



# The Celtic Orthodox Church in Britain

## Community of St Gwenn

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*The Celtic Orthodox Church is an Ancient Christian Church, founded in AD37. It is the original Church of Great Britain, and its spirituality blessed our land for the first twelve centuries of the Christian era. Now it is revived!*

### St Gwenn's News No 148 – April 2025



**We celebrate our Liturgies at the Woodbury Community Hall, Woodbury Lane, Axminster EX13 5TL**

### April Liturgical Calendar

- Sun 6 Apr**            **LENT 5 – St Mary of Egypt and Raising of Lazarus Liturgy – 10.30am**
- Sun 13 Apr**        **PALM SUNDAY Blessing of Palms ZOOM 10.30am**
- Thur 17 Apr**        **Great and Holy Thursday – Commemoration of the Last Supper Thanksgiving for the Last Supper ZOOM 7.30pm**
- Fri 18 Apr**        **Great and Holy Friday Vespers of the Shroud – 1.00pm**
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- Sat 19 Apr/**        **PASCHA – Paschal Vigil and PASCHAL LITURGY: 7pm**  
**[for Sun 20 Apr]**
- CHRIST IS RISEN! INDEED HE IS RISEN!**
- \*\*\*\*\*
- Wed 23 Apr**        **Great Martyr and Wonderworker George**
- Fri 25 Apr**        **St Mark, Apostle and Evangelist**  
**[Baptism and Chrismation of catechumen Adam: at Portland]**
- Sun 27 Apr**        **PASCHA 2**
- Wed 30 Apr**        **St James, Son of Zebedee**
- Sun 4 May**        **PASCHA 3 – Liturgy: 10.30am**

**From Fr Leonard**

Greetings to you all!

We start this month in Lenten solemnity and end it in Paschal joy. I hope Lent is being fruitful for you, and whetting your appetite for the Paschal celebration.

As our worship together at Woodbury, and the distance many of you travel, doesn't make it viable for us to meet together for every liturgical feast day, to keep some sense of community we have a few times now, prayed together via Zoom. As we shall not be meeting for Palm Sunday or Great and Holy Thursday, I am proposing that, as many as wish to do so, pray together via Zoom (as Calendar above).

For those who intend to join the Blessing of Palms Zoom on Sunday 13th April, I will give or send palm crosses so you can hold them up whilst I bless them through the magic of Zoom. I will give out the palm crosses at the April Liturgy. If you will not be with us on 6th April but would like to join in on Palm Sunday let me know as soon as possible confirming your address.

On Great and Holy Thursday when we give thanks for the Last Supper and the Institution of the Eucharist, please have some bread and wine (or red juice) ready so they can be blessed (NOT consecrated), then we can enjoy consuming these communally after the prayers.

Our parish secretary, Diakonissa Clare [[meganJ210618@outlook.com](mailto:meganJ210618@outlook.com)] will be organizing the Zoom meetings. Please let her or me know if you wish to join either or both of these on-line services and she will send you the links.

Blessings and love in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr Leonard +". The signature is written in a cursive style and is enclosed in a thin yellow rectangular border.

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## The Sundays and Feast Days of Lent, Holy Week and Pascha

### LENT 5 – St Mary of Egypt and Raising of Lazarus

The Orthodox theme for the fifth Sunday of Lent is St Mary of Egypt, so let us consider her extraordinary life. From it we can take courage that whatever we may have done, whatever darkness we may have embraced, true repentance can put us right with God.

Mary was born in Egypt in AD 344. She was a highly spirited young lady and, at the age of twelve, she ran away from her parents and began her life of nymphomania in Alexandria. She was driven by insatiable sexual desire.

She lived by begging and spinning flax, but would never take money from the men with whom she copulated – that was purely for her sexual gratification.

After seventeen years of this dissolute life, she met a group of young men heading toward the sea to sail to Jerusalem for the veneration of the Holy Cross. Mary asked if she could go along for the ride.....and, for the sheer fun of it, she seduced the men as they travelled.

The group reached Jerusalem and made their way towards the church, but an invisible force prevented Mary from entering.

Realizing that this was because of her impurity, she was struck with extreme remorse, and upon seeing an icon of the Theotokos outside the church, she prayed for forgiveness, promising to give up the ways of the world and devote herself to a life of



prayer. Then she again attempted to enter the church, and this time was allowed to go in. After venerating the relic of the true cross, she returned to the icon to give thanks, and heard a voice telling her, "If you cross the Jordan, you will find glorious peace."

She immediately went to the monastery of St. John the Baptist on the bank of the River Jordan, where she received absolution and afterwards Holy Communion. The next morning, she crossed the Jordan and retired to the desert to live the rest of her life as a hermit in penitence. She took with her only three loaves of bread, and once they were gone, she lived on just what she could find in the wilderness.

About a year before Mary's death, St Zosimas of Palestine unexpectedly encountered her in the desert. She was completely naked and almost unrecognizable as human. Zosimas gave Mary his cloak to cover herself with, and she then recounted her life's story to him, manifesting how deeply spiritual she had become.

She asked him to meet her at the banks of the Jordan, on Holy Thursday of the following year, and bring her Holy Communion. This Zosimas duly did. To reach him Mary crossed the Jordan walking on the surface of the water.

After receiving Holy Communion Mary asked Zosimas to meet her again in the desert the following Lent.

The next year, Zosimas again travelled into the desert, some twenty days' journey from his monastery. There he found Mary lying dead. An inscription written in the sand next to her head, told Zosimas that Mary had died on the very night he had given her Communion. Miraculously her body was preserved incorrupt.

He buried her and returned to the monastery and related her life story to his brethren. That account of her life was preserved among the monks as an oral tradition until it was written down by St Sophronius in the Seventh Century.

So, as we move towards the end of Lent let's use Mary's life of penitence and repentance as an inspiration for us to offer our own repentance to God and come more clearly into His resurrection Light at Pascha.

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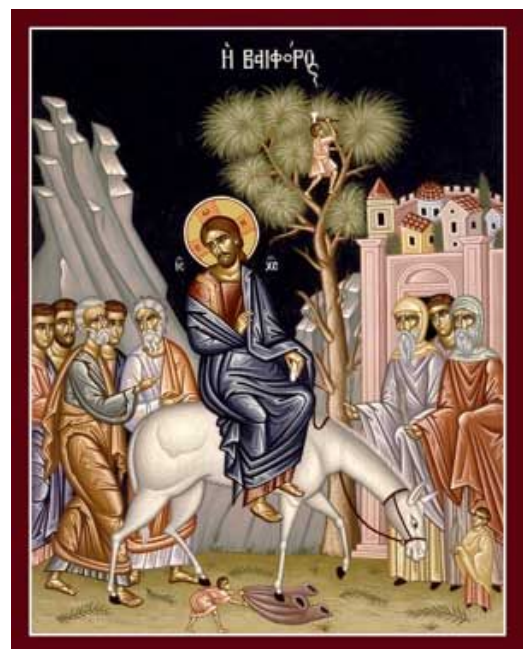
## **PALM SUNDAY - The Entry of Our Lord into Jerusalem**

Today, Palm Sunday, as it is popularly known, marks the start of Passion Week or Great and Holy Week. Holy Week is, in a way, distinct from Lent. We now enter another more stringent period of fasting – 'Super-Lent,' if you like.

Now Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem. He moves inexorably on towards His Passion, on towards the Way of the Cross, but today it is all adulation and jubilation. As Jesus enters Jerusalem He is fêted. The cry goes up, "Hosanna to the son of David!" By the end of the week, however, the cry will be, "Crucify Him."

This 'sting-in-the-tail' turn of events is well illustrated in the hymn, 'Ride on, ride on in majesty.' Just because we Orthodox don't generally sing the popular hymns from the Catholic, Anglican or Protestant traditions it doesn't mean they have no merit. Many such hymns are steeped in solid theology. For example:

"RIDE ON IN MAJESTY" Yes, the Lord is KING; truly majestic.



“IN LOWLY POMP RIDE ON TO DIE” Majestic yes, but the pomp of this triumphal entry into Jerusalem is tempered by the lowliness of the humble donkey and the fate it carries its rider to.

“THE LAST AND FIERCEST STRIFE IS NIGH; THE FATHER ON HIS SAPPHIRE THRONE, AWAITS HIS OWN ANOINTED SON.” The 19thC Henry Milman, writer of this hymn, well describes the impending passion and cruel death ahead, when he calls it the “LAST AND FIERCEST STRIFE.” And he makes clear that the Father is there, waiting to receive His Son when the redeeming work is done. [The “Father’s sapphire throne,” is a reference to the heavenly vision of Ezekiel.]

