the world’, He says, ‘Let all the angels of God worship Him’ (Hebrews 1:6, Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX). All these titles we shall in consistency apply to the

¹²³ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith III, 2.

¹²⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius II, 8.

phrase ‘first-born of all creation’. Since the title is one and the same it must be that the meaning conveyed is also one”.

“In what sense then does He become ‘the first-born among many brethren’? In what sense does He become ‘the first-born from the dead’? We are by birth flesh and blood, as the Scripture says, ‘He Who for our sakes was born among us and was partaker of flesh¹²⁵ and blood’. Purposing to change us from corruption to incorruption by the birth from above (John 3:3-7), Himself led the way in this birth, drawing down upon the water, by His own baptism, the Holy Spirit. So that in all things He became the first-born of those who are spiritually born again, and gave the name of brethren to those who partook in a birth like to His own by water and the Spirit”.

“But since it was also meet that He should implant in our nature the power of rising again from the dead, He became the ‘First-Fruits of them that slept’ (1 Corinthians 15:20) and the ‘first-born from the dead’. By His own act, He loosed the pains of death, so that His new birth from the dead was made a way for us also, since the pains of death, wherein we were held, were loosed by the resurrection of the Lord. By having made Himself the First-Fruits of the resurrection, He obtained the name of the ‘first-born from the dead’”.

“This first-born also has brethren, concerning whom He speaks to Mary, saying, ‘Go and tell My brethren, I go to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God’ (John 20:17). In these words He sums up the whole aim of His dispensation as Man. Men revolted from God, and ‘served those which by nature were not gods’ (Galatians 4:8); though being the children of God, they became attached to an evil father falsely so called. For this cause, the mediator between God and man, having assumed the First-Fruits of all human nature, sent to His brethren the announcement of Himself, not in His divine character, but in that which He shares with us. He said, ‘I am departing in order to make by My own self that true Father, from whom you were separated, to be your Father, and by My own self to make that true God from whom you had revolted to be your God. By that First-Fruit, which I have assumed, I am in Myself presenting all humanity to its God¹²⁶ and Father’”.

“Since the First-Fruits made the true God to be its God, and the good Father to be its Father, the blessing is secured for human nature as a whole, and by means of the First-Fruits the true God and Father becomes Father and God of all men. Now ‘if the First-Fruits is holy, the lump also is holy’ (Romans 11:19). But where the First-Fruit is, and the First-Fruit is none other than Christ, there also are they that are Christ’s”.

Gregory was clear¹²⁷ that Christ, as the First-Fruits, applies to His humanity, not to His Deity. He is the First born of many brethren (Romans 8:29) in His humanity, but the Only begotten of the Father (John 1:14) in His Deity. In His Deity, He has no brethren; only in His humanity did He have brethren.

“Of this new creation therefore in Christ, which He Himself began, He was called the first-born, being the First-Fruits of all, both of those begotten into life, and of those quickened by resurrection of the dead. ‘That He might be Lord

¹²⁵ This is Gregory’s paraphrase of Hebrews 2:14.

¹²⁶ This is Gregory’s paraphrase of John 14.

¹²⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* IV, 3.

both of the dead and of the living' (Romans 14:9), and might sanctify the whole lump by means of its First-Fruits in Himself. The character of 'first-born' does not apply to the Son with respect to His pre temporal existence; the appellation of "Only-begotten" testifies of this. He who is truly only-begotten has no brethren, for how could anyone be only-begotten if numbered among brethren?

2) Humanity Conquers Death

There were some heretics in the First Century who claimed that Christ came in appearance only and not in the flesh, not in reality. They were understandably impressed with the Deity of Christ and assumed He wouldn't stoop to take on the suffering and filth of His own Creation. Paul addresses this, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same. That through death He might destroy him who had the power of death; that is the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15). John Chrysostom stated¹²⁸ that Christ "partaking of flesh and blood" refers to the Incarnation. Chrysostom also stated¹²⁹,

"Here he points out the wonder that by what the devil prevailed at, by that was he overcome; and the very thing which was his strong weapon against the world (namely death), by this Christ smote him. In this He exhibits the greatness of the conqueror's power. Do you see how great a good death has wrought?"

"Why do you fear him that has been brought to nothing? He is no longer terrible, but has been trodden under foot, has been utterly despised (see 2 Timothy 1:10); he is vile and of no account."

Chrysostom then made¹³⁰ an analogy. Life prior to Christ he compared to being held captive in prison awaiting execution, but being fed with choice food all the while. But now, the choice food and the death sentence have been removed and in its place is a contest involving combat that leads not to death but to a kingdom. "Which group would you want to be in: Those fed well in prison awaiting execution, or those who contend and labor willingly that they may crown themselves with the diadem of the kingdom? Not only has death been terminated, but he who is ever showing that war without truce against us (i.e. the devil) has been brought to nothing, since he that doesn't fear death is out of reach of the devil's tyranny".

3) Aspects of Baptism in the Light of the Descent into Hell

John the Baptist understood something of Christ's descent into hell. Gregory Thaumaturgus, speaking of the conversation of Jesus with John the Baptist before His baptism, spoke¹³¹ of how Jesus convinced John to proceed. One aspect of Jesus' explanation was His need to descend into hell on behalf of the dead there.

"Jesus answered and said to John, 'Permit *it to be so* now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness' (Matthew 3:15). Permit *it to be so* now; grant the favor of silence, O Baptist, to the season of My economy. Learn to will whatever is My Will. Learn to minister to Me in those things on which I am bent,

¹²⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, IV, 4-5.

¹²⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, IV, 6.

¹³⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, IV, 6.

¹³¹ Gregory Thaumaturgus, "On the Holy Theophany", Four Homilies, IV, Dubious or Spurious Writings, Part II, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 6.

and do not pry curiously into all that I wish to do. Permit *it to be so* now; do not yet proclaim My Divinity; do not yet herald My Kingdom with your lips, in order that the tyrant may not learn the fact and give up the counsel he has formed with respect to Me. Permit the devil to come on Me, and enter the conflict with Me as though I were but a common man, and thus receive his mortal wound. Permit Me to fulfill the object for which I have come to earth. It is a mystery that is being gone through this day in the Jordan. My mysteries are for Myself and My own. There is a mystery here, not for the fulfilling of My own need, but for the designing of a remedy for those who have been wounded. There is a mystery, which gives in these waters the representation of the heavenly streams of the regeneration of men. Permit *it to be so* now; when you see Me doing what seems to Me good among the works of My hands. In a manner befitting divinity, then attune your praises to the acts accomplished. When you see Me cleansing the lepers, then proclaim Me as the framer of nature. When you see Me make the lame ready runners, then with quickened pace prepare your tongue to praise Me. When you see Me cast out demons, then hail My Kingdom with adoration. When you see Me raise the dead from their graves by My Word, glorify Me as the Prince of Life. When you see Me on the Father's right hand, then acknowledge Me to be divine, as the equal of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Permit *it to be so* now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. I am the Lawgiver, and the Son of the Lawgiver; and it is fitting for Me first to pass through all that is established, and then to set forth everywhere the intimations of My free gift. It is fitting for Me to fulfill the Law, and then to bestow grace. It is fitting for Me to use the shadow as an example, and then introduce the reality. It is fitting for Me to finish the old covenant, and then to dictate the new, to write it on the hearts of men, to subscribe it with My Blood, and to seal it with My Spirit. It is fitting for Me to ascend the cross, to be pierced with its nails, to suffer after the manner of that nature which is capable of suffering, and to heal sufferings by My suffering. By the tree I will cure the wound that was inflicted on men by the medium of a tree. It is fitting for Me to descend even into the very depths of the grave, on behalf of the dead who are detained there. It is fitting for Me, by My three days' dissolution in the flesh, to destroy the power of the ancient enemy, death. It is fitting for Me to kindle the torch of My body for those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. It is fitting for Me to ascend in the flesh to that place where I am in My Divinity. It is fitting for Me to introduce to the Father the Adam reigning in Me. It is fitting for Me to accomplish these things, for on account of these things I have taken My position with the works of My hands. It is fitting for Me to be baptized with this baptism for the present, and afterwards to bestow the baptism of the consubstantial Trinity on all men. Lend Me, therefore, O Baptist, your right hand for the present economy, even as Mary lent her womb for My birth. Immerse Me in the streams of Jordan, even as she who bore Me wrapped Me in children's swaddling clothes. Grant Me your baptism even as the Virgin granted Me her milk. Lay hold of this head of Mine, which the seraphim revere. With your right hand lay hold of this head that is related to yourself by birth. Lay hold of this head, which nature has made to be touched. Lay hold of this head, which for this very purpose has been formed by My Father and Myself. Lay hold of this head of Mine, which, if one does lay hold of it in piety, will save him from ever suffering shipwreck. Baptize Me, who am destined to baptize those who

believe on Me with water, with the Spirit, and with fire. With water, capable of washing away the defilement of sins; with the Spirit, capable of making the earthly spiritual; with fire, naturally fitted to consume the thorns of transgressions. On hearing these words, the Baptist directed his mind to the object of the salvation, comprehended the mystery which he had received, and discharged the divine command; for he was at once pious and ready to obey. Stretching slowly his right hand, which seemed both to tremble and to rejoice, he baptized the Lord”.

John Chrysostom also stated¹³² that John the Baptist knew that Jesus was going to descend into hell, but he didn't know when. John anticipated himself as being a forerunner of Christ in hell as well as in Israel. Chrysostom also affirmed that the “gates of brass” and “bars of iron” (Psalm 107:16 LXX) refer to hell. He noted that some kinds of suffering in this life can deliver us from suffering in hell, depending on how we respond to it. There are degrees to the punishments in hell. We who live in the light of Christ's Advent consequently have more responsibility than those who lived before His Advent.

“John the Baptist was not ignorant; that Jesus was the Christ, he knew, but he also knew He was to die for mankind. Therefore he said, ‘Are You He that should come?’ (Luke 7:18-20), that is, He that is to descend into hell? This he proclaimed before all the others. ‘Behold’, he said, ‘the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29, 36). Now he called Him a lamb, as proclaiming the cross”.

“Why did John not say, ‘Are You He that should come to hell’, but simply, ‘He that should come?’ (Luke 7:18-20) John said these things that he might preach there (i.e. in hell) also after his departure. It would be proper to say, ‘Brethren, don't be childish in understanding; in malice be like babies, but in understanding be mature’ (1 Corinthians 14:20). For the present life is the season for proper conversation, but after death is judgment and punishment. ‘For in hell’, it is said, ‘who will confess You?’” (Psalm 6:5 LXX)

“How then were ‘the gates of brass burst, and the bars of iron broken apart’? (Psalm 107:16 LXX) By Christ's body; for then, for the first time, was a body shown, immortal, and destroying the tyranny of death. Besides, this indicates the destruction of the power of death, not the loosing of the sins of those who had died before His coming. If this were not so, but He had delivered all that were before Him from hell, how does He say, ‘It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah?’ (Matthew 10:15, 11:23-24) These words suppose that Sodom and Gomorrah are also to be punished; more mildly indeed, yet still they are to be punished. Yet they suffered the most extreme punishment¹³³, nevertheless not even this will deliver them. If it is so with them, much more it is so with those who have suffered nothing.

One might say, ‘Were they wronged who lived before His coming?’ By no means! Men might then be saved, even though they had not confessed Christ. Confessing Christ was not required of them, but to avoid worshipping idols, and to know the true God. ‘For the Lord your God’, it is said, ‘is one Lord’ (Deuteronomy 6:4). Therefore the Maccabees were admired, because for the observance of the Law they suffered (2 Maccabees 3-7); similarly with the three

¹³² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXVI, 3-4.

¹³³ That is, the raining of fire and brimstone from the Lord out of heaven (Genesis 19:24).

children (Daniel 3:8-30). Many others too among the Jews, having shown forth a very virtuous life; and having maintained the standard of their knowledge, had nothing more required of them. Then it was sufficient for salvation to know God only; but now there is need also of the knowledge of Christ. Therefore He said, 'If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had no sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin'" (John 15:22).

"Where now, tell me, are the unbelievers in hell? Those before Christ's coming, who had not so much as heard the name of hell or resurrection, were punished here, and shall suffer punishment there also. How much more will we be punished, who have been nurtured in so many lessons of strict virtue in the Church, and ignored it?"

Hippolytus also stated¹³⁴ that John the Baptist was a forerunner for Christ both in Israel and in Hades.

"At the Jordan, seeing the Savior with his own eye, John pointed Him out, and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29, 36) He also first preached to those in Hades, becoming a forerunner there when he was put to death by Herod, that there too he might proclaim that the Savior would descend to ransom the souls of the saints from the hand of death".

Referring to the Baptismal service, John Chrysostom stated¹³⁵ that the confession of the resurrection of the dead at Baptism is important, since the immersion in and the emerging from the water is a symbol of our descent into Hades and our return from Hades.

"After the enunciation of those mystical and fearful words, this also we add at the end when we are about to baptize, bidding them say, 'I believe in the resurrection of the dead', and upon this faith we are baptized. After we have confessed this together, then at last are we let down into the fountain of those sacred streams. This Paul recalled¹³⁶ to their minds saying, 'If there is no resurrection, why then are you baptized for the dead?' You confess a resurrection of the dead in words; but the priest, as in a kind of image, signifies to you in deed the things, which you have believed and confessed in words. In your confession without a sign you believe; then he gives you the sign also. When you have done your own part, then God fully assures you by the water. the being baptized, immersed and then emerging, is a symbol of the descent into Hades and the return from there. Therefore Paul calls baptism a burial, saying, 'Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death'" (Romans 6:4).

Basil the Great also made an analogy between our baptism and the Descent into Hell. We imitate Christ's Descent into Hell as we are buried with Him in baptism (Romans 6:4). It is an end to our first life by death and burial, a putting off of the works of the flesh and a beginning of our new life in Christ.

"The sea and the cloud led the people¹³⁷ through amazement to faith, but for the time of the Exodus, they, in type, prefigured the grace to be. He who is

¹³⁴ Hippolytus, "On Christ and Antichrist", 45, Extant Works and Fragments, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 5.

¹³⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XL, 2.

¹³⁶ By "baptized for the dead", Chrysostom is referring to our own bodies. See John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXIII, 3.

¹³⁷ Basil, On the Spirit, XIV, 31-32.

wise shall understand these things, how the sea is, in type, a baptism bringing about the departure of Pharaoh. In like manner, this washing causes the departure of the tyranny of the devil. The sea slew the enemy in itself, and in baptism too our enmity towards God dies. From the sea the people came out unharmed; we too, alive from the dead, step up from the water 'saved' by the 'grace' of Him who called us. The cloud is a shadow of the gift of the Spirit, who cools the flame of our passions by the 'mortification' of our 'members'".

"In baptism, it is necessary¹³⁸ that the continuity of the old life be cut. This is impossible unless a man is born again; for the regeneration is a beginning of a second life. So before beginning the second, it is necessary to put an end to the first. In making a change in lives, it is necessary for death to come as mediator between the two, ending all that goes before, and beginning all that comes after. We achieve the descent into hell by imitating, through baptism, the burial of Christ. The bodies of the baptized are buried in the water. Baptism then symbolically signifies the putting off of the works of the flesh. As the Apostle says, you were 'circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; buried with him in baptism' (Colossians 2:11-12). There is, as it were, a cleansing of the soul from the filth that has grown on it from the carnal mind, as it is written, 'You shall wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow'" (Psalm 51:7).

Of the fifteen Old Testament readings prescribed for Holy Saturday, the following have to do with the theme of "Deliverance". These five Readings give us additional illumination regarding Baptism, and will be covered in the following order:

1. 3rd Parable from the Old Testament: Exodus 12:1-11 "Christ -- The Passover Sacrifice"
2. 6th Parable from the Old Testament: Exodus 13:20-15:19 "Crossing the Red Sea"
3. 10th Parable from the Old Testament: Genesis 22:1-18 "Isaac Prefigures Christ"
4. 15th Parable from the Old Testament: Daniel 3:1-30 "The Children in the Furnace", including the Song of the Three Children 1:1-65
5. 4th Parable from the Old Testament: Jonah 1:1-4:11 "The Belly of the Sea Monster"

3rd Parable from the Old Testament: Exodus 12:1-11 "Christ -- The Passover Sacrifice "

6th Parable from the Old Testament: Exodus 13:20-15:19 "Crossing the Red Sea"

Discussion of these Readings has been moved to the section on Good Friday Evening Lamentation to help with the continuity of subject matter.

10th Parable from the Old Testament: Genesis 22:1-18 "Isaac Prefigures Christ"

Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only son models that of God the Father. Also Isaac's willingness to become the sacrifice models the will of the Son. Abraham was tested and his faith was demonstrated to be of the highest order, since he had to see beyond the events of this life. In comparison with Abraham's faith, we will also look at the faith of Jephthah and his daughter.

¹³⁸ Basil, On the Spirit, XV, 34.

1) God Commands Abraham to Sacrifice Isaac

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. He went, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country” (Hebrews 11:8-9). He was told he was going to inherit this land; yet he lived in it and never received it. This is because “he waited for the city which has foundations whose craftsman and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

John Chrysostom stated¹³⁹ that Abraham’s task was more difficult than Abel’s, Enoch’s and Noah’s. They had to go beyond human reasoning, but Abraham was asked to obey the Lord’s commands even though the commands seemed to oppose the Lord’s promises.

“Great indeed was the faith of Abraham. In the case of Abel, Noah and Enoch, there was an opposition of reasoning¹⁴⁰ only, and it was necessary to go beyond human reasoning. In this case it was necessary not only to go beyond human reasoning, but to see something more. What was of God seemed to be opposed to what was of God; and faith opposed faith, and command opposed promise”.

In addition, the Lord had told him that his descendants would be as numberless as the dust on the earth (Genesis 13:16), yet it would be through Sarah that they would be numbered (Genesis 17:16-19). The Lord first mentioned how numerous Abraham’s posterity could be when Abraham was 75 years old and Sarah was 66 years old (Genesis 12:1-3). It wasn’t until 25 years later that Isaac was born (Genesis 21:5, 17:17). This required considerable patience on the part of Abraham. It taught Abraham to expect the miraculous in his dealings with God, since Sarah was at least 40 years past the age of child bearing when Isaac was born.

When Isaac was young, the Lord told Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering on the top of Mt. Moriah (Genesis 22:1-2). Hebrew tradition¹⁴¹ places this mountain top as the site where the Temple in Jerusalem¹⁴² was later built. However, offering human sacrifice was contrary to the Lord’s Law (Leviticus 18:21, Deuteronomy 18:10) and was seemingly contrary to the Lord’s promise that his posterity would be numbered through Isaac (Genesis 17:16-19). This did not deter Abraham.

After traveling three days, they reached the foot of the mountain (Genesis 22:4). Abraham told his servants to stay there at the foot of the mountain with the donkey, “and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you” (Genesis 22:5). As they walked up the mountain, with Isaac carrying the wood, and his father the fire and the knife, young Isaac asked his father, “Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” (Genesis 22:7). Abraham replied, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22:8). In saying this, Abraham seems to have understood the coming of the Son of God as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, 36). Abraham concluded that God was able to raise Isaac up from the dead if that was His plan

¹³⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXV, 1.

¹⁴⁰ For example, Abel offered the firstborn of his flock to be burned to ashes (Genesis 4:4). Enoch was translated and never died (Genesis 5:24, Jude 1:14-15). Noah built a huge boat (Genesis 6:15) that couldn’t possibly be transported to the water, and at a time when it had never rained (Genesis 2:5-6).

¹⁴¹ Gower, Manners and Customs of Bible Times 1987, p. 203

¹⁴² Solomon built the First Temple on Mt. Moriah (2 Chronicles 3:1).

(Hebrews 11:17-19). Josephus stated¹⁴³ that Isaac shared Abraham's faith and willingly climbed up on the altar to be sacrificed. Ambrose of Milan stated¹⁴⁴ it this way: "Isaac feared the Lord, as might be expected from the son of Abraham. He was subject to his father to such an extent that he would not avoid death in opposition to his father's will".

Jerome applied¹⁴⁵ the circumstances of the sacrifice of Isaac to his day as a sowing of seed, for which we will receive a reward.

"Thus we have received more than we have given. The things we have renounced are small; the things we possess are great. All that Christ promises is duly performed and for what we have given up we have received a hundredfold. This was the ground in which Isaac sowed his seed, Isaac who in his readiness to die bore the cross of the Gospel before the Gospel came".

Commenting on the contrary signals Abraham received and comparing them to our own, John Chrysostom said¹⁴⁶ that God is not limited by nature, form and order. He is able to give contraries by means of contraries.

"What are you saying? If I give drink to my enemy, do I then punish him? (Proverbs 25:21-22, Romans 12:20). If I give up my goods, do I then possess them? (Matthew 19:29). If I humble myself, shall I then be exalted? (Matthew 20:26, 23:12). Yes, He says, for such is My power to give contraries by means of contraries. I abound in resources and in stratagems: be not afraid. The nature of things follows My Will; I don't wait for nature. I do all things; I am not controlled by them; wherefore I am able to change their form and order". "He then who admires the things here slights those yonder, since he judges these worthy of exertion, even though they're so far inferior to the other".

Chrysostom also noted¹⁴⁷ that Abraham did not tell his wife or his servants what he was doing. He did not even tell Isaac, fearing that Isaac might be astounded and prove unworthy. There were no tears, and no sentimentality; his sole purpose was to fulfill the command. We should act similarly regarding our charitable deeds.

"Abraham, who had an admirable wife, when he was about to offer up his son, concealed it from her, though he knew not what was to happen, but was fully persuaded that he must slaughter his son. What would any ordinary man have said? 'Who is this that perpetrates such acts?' Would he not have accused him of cruelty and brutality? His wife was not even allowed to see her son, to receive his last words, to witness his dying struggles. But he led him away like a captive. Abraham, that just man, was inebriated with zeal, and looked only how to fulfill that which was commanded. No servant, no wife was present; he himself did not know what would happen. But intent upon offering up a pure victim, he would not defile it with tears, or with any opposition. Mark too with what gentleness Isaac asks, 'Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' What was the father's answer? 'My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering' (Genesis 22:7, 8). In this he uttered a prophecy that

¹⁴³ Josephus, *Antiquities*, I, xiii, 4.

¹⁴⁴ Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy*, I, xvii, 66.

¹⁴⁵ Jerome, *Letters*, LXVI, 7.

¹⁴⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, XXV, 4, 6.

¹⁴⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Timothy*, XIV, v. 9.

God would provide Himself a burnt offering in His Son, and it also came true at the time. But why did he conceal it from him who was to be sacrificed? He feared lest he should be astounded, lest he should prove unworthy. With such care and prudence did he act throughout this affair! Well then has the Scripture said, ‘Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing’ (Matthew 6:3). If we have one dear to us as one of our own members, let us not be anxious to show to him our charitable works, unless it is necessary”.

Tertullian noted¹⁴⁸ that in carrying the wood for his own sacrifice, Isaac speaks of Christ who carried the wood of His Cross.

