

WHY SPECIFICALLY THE CROSS?

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WHY DID THE LORD JESUS CHRIST CHOOSE TO DIE CRUCIFIED?

Why Didn't He Die by Being Burned?

Why Didn't He Die by Drowning?

Why Didn't He Die by Piercing of the Sword?

Why Didn't He Die by Strangling or Hanging?

Why Didn't He Die by Slaying?

PROLOGUE:

Why the Cross?

The cross has a great depth related to concepts and meanings embedded in God's original plan for mankind's salvation. Our teacher Saint Paul the apostle says, "*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*" (1 Cor 1: 18). **Therefore, the cross is not simply a method of killing.**

The Cross Spiritually:

The cross penetrates into the depth of human emotions, spiritual thoughts, and the work of the Holy Spirit within. To the saints the cross is the focus of strong embrace, in their relationship with God. It is the subject of their contemplation and daily practice. The cross has connotations that enter into the depths of the soul by the power of the Holy Spirit, even without our awareness. For us, the cross is strength, victory, triumph, and life. **Why then did the Lord Christ choose to die crucified?**



WHY DID THE CHRIST DIE CRUCIFIED?

1) Through the cross He became the Priest and the Sacrifice:

The Lord Jesus Christ was not only a sacrifice who was offered for the life of the world; **He was both the priest and the sacrifice simultaneously.** If He was slain on the ground He would have only been a sacrifice, and not a priest; on the cross however, He was seen hanging as a sacrifice offering, with uplifted arms praying as a priest. The observer would see a priest praying and a sacrifice offered and would say, "*For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us*" (1 Cor 5:7). The Lord Christ's intercession for humanity is necessary while He offers Himself as a sacrifice; He is the Lamb of God. In the Revelation Saint John the beloved saw Him, "*a Lamb as though it had been slain*" (Rev 5: 6); therefore the Lord

Jesus Christ had to be standing. He could not lie down as He performs His work as High Priest; therefore an internal slaying was necessary.

❖ **The Internal Wound was Deeper:**

Despite the wounds, the nails, and the crown of thorns, the main wound was internal. God's deep love was manifest in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ who endured **this internal slaying**. Saint Paul the apostle says, "...how I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." (Phil 1: 8). The internal slaying was more serious and harder than the external one. In this regard one of the poets said that oppression from a relative is deeper than a sharp sword, meaning that the wound of a sharp sword is easier to the soul than being oppressed by a relative. In a similar fashion, it is written in the Holy Bible, "*What are these wounds between your arms? Then he will answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.*" (Zech 13: 6).

❖ **The Internal Hemorrhage:**

The whip by which the Lord Jesus Christ was scourged was made of cow thongs, having parts of bones or metal attached to its edges. Therefore it tore the veins surrounding the chest and caused **an internal hemorrhage**. When the soldier pierced His side with the spear, blood was filling the chest; the red Hemoglobin flowed out, followed by the transparent edema. This is what Saint John simply described as, "*Blood and water came out*" (John 19: 34). Saint John saw the elements of blood separated since the soldier pierced the Lord Jesus Christ's side about sunset, nearly two hours after He had given up His soul in the ninth hour.

❖ **He Died Slain:**

Saint John was careful to mention the incident of the flow of water and blood from His side to emphasize that Christ the Lord had died slain. He said, "*And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true*" (Jn 19: 35). The Lord's neck and chest were relatively unharmed, while the hemorrhaging was acute from within. The external appearance only revealed the scars of the whip, and the wounds of the nails in the arms and feet; which caused a limited external hemorrhage. A crucified person could remain hanging and suffering for three days without dying. Saint John the evangelist was careful to emphasize that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lamb of the passover Who was slain for our sake, therefore he emphasized the flow of blood and water from His side.

❖ **The Cause of the Heart Failure:**

The acute internal hemorrhage that the Lord Jesus Christ underwent resulted in a diminished amount of blood in His blood circulation, therefore the heart had to pump quicker to replace the lost blood. For the heart muscle to pump quicker, it required larger amounts of blood. As a result of the hemorrhage, the aortic veins that supply the heart, were unable to fulfil their role due to the inadequate amount of blood reaching them; and the cycle repeated. If the normal heart rate is seventy beats per minute, with hemorrhaging it doubles to one hundred and forty beats per minute. This exhausts the heart muscle until the right side of the heart collapses, resulting in death.