The hymn ends, “BOW THY MEEK HEAD TO MORTAL PAIN, THEN TAKE, O GOD, THY POWER AND REIGN.” And so it was. On Great and Holy Friday, Jesus, in pain we can scarcely begin to imagine, bowed His head and died. But three days later He was alive; and now He reigns with the Father and the Spirit in heaven.

In Holy Week we shall follow all these events with our Blessed Lord as He, for our Salvation, takes us into darkness and then forward into the blindingly dazzling light of PASCHA – great glory for which Jesus paid a great price.

As the crowds welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem, so let us welcome Him into our hearts.

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### **GREAT AND HOLY THURSDAY – Commemoration of the Last Supper**



We have been making our way through the final events of our Saviour’s incarnate life in the Great and Holy Week. With zeal for His Father’s House, Jesus has cleansed the Temple. He has taught for the last time in that Temple. He has been anointed with perfumed oil – much to the annoyance of Judas Iscariot.

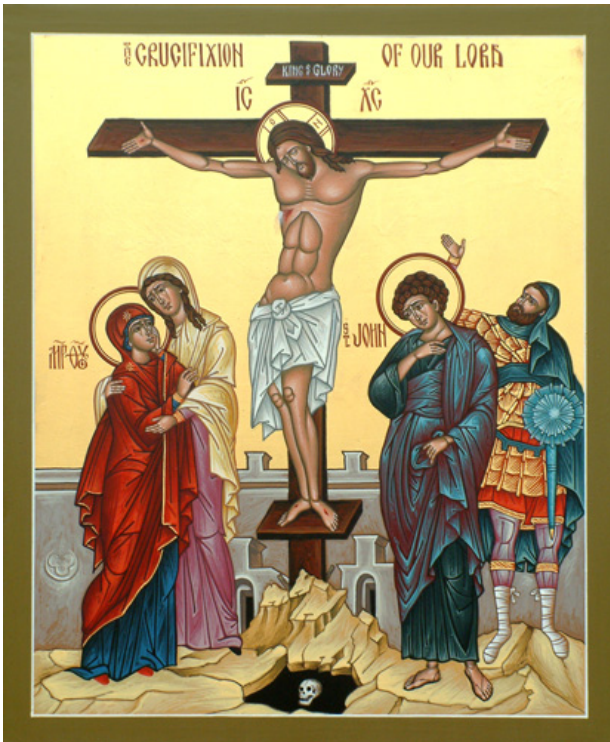
And now we come today to the Last Supper. The disciples have made ready in an upper room, willingly loaned by its owner. The scene is set. The most significant event we recollect today is the institution of the Eucharist, the Liturgy, the Mass. Jesus takes bread and wine and tells us they are, in perpetuity, His precious Body and Blood. He is soon to be crucified, and then, 3 days later he will rise again. Then 40 days after that He will ascend into His heavenly kingdom; but, in that precious Body and Blood, we are able to remain in communion with Him. He nourishes us with His risen life through the sacrament of the altar. We can’t begin to give sufficient thanks or praise for so great a gift.

Then, after supper He gives us the great lesson of love and humility. He, the Lord of all Life, washes His disciples’ feet.

If you will be unable to attend a church or join our Zoom service, then you can take time to be quiet with God and to thank Him for the great Sacrament of the Eucharist, and pray that we too may learn humility.

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## GREAT & HOLY FRIDAY



In the Orthodox Church we know this day as Great and Holy Friday, but to many it is known as Good Friday. That name has perennially raised the question, why GOOD? Surely it's anything but!

The Catholic Encyclopaedia, states that the term's origins are unclear with some sources seeing it as a corruption of 'God's Friday,' while others maintain that it is from Gute Freitag – which doesn't help much as that's just Good Friday in German!

I think we can assume that it means good in the sense of being of a holy nature.

Whatever we call today, it's the day we recall Jesus' death on the cross. This is an horrendous, cruel and gruesome event, yet, horrible and sickening as it was physically, the Celtic vision was one of a battleground where Christ is Victor.

As Jesus struggles on, bleeding and stumbling, it looks as though He is losing this battle....but He is going on to *win* the war.

Around this physically weakened figure on that tortuous road we might imagine a vision of the angelic host, the heavenly army supporting Him, their banners of victory anticipating the victory he will win – "The royal banners forward go,....."

It is a distinctive mark of Orthodoxy that whenever we think of the cross we think of the victory Christ won upon it – the cross indeed "shines forth in mystic glow."