“This ‘wood’, Isaac personally carried for his own sacrifice, when God said that he should be made a victim to Himself. These were mysteries which were being kept for perfect fulfillment in the times of Christ. Isaac, on the one hand, with his ‘wood’, was reserved, the ram being offered which was caught by the horns in the bramble. Christ, on the other hand, in His times, carried His ‘wood’ on His own shoulders, adhering to the horns of the cross, with a thorny crown encircling His head”.

John Cassian stated¹⁴⁹ that God’s testing of Abraham involved faith and works, where his faith was tested to the limits of his ability to bear it. A way of escape was provided at the last minute. Similarly, false prophets were allowed to rise up in ancient Israel to test the faith of the people and their will to fight for what is right. We are also tested in our wrestling with spiritual wickedness. God does not forbid us to be tested, but desires us to use our will power and our human efforts, aided by His grace, in our efforts.

“In a searching trial of faith, the Divine righteousness brought about the case of the grandest of the patriarchs. ‘And it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham’ (Genesis 22:1). For the Divine righteousness wished to try not that faith with which the Lord had inspired him, but that which he could show by his own free will, when called and enlightened by the Lord. The firmness of his faith was proven, and when the grace of God, which had left him for a while to prove him, came to his aid, it said, ‘Lay not your hand on the lad, and do nothing to him. Now I know that you fear the Lord, and for My sake have not spared your beloved son’” (Genesis 22:12).

“This kind of temptation can befall us, for the sake of proving us, and is clearly foretold by the giver of the Law. ‘If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’ -- which you have not known -- ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. The Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul’ (Deuteronomy 13:1-3). What then follows? When God has permitted that prophet or dreamer to arise, we must hold that He will protect those, whose faith He about to try. There will need to be a place for their own free will, where they can fight with the tempter with their own strength. But why is it necessary for them even to be tried, if He knows them to be so weak as to be unable to resist the tempter by their own power? Certainly the Divine

¹⁴⁸ Tertullian, Answer to the Jews, I, vii, 13.

¹⁴⁹ John Cassian, Conferences, II, xiii, 14.

righteousness would not have permitted them to be tempted, unless it knew that they had an equal power of resistance, by which they could be found either guilty or worthy of praise”.

“Let us illustrate this incomparable mercy of our Creator from something earthly. Consider a tender and anxious nurse who carries an infant in her bosom for a long time in order to teach it to walk. First she allows it to crawl, then supports it that, by the aid of her right hand, it may lean on its alternate steps, and later leaves it for a little. If she sees it tottering at all, she catches hold of it, and grabs at it when falling. When down she picks it up and either shields it from a fall, or allows it to fall lightly, and sets it up again after a tumble. But when she has brought it up to boyhood or early manhood, she lays upon it some burdens or labors by which it may be not overwhelmed but exercised. She allows it to vie with those of its own age. How much more does our heavenly Father know whom to carry in the bosom of His grace and whom to train to virtue in His sight by the exercise of free will! He helps him in his efforts, hears him when he calls, leaves him not when he seeks Him, and sometimes snatches him from peril even without his knowing it”.

John Chrysostom stated¹⁵⁰ that Abraham was not bothered that God’s promises seemed to be out of harmony with His commands. He had seen Isaac born of a 90-year old woman, and he assumed that if God can raise a dead womb, he could also raise a dead child. God’s “testing” of Abraham in these matters was simply an exercise of His own athletes to demonstrate how proficient Abraham had become.

“He heard the opposite of the promises from Him who had made them; and yet he was not disturbed, but did them as if they were completely in harmony. They were in harmony; being opposed according to human calculations, but in harmony when viewed by Faith. How this was, Paul has taught us, ‘accounting that God was able to raise Him up, even from the dead’ (Hebrews 11:19). By the same faith by which he believed that God gave what couldn’t be and raised up a dead womb, by the same was he persuaded that He would also raise him up after he had been slain in sacrifice. It was alike impossible, from a womb which was dead and grown old and already become useless for child-bearing, to give a child, and to raise again one who had been slain. But his previous faith prepared the way for things to come”.

“Moses shows another thing too, by saying, that ‘God tested Abraham’ (Genesis 22:1). Did not God know that the man was noble and approved? Why then did He test him? Not that He Himself might learn, but that He might show to others, and make Abraham’s fortitude clear to everyone. He shows the cause of trials, that we may not suppose we suffer these things as being forsaken of God. If then temptations make men approved, even where there is no occasion, as God exercises His own athletes; much more should we bear all things nobly”.

“Paul said emphatically, ‘By faith, when he was tried, he offered up Isaac’ (Hebrews 11:17), for there was no other cause for his bringing the offering but that”.

¹⁵⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXV, 2.

2) Contrasts Between Abraham's Sacrifice and Jephthah's Sacrifice

Jephthah was one of the Judges of Israel during the 400 years between Moses and Samuel. He was born of a harlot, and even though he was a mighty man of valor, his brothers drove him into exile; saying, "You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you *are* the son of another woman" (Judges 11:2). When war with neighboring Ammon broke out, the elders of Gilead begged Jephthah to lead them into battle. Jephthah agreed. Heading for battle, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah and he made a vow to the Lord. He said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's. And I will offer it up as a burnt offering" (Judges 11:29-31).

On his return from the defeat of Ammon, Jephthah's daughter, his only child, came running out to meet him¹⁵¹ with timbrels and dancing (Judges 11:34). Jephthah was understandably upset, but felt that he had to pay his vow to the Lord, "I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot go back on it" (Judges 11:35). His daughter agreed with him that he should pay his vow, but asked for two months time to mourn her virginity with her friends. From that time on, it became a custom in Israel *that* the daughters of Israel spent four days each year lamenting the daughter of Jephthah (Judges 11:39-40).

Jephthah's daughter had a faith similar to Isaac in her willingness to become a sacrifice according to her father's will. She didn't question her father or complain; she just asked for time to prepare. The Church Historian, Severus, admired¹⁵² the courage of Jephthah's daughter, who did not refuse to die. She willingly returned to her father, and fulfilled the vow to God.

There are similarities between Jephthah and Jesus, in that both were persecuted. His brethren drove Jephthah out of his father's house, and Jesus was lifted up and crucified by His brethren. Although persecuted, Jephthah arose as leader of the people; Jesus was persecuted and arose as King of Kings. Jephthah offered up his firstborn daughter as a sacrifice; Jesus was lifted up as a sacrifice to his Father for all the Gentiles.

Paul commends the faith of Jephthah along with others who were outstanding in their faith. Among them, Paul mentioned Gideon, Barak, Samson, David and Samuel after speaking of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses (Hebrews 11:32). All these, including Jephthah, obtained a good testimony through faith (Hebrews 11:39).

Jephthah's story is set against the backdrop of significant demonic activity going on in Israel. It was customary among the neighboring nations to offer one's firstborn child as a human sacrifice by fire to their deity, such as Molech (Leviticus 18:21). The Canaanite gods were portrayed as very cruel¹⁵³, and could be appeased only by very dear sacrifices for the salvation of men. Human sacrifice, however, was strictly forbidden in Israel, and God stated that He would

¹⁵¹ That is, as the leader of a group of women singing and dancing in a manner similar to Miriam after the Crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20-21).

¹⁵² Sulpitius Severus, Sacred History, I, 26.

¹⁵³ In the Early Church, the heretic Simon Magus similarly taught that God is very cruel and that the persons in the "Godhead" were always quarreling. For details, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, Unpublished Work, 2002.

curse the offender, his family, and anyone who knew about it and turned their eyes away (Leviticus 20:1-5).

a) Divided Opinion over Jephthah

Opinions of Jephthah's sacrifice are divided, even among the Church Fathers. In one camp are those who say that Jephthah acted wrongly, that he was tricked or that he made his vow rashly. But that he did offer his daughter as a human sacrifice.

In another camp, Jephthah is regarded as one of the Saints and that his sacrifice of his daughter was something noble and pleasing to God.

A more modern opinion regards Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter as not her death, but her dedication to perpetual virginity, serving in the Tabernacle of God at Shiloh.

Those who feel Jephthah actually did offer human sacrifice make the following arguments:

1. Jephthah stated, "I will offer it up as a burnt offering" (Judges 11:31), and "he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed" (Judges 11:40).
2. Jephthah was half heathen, born of a harlot (Judges 11:1), and human sacrifices were common in that area.
3. His grief when his daughter was the first to meet him on his return (Judges 11:35).
4. The mourning for Jephthah's daughter for four days every year by the daughters of Israel (Judges 11:40).
5. There is no indication in the account that God sanctioned Jephthah's actions.
6. This was a time in the history of Israel when every man did that which was right in his own eyes, because there was no king in Israel (Judges 17:6). Jephthah may have been able to do something that people later couldn't do.

b) First Opinion: Jephthah Made a Mistake

Among those who stated that Jephthah made a mistake, John Chrysostom stated¹⁵⁴ that it was Satan who tricked Jephthah into making his vow, just as Satan also tricked Adam, pretending that he was concerned over Adam's best interests.

"When conversing with Adam, he puts on the air of one concerned and watching over his interests, and says, that 'your eyes shall be opened in the day that you eat of the tree' (Genesis 3:5). Jephthah too he persuaded, under the pretext of religion, to slay his daughter, and to offer the sacrifice the Law forbade. Do you see what his wiles are, what is his varying warfare? Be then on guard, and arm yourself at all points with the weapons of the Spirit; get exactly acquainted with his plans, that you may both keep from being caught, and easily catch him".

Chrysostom labeled¹⁵⁵ as perjury the breaking of any vows made to the Lord. Jephthah made a vow, and he was required to keep it; but he was not following the Mind of God as Abraham was in the sacrifice of Isaac. To insure that others did not repeat Jephthah's rash vow, Hebrew law required virgin girls to lament the memory of Jephthah's daughter for four days every year to commemorate her death.

¹⁵⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, X, v. 3.

¹⁵⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statutes, XIV, 7.

“Many unbelievers accuse us of cruelty and inhumanity on account of this sacrifice; but I say that the concession in the case of this sacrifice was a striking example of providence and clemency. It was out of care for our race that He allowed that sacrifice. If after that vow and promise, He had forbidden the sacrifice, many who were subsequent to Jephthah, expecting that God would not receive their vows, would have increased the number of such vows, and would have fallen into child-murder. By allowing this vow to be actually fulfilled, He put a stop to all such cases in the future. We can see that this is true; after Jephthah’s daughter had been slain, in order that the calamity might be always remembered, her fate was not be consigned to oblivion. It became a law among the Jews, that the virgins assembling at the same season should bewail for four days the sacrifice, which had taken place. By renewing the memory of it by lamentation, they should make all men wiser for the future. Thus they might learn that it was not after the mind of God that this should be done, for in that case He would not have permitted the virgins to bewail and lament her. That what I have said is not conjectural, the event demonstrated; for after this sacrifice, no one vowed such a vow to God. Therefore He did not forbid this. What He had expressly commanded in the case of Isaac, that He directly prohibited; plainly showing through both cases, that He does not delight in such sacrifices”.

Ambrose compared¹⁵⁶ Jephthah to Herod Antipas, who made a rash vow that resulted in the beheading of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:7-8). It is sometimes contrary to duty to fulfill such a vow. Other early Christian tradition also stated¹⁵⁷ that Jephthah’s vow concerning his daughter was rash and not well thought out.

“It is also sometimes contrary to duty to fulfill a promise, or to keep an oath. As was the case with Herod, who swore that whatever was asked he would give to the daughter of Herodias, and so allowed the death of John, that he might not break his word. What shall I say of Jephthah, who offered up his daughter in sacrifice, she having been the first to meet him as he returned home, victorious. He fulfilled the vow, which he had made that he would offer to God whatever should meet him first. It would have been better to make no promise at all, than to fulfill it in the death of his daughter”.

Jerome stated¹⁵⁸ that most Hebrews of his day blamed Jephthah for the rash vow he made. Supposing, they say, a dog or a donkey had met him, what would he have done? (He could not offer an unclean animal!) Their meaning is that God so ordered events, that he who had improvidently made a vow, should learn his error by the death of his daughter.

Josephus stated¹⁵⁹ that Jephthah “sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering, offering such an oblation as was neither conformable to the Law nor acceptable to God. He did not weigh with himself what opinion the hearers would have of such a practice”.

¹⁵⁶ Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy*, I, 1, 264.

¹⁵⁷ *Constitution of the Holy Apostles*, VII, ii, 37.

¹⁵⁸ Jerome, *Against Jovinianus*, I, 23.

¹⁵⁹ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, V, vii, 266.

c) Second Opinion: Jephthah Was Among the Saints

Others of the Church Fathers see Jephthah's sacrifice as something pleasing to God, similar to Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. Jerome noted that Paul numbered Jephthah among the Saints (Hebrews 11:32) for the sacrifice of his daughter. He likened this to Jephthah giving everything he had to the Lord, just as the Twelve Apostles left everything to follow Christ. Others also numbered Jephthah¹⁶⁰ among the Saints. Jerome stated¹⁶¹:

“Great was the triumph that was won by Abraham, who was content to slay his only son, of whom he had been told that he was to inherit the world (Exodus 32:13, Deuteronomy 32:8-9). Yet he did not cease to hope that after death, Isaac would live again. Jephthah too offered up his virgin daughter, and for this is placed by the Apostle in the roll of the saints (Hebrews 11:32). I would not therefore have you offer to the Lord only material things, what a thief may steal from you or an enemy fall upon, or a proscription confiscate, or what is liable to fluctuations in value now going up and down. Nor what belongs to a succession of masters who follow each other as fast as wave follows wave in the sea, and what you must leave behind you when you die. Rather offer to God that which no enemy can carry off and no tyrant can take from you, which will go down with you into the grave, and on to the kingdom of heaven and the enchantments of Paradise. You already build monasteries and support a large number of holy men in the various islands of Dalmatia. But you would do better still if you were to live among these holy men as a holy man yourself. ‘Be holy’, says the Lord, ‘for I am holy’ (Leviticus 19:2, 1 Peter 1:16). The apostles boasted that they had left all things and had followed the Savior (Matthew 19:27-30). We do not read that they left everything except their ship and their nets. Yet they were crowned with the approval of Him who was to be their judge. Why? In offering up themselves, they had indeed left all that they had”.

Similarly, Jephthah's daughter was very highly regarded for her willingness and courage. Ephraim the Syrian, in his Nisibene Hymns, wrote¹⁶² that Jephthah's daughter was to her father a mirror of life from the dead. As she gave herself for her father, so we should commend our life to the Father of all, in the hope of our end.

Ambrose, who felt that Jephthah's vow was rash, stated that the example of Jephthah's daughter is a glorious and ancient example¹⁶³ of someone willing to die for another, especially being the case of a virgin.

“She said to her sorrowing father, ‘Do to me according to that which has proceeded out of your mouth’ (Judges 11:36). But she asked for a delay of two months in order that she might go about with her companions upon the mountains to bewail fitly and dutifully her virginity now given up to death. The weeping of her companions did not move her, their grief did not prevail upon her, nor did their lamentations hold her back. She did not allow the day to pass, nor did the hour escape her notice. She returned to her father as though returning according

¹⁶⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, Letter to the Bishops of Egypt, II, 21.

Jerome, “To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem”, xxii, Treatises.

Jerome, Letter to Helioidorus, LX, 8.

¹⁶¹ Jerome, Letter to Julian, CXVIII, 5.

¹⁶² Ephraim the Syrian, Nisibene Hymns, LXIII, 6-7.

¹⁶³ Ambrose of Milan, Duties of the Clergy, III, xii, 80-81.

to her own desire, and of her own will urged him on when he was hesitating. She acted thus of her own free choice, so that what was at first an awful chance became a pious sacrifice”.

Methodius portrayed¹⁶⁴ Jephthah’s daughter as a freshly slaughtered lamb, nobly fulfilling the type of Thy Body, O blessed One. She bravely cried, “I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee”.

d) Third Opinion: Service in the Tabernacle as a Virgin

A more modern opinion regards Jephthah’s sacrifice of his daughter as not her death, but her dedication to perpetual virginity, serving in the Tabernacle at Shiloh, about 25 miles away. This viewpoint seems to have grown up somewhere after the 5th Century AD from careful examination of the text. Arguments in favor of this are as follows:

1. Jephthah’s vow specifically referred to whichever *human being* first came out of his house. The words could not be applicable to any kind of animal.
2. The sacrifice of children to Molech was not just forbidden, but there was a mandatory death penalty for anyone involved and anyone who knew about it (Leviticus 20:1-5, 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31, 18:10). To sacrifice a child to the Lord was the ultimate insult. It was akin to carrying out the work of the Lord by a worshipper of Molech.
3. No father could even put an *offending* child to death, much less one that was innocent (Deuteronomy 21:18-21, 1 Samuel 14:24-45).
4. The emphasis regarding what Jephthah did to his daughter is “He carried out his vow” and “She knew no man” (Judges 11:39). If she were offered as a human sacrifice, one would think that the location of the burnt offering and her gravesite would have been mentioned as part of the annual commemoration.
5. Jephthah’s daughter asked for two months to mourn her virginity in the mountains. It seems strange that she would mourn just her virginity and not her imminent death.
6. There was a class of women devoted to service in the Tabernacle at Shiloh (Exodus 38:8), of whom the Prophetess Anna was one who served later at the Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38). The Virgin Mary also served with this group of virgins until her betrothal to Joseph. At the time of Samuel, the apostate sons of Eli engaged in adulterous relations with these women (1 Samuel 2:22). These women were Nazirites (Numbers 6:1-20) and were dedicated to the Lord’s service by a vow. Jephthah’s daughter could have joined these women leaving her father with no offspring.
7. The annual commemoration of Jephthah’s daughter celebrated her with songs of praise for her service to the Lord rather than lamenting her death. The Hebrew word “*tanah*”, sometimes translated *lament* (Judges 11:40), means to celebrate with the giving of presents¹⁶⁵.
8. At the time Jephthah made his vow, he had just finished a long and careful negotiation with the king of Ammon. These careful negotiations suggest that he was not a rash individual at all.
9. At the time he made his vow, the Spirit of the Lord had come upon Jephthah (Judges 11:29), and there appears to have been a considerable spiritual dimension to Jephthah that Paul acknowledged (Hebrews 11:32). For example, when Jephthah made his treaty with the elders of Gilead, he did so such that “The Lord will be a witness between us” (Judges 11:10).

¹⁶⁴ Methodius, *Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, XI, ii, 13.

¹⁶⁵ H. W. F. Gesenius, *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 1996.

In recounting the history of the Exodus involving the territory disputed between Israel and Ammon, Jephthah was very knowledgeable regarding the events c. 300 years earlier.

10. As Jephthah's firstborn, his daughter belonged to the Lord, Jephthah was required to redeem her (Numbers 18:15-16), and he could not sacrifice her. To sacrifice her anyway was a gross violation of the Mosaic Law. His daughter could not have been set apart for destruction in the sense of anathema (Leviticus 27:28-29), since that only applied to the enemies of God. An example of this anathema was everything in Jericho except Rahab and her family (Joshua 6:17-26).

15th Parable from the Old Testament: Daniel 3:1-30 "The Young Men in the Furnace" Song of the Three Children 1:1-65

The three young men in the Babylonian furnace present an Old Testament picture of Christ's descent into hell. Just as the Son of God descended into the Babylonian furnace to save the three young men, so He descended into hell to save those imprisoned there. This parable also presents a secondary picture of how the Gentiles would recognize the Incarnate Christ.

During the Babylonian captivity, King Nebuchadnezzar ruled most of the civilized world. Near Babylon, he had a 90 foot tall gold statue of himself made¹⁶⁶ and sent word to all his officials to come bow down to it at the dedication of the statue (Daniel 3:1-5). Anyone not doing so was to be thrown into a huge furnace (Daniel 3:6, 11). There was an awakening going on in Nebuchadnezzar's life, but it was going to take some refining.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego had been appointed by the Prophet Daniel as officials over the province of Babylon, where Daniel was ruler over the whole province and chief prefect over the Magi (Daniel 2:48-49). Some of the Chaldeans complained to the king that the Jews (Daniel's officials) were not obeying the king's command (Daniel 3:12). The king was angry and called them in to give an account, threatening them with the furnace, and asking, "What god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" (Daniel 3:14-15) They replied, "Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Daniel 3:17-18). One aspect of religious life in this part of the world was the worship of fire. Throwing the three young men into the furnace was delivering them over to the Babylonian "gods".

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were bound with ropes (Daniel 3:19-21), and were taken to the furnace by Nebuchadnezzar's mighty men. The soldiers put the three young men (probably down a ramp) into the midst of the furnace (Daniel 3:22). They then proceeded to make the fire hotter by adding fuel to the fire. As they were doing so, the fire streamed 73 feet above the furnace and killed them. Inside the flame, the angel surrounded the three young men with a moist whistling wind (Song of the Three Children 1:22-26). According to Hippolytus¹⁶⁷, the angel inside the furnace drove the flames that killed the soldiers.

¹⁶⁶ The gold statue that Nebuchadnezzar made was an image of what he saw in his dream (Daniel 2:27-45), that Daniel interpreted in the 2nd year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (Daniel 2:1). In the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (Daniel 3:1), he had become puffed up from the lofty words that Daniel had addressed him with, so he made a copy of this image, in order that he might be worshipped by all as God. See Hippolytus, "On Daniel", III, 3:1, Fragments from Commentaries on Various Books of Scripture.

¹⁶⁷ Hippolytus, "On Daniel", III, 3:47, Fragments from Commentaries on Various Books of Scripture.

“See how even the fire appears intelligent, as if it recognized and punished the guilty. It did not touch the servants of God, but it consumed the unbelieving and impious Chaldeans. Those who were within were sprinkled with (cooling) dew by the angel, while those who thought they stood in safety outside the furnace were destroyed by the fire”.

Nebuchadnezzar observed the three young men loose and walking about in the flames accompanied by one he described as “the Son of God” (Daniel 3:24-25 LXX). While in the flames, they sang a song of praise to God while they walked about in the furnace. This Song was originally part of the text of Daniel, but is now listed in the Old Testament Apocrypha (in the Septuagint) as “The Song of the Three Children”.

According to Hippolytus¹⁶⁸, Nebuchadnezzar was the only one among his governors, captains, princes, etc. that saw the Son of God in the flames. This foreshadowed the recognition by the Gentiles of the Incarnate Christ. Hippolytus stated:

“Tell me, Nebuchadnezzar, when did you see the Son of God, that you should confess that this is the Son of God? Who pricked your heart, that you should utter such a word? With what eyes were you able to look into this light? Why was this revealed to you alone, and to none of the satraps about you? As it is written, ‘The heart of a king is in the hand of God’ (Proverbs 21:1). The hand of God is here; the Word pricked his heart, so that he might recognize Him in the furnace, and glorify Him. Since the children of Israel were destined to see God in the world, and yet not to believe on Him, the Scripture showed beforehand that the Gentiles would recognize Him incarnate. While He was not yet incarnate, Nebuchadnezzar saw and recognized Him in the furnace, and acknowledged Him to be the Son of God”.

