

The "Winter Pascha"

Introduction by Father Thomas Hopko

Taken from the book: *The Winter Pascha* (SVS Press)

The liturgical services for Christmas, officially called The Nativity According to the Flesh of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, are consciously patterned after the services for the festival of the Pascha of the Lord, the holy Resurrection. There is a forty-day fast. There are prefeast preparations. There are the special royal hours with their prophecies, epistles, gospels, and hymns on the eve of the feast, followed by the vespereal liturgy of St. Basil the Great. There is the solemn all-night vigil, crowned by the matin's canon and hymns. And finally, after the Eucharistic Celebration of St. John Chrysostom on the day of the feast itself, the celebration continues to its completion in the festival of The Meeting of the Lord in the Temple forty days later. At the center of the festal season remains the original "Festival of Light," the holy Epiphany, officially called in the Orthodox Church: The Holy Theophany of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ.

The liturgical verses and hymns for Christmas and Epiphany, the Pascha of Christ's incarnation and manifestation in the flesh, repeat those of Easter, the Pascha of Christ's death and resurrection. The Lord's birth and baptism are directly connected to His dying and rising. He was born in order to die. He was baptized in order to be raised.

Nativity/Theophany

Today, He who holds the whole creation in His hand is born of a virgin.

He whose essence none can touch is bound in swaddling-clothes as a mortal man.

God who in the beginning fashioned the heavens lies in a manger.

He who rained manna on His people in the wilderness is fed on milk from His mother's breast.

The Bridegroom of the Church summons the wise men.

The Son of the Virgin accepts their gifts.

We worship Thy Nativity, O Christ!
We worship Thy Nativity, O Christ!
We worship Thy Nativity, O Christ!

Show us also Thy glorious Theophany!

Pascha

Today, He who hung the earth upon the waters is hung upon the tree.

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

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

He who freed Adam in the Jordan is slapped in the face.

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

The Son of the Virgin is pierced with a spear.

We worship Thy Passion, O Christ!
We worship Thy Passion, O Christ!
We worship Thy Passion, O Christ!

Show us also Thy glorious Resurrection!

Jesus lay as an infant in the cavern in the reign of Caesar Augustus that He might lay in the tomb under Pontius Pilate. He was hounded by Herod that He might be caught by Caiaphas. He was buried in baptism that He might descend into death through the Cross. He was worshipped by wise men that the whole of creation might adore Him in His triumph over death.

The Pascha of His Cross was prepared by the Pascha of His Coming. The Pascha of His Resurrection was begun by the Pascha of His Incarnation. The Pascha of His Glorification was foretold by the Pascha of His Baptism. This is what Christians celebrate each year in what Father Alexander Schmemmann was the first to call "the Winter Pascha."