

The Holy week and Easter (Pascha)

Palm Sunday

On the Eve of the Feast, in the afternoon, the Patriarch of Jerusalem goes to the Temple in a procession, venerates the deposition shrine in the Holy Sepulchre and enters the Catholicon for Vespers. On Palm Sunday His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem goes to the Church of the Resurrection and in a ritual puts his liturgical vestments on in the centre of the Catholicon. After the end of the Divine Liturgy preceding the Patriarch of the Orthodox clergy, a litany is held inside the Temple, in which they rotate three times the Holy Sepulchre holding olive and palm tree branches in a glorious ceremony.

Holy Thursday

On Holy Thursday morning after the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great in the Cathedral of Saint James the Brother of God, the rite of the washing of the feet is celebrated on the court of the Church of the Resurrection, preceding His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who according to the ritual of the Church of Jerusalem, washes the feet of twelve Archimandrites in commemoration of the incident that in the Last Supper, the Lord put on a towel and washed the feet of His twelve disciples, setting an example of humility for them and for all of us. All faithful are gathered around the platform in the middle of the Holy Yard in order to watch the rite of the washing of the feet. In this Holy ritual, the relevant gospel narratives to the Last Supper and the washing of the feet of His disciples are read. On Holy Thursday evening the rite of the Passion is performed in the Holy Church of the Resurrection, officiated by His H.B. the Patriarch of Jerusalem in the contrite presence of a multitude of pilgrims.

Holy Friday

The Royal Hours of Holy Friday

Holy Friday is the very day of commemoration of the cruciform death of our Lord Jesus Christ for our sake, which is celebrated in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in genuine contrition and deep elate mourning fitting to Christians. On Holy Friday morning a holy procession with the participation of a multitude of pilgrims begins at Praetorium – the place of the unjust judgment of our Lord Jesus Christ by Pilate, heading through Via Dolorosa to the Horrendous Golgotha – the place of the cruciform sacrifice – where the Royal Hours of Holy Friday are read.

Vespers of the Deposition of Christ from the Cross

The Vespers of the Deposition of Christ from the Cross is celebrated in the Catholicon of the Church of the Resurrection. After the reading of the 9th Hour in the Holy Church of Saints Constantine and Helen, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem, wearing an engolpion and accompanied by the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, walks down the stairs of the Church of Saint James the Brother of God, and through the Horrendous Golgotha where he venerates the Cross, he enters the Catholicon of the Church of the Resurrection. The Deposition Vespers is celebrated there in all modesty, in which the Byzantine choir sings the devout deposition and burial of our Lord Jesus Christ troparion: *“When Joseph with Nicodemus took thee down from the tree, who art clothed with light as with a garment...”* At the end of Vespers, which belongs to the Established Rights of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, His Beatitude goes to the Patriarchate through the Christian path, accompanied by Hagiotaphite Fathers under the mournful tolling of the church bells.

The Epitaph Procession

Around 8.00 pm on Holy Friday evening, His Beatitude comes to the Most-Holy Church of the Resurrection with the Hagiotaphite entourage, the visiting Archbishops and Priests of the other Orthodox Churches and a multitude of devout pilgrims from various Orthodox countries as well as local people. There, initially in the Catholicon, they sing the Canon "*He who in ancient times hid the pursuing tyrant beneath the waves of the sea...*" until His Beatitude and the Archbishops wear their gold-brocaded mourning sacerdotal vestments. When they are clad in their Episcopal vestments, carrying small gospel books they perform a litany from the "Touch me not" shrine, through the chapels surrounding the Catholicon of the Church of the Resurrection, "*The stolen*", of Saint Longinus the Centurion, the "*They parted my raiment among them*", the "*Crown of thorns*", of "*Adam*", and ascend to the Horrendous Golgotha, where His Beatitude and the Archbishops carry the heletarion of the Holy Epitaph. This they place on the Holy Table of the Horrendous Golgotha and venerate it after the Gospel reading. Following this they go down to the Deposition shrine and place on the slab the Epitaph depicting the body of our Lord Jesus Christ covered in flowers.

After the Deposition shrine the litany heads towards the Holy Sepulchre, which they rotate three times. After the third rotation the Epitaph is enshrined on the Holy Sepulchre stone, they sing the three parts of the Lamentations followed by the Eulogitaria.