Coming out of the fire, the three young men were not singed, and didn’t even smell like the fire (Daniel 3:26-27). King Nebuchadnezzar then issued another decree ordering the death penalty for anyone speaking anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego (Daniel 3:19). This is a dramatic change in king Nebuchadnezzar. Prior to the defiance of the three young men, he stated, “Who is the God that shall deliver you out of my hand?” (Daniel 3:15) After seeing the Son of God in the flames, he stated, “Blessed is the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, who has sent His angel, and delivered His servants, because they trusted in Him. They have changed the king’s word; they have delivered their bodies to be burned, that they might not serve any god, except their own God” (Daniel 3:28). Nebuchadnezzar’s enlightenment¹⁶⁹ was similar to that of Emperor Constantine¹⁷⁰ about a millennium later

John Chrysostom noted¹⁷¹ the details inside the furnace; the fire was close enough to burn off the ropes binding the three young men, but not close enough to singe them or even to

¹⁶⁸ Hippolytus, “On Daniel”, III, 3:92 LXX (MT 3:25), Fragments from Commentaries on Various Books of Scripture.

¹⁶⁹ Some comments from the Church Fathers can be found at:

John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statutes, VI, 11-13.

¹⁷⁰ Emperor Constantine, a pagan on his way to battle, saw a vision of the Cross in the sky, with the words, By this sign, conquer”. He went on to win the battle, and subsequently stopped the persecution of Christians with the Edict of Milan, and later made Christianity the state-supported religion.

¹⁷¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statutes, IV, 7-8.

make them smell of smoke. This miracle was directed at Nebuchadnezzar to demonstrate that the Babylonian fire gods were impotent against the Son of God.

“The force of the fire was both quenched and not quenched. While it came in contact with the bodies of these saints, it was quenched; but when it was needful to burn off their ropes, it was not quenched. It broke their ropes, but didn’t touch their ankles (Daniel 3:25). Do you see how very close it was? Yet the fire was very real, but dared not penetrate past the ropes. The tyrant bound, and the flame set loose; that you might learn the fierceness of the barbarian, and the submissiveness of the element. Why did he tie them up, when he was about to cast them into the fire? In order that the miracle might be greater; that the sign might be the more unaccountable; and that you may not suppose that the things seen were an optical illusion. If that fire hadn’t been real, it would not have consumed the ropes. What is much more, it would not have seized the soldiers who were placed outside the furnace (Daniel 3:4, 6, 20). But as the case was, it showed its power on those outside; but towards those inside, its submissiveness”.

In the 16 years since the Lord sent Nebuchadnezzar his dream of the golden headed statue, that Daniel interpreted, Nebuchadnezzar seems to be trying to follow the word that the Lord sent him, but he was clueless as to what to do. His only vision was the statue with the golden head (which was himself), silver chest and arms, etc. Besides this, he knew little, and his own ego got in the way of further inquiry. It would take seven years of a very humbling homeless existence (Daniel 4:30-33) and the loss of his kingdom to educate him. Following this humbling experience, Nebuchadnezzar repented, his kingdom was restored to him, and he, himself, wrote¹⁷² part of the Book of Daniel (Daniel 4:34-37).

John Chrysostom noted¹⁷³ especially the language used by Nebuchadnezzar in addressing the three young men in the furnace. The king himself became a preacher of the Gospel!

“By what title does he call them? He called to them, ‘You servants of the most high God’ (Daniel 3:26). To the servants of God, all things are possible. If some, who are the servants of men, have power and authority, much more have the servants of God”.

“Let us look at the words of the Philippian jailer, who was responsible for Paul and Silas. ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ (Acts 16:30) What language is nicer than this? This makes the angels leap for joy. To hear this language, even the Son of God Himself became a servant. This language they who believed at the beginning addressed to Peter (Acts 2:37) ‘What shall we do?’ Peter answered, ‘Repent and be baptized’” (Acts 2:37-38).

“The king here does not say, ‘What must I do to be saved?’, but the teaching is plainer in his case than any language whatever. He immediately becomes a preacher; he does not need to be instructed like the jailer. He proclaims God, and makes confession of His power. “Truly your God is the God of Gods and the Lord of Kings, because He has sent His Angel, and has delivered you.” (Daniel 3:28, 2:47) What was the result? Not a single jailer, but numbers are instructed by the king’s writings, by the sight of the facts. That the king would not have told a falsehood is evident enough to everyone, because he never would have chosen to bear such testimony to captives, nor to overthrow his own

¹⁷² Note the change in tense from the third person in verse 33 to the first person in verse 34.

¹⁷³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VIII.

acts. He never would have chosen to imply such utter madness. Had not the truth been abundantly clear, he would not have written in such terms, and with so many persons present”.

The text of the “Song of the Three Children” speaks to us of our deliverance from the fires of hell that we and our brothers and sisters, the saints, will be blessed with. Our enemy, here pictured by an ungodly king of this world, endeavors to throw us into the fire, but the Son of God rescues us by going into the fire Himself. Cyprian stated¹⁷⁴ that this proves that the heat of hell can have no power against the confessors and martyrs of Christ.

John Chrysostom compared¹⁷⁵ Christ on the Cross with the Three Children in the fire (Daniel 3:16-25) and with Jonah in the belly of the sea monster (Jonah 2).

“The Three Children not entering the fire would not have been as astonishing as having entered and having trampled on the fire. For Jonah, it was a greater thing by far, after the fish swallowed him, to suffer no harm from the monster, than if he had not been swallowed at all. For Christ, not dying wouldn’t have been as inconceivable as having died and then loosening the bonds of death. He did not come down from the Cross, for He was hastening on to close conflict with death himself. He descended not from the Cross; not because He could not, but because He would not”.

Sometimes we also find ourselves in predicaments from which there appears to be no escape, such as Moses, who was trapped between the Red Sea, the mountains and a powerful army. Sometimes the only solution may be the resolve of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego as they were about to be thrown into the furnace. “The Lord can save us if He wills; but even if He does not, we will not bow to idolatry” (Daniel 3:13-27).

John Chrysostom also compared¹⁷⁶ poverty to a furnace because of the effect it has on its victims, forcing them into idolatry just to obtain food, clothing and shelter. As examples, he gives Lazarus sitting at the rich man’s gate (Luke 16:20-21) and Christ’s words, “You saw Me hungry and fed Me” (Matthew 25:34-36). Like the Son of God, he encourages us to go down into the furnace with almsgiving to provide a “moist, whistling wind” for those trapped there.

“Let us imitate these young men, because there is set up today a golden image, namely the tyranny of mammon (i.e. possessions). Let us not pay attention to the timbrels, to the flutes, to the harps, nor to the rest of the pomp of riches. Though we fall into a furnace of poverty, let us choose it, rather than worship that idol; and there will be ‘in the midst a moist whistling wind’ (Song of the Three Children 1:26 LXX). Let us not shudder at hearing of ‘a furnace of poverty’. Those that fell into the furnace were shown the more glorious, but they that worshipped the fire were destroyed (Daniel 3:22, Song of the Three Children 1:22-24 LXX). Those that have chosen poverty, in order that they might not worship mammon, will be more glorious both here and then, but they that have been rich unjustly here, shall then pay the utmost penalty”.

¹⁷⁴ Cyprian, Epistles, LXXX, 3.

¹⁷⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 3.

¹⁷⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, IV, 19-20.

“From this furnace of poverty Lazarus came out at least as glorious as those young men; but the rich man who was in the place of those that worshipped the image, was condemned to hell” (Luke 16:22-23).

“The saints walking through the river of fire (Daniel 7:10 LXX) shall suffer no pain, and they will even appear joyous; but they that have worshipped the image, shall see the fire rest upon them fiercer than any wild beast, and draw them in. So if anyone disbelieves hell, when he sees this furnace, let him from the things present believe things to come, and fear not the furnace of poverty, but the furnace of sin”.

“These things let them hear that are rich that are kindling the furnace of poverty. Though they shall not hurt those others, ‘the dew’ coming to their aid; yet they themselves will be an easy prey to the flame, which they have kindled with their own hands”.

“In Babylon, an angel went into the flame with those young men; now let us go down with them that are in the furnace of poverty, and by alms-deeds let us make a ‘dewy air’, and blow the flame aside, that we may be partakers of their crowns also. In this way, the flames of hell may likewise be scattered by the voice of Christ saying, ‘You saw me hungry, and fed me’ (Matthew 25:35). Christ’s voice shall then be with us instead of a ‘moist wind whistling’ through the midst of the flame. Let us then go down with alms-giving, into the furnace of poverty; let us behold them that in self-restraint walk therein, and trample on the burning coals. Let us behold the marvel, strange and beyond thought, a man singing praise inside a furnace, a man giving thanks in fire, chained to extreme poverty, yet offering praise to Christ. They, who bear poverty with thankfulness, really become equal to those young men. No flame is as terrible as poverty, nor so apt to set us on fire”.

John Cassian compared¹⁷⁷ the furnace in Babylon to the burning for sins and vices in our body. By the Holy Spirit, as dew, we can overcome this heat.

“We shall succeed in extinguishing the fiery furnace of our body, which is kindled by the Babylonian king who continually furnishes us with opportunities for sin and vices, with which we burn more fiercely, than with naphtha and pitch. Through the grace of God, instilled like dew by His Spirit in our hearts, we can altogether deaden the heats of fleshly lusts. This then is our first contest; this is as it were our first trial in the Olympic Games, to extinguish the desires of the palate and the belly by the longing for perfection”.

4th Parable from the Old Testament: Jonah 1:1-4:11 "The Belly of the Sea Monster"

Jonah was born in the city of Gath Hopher, about 3 miles from Nazareth (2 Kings 14:25), during the days of Elijah the Prophet. As a child, Jonah lived¹⁷⁸ with his widowed mother in Zarephath, just south of Sidon, when Elijah prophesied that there would be no rain for 3 ½ years (1 Kings 17:1, 18:1, Luke 4:25). Sidon was a Gentile city where Elijah was “hiding out” from the wrath of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 17, Luke 4:24-27). During most of that period, Elijah lived in an upper room at the house of Jonah’s mother (1 Kings 17:9-10). His

¹⁷⁷ John Cassian, Institutes of the Coenobia, V, 14.

See also Jerome, Letter to Demetrios, CXXX, 10-11.

¹⁷⁸ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, September 22.

mother was expecting to starve to death due to the famine (1 Kings 17:12), but Elijah saw to it that the jar of flour and the jar of oil never ran out (1 Kings 17:16). Near the end of the 3½ years, Jonah died, and Elijah raised him from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-24).

Jonah Refused to Convert Gentile Nineveh:

The Book of Jonah is unusual in that the entire focus of the book is the mission of a Hebrew prophet to a Gentile city. In the early 8th Century BC, Jonah was told by the Lord to prophesy against Nineveh, a city in Northern Assyria, 600 miles from Jerusalem. Nineveh was an ancient city, was built by Nimrod following the Flood (Genesis 10:11) and was the Capital city of the Assyrian Empire in the late 8th Century BC.

Instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah “fled to Tarshish (i.e. Spain) from the presence of the Lord” (Jonah 1:3). The Lord then sent a fierce storm on the Mediterranean Sea so that the ship was about to break up (Jonah 1:4). The sailors ascertained by casting lots that the storm came up on account of Jonah (Jonah 1:7). They therefore asked Jonah what they should do to him in order to calm the storm (Jonah 1:11). Jonah replied, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea” (Jonah 1:12). The sailors were unwilling to shed innocent blood and tried rowing harder; when all hope seemed lost, they asked the Lord to forgive them and threw Jonah overboard (Jonah 1:13-15). Immediately the storm ceased and the sailors all made vows and offered sacrifices to the Lord (Jonah 1:16). Jonah, however, was swallowed by a great sea creature that the Lord appointed (Jonah 1:17). The great sea creature was not a modern “whale” and was larger than anything that is common today. According to Tertullian¹⁷⁹,

“Jonah was swallowed by the monster of the deep, in whose belly whole ships were devoured, and after three days was vomited out again safe and sound”.

The Hebrew text refers to this sea monster as *dag*, or just the generic word for fish. The LXX refers to the sea monster as *ketos*, or a huge fish. Neither of these words are very helpful in identifying what species of sea creature it was that was large enough both to swallow Jonah, and whose belly was large enough to allow Jonah to breathe for three days (Jonah 1:17).

We can get some understanding of Jonah’s experience from Jonah’s prayer while he was in the sea creature’s belly.

1. Jonah prayed from the “belly of hell” (Jonah 2:2 LXX). This indicates that it was quite unpleasant, and the stench must have been unbearable.
2. Jonah stated that “The waters closed over me, the deep encircled me; the weeds¹⁸⁰ were wrapped around my head” (Jonah 2:5, Dead Sea Scrolls). Thus the sea creature swallowed other things besides Jonah, and Jonah had difficulty moving and untangling himself in the sea creature’s belly.
3. Jonah stated that he “went down to the roots of the mountains; the earth with its bars *closed* behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit¹⁸¹, O Lord, my God” (Jonah 2:6 DSS). This indicates that the sea creature was a deep diver, and that the pressure from the deep water was quite high.

¹⁷⁹ Tertullian, On the Resurrection of the Flesh, II, vi, 58.

¹⁸⁰ According to Keil and Delitzsch, these weeds, Hebrew *soph*, are sea grasses, which grow on the ocean bottom. See Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, v. 10, p. 271.

¹⁸¹ Keil and Delitzsch suggest that the word translated “pit” probably refers to an undersea cavern, perhaps the lair of the sea creature. See Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, v. 10, p. 272.

4. Jonah stated, “When my soul was failing me¹⁸², I remembered the Lord” (Jonah 2:7 LXX). This indicates that Jonah was near death in the sea creature’s belly, possibly from lack of oxygen, possibly from the “bends”, which is a very painful death for deep-sea divers.
5. Finally, after three days, “The Lord spoke to the sea creature and it vomited Jonah out on the dry land” (Jonah 2:10 DSS). For the sea creature to do this, it was likely a species that could move as easily in shallow water as in deep water.

Only one sea creature mentioned in the Scripture was large enough to swallow Jonah, and this was the “leviathan”, which is probably extinct now. Leviathan was described as having the following characteristics:

1. He is very large. “And all the ships coming together¹⁸³ would not be able to bear the mere skin of his tail; neither *shall they carry* his head in fishing-vessels” (Job 41:7 LXX).
2. His skin is like armor plate, and harpoons cannot penetrate it. His face is as large as a door. “Who will open the doors of his face? Terror is round about his teeth. His inwards are as brass plates and the texture of his *skin* as a smyrite stone” (Job 41:14-17 LXX). “If spears should come against him, *men* will affect nothing, *either with* the spear or the breast-plate. He considers iron as chaff, and brass as rotten wood. The bow of brass shall not wound him; he deems a slinger as grass” (Job 41:26-28 LXX).
3. He can breathe fire and smoke out of his mouth. “At his sneezing a light shines, and his eyes are *as* the appearance of the morning star. Out of his mouth proceed as it were burning lamps, and as it were hearths of fire are cast abroad. Out of his nostrils proceeds smoke of a furnace burning with fire of coals. His breath is *as* live coals, and a flame goes out of his mouth” (Job 41:18-21 LXX).
4. His swimming motion is so strong that it makes the sea appear to boil (Job 41:31 LXX).
5. He lives in the deepest parts of the ocean, and is king of all that are in the waters (Job 41:32-34 LXX).
6. Leviathan was also used figuratively as an image of Satan (Isaiah 27:1).

After his deep-sea adventure, Jonah received another vision directing him to go to Nineveh (Jonah 3:1). This time he obeyed. Walking through the streets, he proclaimed that Nineveh would be overthrown¹⁸⁴ in 40 days (Jonah 3:4). Word of his encounter with the sea creature and the storm may have gotten back to Nineveh, because Jonah received instant attention! All the people of Nineveh believed God and began fasting in sackcloth and ashes, including the King of Nineveh (Jonah 3:5-6). When God saw their repentance, He relented concerning their destruction and spared the city (Jonah 3:10). Succeeding generations in Nineveh, however, forgot the Lord; about 150 years later, Nineveh was obliterated so completely that it wasn’t until the 19th Century that archaeologists finally discovered its location.

One message for us from Jonah is that “as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great sea creature, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40). Just as leviathan, who swallowed Jonah, represents Satan, so

¹⁸² Small parts of Jonah 2:7 are missing from the Dead Sea Scrolls text, so the LXX is used here.

¹⁸³ These fishing vessels are larger than rowboats and could carry the Twelve Apostles across the Sea of Galilee. This suggests a rough weight of the head of leviathan as over 2000 pounds.

¹⁸⁴ The LXX reads “3 days”, while the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scrolls read “40 days”. Justin Martyr (2nd Century) mentioned that this difference existed in his days also. There is probably a copying error in the LXX text used today that was also present in the 2nd century. See Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, CVII.

Hades, who “swallowed” Christ in His death, represents the efforts of Satan (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

Another message for us is “the men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here” (Matthew 12:41, compare also Hebrews 2:3).

Gregory Nazianzen stated¹⁸⁵ that Jonah’s flight from God does not make sense, especially for a prophet. Jonah knew what God had in mind at Nineveh: the passing over of the grace of prophecy to the Gentiles. Thus Jonah reacted in a similar fashion to the Chief Priests and Scribes when Jesus told them that the Gentiles would inherit the Kingdom of God instead of them. Their reaction was, “May it never be!” (Luke 20:16).

“To imagine that Jonah hoped to hide himself at sea, and escape by his flight the great eye of God, is surely utterly absurd and stupid. It is unworthy of credit, not only in the case of a prophet, but even in the case of any sensible man, who has only a slight perception of God, Whose power is over all. On the contrary, Jonah knew better than anyone the purpose of his message to the Ninevites”.

“Jonah did not imagine that he could utterly escape the Divine power; this we are not to believe. But when he saw the falling away of Israel, and perceived the passing over of the grace of prophecy to the Gentiles — this was the cause of his retirement from preaching and of his delay in fulfilling the command. Accordingly he left Joppa, in Hebrew *beauty*, (Jonah 1:3), I mean his former dignity and reputation, and flung himself into the deep of sorrow. Then he was tempest-tossed, fell asleep, and was wrecked, aroused from sleep, taken by lot, confessed his flight, was cast into sea, and swallowed, but not destroyed, by the ‘sea creature’. But there he called upon God, and, marvelous as it is, on the third day he, like Christ, was delivered”.

Irenaeus used¹⁸⁶ the great sea monster as an illustration of Satan engulfing man. The righteous, then, are resurrected out of the “belly of hell”.

“From the beginning, did God permit man to be swallowed up by the great ‘sea creature’, who was the author of transgression, not that he should perish altogether when so engulfed. But, arranging and preparing the plan of salvation, which was accomplished by the Word, through the sign of Jonah. This benefited those who held the same opinion as Jonah regarding the Lord, and who confessed, and said, ‘I am a servant of the Lord, and I worship the Lord God of heaven, who has made the sea and the dry land’ (Jonah 1:9). This was done that man, receiving an un hoped-for salvation from God, might rise from the dead, and glorify God, and repeat that word which was uttered in prophecy by Jonah. ‘I cried by reason of my affliction to the Lord my God, and He heard me out of the belly of hell’” (Jonah 2:2).

Cyril of Alexandria stated¹⁸⁷ that the Gentiles on the ship bound for Tarshish (Spain) knew that Jonah was a prophet and that he had a special relationship with God.

¹⁸⁵ Gregory Nazianzen, Oration in Defense of His Flight to Pontus, II, 107-109.

¹⁸⁶ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, xx, 1.

¹⁸⁷ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, V, 14.

“Jonah, the prophet, intimates this in what he says: ‘And the shipmaster came to him, and said to him, ‘Why do you snore? Rise, call on your God, that He may save us, and that we may not perish’ (Jonah 1:6 LXX). The expression ‘your God’ implies one who knew Him by way of knowledge; and the expression, ‘that God may save us’, revealed the consciousness in the minds of heathen, who had applied their mind to the Ruler of all, but had not yet believed. Again the same: ‘He said to them, I am the servant of the Lord; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven’ (Jonah 1:9). And again the same, ‘Let us by no means perish for the life of this man’” (Jonah 1:14).

Athanasius of Alexandria stated¹⁸⁸ that Jonah in the belly of the sea monster was a parallel to Christ in Hades. The limitation of this imagery is that Jonah did not bring up others who had been swallowed by the sea monster.

“When Christ said, ‘As Jonah was three days and three nights in the sea monster’s belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth’ (Matthew 12:40). Jonah was not as the Savior, nor did Jonah go down to Hades; nor was the sea monster Hades; nor did Jonah, when swallowed up, bring up those who had before been swallowed by the sea monster. But he alone came forth, when the sea monster was asked. There is no equality signified in the term ‘as,’ but it shows a certain kind of parallel in the case of Jonah on account of the three days. In like manner we too, when the Lord says ‘as,’ we neither become as the Son in the Father, nor as the Father is in the Son. We become in mind and agreement of spirit. As Jonah was swallowed up, so did the Savior descend into Hades, but it is a parallel. In like manner, we too become one, as the Son in the Father. We shall not be equal to Him; for He and we are but parallel”.

The Fasting and Repentance of Nineveh: A Prelude to the Church

John Chrysostom had a great deal to say about the fasting and repentance of Nineveh that can be applied to life within the Church. First, he stated¹⁸⁹ that the repentance of Nineveh is nothing short of incredible. It rivals the repentance of the world at the preaching of the Apostles hundreds of years later.

“The Ninevites were a barbarous and foreign people, who had never participated in any of the benefits of Israel. When they saw a man, who had been saved from shipwreck, who had never associated with them before, enter their city and say ‘Nineveh shall be overthrown’ (Jonah 3:4), they were converted and reformed by the mere sound of these words. Putting away their former wickedness, they caused the sentence of God to be revoked, and stopped the threatened disturbance of their city. They averted the heaven-sent wrath, and were delivered from every kind of evil. ‘God saw that every man turned from his evil way, and was converted to the Lord’ (Jonah 3:10). Their wickedness was great, their iniquity unspeakable, which was plainly shown by the prophet when he said ‘their wickedness ascended even to heaven’ (Jonah 1:2, Genesis 18:20), indicating the magnitude of their wickedness. Nevertheless such great iniquity, which was piled up to such a height as to reach even to heaven, all this in the course of a few days they abolished. They had the happiness of hearing the

¹⁸⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, III, xxv, 23.

¹⁸⁹ John Chrysostom, Treatise on the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself, XIV.

declaration, ‘God saw that everyone turned from his evil way, and He relented of the evil which He said He would do to them’ (Jonah 3:10). Do you see that he who is temperate and watchful not only allows no injury at the hands of man, but even turns back Heaven-sent wrath? Whereas he who betrays himself and harms himself by his own doing, even if he receives countless benefits, reaps no great advantage. So the Jews were not profited by those great miracles, nor did having no share in them harm the Ninevites. But inasmuch as they laid hold of a slight opportunity they became better, barbarians and foreigners though they were, and ignorant of all divine revelation, and dwelling at a distance from Palestine”.

Second, Chrysostom looked¹⁹⁰ at the methods of fasting used by the Ninevites. Fasting is a medicine for the soul, and it has been used extensively in the Church; but it needs to be applied carefully. In Nineveh, both man and beast fasted, just like man and beast wear sackcloth at a funeral to show pity for the deceased. But fasting by itself is useless without an accompanying change of life; it was the change of life by the Ninevites that really saved them.

