



An Order for
A PASCHAL FEAST

To be Celebrated by Christians at Home

THE FIRST PREPARATIONS

The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come.

SONG OF SONGS 2:12

IN THE DAYS just before the celebration of our Lord's glorious Resurrection we make our preparations in eager anticipation. We prepare the **Paschal Lamb**, boil and dye our **eggs**, bake our **sweet breads**, make or procure our **cheeses**, and gather and prepare any other festal foods we might desire.

If there are any **flowers** readily available outdoors, or **shapely branches** with leaf buds, or **beautiful dry grasses**, then we'll go and gather some of those and craft them into garlands, or place them in vases, and lay them aside in readiness. But if nothing is available outside, we'll get the most beautiful flowers we can find at the store—even just a bouquet or two will do. These will be the **Paschal Boughs**.

Whatever **clothing** or **linens** we want to use on Pascha, we clean those and carefully press them, laying them aside to be ready for the night. We dress as we would for a wedding, or even finer—for indeed, our celebration is a foretaste of that great wedding feast of the Lamb which is to come.

BEFORE THE SERVICE

THE FESTIVE CLOTHES

ON THE EVE of our Lord's Passover from death to life—the night on which Adam's old, worn-out garment of corruption was cast off by Christ, and Adam was clothed anew in the glory of incorruption—we all, young and old, put on our **finest clothing** and lay upon the table the **Paschal Cloth**—a white tablecloth, or simply our finest large piece of fabric of any bright color. Before we dress and lay the tablecloth, though, we bring our garments and tablecloth forward in front of our icons (or an image of the Lord's precious Cross), and one of us reads aloud the following verses from the **BOOK OF PSALMS**:

LORD, BY THY WILL thou gavest strength to my beauty; thou didst hide thy countenance and I was troubled. I shall cry out to thee, O Lord, to the Lord I shall make supplication: What profit is there in my blood when I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise thee? Will it declare thy truth? The Lord heard and had mercy on me, the Lord became my helper. Thou hast turned my lamentation to joy, tearing up my sackcloth and clothing me in gladness that my glory may sing praise to thee, that I not be stunned with sadness. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to thee forever. [Ps. 29: 7–12]

Then, in a spirit of gratitude, we immediately add the following **PRAYER OF THE FESTIVE CLOTHES**:

I THANK THEE, my Lord Jesus Christ, for this bodily clothing, and I pray that I may be clothed in thee. May I make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof, but rather grant that, with the currency of faith and virtue, I may buy from thee a garment of salvation, pure and white as a lily of the field, with which to clothe myself at thy wedding feast, O Lamb whose blood washes away my sins. [*Orthodox Christian Prayers*, 104]

After having prayed thus, the head of the household makes the sign of the Cross over everyone's clothing and over the Paschal Cloth (using a hand-cross, if possible), and then, having set our clothes aside for a moment, we together lay the Paschal Cloth upon the table, while someone recites the following verse from the **BOOK OF NUMBERS**:

AND UPON THE TABLE they shall spread a cloth, and put thereon the dishes, and the spoons, and the bowls, and covers to cover withal: and the continual bread shall be thereon. [NUM. 4:7]

Then we all take our clothing and repair to our rooms to dress for the approaching feast.

THE PASCHAL BOUGHS

AFTER EVERYONE HAS DRESSED, and any children who need help with their hair or clothing have been taken care of, we gather again to decorate the house and table with the Paschal Boughs. We might place flowers and branches about the house and in front of our icons, but we reserve the finest of the boughs for the center of the table. As we place the Paschal Boughs on the table, one of us reads the following verses from the **BOOK OF LEVITICUS**:

AND YE SHALL TAKE on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. [LEV. 23:40]

THE TABLE

HAVING PLACED the boughs, we begin setting the table. If Holy Water is available, the oldest member of the family places a comely vessel of this on the table first. Then we proceed to set places for each member of the family and each guest, using the finest service we have. We set as many **candlesticks** on the table as we have, and place candles in them, but leave them unlit.

We also set all of our Paschal **food** out in readiness, except for the Paschal Lamb, which we set to the side (or in the refrigerator, or in the oven). As the table is being set, one member of the family reads the following passage from the **GOSPEL OF MARK:**

AND ON THE FIRST DAY of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, the disciples said unto Christ, "Where wilt thou have us go and prepare for thee to eat the Passover?" And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover. [MARK 14: 12-16]

Once the table is set and the food laid out, we place an **image of the Savior** (or a cross, or a crucifix) on a stand beside the Paschal Boughs (or leaning against the boughs), and we set a single **votive light** in front of it. Then as Joseph of Arimathea wrapped the body of our Lord with a fine linen, we cover the image of the Savior with a cloth, while someone reads another passage from the **GOSPEL OF MARK:**

NOW WHEN EVENING HAD COME, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. And

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where He was laid. [MARK 15: 42-47]

Then we sing the hymn *The Noble Joseph* (See Appendix).

