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ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE MOTHER OF GOD OCA – Diocese of New York & New Jersey

The Most Reverend Michael, Archbishop of NY & the Diocese of NY/NJ

V. Rev. Dr. Matthew Searfoorce, Temporary Rector

Sub-Deacon Edward Dawson Sub-Deacon Vlashi

Parish Council President: Andrew Romanofsky

Parish Council Vice President: Sub-Deacon Edward

HYMNS OF THE DAY

Resurrectional Troparion in Tone 1

When the stone had been sealed by the Jews, while the soldiers were guarding Thy most pure body, Thou didst rise on the third day, O Savior, granting life to the world. The powers of heaven therefore cried to Thee, O Giver of Life: “Glory to Thy Resurrection, O Christ! Glory to Thy Kingdom! Glory to Thy dispensation, O thou who lovest of mankind!”

Troparion for the Annunciation in Tone 4

Today is the beginning of our salvation, the revelation of the eternal mystery! The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin as Gabriel announces the coming of Grace. Together with him let us cry to the Theotokos: Rejoice, O Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee!

Kontakion for the Annunciation in Tone 8

O victorious leader of triumphant hosts! We thy servants, delivered from evil sing our grateful thanks to thee, O Theotokos. As thou dost possess invincible might, set us free from every calamity so that we may sing: “Rejoice, O unwedded Bride!

Prayer Requests

For Health of:

Lucia & Michael Fiocca, offered by Denise Hartzel..

Nicholas Zimmerman, on his 20th birthday, offered by his family with love.

In Memory of:

Christopher Dawson, on his birthday, offered by the Dawson family.

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SAINTS AND FEASTS OF THE DAY

MARCH 15, 2018

FIFTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT: ST MARY OF EGYPT. THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR MOST HOLY LADY, THEOTOKOS AND EVER-VIRGIN MARY .



5th Sunday of Great Lent: St Mary of Egypt

Saint Zosimas (April 4) was a monk at a certain Palestinian monastery on the outskirts of Caesarea. Having dwelt at the monastery since his childhood, he lived there in asceticism until he reached the age of fifty-three. Then he was disturbed by the thought that he had attained perfection, and needed no one to instruct him. “Is there a monk anywhere who can show me some form of asceticism that I have not attained? Is there anyone who has surpassed me in spiritual sobriety and deeds?”

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, “Zosimas, you have struggled valiantly, as far as this is in the power of man. However, there is no one who is righteous (Rom 3:10). So that you may know how many other ways lead to salvation, leave your native land, like Abraham from the house of his father (Gen 12:1), and go to the monastery by the Jordan.”

Abba Zosimas immediately left the monastery, and following the angel, he went to the Jordan monastery and settled in it.

Here he met Elders who were adept in contemplation, and also in their struggles. Never did anyone utter an idle word. Instead, they sang constantly, and prayed all night long. Abba Zosimas began to imitate the spiritual activity of the holy monks.

Thus much time passed, and the holy Forty Day Fast approached. There was a certain custom at the monastery, which was why God had led Saint Zosimas there. On the First Sunday of Great Lent the igumen served the Divine Liturgy, everyone received the All-Pure Body and Blood of Christ. Afterwards, they went to the trapeza for a small repast, and then assembled once more in church.

The monks prayed and made prostrations, asking forgiveness one of another. Then they made a prostration before the igumen and asked his blessing for the struggle that lay before them. During the Psalm “The Lord is my Light and my Savior, whom shall I fear? The Lord is defender of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?” (Ps 26/27:1), they opened the monastery gate and went off into the wilderness.

Each took with him as much food as he needed, and went into the desert. When their food ran out, they ate roots and desert plants. The monks crossed the Jordan and scattered in various directions, so that no one might see how another fasted or how they spent their time.

The monks returned to the monastery on Palm Sunday, each having his own conscience as a witness of his ascetic struggles. It was a rule of the monastery that no one asked how anyone else had toiled in the desert.

Abba Zosimas, according to the custom of the monastery, went deep into the desert hoping to find someone living there who could benefit him.

He walked into the wilderness for twenty days and then, when he sang the Psalms of the Sixth Hour and made the usual prayers. Suddenly, to the right of the hill where he stood, he saw a human form. He was afraid, thinking that it might be a demonic apparition. Then he guarded himself with the Sign of the Cross, which removed his fear. He turned to the right and saw a form walking southward. The body was black from the blazing sunlight, and the faded short hair was white like a sheep’s fleece. Abba Zosimas rejoiced, since he had not seen any living thing for many days.

