

ST. THOMAS SUNDAY

Every day during the week of Easter, called **Bright Week** by the Church, the paschal services are celebrated in all their splendor. The Easter baptismal procession is repeated daily. The Royal Gates of the Sanctuary remain open. The joy of the Resurrection and the gift of the Kingdom of eternal life continue to abound. Then, at the end of the week, on Saturday evening, the second Sunday after Easter is celebrated in remembrance of the appearance of Christ to the Apostle Thomas “after eight days” (*Jn 20:26*).

It is important to note that the number eight has symbolic significance in both Jewish and Christian spiritual tradition. It signifies more than completion and fullness; it signifies the Kingdom of God and the life of the world to come, since seven is the number of earthly time. The **Sabbath, the seventh day**, is the blessed day of rest in this world, the final day of the week. The “first day of the week, “the day after Sabbath;” stressed in all of the gospels as the day of Christ’s Resurrection (*Mk 16:1, Mt 28:1, Lk 24:1, Jn 20:1, 19*) is, therefore, also the eighth day, “the day beyond the confines of this world, the day which stands for the life of the world to come, the day of the eternal rest of the Kingdom of God (see *Hebrews 4*).

The Sunday after Easter, called the Second Sunday is, thus, the eighth day of the paschal celebration; the last day of **Bright Week**. It is, therefore, called the **Antipascha** and it was only on this day, in the early church, that the newly baptized Christians removed their robes and entered, once again, into the life of this world.

In the Church services, the stress is on the Apostle Thomas’ vision of Christ and the significance of the day comes to us in the word of the Gospel:

*Then He said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see My Hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.”
Thomas answered Him, “My Lord and my God!”
Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen Me?
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (John 20:27-29).*

We have not seen Christ with our physical eyes, nor touched His risen body with our physical hands, yet, in the Holy Spirit, we have seen and touched and tasted the Word of Life (*Jn 1:1-4*), and so we believe. At each of the daily services until Ascension Day, we sing the **Easter Troparion**. At each of the Sunday services, beginning with Antipascha, we sing the Easter canon and hymns, and repeat the celebration of the “first day of the week” on which Christ rose from the dead. At all the liturgies, the epistle readings are taken from the **Book of Acts**, telling us of the first Christians who lived in communion with the Risen Lord. All of the gospel readings are taken from the Gospel of St. John, considered by many to be a gospel written particularly for those who are newly baptized into the new birth of Christ, in the name of the Holy Trinity. The reason for this opinion is that all of the “**signs**” – as the miracles in St. John’s Gospel are called – deal with sacramental themes involving water: wine, and bread. Thus, each of the Sundays after Thomas Sunday, with the exception of the third, is dedicated to the memory of one of these “signs.”