❖ The Victorious Scream:

As the Lord Jesus Christ was approaching this final second, He cried out in a loud voice and said, “**Father, ‘Into Your hands I commit My spirit’**” (Lk 23: 46). This was a shout of victory! For the first time since the fall of Adam in Paradise, someone was able to say, ‘*Into Your hands I commit My spirit*’. Every person who died before Christ was unable to commit his spirit into the hands of the Father; Satan captured him. In spite of His severe faintness, Christ the Lord screamed in a loud voice, to direct the attention to this victorious phrase. This was the first time since the fall of Adam that a human being committed his spirit into the hands of the Father.

The Lord Jesus Christ became a bridge by which the redeemed would cross from Hades toward the paradise of joy and to His Kingdom. Satan lost hope at this moment, because he was confronted with the power of Him who was Victorious through the cross. In the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom it says, “**When You sloped towards death, O Life Who never dies, You killed Hades by the lightning of Your Divinity. When You raised the dead from under the moist, the heavenly hosts cried out to You, O Christ life-giver, glory to You.**” The Lord Jesus Christ lightened when He gave up His spirit into the hands of the Father. In other words, He became like lightning and frightened all the kingdom of Satan.

In Gesemene, the Lord Jesus Christ said, “*My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death*” (Mk 14: 34). As He struggled, an angel came to strengthen Him. This was all done in order to conceal His Divinity from Satan. However, at the moment in which He gave up His spirit upon the cross, i.e. when His human soul departed from the body, He immediately lightened by the glory of His Divinity. Thus, it is written, “*Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it*” (Col 2: 15). Satan was prepared for a great festival, and had all the gates of Hades and all the powers of darkness surrounding the area of Golgotha, suddenly the scene changed as, the One Who “*Went out conquering and to conquer*” (Rev 6: 2) confronted him. All those powers were terrified at the sight of the glory of His Divinity.

2) Through The Cross He Was The Standing Dead:

Christ had to be the sacrifice Who was slain praying or standing. The scene after the release of His Spirit was tremendous! **He was dead and standing at the same time**, since the legs of a crucified person carry him. They did not break His legs when they found that He had already given up His Spirit, therefore He was actually standing on His feet when He gave up His spirit. This signifies that during His death He was the Risen and Living Christ. This does not mean that He did not really die, but symbolizes that, “***In Him was life***” (Jn 1: 4). He gave up His spirit but the power of life was within Him. When He rose from the dead He kept the wounds so we would see Him risen as slain. In other words, as the Risen Christ He was slain, and as a slain sacrifice He was standing. It was mentioned in the Book of Revelation that there, “***Stood a Lamb as though it had been slain***” (Rev 5: 6). Therefore, Christ the Lord could not have been burned or drowned because those methods of dying could not carry these deep meanings.

3) Through the Cross He Reconciled the Earthly with the Heavenly:

Does the Lord Jesus Christ represent God among human beings or human beings before God? Certainly, He does both simultaneously. **He is the Son of God and the Son of Man at the same time.** Without the incarnation, the Lord Jesus Christ would have remained the Son of God, and human beings the sons of man. Through His incarnation He united the sonship to God with the sonship to man, since He Himself became the Son of God and the Son of Man at the same time. He wanted to bridge the link between God and man.

❖ When does this link reach the climax of its goal?

On the cross, this link reached the climax of its goal. As the Only Begotten Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ became the Son of Man through His Advent, He did not simply establish a relationship between God and humanity through His Advent, but wanted to reconcile God and humanity. There is no relationship or communion between God and human beings except through Jesus Christ, as He was hanging upon the cross. He is God manifest in the flesh; the first-born of humanity in the presence of the heavenly Father, and the ladder that links heaven to earth.