“The Ninevites fasted, and won the favor of God (Jonah 3:10). The Jews, fasted too, and profited nothing (Matthew 6:16-18); they even departed with blame (Isaiah 58:3, 7). Since then the danger in fasting is so great to those who do not know how they ought to fast, we should learn the laws of this exercise. We do not wish to ‘run uncertainly’, ‘beat the air’ (1 Corinthians 9:26), or while we are fighting contend with a shadow. Fasting is a medicine; but a medicine, though it is profitable, becomes frequently useless owing to the lack of skill of him who employs it. It is necessary to know when it should be applied, and how much; and the temperament of body that admits it. Also important are the nature of the country, and the season of the year; the corresponding diet; as well as various other particulars; any of which, if one overlooks, he will mar all the rest that have been named. When the body needs healing, exactness is required on our part; much more exactness is needed when our care is about the soul. When we seek to heal the distempers of the mind, we need to search into every particular with the utmost accuracy”.

“Let us see then how the Ninevites fasted, and how they were delivered from that wrath. ‘Let neither man, beast, herd or flock taste anything’ (Jonah 3:7), said the prophet. What are you saying? Must even the irrational things fast, and must the horses and the mules be covered with sackcloth? ‘Even so’, he replies. At the decease of some rich man, the relatives clothe not only the men servants and maidservants, but also the horses with sackcloth, and give orders that they should follow the procession to the sepulcher, led by their grooms. This signifies the greatness of the calamity, and invites all to pity. Thus also, when that city was about to be destroyed, even the irrational nature was enveloped in sackcloth, and subjected to the yoke of fasting”.

“Was it only fasting and sackcloth? We say not so; but the change of their whole life. This appears from the language of the prophet. He who has discoursed of the wrath of God, and of their fasting, when speaking of the reconciliation, speaks to this effect, ‘God saw their works’. What kind of works? ‘That everyone turned from their evil ways, and the Lord repented of the evil that He had said He would do to them’ (Jonah 3:10). Do you see that fasting did not

¹⁹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statutes, III, 8-10.

rescue from this danger, but it was the change of life, which rendered God propitious and kind to these barbarians?”

To contrast the fasting of the Ninevites, Chrysostom stated¹⁹¹ that some people in the Church go through the motions of fasting, even wearing rough garments and bewailing their sins, but never seem to change. They never accrue any benefit from their fasting; never show any fruit; and Satan ends up destroying them through their “repentance”.

“These things are not repentance; these things are the semblance and shadow only of repentance, not repentance itself. In the case of these persons, it is well to say, ‘Take heed lest Satan should get an advantage over us, for we are not ignorant of his devices’ (2 Corinthians 2:11). Some he destroys through sin, others through repentance; but these in yet another way, by allowing them to gain no fruit from repentance. When he didn’t find how he might destroy them by direct attack, he came by another road, heightening their toils, while robbing them of the fruits. He persuaded them, as if they had successfully accomplished all they had to do, to be neglectful of what remains”.

“In ancient time the Ninevites sinned, and they did the things which you too now are doing. Let us see however what it was that helped them. They applied extreme fasting to the wounds, sleeping on the ground, putting on sackcloth, and ashes, and lamentations; they applied also a change of life. Let us then see which of these things made them whole”.

“‘God’, said He, ‘saw that they turned everyone from his evil way, and He repented of the evil that He had said He would do to them’ (Jonah 3:10). He didn’t say not, ‘He saw their fasting, sackcloth and ashes’. I don’t say this to overturn fasting, (God forbid!) but to exhort you that with fasting you do that which is better than fasting, the abstaining from all evil”.

To put the fasting of Nineveh in perspective, Chrysostom stated¹⁹² that the events at Nineveh are, to this day, a model for repentance. If they can be saved, anyone can! They knew almost nothing about God; yet they generated true repentance just on the uncertainty that God might spare them.

“He threatened the city of Nineveh, and yet Nineveh was not overthrown, but it arose, and became still more distinguished. We all still celebrate and admire it even to this day. From that time it has been a sort of excellent haven for all who have sinned, not allowing them to sink into desperation, but calling all to repentance. By what it did, and by what it obtained of God’s favor, it persuades men never to despair of their salvation”.

“They had heard that the buildings would fall, and yet they fled not from the buildings, but they fled from their sins. They did not depart each from his house as we do now, but each departed from his evil way. They said, ‘Why should we think the walls have brought forth the wrath? We are the causes of the wound; we then should provide the medicine’. To insure their safety, they trusted not a change of habitations, but of habits”.

“Let us imitate the spiritual wisdom of the barbarians. They repented even on uncertain grounds! The sentence had no such clause, ‘If you turn and repent, I will set up the city’, but simply, ‘Yet three days¹⁹³, and Nineveh shall be overthrown’ (Jonah 3:4). What then did they

¹⁹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, IV, 6.

¹⁹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statutes, V, 16-17.

¹⁹³ The LXX reads “3 days”, while the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scrolls read “40 days”. Justin Martyr (2nd Century) mentioned that this difference existed in his days also. There is probably a copying error in the

say? ‘Who knows whether God will repent of the evil He said He would do unto us?’ (Jonah 3:9) They did not know the outcome, and yet they do not neglect repentance! They are unacquainted with God’s method of showing mercy, and yet they change habits upon the strength of uncertainties! Neither was it in their power to look at other Ninevites, who had repented and been saved; nor had they read prophets. They had not heard the patriarchs; they had not enjoyed counsel, or partaken of admonition; nor had they persuaded themselves that they should certainly propitiate God by repentance. The threatening did not imply this; they were doubtful, and hesitating concerning it; and yet they repented with all diligence. What reason shall we have to shrink back, when those who had no ground for confidence as to the outcome, are seen to have exhibited so great a change. We have grounds for confidence in the mercy of God, and have frequently received many pledges of His care, and have heard prophets, and Apostles. We have been instructed by actual events; and yet have no desire to reach the same measure of virtue as these did! Great assuredly was their virtue!”

LXX text used today that was also present in the 2nd century. See Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, CVII. Obviously Chrysostom is quoting from the LXX.

The Resurrection of the Dead

Gospel: Matthew 28:1-20 – The Resurrection

On the 3rd Sunday of Pascha two weeks from today, the Gospel lesson is the parallel account of the Resurrection from Mark 15:43-16:8. There the focus is on the role of the Myrrh-Bearing Women at the Cross, the Tomb, etc., and the sequence of events at the Tomb. Therefore that aspect of today's Gospel lesson will be postponed for two weeks.

The use of this Gospel lesson for Holy Saturday takes on a more global perspective than just a remembering of the historical events of that Sunday morning. First, the Gospel lesson describes the events of Sunday morning, yet it is used here in anticipation of the Resurrection on Holy Saturday. Second, the Gospel lesson concludes with the Lord's commission to evangelize the earth. Thus Holy Saturday deals not just with the events but with the longer term implications of the events.

1) The Cover-up by the Jewish Leaders:

On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, 'Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise'. Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him *away*, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead'. So the last deception will be worse than the first'. Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard; go your way, make *it* as secure as you know how'. They went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard" (Matthew 27:62-66).

"Now while the women were going home, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, 'Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him *away* while we slept'. And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure'. So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day" (Matthew 28:11-15).

We notice that the Chief Priests and Pharisees remembered that Jesus had said that He would rise from the dead after three days (Matthew 27:63). In this they may have been more cognizant of His words than His disciples were. But their reaction was to conspire with Pilate to seal the stone and set a 24-hour guard. On this, John Chrysostom comments¹⁹⁴:

"Everywhere deceit recoils upon itself, and against its will supports the truth. Observe: it was necessary for it to be believed that He died, that He rose again, and that He was buried; and all these are brought to pass by His enemies".

"If the sepulcher was sealed, the proof of His resurrection has become incontrovertible. Because it was sealed, and the sepulcher was found empty, it is clear that He is risen, plainly and incontrovertibly".

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¹⁹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXIX, 1.

“But it is worthwhile to inquire concerning that point also, where He said, ‘After three days I rise again’ (Matthew 20:19). One would not find this distinctly stated, but rather in the example of Jonah¹⁹⁵. So this demonstrates that they understood His saying, and of their own will, they dealt to prevent it”.

“If only the soldiers had sealed the tomb, they might have said that the soldiers, having given up the body to be stolen, gave His disciples opportunity to feign the history concerning His Resurrection. But now having themselves made it secure, they are not able to say this”.

“Do you see how they labor for the truth against their will? They themselves came to Pilate, themselves asked, themselves sealed, setting the watch, so as to be accusers and refuters one of another”.

This was carried to extreme when some of the guards that had kept watch at the Tomb reported these events to the Chief Priests (Matthew 28:11). After consulting together, the Chief Priests and elders gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them to say that Jesus’ disciples stole the body by night (Matthew 28:12-13). Matthew concludes that this falsehood “was commonly reported among the Jews until this day” (Matthew 28:15).

Some of the soldiers refused to accept the bribe, however. The centurion at the cross (Matthew 27:54) was also in charge at the tomb. Longinus (his name) and two of his soldiers would not accept the bribe, so the Jewish leaders conspired to kill them also. Hearing of the plot, Longinus and his friends resigned their commission, received baptism from the Apostles, and left for Cappadocia. The Jewish leaders, however, slandered them to Pilate, and Pilate sent other soldiers to hunt them down and behead them¹⁹⁶. When Pilate’s soldiers arrived, Longinus and his two friends knew what their mission was, but the soldiers didn’t know who Longinus was. He let them stay at his house that night, fed them, and announced who he was the next morning. The soldiers were so embarrassed that they volunteered to leave and report to Pilate that they couldn’t find their quarry. But Longinus persuaded them that they had a job to do and that they needed to be truthful about what they did. They beheaded Longinus and the two others, brought their heads back to Pilate, but then became Christians themselves. Thus the testimony of the deceit and the cover-up was not snuffed with the death of Longinus, but it was exposed and amplified.

Chrysostom spoke¹⁹⁷ at length about the cover-up and how illogical it was. The Jewish leaders were afraid of the disciples, who were so afraid for their lives that they rarely ventured outdoors. The Jewish leaders were afraid of Christ as a deceiver, and tried to prove that His claim of a third day Resurrection was a falsehood. But all they did was prove it to be true by the seal and the guard. As a result, the burial was published abroad and the Resurrection was proven beyond doubt. In doing all this, they violated the Sabbath by doing work, an infraction that they used as a reason to kill Jesus (John 5:18)

“When could the disciples have stolen Him? On the Sabbath? How? It was not lawful so much as to go out. Even if they transgressed the law, how should they have dared to come out, who were so timid? How could they also have been able to persuade the multitude? By saying what? By doing what?”

¹⁹⁵ We also find this stated in the imagery surrounding the Day of First-Fruits. For more details of this, see the Study for Holy Thursday morning.

¹⁹⁶ Nickolai Velimirovic, *Prologue From Ochrid*, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, October 16.

¹⁹⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXXIX, 1-2.

From what sort of zeal could they have stood up on behalf of the dead? Expecting what recompense? Seeing Him yet alive and merely seized, they had fled; and after His death were they likely to speak boldly in His behalf, unless He had really risen again? How should these things be reasonable? That they were neither willing nor able to feign a resurrection that did not take place is plain from the circumstances. He spoke to them much of a resurrection, and continually said, as indeed these very men have stated, ‘After three days I rise again’ (Matthew 20:19). If therefore He did not rise again, it is quite clear that His disciples, who had been deceived and made enemies to an entire nation for His sake, and who had come to be without home and without city, would have abhorred Him. They would not have been willing to invest Him with such glory, after having been deceived, and after having fallen into the utmost dangers on His account. That they would have been unable to feign the Resurrection, unless it had been true, this does not need much reasoning”.

“But note the craftiness of the Jewish leaders, how ridiculous it is. ‘We remember’, these are their words, ‘that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, ‘After three days I rise again’ (Matthew 27:63). Yet if He were a deceiver, and boastfully uttered falsehood, why are you afraid and run to and fro, and use so much diligence? We are afraid, it is replied, lest perchance the disciples steal Him away, and deceive the multitude. Yet this has been proven to have no probability at all. Malice, however, is a thing contentious and shameless, and attempts what is unreasonable”.

“They commanded it to be made secure for three days, as contending for doctrines, and being minded to prove that before that time also He was a deceiver, and they extend their malice even to His tomb. For this reason then He rose before the three days ended, that they might not say that He spoke falsely, and was stolen. If He had not risen then, when they were sitting there and watching, but when they had withdrawn after the three days, they would have had something to say, and to speak against it, although foolishly. For this reason then He anticipated the time. It was fitting that the resurrection should take place while they were sitting by and watching. Therefore also it was fit it should take place within the three days, since if it had been when they were passed, and the men had withdrawn, the matter would have been regarded with suspicion. Therefore He allowed them to seal it, as they were minded, and soldiers sat around it”.

“They didn’t care about doing these things, and working on a Sabbath day, but they looked to one object only, their own wicked purpose. Those who seized Him, when living, are afraid of Him when He’s dead! Yet if He had been a mere man, they had reason to have taken courage. But that they might learn, that when living He endured everything of His own will; behold, a seal, a stone, and a watch, and they were not able to hold Him”.

Theophylact stated¹⁹⁸ that it was incredible that the tremendous signs from heaven did not move the Jewish leaders to repentance. They had taunted Him about coming down from the Cross as a sign that He was Who He said He was. The sign He gave was greater than they had asked for, but they still refused to believe.

¹⁹⁸ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 313-314.

“Marvel with me at the hard heartedness of the Jews. Those who said, ‘Let Him now come down from the Cross, and we will believe’ (Matthew 27:39-43), when they see even greater things than this they still do not believe. Was coming down from the Cross the equal to darkening the sun, breaking the rocks, causing a fearful earthquake, raising the dead, tearing the veil, and altering the elements of creation? Therefore, let no one wonder why the Lord did not come down from the Cross to make them believe, but let him accept these things without idle curiosity, realizing that, even if He had come down, they would still not have believed. Moreover, had He come down from the Cross, it would have eliminated any hope of our salvation through the Cross. The Cross, above all else, is the glory of Christ. By working greater miracles than coming down from the Cross, none of which brought the Jews to belief, He achieved two things at once. He endured and accepted the Cross until the end, making it the great trophy¹⁹⁹ of victory. He showed these unbelieving Jews to be complete ingrates with no trace of good in them, who were fused to their unbelief”.

2) The Logic of the Resurrection:

In contrast to the campaign of falsehood on the part of the Jewish leaders, we note that the disciples reported events objectively as they happen. For example, the Chief Priests’ conversation with Pilate was reported as “Sir, we remember while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days, I will rise’” (Matthew 27:63). Matthew, one of the Twelve, in writing his Gospel, didn’t have to repeat the term “deceiver”, but he did even though it was derogatory toward himself and his cause. Even after the Resurrection when the Lord met them in Galilee, Matthew reported that “some doubted” (Matthew 28:17). These are not the words of someone who stole the body in order to pretend a resurrection occurred. These are the words of someone who is reporting things objectively as they happen. John Chrysostom went into²⁰⁰ this at length.

“When should they have stolen Him? On the Sabbath? But how? It was not lawful so much as to go out (Exodus 16:29). Even if they transgressed the Law, how should they have dared to come out when they were so timid (John 20:19)? How could they also have been able to persuade the multitude at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36)? By saying what? By doing what? From what sort of zeal could they have stood in behalf of the dead? Expecting what recompense? Seeing Him still alive and merely seized by the Jews, they had fled (Matthew 26:56). After His death, were they likely to speak boldly in His behalf, unless He had risen again? How should these things be reasonable? That they were neither willing nor able to feign a resurrection that did not take place is plain from all this”.

Responding to the claim of the Jewish rulers that His disciples stole His body, Chrysostom continued²⁰¹,

“How did they steal Him? O most foolish of all men! For because of the clearness and conspicuousness of the truth, they are not even able to make up a

¹⁹⁹ A trophy [tropaion] in the ancient world was a monument of victory in war. It consisted of the weapons of the defeated enemy, which were hung on a tree or post.

²⁰⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXIX, 1.

²⁰¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XC, 1.

falsehood. what they said was highly incredible. For how, I ask, did the disciples steal Him, unlearned men not venturing so much as to show themselves? (John 20:19) What? Was not a seal put upon it? What? Were there not so many watchmen, and soldiers, and Jews stationed round it? What? Did not those men suspect this very thing, take thought, break their Sabbath rest, and continue anxious about it? Why moreover did they steal it? That they might feign the doctrine of the resurrection? How should it enter their minds to feign such a thing, men who were well content to be hidden and to live? How could they remove the stone²⁰² that was made sure? How could they have escaped the observation of so many? No, though they had despised death, they would not have attempted without purpose, and fruitlessly, to venture in defiance of so many²⁰³, who were on the watch? If they did not dare so much as to stand their ground when they saw Him alive (Matthew 26:56), how when He was dead could they but have feared such a number of soldiers?

If the disciples did not have the strength to watch with Him, and that, though criticized by Him (Matthew 26:40-46), how could they have ventured on these things?" If they were going to steal His body, they would have done it the first night before the Jewish rulers set the guard in place.

John Chrysostom noted²⁰⁴ that there were other difficulties in trying to steal the body from the tomb. Getting the burial wrappings off would have been a very difficult task to do quickly.

“And what does it mean that the napkins were stuck on with the myrrh; for Peter saw these lying (John 20:6-8). If they had been disposed to steal, they would not have stolen the body naked, not because of dishonoring it only, but in order not to delay and lose time in stripping it, and not to give them that were so disposed opportunity to awake and seize them. Especially when it was myrrh! This is a drug that adheres so to the body, and cleaves to the clothes, such that it was not easy to take the clothes off the body. People that do this need much time, so that from this again, the tale of the theft is improbable”.

There is a significant testimony from the burial clothes themselves. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had wrapped Jesus' body in strips of linen with about a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, creating a “mummy” or a cocoon (John 19:39-40). This was a burial rite used only by the wealthy. From a modern study²⁰⁵ on customs of that time, the technique used in the burial rite was described as follows.

“The body was covered in spices and in paste and the spices and paste were tied to the body by layers of white roller bandage. The paste hardened and impregnated the bandages until a hard preservative mold or cocoon was formed about the body. A cap was put on the head, and often the jaw was held in position by a bandage under the chin”.

When Peter and John came to the Tomb on Pascha morning, they “saw the linen clothes lying there” (John 20:5-6). This was the undisturbed 100-pound empty cocoon; Jesus had passed

²⁰² A stone 4 feet diameter by 1 foot thick weighs about 2,200 lb

²⁰³ If a centurion was in charge, 100 soldiers were involved!

²⁰⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XC, 2.

²⁰⁵ Gower, New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, pp. 72-74

through the cloth of the cocoon as He rose, leaving them lying there. No wonder that John and Peter saw and believed when presented with this evidence (John 20:8).

From all this, the Resurrection is the only logical conclusion. As John Chrysostom said²⁰⁶,

“The Jewish rulers confessed the body was not there, but the stealing it is shown to be false and incredible. By their watching it and by the seals and by the timidity of the disciples, the proof of the Resurrection even to this day appears incontrovertible”.

3) Our Descent into Hades and Our Resurrection at the Second Coming

Earlier we covered Christ’s Descent into Hell to rescue those that had been dwelling there in Abraham’s bosom, like Lazarus (Luke 16:20-26). Yet, when Christ returns in glory at the Second Coming, Paul stated that the dead in Christ would be raised first to meet Him as He comes.

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

This implies that “the dead in Christ”, who rise first, will still be on earth and not in heaven. If they are caught up together with those still alive, they must be in the graves, similar to Lazarus, awaiting the Second Coming. But then who is in heaven that comes with Christ at His return?

Tertullian stated²⁰⁷ that Christ descended into hell after His death and removed the Patriarchs and Prophets to be with Him in Paradise. But those that have died since His descent will remain in Hades until His Second Coming. John describes the souls of just the martyrs under the altar in heaven (Revelation 6:9), where the souls of everyone else must be still on earth in Abraham’s Bosom (Hades) where Lazarus was at one time (Luke 16:22-23). The dead that are raised at the Second Coming to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17) must have been also dwelling in Hades.

“We suppose the lower regions of Hades are not a bare cavity, nor some subterranean sewer of the world, but a vast deep space concealed in the interior of the earth. We read that Christ in His death spent three days in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:40), that is, in the secret inner recess which is hidden in the earth. Now although Christ is God, yet being also man, ‘He died according to the Scriptures’ and ‘was buried’ (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). He fully complied with His own law by remaining in Hades in the form and condition of a dead man. He did

²⁰⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XC, 2.

²⁰⁷ Tertullian, A Treatise on the Soul, I, ix, 55.

not ascend into the heights of heaven before descending into the lower parts of the earth, that He might there make the patriarchs and prophets²⁰⁸ partakers of Himself (1 Peter 3:19). This being the case, you must suppose Hades to be a subterranean region, and keep at arm's length those who are too proud to believe that the souls of the faithful deserve a place in the lower regions. These persons, who are 'servants above their Lord, and disciples above their Master' (Matthew 10:24), would no doubt spurn the comfort of the resurrection, if they must expect it in Abraham's bosom. They say that Christ descended into hell that we might not ourselves have to descend there".

"Well, then, what difference is there between the heathen and Christians, if the same prison awaits them all when dead? How shall the soul mount up to heaven, where Christ is already sitting at the Father's right hand, when as yet the archangel's trumpet has not been heard by the command of God? (1 Corinthians 15:52, 1 Thessalonians 4:16) Those, whom Christ will find on the earth at the Second Coming, have not yet been caught up into the air to meet Him at His coming. When He comes, the dead in Christ shall be the first to arise (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). To no one is heaven opened; the earth is still safe for us, but I would not say it is shut against us. When the world shall pass away, then the kingdom of heaven shall be opened. We shall sleep in Paradise, you tell me, where already the patriarchs and prophets have been removed from Hades in the retinue of the Lord's resurrection. How is it, then, that the region of Paradise, which as revealed to John in the Spirit lay under the altar, displays no other souls in it besides the souls of the martyrs? (Revelation 6:9) How is it that the most heroic martyr Perpetua²⁰⁹ on the day of her passion saw only her fellow-martyrs there, in the revelation which she received of Paradise? The sword which guarded the entrance permitted no one to go in there, except those who had died in Christ and not in Adam."

"Observe, then, the difference between a heathen and a Christian in their death. If you have to lay down your life for God, as the Comforter counsels (Matthew 10:37-39, Mark 8:34-38), it is not in gentle fevers and on soft beds, but in the sharp pains of martyrdom. You must take up the cross and bear it after your Master, as He has Himself instructed you (Matthew 16:24-27). The sole key to unlock Paradise is your own life's blood. Every other soul is detained in safe keeping in Hades until the day of the Lord".

Irenaeus stated²¹⁰ that Christ observed the law of the dead, and spent three days in the lower parts of the earth. Just as no disciple is above his Master, so we will do the same, awaiting our resurrection.

"Christ dwelt for three days in the place of the dead, as the prophet says²¹¹ concerning Him. 'And the Lord remembered His dead saints who slept formerly

²⁰⁸ The "Patriarchs" in the context of the pre-Flood civilization that Peter referred to represents the people numbered in Genesis 5. But Tertullian generalized the text of Peter's Epistle to include others who lived prior to Christ's Advent, such as the Prophets, Abraham, etc.