These theological hymns of the Orthodox Church, sung in genuine Byzantine music, create feelings of joy and contrition to the souls of the many pilgrims, together with an increased desire for their own participation in the cross, the burial and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

After the "*Praises*" and the *Doxology*, the Epitaph Procession concludes in the Catholicon of the Church of the Resurrection, where the Prophecies, the Apostle and Gospel are read, followed by His Beatitude's blessing and dismissal of the

people. Henceforth the Temple is left on the hands of the Hagiotaphite Templar Fathers to make the preparations for the Holy Saturday ceremony of the Holy Light.

Holy Saturday

Early on Holy Saturday morning, one can observe an unusual traffic in the Old City streets, especially around the Christian quarter near the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Church of the Resurrection.

Pilgrims of all ages and nationalities merge to one central destination, the Most-Holy Church of the Resurrection. Reaching the barricades set by the police, the pilgrims are steadily thronged. Some wait in front of the barricades until the Church gate opens, while others who manage to pass by the police checks attend the Holy Saturday Divine Liturgy in the nearby monasteries of Saints Theodoroi, Panagia Seyda Maya, Saint Catherine, Saint Panteleimon etc. Holy Saturday is known in the local language as the "Saturday of Light", "Sabt elnour" in Arabic and "Siabat Ha-Or" in Hebrew. Meanwhile His H.B. the Patriarch of Jerusalem and all Palestine receives Delegates from the Orthodox churches all over the world who come especially to transport the Holy Light to their countries. At noon the Patriarch leaves the Patriarchate and through the stairs of Saint James Cathedral he walks down to the Holy Church of the Resurrection. From the Deposition shrine he walks to the right and enters the Holy Bema of the Catholicon through the door of the right choir; Delegates of the Armenians, the Syrians and the Copts arrive to receive the blessing of touching the Holy Light. Afterwards the Patriarch puts on his patriarchal vestments before the Holy Table of the Catholicon, and proceeds in the thrice rotation of the Holy Sepulchre, having blessed the entrance from the Catholicon. In front of the Holy Sepulchre he takes off his patriarchal vestments and enters the Holy Aedicule wearing only a white stoicharion and petrahilion. Upon entering the Holy Aedicule on his own, His Beatitude reads the established prayer of the

Holy Light, which he then offers to the thousands of impatient pilgrims to receive in their candles. Under loud bell-tolling and hailing voices, the pilgrims carry the Holy Light in faith, certainty, hope, joy, bliss. Holding the lit candle stacks, His Beatitude leaves the Holy Aedicule and enters the Holy Bema and the Sacristy. Henceforth, with the Fathers and the Greek Delegates' entourage he walks to the Patriarchate under the cheerful peal of bells and unspeakable joy.

The Resurrection Night

The Feast of the Resurrection starts on Holy Saturday morning with the Vespers and the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great, and is completed on Resurrection night in the Most-Holy Church of the Resurrection with the Divine Liturgy in the Life-giving Holy Aedicule, where our Lord was buried and Risen from the dead. The Liturgy is celebrated by His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem with co-celebrants Archbishops of the Patriarchate, many Hagiotaphite Priests, and visiting Priests of other Orthodox Churches, and the participation of a multitude of Orthodox Christians from Greece, Cyprus, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria and other countries.

The Divine Liturgy and the participation in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is indeed a strong experience of the Cross and the Resurrection of the Lord, as well as an undeniable union with His immaculate Body and Sacred Blood. With this event the presence of the Orthodox Church in the Holy Land is displayed in meekness.

The Vespers of Agape (Vespers of Love)

The Vespers of Agape or "Second Resurrection" is celebrated on Sunday morning. Hagiotaphite Fathers gather in the Patriarchate where after embracing each other, they put on their Episcopal and Liturgical vestments and read in turns the Paschal 9th Hour, while the choir sings "*Christ is Risen*" and "*Resurrection Day*". Consequently the glorious and formal

litany begins in a procession with the Holy Icon of the Resurrection, preceding H.B. the Patriarch of Jerusalem, marching from the Patriarchate towards the Church of the Resurrection amidst a great crowd of joyful Christians and representatives of the Greek and local press. At the Church they make a Deisis (prayer) and they enter the Catholicon having first venerated the Deposition shrine and the Holy Sepulchre. At Vespers they read the Gospel narrative according to John, on the Lord's appearance to His disciples while the doors were closed, on the first Day of His Resurrection, when He also showed them his side in the absence of Apostle Thomas. With this ceremony the circle of the feasts of the Holy Week is completed and the circle of the Pascha (Easter) Feast begins in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.