

“Lord, when the woman who had fallen into many sins perceived Your divinity, she assumed the role of a myrrh-bearing woman, and lamenting brought fragrant oils to anoint You before Your burial. “Woe is me,” she says. “Night for me is a frenzy without restraint, very dark and moonless, a sinful love-affair. Accept the fountains of my tears, You who draw out from the clouds the water of the sea. Take pity on me, and incline to the sighing of my heart, You who bowed the heavens by Your ineffable self-emptying. I shall cover Your unstained feet with kisses, and wipe them dry again with the locks of my hair; those feet, whose sound at twilight in Paradise echoed in Eve’s ears, and she hid in fear. Who can reckon the multitude of my sins, or fathom the depths of Your judgments, O my life-saving Savior? Do not despise me, Your servant, since without measure is Your mercy.”

- Hymn of Kassiani

Catechism & Theology Course  
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### **Bravery: A Daring Woman & a Hiding Eve – Holy Wednesday**

“On Holy and Great Wednesday, remembrance should be made of the prostitute woman [*pornēs gynaikos*] who anointed [*aleipsasēs*] the Lord with [fragrant] oil [*myrō*], as the most divine fathers decreed [*ethespian*], that this occurred shortly [micron] before the saving Passion.”

- From the Synaxarion for Holy Wednesday

“Though I have outdone the harlot in sin, yet I have offered You no shower of tears. Rather, I fall before You fervently kissing Your spotless feet, praying silently that, as Master, You will remit my debts as I cry: “Savior, free me from the foulness of my deeds!”

- Kontakion of Holy Wednesday

- Holy Wednesday moves from theological-eschatological outlook of Holy Monday and Holy Tuesday to the commemorative outlook characterizing the last three days of Holy Week
- Timeline: Jesus remains at home of Lazarus, not yet on the way to Jerusalem. This is the day Simon the Leper invites Jesus to his home for supper, where a woman brings expensive alabaster of myrrh and pours it on Jesus’ head (interpreted as a preparation for crucifixion); leads to Judas’ act of betrayal.
- Hymns of Holy Wednesday focuses on difference of the fallen woman and of Judas. There is also a contrast of the sinful woman who anoints Christ’s feet and the old Eve. Both sinful, while one runs and hides in fear, the other approaches with repentance to the

Lord to be freed of sin. This hymn- the most important of the day- relies on a different anointing account (from Luke 7:36-50).

- Gospel focus is Matthew 26:6-16 in the Presanctified Liturgy. This is the story of the righteous woman anointing Christ's feet at the house of Simon the Leper before the crucifixion. But the hymnography is drawn from the anointing of the Lord's feet by the sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50.
  - There are three anointing of Christ in the Gospel accounts: 1) Luke 7:36-50 - anointing of Jesus' feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee by a sinful woman (probably in Capernaum), 2) John 12:1-8 - the anointing of Jesus' feet in Bethany, perhaps in the house of Lazarus after the latter's resurrection by Mary (as a prophetic sign of entombment), and 3) Matthew 26:6-16/Mark 14:3-9 - the anointing of Jesus' head in the house of Simon the Leper, in Bethany, by an unnamed woman (also as a prophetic sign of entombment).
- The Lord's feet are a theme here: Eve ran from the "feet whose walking sound was perceived in the garden" (Genesis 3:8), and the sinful woman runs to anoint those feet.
- Collaterally, the OT readings for the Presanctified Liturgy are from Exodus 2:11-22 and Job 2:1-10, reinforcing the day's theme of bravery and determination; Moses' courageous act to help oppressed Hebrews, and Job remaining upright in trial and temptation.

### Saint Kassia or Kassiani

St. Kassiani the Hymnographer was born between 805 and 810 in Constantinople into a wealthy family and grew to be exceptionally beautiful and intelligent. Three Byzantine chroniclers claim that she was a participant in the "bride show" (the means by which Byzantine princes/emperors sometimes chose a bride, giving a golden apple to his choice) organized for the young bachelor-emperor Theophilus. Smitten by Kassiane's beauty, the young emperor approached her and said: "Through a woman came forth the baser things," referring to the sin and suffering coming as a result of Eve's transgression. Kassiane promptly responded by saying: "And through a woman came forth the better things," referring to the hope of salvation resulting from the Incarnation through the Most Holy Theotokos. His pride wounded by Kassiane's rebuttal, Theophilus haughtily passed her by and chose another to be his wife.



We next hear of Kassiane in 843 when it is recorded that she founded a convent in Constantinople, becoming its first abbess and devoting her life to asceticism and the composing of liturgical poetry. The best known of her compositions is the Doxastikon on the Aposticha of

the Bridegroom Orthros for Great and Holy Wednesday (which service is, in parish churches, chanted by anticipation on the previous evening).

Tradition says that in his later years the Emperor Theophilus, still in love with Kassiane, wished to see her one last time before he died, so he rode to the monastery where she resided. Kassiane was alone in her cell, writing her now famous hymn, when she realized that the commotion she heard was because the imperial retinue had arrived. Being now devoted to God in her monastic life, Kassiane fled from her cell and hid, leaving the unfinished hymn on her writing desk. Theophilus was directed to her cell and entered it alone. Not finding Kassiane, he turned to leave when he noticed papers on the desk and read what was written upon them. When he was done reading, he sat and added one line to the hymn; then he left - never to see Kassiane again. The line attributed to the Emperor is "those feet whose sound Eve heard at dusk in Paradise and hid herself for fear."

When the emperor and his party departed from the monastery, St Kassiane returned to her cell, discovered what Theophilus had written, and finished the hymn now popularly known as "The Hymn of the Sinful Woman."

Reading for Holy Wednesday:

“Two women - say the more discerning interpreters of the Gospel - anointed the Lord with myrrh; the one, a long time before His Passion; the other, a few days before. One was a harlot and sinner; the other, chaste and virtuous. The Church commemorates this reverent act today. While mentioning herein the person of the harlot, it also mentions Judas' betrayal; for, according to the account in Matthew, both of these deeds took place two days before the Passover, on Wednesday.

That woman, then, anointed Jesus' head and feet with very precious myrrh, and wiped them with the tresses of her hair. The disciples, especially the avaricious Judas, were scandalized, supposedly because of the waste of the myrrh, which could be sold for a great price and given to the poor. The Lord Jesus reproved them and told them not to trouble the woman. Indignant, Judas went to the high priests, who were gathered in the court of Caiaphas and were already taking counsel against Jesus. On agreeing with them to betray his Teacher for thirty pieces of silver, Judas sought from that time opportunity to betray Him (Matt. 26:14-16). Because the betrayal took place on Wednesday, we have received the tradition from Apostolic times to fast on Wednesday throughout the year.”

Also on Holy Wednesday...

The mystery (sacrament) of Holy Unction (ευχέλαιον, “efhalion”- "blessed oil”) is offered for the anointing of the Faithful (based on James 5:14-17) also done on this day.