

Let us therefore follow one and the same path, Christ's commandments, which elevate us to heaven and to God.

Even though the word shows us many paths and many ways for people to reach the kingdom of heaven, these paths are not, in fact, many, but one, though they're divided into many, according to each person's ability and disposition.

While we may begin from many and varied works and actions, just as travelers depart from different places and many cities, the destination we are attempting to reach is the same: the kingdom of heaven.

The actions and ways of godly men must be understood as spiritual virtues.

Those who begin to walk in them must head towards one goal, just as those who come from various countries and places come together, as we have said, to one city, the kingdom of heaven, where, together, they will become worthy to reign with Christ and become subjects of one King, our God and Father.

Saint Symeon the New Theologian

**20 March 2016 is
the Sunday of Orthodoxy**

Matins Gospel: John 20:19-31

Epistle: Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-40

Gospel: John 1:43-51

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

When the stone had been sealed by the Jews and the soldiers were guarding Thine immaculate Body, Thou didst arise on the third day, O Saviour, granting life unto the world. Wherefore, the powers of the Heavens cried out to Thee, O Lifegiver: Glory to Thy Resurrection, O Christ. Glory to Thy Kingdom. Glory to Thy dispensation, O only Friend of man.

Apolytikion for the Sunday of Orthodoxy:

O Christ our God, begging forgiveness of our sins, we venerate Your Pure Image, O Good One. Of your own will you condescended to ascend upon the Cross in the flesh and deliver those You created from the bondage of the enemy. Wherefore, thankfully, we cry out, "When You came to save the world, Your filled all things with joy, O Our Savior."

Seasonal Kontakion:

To you, Theotokos, invincible Defender, having been delivered from peril, I, your city, dedicate the victory festival as a thank offering. In your irresistible might, keep me safe from all trials, that I may call out to you: "Hail, unwedded bride!"

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday, 21 March: Isaiah 4:2-5:7; Genesis 3:21-4:7; Proverbs 3:34-4:22
2nd Monday of Lent; James the Confessor; Thomas, Pat. Of Constantinople

Tuesday, 22 March: Isaiah 5:7-16; Genesis 4:8-15; Proverbs 5:1-15
2nd Tuesday of Lent; Hieromartyr Basil of Ancyra; Kalliniki & Vassilisa the Martyrs

Wednesday, 23 March: Isaiah 5:16-25; Genesis 4:16-26; Proverbs 5:15-6:3
2nd Wednesday of Lent; Martyr Nikon & the 199; Anatolios & Protoleon the Martyrs

Thursday, 24 March: Isaiah 6:1-12; Genesis 5:1-24; Proverbs 6:3-20
2nd Thursday of Lent; Forefeast of the Annunciation; Bp. Artemon

Friday, 25 March: Luke 1:39-49, 56; Hebrews 2:11-18; Luke 1:24-38
Annunciation of the Theotokos;

Saturday, 26 March: Hebrews 2:2-10; Luke 10:16-21
Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel; 26 Martyrs in Crimea



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

20 March 2016

You Will See Heaven Opened

Today, on the first Sunday of Great Lent, which is also the Sunday of Orthodoxy, we hear Saint John's account of the calling of the first disciples. Today's Gospel tells us how Jesus called Philip and how he then went and called Nathanael, who skeptically

questioned whether anything good could come from Nazareth. However, his eyes were opened when the Lord told him how He had seen him sitting under the fig tree. Jesus Christ told him: "You will see greater things than that ... you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man."

We read this Gospel at the beginning of Lent because it shows us where our Lenten journey is headed. In the early Church, Lent was the time in which new converts were prepared for baptism, which was referred to as illumination, for becoming Christian is about learning to see with the eyes of faith.

Most of us are already baptized and have had our eyes opened to the truth of the faith. And yet our sight tends to become darkened and we all need to learn to see with the eyes of faith. In setting out on a journey to Pascha, the great feast in which the Light of Christ conquers all darkness, we need to be able to prepare ourselves to receive that light. We need to be purified so that Christ's light does not consume us, but rather gives us life and leads us to the vision of God.

The purpose of our Lenten discipline is to help us to enter into the depths of our own hearts, so that we may learn to see with "the eye of the heart" so that, beholding God there, we may receive life in Him.

