

Prayer is the height of our blessings and communion with God; for it is both companionship and unity with God. Just as the eyes of the body are enlightened when they look upon light, so a soul intent on God is illumined and enlightened by His inexpressible light. It is not indeed formal prayer that I refer to, but prayer offered from the heart, and so not confined to suitable times and fixed intervals, but continuing in action without cease day and night. For we do not only have to withdraw to pray, and suddenly turn our minds towards God. No, even while we are busy among the needy, either with the care of the poor or with other concerns, or useful good works – into their very midst we should also bring our desire for and remembrance of God, so that seasoned, as it were, with the love of God they may provide a most acceptable offering for the Lord of all men.

Saint John Chrysostom

**11 December is the  
Eleventh Sunday of Luke**

**Matins Gospel:** Mark 16:9-20

**Epistle:** Colossians 3:4-11

**Gospel:** Luke 14:16-24

**Resurrectional Apolytikion:**

From on high didst Thou descend, O Compassionate One; to burial of three days hast Thou submitted that Thou mightest free us from our passions. O our Life and Resurrection, Lord, glory be to Thee.

**Apolytikion of 11th Sun. of Luke**

You justified the forefathers in faith, and through them betrothed yourself, aforetime, to the Church taken from out of the Gentiles. The saints boast in glory. For from their seed, there exists a noble crop, who is she who without seed has given You birth. By their intercessions, O Christ our God, save our souls.

**Seasonal Kontakion:**

On this day the Virgin cometh to the cave to give birth to God the Word ineffably, Who was before all the ages. Dance for joy, O earth, on hearing the gladsome tidings; with the Angels and the shepherds now glorify Him Who is willing to be gazed on as a young Child Who before the ages is God.

***Readings and saints for this week:***

**Monday, 12 December:** John 10:1-9; Ephesians 5:8-19; John 10:9-16  
Spyridon the Wonderworker; Peter the Aleut

**Tuesday, 13 December:** 1 Timothy 1:8-14; Mark 8:22-26  
Martyr Eustratius & companions

**Wednesday, 14 December:** 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 2:8-15; Mark 8:30-34  
Martyrs Thyrsus & companions

**Thursday, 15 December:** 2 Timothy 1:8-18; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-5  
Hieromartyr Eleutherios & Anthia; Susannah the Deaconess

**Friday, 16 December:** 1 Timothy 4:4-8, 16; Mark 9:33-41  
Prophet Haggai; Modestos, Bp. of Jerusalem

**Saturday, 17 December:** Hebrews 11:33-40; 12:1-2; Luke 14:1-11  
Prophet Daniel; Dionysios of Zakynthos



# Evangelion

*A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith*

Archbishopric of Good Hope

Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa

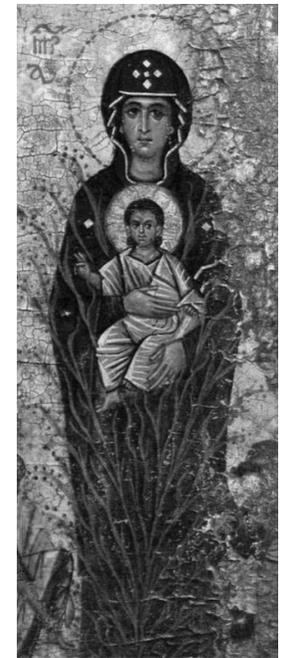
11 December 2016

## 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 recognise 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 for Christ's Nativity

## The Forefathers of Christ

Today, on the second Sunday before Christmas the Church commemorates Christ's forefathers according to the flesh, those righteous men and women who lived under the Old covenant, and foretold and longed for the coming of the Saviour. This includes those who lived before the giving of the Law, notably the patriarch Abraham, as well as the many prophets and righteous ones who witnessed to God's revelation to the people of Israel and called His people to return to Him when they strayed into error.



***Let us hear the divine words of those who cry aloud, telling of the coming of the Christ. For behold, He is born in a cave of an unwedded Maiden, and His awesome birth is foretold to Wise Men by the suddenly appearing star.***

Matins of the Sunday  
of the Holy Forefathers

The Church understands the events that are recounted in the Old Testament as one long preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament we see how God was preparing a people who would be able to receive His Son, and the birth of the Holy Theotokos, as we saw last week, is the final moment of this long work of preparation.

The Church also insists that we need to read the Old Testament with the eyes of faith, a faith informed by the coming of Jesus Christ. Seen in this way, the Old Testament books are not simply about a series of historical events, or even the development of early Judaism. Rather, they foretell the coming of Christ in various different ways. Everything points to Him and should be interpreted in the light of Him.



The Redeemer of the human race willed to arrange a new birth and re-creation of mankind: just as the first creation, taking dust from the virginal and pure earth, where He formed the first Adam, so also now, having arranged His Incarnation upon the earth, and so to speak, in place of dust He chooses out of all the creation this pure and immaculate Virgin and, having re-created mankind in His chosen one from among mankind, the creator of Adam is made the New Adam, in order to save the old.

Saint Andrew of Crete

What joy does the Nativity of the Mother of God bring us? Let us explain in more detail the Church hymn which explains the meaning of this feast's joy. Through the birth of the Ever-Virgin, through Her only-begotten Son and God, cursed and outcast mankind makes peace with God Who is immeasurably offended by man's sins, for Christ became the mediator of this peace (cf. Rom. 5:10-11). Man is freed from the curse and eternal death, made worthy of the blessing of the Heavenly Father; he is united and co-mingled with the Divine nature; he is raised to his first inheritance by this *co-mingling*, according to the Church hymn. Mankind, once an outcast, has been made worthy of sonship to the Heavenly Father, received the promise of the glorious resurrection and eternal life in the heavens together with the angels.

This has all been and is being wrought by the Son of God incarnate from the Most Pure Virgin from the Holy Spirit, and by the intercession of His Most Pure Mother. How honoured and magnified is mankind through the Holy Virgin Mother of God, for it has been made worthy of renewal and sonship by God; She Herself was made worthy by Her immeasurable humility and exceedingly great purity and holiness to be the Mother of the God-man!

Saint John of Kronstadt



## ***The Prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Youths***

On Saturday we commemorate the Prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Youths who refused to worship the idol of King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon and instead insisted on the worship of the one true God. Their steadfastness in faith can be seen in the hymn that they sang in praise of God, which has become part of the basis of Matins. Moreover, the account of these youths being thrown into a burning furnace and not being burnt, but instead encountering the Angel of God, is understood by the Church as prefiguring the Holy Virgin's Conception of Christ, the Living Flame, without being burnt. In the words of the Eighth Ode of the Katavasias of the 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.***