

# CANON OF PASCHA

## JOHN OF DAMASCUS

### ODE 1

#### *Tone 1.<sup>1</sup> Irmos*

The day of Resurrection,<sup>2</sup> let us be radiant, O peoples! Pascha, the Lord's Pascha;<sup>3</sup> for Christ God has brought us over<sup>4</sup> from death to life, and from earth to heaven, **as we sing the triumphal song<sup>5</sup>.**

Let us purify our senses,<sup>6</sup> and in the unapproachable light<sup>7</sup> of the resurrection we shall see Christ shining forth, and we shall clearly hear him saying 'Rejoice!'<sup>8</sup>, **as we sing the triumphal song.**

Let the heavens, as is fitting, rejoice and let the earth be glad.<sup>9</sup> Let the whole world, both seen and unseen,<sup>10</sup> keep the feast: for Christ has risen,<sup>11</sup> our eternal joy.

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<sup>1</sup> St Nikodemus starts with a long, highly rhetorical explanation, as to why St John wrote his Canon in Tone 1. He plays on the word 'radiant', λαμπρός. In Greek the Sunday of Pascha is often referred simply as 'Η Λαμπρά [ἡμέρα]. He writes "Just as the day of Pascha is the feast of feasts, the festival of festivals and the most radiant day of all, so the first tone, which is sung on it, is more radiant than all the others. This is why in the common opinion of the musicians it was judged worthy to take the first place among the other tones". He quotes the verses which are given in the Oktoechos at the end of each tone.

The art of music marvels at your sounds,  
Gives you the first place. Ah, how well deserved!  
As you are called First Tone by music's art,  
First then be eulogised by us in words.  
O First, the first of beauties you obtain;  
First prize you hold of all in every place.

<sup>2</sup> These words, the first of which in Greek is 'Resurrection' are from the opening of St Gregory's short Easter sermon (*Sermon 1*, PG 35:396-401), which is also the source of Doxastikon of the paschal stichera. Ἀναστάσεως ἡμέρα, καὶ ἡ ἀρχὴ δεξιᾶ, καὶ λαμπρυνθῶμεν τῇ πανηγύρει, καὶ ἀλλήλους περιπτυσσώμεθα· εἴπωμεν, ἀδελφοί, καὶ τοῖς μισοῦσιν ἡμᾶς, μὴ ὅτι τοῖς δι' ἀγάπην τι πεποιηκόσιν, ἢ πεπονθόσι· συγχωρήσωμεν πάντα τῇ ἀναστάσει· δώμεν συγγνώμην ἀλλήλοις.

<sup>3</sup> This is taken from St Gregory's second sermon on Pascha (*Sermon 45*, PG 36:624-664), although St Gregory adds a third 'Pascha', as he says, 'in honour of the Trinity' [PG 36:624].

<sup>4</sup> Philo gives the meaning of Pascha as 'passing over, (διάβασις or διαβατήρια) and this meaning was therefore known to the Fathers. The Vulgate, though not the LXX, glosses the word at Exodus 12:11 'id est Transitus Domini'. St Gregory gives the explanation in his second homily on Pascha, Τὸ Πάσχα τοῦτο, τὸ μέγα τε καὶ σεβάσμιον, Φάσκα τοῖς Ἑβραίοις προσαγορεύεται, κατὰ τὴν ἐκείνων φωνήν· δηλοῖ δὲ ἡ φωνὴ τὴν διάβασιν. [PG 36:637]

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Exodus 15:1

<sup>6</sup> This is based on St Gregory's Sermon 45, where he says the paschal lamb was kept until the fifth day, 'perhaps because my victim [sc. Christ] purifies the senses, from which comes falling [into sin]', Διατηρεῖται δὲ εἰς πέμπτην ἡμέραν, ἵσως ὅτι καθαρτικὸν αἰσθήσεων τὸ ἐμὸν θῦμα, ἐξ ὧν τὸ πταίειν. [PG 36:641]

<sup>7</sup> 1 Timothy 6:16

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 28:9

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 95:11

<sup>10</sup> The allusion to the Creed is clear, but the immediate source is again St Gregory, Σήμερον σωτηρία τῷ κόσμῳ, ὅσος τε ὁρατός, καὶ ὅσος ἀόρατος. The whole passage is interesting, Σήμερον

### ODE 3

#### *Irmos*

Come let us drink a new drink,<sup>12</sup> not one marvellously brought forth from a barren rock,<sup>13</sup> but a Source of incorruption, which pours out from the tomb of Christ, **in whom we are established.**

Now all things have been filled with light, both heaven and earth and those beneath the earth;<sup>14</sup> so let all creation sing Christ's rising, **in whom<sup>15</sup> it is established.**<sup>16</sup>

Yesterday I was buried with you O Christ, today I rise with you as you arise. Yesterday I was crucified with you;<sup>17</sup> glorify me with you, Saviour, in your Kingdom.

### ODE 4

#### *Irmos*

Let the Prophet Avvakoum, inspired by God, keep the divine watch with us, and show forth the radiant Angel, who with resounding voice declares, 'To-day is salvation for the world, for Christ has risen as omnipotent'.<sup>18</sup>

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σωτηρία τῷ κόσμῳ, ὅσος τε ὁρατός, καὶ ὅσος ἀόρατος. Χριστὸς ἐκ νεκρῶν, συνεγείρεσθε· Χριστὸς εἰς ἑαυτὸν, ἐπανέρχεσθε· Χριστὸς ἐκ τάφων, ἐλευθερώθητε τῶν δεσμῶν τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Πύλαι ἔξδου ἀνοίγονται, καὶ θάνατος καταλύεται, καὶ ὁ παλαιὸς Ἀδὰμ ἀποτίθεται, καὶ ὁ νέος συμπληροῦται. [PG 36:634]

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:20, but also St Gregory in the passage quoted in note 10.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 26:29, where St John Chrysostom, in his Commentary on St Matthew, sees in the word 'kingdom' a reference to the resurrection, Εἶτα ἐπειδὴ παρέδωκε, φησὶν· Οὐ μὴ πῖω ἐκ τοῦ γεννήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου ταύτης ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης, ὅταν αὐτὸ πίνω καινὸν μεθ' ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Πατρὸς μου. Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ περὶ πάθους αὐτοῖς καὶ σταυροῦ διελέχθη, καὶ τὸν περὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως πάλιν εἰσάγει λόγον, βασιλείας εἰς μέσον ἀναμνήσας, καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν οὕτω τὴν ἑαυτοῦ καλέσας. [PG 58:739] "Then, when he had delivered it, he says, 'I will not drink of the fruit of this vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom' For because he had spoken with them about suffering and cross, he again introduces a saying about the resurrection, introducing a kingdom to them, and in this way referring to his own resurrection".

<sup>13</sup> Exodus 17:1-6, Numbers 20:2-11, 1 Corinthians 10:4. The use of the word 'barren', as well as 'established' are deliberate reminders of the story of Anna, whose Song forms the 3rd Ode.

<sup>14</sup> Philippians 2:10; here with reference to the Descent into Hades

<sup>15</sup> There is a textual problem here, some texts reading a feminine, and so making 'rising' the antecedent, others a masculine, so making Christ the antecedent. St Nikodemos argues for the latter because both the commentators to whom he has access read the masculine and because the context in the biblical Ode, where it is 'The Lord' in whom Anna's 'heart is established', suggests the same.

<sup>16</sup> According to an Athonite tradition, this is the troparion at which St Kosmas said to St John that he was defeated and that it should be John's canon only that should be sung in the churches at Pascha. St Nikodemos says that people from Vatopedi have told him that the library of Vatopedi contains a manuscript of an Easter canon by St Kosmas in Tone 2.

<sup>17</sup> This troparion is once again a paraphrase of St Gregory's first paschal sermon, Χθὲς συνεσταυρούμην Χριστῷ, σήμερον συνδοξάζομαι· χθὲς συνενεκρούμην, σὺζωοποιούμαι σήμερον· χθὲς συνεθαπτόμην, σήμερον συνεγίρομαι [PG 37:397]. St Gregory's source is Romans 8:17.

