

# The Paschal Zadostoinik

Reader Michael Astley

The Angel cried unto the lady, full of grace: 'O pure Virgin, rejoice! and again I say, rejoice! for thy Son is risen from the grave on the third day. And He hath raised all the dead.' O ye people, be joyful!

Shine, shine, O new Jerusalem! for the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. Dance, now, dance and be glad, O Sion! Do thou exult, O pure Theotokos, in the Resurrection of thy Son!

- *The Zadostoinik of Pascha*

I was listening to a recording of this hymn sung by the choir of the Valaam Monastery, and was moved to tears. It was, by far the most beautiful rendition I have ever heard of one of my favourite hymns of the Church, which we sing during the days of Pascha in place of *It is truly meet*.

I find it inexpressibly moving to think that the mourning Mother of God, having endured so much and seen her beloved Son endure so much, was once again comforted by an angel, perhaps even the Holy Archangel Gabriel himself, who had first brought her the news that she, of all women throughout all the world and throughout all the ages, would be the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy of the sign. Indeed, the description of her as "full of grace" is a direct reference to this very event.

Having been obedient to God's will throughout all of those trials, it seems fitting that she should learn of the Resurrection from the angel in a new annunciation. And so the story goes full circle, and the anticipation and uncertainty of the first angelic salutation, "Rejoice!" is fulfilled in the comfort and joyous victory of the second.

Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel. He shall eat butter and honey, that he may know to refuse the evil, and to choose the good.

- *Isaiah 7: 14&15*



*The icon of Our Lady of the Sign (Isaiah 7:14), showing the Virgin who conceived and bore Emmanuel. The Christ is enthroned in a circle of the stars, touching on another hymn, in which we hail her as having a womb "more spacious than the heavens", for she contained the One Who Is, Whom the vast expanse of the universe could not possibly contain.*

A friend of mine saw this text of this hymn and was moved, even to the point of entertaining the thought of the angels arguing among themselves over which of them would get to bring her the glad tidings of the Resurrection.

Of course, the Mother of God has what we are called to have, and is what we are all called to be, so the hymn doesn't stop with her but calls all of us to share in the joy and life of the Resurrection in the exhortation, "Shine, shine, O new Jerusalem!"

At the Vesperal Liturgy of St Basil on Great and Holy Saturday - the "old" paschal vigil - we hear this reading from the prophecy of Isaiah:

**Shine, shine, O Jerusalem: for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.** For behold darkness shall cover the earth, and a mist the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thy eyes round about, and see: all these are gathered together, they are come to thee: thy sons shall come from afar, and thy daughters shall rise up at thy side. Then shalt thou see, and abound, and thy heart shall wonder and be enlarged, when the multitude of the sea shall be converted to thee, the strength of the Gentiles shall come to thee.

The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Madian and Ephraim: all they from Saba shall come, bringing gold and frankincense: and shewing forth praise to the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nabaioth shall minister to thee: they shall be offered upon my acceptable altar, and I will glorify the house of my majesty. Who are these that fly as clouds, and as doves to their windows? For the islands wait for me, and the ships of the sea in the beginning: that I may bring thy sons from afar: their silver, and their gold with them, to the name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee. And the children of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister to thee: for in my wrath have I struck thee, and in my reconciliation have I had mercy upon thee.

**And thy gates shall be open continually: they shall not be shut day nor night,** that the strength of the Gentiles may be brought to thee, and their kings may be brought. For the nation and the kingdom that will not serve thee, shall perish: and the Gentiles shall be wasted with desolation. The glory of Libanus shall come to thee, the Ar tree, and the box tree, and the pine tree together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary: and I will glorify the place of my feet. And the children of them that afflict thee, shall come bowing down to thee, and all that slandered thee shall worship the steps of thy feet, and shall call thee the city of the Lord, the Sion of the Holy One of Israel. Because thou wast forsaken, and hated, and there was none that passed through thee, I will make thee to be an everlasting glory, a joy unto generation and generation:

And thou shalt suck the milk of the Gentiles, and thou shalt be nursed with the breasts of kings: and thou shalt know that I am the Lord thy Saviour, and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

- *Isaiah 60:1-16*

In the Resurrection of Christ, we see this prophecy fulfilled. The Church **is** the *new* Jerusalem, and the glory of the Lord has indeed arisen upon us, just as Isaiah foretold. Death is conquered and life is set free, and it is our inheritance, for us to claim and in which we participate in the sacramental life of the Church - in the services, the Mysteries, the prayers and hymns, and in our communion with, and love for, each other.

In this brilliance of the Resurrection, and in keeping with Isaiah's prophecy that "thy gates shall be open continually, and they shall not be shut day or night" the doors of the iconostas in our church are left open throughout Bright Week, so that we look through the open doors, which depict the Mother of God, whose entry into the temple is described in our hymns as "the prelude of God's goodwill and the prophecy of the salvation of men". We look through these open doors and we see something of the Reign and Kingdom of God. We see the eschatological nature of the life in Christ, Whose kingship is symbolised by the Gospel Book and Holy Things enthroned on the Holy Table, beneath the icon of the Mystical Supper which depicts the heavenly banquet into which we are all called to be partakers.

You who have kept the fast, and you who have not,  
rejoice this day, for the table is bountifully spread!  
Feast royally, for the calf is fatted.  
Let no one go away hungry.  
Partake, all, of the banquet of faith.  
Enjoy the bounty of the Lord's goodness!

- *from the paschal Homily of St John Chrysostom*

This short hymn that we sing, aptly during the Anaphora, throughout the paschal season, is replete with the theology of the Resurrection and the whole Christian life, and I think that we would all benefit from pondering on these mysteries at the next Liturgy in which we take part, focussing our hearts and minds on the wonders that God has brought about for us.

*Shine, shine, O new Jerusalem, for the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!*