

LIGHT VERSUS DARKNESS THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER

**April 12, 2015
Revision C
Pascha**

**Gospel: John 1:1-17
Epistle: Acts 1:1-8**

Easter Sunday is referred to in the Orthodox Church as Pascha, which is Greek for “Passover.” The date for Pascha in the early Church was determined using the Old Testament formula for Passover and fell on the 14th of Nisan (Exodus 12:6) no matter what day of the week it was. The First Ecumenical Council in 325 AD decided to celebrate Pascha on a Sunday and always after the vernal equinox. However, differences in “paschal cycles” developed in the 5th Century between the Roman calculation and the Alexandrine calculation and Pascha in the East vs. The West has been on different days ever since. In the West, Pascha began to be called Easter in the 8th Century as it superseded an old Anglo-Saxon (pagan) festival. For more information, see Cross, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 2nd ed. pp. 437, 1037.

In the West, Gospel readings for Easter Sunday center on the historical events at the tomb early in the morning of Easter Sunday. In the Eastern Lectionary, these events are read on Holy Saturday while the Pascha readings center on a broader perspective of light vs. darkness and the Word made flesh. Today’s readings are used in the West for Christmas Day.

To understand more fully the significance of the victory of light over darkness described in today’s readings, one needs to understand the significance of Holy Saturday and Christ’s descent into hell. Pascha is seen as the victory celebration; the battle has already been won on Holy Saturday.

Today’s Epistle reading is used in the West for Ascension Day. In the Eastern Lectionary, an expanded version of today’s Epistle lesson is also used for Ascension Day, which is the Thursday of the Sixth Week of Pascha.

Gospel: John 1:1-17

The Greek text for John 1 starts out, “In beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was *in beginning with God*” (italics mine). There is no definite article “the” associated with beginning in the Greek text indicating that the Word (1) was God before creation (that is, He eternally existed), (2) is a distinct person from God the Father and (3) from verse 3 was a co-creator of all things with the Father.

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The next thought John presents is the subject of light versus darkness. This parallels the account in Genesis 1:1-5 where 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 1:1-13 is one of the Old Testament readings for Holy Saturday Vespers.)

In the Genesis 1 account, the “light” that was created on the first day had no embodiment until the fourth day when God created the sun, moon and stars. This is reminiscent of the days of the New Jerusalem when the sun, moon, lamps and lights will not be needed because the glory of God is all the illumination needed (Revelation 21:23, 22:5, Isaiah 60:19-20). Yet on the first day, God separated the light from the darkness. How is this possible if there is no embodied light?

From our Gospel lesson, “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 in 3:19 “...men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.”

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.

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).

John Chrysostom reasoned that if He “gives light to all men that come into the world” (John 1:9), how is it that so many continue unenlightened? For 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 (Homily viii on John 1).

Old Testament Readings

As a prelude to the Gospel for Pascha, two Old Testament passages that deal with light vs. darkness are read for Holy Saturday Vespers:

The Saints Clothed in Brightness: Isaiah 61:10-62:5: In this passage, the people of God are clothed with the garments of salvation and wrapped with a robe of righteousness (v.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 (62:1)
 - They will be called by a new name (62:2)
 - They will be the Lord's crown (62:3)
 - They and the Land will be married to the Lord (62:4)
 - Their God will rejoice over them as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride (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), and the Apostle Paul's vision for the Gentile Church (2 Corinthians 11:2).

The Light Has Come: Isaiah 60:1-16: This passage contains mixed imagery of Christ's First and Second Coming. The theme is "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you" (v.1). It goes on to say that:

- Darkness will cover the earth (v.2)
- The Lord will rise upon His people and His glory will appear to them (v.2)
- The Gentiles will come to your light (v.3)
- The wealth of the Gentiles will come to you (v.5; see Revelation 21:26)
- They will bring gold and frankincense (v.6; see The Magi, Luke 2:11)
- The Holy One of Israel has glorified you (v.9)
- Jerusalem's gates will be open continually (v.11; see Revelation 21:25)
- All the rulers of the earth will serve the Lord and bow down before the Lord's people (vv.11-14; see Revelation 21:24).

