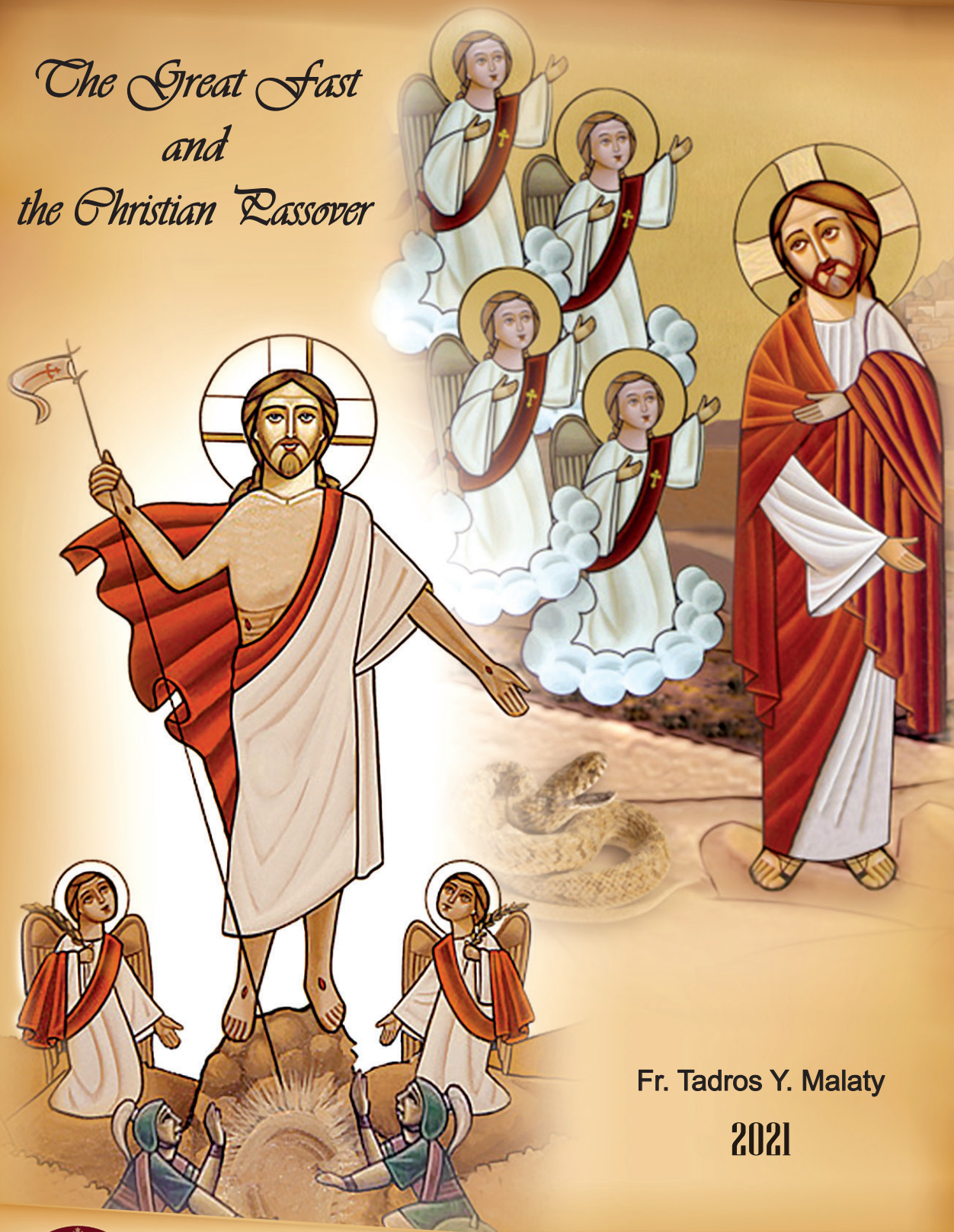


*The Great Fast  
and  
the Christian Passover*



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2021

## *The Christian Passover*

The early church was accustomed to calling the glorious feast of the Resurrection, the Christian Passover. Because of that, the letters that were sent by Saints Athanasius the Apostolic, St. Cyril the Great, and other fathers were called “Paschal Letters”. The early church felt that the events of the crucifixion and the Resurrection fulfilled the Old Testament’s prophecies and that the Passover feast of God’s people in the Old Testament, which was considered to be of highest rank among their feasts, was a symbol of the Lord's crucifixion for our salvation, the forgiveness of our sins and the Resurrection. The Resurrection provided us with the resurrected life and opened the gates of hope in the eternal life. As St. Paul says: “For since by man came death, by Man also came the Resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15: 21-22). “And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we[a] shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man” (1 Corinthians 15:49).

