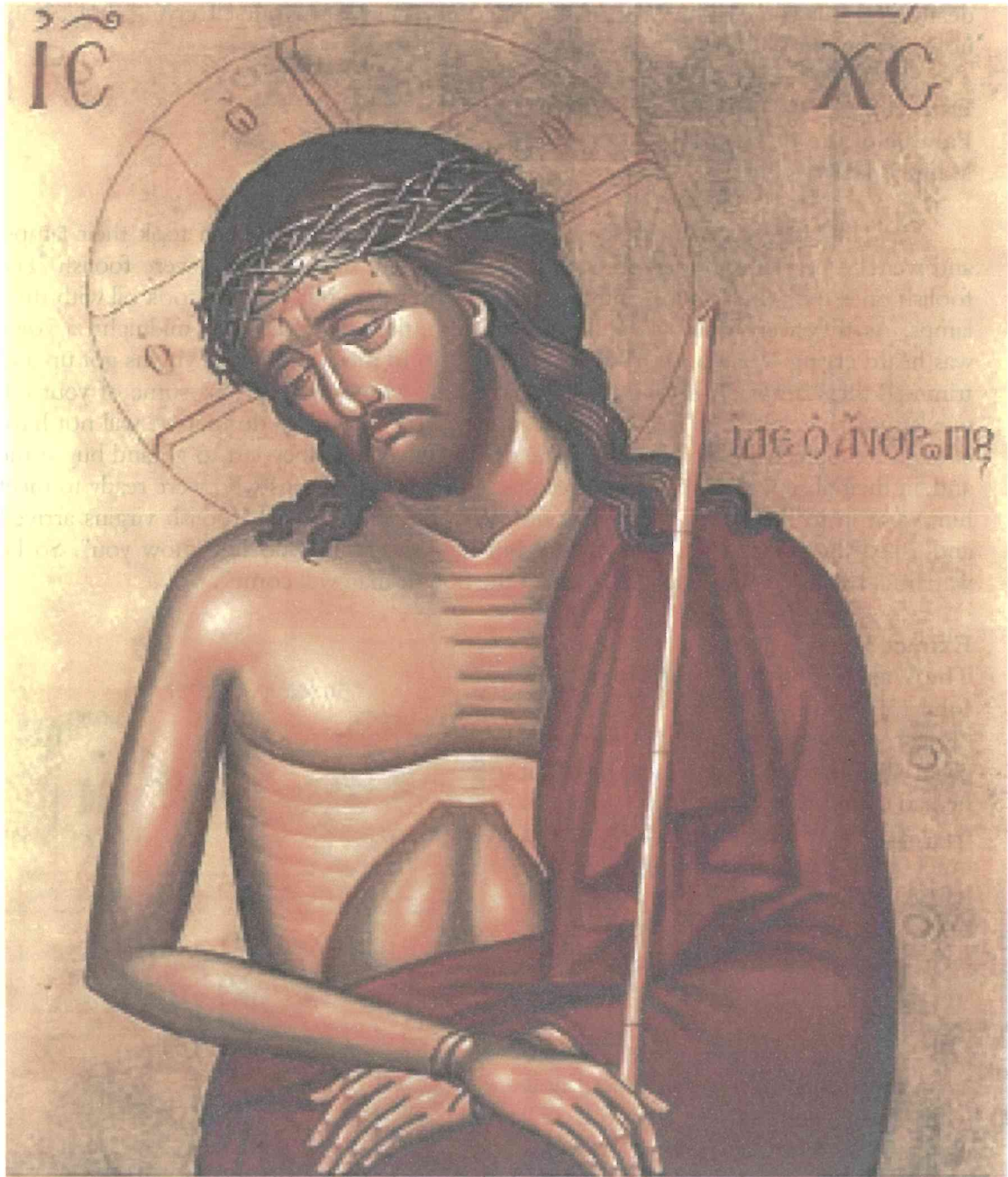


# HOLY WEEK



ICON OF THE BRIDEGROOM (NYMPHIOS)