From the close parallel with Revelation 21, both the First and Second Coming are being celebrated in the victory of light over darkness.

John the Baptist Bore Witness to the Light

In our Gospel text, it is stated that John the Baptist bore witness to the Light (John 1:6-8) and a number of the Twelve Apostles were first disciples of John the Baptist. For sure John the Apostle and Andrew were (John 1:40) and probably also Peter, James, Philip and Nathanael (John 1:40-45). When John the Baptist pointed to Jesus "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, 33-34, 36) a number of John's disciples began to follow Jesus. This did not bother John because John recognized his cousin Jesus as "He who comes after me has become ranked before me because He existed before me" (John 1:15).

John was a "burning and shining lamp and people were willing for a time to rejoice in his light" (John 5:35). Even Herod rejoiced in John's light for a while (Mark 6:20). Yet John stated

that he, himself, was not that true Light that gives light to every man coming into the world (John 1:9). John did not understand everything. For example, he did not understand why he should baptize Jesus rather than vice versa (Matthew 3:14-15). While in prison, John also did not understand the direction and purpose of Jesus' ministry (Matthew 11:2-6). But John obeyed what he knew and was referred to by the Lord as the greatest of the Prophets (Luke 7:28). John (the Apostle) said that John (the Baptist) came that all men through him might believe (John 1:7).

John Chrysostom stated that Christ's coming said, in brief, "I am God; and the really-Begotten Son of God, and am of that simple and blessed Essence. I need none to witness to Me; and even though none would do so, yet I am not by this anything diminished in My Essence. But because I care for the salvation of the many, I have descended to such humility as to commit the witness of Me to a man.' For by reason of the groveling nature of the Jews, the faith in Him would in this way be more easily received and more palatable... For (to prove) that He had no need of that (herald's) testimony, it would have sufficed that He should only have shown Himself as to Who He was in His unveiled Essence. But doing this, He would have annihilated all, since none could have endured the encounter of that unapproachable light" (Homily VI on John 1).

The Word Became Flesh

Also in the Gospel text, Jesus, the Son of God, is referred to as "the Only Begotten of the Father" (John 1:14; see also John 3:16, 1 John 4:9, Isaiah 9:6). He is referred to as "Only Begotten" because He is the only one who was eternally born of the Father, making Him God of God. During Creation Week, all things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3, Hebrews 1:8-12). The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, proceeds from the Father (John 15:26). Both the Son's begotten-ness and the Holy Spirit's procession are mysteries that are unknowable by human wisdom. However, both the Son and the Holy Spirit are described in the Scriptures as God (2 Corinthians 3:17, 18, John 15:26, 1 John 5:6, Ephesians 4:3-6, John 1:32-34, Matthew 1:18).

John Chrysostom used a good analogy to describe the eternal begotten-ness of the Son and showed what are the implications of denying this:

"Tell me, then, does the radiance of the sun proceed from the substance itself of the sun, or from some other source? Any one not deprived of his very senses must confess, that it proceeds from the substance itself. Yet, although the radiance proceeds from the sun itself, we cannot say that it is later in point of time than the substance of that body, since the sun has never appeared without its rays. Now if in the case of these visible and sensible bodies there has been shown to be something, which proceeds from something else, and yet is not after that from whence it proceeds; why are you incredulous in the case of the invisible and ineffable Nature? This same thing there takes place, but in a manner suitable to That Substance. For it is for this reason that Paul too calls Him 'Brightness' (Hebrews 1:3); setting forth thereby His being from Him and His Co-eternity. Again, tell me, did he create not all the ages and every interval? Any man not deprived of his senses must necessarily confess this. There is no interval therefore between the Son and the Father; and if there be none, then He is not after, but Co-eternal with

Him. For “before” and “after” are notions implying time, since, without age or time, no man could possibly imagine these words; but God is above times and ages.”