The Church inherited this apostolic mind and considered the **Christian Passover or the Feast of the Resurrection, the “Great Feast”**, the Word of God’s main goal from emptying Himself, His incarnation, baptism, allowing Satan to tempt Him, His ministry, His divine sermons and all His works, was to offer salvation through His crucifixion and Resurrection. Let us be crucified with Him every day and experience the power of His Resurrection, so that by His grace we may elevate our hearts to heaven, taste heaven, and cry out with all our hearts: “Amen, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelations 22:20).

The Church has linked the Great Fast with the suffering, crucifixion, and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that this fast may offer us what St. Paul the Apostle said about practical faith: “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,” (Philippians 3:10). **Saint Jacob of Serugh** talks about this connection, considering the Feast of the Resurrection to begin

with the forty days of fasting, extends to the passion, crucifixion, death, and Resurrection of Christ. When he sees the toil of the flesh during the fast, he considers it fellowship in the passions of Christ, that the faithful may experience the joy of Christ's resurrection, its power, and its glory.

❖ Man attains righteousness by the continuity of his struggle, but the lazy sees righteousness fleeing away from them without being able to catch it.

These are the days of righteousness, labour O you who fasts so that you can experience the sweetness that is filled with life.

**Hasten on the path of fasting like a man full of energy, searching for his life**, so that you can become righteous when the resurrection reveals itself.

Fast for the groom, so that you can rejoice with him at his banquet because He came to triumph those who fast and to crown them.

On His great day (the feast of the resurrection) when you are supposed to be smiling, how can you rejoice if you do not grieve first with those who were fasting?

On the feast that brightens the faces of the strugglers, how can you benefit from it if you chose to rest today?

If you do not suffer with the Only begotten, you will not have a share in the joy of His Passover.

Toil yourself with fasting and in the path of righteousness that you may find the crown of glory in the end.

The crown of fasting is the Resurrection of the Only begotten and unless you fast, you will not attain the crown.

Fasting, watchfulness, prayers, and giving alms allow us to enter with gifts before the bridegroom when he resurrects.

As you fast, collect all the gifts you can from it so that when the bridegroom sees you on His day, He would be happy to see you.

From your alms, collect it like bees do, that you may bring honey with you to the feast.



Righteousness is sweet on the big feast; let it be your friend. Otherwise, the bridegroom will not rejoice in you.

When those who fast enter, in their many forms, each one carrying his watchfulness, fasting and asceticism,

When the angels surround His tomb in their white garments along with the disciples with their fragrant oils and spices,

On that great morning, on which the faces of all those who were fasting is enlightened, be the first person claiming your reward.

Run quickly to proclaim the good news like John and see the resurrection without being despised by justice (John 4 :20).

In the Resurrection, put on a garment that was woven with alms so that you are as beautiful as the angels in their white garments.

Put in the effort and prepare for yourself glorious clothing for the great feast: a pure and righteous fast full of beauty.

Who will allow you to rejoice spiritually in the Great Feast, if you had not become physically toiled during the fast?

**Saint Jacob of Serugh**

## *A Joyful Encounter with Christ who Fasted for us*

Our father Adam received the commandment of fasting, not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but he disobeyed it. Our father the second (or new) Adam came, and the Enemy told him to eat, by turning the stones into bread (Matthew 4:3), but He refused, declaring His fast. Thus, just like we were expelled from the garden of Eden in the person of the earthly Adam, we are granted entry to heaven in the person of the heavenly Adam, the head of the Church, who sanctified fasting.

Often, **Saint Jacob of Serugh** would start his speech to the people about fasting by directing his eyes to the person of Christ, asking Him for a word to fill his soul in his hungry body. Thus, his soul overflows with praise to the

Lord, before offering a song about fasting to edify his people. In most of his homilies, he is used to start off by raising his heart and his tongue up to Heaven. He realized that words of exhortation and advice are of no use unless heaven opens its gates and its treasures overflow within him.