**Extract 1.**  
**Hymn of the Bridegroom Service**

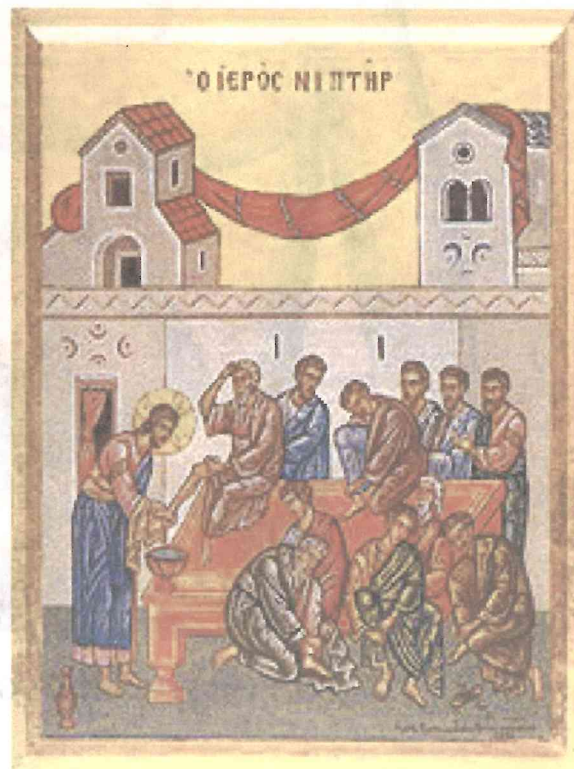
Behold the Bridegroom comes at midnight, and blessed is the servant whom he shall find watching. And again, unworthy is the servant whom he shall find heedless. Beware therefore O my soul, do not be weighed down with sleep, lest you be given up to death, and lest you be shut out of the kingdom. But rouse yourself crying: holy, holy, holy are you our God.

**Extract 2.**  
**Parable of the 10 Virgins**  
Matt.25: 1-13

“The kingdom of heaven is comparable to ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were wise, and five were foolish. The foolish ones took their lamps, and took no oil with them; but the wise took oil with their lamps. As they were waiting for the bridegroom, they fell asleep. At midnight, a voice was heard crying: “The bridegroom is coming! Go to meet him!” The virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise ones, “give us some of your oil, our lamps have gone out”. The wise ones answered, “no, if we do that we will not have enough for ourselves. Go and buy some of your own”. So they left to go and buy some and, in their absence, the bridegroom came, and the wise virgins who were ready to meet him went in to the house with him, and the door was shut. The foolish virgins arrived and asked the bridegroom to open up, but he answered, “I do not know you”. So be watchful, because you do not know when the Son of man will come”.

**Extract 3.**  
**The Washing of the Feet (Niptir)**  
John 13:3-9

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a bowl and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” Jesus answered, “You do not understand now what I am doing, but later you will understand. Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet”. Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me”. Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”



*Icon of Christ washing the Disciples' feet*





*Icon of the Mystical Supper*

#### **HYMNS OF GREAT FRIDAY**

##### **Extract 4.**

Today, he who hung the earth  
upon the waters is hung upon a  
tree.

The King of angels is decked with  
a crown of thorns.

He who wraps the heavens in  
clouds is wrapped in the purple of  
mockery.

He who freed Adam in the Jordan  
is struck on the face.

The Bridegroom of the Church is  
affixed to the cross with nails.

The Son of the Virgin is pierced  
by a spear.

We worship your passion O  
Christ.

Show us also your glorious  
Resurrection.



*A Wood Carving of the Crucifixion*

##### **Extract 5.**

They have stripped me of my garments  
And have clothed me in a scarlet robe.

They have set upon my head a crown of thorns  
And have given me a reed in my right hand

*That I might smash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*

Extract 6.  
**HYMN OF GREAT SATURDAY**



Today Hell cries out groaning: "I should not have accepted the man born of Mary; He came and destroyed my power. He shattered the gates of brass; He has raised the souls which I had held captive". Glory to your Cross and Resurrection O Lord.

Today Hell cries out groaning: "My authority has been taken away; I received a mortal man as one of the dead; but I was powerless to contain Him; Because of Him I have lost those whom I ruled. For ages I had dominion over the dead, but behold, He raises all". Glory to your Cross and Resurrection O Lord.

*The Epitaphios (cloth depicting Christ in the tomb)*



Today Hell cries out groaning: "My power has been trampled on; the Shepherd has been crucified and Adam is raised. I have been deprived of those whom I ruled. Those whom I swallowed in my strength I have given up. He Who was crucified has opened the tombs. The power of death has been vanquished". Glory to your Cross and Resurrection O Lord.

Extract 7.

**EASTER SERMON OF ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM**

Is anyone devout and loves God, let them enjoy this fair and shining festival. Is anyone a grateful servant, let them enter the joy of his Lord. **Have any wearied themselves with fasting, let them now enjoy their payment. Has anyone laboured since the first hour, let them today receive their due. Did any come after the third hour, let them feast with gratitude. Did any arrive after the sixth hour, let them**



