

GREAT & HOLY FRIDAY



Theodosia Pouloupos Epitaphios, Benaki Museum Date 1599 from wiki

Today is the saddest day in the whole world. It is also the most joyful day. How can this be? We remember that this day Our Lord Jesus was delivered to His enemies, suffered terrible torment and died upon the cross. This evening we will place ourselves among the mourners as we attend a Solemn Vespers and Burial Service. Vespers will begin, as it usually does, and the hymns will once again tell the story of the day. Listen closely to them as they begin: All creation was transformed with fear, when it beheld You hanging on the cross, O Christ. The sun was darkened and the foundations of the earth trembled. All creation suffered with the One Who created all things. O Lord, Who willingly suffered for us, glory to you. The hymns continue to tell the story, and at the end of the Vespers service, Father will take the Plaschanitsa (Burial Shroud) and carry it upon his back as if he, himself, was Joseph of Arimathea. We will follow him in a procession, as if we were with Nicodemus and the holy women, around the outside of the church, pretending that we are taking Jesus' Body to the burial garden as we sing this hymn:

♪ "THE NOBLE JOSEPH. ♪

TOOK DOWN FROM THE CROSS YOUR MOST PURE BODY.
ANOINTING IT WITH SPICES, HE WRAPPED
IT IN PURE LINEN AND PLACED IT IN A NEW TOMB.
GLORY TO THE FATHER AND TO THE SON AND TO THE
HOLY SPIRIT, NOW AND EVER AND FOREVER, AMEN.
THE ANGEL, STANDING BY THE GRAVE EXCLAIMED
TO THE MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN:
"SPICES ARE MEANT FOR THE DEAD. BUT CHRIST
REVEALS HIMSELF AS NOT SUBJECT TO CORRUPTION!"

When we arrive back at the front doors of the church, some of the men will help Father hold the Plaschanitsa up by its corners in order for us to be able to walk under it as we re-enter the church. When we do this, we mystically place ourselves in the tomb with Christ, burying our sins with Him in order for Him to save us from them. As we return to our places, Father will place the shroud in a tomb that has been prepared in the church to receive Him, and the congregation will approach Christ in this tomb at the end of the service, on their knees, to venerate the Shroud.

We remember that because of the decision made at the council of Nicea, any respect that we show to the Plaschanitsa is transferred directly to the Body of Jesus. It is proper for us to kiss his five wounds: his two hands, two feet and side, but we do not kiss His face because the memory of the kiss of Judas makes it inappropriate. Many people will choose to remain in the church afterward to pray. Many churches will remain open all night, and all the next day, with parishioners taking turns at vigil, so that Jesus Body may not be left unattended. All the earth mourns the loss of Jesus; but meanwhile, in the depths of Hades, after centuries of waiting in darkness, He finally arrives. For these captive souls, it is the most joyful day in the entire world.

- Excerpted from *The Zacchaeus Tree*, by Lynne Wardach

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