**Saint Severus of Antioch** says: [Isaiah the prophet, as he was raising them from this pit (attachment to materialism), he elevates and attracts their minds on high by declaring the greatness of fasting, so he pushes them to experience spiritual joy, while kicking sadness and agony out of their spirits as he cries to them saying: “Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes?” (Isaiah 58:5). Thus, while our Lord was declaring the glory of fasting and its joy, He commanded in a clear voice saying: “But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face” (Matthew 6:17). He was pointing to the splendor of the spirit and its purity through the main members of the body. Our Lord Himself commands us to wash up and be purified by abstaining from evil, and on the other hand to adorn ourselves and shine forth by doing good deeds, supported by spiritual grace!]

Moreover, **Saint Augustine says**: [Let us understand the commandment as washing the face and anointing the head of our inner man... Hence, to anoint the head refers to joy and to wash the face refers to purity: and therefore when a man anoints his head, he rejoices inwardly in his mind and reason. For we rightly understand that as being the head which has the pre-eminence in the soul, and by which it is evident that the other parts of man are ruled and governed. And this is done by him who does not seek his joy from without, so as to draw his delight in a fleshly way from the praises of men<sup>1</sup>]

## *Sermons and Advice or Praises and Songs!*

We expect from someone who writes about lent to offer sermons that urge the reader to follow certain ascetic commandments that seem difficult to many people. As for **Saint Jacob of Serugh**, even though he demands this,

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on Mount 2:42.

he did not offer his words in the form of sermons or advice but in the form of poems and praises, which he views as a gift that God Himself offers to the author or the speaker as He also works in the souls of those who listen.

Fasting, according to **saint Jacob**, is opening the inner mouth of the soul to be filled and quenched with the heavenly joy, so the soul sings not by some eloquent speeches or words, but through grace that abounds in the soul, turning it into a spiritual harp that the Holy Spirit uses to play a symphony of love full of heavenly joy.

In every homily on fasting, **Saint Jacob of Serugh** presents us an excellent biblical understanding that concerns our inner life or the kingdom of God within us. On other occasions, it concerns our eternity and our experience of heaven. Thirdly, he discusses the true role of fasting in our relationship with our fellow humans. Fourth, the role of fasting as a wedding not for ourselves alone, but for the body as well, like newlyweds on their way to eternal glory.

As experienced by **Saint Jacob of Serugh**, fasting touches every single element in the believer's life that they may experience union with Christ at a deeper level. Through fasting, the believer experiences the continued work of the Holy Trinity.

*Oh, the beauty of fasting!*

❖ You are so sweet, O fasting! blessed is he who conquers through you, for through all mysteries are found...

Great are you, O fasting and great is the mystery, which is fulfilled in you for through you all victories are granted to all those who conquer. Through you, the great prophet (Moses) son of the Levites was purified, and he became a 'sun' in the flesh to the people through the light which he put on (Exodus 35-34:29).

Through you, his inner man experienced the depths of the divinity, and

he came out and preached life unto the world with great hope.

Through you, Elijah was beautified and purified. He was granted two wings and he flew up to a place where death cannot enter (2 Kings 2:11).

Through you, our Savior brought down our Enemy in the battle, and at your end He destroyed Hades (Matthew 11-4:1)

**Saint Jacob of Serugh**

- ❖ Fasting is a safeguard of a soul, a stabilizing companion to the body, a weapon for the brave, a discipline for champions.

Fasting knocks over temptations, anoints for godliness.

It is a companion of sobriety, the crafter of a sound mind.

In wars she fights bravely, in peace it teaches tranquility.

It sanctifies the Nazirite, and it perfects the priest.

Fasting causes the barren to give birth.

It strengthens the powerful and makes lawmakers wise.

For how can a priest pray without fasting?

Fasting was a necessary practice, not only in the sacramental worship of the new testament, but also for the worship according to the Law.

- ❖ Fasting guards infants, chastens the young, dignifies the old-for gray hair is more venerable when it's adorned with fasting. It is an attractive ornament to women, a preventative for aging, a castle for couples, a nurse of virginity. There are people like this in each house who diligently pursue it.

**Saint Basil the Great**

*“Know that the Lord will heed your prayers, if you continue to persevere in fastings and prayers in the sight of the Lord” (Judith 4:12)*

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