The desert-dweller saw Zosimas approaching, and attempted to flee from him. Abba Zosimas, forgetting his age and fatigue, quickened his pace. When he was close enough to be heard, he called out, “Why do you flee from me, a sinful old man? Wait for me, for the love of God.”

The stranger said to him, “Forgive me, Abba Zosimas, but I cannot turn and show my face to you. I am a woman, and as you see, I am naked. If you would grant the request of a sinful woman, throw me your cloak so I might cover my body, and then I can ask for your blessing.”

Then Abba Zosimas was terrified, realizing that she could not have called him by name unless she possessed spiritual insight.

Covered by the cloak, the ascetic turned to Zosimas: “Why do you want to speak with me, a sinful woman? What did you wish to learn from me, you who have not shrunk from such great labors?”

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Abba Zosimas fell to the ground and asked for her blessing. She also bowed down before him, and for a long time they remained on the ground each asking the other to bless. Finally, the woman ascetic said: "Abba Zosimas, you must bless and pray, since you are honored with the grace of the priesthood. For many years you have stood before the holy altar, offering the Holy Gifts to the Lord."

These words frightened Saint Zosimas even more. With tears he said to her, "O Mother! It is clear that you live with God and are dead to this world. You have called me by name and recognized me as a priest, though you have never seen me before. The grace granted you is apparent, therefore bless me, for the Lord's sake."

Yielding finally to his entreaties, she said, "Blessed is God, Who cares for the salvation of men." Abba Zosimas replied, "Amen." Then they rose to their feet. The woman ascetic again said to the Elder, "Why have you come, Father, to me who am a sinner, bereft of every virtue? Apparently, the grace of the Holy Spirit has brought you to do me a service. But tell me first, Abba, how do the Christians live, how is the Church guided?"

Abba Zosimas answered her, "By your holy prayers God has granted the Church and us all a lasting peace. But fulfill my unworthy request, Mother, and pray for the whole world and for me a sinner, that my wanderings in the desert may not be useless."

The holy ascetic replied, "You, Abba Zosimas, as a priest, ought to pray for me and for all, for you are called to do this. However, since we must be obedient, I will do as you ask."

The saint turned toward the East, and raising her eyes to heaven and stretching out her hands, she began to pray in a whisper. She prayed so softly that Abba Zosimas could not hear her words. After a long time, the Elder looked up and saw her standing in the air more than a foot above the ground. Seeing this, Zosimas threw himself down on the ground, weeping and repeating, "Lord, have mercy!"

Then he was tempted by a thought. He wondered if she might not be a spirit, and if her prayer could be insincere. At that moment she turned around, lifted him from the ground and said, "Why do your thoughts confuse you, Abba Zosimas? I am not an apparition. I am a sinful and unworthy woman, though I am guarded by holy Baptism."

Then she made the Sign of the Cross and said, "May God protect us from the Evil One and his schemes, for fierce is his struggle against us." Seeing and hearing this, the Elder fell at her feet with tears saying, "I beseech you by Christ our God, do not conceal from me who you are and how you came into this desert. Tell me everything, so that the wondrous works of God may be revealed."

She replied, "It distresses me, Father, to speak to you about my shameless life. When you hear my story, you might flee from me, as if from a poisonous snake. But I shall tell you everything, Father, concealing nothing. However, I exhort you, cease not to pray for me a sinner, that I may find mercy on the Day of Judgment."

"I was born in Egypt and when I was twelve years old, I left my parents and went to Alexandria. There I lost my chastity and gave myself to unrestrained and insatiable sensuality. For more than seventeen years I lived like that and I did it all for free. Do not think that I refused the money because I was rich. I lived in poverty and worked at spinning flax. To me, life consisted in the satisfaction of my fleshly lust."

"One summer I saw a crowd of people from Libya and Egypt heading toward the sea. They were on their way to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. I also wanted to sail with them. Since I had no food or money, I offered my body in payment for my passage. And so I embarked on the ship."

"Now, Father, believe me, I am very amazed, that the sea tolerated my wantonness and fornication, that the earth did not open up its mouth and take me down alive into hell, because I had ensnared so many souls. I think that God was seeking my repentance. He did not desire the death of a sinner, but awaited my conversion."

"So I arrived in Jerusalem and spent all the days before the Feast living the same sort of life, and maybe even worse."

