

St. Mary Magdalene Orthodox Church

March 31st, 2024

SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT

ST. GREGORY PALAMAS

REPOSE OF ST. INNOCENT, METROPOLITAN OF MOSCOW, ENLIGHTENER OF
THE ALEUTS AND APOSTLE TO THE AMERICAS (1879)

Activities and Events this Week

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|--------|
| • Wednesday April 3 | Choir Rehearsal | 4:30pm |
| | Presanctified Liturgy | 6:00pm |
| | Lenten Fellowship Meal to follow | |
| • Thursday April 4 | St. John Brotherhood Meeting | 6:00pm |
| • Saturday April 6 | Catechism Class (final class) | 3:30pm |
| | Great Vespers | 5:00pm |

Some Fun Facts on Orthodox Pascha

1. Orthodox Pascha has absolutely nothing to do with the Jewish Passover. Today, all over the internet, you will see Bishops and Priests saying the opposite – they are wrong!
2. This year the West celebrates Easter the earliest date possible (March 31st) while the East celebrates on the latest possible date – May 5th
3. Next year both East and West will celebrate Pascha (Easter) on Sunday April 20th.
4. After the year 2700, if the Orthodox continue using the Julian calendar we will no longer ever celebrate Easter on the same day with the West.
5. The Orthodox in Finland, by law, must celebrate Pascha with the West each year. The Orthodox Church and the Lutheran Church are Finnish state Churches.
6. The Patriarch of Alexandria bears as one of his names – Lord and Judge of the Universe as Pascha was calculated and announced by the Church of Alexandria.

It's a scandal...

Today is Easter Sunday for Christians in the West and only the second Sunday of the Great Lent for us Orthodox Christians. The West and the East celebrate Easter six weeks apart this year which represents the longest time period the two celebrations occur. This long stretch happens only periodically. When the East and the West have two separate celebrations of Pascha, I consider it a scandal!

In the ancient church there were multiple celebrations of Easter among Christians - many more than just the two celebrations today. St. Irenaeus in the 1st century writes how there were multiple celebrations in the city of Rome alone and how the various Christian groups observed together the variant celebrations.

Following his victory at the battle of the Milvian Bridge (313A.D.), Constantine became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire and signed an edict tolerating Christians. Christianity quickly grew and Constantine decided it was important that all Christians in the Empire celebrate together the most important feast of the Christian calendar - Pascha. In the year 325 he called what later would be called, the 1st ecumenical council which took place in the city of Nicaea. The main point of discussion was of course Arius, but also the dating of Easter and clergy discipline.

At the council it was determined that the Christian Pascha would occur on the first Sunday, following the first full moon, following the Vernal Equinox. This was the formula to be followed by all Christians. The main idea surrounding this formula was for Christians to rid themselves of any dependence on the Jewish calendar. A number of Christian groups relied on the Jewish calendar and their reckoning of the 14th of Nisan, the Jewish Passover, in celebrating the resurrection of Christ. The main problem with the Jewish calendar since the 1st century is that it kept changing. Thus the council at Nicaea said that Christians would no longer rely on the ever changing Jewish calendar.

So if this is all true, why does the East and the West often have two celebrations? Are we all not supposed to follow the same formula? The answer is yes, we both follow the same formula. However, in 1582 with the issuance of the papal bull *Inter Gravissimas*, Pope Gregory XIII corrected the Julian calendar which at that time had fallen behind by 10 days from the observed astronomical reality of the vernal equinox. Because this calendar reform, which Europe was clambering for hundreds of years, was from Rome, the Orthodox lands refused to accept it. The Gregorian calendar is the most accurate calendar ever constructed, being only seconds off each year. The Orthodox still use the less accurate Julian calendar for the calculation of Pascha which reckons the vernal equinox as happening on March 25 and not on March 21 or 22nd. In addition, the Orthodox still use lunar tables as constructed in the 4th century and not on modern lunar charts. Thus applying the same formula with these two anomalies, renders variant celebrations on either the same day, one week later (most common) and six weeks later (less common).