²⁰⁹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, February 1 gives a brief summary of the life of Perpetua and her friends, but not her vision.

The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO, 2004, February 1.

²¹⁰ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, V, xxxi, 1-2.

²¹¹ In Justin Martyr, Dialogue With Trypho, 72, Justin stated that the Jews of his day had intentionally deleted this from the Hebrew text of Jeremiah's writings. In Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, xx, 4, Irenaeus attributed

in the land of sepulture; and He descended to them, to rescue and save them'. The Lord Himself says, 'As Jonah remained three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth' (Matthew 12:40). Paul says, 'But when He ascended, what is it but that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth?' (Ephesians 4:9) This, too, David says when prophesying of Him, 'You have delivered my soul from the nethermost hell' (Psalm 86:13 LXX). When He rose again on the third day, He spoke to Mary, who was the first to see Him and to worship Him. 'Don't touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to the disciples, and say to them, I ascend to My Father, and to your Father'" (John 20:17). Christ observed the law of the dead, that He might become the first-begotten from the dead, and waited until the third day 'in the lower parts of the earth' (Ephesians 4:9). Afterwards He rose in the flesh, so that He even showed the print of the nails to His disciples (John 20:20, 27); He thus ascended to the Father. The Lord 'walked in the midst of the shadow of death' (Psalm 23:4 LXX), where the souls of the dead were kept; yet afterwards He arose in the body. After the resurrection, He was taken up into heaven. It is clear that the souls of His disciples also, upon whose account the Lord underwent these things, shall go away into the invisible place allotted to them by God, and there remain until the resurrection, awaiting that event. Then they will receive their bodies, and rise in their entirety; that is, bodily; just as the Lord arose, they shall come into the presence of God. 'For no disciple is above the Master, but everyone that is perfect shall be as his Master' (Luke 6:40). Our Master, therefore, did not immediately depart, taking flight to heaven, but awaited the time of His resurrection prescribed by the Father. This had been also shown through Jonah; rising again after three days, He was taken up to heaven. So we also should await the time of our resurrection, prescribed by God and foretold by the prophets; and so be taken up, as many as the Lord shall account worthy of this privilege".

John Cassian stated²¹² that the souls of people who have died are still capable of reason and feelings such as hope, sorrow, joy and fear. They are in a state where they are already beginning to taste something of what is reserved for them at the Last Judgment.

"People are not idle after the separation from this body, and are capable of feeling. In the parable of the beggar Lazarus and Dives, the rich man clothed in purple, one obtained a position of bliss, in Abraham's bosom, the other was consumed with the dreadful heat of eternal fire (Luke 16:19-24). But understand the words spoken to the thief 'Today you shall be with Me in Paradise' (Luke 23:43). They clearly show that not only their former intelligence continues with the souls, but also in their changed condition they partake of some state, which corresponds to their actions and deserts? The Lord would certainly never have promised him this, if He had known that his soul, after being separated from the flesh, would either have been deprived of perception or have been resolved into nothing. It was not his flesh but his soul which was to enter Paradise with Christ. We must avoid, and shun with the utmost horror, that wicked punctuation of the heretics, who do not believe that Christ could be found in Paradise on the same

the quote to Isaiah, and in Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xxii, 1, he attributed it to Jeremiah. All we can say is that it is not in any of our texts today, either the Hebrew text, the LXX or the Dead Sea Scrolls.

²¹² John Cassian, First Conference of Abbot Moses, I, i, 14.

day on which He descended into hell. They punctuate ‘Verily, I say unto you to-day’, and making a stop apply ‘you shall be with Me in Paradise’, in such a way they imagine that this promise was not fulfilled at once after he departed from this life, but that it will be fulfilled after the resurrection. They do not understand what He declared to the Jews, who fancied that human difficulties and weakness of the flesh hampered him as it did them. ‘No man has ascended into heaven, but He who came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven’ (John 3:13). By this He clearly shows that the souls of the departed are still endowed with reason, but that they even have such feelings as hope and sorrow, joy and fear. They already are beginning to taste beforehand something of what is reserved for them at the last judgment, and they are not resolved into nothing after their departure from this life. They live a more real life, and are still more earnest in waiting on the praises of God”.

Rufinus of Aquilea stated²¹³ that Christ’s descent into hell brought three kingdoms at once under His subjection: things in heaven, things on earth, and things under the earth (Philippians 2:10). He achieved this victory over the angelic world-rulers whom He had established at the Creation.

“When God made the world in the beginning, He set over it certain powers of celestial virtues by which the race of mortal men might be governed and directed. Moses signifies this, ‘When the Most High divided the nations, He appointed the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God’ (Deuteronomy 32:8 LXX). But some of these, as he who is called the Prince of this world, did not exercise the power, which God had committed to them according to the laws by which they had received it. They didn’t teach mankind to obey God’s commandments, but taught them rather to follow their own perverse guidance. Thus we were brought under the bonds of sin, because, as the Prophet said, ‘We were sold under our sins’ (Romans 7:14). Every man, when he yields to lust, is receiving the wages for his own soul (Matthew 16:26). Those wicked rulers held every man under that bond; when Christ came, He tore them down and stripped them of their power. Paul signifies this under a great mystery when he says of Him, ‘He destroyed the hand-writing which was against us, nailing it to His cross, and led away principalities and powers, triumphing over them in Himself’ (Colossians 2:14-15). Those rulers, whom God had set over mankind, had become tyrannical, had attacked the men who had been committed to their charge and had routed them utterly in the conflicts of sin. Ezekiel mystically intimates this when he says, ‘In that day angels shall come hastening to exterminate Ethiopia, and there shall be perturbations among them in the day of Egypt; for behold He comes’ (Ezekiel 30:9 LXX). Having stripped them of their power, Christ is said to have triumphed, and to have delivered to men the power which was taken from them. Also He said to His disciples, ‘Behold I have given you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and on all the might of the enemy’ (Luke 10:19). The Cross of Christ brought those, who had wrongfully abused the authority which they had received, into subjection to those who had before been in subjection to them. This teaches mankind first of all to resist sin even to death, and to be willing to die for the sake of the Faith.”

²¹³ Rufinus of Aquilea, *A Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed*, 15.

4) The Great Commission:

On the evening of the Resurrection, the Eleven minus Thomas were huddled together in the upper room in Jerusalem when the Lord appeared to them (John 20:19). A week later the same thing occurred when Thomas was present (John 20:26). The end of Matthew's Gospel picks up just after this after they all had returned to Galilee to the mountain which Jesus had appointed (Matthew 28:16; also Matthew 28:7, 10; Matthew 26:32). The occasion described (Matthew 28:16) may be the same event (or series of events) that Paul described where the Lord appeared to 500 brethren at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6).

Included in the Gospel reading for Holy Saturday are Jesus' words, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). Since Matthew's Gospel ends here, the implication is that the Twelve Apostles are just about to go do this, and that they haven't started yet. They began to go to all the nations shortly after the stoning of Stephen and the scattering of the people of God (Acts 8:4), which occurred less than one year after Pentecost²¹⁴. Thus the Holy Saturday reading speaks of longer term implications of the Resurrection than is immediately at hand.

At this occasion in Galilee, the Holy Spirit had not yet been given since Christ had not yet ascended. Thus, they are not yet able to do these things (make disciples of all nations) because they didn't have the means yet. But they will acquire the means in a few weeks at Pentecost.

John Chrysostom pointed out²¹⁵ that when the Lord said, "I am with you", "He said this to the prophets in the Old Testament continually; such as to Jeremiah, when Jeremiah objected to his mission because of his youth (Jeremiah 1:6, 8). He said it to Moses, when Moses object to his unskilled speech (Exodus 4:10, 12), and to Ezekiel shrinking from the office (Ezekiel 2, 3). He promised to be with not just these men only, but also with all that believe after them".

²¹⁴ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 27.
Demetrius of Rostov, The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2000, December 27.

²¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XC, 2.

5) Parables from the Old Testament

Of the fifteen Old Testament readings prescribed for Holy Saturday, the following have to do with various aspects of the theme of "Resurrection". These six Readings will be covered in the following order:

1. 8th Parable from the Old Testament: 1 Kings 17:8-24 "Elijah Raises the Widow's Son"
2. 12th Parable from the Old Testament: 2 Kings 4:8-37 "Elisha Raises the Shunammite's Son"
3. 7th Parable from the Old Testament: Zephaniah 3:8-15 "The Remnant"
4. 2nd Parable from the Old Testament: Isaiah 60:1-16 "The Gathering of the Elect"
5. 13th Parable from the Old Testament: Isaiah 63:11-64:5 "The Second Coming"
6. 9th Parable from the Old Testament: Isaiah 61:10-62:5 "The Bridegroom Rejoices"

8th Parable from the Old Testament: 1 Kings 17:8-24 "Elijah Raises the Widow's Son"

The Parable of Elijah raising the widow's son teaches us some things about the implications of Holy Saturday. We will be raised like the widow's son, and the Kingdom of God will not be exclusively Jewish any more. The three years of drought speaks of Christ's three-year public ministry, and the one widow who gave Elijah everything she had speaks of the Church. Therefore this widow is preferred over many others, just as Christ prefers the Church over many pretenders.

The widow portrays the righteous during a drought on the earth, which is our present condition, and the rain is the Coming of Christ. She was miraculously preserved by something that foreshadows the Eucharist. Just as Elijah went to the Gentiles in Sidon, so the Church is now largely of the Gentiles.

Elijah was a descendant of the settlers of Gilead (1 Kings 17:1) who moved in during the time of the Judges (Judges 12:4-7). The first mention of him occurred during the reign of King Ahab following Ahab's marriage to Jezebel and the subsequent building of altars and a Temple to Baal, and building the Asherah on the high places. Elijah said to King Ahab that there would be neither dew nor rain for several years until he (Elijah) said so. Then Elijah left for the East side of the Jordan (1 Kings 17:1-3).

Elijah lived there for a while and was fed by ravens sent by the Lord, who brought him bread and meat in the morning and in the evening. His source of water was the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:4-6). When the brook dried up from the lack of rain, the Lord told him to go to the town of Zarephath in Sidon on the Mediterranean coast. Sidon was the birthplace of Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31).

On entering the gate of Zarephath, he called to a widow who was gathering sticks, asking for a drink of water. As she was going to get the water, he asked her also for a piece of bread. She replied that she had no bread. All she had was a handful of flour and a little oil. She was going to prepare a last meal for her son and herself, expecting that they would starve to death afterward because of the famine²¹⁶ and drought (1 Kings 17:9-12).

²¹⁶ Plowing to plant crops was timed to take advantage of the winter rains. Beginning in late October, the first heavy rains come and loosen the soil sufficiently for plowing. Rain is intermittent throughout the winter, and ends with some heavy showers of March and April (the late rain). From April to October is the dry season

Elijah instructed her to use that last little bit to make him a little bread cake, then some for her and her son. “For thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain on the face of the earth’” (1 Kings 17:11-14). She did as Elijah asked and her bowl of flour lasted for several years until the famine was over. During that time, Elijah stayed in the upper room of her house (1 Kings 17:15-16).

During the time Elijah stayed there, the woman’s young son died. Elijah carried the child to the upper room and laid him on his own bed. Then he raised him from the dead (1 Kings 17:24). According to tradition²¹⁷, the child was later known as the Prophet Jonah who prefigured Christ by spending three days in the belly of the sea monster (Jonah 1:17).

This account has a strong message for us: putting the things of God first has significant benefits. The widow had very little; yet by faith she gave of what she had to Elijah. Her benefits were an unlimited food supply, her son resurrected, and her testimony has been remembered as being greater than all the widows in Israel (Luke 4:25-26).

Jesus referred to these events in the life of Elijah early in His public ministry as an example of how “no prophet is accepted in his own country”. In Nazareth, Jesus’ home town (Luke 4:16), in the year 27 AD, He was asked to read from the Prophet Isaiah in the Synagogue. He had recently been baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist (Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-34) and tempted for 40 days in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13).

After His baptism, John records Jesus’ trip to Cana of Galilee for the wedding feast (John 2:1-12), then to Capernaum before returning to Jerusalem for Passover of 27 AD (John 2:12-13). While there, Jesus cleansed the Temple (John 2:13-25), spoke with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) and, with His disciples began baptizing many people in Judea (John 3:22-36) such that word got out that Jesus had baptized more people than John (John 4:1).

At this point He left Judea to go to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (John 4:3, Luke 4:14). On the way, He spoke with Photini, the woman at the well in Sychar (John 4:4-45). Following this, He came to Nazareth. At this time, Jesus was very highly regarded, and He “was being glorified by all” (Luke 4:15). “All bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke 4:22). They just couldn’t believe this was Joseph and Mary’s son, the kid they grew up with.

When Jesus was asked to read²¹⁸ from the Prophet Isaiah, He read from Isaiah 61:1-2. There are six items included in this and most of them relate to the Feast of Trumpets²¹⁹ and thus the beginning of the Church Year. What made this reading all the more powerful is that Jesus

and the hot summer, where clouds are infrequent and rain is rare. Without these rains, hardship or famine was a certainty, as demonstrated by Elijah (1 Kings 18:1-2). Moses linked the rains from heaven with the love of God and the obedience to His commandments (Deuteronomy 11:10-17).

²¹⁷ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, September 22.

²¹⁸ This was the prescribed reading for the day according to the Synagogue lectionary.

²¹⁹ For details of the Feast of Trumpets and the Beginning of the Church Year, see the Study for September 1st, “The Beginning of the Indiction”.

stated after He read it: “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21). Luke’s account states:

“So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, ‘Is this not Joseph's son?’ He said to them, ‘You will surely say this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country’’. Then He said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land. But to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, *in the region* of Sidon, to a woman *who was* a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them were cleansed except Naaman the Syrian’. So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city. And they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built that they might throw Him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way” (Luke 4:22-30).

Jesus quoted the above account about Elijah to people in the synagogue of Nazareth in response to their unbelief (Luke 4:24-26). Being confronted with their unbelief made them so angry that they tried to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:28-30). They had wanted him to do in Nazareth what He had done in Capernaum (Luke 4:23), but Jesus said, “no prophet is accepted in His own country” (Luke 4:24), and He could do few miracles there (Mark 6:1-6). The response of the people of Nain²²⁰ was quite the opposite (Luke 7:11-16). This is a very interesting comparison. Even the Son of God can be limited in His performing of miracles depending on the faith of the people present. Why? In His mercy, He is reluctant to bring increasing judgment on them for rejecting Him.

One impact of the lesson of the Widow of Zarephath in connection with Holy Saturday is that entrance to the Kingdom of God will no longer be considered exclusively Jewish. The Widow may have been Jewish, but living in a Gentile area²²¹, but others from among the Gentiles nearby will be welcomed in the days following Holy Saturday.

John Chrysostom spoke²²² at length about the widow and compared her to the poor widow who gave her last two mites to the alms box at the Temple (Luke 21:2-4). By giving her last food to Elijah, she was rewarded with several years’ supply of food and the resurrection of her son. This is the message of Holy Saturday. As we give of ourselves to others, like our Lord gave to us, we will be rewarded quite out of proportion to what we give.

“What shall we say of the widow in the time of the prophet Elijah? For the risk she ran was not of poverty, but even of death and extinction, and not her own only, but her children’s too. She had no expectation of receiving from others, and was resigned to dying. ‘But,’ one might say, ‘she saw the prophet, and that made her generous’. You also see the Lord of the prophets asking for

²²⁰ Nain was about 5 miles Southeast of His hometown of Nazareth.

²²¹ There was considerable intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles in Galilee, and the widow’s late husband may have been a Gentile who moved the family to Zarephath, near Sidon, after Jonah was born.

²²² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XIX, v. 9.

See also John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philipians, I, v. 7.

alms, and yet you do not become humane. Though you have coffers spewing one into another, you do not even give of your abundance”.

“Was she persuaded to so great a magnanimity by the fact that a prophet came to her? This of itself deserves much admiration, that she was persuaded of his being a great and wonderful person. Why did she not say, as it would have been likely that a barbarian woman and a foreigner would have reasoned, ‘If he were a prophet, he would not have begged of me. If he were a friend of God, God would not have neglected him. Granted that because of sins the Jews suffer this punishment; but why does this man suffer?’”

“But she entertained none of these thoughts; but opened her house to him, and before her house, her heart; and set before him all she had. Putting nature on one side and disregarding her children, she preferred the stranger first. Consider how great a punishment will be laid up for us, if we don’t do what she did, a widow, poor, a foreigner, a barbarian, a mother of children, knowing nothing of these things which we know!”

“Just because we have strength of body, does not mean that we are manly persons. Learn that this is the measure of manliness. What could be manlier than that woman, who both against the tyranny of nature, the force of hunger, and the threat of death, stood fast? Hear how Christ proclaims her. He said, ‘there were many widows in the days of Elijah, and to none of them was the prophet sent but to her’” (Luke 4:25, 26).

“Shall I say something great and startling? This woman gave more to hospitality, than our father Abraham. She ‘ran’ not ‘to the herd’, as he, (Genesis 18:7) but by that ‘handful’ (1 Kings 17:12) outstripped all that have been renowned for hospitality. In this was her excellence, that she set herself to do what she did. She didn’t spare even her children for the sake of the stranger even though she wasn’t conscious of the things to come. But we, though a heaven exists, though a hell is threatened, though (which is greater than all) God has wrought such great things for us and is made glad and rejoices over such things, yet we shrink back. Let us not do this, I beseech you; but let us ‘scatter abroad’, let us ‘give to the poor’ as we ought to give”.

Cyprian of Carthage concurred²²³ with John Chrysostom and added that the widow did not take away from her children, but added to them by her generosity. Conversely, those in the Church who hoard an abundant estate sin before God.

“The mother did not take away from her children what she gave to Elijah, but rather she conferred upon her children what she did kindly and piously. She did not as yet know Christ; she had not yet heard His precepts. She did not, as redeemed by His cross and passion, repay food and drink for His blood. From this it may appear how much he sins in the Church, who, preferring himself and his children to Christ, preserves his wealth, and does not share an abundant estate with the poverty of the needy”.

Ambrose of Milan stated²²⁴ that the Widow of Zarephath speaks of the mystery of Christ and the Church, and the three years of drought speaks of the three years of Christ’s public

²²³ Cyprian, *Treatises*, VIII, 17.

For similar statements, see Ambrose of Milan, *On the Duties of the Clergy*, II, iv, 14-15.

²²⁴ Ambrose of Milan, *Concerning Widows*, III, 14-15.

ministry, where He found no fruit on the fig tree. The reward for the widow foretells that of the righteous at the end of the age.

“In this story the Lord warns me that He bids my ears attend to a mystery. What can be truer than the mystery of Christ and the Church? Not without a purpose is one preferred among many widows. Who is such a one, to whom so great a prophet, who was carried up into heaven, should be guided, especially at that time when the heaven was shut for three years and six months, when there was a great famine in the whole land? The famine was everywhere, and yet this widow did not want. What are these three years? Are they not those in which the Lord came to the earth and could not find fruit on the fig-tree, according to what is written, ‘Behold, there are three years that I came seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none’” (Matthew 21:18-20).

“This is assuredly that widow of whom it was said, ‘Rejoice, O barren, You *who* have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, You *who* have not labored with child! More *are* the children of the desolate, than of her who has a husband’ (Isaiah 54:1, Galatians 4:27). Well is she a widow of whom it is said, ‘You shall not remember your shame and your widowhood, for I am the Lord Who make you’ (Isaiah 54:4). Perhaps therefore is she a widow who has lost her Husband indeed in the suffering of His body, but in the Day of Judgment shall receive again the Son of Man, Whom she seemed to have lost”.

12th Parable from the Old Testament: 2 Kings 4:8-37 "The Shunammite's Son"

The town of Shunem was located in the Plain of Jezreel about 5 miles South of Mt. Tabor and about 25 miles East of Mt. Carmel. The unnamed Shunammite woman lived along a trade route that ran from the Mediterranean Coast to the Sea of Galilee. She recognized Elisha as a man of God as he traveled back and forth along the Trade Route. She persuaded her husband to build an upper room and furnish it for Elisha to stay in as he traveled back and forth in the country (2 Kings 4:9-10). Elisha appreciated this unsolicited kindness and one day asked the woman what he could do for her (2 Kings 4:13). When she didn't ask for anything at all, Elisha's servant Gehazi suggested that what she really wanted was a son, since she was barren (2 Kings 4:14). Elisha then told her, “At this season next year, you shall embrace a son” (2 Kings 4:16).

A few years later, when the Shunammite woman's child complained of a sudden head injury, perhaps an aneurysm, his mother laid him on her lap until noon. When the child died, his mother laid him on Elisha's bed in the upper room (2 Kings 4:18-21). She then saddled a donkey and left with one of the servants to find Elisha at Mount Carmel (2 Kings 4:22-25). This was a 25-mile ride, and it probably took her two days to get there. The young man, one of the servants that accompanied her, was necessary to protect her along the journey and at night. The day that she left was not a Sabbath (2 Kings 4:23), but the day Elisha returned to Shunem was a Sabbath. According to the Mosaic Law, it was unlawful for her to travel back from Mt. Carmel on the Sabbath, because it was greater²²⁵ than a “Sabbath Day's journey” (Acts 1:12).

²²⁵ Rabbinic interpretation of the restriction of travel on the Sabbath was 2000 cubits, or a little more than half a mile. 2000 cubits was the distance between the Ark and the people as Israel traveled in the desert (Joshua 3:4) and also the limit of the pasturelands outside the Levitical cities (Numbers 35:4-5). Limited to 2000 cubits, they reasoned, one could be following the Lord's command, “Let every man remain in his place; let

Finding Elisha, she grabbed hold of his feet and wouldn't let go or leave (2 Kings 4:27-30). Elisha got the message and sent his servant Gehazi ahead to the woman's house to heal her son with his staff. But Gehazi was unable to do so, just like the Twelve were unable to cast out a demon because of their lack of preparation with prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:14-21). At that time, Gehazi was not a man of faith, as was shown subsequently by his greed when he lied about receiving money from Naaman (2 Kings 5).

Healing on the Sabbath

While Gehazi went on ahead, Elisha followed him to Shunem accompanied by the woman, who was probably exhausted from her trip to Mt. Carmel. After prayer Elisha laid his body on top of the dead child seven times; by doing so, he raised him from the dead (2 Kings 4:33-37). Since the child was, by that time, about 4-days dead, there was probably also some odor to his dead body, just like there was with Lazarus (John 11:39). According to Tertullian²²⁶, it was on the Sabbath that Elisha raised the woman's son from the dead, and thus Elisha is an image of Christ's healing on the Sabbath. This was particularly noteworthy since the Mosaic Law required a 7-day period of uncleanness for touching a dead body, and forbid entirely working on the Sabbath.

