

For some are saved by fear, as for example, when we break off from sin because we have our eyes on the threatened punishment of Hell. There are others, too who live lives of virtue because of the rewards promised to the good; and these possess their goal not by charity but by hope of reward. But he who runs in spirit to reach perfection, casts out fear. For it is the attitude of a slave, who does not stay with his master out of love and simply does not run away for fear he will be beaten. The truly virtuous man even despises rewards, lest he give the impression that he esteems the gift more than the giver. He loves with his whole heart and soul and strength (Deut. 6:5) not the creatures that come from God but Him Who is the source of all good. And He Who calls us to share in Him commands that this disposition be in the souls of all who listen to Him.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa



**4 December is the
Tenth Sunday of Luke**

Matins Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: Galatians 3:23-29; 4:1-5

Gospel: Luke 13:10-17

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

Thou didst abolish death by Thy Cross;
Thou didst open Paradise to the thief;
Thou didst transform the myrrh-bearers' lamentation, and didst bid
Thine Apostles to preach that Thou art risen, O Christ God, granting great mercy to the world.

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, 5 December: Luke 6:17-23; Galatians 5:22-26; 6:1-2; Matthew 11:27-30
Sabbas the Sanctified; Martyr Diogenes; Philotheos of Mount Athos

Tuesday, 6 December: John 10:1-9; Hebrews 13:17-21; Luke 6:17-23
Nicholas the Wonderworker; Nicholas of Asia Minor

Wednesday, 7 December: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Luke 21:5-8, 10-11, 20-24
Ambrose, Bp. Of Milan; Martyr Athenadorus

Thursday, 8 December: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17; 3:1-5; Luke 21:28-33
Conception of the Theotokos Forefeast; Patapius of Thebes

Friday, 9 December: Galatians 4:22-27; Luke 8:16-21
Conception of the Theotokos; Prophetess Hannah

Saturday, 10 December: Galatians 1:3-10; Luke 13:19-29
Martyr Menas & Companions; Thomas of Bithynia



Evangelion

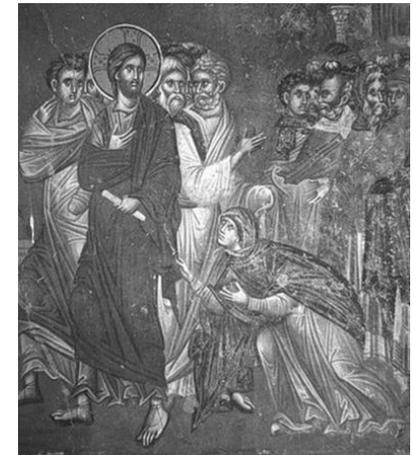
A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

4 December 2016

Be Healed!

Today we hear Saint Luke's account of how Jesus Christ healed a crippled woman on the Sabbath. This woman, who had been suffering for eighteen years, was bent double and unable to stand up. When Jesus Christ healed her, she stood up straight and glorified God. However, Jesus' opponents sought to use this against Him, accusing Him of not respecting the Sabbath. In response, He pointed out the hypocrisy of those who would happily rescue their animals on the Sabbath, but were unconcerned with the dignity of a human being.

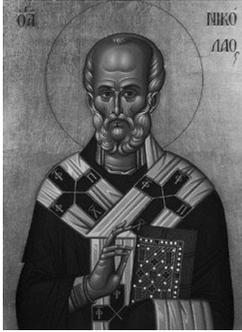
In this incident we see two different approaches to religion. For Christ's opponents, religious observances such the keeping of the Sabbath had lost their connection to a genuine concern for human beings and had simply become mindless legalism. Many people today are inclined to see religious beliefs and practices as somehow in conflict with human freedom and human dignity. For some, God has become an oppressive tyrant who must be rejected in the name of human freedom and human dignity.



In Jesus Christ we see a totally different approach to religious observances. They do not exist to satisfy a tyrannical God, but rather to restore us to our original human dignity in which we are created in the image of God. While the Church certainly has "rules" – and calls us to a serious asceticism – this is not in order to cramp our freedom, but rather because it is only within the guidelines that God has revealed that we are able to discover what it really means to be human. The holiness to which the Christ calls us is not meant to kill our spirits, but rather to free us from all that keeps us from the vision of God which is the true purpose for which we have been created.

The glory of God is the human person fully alive,
and the life of a human being is the vision of God.

Saint Irenaeus of Lyons



Saint Nicholas of Myra

On Tuesday we commemorate Saint Nicholas of Myra. Throughout the centuries, devotion to him has spread around the world. In the secularized West he has even been transformed into the red-suited Father Christmas who has lost all connection to the original saint. However, the holy bishop from Myra can be a helpful guide as we prepare to celebrate Christ's Nativity.

Saint Nicholas was bishop of Myra in Asia Minor in the fourth century. He was imprisoned during the persecutions of Diocletian and Maximian, but also experienced the new freedom that the Church was granted under St Constantine. St Nicholas was a strong

opponent of the heretic Arius and was present at the Council of Nicaea in 325 where Arianism was condemned.

St Nicholas is best known, however, for his care and compassion for his flock. He was, quite simply, a genuinely good man, a true shepherd through whom Christ's love was able to shine. And he is best known by the many miraculous accounts of how he helped others. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, let us pray that we may learn something of the virtue and compassion of St Nicholas.



The Conception of the Holy Theotokos

Friday is the feast of the Conception of the Most Holy Theotokos by Saint Anne. The Church's tradition tells us that Saints Joachim and Anne were advanced in years and childless. Their barren old age is symbolic of human nature itself, weighed down by sin and death, and yet longing for a Saviour. In the Conception of the Mother of God we see not only the answer to their prayers, but also the coming fulfillment of humanity's longing for the Saviour whose birth we will celebrate at Christmas.

Since the fall of humanity, God had been preparing the way for the Incarnation of Christ who would come to save us. The whole Old Testament is the account of the formation of a people who were being

prepared to receive the Saviour. And in order for Christ to take on our human nature, He needed a human mother, someone who would be dedicated to the Lord, nurtured in holiness, and able to become the Mother of the Messiah. The Holy Theotokos stands at the end of a long line of preparation. She is the Vessel who was chosen to bear the Incarnate Son of God and so her Conception which we commemorate today is an event of great joy as we await the coming of Christ into our midst this Nativity.

The heart of the Lord is directed towards the humble, to benefit them. The face of the Lord is set against the proud, so as to humble them. Humility receives compassion continuously, whereas a hard heart and absence of faith continuously meet with endless difficulties.

Saint Isaac the Syrian

Preparing for Christ's Nativity

The Rod of the Root of Jesse

During this time of the Nativity fast when we are preparing to celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmas, the Church's liturgical texts provide us with a rich illustration of how the Orthodox Church reads the Bible. The Scriptures are not merely about historical events in a distant past, but are loaded with meaning that finds its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. We can only understand the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, for its very purpose was to prepare the way for the coming of Christ, and its pages are full of prophecies of and allusions to the coming of Christ.

We do not read the Bible as isolated individuals, but as members of the Church, and the Church's liturgical texts guide our interpretation of it, helping to explain otherwise obscure passages. This is particularly evident during this time of preparation for the Nativity, and the Katavasias, which are based on the biblical odes, provide a good example of this.

The fourth ode refers to one of the great prophecies of the coming of the Messiah:

There shall come forth a rod from the root of Jesse, and a flower shall grow out of his root. The Spirit of God shall rest upon

Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and godliness. (11: 1-2)

Jesse was the father of King David, whose royal line would be cut off because of sin. Nevertheless, God had promised David that his seed would be established forevermore. Therefore, a "rod" or "shoot" would grow forth from the dead "stump" of Jesse's family tree. The Church understands the Virgin Theotokos as the root of Jesse, and Christ as the rod or flower that has sprung forth from this family tree. In the Gospel reading that we will hear on the Sunday before Christmas, Saint Matthew goes to great lengths to establish the family ancestry of Jesus Christ. Far from being about boring or irrelevant details, this is important because it shows how the birth of Christ is the fulfillment of people's longings for the Saviour throughout the centuries.



Rod of the root of Jesse, and flower that blossomed from his stem, You, O Christ, have sprung forth from the Virgin. From the mount of shaded leafy trees, You, the God who is not material, have come to be incarnate from her who did not know wedlock. Glory to Your power, O Lord.

Fourth Ode of the
Katavasias of the Nativity