



*Icon of Apocalypse as envisioned by St. John in the Holy Book of Revelation*

## **Background**

The word apocalypse in Greek means "revelation". The night of Great Friday is called the Night of Apocalypse because it is on this night that we read the entire Holy Book of Revelation. On this night we celebrate the descent of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into the pit of Hades to restore all those who died on the hope of the resurrection to Paradise. The church gathers around the tomb of the Lord Jesus Christ the whole night in prayers and rituals.

This special night is begun with the opening of the altar curtain, which symbolizes when Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ opened the gates of Paradise on the great Friday. The Night of Apocalypse is divided into eight major parts: Midnight Praises, Prayer of Prime Hour, Morning Raising of Incense, Prayers of the Third and Sixth Hours, Revelation, Prayers of the Ninth Hour, the Divine Liturgy, and the Prayers of the Eleventh Hour.

## **Midnight Praises**

The Midnight Praises on the Night of Apocalypse are expanded to include all the praises of the prophets of the Old Testament. The night begins with the

reading of the Holy Book of Psalm 151, "*I am the youngest of my brethren...*" Although this Holy Psalm is about David, the words of the Holy Psalm also apply to Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For example, like David...Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was not from the tribe of Levi, which is the tribe of the priesthood, like David He was a shepherd who tended the flock of the Father, His Father's sheep. He fought Satan...David's Goliath, He used the sword of the Lord... the cross to defeat Satan, and He took away disgrace...sin from His people. The reading of the Holy Psalm 151 is a continuation of Great Friday when all 150 Holy Psalms are read during burial in the 12th Hour while chanting Golgotha.

In this night, there are three processions which are symbolic of:

1. the joy and happiness of entering Paradise
2. Preaching to the world that the gates of Paradise have been opened, and
3. Saints departing from Hades and entering Paradise.

The number three in the processions symbolizes that the Lord rose from the dead on the third day.

All the praises from the Old Testament are then read and sung. These praises come from the prophets and persons of the Old Testament like Moses, Hannah, Jonah, Manasseh, Isaiah, Daniel, Hezekiah, Elijah, David, and the Three Young Men. These praises are significant in that they speak of one specific topic: the salvation of the Lord. These prophets and Old Testament figures did not see the salvation, but looked upon it from afar.

The reading of these praises is also symbolic of the fact that the prophecies regarding salvation have now been fulfilled. During these praises, there are deacons who chant from within the altar and there are other deacons who chant from outside of the altar. The deacons chanting from within are symbolic of the Saints who entered Paradise and those who stand outside represent the congregation, the people in the church participating with the Saints in praising God.

The story of Susannah the Virtuous is then read from the Holy Book of Daniel. In the story, two elders, who wanted to commit sin with her, of adultery, wrongfully accuse Susannah. The people then believing the words of the elders sought to kill her. Daniel being moved by the Spirit of God speaks with the elders separately and reveals to the people who would condemn Susannah that the elders bear false

witness against her and Daniel then reveals the truth.

This story is symbolic of the death of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by false witnesses and how He rose from the dead after that, much like Susannah was to face death from the false witness of the elders but she was brought back to life. In this way, Susannah is symbolic of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Also as Daniel saved Susannah from death, so also the Lord Jesus Christ saved us from the sentence of death.

## **Raising of Incense**

During the Raising of Incense the Holy Psalm is read half in Paschal Tune and half in the Annual Tune. The people on the earth, like the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ were not aware that the gates of Paradise had been opened, which is why the first half is said in Paschal Tune. The second half of the Holy Psalm, which is said in the Annual Tune, is symbolic of the saints who entered Paradise and were joyful. This represents the transition between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

## **The Holy Book of Revelation**

After the Raising of the Incense, the Third and Sixth Hours are prayed according to the rituals of that

night. After the Third and Sixth Hours Prayers have been read, the church begins to read the Holy Book of Revelation. The Holy Book of Revelation is read on Night of the Apocalypse because the Holy Book of Revelation refers to the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ; the Church.

In the Holy Gospel of St. John, St. John calls Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ the "*bridegroom*" (John 3:29) and in the Holy Book of Revelation 21:9 St. John refers to the "*bride*" of the Lord Jesus Christ; the church...and tells St. John..."*Come I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.*" Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross and descended into Hades to get his bride, the saints and then opened the gates of Paradise. Now there is a bridegroom and we await the bride by reading the description of the church in the Holy Book of Revelation.

The story of salvation is that God the Father chose a bride for His Son, who paid for His bride, not with gold or silver, but with His Precious Blood. We are engaged to the Lord Jesus Christ; purified by His water and blood (Ephesians 5:25), wedded at the moment of His death on Great Friday.

All the hymns of the holy book of revelations are related to the bride of Christ: the church. These

hymns call the bride to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, enumerate the number the sealed bride, the song of the bride (Alleluia), and the foundation of the heavenly Jerusalem (the bride of Christ).

The book of revelation is read between the Sixth and the Ninth hour since at that time the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, shed His blood and descended into Hades to restore Adam and his children to the paradise of joy.

The anointing of oil by the priests to the congregation before the Divine Liturgy is referred to in the Holy Book of Revelation 7:2-8, in which the servants of God must have sealed upon their foreheads. We are anointed with oil to seal us; to say that we are the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. Following this, the Ninth Hour is prayed in preparation for the Divine Liturgy.

## **The Divine Liturgy**

The Night of Apocalypse ends with the Divine Liturgy and the Holy Communion; called the "*Supper of the Wedding of the Lamb*" (Revelation 19:9). This Divine Liturgy is unique in that we do not pray the "Prayer of Reconciliation" because the Lord Jesus Christ must trample death by His death (1 Corinthians 15) and death was not yet abolished at

this point. Although we do not pray the Commemoration of the Saints on Covenant Thursday, we do pray the Commemoration of the Saints on Bright Saturday because Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has opened the gates of Paradise.

During Holy Communion the church prays the Eleventh Hour, chants selected Holy Psalms, and reads the prophecies of the Glorious Feast of Resurrection.

May we all enter into a blessed Holy Week with daily church attendance and solemn prayers and scriptural readings befitting its spiritual remembrance.

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