Elisha thus exhibited considerably more "work" in doing this healing than Jesus ever did. But the Scribes and Pharisees never mentioned this, even though they knew the Scriptures like the back of their hand. Tertullian, in commenting²²⁷ on this being done on the Sabbath, made distinctions of labor between human work (our jobs and employment), and God's work. Raising the son of the Shunammite woman was an example of doing the Lord's work on the Sabbath. Similarly, when the priests carried the Ark around Jericho on the Sabbath, this was God's work. Jesus endeavored to bring the observance of the Sabbath back to what He originally intended. He did not rescind the Sabbath but fulfilled it.

"The Pharisees were in utter error concerning the Law of the Sabbath, not observing that its terms were conditional when it commanded rest from labor, making certain distinctions of labor. When it says of the Sabbath, 'In it you shall not do any work of yours' (Exodus 20:9-10), by the word *yours*²²⁸ it restricts the prohibition to human work — which everyone performs in his own employment or business — and not to divine work. Now the work of healing or preserving is not proper to man, but to God. So again, in the Law it says, 'You shall not do any manner of work in it' (Exodus 12:16 LXX), except what is to be done for any soul, that is to say, in the matter of delivering the soul. What is God's work may be done by human agency for the salvation of the soul".

"God would do that which the man Christ did, for He was likewise God. Wishing, therefore, to initiate them into this meaning of the Law by the restoration of the withered hand, He asked, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or not; to save life or to destroy it?' (Luke 6:9) In order that He might

no man go out of his place on the seventh day" (Exodus 16:29). Thus limited, the Levites, and thus everyone else, could tend to their livestock on the Sabbath without disobeying God (Luke 13:15).

²²⁶ Tertullian, *Five Books Against Marcion*, II, ii, 4, 12.

²²⁷ Tertullian, *Five Books Against Marcion*, II, ii, 4, 12.

²²⁸ Tertullian carries the term "your work" over from verse 9 into verse 10.

remind them what works the Law of the Sabbath forbade — i.e. human works — He was called ‘Lord of the Sabbath’” (Mark 2:23-28).

“The Creator did not break the Sabbath, even at the time when the ark was carried around Jericho (Joshua 6:1-15). That was really God’s work, which He commanded Himself, and which He had ordered for the sake of the lives of His servants, when exposed to the perils of war. He has in a certain place expressed an aversion of Sabbaths, by calling them *your Sabbaths* (Isaiah 1:13-14 LXX). He reckoned them as men’s Sabbaths, not His own, because they were celebrated without the fear of God by a people full of iniquities, and loving God ‘with the lip, not the heart’ (Isaiah 29:13). His own Sabbaths (those, that is, which were kept according to His prescription) are in a different position; for by the same prophet, in a later passage, He declared them to be ‘true and delightful, and inviolable’” (Isaiah 58:13-14, 56:4-8, 66:23-24).

“Thus Christ did not at all rescind the Sabbath; He kept the Law of the Sabbath. He gave them the relief of food when they were hungry by feeding the 5000 (Luke 9:12-17), and cured the withered hand (Matthew 12:9-14). In each case He intimated by facts, ‘I came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it’ (Matthew 5:17). He fulfilled the Law, while interpreting its condition. He exhibited in a clear light the different kinds of work, while doing what the Law exempts from the sacredness of the Sabbath. He imparts to the Sabbath itself, that which from the beginning had been consecrated by the benediction of the Father, an additional sanctity by His own beneficent action. In like manner, the prophet Elisha on the Sabbath day restored to life the dead son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:32-37). It was *proper employment* for the Sabbaths of old to do good, to save life, not to destroy it. Christ introduced nothing new²²⁹, which did not follow the example, the gentleness and the mercy of the Creator”.

When Jesus sent the Twelve and the Seventy Apostles out two by two to perform miracles in His Name, He followed the same pattern set by Elisha. Tertullian noted²³⁰ these similarities:

“When Elisha sent his servant Gehazi to raise the Shunammite’s son from death, I rather think he gave him these instructions. ‘Gird up your loins, and take my staff in your hand, and go your way. If you meet any man, don’t greet him; and if anyone greets you, don’t answer him’ (2 Kings 4:29). What is a wayside blessing but a mutual greeting as men meet? So also the Lord commands: ‘Into whatever house they enter, let them say, Peace be to it’ (Luke 10:5). He follows the very same example as Elisha’s servant. Elisha commanded his servant the same greeting when he met the Shunammite; he was to say to her: ‘Peace to your husband, peace to your child’” (2 Kings 4:26).

The Holy Women

One of the messages of this Reading about Elisha is: “He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward” (Matthew 10:41). The Shunammite woman

²²⁹ For a more detailed Study of the Sabbath in the life of Jesus, see the Study of the Gospel lesson for the 10th Sunday of Luke in Mark Kern, The Whole Counsel of God, St. Athanasius Church Press, 1996, 1998.

²³⁰ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 24.

brings to mind the activities of the Myrrh-Bearing Women that accompanied Jesus (Mark 15:40-41) and provided for Him out of their possessions (Luke 8:3).

There are eight women that are generally identified as the Myrrh-Bearers. Each of the four Gospels gives different aspects of the roles of these eight women at the Cross and at the tomb on Pascha morning, perhaps since the eight women arrived in different groups and at different times. The eight are:

- Mary Magdalene
- Mary Theotokos (The Virgin Mary)
- Joanna
- Salome
- Mary the wife of Cleopas (or Alphaeus)
- Susanna
- Mary of Bethany
- Martha of Bethany

Of the eight, the first five are the more prominent and outspoken. The last three, according to tradition, were also included. Five of these women were also very wealthy. The women of means were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and Mary and Martha of Bethany.

These eight women had been together a lot during Jesus' three-year public ministry. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and others (Luke 8:3) are described as providing for Jesus out of their possessions (that is, acting as deaconesses). These same women had faithfully followed Him from Galilee and had come up with Him to Jerusalem (Matthew 27:55, Mark 15:40-41, Luke 23:55).

Throughout the Lord's three-year earthly ministry, the Myrrh-Bearing Women stayed in the background but contributed to everyone's support with meals and provisions. After the resurrection, these women are mentioned as being prominent during the prayers and supplications in the upper room prior to Pentecost. During this time, the Virgin Mary was especially prominent. All the things that the Virgin Mary had kept and pondered in her heart (Matthew 2:19) now needed to come out in order that everyone might understand the Word of the Cross (1 Corinthians 1:18ff) and how Jesus had to be crucified.

In an Epistle attributed to Clement of Rome, Clement compared²³¹ the Shunammite woman very favorably to the Myrrh-Bearing Women. They both lived a holy life and contributed to the ministry of holy men out of their possessions.

“Many holy women ministered to holy men of their substance, as the Shunammite woman ministered to Elisha; but she did not live with him, but the prophet lived in a house apart (2 Kings 4:8-11). When her son died, she wanted to throw herself at the feet of the prophet; but his attendant would not allow her, but restrained her. Elisha said to his servant: ‘Let her alone, because her soul is distressed’ (2 Kings 4:25-27). From these things, then, we ought to understand their manner of life. To Jesus Christ our Lord, women ministered out of their substance (Luke 8:3); but they did not live with him. But they lived in a chaste, holy and blameless manner before the Lord, and finished their course, and received the crown in our Lord God Almighty”.

²³¹ Clement of Rome, “Two Epistles Concerning Virginité”, II, 15, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 8.

Holy Relics

The Reading about Elisha also speaks of the use of Holy Relics. Elisha sent his servant Gehazi ahead to the woman's house to heal her son with his staff, by laying the staff on the child's face. But Gehazi was unable to do so, just like the Twelve were unable to cast out a demon because of their lack of preparation with prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:19-21). Holy relics can be useful, but they are not some kind of magic wand that can be used by anyone.

John Cassian focused²³² on Elisha's use of his staff. The staff is the Cross, and it is useful against the demons that we encounter. Just as Peter's shadow (Acts 5:14-15), Paul's aprons (Acts 19:11-12) and even Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13:20-21) had power because of the effect of the Cross on their owner, so relics of the saints have power to one who believes.

"Elisha teaches the use of a staff; as he says to Gehazi, his servant, when sending him to raise the woman's son to life. 'Take my staff and run and go and place it on the lad's face that he may live' (2 Kings 4:29). The prophet would certainly not have given it to him to take unless he had been in the habit of constantly carrying it about in his hand. The carrying of the staff spiritually teaches that they ought never to walk unarmed among so many barking dogs of faults and invisible beasts of spiritual wickedness. From this, the blessed David, in his longing to be free, says, 'Deliver not to the beasts, O Lord, the soul that trusts in You' (Psalm 74:19 LXX). But when they attack them, they ought to beat them off with the sign of the cross and drive them far away. When they rage furiously against them they should annihilate them by the constant recollection of the Lord's passion and by following the example of His life".

Cyril of Jerusalem pondered²³³ how Elisha raised the dead twice. In the second case, it was due to a virtue that resides in his relics due to its close association with his righteous soul for many years.

"I speak of Elisha, who raised the dead twice; once in his lifetime and once after his death. When alive he worked the resurrection by means of his own soul. Not only the souls of the just are honored, but also in the bodies of the just there is a power. The corpse, which was cast into the sepulcher of Elisha, when it touched the dead body of the prophet, was raised (2 Kings 13:20-21); the dead body of the prophet did the work of the soul. That which was dead and buried gave life to the dead, and though it gave life, yet it continued itself among the dead. Why? If Elisha should rise again, the work might be ascribed to his soul alone. This also shows that even though the soul is not present, a virtue resides in the body of the saints, because of the righteous soul which has for so many years dwelt in it, and used it as its servant. Let us not foolishly disbelieve, as though this thing had not happened. If handkerchiefs and aprons, coming from outside, touching the bodies of the diseased, raised up the sick (Acts 19:12), how much more should the actual body of the Prophet raise the dead?"

²³² John Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, I, 8.

²³³ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XVIII, 16.

Ambrose of Milan noted²³⁴ that in both cases where Elisha raised the dead, it occurred after close contact with his physical body. This foreshadowed the raising of the dead after the death of Christ (Matthew 27:51-53).

“Elijah, then, raised the dead, but he prayed — he did not command. Elisha raised one to life after laying himself upon the dead body (2 Kings 4:34-35), in accordance with its posture. And, again, the contact of Elisha’s corpse gave life to the dead (2 Kings 13:20-21), that the prophet might foreshadow the coming of Him, Who, being sent in the likeness of sinful flesh, should, even after His burial, raise the dead to life” (Matthew 27:51-53).

7th Parable from the Old Testament: Zephaniah 3:8-15 "The Remnant"

Zephaniah was the great-great grandson of King Hezekiah (Zephaniah 1:1), and he prophesied in the days of the righteous King Josiah (Zephaniah 1:1), who instituted many reforms (2 Kings 23:25). Zephaniah, as a prophet and a member of the royal family, was doubtless influential in Josiah’s reforms. A contemporary of Zephaniah was Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:2) and there are many similarities in their descriptions of apostate Israel. Nahum, who prophesied the destruction of Nineveh, was also a contemporary of Zephaniah.

Zephaniah echoed the prophecy of Huldah the prophetess, who prophesied that the Babylonian Captivity would occur after the death of King Josiah, since Josiah’s heart was tender toward the Lord (2 Kings 22:13-19).

After this, Zephaniah prophesied that neighboring countries will be destroyed, Philistia (including the cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron), Moab and Ammon. Philistia will become the pasturage for local shepherds (Zephaniah 2:5-7), which describes its land-use for the last 2000 years by the Palestinians²³⁵. Moab and Ammon will become an eternal salt desert (Zephaniah 2:9), which is a description²³⁶ of their former territory Southeast of the Dead Sea.

But Zephaniah went beyond the immediate events of his days. He also wrote, “In that day, that I will search Jerusalem with a candle, and will take vengeance on the men that despise the things committed to them. But they say in their hearts, ‘The Lord will not do any good, neither will he do any evil’. Their power shall be for a spoil, and their houses for utter desolation. They shall build houses, but shall not dwell in them; and they shall plant vineyards, but shall not drink the wine of them” (Zephaniah 1:12-13). This happened in c. 70 AD as the Romans searched Jerusalem after the siege. Many people had gone into hiding in the caverns, tombs and sewers to escape, hoping to emerge alive after the Romans had destroyed the city. But the Romans were so angry with the Jews that they diligently searched everywhere for remnants. Josephus wrote²³⁷, “They were not able to lie hidden either from God or from the

²³⁴ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, III, iv, 30.

²³⁵ The Hebrew word for “Philistine” is *Pelishiti*, from which comes the English word Palestinian.

²³⁶ In the words of an early explorer of modern times, “Nothing but ruins are found here by the amazed explorer. Not an inhabited village remains, and not an Ammonite exists on the face of the earth”. From Thomson, Land and Book, III, 622; quoted by Merrill Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 45.

²³⁷ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, VI, vii, 370-373.

Josephus, Wars of the Jews, III, vii, 336.

Romans”. As they had requested, “Christ’s blood was on them and on their children” (Matthew 27:25).

Zephaniah also spoke of the events surrounding the Second Coming of Christ, and it is this aspect of his prophecies that is the subject for the Holy Saturday Reading. The Reading is as follows:

Therefore wait upon Me, says the Lord, until the day when I rise up for a witness. Because My judgment *shall be* on the gatherings of the nations, to draw to Me kings, to pour out upon them all *My* fierce anger; for the whole earth shall be consumed with the fire of My jealousy. For then will I turn to the peoples a tongue for her generation, that all may call on the Name of the Lord, to serve Him under one yoke. From the boundaries of the rivers of Ethiopia will I receive My dispersed ones; they shall offer sacrifices to Me. In that day you shall not be ashamed of all your practices, wherein you have transgressed against Me. For then will I take away from you your disdainful pride, and you shall no more magnify yourself upon My holy mountain. And I will leave in you a meek and lowly people. And the remnant of Israel shall fear the Name of the Lord, and shall do no iniquity, neither shall they speak vanity; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth. For they shall feed, and lie down, and there shall be none to terrify them.

Rejoice, O daughter of Zion; cry aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem; rejoice and delight yourself with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away your iniquities, He has ransomed you from the hand of your enemies. The Lord, the King of Israel, is in the midst of you; you shall not see evil any more. At that time the Lord shall say to Jerusalem, ‘Be of good courage, Zion; let not your hands be slack. The Lord your God is in you; the Mighty One shall save you. He shall bring joy upon you, and shall refresh you with His love; and He shall rejoice over you with delight as in a day of feasting’. And I will gather your afflicted ones. Alas! Who has taken up a reproach against her? Behold, I *will* work in you for your sake at that time, says the Lord. And I will save her that was oppressed, and receive her that was rejected; and I will make them praised and honored in all the earth. And *their enemies* shall be ashamed at that time, when I shall deal well with you, and at the time when I shall receive you. For I will make you honored and praised among all the nations of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before you, says the Lord (Zephaniah 3:8-20).

The Holy Saturday Reading from Zephaniah begins at the Second Coming of Christ with the wrath of God against His enemies (Zephaniah 3:8, Revelation 19:11-21). Peter wrote that, the Word of God created the heavens and the earth out of water; then, they were destroyed by water during the Flood of Noah. The same Word now preserves the heavens and earth, being reserved for fire on Judgment Day (2 Peter 3:5-7). The other Minor Prophets speak of this also. Micah wrote of the Lord’s return; the mountains will melt under Him like wax before a fire (Micah 1:4, 7). Zephaniah wrote “all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy and zeal” (Zephaniah 1:18, 3:8). Nahum, speaking of Nineveh, wrote that the mountains quake and the hills dissolve as His wrath is poured out like fire (Nahum 1:5-6).

Paul refers to the saints “being saved, yet so as through fire”, where “the day of the Lord will declare and reveal by fire each one’s work of what sort it is”. Gold, silver, precious stones

will survive the fire; wood, hay, straw will be burned (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). All of the above is a mystery that we are not given a lot of detailed information about. We need to trust the Grace of God in these things.

There are other references to the fire associated with the Lord's judgment at the close of this age. Daniel described the Throne of God as a flame of fire, where a river of fire came out from His Presence (Daniel 7:9-10). All men's works are to be judged by this fire (1 Corinthians 3:12-15), where the fire is an uncreated fire. The uncreated fire of God has already judged some people. Examples of this are the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24), 250 men in Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16:35, 26:10), and the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:2). Others will be judged in the Lake of Fire at the close of this age (Revelation 20:13-15, 21:8).

Prior to this judgment, the saints are told to wait and leave judgment for the Lord at His Second Coming. Cyprian of Carthage quoted²³⁸ Zephaniah and Revelation together in teaching about this:

“I know, beloved brethren, that very many are eager, on account of the burden, to be quickly avenged of those who act harshly and rage against them. We must not withhold the fact that we are placed in the midst of these storms of a jarring world. Moreover, in the persecutions both of Jews, Gentiles and heretics, we may patiently wait for the day of God's vengeance, and not hurry to revenge our suffering with a whining haste. Since it is written, ‘Wait upon Me, says the Lord, in the day of My rising up for a testimony; for My judgment is to the congregations of the nations, that I may take hold on the kings, and pour out on them My fury’ (Zephaniah 3:8). The Lord commands us to wait, and to bear with brave patience the day of future vengeance. He also speaks in the Apocalypse, saying, ‘Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand for them that persevere in injuring to injure, and for him that is filthy to be filthy still. But he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his deeds’ (Revelation 22:10-12). Also the martyrs, crying out and hastening with grief breaking forth to their revenge, are bidden still to wait, and to give patience for the times to be fulfilled and the martyrs to be completed. ‘And when He had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar of God the souls of those that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony, which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, do You not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?’ Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until the number of their fellow-servants and brethren is completed, who afterwards shall be slain after their example” (Revelation 6:9-11).

Following this reference to the judgment of God, Zephaniah described the characteristics of what His Kingdom will be like. We have a foretaste of this in the Church.

1. All will call on the Name of the Lord (Zephaniah 3:9, Jeremiah 31:34).

²³⁸ Cyprian, Treatises, IX, 21.

2. From all parts of the earth, people will bring sacrifices of praise (Zephaniah 3:10, Hebrews 13:15).
3. No one will feel shame for what they had done in their life (Zephaniah 3:11, Isaiah 45:17, 54:4).
4. Everyone will be humble and lowly; sin will be gone (Zephaniah 3:12-13, Isaiah 11:6-9).
5. Everyone will live in safety and security with the Lord in their midst (Zephaniah 3:13-15, Revelation 7:17)

2nd Parable from the Old Testament: Isaiah 60:1-16 “The Gathering of the Elect”

Part of Holy Saturday is a looking forward to the Second Coming of Christ. Isaiah’s prophecy is applicable for Holy Saturday in that it addresses mostly events that will occur at the Second Coming of Christ and at the Resurrection of the dead. In these prophecies, when Isaiah speaks of “Jerusalem”, he means the “New Jerusalem” (Revelation 21:1-3), and Isaiah’s words are strikingly similar to those of John in Revelation. Isaiah uses the same imagery that Paul later used to refer to the gathering of the Just to Christ at His Second Coming. Finally he describes the martyrs, who had been crucified for their faith; they will glorify the New Jerusalem. In between all this, Isaiah mentioned the Magi, who visited Christ as a toddler, and their contribution to the glory of God. This Reading can be divided into three parts:

1. The Sons of the Resurrection: Isaiah 60:1-4

The Reading from Isaiah is: “Be enlightened, be enlightened, O Jerusalem, for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and *there shall be* gross darkness on the nations; but the Lord shall appear upon you, and his glory shall be seen upon you. And kings shall walk in your light, and nations in your brightness. Lift up your eyes round about, and behold your children gathered; all your sons have come from far, and your daughters shall be *carried*²³⁹ *on the hip*” (Isaiah 60:1-4 LXX).

Isaiah’s words are directed toward events that will occur at the Resurrection of the dead at Christ’s return. The “darkness that covers the earth” is the “strong delusion” brought on by the “lawless one” and by the “mystery of lawlessness” (2 Thessalonians 2:7-11) that precedes the Second Coming. During this period, the light of God present within the Church has been available to influence kings and nations.

Isaiah went on to describe “Jerusalem” in words that are very similar to the description of the New Jerusalem by the Apostle John. For example:

- The sun and moon will no longer be needed for light, because the Lord will be an everlasting Light (Isaiah 60:19-20, Revelation 21:23).
- Jerusalem’s gates will be open continually (Isaiah 60:11, Revelation 21:25).
- The glory, honor and wealth of the Gentiles will be brought to Jerusalem (Isaiah 60:11-14, Revelation 21:24).

The “children that will be gathered” (Isaiah 60:4) are the “sons of the Resurrection” (Luke 20:36). In explaining to the Sadducees what the Resurrection of the Dead will be like, the

²³⁹ “Carried on the hip” is the reading from the Dead Sea Scrolls text.

Lord referred to the just as being equal to the angels and sons of God (Matthew 22:30). Paul used the term “adoption as sons” to describe how we inherit the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 1:5, Galatians 4:5, Romans 8:15, 23). Paul also quoted part of this text from Isaiah in his letter to the Ephesians:

“But all things that are exposed are made clear by the light, for whatever makes clear is light. Therefore He says, ‘Awake, you who sleep; arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light’ (Isaiah 60:1 paraphrase). See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:13-15).

Methodius stated²⁴⁰ that the “children” are the “sons of the Resurrection” from the Church, who will be raised at the Last Day. Their “light” is a garment of light similar to what Adam and Eve had in the Garden, and this contrasts with the darkness that had covered the earth.

“It is the Church whose children shall come to her with all speed after the resurrection, running to her from all quarters. She rejoices receiving the light, which never goes down, and clothed with the brightness of the Word as with a robe. With what other more precious or honorable ornament was it becoming that the queen should be adorned, to be led as a Bride to the Lord, when she had received a garment of light, and therefore was called by the Father? Come, then, let us go forward in our discourse, and look upon this marvelous woman as upon virgins prepared for a marriage, pure and undefiled, perfect and radiating a permanent beauty, lacking nothing of the brightness of light. Instead of a dress, clothed with light itself; and instead of precious stones, her head adorned with shining stars. Instead of the clothing, which we have, she had light; and for gold and brilliant stones, she had stars. But not stars such as those which are set in the visible heaven, but better and more resplendent, so that those may rather be considered as their images and likeness”.

“These promises will be fulfilled after the resurrection. The Holy Spirit does not speak of that well-known town in Judea; but truly of that heavenly city, the blessed Jerusalem. He declares this to be the assembly of the souls which God plainly promises to place first, ‘above His chief joy’ (Psalm 137:6), in the new dispensation, settling those who are clothed in the pure dwelling of unapproachable light. They had it not in mind to put off their wedding garment — that is, to relax their minds by wandering thoughts”.

2. The Gathering of the Elect to Christ: Isaiah 60:5-9

The Reading from Isaiah is: “Then shall you see, and fear, and be amazed in your heart; for the wealth of the sea shall come round to you, and of nations and peoples. Herds of camels shall come to you, and the camels of Midian and Ephah shall cover you. All from Sheba shall come bearing gold, and shall bring frankincense, and they shall publish the salvation of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered, and the rams of Nebaioth shall come; and acceptable sacrifices shall be offered on my altar, and my house of prayer shall be glorified. Who are these *that* fly as clouds, and as doves with young ones to me? The isles have waited for me; and the ships of Tarshish among the first, to bring your children from afar, and their silver and their gold

²⁴⁰ Methodius, Banquet of the Ten Virgins, VIII, 5. See also Methodius, Banquet of the Ten Virgins, IV, 5.

with them. All *this is* for the sake of the holy Name of the Lord, and because the Holy One of Israel is glorified” (Isaiah 60:5-9 LXX).