When we look to the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, we say that He is the way that leads to heaven. He Himself said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life”* (Jn 14: 6). Everyone looking towards the cross should be looking towards heaven, because he looks upwards. *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up”* (Jn 3: 14). **Whoever looks towards Him should look upwards,** as He was hanging between heaven and earth. When we see Him, we observe God manifest in the flesh, and we observe the love of God announced to humanity. In the meanwhile, when the Father looks at Him from heaven He witnesses His full obedience and smells the aroma of joy that He smelt at sunset upon the Golgotha. **Therefore, He is a meeting point between our sight and that of the Heavenly Father.** The Father looks at Him; and if each one of us looks at the Lord Jesus Christ, our gaze will meet with the Father’s. In other words, if you were standing near the cross as the Father was looking from heaven towards the cross, He would see you under it. Simultaneously, if you looked at the Lord Jesus Christ you would see the Father accepting His sacrifice.

4) The Cross and the Bestowed Ego:

The sign of the cross signifies the sacrificed ego and the fullness of obedience. If we want to cross or cancel a line we put a crosswise line through it. The cross in itself announces the life of full surrender to God. The Lord Jesus Christ in His outward appearance on the cross was standing, but in reality every part of His body was fixed, unable to move. He wants to tell us that we have to crucify *“the flesh with its passions and desires”* (Gal 5: 24). Each one of us should say, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”* (Gal 2: 20).

Upon the cross all passions and private desires of the flesh were fixed. The Lord Jesus Christ of course did not have any sinful desire, God forbid, but He had natural desires, such as hunger, thirst, exhaustion. For example, when He fasted, He hungered, a natural bodily desire which is not sinful in itself. The will of the heavenly Father for the Lord Jesus Christ

was to abolish these desires; **He responded with full obedience.** When Satan came to tempt Him as Jesus was hungry, he told Him, *“If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread. He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”* (Matt 4: 3-4). If the body is busy fulfilling its desires (feeding on bread), the spirit is hindered from growth, even if these desires are not sinful. **Let the body be crucified, for the Divine will to be executed.** Also, when Christ was upon the cross He was told, *“If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross”* (Matt 27: 40). Why all this fatigue, why all these terrible sufferings? The Lord Jesus Christ, however, would never obey the desires of the flesh, as long as they conflict with the will of the Heavenly Father. He said, *“Not My will, but Yours, be done”* (Lk 22: 42), that is: let not my bodily desires for rest or liberation from physical and psychological pain be done, but let the Heavenly Father’s will be fulfilled; i.e. the redemption of humankind.

Aside from physical pain, the Lord Jesus Christ was exposed to bitter psychological pain. He suffered betrayal from Judas (one of His own disciples) who kissed Him and through the kiss handed Him over to His enemies. Likewise, the people for whose salvation He came disgraced Him. He had given them all His love and they rewarded Him with disgrace, what a **very bitter and inexpressible feeling!** Moreover, He was put in the place of the despised who are stricken and smitten by God, and carried all the sins of humanity to pay the cost of the disobedience and mutiny of human beings – this is a chalice full of bitterness.

It was natural that both the Lord Jesus’ body and soul feel that they were confronting a chalice that was bitter to undertake. Yet He had to drink it till its end, and told the Father, *“Nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done”* (Lk 22: 42). What He means by “will” here, is the natural desires or needs that develop as a result of carrying a real human nature, and not the will of responsible for carrying out a decision, since that decision had already been made by the Holy Trinity in order to fulfill Christ’s intended salvation. It is characteristic of this human nature to feel pain, grief and suffering. The Lord Jesus Christ, in the terrifying sufferings that He was exposed to, wanted to tell the Father: ‘My decision would not be built upon the characteristics that belong to this nature, (feelings of pain, exhaustion, sadness), but is built upon My full desire to please You and to save those whom You loved to the end’. Saint John wrote, *“Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end”* (Jn 13: 1).