“But if in any case you say that you have found a beginning to the Son, see whether by the same reason and argument you are not compelled to reduce the Father also to a beginning, earlier indeed, but still a beginning. For when you have assigned to the Son a limit and beginning of existence, do you not proceed upwards from that point, and say, that the Father was before it? Clearly you do. Tell me then, what is the extent of the Father’s prior subsistence? For whether you say that the interval is little, or whether you say it is great, you equally have brought the Father to a beginning. For it is clear, that it is by measuring the space that you say whether it is little or great. Yet it would not be possible to measure it, unless there were a beginning on either side; so that as far as you are concerned you have given the Father a beginning, and henceforth, according to your argument, not even the Father will be without beginning. Do you see that the word spoken by the Savior is true, and the saying everywhere discovers its force? And what is that word? It is, (John 5:23) ‘He that honors not the Son, honors not the Father’” (Homily IV on John 1).

Gregory of Nazianzus (4th Century) described it as follows, “And He is called the Word, because He is related to the Father as word to mind.Perhaps, too, this relation might be compared to that between the definition and the thing defined since this also is called logos. For, it says, he who has mental perception of the Son (for this is the meaning of ‘has seen’) has also perceived the Father; and the Son is a concise demonstration and easy setting forth of the Father’s nature. For everything that is begotten is a silent word of Him who begot it. ...He is also called Wisdom, as the knowledge of things divine and human...And Power, as the sustainer of all created things and the furnisher to them of power to keep them together. And Truth...and as the pure seal of the Father and His most unerring impress. And the Image, as of one substance with Him...For this is the nature of an image, to be the reproduction of its archetype” (*Fourth Theological Oration*).

John Chrysostom added that the Word made flesh does not mean that God changed. The Psalm says, “They shall all grow old as a garment; and as a vesture shall you fold them and they shall be changed. But You are the same and Your years shall not fail” (Psalm 102:26 LXX). For there is nothing better than He (nor even equal to or approaching) to which He might advance and reach. It remains that if He were to change, it would be a change for the worse; and this would not be God. Instead Chrysostom noted that the Word was made flesh and *dwelt among us* (John 1:14). This is not a change of the unchangeable Nature, but of Its dwelling and inhabiting. That which dwells cannot be the same as that in which it dwells, but different. Nothing can inhabit itself. God the Son became man but didn’t cease being God or change or add to the Godhead. God the Word and the Flesh are One, not by any confusion or obliteration of substance but by a certain union ineffable and beyond understanding (Homily xi on John 1).

The effect on us is this: with the Holy Spirit in us, Jesus is not as ashamed to call us brothers (Hebrews 2:11). In fact, He refers to us as part of His Body and as His members just like the limbs of a body are members of that body (1 Corinthians 6:12-20 which is the Epistle lesson for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son in February). Thus we have become sons and

daughters of God also, and we address Him as such in the Lord's Prayer, "Our **Father**, Who art in heaven..." (Matthew 6:9-13).

Chrysostom noted the phrasing used by John in this passage and asked, "Why then did he say not that 'He made them sons of God' but instead said, 'He gave them power to become sons of God'? To show that we need much zeal to keep the image of Sonship impressed on us at Baptism all through life without spot or soil. And at the same time to show that no one shall be able to take this power from us unless we are the first to deprive ourselves of it" (Homily x on John 1).

THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER

April 12, 2015

Revision C

Pascha

Epistle: Acts 1:1-8

In beginning Acts, Luke addresses his account to one Theophilus about whom we know very little. From Luke 1:3-4, we can infer that Theophilus was a prominent Gentile (most excellent Theophilus v.3) and had been instructed in the Faith (v.4) already. According to tradition, Theophilus was a governor in Antioch, and was very well known; Luke was also from Antioch. Luke was writing to confirm the certainty of those things Theophilus already had been taught. Luke's Gospel ends with the Ascension in 30 AD and Acts begins with the Ascension and ends with Paul in Rome about 62 AD. Following the end of Luke's record in Acts 28, Luke continued to travel with Paul up until Paul's martyrdom in Rome in about 67 AD (2 Timothy 4:11). After 67 AD, Luke traveled extensively as an evangelist and was martyred in the mid 80s in Egypt. Many authorities date Luke's Gospel as being written after 70 AD and Acts around 75 AD. If this were the case, it seems strange that Luke would end the account in Acts and leave out the end of Paul's life and the last 13 years of what's happened. The last chapter of Acts suggests that Luke wrote Acts about 62 AD and that Luke wrote his Gospel a short time earlier.

The Ascension

The Epistle lesson continues the theme of the Gospel lesson in speaking of Pascha from a broader perspective than just the actual events. In today's reading, Jesus was about to ascend back to the Father to be glorified as He was before He came. And He had told His disciples to wait for the Promise from the Father (which is the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father, John 15:26).

From the Gospel lesson, we have seen Jesus described in terms of light vs. darkness. From the Epistle lesson, we see Jesus presented in terms of His Deity preparing to return to the Father after having accomplished His mission.

In taking on human flesh, Jesus emptied Himself and took on the form of a slave (Philippians 2:7). Yet, prior to that, He was in the form of God and equal to God the Father (Philippians 2:6, John 5:18, 10:33, Colossians 2:9). In becoming a man, born of the Virgin Mary, He took on poverty and laid aside His eternal wealth (2 Corinthians 8:9). He came to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:28).

In ascending back to the Father, Jesus sat down at the Right Hand of God (Mark 16:19, Luke 22:69, Acts 7:55-56, Romans 8:34, Ephesians 1:20, Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2, 1 Peter 3:22). From there, He will return again at the Right Hand of Power (Mark 14:62, Psalm 110:1, Revelation 19:11-16). From this point of view, we can rejoice that Jesus ascended back to the Father (John 14:28).

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As He ascended, He did not go empty handed. He led captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8-10, Colossians 2:15) and plundered (literally stripped naked or off clothed) the rulers and authorities of Hades. In the Orthodox worship service, we speak of Jesus having plundered Hades, and iconography pictures Adam and Eve as being released from captivity in Hades.

At the Tomb, the angels had told the Myrrh-Bearing Women that “He is going before you into Galilee” (Matthew 28:7). Thus the Eleven “went away into Galilee to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them” (Matthew 28:16). In the Epistle text, He was “seen by them during 40 days and was speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Just prior to His Ascension, He commanded them “not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father” (v.4). During these 40 days, His followers’ eyes were opened and they regarded Him in a much different light. For example, at the tomb on Pascha morning, Jesus told Mary Magdalene, “Do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended to My Father...” (John 20:17). That is to say, “You need to regard Me differently now, Mary.”

Cyril of Jerusalem stated¹ that when Mary met the risen Christ at the Tomb, He had the dead with Him, but she didn’t know it.

“Mary came seeking Him, according to the Gospel, and did not find Him; and presently she heard from the Angels, and afterwards saw the Christ. These things are written in the Song of Songs, ‘On my bed I sought Him whom my soul loved. By night on my bed I sought Him, Whom my soul loved’ (Canticles 3:1, John 20:1-2). Mary, it says, came while it was yet dark. And in the Gospels Mary says, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him’ (John 20:13). But the Angels that were present cure their lack of knowledge; for they said, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead?’ (Luke 24:5) He not only rose, but had also the dead with Him when He rose. But she didn’t know this, and in her person the Song of Songs said to the Angels, ‘Did you see Him, Whom my soul loved? It was but a little that I passed from them’; that is, from the two Angels, until I found Him. I held Him, and would not let Him go” (Canticles 3:3-4).

Gregory of Nyssa commented² on Jesus’ words to Mary. The message that He wanted her to communicate back to His brethren was that man was no longer alienated from God, and that they would need to learn to “touch” Him in a new way.

“The orthodox interpretation of these words, the sense in which we have been accustomed to believe that they were spoken to Mary, is I think manifest to all, who have received the Faith in truth. Others, who allege against us such phrases as “being recognized by touch,” and “being associated with men by brotherhood,” may consider them to be proper either to the Divine or to the Human Nature. For they may see in the Godhead the capacity of being seen and touched, and all the attributes of corporeal nature”.

“Christ was discoursing with Mary about His brethren. ‘Go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God’ (John 20:17). Yet, the Only Begotten has no brethren; if

¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIV, 12.

² Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, XII, 1.

He had brethren, how could the property of being Only Begotten be preserved? On the other hand, the same Person Who said, 'God is a Spirit' (John 4:24), said to His disciples, 'Handle Me' (Luke 24:39), that He may show that while the Human Nature is capable of being handled the Divinity is intangible. The Divine power is not discoverable by touch (Acts 17:27), but by intelligent contemplation and faith. He Who ate before the eyes of His disciples, and promised to go before them into Galilee and there be seen of them, — whom does He reveal Him to be Who should so appear to them? God, Whom no man has seen or can see? (1 Timothy 6:16, John 1:18) Or the bodily image, that is, the form of a servant in which God was?"

"Now the words addressed to Mary are not applicable to the Godhead of the Only Begotten. But what is the meaning of what He then uttered?"

"He Who is by nature Father of existent things, from Whom all things have their birth, has been proclaimed as one. 'For there is one God and Father, of Whom are all things' (1 Corinthians 8:6). Accordingly human nature did not enter into the creation from any other source, nor grow spontaneously from Adam, but it had for its author none other than the Father of all".

"By the wiles of him that sowed in us the tares of disobedience, our nature no longer preserved in itself the impress of the Father's image, but was transformed into the foul likeness of sin. For this cause it was grafted, by virtue of similarity of will, into the evil family of the father of sin. So that the good and true God and Father was no longer the God and Father of him who had been thus outlawed by his own depravity. But instead of Him, Who was by Nature God, those were honored who, 'by nature were not Gods', (Galatians 4:8) and in the place of the Father, he was deemed father who is falsely so called".

"Since, then, this was the sum of our calamity, humanity was exiled from the good Father, and was banished from the Divine oversight and care. For this cause He, Who is the Shepherd of the whole rational creation, left in the heights of heaven His unsinning and supramundane flock, and, moved by love, went after the sheep, which had gone astray, even our human nature".

"Since then it was impossible that our life, which had been estranged from God, should of itself return to the high and heavenly place, He Who knew no sin was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). He freed us from the curse by taking on Him our curse as His own (Galatians 3:13). Having taken up, and, 'slain' in Himself 'the enmity' (Ephesians 2:16) which by means of sin had come between God and us, — in fact, sin was 'the enmity' — and having become what we were, He through Himself again united humanity to God. By purity, He brought into closest relationship with the Father of our nature that new man which is created after God (Ephesians 4:24), in Whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9). He drew with Him into the same grace all the nature that partakes of His body and is akin to Him".

"And these glad tidings He proclaimed through the woman, not to those disciples only, but also to all who up to the present day become disciples of the Word. Man is no longer outlawed, nor cast out of the kingdom of God, but is once more a son, once more in the station assigned to him by his God, inasmuch as along with the first-fruits of humanity the lump also is hallowed (Romans

11:16). “For behold,” He says, “I and the children whom God hath given Me” (Hebrews 2:13, Isaiah 8:18). Therefore, it was not the intangible, immutable, and invisible God, but the moving, visible, and tangible nature which is proper to humanity, that gave command to Mary to minister the word to His disciples”.