"When the holy Feast of the Exaltation of the Venerable Cross of the Lord arrived, I went about as before, looking for young men. At daybreak I saw that everyone was heading to the church, so I went along with the rest. When the hour of the Holy Elevation drew nigh, I was trying to enter into the church with all the people. With great effort I came almost to the doors, and attempted to squeeze inside. Although I stepped up to the threshold, it was as though some force held me back, preventing me from entering. I was brushed aside by the crowd, and found myself standing alone on the porch. I thought that perhaps this happened because of my womanly weakness. I worked my way into the crowd, and again I attempted to elbow people aside. However hard I tried, I could not enter. Just as my feet touched the church threshold, I was stopped. Others entered the church without difficulty, while I alone was not allowed in. This happened three or four times. Finally my strength was exhausted. I went off and stood in a corner of the church portico."

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“Then I realized that it was my sins that prevented me from seeing the Life-Creating Wood. The grace of the Lord then touched my heart. I wept and lamented, and I began to beat my breast. Sighing from the depths of my heart, I saw above me an icon of the Most Holy Theotokos. Turning to Her, I prayed: “O Lady Virgin, who gave birth in the flesh to God the Word! I know that I am unworthy to look upon your icon. I rightly inspire hatred and disgust before your purity, but I know also that God became Man in order to call sinners to repentance. Help me, O All-Pure One. Let me enter the church. Allow me to behold the Wood upon which the Lord was crucified in the flesh, shedding His Blood for the redemption of sinners, and also for me. Be my witness before Your Son that I will never defile my body again with the impurity of fornication. As soon as I have seen the Cross of your Son, I will renounce the world, and go wherever you lead me.”

“After I had spoken, I felt confidence in the compassion of the Mother of God, and left the spot where I had been praying. I joined those entering the church, and no one pushed me back or prevented me from entering. I went on in fear and trembling, and entered the holy place.

“Thus I also saw the Mysteries of God, and how God accepts the penitent. I fell to the holy ground and kissed it. Then I hastened again to stand before the icon of the Mother of God, where I had given my vow. Bending my knees before the Virgin Theotokos, I prayed:

“O Lady, you have not rejected my prayer as unworthy. Glory be to God, Who accepts the repentance of sinners. It is time for me to fulfill my vow, which you witnessed. Therefore, O Lady, guide me on the path of repentance.”

“Then I heard a voice from on high: ‘If you cross the Jordan, you will find glorious rest.’

“I immediately believed that this voice was meant for me, and I cried out to the Mother of God: ‘O Lady, do not forsake me!’

“Then I left the church portico and started on my journey. A certain man gave me three coins as I was leaving the church. With them I bought three loaves of bread, and asked the bread merchant the way to the Jordan.

“It was nine o’clock when I saw the Cross. At sunset I reached the church of Saint John the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan. After praying in the church, I went down to the Jordan and washed my face and hands in its water. Then in this same temple of Saint John the Forerunner I received the Life-Creating Mysteries of Christ. Then I ate half of one of my loaves of bread, drank water from the holy Jordan, and slept there that night on the ground. In the morning I found a small boat and crossed the river to the opposite shore. Again I prayed that the Mother of God would lead me where She wished. Then I found myself in this desert.”

Abba Zosimas asked her, “How many years have passed since you began to live in the desert?”

“I think,” she replied, “it is forty-seven years since I came from the Holy City.”

Abba Zosimas again asked, “What food do you find here, Mother?”

And she said, “I had with me two and a half loaves of bread when I crossed the Jordan. Soon they dried out and hardened. Eating a little at a time, I finished them after a few years.”

Again Abba Zosimas asked, “Is it possible you have survived for so many years without sickness, and without suffering in any way from such a complete change?”

“Believe me, Abba Zosimas,” the woman said, “I spent seventeen years in this wilderness (after she had spent seventeen years in immorality), fighting wild beasts: mad desires and passions. When I began to eat bread, I thought of the meat and fish which I had in abundance in Egypt. I also missed the wine that I loved so much when I was in the world, while here I did not even have water. I suffered from thirst and hunger. I also had a mad desire for lewd songs. I seemed to hear them, disturbing my heart and my hearing. Weeping and striking myself on the breast, I remembered the vow I had made. At last I beheld a radiant Light shining on me from everywhere. After a violent tempest, a lasting calm ensued.

“Abba, how shall I tell you of the thoughts that urged me on to fornication? A fire seemed to burn within me, awakening in me the desire for embraces. Then I would throw myself to the ground and water it with my tears. I seemed to see the Most Holy Virgin before me, and She seemed to threaten me for not keeping my vow. I lay face downward day and night upon the ground, and would not get up until that blessed Light encircled me, dispelling the evil thoughts that troubled me.