5) Through the Cross the Prophecies were fulfilled:

The cross was essential because through it the prophecies were fulfilled. David the prophet in the psalms said, *“They pierced My hands and My feet”* (Ps 22: 18), and, *“They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots”* (Ps 22: 18). He also said, *“And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink”* (Ps 69: 21). How else could the prophecies be fulfilled except through crucifixion? Even Christ prophesied saying, *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up”* (Jn 3: 14). Christ carried our sins which are symbolized by the serpent, and ascended the cross; nailing the sins to the cross. He then descended, leaving the sins hanging upon the cross. Thus we say in the liturgy, **‘Abolish the record of our sins Lord Christ and save us’.** Paul writes that He, *“Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross”* (Col 2: 14). The

hanging serpent was a symbol of Christ carrying the sins of the world. For the prophecies to be fulfilled the sacrifice had to be lifted upward.

Another symbolic incident is when Moses the prophet split the Red Sea by the stroke of his staff. He then returned the waters to their original form with the next stroke; making the sign of the cross. Therefore, causing Pharaoh - who is a symbol of Satan - to drown. Thus the cross was a means of conquering the Kingdom of Satan.

6) Through the Cross He Reigned from the Cross:

David the psalmist wrote, “*The Lord reigns from the cross*” (Ps 96:10). The instrument that caused His death, and through which He reigned over the hearts of human beings, had to be a wooden cross. Since He said, “*My kingdom is not of this world*” (Jn 18:35), this wooden cross should be lifted up high. The cross was His throne, as the governor himself confessed in writing “*Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*” (Jn 19: 19). Further, it is written “*And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: This Is Jesus the King of the Jews*” (Matt 27: 37). It was written in three languages (Latin, Greek, and Hebrew), therefore the whole world confessed Him officially as the King of the Jews. For this accusation to be hung above His head while He was enthroned, He had to die crucified. No other means of death would have allowed this for Him. He is the King of the Jews, and His throne is the cross. In other words, **being the King is the reason He was sentenced to death, and He died for His kingdom.** But how did He reign? He reigned through death!

7) The Cross Offered an Opportunity of Three Hours to Fulfil His Work:

There is no other method of death that would take three hours. If someone was cast into a furnace he would die in five minutes. Likewise, if someone drowned or was hanged, death would occur almost immediately. When someone is hung, the noose is placed around his neck, and when the platform supporting him is removed, his spinal cord is split instantly, and after two minutes he gives up his spirit. However, the Lord Jesus Christ had been dying for three hours, during which many important and very great events occurred.

1- The Remembrance of Adam:

The Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on the sixth day and in the sixth hour to point to us that He is the second Adam; as Adam was created on the sixth day.

2- The Lamb of the Passover:

The crucifixion took place between the sixth and ninth hours, which is the time for slaying the passover lamb. According to the Mosaic law it was to be, “*at twilight*” (Num 9:3).

3- The Sun of Righteousness:

“*Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land*” (Matt 27: 45). The sun hid its rays. A spiritual interpretation is written, “*But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with “healing in His wings”*” (Mal 4: 2). There has never been a sun with wings. The Lord Jesus Christ was hanging upon the cross with His arms (His wings) stretched out, saying, “*Father, forgive them*” (Lk 23: 34).

This is the healing in His wings. The sun hid its beams to declare that the Sun of Righteousness is the One hanging upon the cross, thus it is not fitting for the sun to shine in the presence of the true Sun of Righteousness.

4- The Words of Christ the Lord Upon the Cross:

On the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ told the thief, *“Today you will be with Me in Paradise”* (Lk 23: 43). This expression announces that Paradise will be opened on that day. Him saying, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”* (Lk 23: 34), implies the the Savior of the world’s feelings of love and forgiveness. Likewise, the phrase *“I thirst”* (Jn 19: 28), was said to fulfil the prophecy. *“It is finished!”* (Jn 19: 30), carries implications ensuring the fulfillment of the redemption and prophecies concerning Him. He says to His Mother, the Virgin Saint Mary, *“Woman, behold your son!”* (Jn 19 :26), and hands her to John; to let us know that the Virgin became a spiritual mother for all saints, and the faithful intercessor of the Church in the persona of John the beloved. Moreover, we understand from this that the Virgin is the bride, the sanctuary, and the second heaven.

