

## **ORTHODOX TO OBSERVE EASTER JULIAN CALENDAR DEFINES THE DAY BY EQUINOX**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Those who thought that Easter celebrations were over on April 22 needed to go no farther than south Florida's 23 Orthodox parishes to see it happening all over again last weekend.

"Our service is a very beautiful experience," said Thomas Branch of Margate who is a Deacon at St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church in Fort Lauderdale.

"We have a procession outside of the church with the lights out and using lighted candles," he explained. "After coming back into the church, the lights come on and we chant "Christ is risen from the dead."

"The first Ecumenical Council worked out the formula that Easter would always follow the First Vernal Equinox and would fall after the Jewish Passover," explained the Very Rev. Kirrill Gvosdev, pastor of Saint Nicholas Church. "The holiday is moveable every year, sometimes falling on the same day celebrated by Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, sometimes up to eight weeks apart."

"We follow the ancient Gregorian calendar, the same calendar that the Jewish community uses," added Dr. Don Howard, Chairman of the Board at Davie's Saint Philip Eastern Orthodox Church. "We follow the tradition that Easter has to follow Passover. This year, in the other Christian Churches, Easter was celebrated before Passover was finished."

Howard said that there have been discussions between Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox denominations about seeking a common date for Easter.

Easter, known as Pascha in the Orthodox churches, and the several-month period before, are times of great devotion and reflection for Orthodox members.

"We begin with Triodion, a four week period before Lent, which prepares us for the season," Howard explained. "During Lent we reflect on forgiveness and seek renewal."

"Lent is a time of fasting, but food is not the main issue" said Father Christopher Metropoulos, pastor of Saint Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church in Fort Lauderdale. "We pull ourselves away from things, like TV, movies as well as food, and spend time thinking about God."

Metropoulos said that parishioners select what they will give up in order to help them meditate on God. "What is important is for people to repent and come closer to God."

Holy Week is the culmination of the Orthodox participation Easter, with services starting on Palm Sunday, and continuing each day of the week.

“On Saturday evening we had a Lamentation Service at which the people will walk with the casket,” said Howard.

At St. Nicholas Church, the Lamentation service featured a procession outside of the church with the image of Christ—taken down from the cross in the church--and then continued inside. The image was held high with members walking underneath to symbolize that Christ descended into Hell following his Crucifixion, Gvosdev explained.

Easter celebrations began around 11 p.m. Saturday evening with Matins, or a quiet time of prayer. At midnight the actual Pascha service began and involved a procession around the church three times and the receiving of a candle symbolizing the light of Christ.

“On Easter, we don’t greet people by saying good morning or any such thing,” said Father Michael Kamaritis of Hollywood’s Saint George’s Greek Orthodox Church. “We say ‘Christ has risen’ and people respond, ‘Christ has truly risen.’”

“We do this because his resurrection was a big thing and we need to tell others,” Fr. Kamaritis explained.

Breaking the Lenten Fast, some Orthodox churches schedule lavish meals for Easter day. “We had a big breakfast after the midnight service,” said Howard. “Then following a noon Agape service, we had an Easter egg hunt.”

“Easter is a time of celebration,” Branch said. “People come with beautiful baskets filled with eggs and other good food. They have been fasting for forty days and so they are able to eat anything after the Easter service.”

Some churches plan Sunday afternoon dinner featuring roast lamb, while others, such as St. Nicholas, will serve special breads, including Kulich Bread, a tall, cylindrical loaf containing butter, eggs and other ingredients, “those things that were prohibited during Great Lent,” Fr. Gvosdev explained.

Also served was Cheese Pascha, a cheese dessert, as well as sausage, ham and lamb.

Easter eggs are dyed and distributed, with the dominant color being red to symbolize the blood of Christ in his crucifixion and also his resurrection, Kamaritis said.

There is growing interest in the Orthodox Church, Fr. Metropulos explained. “We have seen an increase in our Inquiry Classes,” he said.

Metropulos believes that people are attracted to the “authenticity of our church. Nothing has been changed since the church was established by Christ,” he said. “If people are looking for the church that the New Testament spoke about, the Orthodox Church is that church.”

Metropulos said that his branch of the Christian church recognizes the Roman Catholic and Protestant branches, but says that they separated from the Orthodox Church that he said is the original church.

“The Orthodox Church is unique, it is the ancient, historic Church of Christ. It remains the same as founded by Christ and the traditions are the same.”

“Our churches are more mystical and less legalistic than the Catholic or Protestant churches,” he said.

#### SERVICES:

##### Saint Philip Eastern Orthodox Church

4870 Griffin Road, Davie

954-584-4030

Lamentation Service, Friday, 7 p.m.

Matins Service, Saturday, 11 p.m.

Pascha Service, Saturday, 12 midnight followed by Breakfast

Agape Service, Sunday, 12 noon, followed by an Easter Egg Hunt

##### Saint Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church

2001 North Andrews Avenue, Fort Lauderdale

954-566-6358

Lamentation Service, Friday, 7 p.m.

Solemn Liturgy, Saturday, 10 a.m.

Matins Service, Saturday, 11 p.m.

Pascha Service, Saturday, 12 midnight

##### Saint Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church

815 NE 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Fort Lauderdale

954-467-1515

Lamentation Service, Friday, 7 p.m., with the procession outside at 9 p.m.

Matins Service, Friday 11:30 p.m. (Broadcast live over WLVI, 1040 AM)

Pascha Service, Saturday, 12 midnight

##### St. George's Greek Orthodox Church

425 North 58<sup>th</sup> Street, Hollywood

954-966-1898

Good Friday Services, 9 a.m., 7:30 p.m.

Holy Saturday service, 8 a.m.

Resurrection Service, 11 p.m.

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