



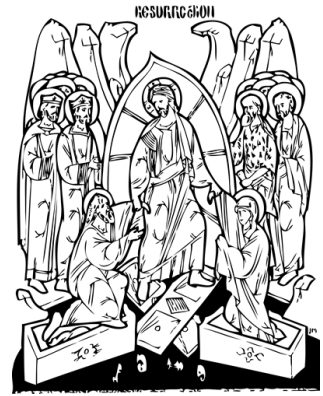
Thomas touches Christ's side

St. Cyril of Jerusalem Orthodox Church

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+ May 5, 2019 +
Thomas Sunday

Great Martyr Irene (2nd cent.)
St. Ephraim of Nea Makri (+1426)



Christ's Descent into Hell

Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!

MANY YEARS to **Lori Afridi** for her birthday this past Thursday; and to those celebrating namedays: **Diane Moretti** (St. Irene, today); **Arthur Hall, John Harris, and John Lickwar** (St. John, May 7).

CHOIR CONCERT on Sunday, May 19, at 3 o'clock p.m., at Robb Chapel, United Methodist Church, 2200 Lake Woodlands Dr., in The Woodlands.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Our income for April was \$7,460; our final expenses were \$8,934; thus for April we sadly had a *shortfall of \$1,474*.

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The Last Supper and the early Christian Liturgy

At a Jewish Passover supper, Jesus Christ celebrated for the first time the Mystery of the Divine Liturgy, the Passover Supper of the Church. It was the last Passover that Christ celebrated with His disciples in His earthly life.

The day before the feast of the Passover, the disciples asked the Lord, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal?" And Christ answered them, "Go to so-and-so in the city and tell him: The Master says, "The time for my Passion is approaching. I am going to keep the Passover at your house, with my disciples." The disciples did as the Lord told them, and prepared the place where they were to celebrate the Passover together.

When the disciples asked Christ where they should prepare the Passover meal, they were of course talking about the *Jewish* Passover. And that was what *they* prepared. "Whereas our Passover, the *Christian* Passover, has been prepared *by Christ*. And He has not only prepared it, but He Himself has become the Passover." At the Last Supper, Christ celebrates both the Jewish and the Christian Passover, "both the Passover that was the *foreshadow* and the Passover that was the *reality*. Christ was doing exactly what an artist does when, on the same canvas, he first draws an outline and puts in the shading, and then adds the actual colors. At the very same table, He both sketched out the Passover that was a foreshadow and added in the true Passover.

The first three Evangelists and the Apostle Paul give us a description of the first Divine Liturgy: *Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to His disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often*

as you drink it, in remembrance of me. I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom."

This description of the first Divine Liturgy is at the same time a description of the eucharistic *synaxis* (assembly) of apostolic times, except that in the place of the leader of the *synaxis* there is no longer Christ but the holy Apostles, living icons of the Teacher. In the Divine Eucharist, the first Christians experienced the presence of Christ and awaited His return in glory. The awareness of Christ's presence and the expectation of His Second Coming gave the eucharistic assemblies of the early Christians an atmosphere of joy and gladness.

In apostolic times, an *agape* meal was offered before the Divine Liturgy. Christians also experienced the Divine Liturgy itself as an *agape* meal, a feast of love, precisely because in the Mystical Supper was the supper of Christ's boundless love for all His disciples. But as time went on, because of the occurrence of various inappropriate things, the Divine Liturgy was separated from the *agape* meal.

When the Apostles began sending letters to the local churches, the eucharistic *synaxis* would begin with the reading of one of these apostolic letters. There followed the kiss of love to which St. Paul refers in his letters. Then the celebrant – the local bishop – would bless the faithful: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all* (2 Cor. 13:13). After this blessing, the prayer of thanksgiving was said. This was followed by the prayer of the invocation of the Holy Spirit, which has its basis in Christ's words on Holy Thursday night: *When the Comforter comes . . . He will bear witness to me . . . He will glorify me.* Finally, the holy Body of Christ was divided up, and the faithful received Holy Communion.

On the personal experience of all the apostles

That which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked upon, and which our hands have touched, we declare to you. (I John 1:1)

Behold, such is the apostolic preaching! The apostles do not speak as worldly sages or as philosophers, or as theoreticians who make suppositions about things in order to discover something. The apostles speak about things which they have not sought, but unexpectedly surrounded them, about a fact which they did not discover but which, so to speak, unexpectedly surrounded them and seized them. They did not occupy themselves with spiritual investigation, nor did they study psychology, nor much less did they occupy themselves with spiritism. Their occupation was fishing – a totally experiential, physical occupation.

While they were fishing, the God-man appeared to them and cautiously and slowly introduced them to a new vocation in His service. At first they did not believe Him, but ever cautiously and slowly – with fear, hesitation, and much wavering – they came toward Him and recognized Him. It was not until the apostles had seen Him many times with their own eyes and examined Him and felt Him with their own hands, that they believed. What they experienced was supernatural, but their manner of recognizing this was thoroughly sensory and learned through positive encounter.

The apostles saw not only one miracle, but numerous miracles. They heard not only one lesson, but so many lessons that they could not be contained in numerous books. They saw the resurrected Lord for forty days: they walked with Him, they conversed with Him, they ate with Him, and they touched Him. In a word, they personally had thousands of wondrous facts firsthand, by which they learned and confirmed the one great fact, that is, that Christ is the God-man, the Son of the Living God, the man-loving Savior of mankind and the All-powerful Judge of the living and the dead.