This concept is emphasised in the Troparion for the day:

We venerate Your cross, O Christ, and we praise and glorify Your holy Name; for the tree of shame has become the tree of joy, and all creations cries aloud – glory to You, Redeemer of the world.

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## PASCHA

CHRIST IS RISEN! INDEED HE IS RISEN!!

Today, thousands of Easter sermons will be preached. Indeed, every year since Jesus' resurrection Easter sermons have been preached – in all, millions of millions of Easter sermons, so it might be interesting to consider the very first Easter sermon ever preached.

Who was the preacher? St Matthew describes him as an angel, St Mark as a young man wearing a white robe. Of course, there is a sense in which everyone of us should be an angel since angel means messenger. The preacher at the tomb on that first Easter morning, however, was



clearly a *heavenly* messenger, his youthfulness symbolising vitality and vigour and his white robes indicating his spotless purity.

Who were the congregation? A company of women led by Mary of Magdala. No men were there. Had they lost heart one wonders? They thought Jesus was dead – had their faith died with Him? – but the women’s love for their late Master was still alive and so they made their way to the tomb with their aromatic oils.

Clearly, they didn’t expect to find Jesus alive. They had come to the tomb as a final act of devotion to their crucified Lord. They meant to anoint His body, but when they arrived the sealed tomb was rent asunder and the body gone, and they were confronted with the angel–preacher in his dazzling robes.

And the sermon itself? Firstly the assertion of a stupendous fact, the fact of the resurrection. “You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified - He has risen! He is not here!”

The women are astounded and awe-struck. Remember, they had witnessed with their own eyes Jesus’ cruel murder. They had seen the body taken down and brought to the tomb. Now they are told He’s not dead; He has risen. Jesus is alive! And it is that proclamation which lies at the very heart of the gospel on which the Church is built.

The preacher concludes by indicating just two of the many consequences of Jesus’ resurrection. First, he says, “Fear nothing.” For believers, all fear – especially the fear of death – is dispelled because Jesus died and rose again. Jesus has triumphed over the cruelty He suffered in His passion; He has conquered even death itself.

Second comes our charge to be messengers. The angel says, “Go and give this message.” The women are entrusted with the good news for others, the good news of the living Christ. It’s good news for everyone.

And so to us today: we mustn’t keep this resurrection joy to ourselves, we are to share it with the whole world. Having found in the crucified and risen Lord the key to the meaning of life we must share it.

So, may the resurrection joy be central to our faith, cast out all our fear, and compel us to share our joy with others.

CHRIST IS RISEN! INDEED HE IS RISEN!!

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### **The Dating of Easter/Pascha**

We, as Western Orthodox, are following the Western/Gregorian Calendar, Whilst the Eastern Orthodox remain with the older Julian Calendar. Because of the different methods used for calculating when Pascha/Easter falls, this can lead to the celebration of Pascha/Easter being as much as four weeks apart between Eastern and Western Christians.

Pope Francis, who seems to be on a gentle road back to stable health, has long been anxious to see East and West using the same date for Easter and it is quite possible that this will be achieved within the remainder of his papacy.

One does wonder, however, whether the Anglican Church and the Free Churches will follow the Catholics and Orthodox in adopting a common date if it were to come about.

This year is one of those infrequent occasions when the Eastern and Western methods of calculating Easter having coincided and we all celebrate the great festival on 20 th April.

Is it possible that in future we will always celebrate this great feast together??

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## Penance

For those wishing to make their confession but cannot get to see a priest, I am willing to hear confessions via Zoom. Contact me on 01297 678566 or stgwenns@gmail.com to arrange a suitable time.

Fr Leonard+

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### **Lord, in your mercy: Hear our Prayers**

That we may use the remainder of LENT to the best of our spiritual ability to cleanse our souls of all pride, deceitfulness, slothfulness, selfishness and all sinful tendencies which the evil one uses to tempt us away from Christ, so that we may be ready to enter into the Resurrection Joy of PASCHA.

For our Patriarch His Beatitude Metropolitan Marc, Bishop Nicholas and all our clergy and people.

For Peace and Justice throughout our troubled world; that all negotiations and efforts to bring about peace may bear fruit.

For all in suffering, sorrow, sickness or distress; that Pope Francis may continue his recovery.

For Keith and all who have died recently; for Colin, Sophia, Edna, Bob, Carol, Arthur, HRH Prince Philip, Maureen, Olivier, Yodit, Daphne, Michael and Christian, whose anniversaries of reposing fall this month.

