

Pascha is about Love and Life

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Translated by Inga Leonova

“Christ is Risen!” is not a routine greeting of the Orthodox forty days a year, but the joyful news that death is no more—even when it seems to remain. Even when it seems like it is inevitable. Christ has risen, and sooner or later the day of our resurrection and meeting with those we love will come.

I have had many different Pascha nights and days. There was a Pascha in a seedy Egyptian hotel, with a strange and inappropriate “Christ is risen!” from drunk compatriots at night. There were Pascha nights as a teenager, watching live services broadcast on TV. There was one working Pascha in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior when, after the end of the service, I walked briskly to my own parish, exchanging these most beautiful words with passers-by. There were also the usual Pascha nights, with the arrival at the church shortly before the procession, with quiet joy at the first “The angels are singing in heaven” and such a joyful and long-awaited response from all the assembled people: “Truly he is risen!”

But this was not the case last year. On Friday before Holy Week, I was discharged from the hospital. Alone. My son remained in intensive care, his prospects unclear.

The weather in Moscow was not spring-like. Our apartment was being renovat-

ed, and my husband and my eldest son stayed with my mother-in-law.

The news from the ICU was different every day. One day they made a less serious, more encouraging diagnosis, and promised that a doctor from a specialized hospital would come to facilitate my son’s transfer there. Then the doctor came and said that his problem did not fall within their expertise. We were back where we started: an incomprehensible diagnosis, an unclear prognosis, and no one wanted to take him. And in the maternity hospital, they had already done everything they could.

On Holy Thursday, we were finally able to move back home. One problem that had been sapping my nerves and strength over the past few months was resolved. Then there was Holy Saturday, which I don’t remember. Probably went to see the baby. Probably cleaned up at home. It was a completely wrong Holy Week, and a completely wrong mood. I did not bake a kulich, although I love doing it. I did not go to any of the Holy Week services, although they are all important and beloved.

And Great Lent had been all wrong, too. It began, I remember perfectly, with a chocolate in the doctor’s office. It was then that we learned that there were problems with the baby. But there was still a long time before giving birth and discovering real problems. . . .



But the eyes worried me very much.
On Pascha morning I wrote a short post,
"Christ is risen! And let there be sun,
spring and hope. And love." And I went
to the ICU.

In Moscow, finally, the sun was shining,
the air was pleasantly springy, there
were puddles, not snow, under my feet.
I walked along a familiar path, read Paschal
greetings in social media, looked at
photos of other people's kuliches and
smiled.

Saint Maria
Skobtsova, Icon of
the Cross-Bearing
Theotokos.

I really wanted to believe. To believe that
we will win, that we can somehow live
and be happy. I wanted to believe the
doctors when they said something encouraging.

There was little that was encouraging.
For example, the baby did not open his
eyes. My first impression of motherhood
had been my elder child's eyes. They had
brought me my baby, and I looked into
those eyes and fell in love immediately.
But now I came to the ICU, looked into
the incubator at my son in wires, and
did not see his eyes. He would not open
them.

A trifle? Yes, it was a trifle compared to
everything else. There were much more
serious reasons for concern than the eyes
that he would not open: a suspected
heart defect, no independent breathing,
malformed arms and legs. . . .

In the ward, the sun was shining merci-
lessly through the window, I was humming
the Paschal troparion, and the clever
and beautiful eyes of my youngest son
were looking at me from the incubator.

And as for the first time, with the eldest, I
immediately fell in love with them. They
were extraordinary. No, of course they
weren't. The most common baby eyes.
All mothers know that the eyes of the
very little ones are huge, and of such incredible
color! But for every mother, they
are the most extraordinary.

He had just over three months left to live.
But then it was spring. Sun, hope, life,
and love.

And Pascha.

And Pascha is always about that. About
love and life. And we'll meet again. Will
we meet? ❀



Irina Kislina graduated from Moscow State University as a
journalist and editor. In 2012 she began working as managing
editor of *Pravmir*, the largest Russian Orthodox internet media
portal. She currently works as a freelance writer at various Orthodox
media. Two of her three children were born with special
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