5- Episodes from Eternity

Scene One:

During the three hours upon the cross Christ the Lord spoke many words. He told the thief on the right side, *“Today you will be with Me in Paradise”* (Lk 23: 43). Initially, this thief was very bitter for being crucified, and agreed with the other thief in reviling the Lord. As time passed however, he started to shift from murmur towards repentance.

The three hours were needed for Christ to paint this perfect picture on Golgotha. The right hand thief was a repenting sinner who went to Paradise, while the left hand thief was a sinner who did not repent, and went to Hades. This scene on Golgotha was like a perfect artistic piece in which we see Jesus – the King of Righteousness and Savior of the world, Who shares our nature and was counted human while He is the Word of God – standing, with those who seek and receive forgiveness on His right, and those who eternally refuse repentance on His left. On the day of the declaration of the Kingdom of God we are going to see the same scene of Golgotha. It is written, *“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. **And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left”*** (Matt 25: 31-33). **This scene was only a glimpse of eternity in which we perceive the sight of the second coming during the fulfillment of redemption upon the cross.**

In the Holy Liturgy we say, ‘As we too commemorate His holy passion, His Resurrection, His Ascension to the heaven, His sitting at Your Right Hand, O Father, and His Second Coming from heavens, awesome and glorious.’ From this statement **we know that the Church does not separate between the incidents of the salvation and those of the second coming and eternity**, because these are all acts of God the Redeemer. The same applies regarding the coming of Elijah the prophet prior to Jesus Christ. In the same manner we perceive what is written in the Holy Scripture; explaining the relationship between the prophecies of the first coming to that of the second. Saint Matthew wrote, *“And His disciples asked Him, saying, Why then do the scribes say that **Elijah must come***

first?” Jesus answered and said to them, *“Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that **Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished**”* (Matt 17:10-12). In the book of Malachi it is written, *“Behold, I will send you **Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD**”* (Mal 4:5). Hence, whenever the Scribes and the Pharisees met the disciples they cautioned them that Elijah has not come yet, and so this could not be the Christ. When the disciples saw Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration they remembered the words of the Scribes and the Pharisees and asked Christ, *“Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”*. He answered that they should understand what is written; the prophecy is double folded. It says, *“He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord”* (Lk 1:17). The one who is meant here is John the Baptist. The Lord Jesus Christ said by His pure mouth, *“But I say to you that Elijah has come already...Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist”* (Matt 17:12-13). Therefore, the prophecy concerns His first coming, but it will be fulfilled literally in His second coming. In the Book of Malachi, the prophet made a link between the first coming and the second when he said, *“For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up, Says the Lord of hosts, That will leave them neither root nor branch”* (Mal 4:1).

Scene Two:

Another beautiful artistic piece that the Divine care painted can be seen in the incidents of the crucifixion. Pontius Pilate the Roman Governor stood in the middle, with the Lord Jesus Christ on one side, and Barabas on the other. This scene contains an awesome meaning, it was not coincidental. Here Pilate symbolizes justice because he epitomizes the rule of the Roman Empire. He was standing in the middle with the King of Righteousness – the Lord Jesus Christ, the second Adam - on one side, and Barabas the criminal - arrogant in evil, symbolizing the ancient Adam - on the other. In the story of salvation one of them should die. Since it was essential to choose, the people asked for the release of Barabas. The inner depth aside from what is apparent in the story of salvation is that **the Lord had to be sentenced to death so that the depraved criminal (who symbolizes the sinful person) may escape eternal ruin.**

The session in which they sentenced the Lord was the strangest in the whole history of humanity. Did it ever occur in history that **a judge simultaneously rules for the justification and crucifixion of the same person in the same court session?** When he decided to kill Him, *“He took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person”* (Matt 27: 24). If someone’s eyes were unveiled, he would see Pilate, with those in Hades and eternal Hell, still washing his hands. His hands are eternally bloodied, because this crime can not be washed by water, but only through repentance and turning from evil. The Lord Jesus Christ is innocent and just according to His personal righteousness, while He is considered a sinner because the Father put on Him all our sins. Thus, it is written, *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Cor. 5: 21).