<sup>18</sup> Avvakoum 2:1. This troparion is little more than a close paraphrase of the opening of St Gregory's Sermon 45, Ἐπὶ τῆς φυλακῆς μου στήσομαι, φησὶν ὁ θαυμάσιος Ἀββακούμ. Καὶ γὰρ μετ' αὐτοῦ σήμερον, τῆς δεδομένης μοι παρὰ τοῦ Πνεύματος ἐξουσίας καὶ θεωρίας, καὶ ἀποσκοπεύσω καὶ γνῶσομαι, τί ὁφθήσεται, καὶ τί λαληθήσεται μοι. Καὶ ἔστιν, καὶ ἀπεσκόπευσα· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἀνὴρ

Christ appeared as a 'male' who opened the virgin womb. As our food he is called 'lamb'; 'unblemished', as our Passover without stain; and 'perfect', for he is true God.<sup>19</sup>

As a yearling lamb, for us a crown of goodness, the Blessed One, the cleansing Passover<sup>20</sup> has been willingly sacrificed for all; and from the tomb the fair Sun of justice<sup>21</sup> has shone for us again.<sup>22</sup>

God's forebear David, dancing, leaped before the Ark,<sup>23</sup> mere shadow, but seeing the fulfilment of the types, let us, God's holy people, inspired, rejoice, for Christ has risen as omnipotent.

## ODE 5

### *Irmos*

Let us arise in the early dawn,<sup>24</sup> and instead of myrrh, offer praises to the Master; and we shall see Christ, the Sun of Justice,<sup>25</sup> who causes life to dawn for all.

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ἐπιβεβηκὼς ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν, καὶ οὗτος ὑψηλὸς σφόδρα· καὶ ἡ ὄρασις αὐτοῦ, ὡς ὄρασις ἀγγέλου· καὶ ἡ στολὴ αὐτοῦ, ὡς φέγγος ἀστραπῆς διερχομένης· καὶ ἐπῆρε τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ κατ' ἀνατολὰς, καὶ ἐβόησε φωνῇ μεγάλῃ. Φωνὴ αὐτοῦ, ὡς φωνὴ σάλπιγγος· καὶ κύκλω αὐτοῦ, ὡς πλῆθος οὐρανοῦ στρατιᾶς, καὶ εἶπε· Σήμερον σωτηρία τῷ κόσμῳ [PG 36:624].

<sup>19</sup> This troparion is based on Exodus 12:5 and St Gregory's second homily on Pascha [Orat. 45] The biblical verse reads as follows:

It shall be for you a sheep **perfect, male**, one year old; you shall take it from the lambs or from the kids.

There is also an allusion to Exodus 13:12:

You shall set apart everything that **opens the womb**, the **male** to the Lord.

In his homily St Gregory comments on these texts and says that the Lamb 'shall be **eaten** towards evening' [PG 36:644 ἡμῖν δὲ ὁ ἄμνός βρωθήσεται] and the word he uses for 'shall be eaten' is the slightly uncommon βρωθήσεται, though it is the one used by the Septuagint at Exodus 12:46. St John in his canon uses the word βρωτός (food), which in a number of printed texts has been corrupted to the more common word βροτός (mortal). The point of the Passover Lamb was that it was **eaten**, not that it was mortal. The Slavonic here is wrong.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:7

<sup>21</sup> Malachy 3:20/4:2 and cf. Psalm 18:6

<sup>22</sup> Here St John continues his meditation on Exodus 12:5, but he adds an allusion to Psalm 64,12, 'You will bless the crown of the year of your **goodness**'. The LXX has, εὐλογήσεις τὸν στέφανον τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ τῆς χρηστότητός σου. The 'year of God's goodness' is commonly taken by the Fathers to refer to the time of the Incarnation, with a reference to Luke 4,19. This combination St John has again taken from the same homily by St Gregory. The word for 'goodness' in the Psalm is χρηστότης, and St John uses the corresponding adjective χρηστός ('good'). This again in many printed editions has been corrupted to the easier Χριστός ('Christ'), but it is not what St John wrote. The Slavonic is wrong here also. The link between the Psalm and Exodus is provided by the Greek words for 'year' and 'yearling'. St Gregory calls Christ στέφανόν τε χρηστότης εὐλογούμενον [PG 36:641]. He also explains in the previous sentence that Christ is a yearling [ἐνάσιον] lamb, because he is the Sun of justice. The two adjectives, εὐλογούμενος and χρηστός both qualifying στέφανος are awkward and I think the former, which has the definite article, may in fact be a title, a virtual proper name, 'the Blessed One'.