“Thus I lived in this wilderness for the first seventeen years. Darkness after darkness, misery after misery stood about me, a sinner. But from that time until now the Mother of God helps me in everything.”

Abba Zosimas again inquired, “How is it that you require neither food, nor clothing?”

She answered, “After finishing my bread, I lived on herbs and the things one finds in the desert. The clothes I had when I crossed over the Jordan became torn and fell apart. I suffered both from the summer heat, when the blazing heat fell upon me, and from the winter cold, when I shivered from the frost. Many times I fell down upon the

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earth, as though dead. I struggled with various afflictions and temptations. But from that time until the present day, the power of God has guarded my sinful soul and humble body. I was fed and clothed by the all-powerful word of God, since man does not live by bread alone, but by every word proceeding from the mouth of God (Dt 8:3, Mt.4:4, Luke 4:4), and those who have put off the old man (Col 3:9) have no refuge, hiding themselves in the clefts of the rocks (Job 24:8, Heb 11:38). When I remember from what evil and from what sins the Lord delivered me, I have imperishable food for salvation.”

When Abba Zosimas heard that the holy ascetic quoted the Holy Scripture from memory, from the Books of Moses and Job and from the Psalms of David, he then asked the woman, “Mother, have you read the Psalms and other books?”

She smiled at hearing this question, and answered, “Believe me, I have seen no human face but yours from the time that I crossed over the Jordan. I never learned from books. I have never heard anyone read or sing from them. Perhaps the Word of God, which is alive and acting, teaches man knowledge by itself (Col 3:16, 1 Thess 2:13). This is the end of my story. As I asked when I began, I beg you for the sake of the Incarnate Word of God, holy Abba, pray for me, a sinner.

“Furthermore, I beg you, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, tell no one what you have heard from me, until God takes me from this earth. Next year, during Great Lent, do not cross the Jordan, as is the custom of your monastery.”

Again Abba Zosimas was amazed, that the practice of his monastery was known to the holy woman ascetic, although he had not said anything to her about this.

“Remain at the monastery,” the woman continued. “Even if you try to leave the monastery, you will not be able to do so. On Great and Holy Thursday, the day of the Lord’s Last Supper, place the Life-Creating Body and Blood of Christ our God in a holy vessel, and bring it to me. Await me on this side of the Jordan, at the edge of the desert, so that I may receive the Holy Mysteries. And say to Abba John, the igumen of your community, ‘Look to yourself and your brothers’ (1 Tim 4:16), for there is much that needs correction. Do not say this to him now, but when the Lord shall indicate.”

Asking for his prayers, the woman turned and vanished into the depths of the desert.

For a whole year Elder Zosimas remained silent, not daring to reveal to anyone what he had seen, and he prayed that the Lord would grant him to see the holy ascetic once more.

When the first week of Great Lent came again, Saint Zosimas was obliged to remain at the monastery because of sickness. Then he remembered the woman’s prophetic words that he would not be able to leave the monastery. After several days went by, Saint Zosimas was healed of his infirmity, but he remained at the monastery until Holy Week.

On Holy Thursday, Abba Zosimas did what he had been ordered to do. He placed some of the Body and Blood of Christ into a chalice, and some food in a small basket. Then he left the monastery and went to the Jordan and waited for the ascetic. The saint seemed tardy, and Abba Zosimas prayed that God would permit him to see the holy woman.

Finally, he saw her standing on the far side of the river. Rejoicing, Saint Zosimas got up and glorified God. Then he wondered how she could cross the Jordan without a boat. She made the Sign of the Cross over the water, then she walked on the water and crossed the Jordan. Abba Zosimas saw her in the moonlight, walking toward him. When the Elder wanted to make prostration before her, she forbade him, crying out, “What are you doing, Abba? You are a priest and you carry the Holy Mysteries of God.”

Reaching the shore, she said to Abba Zosimas, “Bless me, Father.” He answered her with trembling, astonished at what he had seen. “Truly God did not lie when he promised that those who purify themselves will be like Him. Glory to You, O Christ our God, for showing me through your holy servant, how far I am from perfection.”

The woman asked him to recite both the Creed and the “Our Father.” When the prayers were finished, she partook of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. Then she raised her hands to the heavens and said, “Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen Your salvation.”

The saint turned to the Elder and said, “Please, Abba, fulfill another request. Go now to your monastery, and in a year’s time come to the place where we first time spoke.”

He said, “If only it were possible for me to follow you and always see your holy face!”

She replied, “For the Lord’s sake, pray for me and remember my wretchedness.”

Again she made the Sign of the Cross over the Jordan, and walked over the water as before, and disappeared into the desert. Zosimas returned to the monastery with joy and terror, reproaching himself because he had not asked the saint’s name. He hoped to do so the following year.

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A year passed, and Abba Zosimas went into the desert. He reached the place where he first saw the holy woman ascetic. She lay dead, with arms folded on her bosom, and her face was turned to the east. Abba Zosimas washed her feet with his tears and kissed them, not daring to touch anything else. For a long while he wept over her and sang the customary Psalms, and said the funeral prayers. He began to wonder whether the saint would want him to bury her or not. Hardly had he thought this, when he saw something written on the ground near her head: "Abba Zosimas, bury on this spot the body of humble Mary. Return to dust what is dust. Pray to the Lord for me. I reposed on the first day of April, on the very night of the saving Passion of Christ, after partaking of the Mystical Supper."

Reading this note, Abba Zosimas was glad to learn her name. He then realized that Saint Mary, after receiving the Holy Mysteries from his hand, was transported instantaneously to the place where she died, though it had taken him twenty days to travel that distance.

Glorifying God, Abba Zosimas said to himself, "It is time to do what she asks. But how can I dig a grave, with nothing in my hands?" Then he saw a small piece of wood left by some traveler. He picked it up and began to dig. The ground was hard and dry, and he could not dig it. Looking up, Abba Zosimas saw an enormous lion standing by the saint's body and licking her feet. Fear gripped the Elder, but he guarded himself with the Sign of the Cross, believing that he would remain unharmed through the prayers of the holy woman ascetic. Then the lion came close to the Elder, showing its friendliness with every movement. Abba Zosimas commanded the lion to dig the grave, in order to bury Saint Mary's body. At his words, the lion dug a hole deep enough to bury the body. Then each went his own way. The lion went into the desert, and Abba Zosimas returned to the monastery, blessing and praising Christ our God.

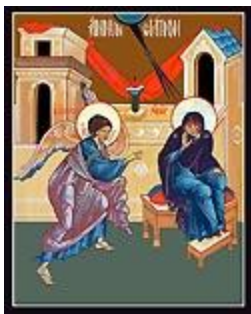
Arriving at the monastery, Abba Zosimas related to the monks and the igumen, what he had seen and heard from Saint Mary. All were astonished, hearing about the miracles of God. They always remembered Saint Mary with faith and love on the day of her repose.

Abba John, the igumen of the monastery, heeded the words of Saint Mary, and with the help of God corrected the things that were wrong at the monastery. Abba Zosimas lived a God-pleasing life at the monastery, reaching nearly a hundred years of age. There he finished his temporal life, and passed into life eternal.

The monks passed on the life of Saint Mary of Egypt by word of mouth without writing it down.

"I however," says Saint Sophronius of Jerusalem (March 11), "wrote down the Life of Saint Mary of Egypt as I heard it from the holy Fathers. I have recorded everything, putting the truth above all else."

"May God, Who works great miracles and bestows gifts on all who turn to Him in faith, reward those who hear or read this account, and those who copy it. May he grant them a blessed portion together with Saint Mary of Egypt and with all the saints who have pleased God by their pious thoughts and works. Let us give glory to God, the Eternal King, that we may find mercy on the Day of Judgment through our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is due all glory, honor, majesty and worship together with the Unoriginate Father, and the Most Holy and Life-Creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen."



The Annunciation of our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary

The Feast of the Annunciation is one of the earliest Christian feasts, and was already being celebrated in the fourth century. There is a painting of the Annunciation in the catacomb of Priscilla in Rome dating from the second century. The Council of Toledo in 656 mentions the Feast, and the Council in Trullo in 692 says that the Annunciation was celebrated during Great Lent.

The Greek and Slavonic names for the Feast may be translated as "good tidings." This, of course, refers to the Incarnation of the Son of God and the salvation He brings. The background of the Annunciation is found in the Gospel of Saint Luke (1:26-38). The Troparion describes this as the "beginning of our salvation, and the revelation of the eternal mystery," for on this day the Son of God became the Son of Man.

There are two main components to the Annunciation: the message itself, and the response of the Virgin. The message fulfills God's promise to send a Redeemer (Genesis 3:15): "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; he shall crush your head, and you shall lie in wait for his heel." The Fathers of the Church understand "her seed" to refer to Christ. The prophets hinted at His coming, which they saw dimly, but the Archangel Gabriel now proclaims that the promise is about to be fulfilled.

We see this echoed in the Liturgy of Saint Basil, as well: "When man disobeyed Thee, the only true God who had created him, and was deceived by the guile of the serpent, becoming subject to death by his own transgressions,

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Thou, O God, in Thy righteous judgment, didst send him forth from Paradise into this world, returning him to the earth from which he was taken, yet providing for him the salvation of regeneration in Thy Christ Himself.”

The Archangel Gabriel was sent by God to Nazareth in Galilee. There he spoke to the undefiled Virgin who was betrothed to Saint Joseph: “Hail, thou who art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

In contrast to Eve, who was readily deceived by the serpent, the Virgin did not immediately accept the Angel’s message. In her humility, she did not think she was deserving of such words, but was actually troubled by them. The fact that she asked for an explanation reveals her sobriety and prudence. She did not disbelieve the words of the angel, but could not understand how they would be fulfilled, for they spoke of something which was beyond nature.

Then said Mary unto the angel, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” (Luke 1:34).

“And the angel answered and said unto her, ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: therefore also that which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible.’ And Mary said, ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.’ And the angel departed from her.” (Luke 1: 35-38)

In his Sermon 23 on the day of the Annunciation, Saint Philaret of Moscow boldly stated that “the word of the creature brought the Creator down into the world.” He explains that salvation is not merely an act of God’s will, but also involves the Virgin’s free will. She could have refused, but she accepted God’s will and chose to cooperate without complaint or further questions.

The icon of the Feast shows the Archangel with a staff in his left hand, indicating his role as a messenger. Sometimes one wing is upraised, as if to show his swift descent from heaven. His right hand is stretched toward the holy Virgin as he delivers his message.

The Virgin is depicted either standing or sitting, usually holding yarn in her left hand. Sometimes she is shown holding a scroll. Her right hand may be raised to indicate her surprise at the message she is hearing. Her head is bowed, showing her consent and obedience. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon her is depicted by a ray of light issuing from a small sphere at the top of the icon, which symbolizes heaven. In a famous icon from Sinai, a white dove is shown in the ray of light.

There are several famous icons of the Annunciation. One is in the Moscow Kremlin in the church of the Annunciation. This icon appeared in connection with the rescue of a prisoner by the Mother of God during the reign of Ivan the Terrible. Another is to be found in the Dormition Cathedral in Moscow (July 8). It was originally located in Ustiug, and was the icon before which Saint Procopius the fool (July 8) prayed to save the city from destruction in 1290. One of the most highly revered icons in Greece is the Tinos icon of the Annunciation (January 30).

The Annunciation falls during Lent, but it is always celebrated with great joy. The Liturgy of Saint Basil or Saint John Chrysostom is served, even on the weekdays of Lent. It is one of the two days of Great Lent on which the fast is relaxed and fish is permitted (Palm Sunday is the other).

GOSPEL AND EPISTLE READINGS

Prokeimenon, Tone 1:

Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us as we have set our hope on Thee! (*Psalm 32:22*)
vs. Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous! Praise befits the just! (*Psalm 32:1*)

Prokeimenon, Tone 4:

From day to day proclaim the salvation of our God! (*Psalm 95:2*)

Epistle Reading

The reading from the Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Hebrews 9:11-14

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Brethren, when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Hebrews 2:11-18

Brethren, both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You." And again: "I will put My trust in Him." And again: "Here am I and the children whom God has given Me." Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

Alleluia, Tone 1:

God gives vengeance unto me, and subdues people under me. (*Psalm 17:48*)
vs. He magnifies the salvation of the King and deals mercifully with David, His anointed, and his seed forever.
(*Psalm 17:51*)

Alleluia, Tone 1:

He descends like rain upon the fleece, like raindrops that water the earth. (*Psalm 71:6*)

Gospel Reading

The Reading is from Mark 10:32-45

At that time, Jesus taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise." And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him, and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant of James and John. And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Luke 1: 24-38

Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people. Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God

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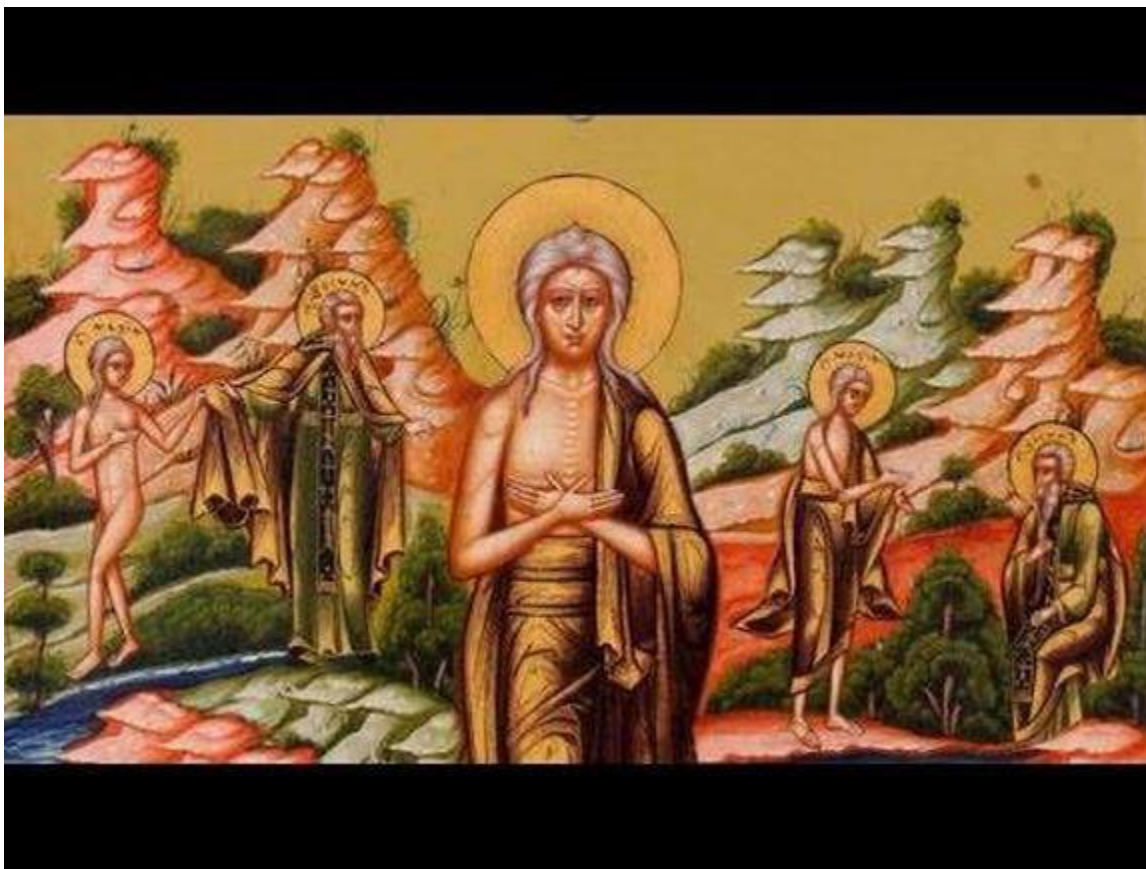
will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.” Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Hymn to the Theotokos:

O earth, announce good tidings of great joy: O heavens, praise the glory of God! Since she is a living Ark of God let no profane hand touch the Theotokos. But let the lips of believers unceasingly sing to her, praising her in joy with the Angel’s song: “Rejoice, O Lady, full of grace, the Lord is with thee!”

Communion Hymn:

Praise the Lord from the heavens! Praise Him in the highest!
The Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation.
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!



Orthodox Quote of the Day

Make your one aim in life the doing of the will of Jesus in every circumstance, however important or trifling it may seem..

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov
On the Prayer of Jesus 98

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PARISH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

The basket raffle will be held today Sunday, March 25.

There will be special collections for Paschal flowers today Sunday March 25 and Sunday April 1st. Please be generous with your donations so that our church can be beautiful for Pascha.

Next Council Meeting: Sunday, March 25, 2018 (St. Mary Of Egypt), following Divine Liturgy.

Annual Clean-up is on Saturday, March 31, 2018. Volunteers are needed; there is a sign-up sheet downstairs.

LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

Sunday, March 18th

9:30 am: Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Liturgy of St. Basil the Great
After Communion: Sunday School pre-K - Grade 3

Wednesday, March 21st

6:30 pm: Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts

Saturday, March 24th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, March 25th

9:30 am: Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Liturgy of St. Basil the Great
After Communion: Sunday School pre-K - Grade

Wednesday, March 28th

6:30 pm: Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts

Saturday, March 31st

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, April 1st

9:30 am: No Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Liturgy of St. Basil the Great
After Communion: Sunday School pre-K - Grade 3

Request & Bulletin Sponsor: Use the sign-up sheet at the candle stand for the health of, eternal memory of or a Pannikhida for a loved one or friend will be remembered during Divine Liturgy for the day/week that you signed up for.