Scene Three:

In the Book of Acts, the section regarding the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost refers us to the book of Joel where he writes, *“And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; **Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy**, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions; And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord”* (Joel 2:28-31). Thus, he links the incidents of Pentecost to those of the end of the world. *“The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light”* (Matt 24: 29) *“Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord”* refers to the Second Coming. On the day of the crucifixion the sun was darkened as well, therefore **the scene of Golgotha is linked to that of the end of the world**. If it were not for God’s mercy, the world would have been destroyed on the day of the crucifixion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. How dare this humanity crucify the Only Begotten Son of God? However, in the Psalm we say, *“This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it,”* (Ps 118:24). It is the great terrifying day of the Lord.

When Christ the Lord spoke of the end of the world He said, *“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from Heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken”* (Matt 24: 29). So, *“The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (Joel 2: 31-32), refers to the Second Coming as well.

All these associations between the incidents and the prophecies would have never been fulfilled unless the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified for three hours; in order for all these incidents to be fulfilled as He was hanging.

8) The Cross is the Tree of Life:

Saint Ephrem the Syrian said, **‘Blessed is that carpenter Who made by His cross a bridge for the crossing of the redeemed’**. The Lord Jesus Christ chose plenty of fishermen as His disciples, but His profession was not a fisherman. He had two professions (metaphorically speaking); one was practiced before the redemption (a carpenter), and the other after the resurrection when He took the appearance of a gardener as though this was His profession.

The first profession He practiced is carpentry. He is the carpenter who formed the cross from a tree, and by it He redeemed humanity. He had to use the same instruments that caused the fall, to fulfil the redemption. The tree was the cause of the fall of humanity, and the cross is the tree of life which lifts up believers who eat from it onto eternal life. Nothing on earth could confront God’s wisdom and economy. As the serpent was another cause in the fall of humanity, Moses hung it up in the wilderness as a means for people to keep away from evil and eradicate sin. Saint Ephrem the Syrian says, **‘As Satan hid himself in the serpent to make man fall, so did the Lord Jesus Christ conceal His divinity from Satan through**

humanity'. He concealed His glory by the Human Nature, "*And He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind*" (Ps 18: 10).

When the Lord Jesus Christ was hanging upon the cross, He was like a tree from which the fruit hangs. Satan looked at it and found that the fruit was good for food and pleasant to the eyes, so he swallowed it. **Because death swallowed its opponent, it was swallowed by Life. Saint Paul wrote, "Through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil"** (Heb 2: 14). The Lord Jesus Christ wanted to remind Satan of what He had done to man, and wanted Him to drink of the same chalice he had filled and caused others to drink. Regarding the grace of salvation Saint Paul says, "**Which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence**" (Eph 1: 8). He never harmed anyone, yet all injury was put on Him as He was liberating man from the power of death and sin. This is the marvelous wisdom of God. **Satan has no excuse because he is the aggressor, so when he was caught in his crime he had to be judged.** Hence, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross was one of the stages of the judgment of sin and evil. "*For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh*" (Rom 8: 3). Satan was judged on the cross.

Summing up, we say that the Lord Jesus Christ had to work as a carpenter so that we would know that He is the One Who performed the redemption on the cross. Therefore, He had to die on a wooden cross.

❖ **The Cross opened the door to Paradise:**

The Lord Jesus Christ selected His tomb in a garden and chose to appear to Mary Magdalene in that garden. She is a symbol of humanity and when she saw Him **she supposed Him "to be the gardener"** (Jn 20: 15). Appearing to her in such a form, He wanted to remind her of paradise and of the incident of the fall of humanity, and to explain that the cross opened paradise. Therefore, He intended that His meeting with her would be in a garden. In the first garden, Satan appeared to Eve in the image of a serpent, but the One Who met the Magdalene - the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior, the new Adam - told her, "*I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.*" (Jn 20: 17). He announced the good tidings: that as God is His Father by nature He became ours by adoption. The one speaking to her is not Satan that spoke to Eve in Paradise, but the Word of God announcing the new life, "*which was with the Father and was manifested to us*" (1 Jn 1: 2).