<sup>23</sup> 2 Reigns 6:5.14-16

<sup>24</sup> An echo of Isaiah 26:9, the scriptural text of the 5th Ode. Cf. Luke 24:1

<sup>25</sup> Malachy 3:20/4:2 and cf. Psalm 18:6

Those who were held by Hades' bonds, seeing your measureless compassion, press forward to the light, O Christ, with joyful steps, praising an eternal Passover.<sup>26</sup>

With torches in our hands<sup>27</sup> let us go out to meet Christ as he comes from the grave like a bridegroom,<sup>28</sup> and with the festive ranks of Angels, let us together feast God's saving Passover.

#### ODE 6

##### *Irmos*

You went down to the deepest parts of the earth,<sup>29</sup> and you shattered the everlasting bars<sup>30</sup> of those that those that were fettered, O Christ. And on the third day, like Jonas from the whale, you arose from the tomb.

Keeping the seals intact,<sup>31</sup> O Christ, you rose from the tomb, you who did not harm the locks<sup>32</sup> of the Virgin's womb at your birth, and you have opened to us the gates of Paradise.

O my Saviour, the living Victim unsuitable for sacrifice,<sup>33</sup> as God offering yourself willingly to the Father, you raised with yourself all Adam's race, in rising from the tomb.

#### ODE 7

##### *Irmos*

He who delivered the Young Men from the furnace,<sup>34</sup> becoming man suffers as a mortal, and through suffering he clothes the mortal with the glory of incorruption: the only blessed and most glorious God of our Fathers.<sup>35</sup>

The holy women hastened after you<sup>36</sup> with sweet spices. The One whom they sought with tears as a mortal, they worshipped with joy as the living<sup>37</sup> God, and they proclaimed the mystic Passover, O Christ, to your disciples.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Isaias 49:8-9, Psalm 145:7

<sup>27</sup> St Gregory describes the lights of the eve of Pascha as a forerunner of the Great Light. Καλὴ μὲν καὶ ἡ χθὲς ἡμῖν λαμπροφορία καὶ φωταγωγία, ἥν ἰδίᾳ τε καὶ δημοσίᾳ συνεστησάμεθα, πᾶν γένος ἀνθρώπων μικροῦ καὶ ἀξία πᾶσα, δαγίλει τῷ πυρὶ τὴν νύκτα καταφωτίζοντες, καὶ τοῦ μεγάλου φωτὸς ἀντίτυπος. ... Καλλίων δὲ ἡ σήμερον, καὶ περιφανεστέρα. Ὅσω χθὲς μὲν πρόδρομον ἦν τοῦ μεγάλου φωτὸς ἀνισταμένου τὸ φῶς, καὶ οἷον εὐφροσύνη τις προεόρτιος. Σήμερον δὲ τὴν ἀνάστασιν αὐτὴν ἐορτάζομεν, οὐκ ἔτι ἐλπίζομένην, ἀλλ' ἤδη γεγεννημένην, καὶ κόσμον ὅλον ἐαυτῇ συνάγουσαν [PG 36:625].

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 25:1-13, Psalm 18:6. There is also a backward echo to Holy Week.

<sup>29</sup> Jonas 2:7, Matthew 12:40

<sup>30</sup> Isaias 45:2-3, Psalm 106:16

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 27:66

<sup>32</sup> Ezekiel 44:2

<sup>33</sup> This again is based on St Gregory, who uses the word ἄθυτον, though slightly apologetically, τὸ μέγα καὶ ἄθυτον ἱερεῖον, ἵν' οὕτως εἴπω, ὅσον ἐπὶ τῇ πρώτῃ φύσει [PG 36:640]. The word is used once in Leviticus of a victim that is 'unsuitable for sacrifice'

<sup>34</sup> Daniel 3:49-51.92

<sup>35</sup> Daniel 3:52-53

<sup>36</sup> Psalm 44:10, cf. Song 1:3-4

<sup>37</sup> Luke 24:5

<sup>38</sup> Matthew 28:7-8

We feast death's slaughter, the overthrow of Hell,<sup>39</sup> the first fruits of a new eternal life:<sup>40</sup> and dancing we hymn the cause: the only blessed and most glorious God of our Fathers.

