

*The believers were first
called Christians at
Antioch*
ACTS. 9:26
APRIL 2007

The Orthodox Church of St. Dunstan Parkstone, Dorset

The Antiochian Orthodox Deanery of The United Kingdom and Ireland
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East

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FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

*Great is the mystery of
godliness: 'God was manifest in the
flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of
angels,, preached unto the Gentiles,
believed on in the world, received up
in glory.'* [1 Tim.3:16]

There is a symmetry about the mystery of our faith. That is, as you delve deeper into its structure you realise that all the parts fit together; that there is coherence and order in what we call the 'economy' of salvation. Just as it was the primal Eve who introduced our race to the knowledge of good and evil in the mystery of the fall, so it was women who brought the world the knowledge of our restoration. Despite the fact that they lived within an era and culture that paid only secondary attention to the testimony of the daughters of Eve, yet God chose the holy Myrrh-bearers as the first discoverers of the resurrection of Christ [Mk.16:1-8]. They it was and not the Apostles who found Our Lord's tomb empty in the garden. Thus, in fine symmetry, the disaster of the first garden is undone and Gethsemane becomes a new paradise.

It is, of course, the resurrection, in a sense, that begins the Christian faith; it is the very content of the Apostles' preaching and everything else flows from it: either in realising who and what Christ was and in defining the meaning and purpose of the Christian life.

This was the Gospel or 'good news' that is the essential apostolic message and it is in the very nature of good news that it has to be proclaimed. If you read the Acts of the Apostles it quickly becomes evident that the actual message preached can be summarised as saying that God has now brought the religious experience of Israel to its fulfilment; that the Torah, the Psalms and the Prophets all intimated this great mystery and that God, having been born among his old people, the Jews, had now died and then rose from the dead, opening the kingdom of heaven to all who would believe. The point is, of course, that this gospel has to be proclaimed; though the mystery of the kingdom might be the pearl of great price, yet the gospel is to be offered to all who will hear. St. Paul speaks of God the Father's grace in Christ, planned before time, being made *'manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.'* [11 Tim.1:9-10].

Clearly, we know that this all had a beginning back around 30AD. The people of those times heard it from the Apostles themselves and they had the evidence of eyewitnesses who confirmed their faith and knowledge by willingness even to die for the hope that was in them. There is the evidence of great saints, like Irenaeus of

Lyons who knew St. Polycarp who, in turn, had known St. John the Theologian himself. That is very close evidence indeed: like you asking own your father to tell you what his father had told him.

Yet what about all these years after? What if someone were to ask how is this gospel being published today, how is it advertised and proclaimed? Well, the answer is quite straightforward: it is you and I; *we* have to be the evidence – the ones who publish it abroad. This, after all, was what was expected of the old Israel of God:

*'You are my witnesses,
says the Lord and my servant
whom I have chosen: that you
may know and believe me...I,
even I am the Lord and beside
me there is no
saviour...therefore you are my
witnesses.'* [Is.43:10-12]

It was not, of course, just with words that the apostles conquered the known world for Christ. It was, more than anything the transformation of their lives that convinced others that these men had handled mysteries that had transfigured them even into wonderworkers. [see: 1Jn.1:1-3] It is when others perceive in us a different quality to our lives; a love that accepts, forgives and gives unconditionally to others because we ourselves are loved by God, that the good news of the resurrection is

Proclaimed. Especially when that faith within us remains immutable, even in the face of all the tragedies that may beset us in this life, then those who do not yet know Christ will at least begin to wonder about you.

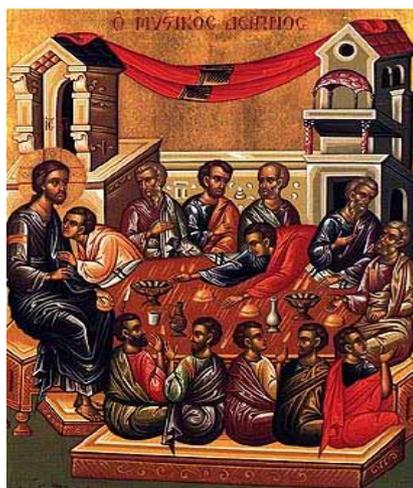
Naturally, the very fact of the Church's existence all these years later publishes to all the message of the Resurrection, we even participate in the mystery every time we serve the Divine Liturgy. But the grace we receive in the Holy Mysteries at the hands of our priests is not just for our souls' good; it is granted that we, in turn, may transform the lives with which we come into contact. And remember, within the life of grace all things are under God's providence, that whomsoever we meet are, like us is made in God's image and God desires that His likeness be restored in them. Thus, nothing is merely fortuitous for us in the gospel and those whom we encounter might not venerate the icon of the resurrection with us *yet*; they might not sing Χριστος ανεστη with us *yet*, but they can meet *in us* that icon, living and breathing; the very dynamic of our transfigured lives can be *for them* the troparion of the resurrection. We might call this the 'liturgy *after* the Liturgy' - I am sure that I have no need to remind you than the very word itself means 'public service'!

The *Letter to Diognetus*, written by an unknown author in the 2nd (or 3rd?) century, suggests that Christians have a unique vocation in the world: *'In a word, what the soul is to the body Christians are in the world. The soul is spread through all the members of the body, and Christians through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body but is not of the body; Christians dwell in the world but are not of the world.'*

The implications of these ideas are many but it certainly means that we are given the mission

of sanctifying the world through the grace of God. Just as St. Paul says, that a Christian married to a non-Christian is in a sacred union, for the Christian partner sanctifies the non-Christian [I Cor.7:14], so our role is to hallow this world, redeeming creation for God. Within the natural world our function is not just to be the steward of creation, - an idea that has developed in western Theology of late in these environmentally aware days - but each of us, as the priestly people of God, are to act as the celebrants of creation, offering it back in praise of the Creator till its final liberation [Rom.8:18-23]. In this land of Britain itself our vocation is the recalling of this people to the Orthodox faith of their fathers from which they have been gradually disinherited since the Norman Conquest a thousand years ago. Such a restoration is a vast undertaking but who else can do it; who else is called upon to offer Christ *'for the life of the world'* but the Orthodox themselves.

Fr. Chrysostom



'Sacrificed is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, for the life of the world and its salvation' [from the Prothesis, the preparation of the bread and the wine before the Divine Liturgy]

SERVICES

Usual weekday services:

Wednesday: Sixth Hour & Typika 10.00am Friday: Sixth Hour & Typika 10.00am

MARCH

Wed 28th Sixth Hour and Typika 10.00am

Sat 31st Vespers 6.00pm

APRIL

Great and Holy Week

1st Entry of Our Lord (Palm Sunday) Orthros 9.00am

Divine Liturgy 10.30am

2nd Great and Holy Monday Bridegroom Service (Orthros) 6.00pm

3rd Great and Holy Tuesday Bridegroom Service 6.00pm

4th Great and Holy Wednesday Anointing Service 7.00pm

5th Great and Holy Thursday Vespers of the Mystical Supper 10.30pm.

Service of the Twelve Gospels (Orthros) 7.00pm

6th Great and Holy Friday Royal Hours 9.00am. Vespers of the Shroud 4.30pm.

Burial Service 6.30pm

7th (Sat) Holy Pascha Midnight Office, Rush Procession, Orthros and

Divine Liturgy 11.00pm followed by the feast

8th (Sun) Vespers of Love 3.00pm

[note: no morning services]

14th Sat Vespers 6.00pm

15th Sun 2nd of Pascha

Thomas Sunday Orthros 9.00am Divine Liturgy 10.30am

21st Sat Vespers 6.00pm

22nd Sun 3rd of Pascha Holy Myrrhbearers Orthros 9.00am Divine Liturgy 10.30am

28th Sat Vespers 6.00pm

29th Sun 4th of Pascha The Paralyse Man Orthros 9.00am Divine Liturgy 10.30am