O resurrected Lord, confirm us in the faith and ardor of Thy holy apostles. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

The Holy New Martyr Ephraim of Nea Makri

Commemorated on May 5

The holy New Martyr and wonderworker Ephraim was born in Greece on September 14, 1384. His father died when the saint was young, and his pious mother was left to care for seven children by herself. When Ephraim reached the age of fourteen, the all-good God directed his steps to a monastery on the mountain of Amoman near Nea Makri in Attica. The monastery was dedicated to the Annunciation and also to Saint Paraskeva.

Being enflamed with love for God, Saint Ephraim eagerly placed himself under the monastic discipline. For nearly twenty-seven years he imitated the life of the great Fathers and ascetics of the desert. With divine zeal, he followed Christ and turned away from the attractions of this world. By the grace of God, he purified himself from soul-destroying passions and became an abode of the All-Holy Spirit. He was also found worthy to receive the grace of the priesthood, and served at the altar with great reverence and compunction.

On September 14, 1425, the barbarous Turks launched an invasion by sea, destroying the monastery and looting the surrounding area. Saint Ephraim was one of the victims of their frenzied hatred. Many of the monks had been tortured and beheaded, but Saint Ephraim remained calm. This infuriated the Turks, so they imprisoned him in order to torture him and force him to deny Christ.

They locked him in a small cell without food or water, and they beat him every day, hoping to convince him to become a Moslem. For several months, he endured horrible torments. When the Turks realized that the saint remained faithful to Christ, they decided to put him to death. On Tuesday May 5, 1426, they led him from his cell. They turned him upside down and tied him to a mulberry tree, then they beat him and mocked him. "Where is your God," they asked, "and why doesn't he help you?" The saint did not lose courage, but prayed, "O God, do not listen to the words of these men, but may Thy will be done as Thou hast ordained."



The barbarians pulled the saint's beard and tortured him until his strength ebbed. His blood flowed, and his clothes were in tatters. His body was almost naked and covered with many wounds. Still the Hagarenes were not satisfied, but wished to torture him even more. One of them took a flaming stick and plunged it violently into the saint's navel. His screams were heart-rending, so great was his pain. The blood flowed from his stomach, but the Turks did not stop. They repeated the same painful torments many times. His body writhed, and all his limbs were convulsed. Soon, the saint grew too weak to speak, so he prayed silently asking God to forgive his

sins. Blood and saliva ran from his mouth, and the ground was soaked with his blood. Then he lapsed into unconsciousness.

Thinking that he had died, the Turks cut the ropes which bound him to the tree, and the saint's body fell to the ground. Their rage was still not diminished, so they continued to kick and beat him. After a while, the saint opened his eyes and prayed, "Lord, I give up my spirit to Thee." About nine o'clock in the morning, the martyr's soul was separated from his body.

These things remained forgotten for nearly 500 years, hidden in the depths of silence and oblivion until January 3, 1950. By then a women's monastery had sprung up on the site of the old monastery. Abbess Makaria (+ April 23, 1999) was wandering through the ruins of the monastery, thinking of the martyrs whose bones had been scattered over that ground, and whose blood had watered the tree of Orthodoxy. She realized that this was a holy place, and she prayed that God would permit her to behold one of the Fathers who had lived there.

After some time, she seemed to sense an inner voice telling her to dig in a certain spot. She indicated the place to a workman whom she had hired to make repairs at the old monastery. The man was unwilling to dig there, for he wanted to dig somewhere else. Because the man was so insistent, Mother Makaria let him go where he wished. She prayed that the man would not be able to dig there, and so he struck rock. Although he tried to dig in three or four places, he met with the same results. Finally, he agreed to dig where the abbess had first indicated.

In the ruins of an old cell, he cleared away the rubble and began to dig in an angry manner. The abbess told him to slow down, for she did not want him to damage the body that she expected to find there. He mocked her because she expected to find the relics of a saint. When he reached the depth of six feet, however, he unearthed the head of the man of God. At that moment an ineffable fragrance filled the air. The workman turned pale and was unable to speak. Mother Makaria told him to go and leave her there by herself. She knelt and reverently kissed the body. As she cleared away more earth, she saw the sleeves of the saint's rasson. The cloth was thick and appeared to have been woven on the loom of an earlier time. She uncovered the rest of the body and began to remove the bones, which appeared to be those of a martyr.

Mother Makaria was still in that holy place when evening fell, so she read the service of Vespers. Suddenly she heard footsteps coming from the grave, moving across the courtyard toward the door of the church. The footsteps were strong and steady, like those of a man of strong character. The nun was afraid to turn around and look, but then she heard a voice say, "How long are you going to leave me here?"

She saw a tall monk with small, round eyes, whose beard reached his chest. In his left hand was a bright light, and he gave a blessing with his right hand. Mother Makaria was filled with joy and her fear disappeared. "Forgive me," she said, "I will take care of you tomorrow as soon as God makes the day dawn." The saint disappeared, and the abbess continued to read Vespers.

In the morning after Matins, Mother Makaria cleaned the bones and placed them in a niche in the altar area of the church, lighting a candle before them. That night Saint Ephraim appeared to her in a dream. He thanked her for caring for his relics, then he said, "My name is Saint Ephraim." From his own lips, she heard the story of his life and martyrdom.

Since Saint Ephraim glorified God in his life and by his death, the Lord granted him the grace of working miracles. Those who venerate his holy relics with faith and love have been healed of all kinds of illnesses and infirmities, and he is quick to answer the prayers of those who call upon him.