

Our brothers and sisters in these churches will be celebrating Easter on Sunday April 19th. Up until 1582 both the Eastern and Western churches celebrated on the same day – the first Sunday after the first full moon to follow the Spring Equinox (21 March). However in 1582 the West switched from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar and what had been 21 March in the Julian calendar now became 3 April. Allowing for the changes in the moon cycle we can now see why the dates of Easter can be up to a month apart -or, rarely, coincide.

In Orthodox art the resurrection is represented by an image known as the **Anastasis**. This represents the Risen Christ descending into the place where those faithful to God who had died before his time on earth were waiting. This arose from meditations on the passage in 1 Peter 3:

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison....

The rescue of these "spirits in prison" is memorably imaged in the frescoes of the **Chora Church of the Holy Saviour**, in Istanbul, a Christian site which goes back to the 4th century. The church was masterfully painted in the 14th century, but for many hundreds of years they were plastered over, as the church was converted into a mosque. From 1948 American archaeologists uncovered and documented the images.



In the Anastasis Christ, in a mandorla (almond shaped) halo of blinding white light seizes Adam and Eve and drags them from their tombs while the gates and keys of hell tumble apart under His feet.



This theme is not unknown in the West. In 1468 **Mantegna** painted a very unusual "Descent of Christ into Limbo". It was only in 2018 that it was realized that it was actually the lower part of a painting of the Resurrection in a private collection. The two were shown together in an exhibition in London last year; on the next page you can see them digitally stitched together.

