

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF PASCHA
Sunday of the Myrrh Bearing Women
21 April / 4 May 2025

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! Amen!

Во имя Отца и Сына и Святого Духа! Аминь!

Epistle: Acts 6:1-7

This morning's Epistle reading comes to us from the Acts of the Apostles attributed to St Luke. *The Orthodox Study Bible* (p. 1468) describes it as "a spiritual and theological record" of the growth of the early Church. As the community grew, its needs became more complex. This morning's reading concerns a dispute between Aramaic and Greek speaking members of the congregation concerning what was assumed to be the neglect of the widows of Greek members. As the congregation continued to grow larger, the Twelve Apostles realized that more people were needed to attend to the needs of the Church. How was this problem solved? The apostles called a meeting and said this: "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." The Apostles would continue to attend to dedicate their labours to matters of faith but seven assistants would be chosen to attend to other matters of importance. Who were the seven? Luke tells us! Stephen, described as "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit", Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and "a proselyte from Antioch." The Apostles prayed for the seven helpers and presented them to the congregation. Problem solved! St Luke writes that as a result of this helpful, sympathetic and sensible act, "...the word of God spread..." and the number of members in the congregation grew more and more!

GLORY TO GOD!

Gospel: Mark 15:43-16:8

It is St Mark who provides us with this morning's Gospel reading, which may be divided into two sections. The first concerns the burial of Jesus after the Crucifixion. Joseph of Arimathea – "the noble Joseph – described as "a prominent council member" and "who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God", goes to Pontius Pilate, prefect of Judea, and pleads for permission to obtain the body of Jesus after the Crucifixion. St Mark writes that Pilate "marvelled" when he learned of the death of Jesus. Evidently Pilate had forgotten about this matter, and had to ask a centurion – a Roman officer – to confirm that Jesus was indeed dead! When the centurion confirmed the death of Jesus, Pilate granted Joseph of Arimathea with permission to remove the body. Joseph of Arimathea bought "fine linen" to wrap the body, and had it taken to a rock cut tomb. Here we remind ourselves of another similar tomb – the tomb from which Jesus raised Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, from the dead. Joseph of Arimathea has the body of Jesus placed within the tomb, the door of which is then sealed with "a stone"! St Mark then switches his narrative to write of Mary Magdalene, "Mary the mother of James" and Salome who have come to the tomb after the Sabbath with the intention of anointing the body of Jesus. When they

arrive at the tomb, however, they find that the massive stone used to seal the tomb has been moved! In fact, St Mark writes of the stone that “it was very large”! They enter the tomb! Jesus is not there! Where is He? St Mark writes that “a young man clothed in a long white robe” tells the two Marys and Salome that Jesus is not there! Not surprisingly, the three women are alarmed but they are calmed by the stranger – an angel – who speaks to them saying “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples – and Peter – that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.” The three women rejoice! St Mark writes this: “So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, This morning’s Epistle is radically different from this morning’s Gospel. The Epistle describes a rapidly growing Christian community. The Gospel, however, refers specifically to events which occurred immediately after the Crucifixion. There must have been an oppressive sense of fear in the air, and yet Joseph of Arimathea has the courage to ask Pontius Pilate for permission to carry away the body of Jesus. We are not told why Pilate permits this! Was it a matter of indifference? Pilate has to ask a centurion to confirm the death of Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea is assisted by an associate, a Pharisee named Nicodemus. The apostles of Jesus are not mentioned, their absence possibly due to fear of arrest. Their absence is in contrast to the strength and faith of the Myrrh-bearing women, some of whom stood near the cross during His crucifixion and others who thought to anoint His body in the tomb in which He was to be buried. Instead, they found that Jesus had risen from the dead and was no longer in the rock-cut tomb. It was myrrh that these women brought with them, a costly tree grown resin used for certain forms of medicine, incense and anointing. It was myrrh that was one of the symbolic gifts presented to the infant Jesus at the time of His birth. Today, the Third Sunday of Pascha is dedicated to the memory of the Myrrh-Bearing Women! Who were they? They include collectively Mary Magdalene; Mary the wife of Cleopas; Joanna; Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee; Susanna; Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus; and Mary, the mother of St James the apostle. The Gospel of St Mark, however, refers only to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James; and Salome in its description of the empty tomb. The dominant themes in both this morning’s Epistle and Gospel are faith, redemption and love! Christ came into the world to save us, and again, it is the glory of the Resurrection, the triumph of divine love that is proclaimed to all of us here this morning!

GLORY TO GOD!

CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE TOMB TRAMPLING DOWN DEATH BY
DEATH AND UPON THOSE IN THE TOMBS BESTOWING LIFE!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! Amen!

Во имя Отца и Сына и Святого Духа! Аминь!