Memorial Candles: Candles can be purchased at the candle stand, suggested donation of \$10 for a large one.

Private Confessions: Can be heard a half hour before any service. See Father Matthew for other times.

General Confession: Will be at 9:45 am on the first Sunday of the month.

Receiving Holy Communion: Holy Communion is offered to those baptized Orthodox Christians who have prepared themselves for the reception of the Sacrament by prayer and fasting. Blessed Bread is available for all our visitors at the very end of the Divine Liturgy.

Pannikhida Service: The third Sunday of each month there will be a Pannikhida after Divine Liturgy. If you would like your loved ones to be remembered please give a list of names to Father Matthew before that Sunday for those to be remembered in the month.

Special Announcements for the bulletin can be submitted by E-Mail: OrthodoxChurchMotherOfGod@outlook.com

The Living Clean Group of Narcotics Anonymous meets every Friday from 8-9:15 pm downstairs in the community room.

The Grey Book Step Meeting Group of Narcotics Anonymous meets every Tuesday from 7-8:00 pm downstairs in the community room.

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Daily Inspirations by Abbott Tryphon

Becoming Like Christ

What does the Lord require of you?



As we examine how we live our lives as Christians, we look to those who leave an impression of goodness, kindness, and humility, as examples of the person we would like to become. That saintly person, by their every example, exudes the humbleness of the Lord, and love seems to be palpable when we are in their presence. Such a person didn't just appear, for these are not the natural traits one finds in most people. Such humility and kindness are developed over time, for this person has sought out the grace of God, and has made, sometimes since childhood, every attempt at giving back the love and goodness they received from the Father of Lights.

Such a person desires, on a daily basis, to become more like Christ. The humility of the Lord becomes their personal standard, for such a person is quick to forgive, quick to grant justice, and desires to be kind to everyone who comes into their presence. This person does not fabricate such sweetness of soul as though he were a politician running for office, for it is the Lord Himself Who dwells in them, and it is Christ in them Who is full of justice, kindness, love, and full of mercy. "He has shown you, O mortal what is good; and what does the LORD require of you? but to do justice, to live kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)."



Daily Reflection

A Woman Blesses a Priest



"Then she (St. Mary of Egypt) turned to Zosima and said: 'Why did you wish, Abba Zosima, to see a sinful woman? What do you wish to hear or learn from me, you who have not shrunk from such great struggles?'" Zosima threw himself on the ground and asked for her blessing. She likewise bowed down before him. And thus they lay on the ground prostrate asking for each other's blessing. And one word alone could be heard from both: 'Bless me!' After a long while the woman said to Zosima: 'Abba Zosima, it is you who must give blessing and pray. You are dignified by the order of priesthood and for many years you have been standing before the holy altar and offering the sacrifice of the Divine Mysteries.' This flung Zosima into even greater terror. At length with tears he said to her: 'O mother, filled with the spirit, by your mode of life it is evident that you live with God and have died to the world. The grace granted to you is apparent -- for you have called me by name and recognized that I am a priest, though you have never seen me before. Grace is recognized not by one's orders, but by gifts of the Spirit, so give me your blessing for God's sake, for I need your prayers.' Then giving way before the wish of the elder the woman said: 'Blessed is God Who cares for the salvation of men and their souls.'" (The Life of St. Mary of Egypt, attributed to Sophronius of Jerusalem)

Among the many not-very "pc" moments in the Life of St. Mary of Egypt, read in our churches at matins of the fifth Thursday of Lent, the one quoted above caught my attention this year. Zosima, who is a priest-monk, is asking for, nay, begging for "with tears," the blessing of a woman. (She made "a grown man cry," in fact, – so even the Rolling Stones would be impressed, I'm thinking, rather irrelevantly). Zosima notes that "grace is recognized not by one's orders, but by gifts of the Spirit."

From all this I can glean a basic lesson about the openness of the Holy Spirit to all of us, regardless of our gender, or "order," or anything else, when we open ourselves to participating in His grace. All of us can, indeed, be blessed, and also impart "blessing" ("ev-logia" in Greek, meaning "a good word") onto our world and those we encounter, when we choose to embrace God's "good" Word, the eternal "Logos" and our Lord, Jesus Christ, – rather than "other" words and narratives of reality, like the voices in our own heads or other sources of merely-human opinion.

So let me be blessed this morning, by re-connecting with God's Spirit in some heartfelt prayer, that I may bless, throughout my schedule today. Holy Mother Maria, pray to God for us!