

For some are saved by fear, as for example, when we break off from sin because we have our eyes on the threatened punishment of Hell. There are others, too who live lives of virtue because of the rewards promised to the good; and these possess their goal not by charity but by hope of reward. But he who runs in spirit to reach perfection, casts out fear. For it is the attitude of a slave, who does not stay with his master out of love and simply does not run away for fear he will be beaten. The truly virtuous man even despises rewards, lest he give the impression that he esteems the gift more than the giver. He loves with his whole heart and soul and strength (Duet. 6:5) not the creatures that come from God but Him Who is the source of all good. And He Who calls us to share in Him commands that this disposition be in the souls of all who listen to Him.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa



Sunday 7 December 2014 is the Tenth Sunday of Luke

Matins Gospel: Luke 24:1-12

Epistle: Ephesians 5:8-19

Gospel: Luke 13:10-17

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

When the stone had been sealed by the Jews, and while soldiers were guarding your most pure Body, you rose, O Saviour, on the third day, giving life to the world. Therefore the heavenly Powers cried out to you, Giver of life: Glory to your Resurrection, O Christ! Glory to your Kingdom! Glory to your dispensation, only lover of humankind!

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: 1 Timothy 5:1-10; Luke 20:27-44
Conception of the Theotokos Forefeast; Patapius of Thebes

Tuesday: Galatians 4:22-27; Luke 8:16-21
Conception of the Theotokos; Prophetess Hannah

Wednesday: 1 Timothy 5:22-25; 6:1-11; Luke 21:5-8, 10-11, 20-24
Martyr Menas & Companions; Thomas of Bithynia

Thursday: 1 Timothy 6:17-21; Luke 21:28-33
Daniel the Stylite; Luke the New Stylite

Friday: John 10:1-9; Ephesians 5:8-19; John 10:9-16
Spyridon the Wonderworker; Peter the Aleut

Saturday: Galatians 5:22-26; 6:1-2; Luke 13:19-29
Martyr Eustratius & companions



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

7 December 2014

Archbishopric of Good Hope

Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa

You Are Freed from Your Infirmary

Today we hear Saint Luke's account of how Jesus Christ healed a crippled woman on the Sabbath. This woman, who had been suffering for eighteen years, was bent double and unable to stand up. When Jesus Christ healed her, she stood up straight and glorified God. However, Jesus' opponents sought to use this against Him, accusing Him of not respecting the Sabbath. In response, He pointed out the hypocrisy of those who would happily rescue their animals on the Sabbath, but were unconcerned with the dignity of a human being.

In this incident we see two different approaches to religion. For Christ's opponents, religious observances such as the keeping of the Sabbath had lost their connection to a genuine concern for human beings and had simply become mindless legalism. Many people today are inclined to see religious beliefs and practices as somehow in conflict with human freedom and human dignity. For some, God has become an oppressive tyrant who must be rejected in the name of human freedom and human dignity.

In Jesus Christ we see a totally different approach to religious observances. They do not exist to satisfy a tyrannical God, but rather to restore us to our original human dignity in which we are created in the image of God. While the Church certainly has "rules" – and calls us to a serious asceticism – this is not in order to cramp our freedom, but rather because it is only within the guidelines that God has revealed that we are able to discover what it really means to be human. The holiness to which the Christ calls us is not meant to kill our spirits, but rather to free us from all that keeps us from the vision of God which is the true purpose for which we have been created.



The heart of the Lord is directed towards the humble, to benefit them. The face of the Lord is set against the proud, so as to humble them. Humility receives compassion continuously, whereas a hard heart and absence of faith continuously meet with endless difficulties.

Saint Isaac the Syrian

Preparing the Way of the Lord

An advent series on the prophets of Israel

We have seen how the Katavasias that are chanted at Matins at this time of year are full of references to the Old Testament prophecies that point to the coming of Christ. Last week we saw how the Katavasia of the Fourth Ode points to the Prophet Moses' experience of the burning bush on Mount Horeb. There he encountered the Preincarnate Christ and in the bush that burned but was not consumed he was saw prefigured the mystery of the virginal birth of the Holy Theotokos, who carried in her womb the Light of divinity without being consumed by it.



The Fiery Furnace

A similar symbolism is found in the texts that refer to the Seventh and Eighth Odes of Matins. These texts refer to the incident described by the Prophet Daniel in which three holy youths had been thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to participate in idol worship. They were miraculously protected in the furnace and were unhurt by the heat of the flames, where they sang their hymn of praise to God that now constitutes the Eighth Ode.

However, while in the fiery furnace, these youths were joined by a fourth figure and the Prophet Daniel describes him as "the Angel of the Lord." The Church Fathers once more understand this figure to be the Preincarnate Christ, and this understanding is reinforced by the words of King Nebuchadnezzar when he described what he saw in the furnace:

I saw four men untied and walking in the midst of the fire, yet they are not destroyed; and the vision of the fourth is like the Son of God. (Daniel 3:92)

Like the burning bush, the fiery furnace is seen by the Fathers and by the hymns of the Church as pointing to the mystery of the Mother of God who gives birth and yet remains a virgin. In the words of the Eighth Ode of the Katavasias of Nativity:

The furnace moist with dew was the image and figure of a wonder beyond nature. For it burnt not the Children whom it had received, even as the fire of the Godhead consumed not the Virgin's womb into which it had descended. Therefore let us sing in praise: Let all creation bless the Lord and exalt Him above all throughout the ages.

When trees send their roots deep into the earth, they are not broken or torn up even by ten thousand assaults of the winds. Why? Their roots are strongly and tightly bound deep in the earth. So it is with prayers. Those which are sent up from deep within the heart, because they are securely rooted, lift themselves up to heaven, and no sophistries of the mind can turn them aside by their assaults. This is why the prophet said: "Out of the depths I have cried to you, O Lord."

Saint John Chrysostom

The Conception of the Holy Theotokos

On Tuesday we celebrate the feast of the Conception of the Most Holy Theotokos by Saint Anne. The Church's tradition tells us that Saints Joachim and Anne were advanced in years and childless. Their barren old age is symbolic of human nature itself, weighed down by sin and death, and yet longing for a Saviour. Indeed, throughout the Old Testament, it is often barren women who give birth to significant people at decisive moments in history. Thus, we have the stories of Abraham who was conceived by the barren Sarah, Samuel who born of the barren Hannah, and of course Saint John the Baptist, whose birth to the barren Elizabeth forms a prelude to the birth of Christ. All of these barren women may have been tempted to despair at their hopeless situation, yet they put their trust in God and God did great things through them.



In the Conception of the Mother of God we see not only the answer to the prayers of the barren Joachim and Anna, but the answer to all humanity's longing for a Saviour. Since the fall of humanity God had been preparing the way for the Incarnation of Christ who would come to save us from our collective barrenness. The whole Old Testament is the account of the formation of a people who were being prepared to receive the Saviour. And in order for Christ to take on our human nature, He needed a human mother, someone who would be dedicated to the Lord, nurtured in holiness and able to become the Mother of the Messiah. The Holy Theotokos stands at the end of a long line of preparation. She is the Vessel who was chosen to bear the Incarnate Son of God and so her Conception which we commemorate today is an event of great joy as we await the coming of Christ into our midst this Nativity.



When Abba Anthony thought about the depth of the judgements of God, he asked, 'Lord, how is it that some die when they are young, while others drag on to extreme old age? Why are there those who are poor and those who are rich? Why do wicked men prosper and why are the just in need?' He heard a voice answering him, 'Anthony, keep your attention on yourself; these things are according to the judgement of God, and it is not to your advantage to know anything about them.'

From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers