

PASCHA 2012

THE MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN, AT THE BREAK OF DAWN, DREW NEAR TO THE TOMB OF THE LIFE-GIVER. THERE THEY FOUND AN ANGEL SITTING UPON THE STONE. HE GREETED THEM WITH THESE WORDS: WHY DO YOU SEEK THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD? WHY DO YOU MOURN THE INCORRUPT AMID CORRUPTION? GO, PROCLAIM THE GLAD TIDINGS TO HIS DISCIPLES. (PASCHAL STICHERA)

To the Venerable Pastors, God-loving Monastics and Devout Faithful of the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania:

Christ is Risen!

When the Myrrh-bearing women arrived early in the morning to the burial site of their Lord and Master, they approached with fear and uncertainty, looking to anoint the One who had recently been laid in the sepulcher. Instead, they found an empty tomb and were greeted with the astounding words of the Angel. What power those brief words must have held for them and what joy must have filled their hearts! They came expecting death and found life; they came in fear and trembling and were given joy.

Christ, the Life-Giver, has triumphed over the law of death and this victory belongs to all of humanity. It is truly a universal victory, which the Angel indicated by sending the Women to announce the good news to the Disciples. By this action, the Angel was, in fact, telling the women to announce to the entire world that death has been overcome by the power of God and that Divine Love now has dominion over all.

With each passing year the Holy Orthodox Church bears witness to this universal reality through her Paschal shout of "Christ is Risen!" In our paschal liturgical celebrations, we perpetuate the original proclamation to the Myrrh-bearing Women. They shared it with the Disciples, and the Disciples, in turn, carried the news to the entire world. It is now our turn to share with the world, not only this message, but the reality of our own rebirth into eternal life through Jesus Christ.

The Savior came into the world, suffered, was crucified and buried, and now has risen from the tomb in order that each person might have the chance to pass through this experience of the Cross and the Empty Tomb. St. Paul speaks clearly of this: *God... will also raise us up by his own power* (1 Cor. 6:14). Orthodox Christians in all generations have faced many challenges and our generation is no different. The Myrrh-bearing Women remind us that our faith is not in the power of death but in the power of the sacrificial life of Christ. That is why the feast of Pascha is the feast of the victory of life over death, for through the resurrection of Christ the Savior, resurrection from the dead has been granted to us all. And through the power of the Resurrection we become luminaries bringing light and life to the darkest regions of despair.

As we celebrate together this most glorious feast, I greet all of you with the Paschal embrace of hope and peace and I pray that you and your loved ones will be filled with the joy received by the Women at the Tomb.

Sincerely Yours in the Risen Lord,

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Bishop of Philadelphia
Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania