

## Traditional Ukrainian Easter Basket: Special Food and Symbolism



**T**HE EASTER BASKET of special foods (described below) is arranged on Holy Saturday, and taken to church, where a special blessing ceremony with prayers and sprinkling with Holy Water is performed by the parish priest. Some churches perform their basket blessing on Easter Sunday, after the Resurrectional Liturgy.

Besides the special foods, the Easter Basket is also decorated with greenery and flowers, as well as colored eggs, and beautiful Pysanky, and each basket is covered with a hand embroidered cloth cover, with Easter motif of pussy willows and Easter Eggs.

This blessed food may not be consumed until after the morning Resurrection Liturgy on Easter Sunday, which breaks the Great Lent fasting.

After Easter Brunch, the Easter celebration continues for the rest of the day, with family and friends visiting, and enjoying many other foods and desserts.

**Paska** – Special Easter Bread (sweet yeast bread, rich in eggs, butter, etc.), takes the centre stage in the basket, symbolic of Christ, who is the True Bread to Christians.

**Baked Ham** – a very popular meat for Slavs as the main dish, because of its richness. It is symbolic of the great joy, and abundance of Easter. Some prefer Lamb or Veal.

**Kovbasa** – a spicy, garlicky, smoked pork sausage, indicative of God's favour and generosity.

**Red Beet Vinaigrette (with Horseradish), or plain Horseradish**, is symbolic of the Passion of Christ still in the minds of Christians, but sweetened with some sugar, because of the Resurrection. The bitter-sweet red coloured mixture is a reminder of the sufferings of Christ.

**Salt** is also included in the basket, necessary for flavour, and as a reminder to Christians of their duty to others.

**Butter** – A favourite dairy product, is usually nicely displayed and decorated with a cross made out of cloves. Butter is symbolic of the goodness of Christ, that we should have toward all things.

**Cheese** – Creamed cheese, or "Hrudka", a sweetened cheese ball, decorated with same herbs as butter, indicative of the moderation that Christians should have in all things.

**Eggs** – Hard boiled, and kept in their shell. There should be at least one or two hard boiled eggs per person, for the Easter Brunch. One of the hard boiled eggs is peeled, as it will be cut to as many pieces as there are attendees to the Easter Brunch, and shared with everyone, accompanied by salt and horseradish.

## Celebrating Our Faith

Byzantine Catholic Worship: *Our Church, Its Customs and Rich Heritage*

### The Fifth Sunday of the Lent: St. Mary of Egypt



**O**N THE FIFTH SUNDAY of the Great Fast (Lent), the Church commemorates our venerable Mother, Mary of Egypt, who lived during the sixth century and passed away in a remarkable manner in the year 522 A.D.

She began her life as a young woman who followed the passions of the body, running away from her parents at age twelve for Alexandria. There she lived as a prostitute for seventeen years, refusing money from the men that she had relations with, instead living by begging and spinning flax.

One day, however, she met a group of young men heading toward the sea to sail to Jerusalem for the veneration of the Holy Cross. Mary went along for the ride, but when the group reached Jerusalem and actually went towards the church, Mary was prohibited from entering by an unseen force. After three such attempts, she remained outside on the church patio, where she looked up and saw an icon of the Mother of God (*Theotokos* in Greek; *Bohorodytsya* in Ukrainian). She began to weep, and prayed with all her might that the Theotokos might allow her to see the True Cross; afterwards, she promised, she would renounce her worldly desires and go wherever the Theotokos may lead her.

After this heart-felt conversion, she fled into the desert to live as an ascetic. For seventeen years, Mary was tormented by "wild beasts, mad desires and passions." After these years of temptation, however, she overcame the passions and was led by the Theotokos in all things. Following 47 years in solitude, she met the priest St. Zosima in the desert, who pleaded with her to tell him of her life. She recounted her story with great humility while also demonstrating her gift of clairvoyance; she knew who Zosima was and his life story despite never having met him before. Finally, she asked Zosima to meet her again the following year at sunset on Holy Thursday by the banks of the Jordan.

Zosima did exactly this, though he began to doubt his experience as the sun began to set that night. Then Mary appeared on the opposite side of the Jordan; crossing herself, she miraculously walked across the water and met Zosima. When he attempted to bow, she rebuked him, saying that as a priest he was far superior, and furthermore, he was holding the Holy Mysteries. Mary then received communion and walked back across the Jordan after giving Zosima instructions about his monastery and that he should return to where they first met exactly a year later. When he did so, he found Mary's body with a message written on the sand asking him for burial and revealing that she had died immediately after receiving the Holy Mysteries the year before (and thus had been miraculously transported to the spot where she now lay). So Zosima, amazed, began to dig, but soon tired; then a lion approached and began to help him, that is, after Zosima had recovered from his fear of the creature. Thus St. Mary of Egypt was buried. The Church also celebrates her feast day on the day of her repose, April 1.

## WALKING THE STEPS OF JESUS: HOLY WEEK TIMELINE

**WHILE THE EXACT ORDER OF EVENTS** during Holy Week is debated by Biblical scholars, this timeline of the days that led up to His arrest represents an approximate outline of major events.

**PALM SUNDAY** ~ Jesus and His disciples spend the night in Bethany, a town about two miles east of Jerusalem, where Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead, and his two sisters, Mary and Martha live. They are close friends of Jesus, and probably hosted Him and His disciples during their final days in Jerusalem.

**MONDAY** ~ Jesus returns with His disciples to Jerusalem. Along the way, He curses a fig tree because it had failed to bear fruit. Some scholars believe this cursing of the fig tree represented God's judgement on the spiritually dead religious leaders of Israel. Others believe the symbolism extended to all believers, demonstrating that genuine faith is more than just outward religiosity.

When Jesus arrives at the Temple, He finds the courts full of corrupt money changers and begins overturning their tables and clearing the Temple, saying, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves." (Luke 19:46)

On Monday evening Jesus stays in Bethany again, probably in the home of His friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

**TUESDAY** ~ Jesus and His disciples return to Jerusalem, passing the withered fig tree on their way, and Jesus speaks to His companions about the importance of faith. At the Temple, religious leaders, upset at Jesus establishing Himself as a spiritual authority, organize an ambush with the intent to place Him under arrest, but Jesus evades their traps and pronounces harsh judgment on them.

Later that afternoon, Jesus leaves the city and goes with His disciples to the Mount of Olives, which overlooks Jerusalem. Here Jesus prophesies about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age, speaking in parables, using symbolic language about the end times events, including His Second Coming and the final judgment. Scripture indicates that this Tuesday was also the day Judas Iscariot negotiated with the Sanhedrin, the rabbinical court of ancient Israel, to betray Jesus (Matt. 26:14-16).

After a tiring day of confrontation and warnings about the future, once again, Jesus and the disciples return to Bethany to stay the night.

**WEDNESDAY** ~ Although the Bible doesn't say what the Lord did on the Wednesday of Passion Week, scholars speculate that after two exhausting days in Jerusalem, Jesus and His disciples spent this day resting in Bethany in anticipation of Passover.

**THURSDAY** ~ Jesus sends Peter and John ahead to the Upper Room in Jerusalem to make the preparations for the Passover Feast. That evening after sunset, Jesus washes the feet of His disciples as they prepare to share in the Passover. Jesus establishes the Lord's Supper, or Communion, instructing His followers to continually remember His sacrifice by sharing in the elements of bread and wine. They leave the Upper Room and go to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus is betrayed by a kiss from Judas Iscariot and arrested. He is taken to the home of Caiaphas, the high priest, where the whole council is gathered to question Him.

Source: [www.thoughtco.com](http://www.thoughtco.com)

# The Holy Shroud

**THE SERVICE OF GREAT OR HOLY FRIDAY** is characterized by its very beautiful ceremonies, stirring hymns and melodies and sticheras of profound significance. Their main theme is the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The central focus of the sublime and moving rites of the Great Friday services is the Holy Shroud (Plashchanytsia). This holy icon of Christ in the tomb became an integral part of the rites of the Vesper services of Great Friday and the Matins service of Great Saturday. During these services, we pay special public honour and veneration to the Holy Shroud. The reason for this is that the history of the salvation of mankind is inscribed on the icon of the Holy Shroud in blood-red letters. The Holy Shroud speaks to us of the severe justices of God and His everlasting love and unfathomable mercy toward us sinners.

Among our people, the Holy Shroud is truly venerated and loved. Many of our faithful observe a strict fast day on Great Friday and approach the Holy Shroud fasting, just as they would approach to receive Holy Communion. They approach the Holy Shroud in no other way than on the knees, starting frequently as far back as the doors of the church. By the grave of our Lord, sometimes through the whole night from Great Friday to Saturday, an honour guard usually stands provided by our youth and adult organizations. The veneration and the kissing of the Holy Shroud is, for our faithful, a truly profound spiritual experience and an opportunity to renew their faith and love for Christ, Who out of love for us, died on the Cross.

*"The noble Joseph took down Your most pure body down from the tree.  
He wrapped it with a new linen shroud and, with aromatic spices,  
placed it in a new tomb."*