When he had been cleansed by fasting, great Moses saw the God for whom he longed. Eagerly follow his example, O my humble soul; make haste to cleanse thyself from evil in the day of abstinence, and so thou shalt behold the Lord who grants thee forgiveness, for He is all-powerful and loves mankind.

From Sunday Evening Vespers on the Sunday of Orthodoxy



The Sunday of Orthodoxy

Today, the first Sunday of Great Lent, is known as the Sunday of Orthodoxy, when we commemorate the victory of the Orthodox faith over the heresy of iconoclasm. In the eighth century the Church had been torn apart by those who objected to the veneration of icons, and in 787 the Second Council of Nicaea responded by affirming the role of icons in the Church, stating that “Whenever these representations are contemplated, they will cause those who look at them to commemorate and love their



On the Sunday of Orthodoxy many parishes have processions in which the faithful carry their icons around the Church, recalling the procession instituted by the Empress Theodora in 844.

prototype.” The Council distinguished between the worship that is due to God alone, and the veneration that we give to icons, and stated that when we venerate an icon we are really venerating the reality for which it stands.

Even after the Council, iconoclasm persisted until in 844 Empress Theodora established Orthodoxy anew with a solemn procession and veneration of icons on the first Sunday of Lent. This was the beginning of today’s feast and celebrates the victory of true doctrine over heresy.

The triumph of Orthodoxy that we celebrate today is integrally related to the earlier struggle for the Orthodox faith, for what was at stake was not simply the validity of venerating icons, but the very reality of the

Incarnation of Christ that the Church had struggled to profess in earlier centuries. Because God had become fully human in Jesus Christ, matter itself had been sanctified and had become a suitable medium for portraying His Image. As Saint John of Damascus wrote “If you have understood that the Incorporeal One became man for you, then it is evident that you can portray His human image.”



The grace of truth has shone forth upon us; the mysteries darkly prefigured in the times of old have now been openly fulfilled. For behold, the Church is clothed in a beauty that surpasses all things earthly, through the icon of the incarnate Christ that was foreshadowed by the ark of testimony. This is the safeguard of the Orthodox faith; for if we hold fast to the icon of the Saviour whom we worship, we shall not go astray. Let all who do not share this faith be covered in shame; but we shall glory in the icon of the Word made flesh, which we venerate but worship not as an idol. So let us kiss it, and with all the faithful cry aloud: O God, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance.

From Vespers for the Sunday of Orthodoxy

The Feast of the Annunciation

On Friday we celebrate the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary. This is one of the twelve great feasts of the Church’s year and usually occurs during Great Lent. It commemorates the message that the Archangel Gabriel brought to the Virgin Mary that she would give birth to the Saviour of the world.

The feast of the Annunciation is both a feast of the Mother of God, and a feast of the Lord. Indeed, it shows the intimate relationship between the Theotokos and her divine Son. For, in her, God’s careful work of preparation reaches its fulfilment. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, He had been preparing the way for the great event of salvation that would reverse the corruption that had entered into the world with Adam and Eve’s disobedience. The Virgin Mary was the grace-filled person whom the generations had been awaiting. She was the one who would give human nature to the Word of God.

But this feast is also the beginning of all of the feasts of the Lord, for it is the beginning of our salvation. The Church’s texts for this feast are full of wonder and amazement at the great mystery of the Incarnation of Christ. Through the obedience of the Mother of God, the uncontainable God, the One who rides upon the Cherubim, comes to dwell in the womb of the Virgin. He takes our nature on Himself in order to redeem us, to heal our brokenness, and to lead us to the Father.



Today is the crowning moment of our salvation, and the unfolding of the eternal mystery: the Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin, and Gabriel brings the good tidings of grace. Therefore with him let us cry aloud to the Mother of God: ‘Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.’

Apolytikion for the Annunciation

Just as all things whatsoever God made He made by the operation of the Holy Spirit, so also it is by the operation of the Spirit that these things are done which surpass nature and cannot be discerned except by faith alone. “How shall this be done to me,” asked the blessed Virgin, “because I know not a man?” The Archangel Gabriel answered, “The Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you.” And now you ask how the bread becomes the Body of Christ and the wine and water the Blood of Christ. And I tell you that the Holy Spirit comes down and works these things which are beyond description and understanding.

Saint John of Damascus