INCENSE & BELLS

AFTER EVERYTHING is ready—the table set, the food laid out, the votive lamp lit, and the image of the Savior covered with a cloth—we light charcoal in a hand censer and put incense on it. As we do this, one of us reads the following verse from the **BOOK OF REVELATION**:

AND ANOTHER ANGEL came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. [REV. 8: 3-4]

With the incense burning, we all light **candles** and **extinguish every other light** in the house. Then we walk around the house, ringing whatever **bells** we have and singing the hymn *Thy Resurrection, O Christ our Savior* (See Appendix). After doing all this, we go to church to attend the **Paschal Service**. (If, for some reason, however, it proves impossible to attend church, we suggest reading, in our abridged form, St. Romanos' Kontakion, *On the Resurrection VI*. This may be found in the Appendix, in a lovely translation by Marjorie Carpenter.)

AFTER THE SERVICE

THE LIGHTING THE LAMPS

HAVING TASTED the fountain of immortality, having bathed in the light of our Lord's ineffable glory, having beheld the Resurrection of Christ, we return home in joy. Everyone is exhausted, but at the same time overflowing with mysterious life. Perhaps we'll sleep for several hours, but when we're ready and sufficiently refreshed, we gather again at the festive table and the head of the household reads following passage from the **BOOK OF PSALMS**:

WHERE COULD I GO from thy Spirit? Where flee from thy countenance? If I rise up to heaven, thou art there, if I go down to Hades, thou art there. Were I to spread out my wings and fly straight to the dawn, taking up home in the sea's farthest reach, even there shall thy hand lead me, thy right hand shall hold fast to me. I thought darkness would surely kill me, but to my delight even the night shall shine, for darkness shall never be dark with thee, the night shall be bright as day, darkness and light one and the same. [Ps. 138: 7–12]

As this is being read, we **unveil the image** of the Savior that we had covered earlier, and proceed to **light all the candles** on the table using the flame from the votive lamp. Once the candles are lit and the reading is finished, we sing three times the **Troparion of Pascha**, *Christ is risen from the dead* (See Appendix).

THE MEAL

BEFORE any other food is eaten, we drink **Holy Water** we first set out (if any is available), while one of us recites the following verse from the **FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS**:

I DO NOT WANT YOU to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank

from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.
[1 COR. 10: 1-4]

Then the **wine** is opened and poured out, and the head of the household, raising his or her glass aloft, says the **PRAYER OF THE WINE**, after which all of us drink:

O LORD OUR GOD, who at Cana in Galilee didst manifest thy glory by transforming water into wine for those keeping feast, we entreat thee: always be with us in our weeping and in our laughter, in sorrow and in joy, in every thought and every word; and direct our every deed all the days of our life. Preserve us all in peace, so that in the next year, if thou shalt not yet have come again in glory and majesty, we may all be found worthy to celebrate once more this great and glorious feast of thy holy Resurrection.

After having drunk to the Lord's Resurrection, we all take up a **dyed egg**, and the youngest member of the party (who is able to read) recites the following **PRAYER OF THE EGGS AND CHEESE**:

O MASTER, LORD OUR GOD, Creator and Fashioner of all things: through the prayers of our holy fathers, do thou bless this curdled milk and also these eggs, and preserve us in thy goodness, so that, partaking of them, we may be filled with thy gifts, ungrudgingly bestowed, and with thine ineffable goodness. For thine is the might, and thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

After the prayer, everyone cracks their egg against the egg of their neighbor, and then peels and eats the egg. We also begin to eat any **cheeses** that might be on the table, along with any **sweet breads**. While everyone is eating their eggs and cheeses and bread, the head of the household takes the image of the Savior from the center of the table and places it carefully in its usual place. Then he or she goes to get the **Paschal Lamb** from where it had been set earlier, and places it in the center of the table where the image had been. When the Lamb is set on the

table, we all rise and the head of the household reads the following **PRAYER OF THE PASCHAL LAMB:**

O LORD JESUS CHRIST OUR GOD, look down upon this flesh meat and sanctify it, as thou didst sanctify the ram which faithful Abraham brought unto thee, and the lamb which Abel offered unto thee as a whole-burnt offering, and likewise also the fatted calf which thou didst command to be slain for thy prodigal son when he returned again to thee: that as he was counted worthy to delight in thy good things, so we might also delight in those things that are sanctified and blessed by thee for the nourishment of us all. For thou art the true Nourishment and the Giver of good things, and unto thee do we send up glory, together with thy Father, who is without beginning, and thine all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. [HIERATIKON VOL. 2, 284–285]

Everyone responds: “**Amen.**” Then the youngest person of the house says three times, in a loud voice, “**Christ is risen!**” and all respond each time, “**Indeed He is risen!**” The Lamb is then cut and served, and everyone eats and drinks to their heart’s content. After we have eaten our fill, we follow the meal with the singing of hymns and carols, dancing, games, and a hunt for easter candy.

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with guidance & assistance from:

HIS GRACE, BISHOP ALEXIS OF BETHESDA

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