The Arrival of the Magi²⁴¹ :

There are two references to the gathering of the Elect included in Isaiah’s prophecy. The first refers to the arrival of the Magi from Persia to visit the toddler Jesus in Bethlehem, which occurred when He was about a year old (Matthew 2:7-11). Their gifts indicate that they knew something about why He had been born, and they had traveled about 800 miles to see Him.

The treasures the Magi gave to the baby Jesus were gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2:11). It was common for kings to present gifts to other kings when they visited, where there was often some significance to the actual gifts presented. When the Queen of Sheba visited King Solomon, she was very impressed by all he did and by his wisdom. Therefore she presented him with 120 talents (4.5 tons) of gold plus a great deal of spices and precious stones (1 Kings 10:1-10). The gold in the Magi’s gifts thus represents earthly royalty visiting heavenly royalty.

Frankincense was a costly gum-resin from plants that grew in certain parts of Arabia. It was to be used only in connection with the worship of God and was customarily beaten very finely (Exodus 30:34-36, Leviticus 2:1-2, 14-16, 6:14-18). For the Magi to give frankincense to Jesus indicated they knew something about His deity and holiness.

Myrrh was made from the gum of an Arabian tree (Balsamodendron Myrrha). It was used both for Holy Oil (Exodus 30:22-33), for cosmetics (Esther 2:12) and for embalming (John 19:39). The Magi giving myrrh to Jesus indicated that they knew He was Messiah and that He planned to give His life for mankind.

Psalms 72 also includes a prophecy regarding the Magi who were to visit Jesus as an infant, “Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. Let all kings bow down before Him; all nations serve Him” (Psalm 72:10, 11).

The “ships of Tarshish” were known from the days of King Solomon, where Solomon used “the ships of Tarshish” as part of a merchant marine (1 Kings 10:22). These “ships of Tarshish” were part of commodity trading and carried refined copper, precious metals and other valuables from one port to another. King Solomon was also sought after for his wisdom by all the earth (1 Kings 10:24).

The Magi who visited Jesus as an infant brought gold from Sheba, which was on the Western side of the Arabian peninsula next to Ophir. Joseph and Mary used this gold to live on during the Flight to Egypt. According to tradition²⁴², the entourage of the Magi included Melchior from Persia, Gaspar from Arabia (Sheba), and Balthazar, a black man from Egypt (Seba). They came to bow down and to worship Him who was born King of the Jews (Matthew 2:2, 11).

²⁴¹ For more details on the Magi, see Mark Kern, “The Sunday After Christmas”, The Whole Counsel of God, 1996, 1998, pp. 422-425.

²⁴² Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 25.

Isaiah had also referred to the arrival of the Magi earlier in his prophecy, and Isaiah spoke of the Magi in connection with the coming of the Holy Spirit, even though the Holy Spirit arrived 32 years after the Magi. He had said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘In a favorable time I have answered you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you’” (Isaiah 49:8). The help referred to is the Lord’s guidance to springs or fountains of water (Isaiah 49:10), which represents the Holy Spirit. Gentiles will be part of this: “Behold, they shall come from afar; and lo, these will come from the North and the West, and these from the land of Persia (Isaiah 49:12 LXX). The Church Fathers have interpreted this as referring to the Magi coming from Persia. In this day of salvation, the Lord will comfort His people (Isaiah 49:13) and have compassion on them (Isaiah 49:10, 13) as a nursing mother does her child (Isaiah 49:14-15). Thus we receive the Comforter (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, Acts 9:31, Romans 8:15) with baptism and the newly baptized receive the pure milk of the Word (1 Peter 2:2).

But the wealth brought by the Magi and by the Queen of Sheba does not even compare to all the treasure in heaven that has been brought into the Church by the Gentiles over the last 20 centuries. The Lord encouraged everyone to sell all that they had in order to obtain this treasure (Mark 10:21), because it is the treasure in heaven that is of lasting value (Luke 12:33-34).

The Gathering at the Second Coming of Christ

The Apostle Paul prophesied of the gathering of the Elect at the Second Coming in these terms:

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18).

Tertullian stated²⁴³ that Isaiah’s prophecy about “flying as clouds to Me” refers to the same gathering of the Elect that Paul referred to.

“He says that those who ‘remain until the coming of Christ’, along with ‘the dead in Christ, shall rise first’, being ‘caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air’. I find it was in their foresight of all this, that the heavenly intelligence gazed with admiration on ‘the Jerusalem, which is above’ (Galatians 4:26), and by the mouth of Isaiah, said long ago, ‘Who are these that fly as clouds, and as doves with their young ones, to me?’ (Isaiah 60:8 LXX) Now, as Christ has prepared for us this ascension into heaven, He must be the Christ of whom Amos spoke. ‘It is He who builds His ascent up to the heavens’ (Amos 9:6 LXX), even for Himself and His people.

Gregory of Nyssa applied²⁴⁴ Isaiah’s words to the personal characteristics of those who will be raised:

²⁴³ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 5, 15.

Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 3, 24.

²⁴⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, “On Virginitly”, II Ascetic and Moral Works, 18.

“For virtue is a light and buoyant thing, and all who live in her way ‘fly like clouds’, as Isaiah says, ‘and as doves with their young ones’ (Isaiah 60:8). But sin is a heavy affair, ‘sitting’, as another of the prophets says, ‘on a talent²⁴⁵ of lead’” (Zechariah 5:7 LXX).

Cyril of Jerusalem mentioned²⁴⁶ other words from the prophets that speak of the same events.

“Finally, my brethren rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice: for your redemption has drawn near (Philippians 4:4), and the heavenly host of the Angels is waiting for your salvation. There is now the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord’ (Isaiah 40:3). The Prophet cries, ‘He, that thirsts, come to the water’ (Isaiah 55:1); and immediately afterwards, ‘Listen to me, and you shall eat that which is good, and your soul shall delight itself in good things’ (Isaiah 55:2 LXX). Within a little while you shall hear that excellent lesson which says, ‘Shine, shine, O you New Jerusalem; for your light is come’ (Isaiah 60:1). Of this Jerusalem the prophet has said, ‘Afterwards you shall be called the city of righteousness, Zion, the faithful mother of cities (Isaiah 1:26 LXX). Because of the Law which went forth out of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem’ (Isaiah 2:3), which word has been showered on the whole world. To her Isaiah says concerning you, ‘Lift up your eyes round about, and behold your children gathered together’ (Isaiah 49:18 LXX). She answers, saying, ‘Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves with their young ones to me?’ (Isaiah 60:8 LXX) That is, clouds, because of their spiritual nature, and doves, from their purity”.

Gregory of Nyssa applied²⁴⁷ Isaiah’s words to the numberless growth of the Church that will “fly to Him” at the Resurrection.

“But now, when I see you thronging here with all your families, I am reminded of the prophetic saying, which Isaiah proclaimed from afar off, addressing by anticipation the Church with her fair and numerous children. ‘Who are these that fly as a cloud and as doves with their young to me?’ (Isaiah 60:8 LXX) And he adds this also, ‘The place is too narrow for me; give room that I may dwell’ (Isaiah 49:20 LXX). The power of the Spirit made with reference to these predictions referring to the populous Church of God, which was afterwards to fill the whole world from end to end”.

3. The Glory of the Lord in Zion by the Cross: Isaiah 60:11-16:

The Reading from Isaiah is: “And strangers shall build your walls, and their kings shall wait upon you: for by reason of my wrath I smote you, and by reason of mercy I loved you. And your gates shall be opened continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; to bring in to you the power of the Gentiles, and their kings as captives. For the nations and the kings, which will not serve you shall perish; and those nations shall be made utterly desolate. And the glory of

²⁴⁵ A “talent” was a measure of weight, and is equivalent to about 75 pounds.

²⁴⁶ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XVIII, 34.

²⁴⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Baptism of Christ”, V *Oratorical Works*.

Lebanon shall come to you, with the cypress, *and the plane*²⁴⁸ and the pine together, to glorify My Holy Place. And the sons of them that afflicted you, and of them that provoked you, shall come to you in fear; and you shall be called Zion, the city of the Holy One of Israel”.

“Because you have become desolate and hated, and there was no helper, therefore I will make you a perpetual gladness, a joy of many generations. And you shall suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shall eat the wealth of kings; and shall know that I am the Lord that saves you and delivers you, the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 60:10-16 LXX).

This Reading speaks about the Kingdom of God restored in glory when the Lord returns. At this time, there will no longer be the sun for light by day or the moon by night, “but you will have the Lord for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory” (Isaiah 60:19). The same description was used by the Apostle John to describe the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:23).

The dominant theme of this Reading is that the wealth of the nations will be brought to Zion (i.e. the New Jerusalem). There is a hint of judgment also: nations not serving the Lord will perish and those nations will be utterly ruined (Isaiah 60:11-12).

Included in the wealth of the nations are three types of trees. It might help to think of this wealth as “treasure in heaven”. These trees will “beautify the place of My sanctuary and make the place of My feet glorious” (Isaiah 60:13). While the Reading states that “the glory of Lebanon will come to you”, notably absent are cedars of Lebanon. In Solomon’s Temple, cedar wood was used extensively for the roof, walls, etc. (1 Kings 6:9-20, 36). Cyprus was used for the floors and the doors to the nave (1 Kings 6:15, 34), where the floors and walls were overlaid with gold (1 Kings 6:30, 20-22). The doors to the inner sanctuary and the doorposts for the entrance to the nave were olivewood (1 Kings 6:32-33). Yet the three trees mentioned are none of these.

The three trees, representing the wealth of the nations are also mentioned together as being among those that the Lord will cause to grow in the Arabah (Isaiah 41:19). The Arabah is the wilderness region between Israel and the Red Sea where Israel wandered for forty years. It is in this area that numerous monasteries thrived beginning in the 3rd-4th Century; and some still exist. Archaeologists have discovered²⁴⁹ over 60 such monasteries just in the Arabah of which a number are still active.

The three trees Isaiah mentioned are:

1. The *te’ashshuwr*, thought to be similar to a cedar since the word means straight and erect.
2. The *tidhar*, a hard wood tree that derives from a word meaning lasting and may be a species of oak.
3. The *berowsh*, which was used for lances and may have been a kind of cypress.

These trees are the likely types of trees that would be used to make crosses to execute criminals. To be used for that purpose, the tree would have to be tall, straight and strong; but yet one would not want to use a tree like prime cedar and oak, since they are valuable for other purposes. Thus, the crosses used to execute Jesus and other Christians over the first three centuries were probably made from these three types of trees.

²⁴⁸ “The plane” is the reading from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

²⁴⁹ Biblical Archaeology Review, September/October 1995, pp. 28-37; July/August 1985 pp. 27-41

These three trees “glorify My Holy Place” (Isaiah 60:13) because the death and martyrdom of the saints is very precious to the Lord (Psalm 116:15). The monks living in the Arabah fit this description also since their goal has always been to die to themselves and take up their crosses in poverty, humility and prayer imitating the Apostle Paul (Mark 2:20, Luke 5:35, Acts 13:2-3, 14:23, Luke 14:26-28, 1 Corinthians 4:11, 2 Corinthians 11:27).

13th Parable from the Old Testament: Isaiah 63:11-64:5 "The Second Coming"

This Reading from Isaiah can be divided into three parts. Isaiah addresses first a remembrance of the days of the Exodus, when Moses and Aaron led God’s people like a sheep through the wilderness. Then he contrasts this with his days, where God seems to have abandoned His people due to their idolatry. Finally, Isaiah longs for the Second Coming and the Presence of the Lord.

1. Recalling the Days of Old

The first section of the Reading from Isaiah is as follows: “And he said, Is it not my people? The children surely will not be rebellious. And He became to them deliverance out of all their affliction; not an ambassador, nor a messenger, but Himself saved them, because He loved them and spared them. He himself redeemed them, and took them up, and lifted them up all the days of old”.

“But they disobeyed, and provoked His Holy Spirit: so He turned to be an enemy, He himself contended against them. Then He remembered the ancient days, *saying*, ‘Where is He that brought up from the sea the shepherd of the sheep? Where is He that put his Holy Spirit in them? Who led Moses with his right hand, the arm of his glory? He forced the water *to separate* from before him, to make himself an everlasting Name. He led them through the deep, as a horse through the wilderness, and they fainted not, and as cattle through a plain. The Spirit came down from the Lord, and guided them. Thus You led Your people, to make Yourself a glorious Name” (Isaiah 63:8-14).

The section of Isaiah’s prophecy just prior²⁵⁰ to this Reading for Holy Saturday is used for the Feast Day of the Ascension of Christ. As the Lord’s disciples stood on the Mount of Olives gazing toward heaven watching the Lord being taken up by a cloud, two angels spoke to them. “This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:9-11). In this reading from Isaiah for the Ascension, then, the Lord’s return is described. He comes as a King, majestic in His apparel, marching in the greatness of His strength (Isaiah 63:1; see also Revelation 19:11, 12, 16).

The Reading for Holy Saturday begins with a response to Israel’s rebellion and grieving the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 63:10), where the Holy Spirit became their enemy. During the days of the Exodus, when Moses led His people out of Egypt, the Holy Spirit led them and guided them (Isaiah 63:13-14). The imagery refers to the Lord as “His Glorious Arm” which went “at the right hand of Moses who divided the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting Name” (Isaiah 63:12).

²⁵⁰ That is, Isaiah 62:10-63:9.

These events of the Exodus were known all over the ancient world as a marvel and a wonder from all the spectacular signs, and nations began to be drawn to Israel to find out more about her God. Some examples:

- **Speaking from the Midst of Fire:** The spectacular events associated with the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai became known to the world (Deuteronomy 4:33). This included the thunder, the lightning, the earthquakes, the smoke, and a huge fire reaching to the heavens (Exodus 19:16-19, Deuteronomy 4:11). God spoke to the people from the midst of the fire (Deuteronomy 4:36), and Moses walked up the mountain right into this fire (Exodus 24:16-18). Clement of Alexandria referred²⁵¹ to this as, “The Lord’s Voice, the Word, without shape, the Power of the Word, the luminous Word of the Lord, the Truth from heaven, coming to the assembly of the Church”.
- **The Exodus from Egypt:** All the neighboring nations knew how the plagues and the events at the Red Sea decimated Egypt (Joshua 2:9-11). They knew how the Lord had fought for Israel against Amalek in the wilderness (Exodus 17:8-16). They knew how Israel had overrun Og and Sihon, the kings of the Amorites who were both stronger than Israel (Deuteronomy 4:38), and how the hornets had helped (Joshua 2:10, 24:12).
- **These Events Were Unique in World History:** This had never been done before; taking out a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and by wonders (Deuteronomy 4:34-37). How could any nation contend with Israel when, with them, the supernatural was normal?

Cyril of Jerusalem used²⁵² the illustration of Jonah (in the sea monster) and Israel descending into the sea interchangeably with Christ descending into the earth or Hades.

“Of this, the Prophet Jonah formed the type, when he prayed out of the belly of the sea monster, and said, ‘I cried in my affliction’, and so on; ‘out of the belly of hell’ (Jonah 2:2 LXX), and yet he was in the sea monster. But though in the sea monster, he says that he is in Hades; for he was a type of Christ, who was to descend into Hades. After a few words, he says, in the person of Christ, prophesying most clearly, ‘My head went down to the roots of the mountains’ (Jonah 2:6 Dead Sea Scrolls); and yet he was in the belly of the sea monster. What mountains then encompass you? I know, he says, that I am a type of Him, who is to be laid in the Sepulcher hewn out of the rock. Though he was in the sea, Jonah says, ‘I went down to the earth’, since he was a type of Christ, who went down into the heart of the earth. Foreseeing the deeds of the Jews who persuaded the soldiers to lie, ‘Say that they stole Him away’ (Matthew 28:13), he says, ‘By regarding lying vanities they forsook their own mercy’ (Jonah 2:8). He who had mercy on them came, and was crucified, and rose again, giving His own precious blood both for Jews and Gentiles. Yet say they, ‘Say that they stole Him away’, having regard to lying vanities. But concerning His Resurrection, Isaiah also says, ‘He who brought up from the earth the great Shepherd of the sheep’ (Isaiah 63:11); he added the word, great, lest He should be thought on a level with the shepherds²⁵³ who had gone before Him”.

²⁵¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VI, 3.

²⁵² Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XIV, 20.

²⁵³ Moses and Aaron were described as leading Israel like sheep in the wilderness (Psalm 77:20).

The ancient understanding of the abyss (Luke 8:31, Revelation 9:1, 20:3) was the ocean bottom. The waters themselves are not the abyss, but they cover the abyss. When the waters are rolled back, as at the crossing of the Red Sea, the abyss is exposed.

“You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron” (Psalm 77:20). He led them like a flock to trample on the abyss as they crossed the Red Sea (Isaiah 63:11), which was five to eight miles wide where the crossing occurred. Similarly when the New Jerusalem descends out of heaven, there will no longer be any sea (Revelation 21:1), and the abyss will be exposed.

The Psalmist Asaph stated that “Your way is in the sea and Your path in the great waters; and Your footsteps are not known” (Psalm 77:19). Melito, the 2nd Century Bishop of Sardis, wrote²⁵⁴ that this Psalm refers to the Lord’s secret operations. Paul described this as “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations but now has been revealed to His saints” (Colossians 1:26, also Romans 16:25, Ephesians 1:9).

The birth of the Virgin Mary began a process of revealing this mystery to mankind. “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him’” (1 Corinthians 2:7-9, Isaiah 64:4). John Chrysostom stated²⁵⁵ that Isaiah’s words

“They to whom it was not told about Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand,” (Isaiah 52:15 LXX; Romans 15:21) refer to the same subject as “the things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard” (Isaiah 64:4).

2. Israel Abandoned by God during Isaiah’s Days

The second section of the Reading from Isaiah is as follows: “Turn from heaven, and look from Your Holy Habitation and *from* Your glory. Where is Your zeal and Your strength? Where is the abundance of Your mercy and of Your compassion, that you have withheld Yourself from us? For you are our Father; for *though* Abraham knew us not, and Israel did not acknowledge us, yet do You, O Lord, our Father, deliver us: Your Name has been upon us from the beginning. Why have You caused us to err, O Lord, from Your way? *And* have hardened our hearts, that we should not fear you? Return for Your servants' sake, for the sake of the tribes of Your inheritance, that we may inherit a small part of Your holy mountain. We have become as at the beginning, when You did not rule over us, and Your Name was not called upon us” (Isaiah 63:15-19 LXX).

This part of Isaiah (Isaiah 63:15-64:8) is also used as one of the Readings for the Feast Day of the warrior-martyr Demetrios²⁵⁶. Isaiah asked that the Lord look down from heaven at the stirrings of the hearts of the righteous. “Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us” (Isaiah 63:15-16 LXX). The nation had departed from the ways of the Lord and the righteous were swept away also, as was the case for Demetrios. “The Lord had hardened

²⁵⁴ Melito, Fragments, ix, from The Key.

²⁵⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, VII, 6.

²⁵⁶ For a Study on the Warrior-Martyr Demetrios, see <http://www.stathanasius.org/site/content/biblestudy> for October 26.

their hearts and they had become like those over whom the Lord had never ruled” (Isaiah 63:18-19 LXX).

Isaiah refers to the Lord as “our Father” (Isaiah 63:16), even though “Abraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us”. Those who are expected to know God don’t recognize the prophet as one of them. The prophet was asking the Lord to straighten this out.

Cyril of Jerusalem noted²⁵⁷ that God is called the Father of men not because He begot them Himself, but because He cares for them as adopted sons.

God is called the Father of men in an improper sense. When in Isaiah God is addressed thus, ‘You are our Father, though Abraham is ignorant of us’ (Isaiah 63:16), and ‘Sarah travailed not with us’ (Isaiah 51:2); need we inquire further on this point? The Psalmist says, ‘Let them be troubled from His countenance, the Father of the fatherless, and Judge of the widows’ (Psalm 68:5 LXX, Isaiah 63:16). Is it not clear to all, that when God is called the Father of orphans who have lately lost their own fathers, He is so named not as begetting them of Himself, but as caring for them and shielding them? But whereas God is in an improper sense the Father of men, of Christ alone is He the Father by nature, not by adoption. He is the Father of men in time, but of Christ before all time, as He said, ‘Now, O Father, glorify Me with Your own self, with the glory which I had with You before the world was’” (John 17:5).

Isaiah concluded, “All of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy²⁵⁸ rag” (Isaiah 64:6 LXX). This was the reason the Law contained detailed requirement for blood sacrifices and this is why Moses wrote “that you may observe it” (Deuteronomy 30:12, 13, 14). One of the purposes of the Law was to identify what is sin in order that repentance and faith might be forthcoming (Romans 7:7ff).

When the Light of God (John 1:4-5) exposes sin in peoples’ lives (John 1:9-11) and they reject the light because they love darkness rather than light (John 3:19-21), they open themselves up for demonic activity. Sometimes, as in the case of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, being given over to the demonic activity produced a gratitude for the things of God. King Nebuchadnezzar was given over to demons for seven years and lived like an animal, eating grass like a cow. Following that seven years, he repented and his kingdom was restored to him (Daniel 4:28-37). Similarly, Paul delivered one of the men of Corinth over to Satan in order that his spirit might be saved (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). The man repented and was restored to the Church (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). In other cases, however, the demonic activity only produced blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:24, 31-32, Matthew 12:14, 1 Corinthians 2:8) and a continued zeal to establish one’s own righteousness apart from God (Romans 10:3).

Justin Martyr, the 2nd Century theologian, in his long discussion with a learned Jew²⁵⁹ of his day, applied²⁶⁰ Isaiah’s words to the Jews following Bar Cochba’s rebellion against Rome a

²⁵⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, VII, 10.

²⁵⁸ Literally as a menstruous cloth.

²⁵⁹ Trypho described himself as a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 1) similar to the way Paul described himself (Philippians 3:5).

²⁶⁰ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 25-26.

few years earlier in 135 AD²⁶¹ and to the subsequent leveling of Jerusalem. By analogy, Isaiah's words also apply to the people of God in any age when they abandon their Master for the things of this world.

“The city of Your holiness has become desolate. Zion has become as a wilderness, Jerusalem a curse. The house, our holiness, and the glory which our fathers blessed, has been burned with fire; and all our glorious things have gone to ruin’ (Isaiah 64:10-11 LXX). And in addition to these misfortunes, O Lord, You have refrained Yourself, and are silent, and have humbled us very much’ (Isaiah 63:15).”

“And Trypho remarked, ‘What is this you say? That none of us shall inherit anything on the holy mountain of God?’”

“And I replied, ‘I do not say so; but those who have persecuted Christ, if they do not repent, shall not inherit anything on the holy mountain. But the Gentiles, who have believed on Him, and have repented of the sins which they have committed, they shall receive the inheritance. They will inherit along with the patriarchs, the prophets, and the just men who are descended from Jacob, even though they do not keep the Sabbath, are not circumcised, and do not observe the Hebrew Feast Days. Assuredly they shall receive the holy inheritance of God. God speaks by Isaiah, ‘I, the Lord God, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand, and will strengthen You. I have given You for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out them that are bound from the chains, and those who sit in darkness²⁶² from the prison-house’” (Isaiah 42:6, 7).

3. Eye Has Not Seen the Blessings for the Righteous

The third section of the Reading from Isaiah is as follows: “If You would open the heaven, trembling will take hold upon the mountains from You, and they shall melt, as wax melts before the fire. Fire shall burn up the enemies, and Your Name shall be manifest among the adversaries. At Your presence the nations shall be troubled, whenever You shall work gloriously; trembling from You shall take hold upon the mountains. From of old we have not heard, neither have our eyes seen a God beside You, and Your works which You will perform to them that wait for mercy. These blessings shall happen to them that work righteousness, and they shall remember Your ways. Behold, You were angry and we have sinned; therefore we have erred, and we are all become as unclean, and all our righteousness as a filthy rag. We have fallen as leaves because of our iniquities; thus the wind shall carry us *away*” (Isaiah 64:1-6 LXX).

In the above, Isaiah describes where the Church is now, awaiting the Lord's return at the Second Coming. The Lord will remember those who work righteousness and who remember His ways (Isaiah 64:5). Isaiah was very humble about his situation and concluded that “You are our Father, and we are clay, all *of us* the work of Your hands” (Isaiah 64:8 LXX).

²⁶¹ Trypho introduced himself to Justin as having recently escaped from the war (Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 1).

²⁶² Compare also Christ's reading from Isaiah 49 in Luke 4:18-21.

Cyril of Jerusalem wrote²⁶³ that the heavens veil the abode of God in order that all might not perish from curiously looking in. Even the saints have difficulty seeing mere angels, where they only reflect Him in His glory.

“For this cause God of His great loving-kindness spread out the heaven as a veil of His proper Godhead that we should not perish. The word is not mine, but the Prophet’s. ‘If You shall tear open the heavens, trembling will take hold of the mountains at sight of You, and they will flow down’ (Isaiah 64:1). Why do you wonder that Ezekiel fell down on seeing ‘the likeness of the glory?’ (Ezekiel 1:28) Daniel, at the sight of Gabriel, who was just a servant of God, immediately shuddered and fell on his face. Even though Daniel was a prophet, he dared not answer him, until the Angel transformed himself into the likeness of a son of man (Daniel 8:15-19). Now if the appearing of Gabriel caused trembling in the Prophets, had God Himself been seen as He is, would not all have perished?”

John Chrysostom compared²⁶⁴ those things that “eye has not seen” to an infant in the womb. We who have been perfectly formed will behold the next life when we are delivered at the Second Coming. Those who miscarry will go from darkness into darkness.

“Now if these things uplift those who possess them to such a pitch of joy, what do you suppose is the condition of those souls who are invited to enjoy the countless blessings in Heaven which are always securely fixed and stable? In their quantity and quality they excel present things to such an extent as never entered even the heart of man. At the present time like an infant in the womb, we dwell in this world confined in a narrow space, and unable to behold the splendor and the freedom of the world to come. But when the time of travail arrives and the present life is delivered at the Day of Judgment of all men whom it has contained, those who have been miscarried go from darkness into darkness, and from affliction into more grievous affliction. But those which are perfectly formed and have preserved the marks of the royal image will be presented to the king, and will take on themselves that service which angels and archangels minister to the God of all”.

Gregory of Nyssa spoke²⁶⁵ of the things that “eye has not seen” also in terms of punishment for the wicked. The “fire” and the “worm” are something beyond this present life, and were mentioned to wean us from all experience of evil in this life.

“Those good things, which are held out in the Gospels to those who have led a godly life, are not such as can be precisely described. How is that possible with things which ‘eye has not seen, neither ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man’? (Isaiah 64:4) Indeed, the sinner’s life of torment presents no equivalent to any kind of pain we experience here. Even if one of the punishments in that other were to be named in terms that are well known here, the distinction is still not small. When you hear the word fire, you have been taught to think of a fire other than the fire we see, owing to something being added to that fire; for that fire is never quenched (Mark 9:43-48), whereas experience has discovered many ways of quenching this fire. There is a great difference between a fire, which can be extinguished, and one that cannot. That fire, therefore, is

²⁶³ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, IX, 1.

²⁶⁴ John Chrysostom, Exhortation to Theodore After His Fall, I, 13.

²⁶⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, “The Great Catechism”, Apologetic Works, IV, 40.

something other than this. If, again, a person hears the word ‘worm’ (Mark 9:43-48), let not his thoughts be carried to the creature here that crawls upon the ground. The addition that it ‘dies not’ suggests the thought of another reptile than that known here. These things are set before us as to be expected in the life that follows this, being the natural outgrowth according to the righteous judgment of God, in the life of each, of his particular disposition. It is the part of the wise not to regard the present, but that which follows after, and to lay down the foundations for that unspeakable blessedness during this short and fleeting life. By a good choice, we wean ourselves from all experience of evil, now in our lifetime here; hereafter will be our eternal recompense”.

9th Parable from the Old Testament: Isaiah 61:10-62:5 "The Garment of Salvation"

This Reading from Isaiah is as follows: “They shall greatly rejoice in the Lord. Let my soul rejoice in the Lord; for He has clothed me with the robe of salvation, and the garment of joy. He has put a mitre on me as on a bridegroom, and adorned me with ornaments as a bride. As the earth puts forth her flowers, and as a garden its seed; so shall the Lord cause righteousness to spring forth, and exultation before all nations”.

“For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as light, and my salvation burns as a torch. The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and kings your glory; one shall call you *by* a new name, which the Lord shall name. You shall be a crown of beauty in the Hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the Hand of your God. You shall no more be called Forsaken; and your land shall no more be called Desert. You shall be called My Pleasure, and your land Inhabited; for the Lord has taken pleasure in you, and your land shall be inhabited. As a young man lives with a virgin, so shall your sons dwell in *you*; and it shall come to pass *that* as a bridegroom will rejoice over a bride, so will the Lord rejoice over you” (Isaiah 61:10-62:5 LXX).

In this Reading, the people of God are clothed with the garment of salvation and wrapped with a robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10) such that Jerusalem’s righteousness goes forth like brightness and her salvation like a burning torch (62:1). Other details:

- The Gentiles will see their righteousness and glory (Isaiah 62:1)
- They will be called by a new name (Isaiah 62:2)
- They will be the Lord’s crown (Isaiah 62:3)
- They and the Land will be married to the Lord (Isaiah 62:4)
- Their God will rejoice over them as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride (Isaiah 62:5)

All this sounds very much like the Apostle John’s vision of the end of time regarding the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2), but major aspects are already present. We acquired the garment of salvation with our baptism, and we need to keep it separate from the things of this world. In an Epistle attributed²⁶⁶ to Clement of Rome, Clement encourages us to keep the things of the Lord private, so that we don’t cast pearls before swine. Our garment of righteousness has nothing in common with the wicked.

“Let ‘all those who see us acknowledge that we are a blessed seed’ (Isaiah 61:9), and ‘sons of the living God’ (Hosea 1:10, Romans 9:26). In everything, in all our words, in purity, in humility, forasmuch as we do not copy the heathen in

²⁶⁶ Clement of Rome, “2nd Epistle Concerning Virginity”, VI, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 8.

anything, nor are as believers like other men, but in everything are estranged from the wicked. We ‘do not cast that which is holy before dogs, nor pearls before swine’ (Matthew 7:6), but with all possible self-restraint, with all discretion, with all fear of God, and with earnestness of mind we praise God. We do not serve where heathens are drinking and blaspheming in their feasts with words of impurity, because of their wickedness. Therefore we do not sing Psalms to the heathen, nor do we read to them the Scriptures, that we may not be like common singers, either those who play on the lyre, or those who sing with the voice, or like soothsayers. Many follow these practices and do these things, that they may satisfy themselves with a paltry mouthful of bread, and for the sake of a sorry cup of wine, go about ‘singing the songs of the Lord in the strange land’ (Psalm 137:4), doing what is not right. Do not so, my brethren; let not these deeds be done among you; but put away those who choose thus to behave themselves with infamy and disgrace”.

Ignatius of Antioch stated²⁶⁷ that the new Name, by which the Lord’s people were to be called, was the term “Christians”. Ignatius’ predecessor, Evodius, the 2nd Bishop of Antioch, first coined the term Christian²⁶⁸.

“Let us not, therefore, be insensible to His kindness. Were He to reward us according to our works, we should cease to be. ‘If You, Lord, shall mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?’ (Psalm 130:3) Let us therefore prove ourselves worthy of that Name which we have received. Whoever is called by any other name besides this, he is not of God; for he has not received the prophecy, which speaks thus concerning us. ‘The people shall be called by a new Name, which the Lord shall name them, and shall be a holy people’ (Isaiah 62:2, 12). This was first fulfilled in Syria; for ‘the disciples were called Christians at Antioch’ (Acts 11:26), when Paul and Peter were laying the foundations of the Church. Lay aside, therefore, the evil, the old, the corrupt leaven, and be changed into the new leaven of grace”.

Cyril of Jerusalem refers²⁶⁹ to the garment of righteousness as the wedding garment that the Apostle John saw at the end times. Presently we stand outside the door waiting, and we have washed our robes in repentance. Some may come to the figurative marriage without the proper garment, but they will be separated from those who are properly clothed.

“Make ready the vessels of the soul, cleansed by unfeigned faith, for reception of the Holy Spirit. Begin at once to wash your robes in repentance, that when called to the bride-chamber you may be found clean. The Bridegroom invites all without distinction, because His grace is bounteous; and the cry of loud-voiced heralds assembles them all. But the same Bridegroom afterwards separates those who have come in to the figurative marriage. O may none of those whose names have now been enrolled hear the words, ‘Friend, how did you come in here, not having a wedding garment?’ (Matthew 22:12) But may you all hear, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I

²⁶⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Magnesians, X.

²⁶⁸ Evodius (or Euodius), one of the original Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-20) was ordained Bishop of Antioch by the Apostle Peter shortly after Peter arrived in Antioch, where Peter had recently escaped from Herod (Acts 12:3-17).

²⁶⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, III, 2.

will set you over many things: enter you into the joy of your Lord” (Matthew 25:21).

“Now meanwhile you stand outside the door. But God grant that you all may say, ‘The King has brought me into His chamber’ (Song of Solomon 1:4). Let my soul rejoice in the Lord; for He has covered me with a garment of salvation, and a robe of gladness. He has crowned me with a garland as a bridegroom’ (Isaiah 61:10, Song of Solomon 3:11), and decked me with ornaments as a bride. That the soul of every one of you may be found not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing (Ephesians 5:27)! I do not mean before you have received the grace, for how could that be? It is for remission of sins that you have been called”.

In his repentance, the Prodigal Son’s father gave him a robe for righteousness when he returned (Luke 15:22). The Prodigal realized that he’d sinned against heaven and against his father (Luke 15:18). He sinned against heaven by joining the Temple of the Holy Spirit to harlots (1 Corinthians 6:15-20); he sinned against his father by squandering the gifts he had been given. In planning his return to his father, he made his confession to God. When he came to his father, he also made his confession to him. That his confession was genuine is indicated by his humility and sense of unworthiness, “I am no longer worthy to be called your son” (Luke 15:21), as opposed to his previous arrogance and independence, “Give me the portion of goods that falls to me” (Luke 15:12). The Prodigal’s father responded with love.

John Chrysostom insisted²⁷⁰ that once we put on the “garment of righteousness” at baptism, we should never take it off. What we are clothed with also affects our inner man. If we strip ourselves of this garment of righteousness, we are naked before the Lord and His angels, and subject to attack by the devil. The clothing of wealth can become thorns to tear the garment of righteousness, fire to burn it or a moth to eat it.

“Our part then is, never to put off the garment of righteousness, which also the Prophet calls, ‘the garment of salvation’ (Isaiah 61:10), that we may be made like God. He indeed has put on righteousness. This garment let us put on. Now the word, ‘put on’, plainly declares nothing else, than that we should never put it off. Listen to the Prophet, where he says, ‘He clothed himself also with cursing as with his garment, and it came into his inward parts’ (Psalm 109:18). And again, ‘Who covers Thyself with light as with a garment’ (Psalm 104:2). Again, it is usual with us to speak concerning men, such a one has ‘put on’ such a one. So then it is not for one day, nor for two, nor for three, but he would have us always arrayed in virtue, and never stripped of this garment. A man is not so disfigured when he is stripped of his clothing, as when he is stripped of his virtue. In the former case his fellow servants behold his nakedness, in the latter his Lord and the Angels. If ever you happen to see anyone going out naked through the public square, aren’t you distressed? When then you go about stripped of this garment, what shall we say? We do not excuse those who have lost their clothes by gambling; how then, if we lose this garment, shall God pardon us? Whenever the devil sees a man stripped of his virtue, he immediately disguises and disfigures his face, and wounds him, and drives him to great distress.”

²⁷⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XIII, v. 4:24.

“Let us strip ourselves of our riches, that we be not stripped of righteousness. The garb of wealth mars this garment. It is a robe of thorns. Thorns are of this nature; and the more closely they are wrapped around us, the more naked are we made. Lasciviousness strips us of this garment; for it is a fire, and the fire will consume this garment. Wealth is a moth; and the moth eats through all things alike, and does not spare even silken garments. All these therefore let us put off, that we may become righteous, that we may ‘put on the new man’ (Ephesians 4:24, 2:15, Colossians 3:10). Let us keep nothing old, nothing outward, nothing that is ‘corrupt’” (Ephesians 4:25-32).

Cyril of Jerusalem connected²⁷¹ the garment of salvation to the Eucharistic Feast described in Psalm 23, where the “table prepared” is the Lord’s Table, the “anointing” is the Holy Chrism, and the “cup” is the Lord’s blood.

“The blessed David shall advise you of the meaning of this, saying, ‘You have prepared a table before me in the presence of them that afflict me’ (Psalm 23:5 LXX). What he says, is to this effect. Before Your coming, the evil spirits prepared a table for men, polluted, defiled and full of devilish influence (1 Corinthians 10:21); but since Your coming, O Lord, You have prepared a table before me. When the man says to God, You have prepared before me a table, what does he indicate but that mystical and spiritual Table, which God has prepared for us, over against that of the evil spirits? That table had communion with devils, but this, with God. ‘You have anointed my head with oil’ (Psalm 23:5). With oil He anointed your head upon your forehead, for the seal which you have of God; that you may be made the engraving of God’s signet (Exodus 28:36, Ecclesiasticus 45:12 LXX). ‘And your cup cheers me like the best wine’ (Psalm 23:5 LXX). You see that cup here spoken of, which Jesus took in His hands, and gave thanks, and said, ‘This is My blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins’” (Matthew 26:28).

“Therefore Solomon, also hinting at this grace, says, ‘Come here, eat your bread with joy’ (that is, the spiritual bread; Come here, he calls with the call to salvation and blessing), ‘and drink your wine with a merry heart’ (that is, the spiritual wine). ‘And let oil be poured out upon your head’ (you see he alludes even to the mystic Chrism); ‘and let your garments be always white, for the Lord is well pleased with your works’ (Ecclesiastes 9:7-8 LXX). Before you came to Baptism, your works were vanity of vanities. But now, having put off your old garments, and put on those, which are spiritually white, you must be continually robed in white. Of course we do not mean that you are always to wear white clothing. But you must be clad in the garments that are truly white and shining and spiritual that you may say with the blessed Isaiah, ‘My soul shall be joyful in my God. He has clothed me with a garment of salvation, and put a robe of gladness around me’” (Isaiah 61:10).

²⁷¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XXII, 7-8.

APPENDIX G
SUMMARY OF THE GOSPEL OF NICODEMUS
Part II: The Descent into Hell

Three different versions of the Descent into Hell exist, one in Greek, two in Latin. Some details differ from one version to another, but this synopsis attempts to summarize what is a consensus of all three accounts. In the following, the Greek text of the Descent into Hell is summarized by chapter. Some details that are mentioned only in the two Latin texts are also included.

Chapter 14: Phineas (a priest); Haggai (a Levite) and Adas (a soldier or teacher) came from Galilee and reported to the Pharisees that Jesus was teaching His disciples in Galilee in the days following the crucifixion. They also reported seeing people long dead, including Karinus and Leucius, two sons of the righteous Simeon who held Christ as a baby (Luke 2:25-32).

Chapter 15: Nicodemus testified that this is not incredible; Elijah had done that too. Nicodemus counseled that they send soldiers to Galilee to try to find Jesus and ask His pardon for the evil they'd done to Him. This they did. They didn't find Jesus, but they did find Joseph of Arimathea who had been locked in a windowless room by the Sanhedrin for his part in the burial of Jesus, but who had disappeared. They invited Joseph to speak to them: he testified how the Lord appeared to him and had taken him out of the locked room to Arimathea.

Chapter 16: They found three priests from Galilee who witnessed the Ascension. Their testimony agreed and by the Mosaic Law, they were legally bound to accept this as factual (Deuteronomy 19:15). Joseph and Nicodemus testified that they had indeed buried Him.

Chapter 17: Joseph testified that there were others raised with Jesus, some of whom they know: Simeon and his two sons (Karinus and Leucius) who were buried in the recent past. Joseph suggested going to Arimathea to see them. Thus Annas, Caiaphas, Joseph, Nicodemus, Gamaliel and others went to Arimathea and brought Karinus and Leucius to Jerusalem.

Chapter 18: Asked to give an account of their resurrection, Karinus and Leucius separately wrote an account. In Hades, they were with all the righteous that had fallen asleep, when a great light lit up Hades. Isaiah, in Hades, testified that this is what he wrote of (Isaiah 9:1-2) that Zebulon and Naphtali would see a great light. Then John the Baptist arrived in Hades, testifying that he had been preparing the way for the Son of God (Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:4, John 1:29, Luke 3:22). John continued that he had been sent to preach similarly in Hades.

Chapter 19: Adam, the first created, then asked his son Seth to tell everyone of an angelic visit by Michael that occurred just before Adam died. Seth explained how the angel told him that 5,500 years after the Creation; the Son of God would become incarnate and would raise up Adam and all those out of him into Paradise. All the patriarchs and prophets exulted greatly.

Chapter 20: Then Satan came and said to Hades to be sure to be ready to secure Jesus when He arrived. Hades cautioned Satan that if Jesus could raise the dead with just a single word, how could he withstand Him? Satan called Hades a coward. Hades reminded Satan that Lazarus had been in Hades' bowels but had been dragged out by force like the flight of an eagle. Hades feared that if Jesus came, He might drag out all the rest from there also.

Chapter 21: As they were speaking there was a great voice like thunder: “Lift up your gates O ye rulers; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting gates; and the King of Glory shall come in” (Psalm 24:7). Hades, Satan and their demons immediately went to secure the “gates of brass and bars of iron”. The forefathers mocked Satan and David reminded him of his prophecy concerning what was happening here. For example, David had prophesied, “Lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up, O ancient doors that the King of Glory may come in! Who is the King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O gates, and lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in! Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts; He is the King of Glory” (Psalm 24:7-10). These ancient doors (Hebrew: *olam*: long duration, antiquity, futurity) have very little meaning aside from the events of Holy Saturday. Again David had prophesied: “He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death and broke their bands apart. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His loving kindness and for His wonders to the sons of men! For He has shattered gates of bronze and cut bars of iron asunder” (Psalm 107:14-16). These people David also referred to as “prisoners” and “the sons of death” (Psalm 79:11, 102:20).

Again a voice of thunder cried, “Lift up the gates”. Satan answered, “Who is this King of Glory?” The angels answered, “The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle!” (Psalm 24:8). Immediately the gates of brass were shattered and the iron bars were broken. The King of Glory came in the form of a man and lit up all the dark places of Hades.

Chapter 22: Then the King of Glory trampled on death by His Majesty and seized Satan by the head and delivered him to His angels to be bound in Hades until His second appearing.

Chapter 23: As Hades received Satan, he criticized him saying, “Through what necessity did you have to crucify the King of Glory that He might come here and deprive us of our power? Like a fool, you didn’t know what you were doing (compare 1 Corinthians 2:8). Look and see; not one of the dead has been left in here. All that you gained by the tree of knowledge you lost by the tree of the Cross. Now that I have received you, by experience you will learn how many evils I shall do to you.”

Chapter 24: Then the King of Glory raised Adam and embraced him along with Eve and all the rest of the patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, forefathers and saints. As He was bringing them all out, Adam was filled with joy and said, “I thank Your Majesty, O Lord, that You have brought me up out of the lowest Hades” (Psalm 86:13). “I will extol You, O Lord; for You have lifted me up, and have not made my foes to rejoice over me. O Lord God, I cried unto You and You have healed me. O Lord, You have brought out my soul from the powers below; You have saved me from them that go down into the pit. Sing praises to the Lord, all His saints, and confess to the memory of His holiness; since there is anger in His indignation and life in His goodwill” (Psalm 30:1-6). All the prophets and saints said, “We thank You, O Christ, Savior of the world, for You have brought our life up out of destruction” (compare Psalm 103:4). As they went, they continued to say, “Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord” (Psalm 118:26, compare Matthew 21:9, 23:39, Mark 11:9, Luke 13:35, 19:38, John 12:13). David sang, “Sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done wonderful things; His right hand and His holy arm have brought salvation to Himself. The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness has He revealed in the sight of the heathen” (Psalm 98:1-2).

Before leaving Hades, all the saints asked the Lord to leave as a sign of victory the sign of the Cross in the midst of Hades, which He did.

Chapter 25: After leaving Hades, the Lord gave all the saints to the Archangel Michael who brought them to Paradise. Meeting them there were Enoch and Elijah who had never died (Genesis 5:24, 2 Kings 2:11-13). Enoch and Elijah told them that the two of them were to remain there until the end of time. At that time, they were to be sent by God to withstand Antichrist, to be slain by him and after three days to be raised and snatched up into the clouds to meet the Lord (Revelation 11:3-12, compare 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Chapter 26: As they arrived, they met another man who had the look of a robber and who was carrying a cross. He identified himself as the robber who was crucified with the Lord Jesus and, after rebuking his fellow robber, asked Jesus to remember him when He came in His Kingdom. Jesus had said, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:39-43). At Michael's instructions he had been waiting for his brethren the saints to come also. On hearing this, the saints cried out, "Great is the Lord and great is His strength" (Psalm 147:5).

Chapter 27: Then Karinus and Leucius testified that these are the things that they saw and heard. They had been sent by Michael to proclaim the Lord's Resurrection, to be baptized in the Jordan, and to celebrate the Passover of the Resurrection for three days. They said they were unable to stay longer or speak in further detail concerning the mystery of God per Michael's instruction. Karinus gave his roll to Annas, Caiaphas and Gamaliel and Leucius gave his roll to Nicodemus and Joseph. Then they were transfigured and disappeared.

Following the disappearance of Karinus and Leucius, there was much weeping and breast beating on the part of the Sanhedrin. For forty days and nights, they lamented, expecting vengeance and destruction from God. The second Latin version closes by saying that God gave them an opportunity for repentance "but they were not found worthy to be turned to the Lord."