John Chrysostom noted that, “Among those very men who had put Christ to death, they exhibit the proofs of His Resurrection; among those who had crucified and buried Him, in the very town in which the iniquitous deed had been perpetrated; thereby stopping the mouths of all foreign objectors. For when even those who had crucified Him appear as believers (Acts 2:36-41), clearly this proved both the fact of the Crucifixion and the iniquity of the deed, and afforded a mighty evidence of the Resurrection” (Homily I on Acts 1).

Chrysostom also spoke of the fears of the Twelve, being few in numbers, but yet living among the thousands of men who had crucified Christ. The Lord put their fears to rest with the Promise of the Spirit. He also noted, “And how was it, if the Spirit had not yet come, that He said (on the evening of the Resurrection), ‘Receive the Holy Spirit?’ (John 20:22). In order to render them capable and meet for the reception of Him! If Daniel passed out at the sight of an angel (Daniel 10:5-17), much more would these when about to receive so great a grace.”

Chrysostom also noted that the greater matters of teaching were reserved for the Spirit, that the disciples might not imagine Him inferior (Ibid.).

The Right Hand of Power

At His trial, the Lord had told His accusers, “Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the Right Hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64, Mark 14:62). This, the High Priest considered blasphemy and asked for the death sentence (Matthew 26:65, Mark 14:62). At His Ascension, the two angels told the disciples, “This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). As He ascended, “a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). Daniel spoke of Him coming on the clouds of heaven (Daniel 7:13), and the Lord confirmed this to His disciples (Matthew 24:30).

The Ascension text states, “He was taken up and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). This is reminiscent of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that led Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 13:21-22, 14:24). Other encounters with the cloud:

- Moses ascending Mt. Sinai into the cloud to receive the Law (Exodus 24:16-18)
- The pillar of cloud stood at the entrance to the Tabernacle to speak to Moses (Exodus 33:9)
- When the Ark entered Solomon’s Temple, the cloud filled the house and the priests could not stand to serve (1 Kings 8:10-11; see also Exodus 40:35)
- At the end of time, smoke similarly fills the Temple of the Tabernacle of Testimony in heaven (Revelation 15:5-8)

The term Right Hand of Power comes primarily from the Psalms. For example, the Lord’s Right Hand:

- Is exalted and victorious (Psalm 89:13, 98:1, 118:15)

- Saved David, the anointed king (Psalm 20:6, 60:5, 108:6, 138:7)
- Possessed the Promised Land (Psalm 44:3, 78:54)
- Is majestic in power (Exodus 15:6)
- Seeks out and swallows enemies (Psalm 21:8, Exodus 15:12)
- Went at the right hand of Moses (Isaiah 63:12).

Yet there are other things associated with the Lord's Right Hand:

- It spread out the heavens (Isaiah 48:13)
- It plants vines; i.e. Churches (Psalm 80:15-17)
- It is full of righteousness (Psalm 48:10)
- It teaches us awesome things (Psalm 45:4)
- It provides support (Psalm 18:35, 63:8, 139:10; Isaiah 41:10)
- It is a place of refuge (Psalm 17:7)
- The Queen Mother sits there (Psalm 45:9, 1 Kings 2:19)

In the Gospel reading, the Lord told His disciples when He met them in Galilee, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:18-19). In the Epistle lesson, He said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Thus, just as "His Glorious Arm went at the right hand of Moses" (Isaiah 63:12), so it did with the Apostles after Pentecost. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is also called "The Helper" (i.e., one called alongside to help, John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), and Jesus had told His disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit at 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). This was covered more extensively two weeks ago on the 5th Sunday of Lent and on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son at the beginning of the Lenten Triodion. 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.

And that is where we are on Pascha. "It is not for us to know the times or seasons which the Father has put under His own authority" (Acts 1:7). However, by coming through the Fast which we've just done, by using the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us, and by confessing Christ before men, the treasure gets refined and the city gets ready.