

Let us not then be ashamed to confess the Crucified. Be the Cross our seal made with boldness by our fingers on our brow, and on everything; over the bread we eat, and the cups we drink; in our comings in, and goings out; before our sleep, when we lie down and when we rise up; when we are in the way, and when we are still. Great is that preservative; it is without price, for the sake of the poor; without toil, for the sick; since also its grace is from God. It is the Sign of the faithful, and the dread of devils: for He *'triumphed over them in it, having made a show of them openly'* [Colossians 2:15]; for when they see the Cross they are reminded of the Crucified; they are afraid of Him, who *'bruised the heads of the dragon'*. Despise not the Seal, because of the freeness of the gift; but for this the rather honour your Benefactor.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem

**19 March is the Sunday of the Holy Cross**

**Matins Gospel:** Luke 24:36-53

**Epistle:** Hebrews 4:14-16;5:1-6

**Gospel:** Mark 8:34-38; 9:1

**Resurrectional Apolytikion:**

Angelic powers were above Thy tomb, and they that guarded Thee became as dead. And Mary stood by the grave seeking Thine immaculate Body. Thou hast despoiled Hades and wast not tried thereby. Thou didst meet the Virgin and didst grant us life. O Thou Who didst arise from the dead, Lord, glory be to Thee.

**Apolytikion of Sunday of the Holy Cross:**

Lord, save Your people and bless Your inheritance, granting our rulers to prevail over adversaries, and protecting Your commonwealth by Your Cross.

**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, 20 March:** Isaiah 14:24-32; Genesis 8:21-9:7; Proverbs 11:19-12:6  
Fathers of the Monastery of St. Savas; Cuthbert the Wonderworker

**Tuesday, 21 March:** Isaiah 25:1-9; Genesis 9:8-17; Proverbs 12:8-22  
James the Confessor; Thomas, Pat. Of Constantinople

**Wednesday, 22 March:** Isaiah 26:21-27:9; Genesis 9:18-10:1; Proverbs 12:23-13:9  
Hieromartyr Basil of Ancyra; Kalliniki & Vassilisa the Martyrs

**Thursday, 23 March:** Isaiah 28:14-22; Genesis 10:32-11:9; Proverbs 13:19-14:6  
Martyr Nicon & the 199; Anatolios & Protoleon the Martyrs

**Friday, 24 March:** Isaiah 29:13-23; Genesis 12:1-7; Proverbs 14:15-26  
Forefeast of the Annunciation; Bp. Artemon

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



# Evangelion

*A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith*

19 March 2017

## Take Up Your Cross

Today, on the Sunday of the veneration of the Holy Cross, we listen to Saint Mark's Gospel and hear Jesus Christ's challenging words about what it means to be His followers. He calls us to renounce ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him, and warns us that if we seek to save our lives we will surely lose them.

These are disturbing words and remind us of the great cost involved in being a Christian. Too often we can domesticate what it means to bear our cross, forgetting that, for Christ, the Cross was something that cost Him His life. And He reminds us in this Gospel that, if we are to be His followers, it will also cost us our life.

We might wonder at this. Is not our life a gift from God, and does He not desire that we should live it to the full? Why should He expect us to renounce life? Does God really want us to be miserable? Jesus gives us a clue to this paradox by telling us that "whoever loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it."

Jesus Christ came to bring us abundant life and to restore to life those who are in the tombs, as we will sing at Pascha. But if we are to receive this gift of life we need to die to our tendency to sin and to renounce our own selfishness and the many ways it has infiltrated our lives. We need to open ourselves to genuinely following Christ. What this involves will be different for each one of us, but there is no true life that does not involve dying to ourselves. And we know too that, in doing so, we receive the only life that is truly worth living.

In Paradise of old the tree stripped me bare; for by giving me its fruit to eat, the enemy brought in death. But now the Tree of the Cross that clothes men with the garment of life has been set up on earth, and the whole world is filled with boundless joy. Beholding it venerated, O ye people, let us with one accord raise in faith our cry to God: His house is full of glory.

From Matins for the Veneration of the Holy Cross



## The Feast of the Annunciation

On Saturday 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.



*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

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.

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

## The Veneration of the Holy Cross

Today, on the third Sunday of Great Lent, we commemorate and adore the Holy and Life- Giving Cross of Christ. In some ways this is similar to the feasts of the Exaltation and Procession of the Cross that we celebrate on 14 September and 1 August. However, this feast is not connected to any historical event, but is rather given to us to mark an important place on our Lenten pilgrimage. It tells us that we are in the middle of Great Lent.

Like the people of Israel we have been wandering in the desert, cast out of Paradise, aware of our alienation from God, but also of our desire to return to Him. If we have been fasting seriously, we are probably getting to the point where we are beginning to feel it, and we may even be asking ourselves whether it is all worth it.

The Church gives us this feast to encourage us on our pilgrimage to Pascha. It likens the Holy and Life-giving Cross to the spring of Marah which the children of Israel encountered in the wilderness (Ex 15:22-25). Its waters were bitter, but when the Prophet Moses placed a piece of wood in the water they became sweet, prefiguring the Cross of Christ which likewise sweetens our Lenten fast.

This day also marks a shift in focus, from our own repentance and Lenten efforts to the events of Holy Week and Pascha. We are called to turn our attention to Christ and His sacrifice and we also receive strength from the knowledge of His Resurrection that we are journeying towards.



Shine, Cross of the Lord, shine with the light of thy grace upon the hearts of those that honour thee. With love inspired by God, we embrace thee, O desire of all the world. Through thee our tears of sorrow have been wiped away; we have been delivered from the snares of death and have passed over to unending joy. Show us the glory of thy beauty and grant to us thy servants the reward of our abstinence, for we entreat with faith thy rich protection and great mercy.

From Vespers for Sunday of the Adoration of the Holy Cross