

The Paschal Cross-Procession

In the Cross-Procession of Pascha, we recall the procession that the myrrh-bearing women made to the tomb of the Saviour to anoint his buried body, in the stillness of the night, while the world still slept, only to learn the joyous news that Christ had indeed risen from the dead. As we sing in the Paschal Canon: *'The godly women had hastened to Thee with myrrh, O Christ. In tears they sought Thee as a dead man, but in joy they worshipped Thee as the living God, and proclaimed the mystical Pascha to thy disciples.'*

This procession is a pious tradition that has developed and been embraced across large parts of the Orthodox world. However, the service books make no mention of a procession, but simply call for the clergy and servers to go out into the narthex for the ceremonies of the beginning of Paschal Matins. For this reason, the way in which the procession is done varies greatly from place to place – some go around the church once, others, three times; some have a Gospel reading while others do not. In many places the more ancient custom is followed and there is no procession at all. The outline below gives the ceremonies as they usually fit around the procession at our parish, although the simpler custom may be preferred in years when the weather is inclement.

Those who have agreed to help to transform the church remain inside during the procession. When everybody has left the church, they close the doors, light all of the candles and lamps in church, (bringing back the votive stands if they have been removed). They put away the chairs and the tomb of the Saviour, and place an icon-stand in the middle of church in readiness for the Resurrection icon. They redistribute the flowers from the tomb around the various icon-stands in the church. The lights in the porch and altar may be switched on, and, if necessary, the heaters may be switched back on at this point. They then stand, prayerfully, inside the doors, listening to the Gospel and singing, and one helper prepares to be the voice of the belly of Hades at the beginning of Matins.

Those who will carry items in the procession should have them ready by the end of the Midnight Office. Immediately after the dismissal of the Midnight Office, a single bell is struck at regular intervals for some time. When this ceases, the clergy in the altar begin to sing.

- Clergy: "Angels in heaven, O Christ our Saviour, sing of thy Resurrection..." x 3
The clergy and servers sing this hymn once, softly. Then the veil is opened. They repeat the hymn, slightly louder than before. Then the Holy Doors are opened. They sing the hymn for a third time, with full voice.
- People: "Angels in heaven", sung many times.
The people immediately take up the singing of this hymn while the priest brings the light to the people. They continue to sing while the light passes

among the people. When all have received the light, the procession sets off in the following order:

- The lamp-bearer
- The Cross-bearer (and a second person with the processional icon of the Mother of God if there are enough people)
- The banner-bearer(s)
- The icon of the Resurrection, flanked by two fans.
- The clergy
- The choir and people (traditionally, the choir precedes the clergy but it is found helpful at our parish for the choir to remain with the people)

The hymn, "Angels in heaven" is sung many times as the procession makes its way, anti-clockwise, around the church three times, finally making a station at the main doors. When everybody has gathered at the doors, the singing stops.

- The Gospel

The second Matins Resurrection Gospel (Mark 16:1-8) is read by the priest, with the usual Matins Gospel sequence (as done at Matins and Molebens).