9) The Cross effaced the Curse:

In Deuteronomy it is written, "**For he who is hanged is accursed of God**" (Deut 21:23). Therefore the Jews insisted that the Lord Jesus Christ should die crucified, in order to prove that he was accursed according to the law. There could be no plea of righteousness or Holiness for someone who is hanged, since the law says, "*For he who is hanged is accursed of God.*" However, God placed this verse in the law intending to hang on the cross, carry the curse of sin, and annul it. Isaiah completed the idea by saying, "*Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed*" (Is 53: 4-

5). They thought He was accursed, nevertheless He bore the curse of the sins of many and interceded for the transgressors, carrying their sins. Never take one verse without discerning the rest of its meaning in other verses of the Bible.

The Lord Jesus Christ effaced the curse through His resurrection from the dead. Saint Paul the Apostle said that He was, *“Declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead”* (Rom 1: 4). He also said that He was the one, *“Who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification”* (Rom 4: 25). He ensured the importance of the cross as a method for lifting the curse from the redeemed. Thus He said, *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree, that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith”* (Gal 3: 13-14).

10) The Cross and the Divine Throne:

The sign of the cross has **four branches or wings**, which symbolize the Divine Throne surrounded by the **four incorporeal creatures**. The **number four** links the cross with the heavenly throne which is not a material but a spiritual throne. The number four is very explicit in the heavenly throne as well as in the cross. The cross symbolizes the spread of salvation throughout the whole world. Salvation from the east to the west, and from north to south was through the cross. Likewise, the four incorporeal creatures surrounding the throne are symbols of salvation. **The image of Man symbolizes the incarnation, the image of the Ox symbolizes the sacrifice or the crucifixion. The symbol of the Lion symbolizes the resurrection and strength**, because through the resurrection from the dead the Lord Jesus Christ declared His Divine power over death, for He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. **The image of the Eagle symbolizes the ascension**, because the eagle hovers high in the sky. **Thus, the four living creatures are symbols of the incarnation of the Logos, His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.**

The Bible spread throughout the entire world through **four evangelists**: Matthew, Luke, Mark, and John. The sequence of the four living creatures carrying the Divine Throne corresponds to this theological sequence of the four evangelists. The total number of the gospels was not three or five, but four. This was not by coincidence, but intentionally correlating the gospels and the concept of the four sided cross, with the throne which is surrounded by the four creatures.

The gospel according to **Saint Matthew** speaks of Christ the Lord as the Son of David or the Son of man. He mentioned the appellation **Son of Man** thirty three times in his gospel, this is why he is symbolized by **the Man**. The gospel according to **Saint Luke** speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ as the servant and His act of offering Himself as a **Sacrifice**. He was very careful to mention incidents such as the circumcision on the eighth day, going to the temple to offer the sacrifice (two young pigeons), and going to the temple again on the fortieth day. In the gospel according to Saint Luke we find many concepts pointing to the sacrifice, therefore he is symbolized by **the Ox**. The gospel according to **Saint Mark**, from the very beginning speaks about the voice of one crying in the wilderness, then he mentions His **miracles and strength**, thus he is symbolized by **the Lion**. The gospel according to **Saint John** speaks of the **Divinity** of the Lord Jesus Christ and of Divine affairs, thus he is

symbolized by the **flying Eagle** that hovers in the sky. The four gospels indicate God's act in the salvation of mankind and the news of its spread throughout the whole world.

For these symbols of redemption and all the spiritual concepts to be fulfilled, the Lord Jesus Christ had to die crucified and not by any other means. Even the pouring of perfume on Him before His death indicated that He was dead as He was alive and also living as He was dead. He died upright so that we should perceive the resurrection in the cross and see the cross in the resurrection.

