

When you sit down for a meal, pray. As you take bread, thank the Giver.

When you are strengthening your weakened body by drinking wine, thank Him who bestowed on you such a gift to cheer your heart and fortify your infirmities.

As you get dressed, thank Him for what He has given you. When you wrap your cloak around your shoulders, so increase your love for God, who has provided us with clothing suitable for winter and summer, to maintain our life and cover us modestly.

Is the day at an end? So thank Him who gave us the sun by which we can perform our daily work, and fire to enlighten the night, and who has bestowed on us all the rest of life's needs.

The night gives us other opportunities for prayer. Look up to the heavens and consider the beauty of the stars, and so give prayer to the Lord of visible things, and worship the Creator of all, who has made all by his wisdom.

When you see living creatures dropping off to sleep, so again worship Him, who cuts short our labors by forcing us into sleep, thus providing us with new strength through a brief rest.

Saint Basil the Great



Sunday 14 December 2014 is the Eleventh Sunday of Luke

Matins Gospel: Luke 24:13-35

Epistle: Colossians 3:4-11

Gospel: Luke 14:16-24

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

When You went down to death,
O immortal life, then you slew
Hades with the lightning flash of
Your Godhead; but when from
the depths below the earth You
raised the dead, all the Powers
above the heavens cried out:
'Giver of life, Christ our God,
glory to You!

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: 2 Timothy 1:8-18; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-5
The Holy Hieromartyr Eleutherius; Susannah the Deaconess

Tuesday: Timothy 3:16-17; 4:1-4; Mark 8:22-26
Prophet Haggai; Modestos, Bp. of Jerusalem

Wednesday: Hebrews 11:33-40; 12:1-2; Mark 8:30-34
Prophet Daniel; Dionysios of Zakynthos

Thursday: Titus 1:5-14; Mark 9:10-15
Martyrs Sebastian & Companions; Michael the Confessor

Friday: Titus 1:15-16; 2:1-10; Mark 9:33-41
Martyrs Boniface & Companions; Gregentius of Ethiopia

Saturday: Galatians 3:8-12; Luke 13:19-29
Forefeast of the Nativity; Ignatius the God-Bearer



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

14 December 2014

Come, for All is Now Ready

Today we hear Saint Luke's account of the parable of the great banquet. Jesus Christ recounts how a man gave a great feast to which many people were invited. However, they did not respond to His invitation, excusing themselves for a variety of reasons. In response, the master of the house instructed his servants to go out into the streets and assemble the poor and crippled to take their place.

The Scriptures use the image of a banquet as a symbol of the Kingdom of God, and the Church Fathers understood this parable as referring to the coming of Christ in the flesh which we are preparing to celebrate this Nativity. By the marriage of Christ's human and divine natures we have been given access to His divine life. For centuries God had been preparing the people of Israel to receive Christ, but, when the Jews rejected Jesus, the Gospel was to be preached to the Gentiles and all were given the chance to respond to Jesus Christ.

This parable is also a warning to us in our complacency. The people who failed to respond to the invitation to the banquet were not bad people, nor were they doing bad things. Their excuses for not attending the feast can sound quite legitimate. We need to be careful that the normal cares of life do not so overwhelm us that they prevent us from seeing what is really going on. For the ultimate tragedy in this account is not simply that people rejected God's revelation, but that they failed to see what it was that they were rejecting. As we await the coming of Christ we need to be vigilant that the cares of life do not overwhelm us and that we may be given the gift of sight to recognize Christ at the many moments that He comes into our lives.



Oh, brothers and sisters, what a banquet that is! How great is the harmony and joy of those who eat at this heavenly table! They enjoy food that produces everlasting life.

Saint Athanasius the Great

Preparing the Way of the Lord

An advent series on the prophets of Israel

We have seen how many of the Church's liturgical texts that prepare us to celebrate the Incarnation of Christ at Christmas are full of references to Old Testament prophecies that point to the coming of Jesus Christ. Today, on the second Sunday before Christmas, we commemorate the ancestors of Christ according to the flesh, those righteous men and women who lived under the Old Covenant and longed for the coming of the Saviour.



The Ancestors of Christ

At Matins today we sing:

Come, let us faithfully celebrate the annual commemoration of Abraham and those who are with him, the fathers that lived before the Law. Let us honour the tribe of Judah as is meet; let us praise the youths in Babylon, who, as an image of the Trinity, quenched the flame of the furnace, together with Daniel; and holding fast to the prophecies of the prophets, let us cry aloud with Isaiah: "Behold, a Virgin shall conceive in her womb, and shall bear a Son, Emmanuel, God with us."

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Saint Paul encourages us to look to the faith of these great forebears as and to take it as an example. He writes:

For faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old received divine approval...

These holy men and women had to endure many hardships, but they held fast to God's promises. Most of them only saw the coming of Christ from far off. We are truly blessed, for we live in the Christian age that has come about through the coming of Christ. Yet we also need to identify with their longing. Although Jesus Christ has come to us and has inaugurated a new age through His birth, death, and resurrection, we also wait in hope for the Lord to come again and to bring to completion all that He has accomplished. In this time of preparing for the birth of Christ, we can examine our lives and ask ourselves what it is that we truly long for.



We especially commemorate the **Patriarch Abraham** today, to whom the promise was first given when God said to him, "In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 22:18) God called him to forsake his country, parents, and kinsmen, and to depart to the land of the Canaanites. When he arrived there, God promised to give the land to him and his descendants. In the one hundredth year of his life, when Sarah was in her ninetieth year, they became the parents of Isaac. Having lived 175 years altogether, he reposed in peace, a venerable elder full of days. He is especially remembered for his obedience to God's plan. He stepped out in faith and believed God's promises, even though he could not see how they would come about.

Question Box

If you have a question about the faith and teaching of the Orthodox Church, you can send it to evangelion@goarch.co.za

What do we mean when we speak of the 'Fear' of God? Is it fear not to disappoint him? Or fear of what he can allow to happen to us if we walk out of his light?

The term "Fear of God" has a rich and varied meaning in the Church's tradition. We need to note that God is, most fundamentally, the Lover of humankind who desires our salvation. While some Protestants see God as a wrathful, vengeful God, this is not the Orthodox view of God. As Saint Isaac the Syrian wrote:

In love did He bring the world into existence; in love does He guide it during this its temporal existence; in love is He going to bring it to that wondrous transformed state, and in love will the world be swallowed up in the great mystery of Him who has performed all these things; in love will the whole course of the governance of creation be finally comprised.

Nevertheless, both the Scriptures and the Fathers speak repeatedly of the fear of God and this is a reminder that we cannot domesticate God to suit our purposes. We cannot take God's love for granted, and it may not mean what we expect it to mean. Saint Paul reminds us that God disciplines those whom He loves and that, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (10:31)

The phrase "Fear of God" can also be understood as "awe." It reminds us that God is totally other, the One before whom we can only bow down in worship. Saint Athanasius the Great writes:

Lord, I constantly offer You worship in the consecrated temple of Your glory, since I enjoy Your love for mankind and am guarded by Your right hand. For having Your fear ever with me, I will not permit it to be cast out through boldness engendered by Your love for mankind.

However, while this sort of fear should always be with us, the Fathers do speak of a progression in our relationship to God in which our motivation moves from acting out of the fear of God to rather acting out of love for Him. As Saint Anthony the Great said: "I used to fear God, but now I love Him." This brings with it another type of fear, namely, the fear of losing the love of God, or of offending against it. Saint Maximus the Confessor wrote:

The second kind of fear is linked with love itself and constantly produces reference in the soul, so that it does not grow indifferent to God because of the intimate communion of its love.