How truly holy and all-festive is this saving night, how full of light, herald of the bright day of the resurrection, in which the timeless Light shone bodily for all from the tomb.<sup>41</sup>

#### ODE 8

##### *Irmos*

This chosen and holy day is the first of Sabbaths,<sup>42</sup> the Queen and Lady, the Feast of Feasts and the Festival of Festivals<sup>43</sup> on which we bless Christ to all the ages.<sup>44</sup>

Come let us share in the new fruit of the vine,<sup>45</sup> in divine joy, and in the kingdom of Christ, on the glorious day of the Resurrection, as we sing his praise as God to all the ages.

Lift your eyes around you, Sion, and see. For behold, like beacons<sup>46</sup> shedding light divine your children have come to you, from West and North, from the Sea and from the East, blessing Christ in you to all the ages.<sup>47</sup>

Almighty Father, Word and Spirit, nature united in three Persons, beyond all being and beyond all Godhead, into you we have been baptised and we bless you to all the ages.<sup>48</sup>

#### ODE 9

##### *Irmos*

Enlightened, be enlightened,<sup>49</sup> O New Jerusalem, for the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.<sup>50</sup> Dance now and be glad, O Sion, and you too rejoice, pure Mother of God,<sup>51</sup> at the arising of him to whom you gave birth.

O divine! O beloved! O sweetest voice! You have truly promised that you will be with us unto the end of time, O Christ.<sup>52</sup> And we the faithful rejoice, having this as an anchor of hope.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Osee 13:14, 1 Corinthians 15:54, Daniel 3:88

<sup>40</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:23

<sup>41</sup> Cf. note 27 above.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Leviticus 23:36

<sup>43</sup> Αὕτη ἑορτῶν ἡμῖν ἑορτὴ, καὶ πανήγυρις πανηγύρεων, τοσοῦτον ὑπεραίρουσα πάσας, οὐ τὰς ἀνθρωπικὰς μόνον καὶ χαμαὶ ἐρχομένας, ἀλλ' ἤδη καὶ τὰς αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἐπ' αὐτῷ τελουμένας, ὅσον ἀστέρας ἥλιος [PG 36:624].

<sup>44</sup> Daniel 3:53

<sup>45</sup> Matthew 26:29, the reference is to holy Communion.

<sup>46</sup> Philippians 2:15

<sup>47</sup> This troparion combines two verses from Isaias, 60:4 and 49:12. It is unclear why St John adds 'West', which is not in the Septuagint and is the meaning of the '[Mediterranean] Sea'.

<sup>48</sup> The only overt reference to Baptism in the canon.

<sup>49</sup> The Hebrew has actives, 'Arise! Shine!', but Greek is either middle or passive.

<sup>50</sup> Isaias 60:1

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Luke 1:47

<sup>52</sup> Matthew 28:20

O great and most sacred Pascha, Christ! O Wisdom and Word and Power of God!<sup>54</sup> Grant that we may partake of you fully in the day that has no evening<sup>55</sup> of your Kingdom.

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<sup>53</sup> Hebrews 6:19

<sup>54</sup> A paraphrase of opening of the final section of St Gregory's paschal homily (Orat. PG 45 36:664), Ἄλλ' ὦ Πάσχα, τὸ μέγα καὶ ἱερὸν, καὶ παντὸς τοῦ κόσμου καθάρσιον! ὡς γὰρ ἐμψύχῳ σοι διαλέξομαι. ὦ Λόγε Θεοῦ, καὶ φῶς, καὶ ζωὴ, καὶ σοφία, καὶ δύναμις! χαίρω γὰρ πᾶσί σου τοῖς ὀνόμασιν. 'But, O Pascha, great and sacred and the purification of the whole world — for I will speak to you as a living person — O Word of God and Light and Life and Wisdom and Power — for I rejoice in all your names'.

<sup>55</sup> The word ἀνέσπερος, which is common in the liturgical texts, is exclusively Christian. It is used by St Basil in his treatise on the Holy Spirit in speaking of the 'eighth day' (27:66) and also in the second homily of the Hexaemeron in explaining why Genesis 1 speaks of 'one day', rather than 'first day'. Both these refer to the titles of Psalms 6 and 11.