❖ **The Four Living Creatures and the Stages of Redemption:**

The prophet Ezekiel saw the Cherubim chariot and saw each of the four living creatures having four faces. We too should see in every incident of salvation all the other incidents. When we observe the incarnation we simultaneously observe the redemption. The Lord Jesus Christ was born in a manger among sheep, cows and bulls, in order for us to know that since His nativity, He is the sacrifice Who came to be slain. Likewise, we could not separate the incarnation from the crucifixion or the resurrection. The Lord Jesus Christ told His Disciples, *"All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night"* (Mk 14: 27). If someone focused on the cross without the resurrection he would doubt, this is why the Lord Jesus Christ said regarding the Son of Man that, *"They will scourge Him and kill Him. **And the third day He will rise again**"* (Lk 18: 33). He had to confirm the resurrection to them, as He said to Peter, *"But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail"* (Lk 22:32). Each of the four living creatures has four faces, so that if we saw one face by a prophetic spirit of revelation with Ezekiel, we would also see the other three faces (the Lion, the Ox, and the Eagle). In other words, when we contemplate His nativity, implicitly we contemplate His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension into heaven.

Mary Magdalene wanted the resurrection without the ascension, but Christ the Lord refused in order to remind her of what He told His disciples: *"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you"* (Jn 16:7). It was as though He was saying: How are you going to be born anew, become children of God, and wash your sins? How are you going to become members in my body and take my body and blood in the Holy Communion? How are you going to be the temples of God? All these are through the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church, and the Holy Spirit will not descend except after my Ascension.

The Lord Jesus Christ had to ascend to heaven after He accomplishing the redemption, because the blessings of the redemption could not reach them until He ascended into heaven. He had to go to the high sanctuary in order to serve as a High Priest before God the Father. There, He would intercede for us, for the forgiveness of our sins. Since ancient times the ascension of a sacrifice meant it was accepted, so the Sacrifice had to ascend. Rejecting His ascension is likened to offering a sacrifice to the Heavenly Father, but wishing its return, when the Father opens His hand to accept it!

Mary Magdalene thought in this same manner: her happiness with the resurrection made her desire to grasp the Lord Jesus Christ. He told her, *"Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"* (John 20:17): this is the condition for our relationship. Of course telling her, *"Do not cling to Me,"* felt like a slap on her face.

In His first appearance to her in the garden, after the resurrection from the dead, she did embrace His feet and worship Him. When He said, “*Do not cling to Me,*” however, He meant, He does not want her to grasp Him. Returning to the Greek meaning of the term we find that, “*Do not cling to Me,*” means: starting to touch in order to grasp, and not just to touch.¹

❖ Ezekiel and John’s Visions:

Why did the prophet Ezekiel see the four living creatures each having four faces, while John saw one face to each? This does not mean that Ezekiel’s vision was clearer, since John’s vision contained more details. The sight that Ezekiel saw was very awesome: wheels, fire or torches, and the Cherubim fiery Chariot. When John saw the revelation: the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, had already taken place. These events had entered into the realm of time, i.e. the incarnation happened in one time, the crucifixion in another, the resurrection in a third, and the ascension in a fourth. They became sequential incidents each having its special identifying features. The resurrection did not occur on the day of crucifixion, nor the crucifixion on the day of nativity, nor the ascension on the day of resurrection. The ascension had to occur forty days after the resurrection in order to have significance, otherwise we would not comprehend each one’s distinct meaning. We would have merged the two events. The resurrection is an independent incident, yet it is not separate from the ascension, the crucifixion or the nativity. In other words, it does not mix or dissolve in the other incidents, without separation, having its own unique fixed features. John saw one face to each of the four living creatures, while Ezekiel the prophet saw four faces to each, because in Ezekiel’s time the incidents had not yet occurred. Ezekiel saw them by the spirit of prophecy as inseparable incidents that accomplish the act of redemption together.

Ezekiel the prophet saw the four living creatures from a distance, therefore he saw four faces to each, but when John looked up-close, he saw only one face. **When Saint John the evangelist described the Divine Throne, he highlighted the distinction between the incidents of incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension which are incidents that he lived in their distinct stages. Ezekiel, however, who watched from afar had the incidents piled up on each other. In his perception the temporal partitions separating them vanished,** because he saw it by the spirit of prophecy, not as real incidents. To clarify we give the following illustration: if we looked at a container from far we would see many angles to it, but if we bring it closer to our eyes we would only see the angle facing us.

Glory to God forever, Amen.

¹ If a member of the congregation approaches to touch the Body in the patent, of course he would be forbidden from touching it, but that does not mean he would be forbidden from receiving the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ.