



The procession with the *epitáphios* in Greece is held outside. From Athens to the smallest village, the procession winds through the streets. In large cities, bands play funeral marches, and in Athens the head of state and other dignitaries take part in the ceremony. In some places the bier is taken to the cemetery and carried over the graves. Effigies of Judas are hung in some towns or burned in bonfires.

Holy Saturday

Morning Service — The Descent into Hades and Anticipation of the Resurrection — The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil

The first service of Holy Saturday takes place in the morning and breaks the somber spell. Jesus' descent to Hades where he preached his message to the dead is observed. Those who believed in him received eternal life and salvation. The heavy sorrow of Good Friday begins to lift when the priest, wearing a bright robe, chants, "Arise, O God, to the world," while sprinkling bay leaves or flower petals throughout the church to celebrate the triumph over death.

EASTER

EVENING — THE MATINS OF EASTER SUNDAY AND THE RESURRECTION (ANASTASI)

The Anastasi service is the climax of the Orthodox year. Before midnight throngs of people dressed in new, bright clothing, especially red, arrive at church. Even those who do not attend religious services during the calendar year make an appearance. This is a universal event for believers and nonbelievers alike, those who observe Lent, and those who do not. They are brought together in a rare emotional harmony for Anastasi.

Participants buy white candles upon entering church or bring decorated ones of their own. Hymns of anticipation for the great event are sung at the matins before midnight as the church gets more and more crowded. A few minutes before twelve, the church is darkened to resemble a tomb. The only light in the church is that of an oil candle on the holy altar. At midnight the royal gates open, the chief celebrant (patriarch, bishop, or priest)



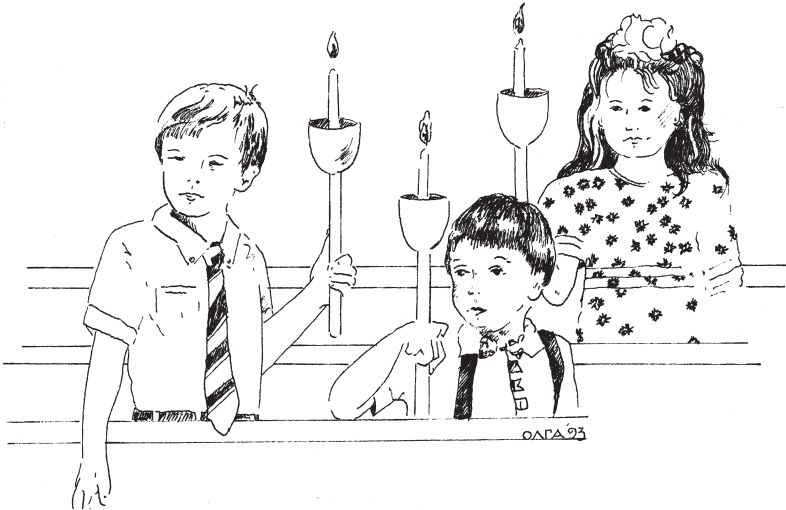
appears holding a lighted candle and joyfully proclaims: “Come receive the light from the unwaning light, and glorify Christ who rose from the dead.”

The light is given to the congregation, and parishioners pass it along to each other. In moments the church is aglow with the light of Christ. In the bright and colorful atmosphere the good news of the Resurrection is read from the Gospel, followed by the most joyful and triumphant hymn of Orthodox Christianity, “Christos Anesti” (“Christ is Risen”).¹⁵ The entire congregation sings while making the sign of the cross with their candles.

Christos Anesti

Chri - stós a - né - sti
ek ne - krón THa ná - to
THá - na - ton pa - tí-
sas ke tis en tis
mní - ma - si zo - in cha - ri-
sá - me - nos.

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and to those in the tombs granting life.



Many parishioners exit after lighting their candles, but they miss the true celebration of Anastasi that follows at the Divine Liturgy and a brief sermon written by St. John Chrysostom. The sermon explains that God welcomes, rewards, and comforts all of those who come to him, whether they have come early or come late. Christ has risen. Death and evil are conquered.

At the end of the service each parishioner receives a red egg sometimes wrapped in netting, a symbolic Orthodox tradition. The red color represents the blood shed by Christ for mankind, and the egg symbolizes the new life of the Resurrection. The enclosed shell is Christ's tomb; and when the egg is cracked, it represents Christ's emergence.

As everyone leaves the church, they greet each other with, "*Christós anēsti*" (Christ has risen) and respond with, "*Alithós anēsti*" (Truly he has risen) or "*Alithós o Kírios*" ("Truly the Lord") and exchange the kiss of the Resurrection. This is a time of forgiveness, peace, and joy.

Parishioners hurry home with their lit candles, trying to keep them from extinguishing. The light of Christ is used for three customs: To make a cross of smoke over the entryway of the home, to light the *kandili* at the home *ikonostási*, and to light the candles on the dinner table. The holy light is believed to have miraculous powers of protection and to bring blessings for the entire year. If you wish to do so, save the candle and bring it back forty days later, on the day of Ascension or the Sunday following it. Light it and leave at church.