not hesitate: for there is no penalty. Did any delay until after the ninth hour, let them approach without hesitating. Did any arrive only for the eleventh hour, let them not fear because of their lateness: for the Lord is generous and receives the last as the first: he gives rest to the worker of the eleventh hour as to those of the first. He has pity on the latter, he cares for the former. He gives to the one, he is generous to the other. He accepts the work done, he welcomes the intention. He honours the achievement, he praises the purpose. Therefore all of you enter into the joy of our Lord: first and last, enjoy your reward. Rich and poor dance together. Sober and slothful honour the day. Fasters and non-fasters be glad today. The table is full, all of you enjoy yourselves. The calf is fatted, let none go away hungry. All of you enjoy the banquet of the faith. All of you enjoy the richness of his goodness. Let no one grieve at their poverty: for the kingdom of all has been revealed. Let no one bewail their faults: for forgiveness has risen from the tomb. Let no one fear death: for the Saviour's death has freed us. By enduring it he quenched it. He who descended into Hell has despoiled Hell. He embittered it when it tasted his flesh as Isaias proclaimed in prophecy, 'Death', he said, 'was embittered when it met you there below'. Embittered, for it was destroyed. Embittered, for it was mocked. Embittered, for it was slain. Embittered, for it was wiped out. Embittered, for it was bound fast. It received a body, and came face to face with God. It received earth, and met heaven. It received what it saw, and fell through what it did not see. **Where, Death, is your sting? Where Hell, is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are abolished! Christ is risen, and the demons have fallen! Christ is risen, and Angels rejoice! Christ is risen, and life has found freedom! Christ is risen, and there is no corpse in the grave! For Christ, being raised from the dead, has become the first fruits of those who sleep. To him be glory and might to the ages of ages. Amen.**

Extract 8.

## HYMN OF THE RESURRECTION

*The day of Resurrection; let us be radiant for the festival, and let us embrace one another. Let us say, brethren, even to those that hate us, 'Let us forgive all things on the Resurrection'.*

### ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE EVENTS OF HOLY WEEK

#### GREAT MONDAY

On Great Monday, we commemorate the noble Joseph and the Cursing and Withering of the Fruitless Fig Tree.

Bearing in mind what I said about Christ as the God of the Old Testament, now become a man in the New, it is only natural that the Church should draw our attention to the harmony between the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is shot through with prophecies and pre-figures of Christ. One such figure is the noble Joseph. He was one of the twelve sons of Jacob, who loved Joseph more than all his other sons. As a result, the other brothers envied and despised Joseph, but the straw that really broke the camel's back was one of Joseph's dreams, which he told to his brothers. In the dream, Joseph and his brothers were gathering wheat in the fields. They bound the sheaves of wheat into bundles and laid them on the ground. Joseph's bundle of wheat stood up and

the other ones bowed before him, suggesting that the other brothers will bow down and worship him. What this signifies is that from the line of Joseph will come the King and Messiah of the 12 Tribes of Israel (Christ) and all will bow down and worship Him as God. The brothers, of course, did not see it that way. They considered murdering him, but one of the brothers, called Judas, came up with the idea of selling him into slavery for 20 pieces of silver. The analogy here, I think, is quite obvious. Joseph as a Pre-figure of Christ is alluded to in a Gospel Reading according to which, as Christ is being arrested for trial, a man, wearing only a white cloth, runs away naked, leaving the cloth behind. This is clearly reminiscent of Joseph. Following his slavery, Joseph rose to be the servant of an Egyptian ruler, Potiphar. One day, Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him, but Joseph resisted. She grabbed hold of his garment, but Joseph ran away leaving the garment behind, and she accused Joseph of attacking her, and he was subsequently arrested and imprisoned on this false testimony. What we have here is an indication that Christ is innocent and is being unjustly arrested and punished and, moreover, it is an indication that all that is to happen to Christ, far from being an unexpected tragedy, was foretold long ago, and is 'meant to happen'.

As for the Cursing and Withering of the Fruitless Fig Tree, the Gospel tells us how Christ goes to eat from a fig tree and finds no fruit on it, so he withers it with a curse. This might seem like bizarre behaviour, but it is, of course, a symbolic action. According to the Synaxarion of Great Monday (the Synaxarion being the record of the Saints and Events of each day) ***"The Fig Tree is compared to the Synagogue of the Jews, devoid of spiritual fruits, and Christ withers it with a curse. Let us flee a similar fate"***. The comparison of people to trees and the theme of producing good fruit is very common in the Scriptures. But what is the meaning of producing good fruit? How are we, as the Synaxarion urges us, to "flee a similar fate"? To answer this, let us look at a hymn which we chant on Great Tuesday:

#### A HYMN FOR GREAT TUESDAY

**" Come O Faithful, let us work zealously for the Master, for He distributes wealth to His servants. Let each of us, according to his ability, increase his talent of Grace: Let one be adorned with wisdom through good works; let another celebrate a service in splendour; the one distributes his wealth to the poor; the other communicates the Word to those untaught. Thus, we shall increase what has been entrusted to us, and as faithful stewards of Grace, we shall be accounted worthy of the Master's joy. Make us worthy of this, O Christ our God, in your love for mankind "**

This hymn is based on the Parable of the Talents. According to this parable, a man, before going away, distributes his wealth to three of his servants, giving to each a different number of talents (talents being an old form of coinage). The man does not simply give them the money for safe-keeping. He expects the money to be returned with interest. If you will, he leaves them in charge of a profit-making business, so simply giving back what they started with would be considered very bad management. On the man's return, two servants give back double the amount that they were given, much to the man's delight. But the third servant buried his talent in the ground, and produced nothing, and so returns the talent much to the man's anger. In modern terms, you could say that two of the employees put the money into a high interest savings account and ended up with more money than they started with, while the third servant simply put his money in a safe and left it there. The talents represent God's gifts to us. Each person has



been given certain gifts, talents and opportunities and not in equal measure. Some have many talents and opportunities, others do not. Some are rich, some are poor. Some have had a good upbringing, others a bad one. Some are clever, others are as thick as two short planks. What matters is not which gifts and how many opportunities we have been given, but what we do with them. We are judged according to our measure. God does not expect us to all be the same. In fact, he values and delights in our differences and individual peculiarities more than we do. Yes, He ultimately asks the same things of all of us: love; repentance; faith, and the rest, but how we exercise these and how much varies from person to person. The key is to examine ourselves and our lives honestly, recognise what gifts and opportunities we have been given, develop them and offer them back to God in thanksgiving for the glory of His name and the benefit of our own souls and of others. Therefore, we ought not to judge others for doing seemingly less than ourselves, for they could be doing more with the little that they have been given than we are doing with the great amount that we have been given, nor should we look down on others who are not as gifted as we are. All gifts are God-given. We can claim no credit. What is important is that we make good of what we have been given.

### **GREAT WEDNESDAY** ***The Anointing at Bethany***

*Matt 26: 5-13*

**“ Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, “What a waste! This ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor”. But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why are you bothering the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her “.**

This penitent woman is a classic example of love and repentance. Having recognised Christ as her God and Redeemer, she honours and thanks Him with an act of loving devotion and sacrifice. It is not unlikely that the woman spent all she had to purchase this very expensive ointment. She approached Christ with contrition for her sins, but at the same time, with faith and confidence in God’s mercy and forgiveness. Furthermore, it was a prophetic act, since it was a Jewish custom to anoint the dead with oil: “By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial”.

Many of us often think in the same way as the Apostles did: Why waste time and money on religious devotion when we could be using them to help, say, the sick and the homeless? It is not a matter of doing one or the other. Both are fundamental to Christian life, but both ought to be done with the same love and profound humility of this penitent woman.

A hymn that we sing on Great Wednesday beautifully expresses the contrast between this woman’s repentance and recognition of the Saviour and the betrayal and downfall of the once glorious Apostle, Judas:

### **HYMN OF GREAT WEDNESDAY**

**“ As the sinful woman was bringing her offering of myrrh, the Disciple was scheming with lawless men. She rejoiced in pouring out her precious gift. He**

hastened to sell the Precious One. She recognised the Master, but Judas parted from Him. She was set free. But Judas was enslaved to the Enemy. How terrible his slothfulness! How great her repentance! O Saviour Who suffered for our sakes, grant us also repentance and save us ”.

### *The Euchelaion or Holy Unction*

Having commemorated Christ's anointing, it is fitting that we too should be anointed, and so, on Great Wednesday evening or, in some places, on Great Thursday morning, we have the service of the Euchelaion (Prayer of Oil). This is a wonderful sacrament of the Church for the healing of both physical and spiritual illness and for the forgiveness of sins. The oldest reference to this sacrament is found in the Epistle of St James (c47AD): **“Are any among you sick? They should call for the priests of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven”.** [James 5:14]. Unfortunately, the Euchelaion is a sacrament which has been almost forgotten by the Church and, in many places, this is the only time when the sacrament is performed, although it was designed for all cases of serious illness, both physical and spiritual, and as ‘the last rites’ before one's death. It is a very lengthy service, which is probably the main reason for its neglect, consisting, as it does, of 7 Epistle Readings, 7 Gospel Readings and 7 prayers.

### **THE SERVICE OF THE APOKATHILOSIS** ***(The Taking Down of Christ From The Cross)***

On Great Friday morning, we have the Service of the Royal Hours and the Service of the Apokathilosis. According to the Gospel, following Christ's Crucifixion, St Joseph of Arimathea, a Pharisee and secret follower of Jesus, goes to Pontius Pilate to request the body of Christ. He takes the body, wraps it in a cloth and buries it in a tomb. Therefore, at the Service of the Apokathilosis, the priest takes the figure of the Crucified down from the cross and wraps it in a white cloth and takes it behind the Sanctuary where the Altar sits. We are not to see the image of the Crucified for the next forty days. The Epitaphios is carried in procession and placed in the middle of the church. It is a shame that so many people choose to miss this beautiful Service, since it carries us visually from the Crucifixion on Thursday evening to the Descent into Hades on Friday evening.

