



# Holy Ascension Russian Orthodox Church

Address: 714 — 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

Rector: Archpriest Paul Volmensky

Telephone: (916) 443-2271. FAX (916) 443-5079

e-mail: frpaul@lanset.com

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## Christ is Risen!

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

Pascha draws us toward our God and His unending Day in various ways and through varying degrees.

The reality of Who God is is revealed to us in stages. For example, through our birth into this world we come to know God as our Creator. Through our spiritual rebirth, our Baptism, we come to know God as our Father. And, through our participation in the Sacrament of Holy Communion we come to know God as our Bridegroom.

We find these truths expressed in the Paschal Canon that is sung on the first day of the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ and throughout this festal season.

God our Creator is praised and glorified: *“Let the heavens be glad as is meet, and let the earth rejoice, and let the whole world, both visible and invisible, keep festival: for Christ is risen, O gladness eternal”* ( Paschal Canon, Ode I). Blessed is he who can proclaim these words with all his heart, who has the capacity to rejoice in God’s wisdom and creation, who can thank the Giver of Life for bringing him from non-existence into being.

A believing and repentant man moves from biological life to spiritual life through the reception of Baptism. *“O Father Almighty, and Word, and Spirit, one Nature united in three Persons, transcendent and most divine! Into Thee have we been baptized, and Thee will we bless unto all ages”* (Paschal Canon, Ode VIII). Being Baptized unto Christ, the aforesaid prodigal has put on Christ. Since the Father and the Son are singular in Nature has not the Father fallen upon him with His loving and divine embrace? Yes, now his soul is arrayed in a garment of the Holy Spirit which has been woven invisibly from the waters of the font. Now he wears the Father’s ring, a symbol terrifying to every foe. Now his feet are shod with spiritual shoes which protect him from the gnashing of the serpent and enable him to trample upon its head. Now he partakes of the Father’s prized Feast, Who is His Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, known also as the Bridegroom.

*“Bearing lights (of grace like the five wise virgins in the Gospel parable), let us approach Christ, Who cometh forth from the tomb like a Bridegroom,*

*and with the feast loving ranks of Angels, let us celebrate the saving Pascha of God (Paschal Canon, Ode V). Through worthy participation in the Eucharist the soul feels with all certainty that Christ is its Bridegroom and that it has found Paradise.*

Yet, beloved brothers and sisters, what is the context of this pure and chaste Union? Did not our Redeemer first offer His Holy Gifts in the company of His betrayer and on the eve of His Divine Passion? And was it not the High-priestly hands, so used to offering sacrifices that orchestrated the slaying of the *“living and unslain Sacrifice”*, Who of His Own will offered Himself up unto the Father (Paschal Canon, Ode VI)?

The Teachers of the Church instruct us that prayer not accompanied by bodily discomfort and anguish of soul is barren. Let us apply this principle when addressing the above questions concerning the Eucharist as well.

In it we will find the meaning of Christ’s words: *“But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom”* (Matt.26:29). And: *“I go to prepare a place for you”* (Jn. 14:2). *“At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and you in Me, and I in you”* (20). And He says again: *“Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou hast loved Me before that foundation of the world”* (Jn. 17:24)

And so on this radiant and saving night, though totally overwhelmed by the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of this world, Who cleanses, sanctifies, enlightens, purges, reconciles and deifies His humble and unworthy servants, we are aware that there is another, more glorious Day awaiting those who possess faith and patience in their hope.

*“O great and most sacred Pascha, Christ! O Wisdom and Word of God and Power! Grant us more perfectly to partake of Thee, in the unwaning day of Thy Kingdom”* (Paschal Canon, Ode IX) .

Archpriest Paul Volmensky  
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