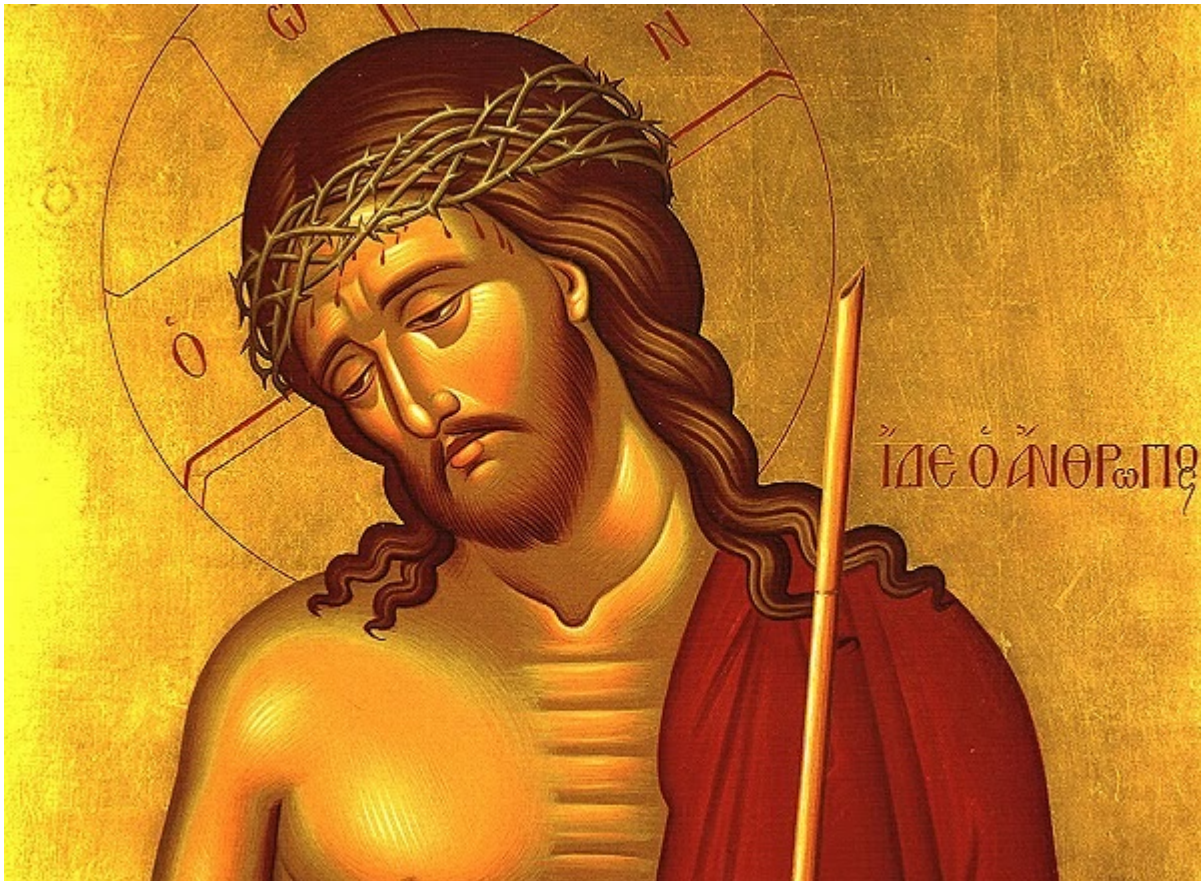


Bridegroom Services

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On the days following His entry to Jerusalem, Christ spoke to His disciples in particular about the signs that will precede the Last Day (Matt. 24 and 25); and so this forms the theme of the first part of Holy Week. In Western worship, on the other hand, the 'last things' are commemorated mainly during the pre-Christmas season of Advent. The eschatological challenge of the first three days of Holy Week is summed up in the troparion and exapostilarion at Matins+, both of which are repeated three times to a slow and solemn melody. The troparion, 'Behold, the Bridegroom comes in the middle of the night...', is based on the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13); the exapostilarion, 'I see Thy bridal chamber...', on the parable of the man cast out from the feast because he had no wedding garment (Matt. 22:11-13). Here, presented in especially urgent terms, is the call that we have heard on many occasions during Lent: the End is near at hand; be watchful; repent while there is still time.



Each of the three days has its own particular theme:

(i) On Monday we commemorate the Patriarch Joseph, whose innocent sufferings (Genesis, chapters 37 and 39-40) prefigure the Passion of Christ. Also we commemorate the barren fig tree cursed by our Lord (Matt. 21:18-20) – a symbol of the judgement that will befall those who show no fruits of repentance; a symbol, more specifically, of the unbelieving Jewish synagogue.

(ii) On Tuesday the liturgical texts refer chiefly to the parable of the Ten Virgins, which forms the general theme of these three days. They refer also to the parable of the Talents that comes immediately after it (Matt. 25:14-30). Both these are interpreted as parables of judgement.

(iii) On Wednesday we commemorate the woman that was a sinner, who anointed Christ's feet as He sat in the house of Simon. In the hymnography of the day, the account in Matthew 26:6-13 is combined with that in Luke 7:36-50 (cf. also John 12:1-8). A second theme is the agreement made by Judas with the Jewish authorities: the repentance of the sinful harlot is contrasted with the tragic fall of the chosen disciple. The Triodion makes it clear that Judas perished, not simply because he betrayed his Master, but because, having fallen into the sin of betrayal, he then refused to believe in the possibility of forgiveness: 'In misery he lost his

life, preferring a noose rather than repentance.’* If we deplore the actions of Judas, we do so not with vindictive self-righteousness but conscious always of our own guilt: ‘Deliver our souls, O Lord, from the condemnation that was his.’** In general, all the passages in the Triodion that seem to be directed against the Jews should be understood in this same way. When the Triodion denounces those who rejected Christ and delivered Him to death, we recognize that these words apply not only to others, but to ourselves: for have we not betrayed the Saviour many times in our hearts and crucified Him afresh?

On the evening of Holy Wednesday the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is usually celebrated in church and all are anointed, whether physically ill or not; for there is no sharp line of demarcation between bodily and spiritual sicknesses, and this sacrament confers not only bodily healing but forgiveness of sins, thus serving as a preparation for the reception of Holy Communion on the next day.

+In modern practice Matins are usually moved forward or ‘anticipated,’ being held on the previous evening.

***Compline for Holy Wednesday.**

****Matins for Holy Tuesday.**

Source: gometropolis.org