



Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ

ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ  
Ο ΜΗΓΩΝ

# Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Sunday of Orthodoxy

March 24, 2013

Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor; Subdeacon Daniel J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris, Cantors      Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

## We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

*It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 - 8.*

## GLAD TIDINGS

+++ We are in the Great Fast. We encourage our faithful to observe the spirit of this holy season by fasting, practicing Charity and increased prayer life. Please observe the penitential prescriptions of the Church during this entire period.

+++ On Monday evening, we celebrate the Divine Liturgy at 7: 30 PM for the feast of the Annunciation. Please join us in prayer and praise. Confession of sin takes place before and after the celebration.

+++ The second All Souls' Divine Liturgy and Memorial is celebrated this Saturday at 9:00 AM. Please come and join us in prayer for departed souls and praise of our God. Confessions prior to and after the celebration.

+++ Everyone is invited to utilize the self-sacrifice envelopes during this holy season. Offer to the church what you would have spent on items you are giving up and fasting from.

+++ Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Anna, Ryan, Betty, Mary, Beth, Ann Helene, Debra and Michael.

+++ The sign-up sheet for both the Web Site and Bulletin sponsors is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. Please sign up as soon as possible. Do NOT make payment until your sign-up month has arrived. This will make it easier for Father to keep track of payments. Thanks in advance to all who support the parish in this way.

+++ We offer thanks to the Blessed Trinity for inspiring generosity in the souls of our faithful and the blessing of abundant grace in our midst with the offering received last Sunday: Tithing Offering, \$563.00; Candles, \$42.00; Self Sacrifice Great Fast Offering, \$75.00; Parish Dues, \$25.00; Food Coupons, \$400.00; Kitchen, \$5195.00, for a total of \$6300.00. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offer their God-given treasure and labored for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls! The attendance was 44 adults and 13 children last Sunday.

+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Pani Lucas, Eleni Pallas, Anna Zacharyczuk, Marilyn Korba, Eleanor Korba, Robert Gorbich, Michael Douglas, Maria Garcia and Pani Bulezta.

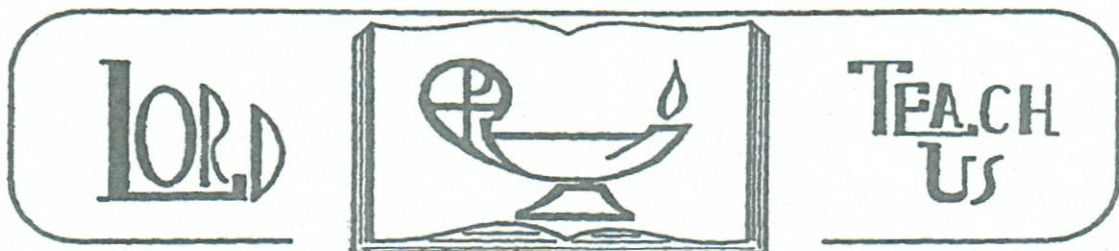
+++ We make a **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN** Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of **\$1694.00** from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ Please be certain to see a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using **Shop Rite Food Coupons** available in \$20.00 denominations. We invite **ALL** to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized \$5550.00 on this project to date!

+++ **The Clothing Drive is a permanent on-going project in our parish. Please bring any type of clothing and fabrics along with stuffed animals and shoes for the benefit of our parish. The bags can be left in the vestibule or on the front porch of the rectory. Please invite your friends and neighbors to assist us in disposing of unwanted clothing, shoes and fabrics.**

+++ **Sincere thanks to all who supported and prepared for the Luncheon prior to the Great Fast. God bless you faithful souls!**

+++ **Please pray the Lord our God grants us an enrichment of our spiritual lives for his glory.**



### Praying For Your Spouse

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in our inner being, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. And to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen Ephesians 3: 14 – 21.*

*And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God Philippians 1: 9 – 11.*

*I have sought your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise Psalms 119: 58.*

*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express Romans 8: 26.*

*To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up Ephesians 4: 12.*

## How About You???

Approximately three thousand years ago, our God inspired His prophet Hosea to observe, "Because there is no truth nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land, false swearing, lying, murder, stealing and committing adultery abound" Hosea 4: 1, 2. Now the Prophet must think, "O God, man did not change much and apparently learned so little in all this time."

We have it here around us in our society and unfortunately, we have it here among us. We as Byzantine Catholics, who have been chosen, who have been called, who have been elected, who have been predestined for heaven, who have been set aside by God to witness in the world for Him, have altogether too many times joined the enemy and find our own description among the words Hosea uttered so long ago.

If we do not sense a difference about us as God's chosen, if we do not live like we ourselves sense this difference, we are trifling with values that effect the destiny of our soul and those of our children.

Morality does not change. It is we who accept loose morals. It is we who overlook the seriousness of the world condition and do not become alarmed. Instead we join the detractors of Christ. We do not diminish our Lord, we diminish ourselves and place little value on our soul and its vocation.

Consequently, we do not act as Christians, as believers, those who have an image of Christ imprinted upon them through the sacramental Mysteries. Instead, we act like His worse enemies. How much more ill affect can we have on His salutary gospel than to claim to be His follower and yet live like His enemy? How many are scandalized because we profess Him with our lips, but crucify Him with our actions, our thoughts, even all the rest of our bodies?

Now is the time to make amends and serious turn-arounds in our daily living, particularly in our attitude. The sacred season of the Great Fast is a time for turning in the correct direction, for facing Christ and keeping our gaze on Him.

## Sunday Of Orthodoxy

Philip seeks out Nathaniel and tells him, "We have found the one Moses spoke of in the law – and the prophets too – Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth" John 1: 45. The best and easiest way to spread our precious faith is by devoutly and faithfully living it. Andrew learns the identity of Christ and introduces his brother Peter to him because he desires that he also become a sharer of the precious and exciting discovery. The spirit and zeal of the individual believer is difficult to overlook. If we are in fact devoted, we will witness to Christ by our lifestyle and it will become contagious. Christ comes among us to spread a contagion, an eagerness for salvation, an ardent desire for life in Christ, a truthful acceptance of our genuine need for totality, completion and integration with the source of life, the Blessed Trinity itself.

Jesus looks at us and sees, in spite of our miscalculations and poor judgment, a soul worthy of being saved, simply and solely because we are created in his image. Nathaniel is approached and Jesus looks at him and addresses both him and his father by name in order to demonstrate He knew them even before they came to him, and therefore did not need to question or ask or find out about him, because He already knew and was acquainted with his entire life. Immediately He renames Peter in keeping with his fore-ordained service of building up the Church of Christ, for he is a symbol and example of the unhewn, not broken away rock which after the mason's work on it and its full equipping for use in the building of man's salvation, is placed in its fitting position in the structure which is the Body of Christ.

So we are reminded we each have a place in this structure of salvation which is the Church. Christ himself is the chief cornerstone and we, each of us are the stones, built one upon the other to be the inviting, the intriguing welcome signs for the world. Christ sees the potential of Peter and he is called and finally becomes numbered first among the twelve disciples of Christ.

Christ looks at you and me today as well. He calls us continually to service. He wants us to contribute of what we are gifted so that the salvation of the world can take place. The invitation, "Follow Me" is addressed to each of us, just as it is on this day to pursue the grace of this sacred season in the blessed faith of Christ. We celebrate the gift of our faith today, but must seriously ask ourselves, "Are we worthy of what we have been given?" "Are we responsive to the grace it enriches us with?" "Are we worthy exemplars of the values of Orthodoxy?" "How seriously do we take the teaching of Christ so that it transforms, changes, alters and turns us around in our daily living?" "How does being a disciple of Christ enhance and enrich our daily living?"

Can we be said to respond with the same enthusiasm of Nathaniel, Philip, Andrew and Peter? Are we as convinced as they of the place of Christ in our life? Do we continually hasten to gladly announce the discovery and attainment of the longed-for-blessing so that others may also experience the satisfaction of soul at the discovery of the obvious blessing of Christ in our lives?

The Church continually introduces us to him from varied perspectives. The prophets pointed to him, the apostles preached him, and the Church exalts him in our midst. What kind of excitement of soul do we know as we hear his name mentioned and are we eager to glorify it because of the personal experiences we have had with him?

We address the invitation to all as did Philip, "Come and see." In other words come here, be here every Sunday, every feast day, and see how faithful we are to the Lord who draws us to himself. Come and see how other believers give expression to their underlying faith commitment. Come here in our midst to see how we are drawn without parallel to Christ every Sunday and holyday, during the Great Fast season, to the devotions which serve to strengthen our commitment and give expression to our joy in sharing his name.

If strangers would "Come and see," would they be similarly drawn, similarly eager, similarly filled with zeal, similarly inspired by our example for the salutary name of the Lord? Would what they see in our lives urge them to pursue the values of the Lord seriously and without respite? Would what a non-Orthodox communicant witness in us make him feel this is where he must be every Sunday, every holyday, every opportunity to grow in precious faith commitment? Is the way we live and practice the treasure we have in Christ an inspiration for others who have something else, to want to, to desire to, to eagerly seek and join the precious ancient treasure which affirms our daily living? Would they be able to truthfully say to us because of our profession of faith, as did the inhabitants of the town of Sichar after hearing the Samaritan woman testify of Christ, "We no longer believe because of what you said, but because of what we experienced ourselves."

Or would it be true to say because of apathy, indifference, neglect, a life of excuses, that the right faith, the precious faith the only true faith in Christ was given to the wrong people?



## **IS FREQUENT COMMUNION NECESSARY ???**

**From its very inception in ancient times, the consistent teaching of our blessed Church has been that the Eucharist must be received regularly, at every Divine Liturgy we are present. Our presence requires us to be spiritually prepared to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Our Lord did say: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" John 6: 54.**

**From these words the Body of Christ has always understood that if we are to have a vibrant spiritual life we must receive Communion often and always. So much an integral part of our faith response is the reception of the sacramental Mystery that the Quinsext Ecumenical Council stated anyone who was present for worship at the Divine Liturgy and did not receive Communion was to be excommunicated.**

**St. Basil always wrote that it is good and proper to receive Communion daily. He noted in his writings that within the confines of his diocese all believers received at least four times a week. St. John Chrysostom in his commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians says it is blasphemy not to receive communion whenever it is offered by the priestly celebrant to the faithful. Do you thereby blaspheme when you attend the Divine Liturgy? The text of the Divine Liturgy itself shows us it is intended for all the faithful to participate in the life-giving sacramental Mystery of the Eucharist. Every prayer at the Divine Liturgy is oriented towards preparing the faithful to worthily receive.**

**Many saints of the Church have written concerning the necessity of frequent and regular Communion. It stands to reason that in our modern day society Communion is most essential to ward off the tempting and sinful ways that separate us from our heavenly Father. We must always strive for reconciliation with Christ and for the perfection of our spiritual life. Frequent Communion enables us to achieve this goal. All the faithful present for the Divine Liturgy are expected by the Saviour to come forward and receive Communion during the Liturgy they worship at and offer with the priestly celebrant. Are you being faithful to Christ and to the rich spiritual patrimony of our blessed Church?**



## The True Image Of The Lord

You may study any icon, any painting or representation of Christ regardless of the iconographer or artist, and there is a strange common similarity. And if you are a perceptive person, demanding answers to questions, you ask why?

What pen picture of Jesus exists from which all artists must work? No one living today saw Jesus when He was alive. There were no cameras when He walked the earth, to record His image.

Why are so many icons and sketches of Jesus so much alike in facial detail, hair, expression? Why the similarity? It cannot all be by accident.

There was a frame of reference for all to consult and that was the image imprinted on the so-called Veronica's Veil while Christ was carrying His Cross. Then, in later time, we have the Shroud which enveloped His sacred body as He lay in the tomb and which contains an imprint of the sacred Body of Christ, particularly His facial features which so imitate an present icons.

One very vivid description of Christ was written by Publius Lentullus, a public official of Judea, in the reign of Tiberius Caesar of Rome and initially appeared in a report to the pagan emperor and later was found in the writings of the western Saint Anselm of Canterbury in the eleventh century. Ever since these have been guidelines for icon writers and painters. Here is the pagan official's description, abbreviated somewhat:

"There appeared in these our days a man of great virtue named Jesus Christ, who is yet living among us, and even among the Gentiles is accepted for a

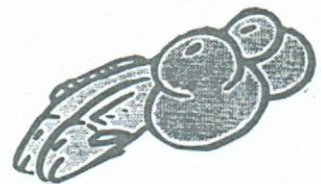
prophet of truth, but His own disciples call him the Son of God. He raises the dead and cures all manner of disease. A man of stature, somewhat tall and comely, with a very reverent countenance, such as beholders may love and fear. His hair is of the color of a chestnut full ripe, plain to His ears, then downwards it is more oriented and curling and wavering about His shoulders. In the midst of His head is a seam or partition in His hair, after the manner of the Nazarites. The forehead is plain and very delicate; His face without spot or wrinkle, beautified with a lovely red. His nose and mouth are so formed as nothing can be reprehended. His beard is thick in color like His hair, not very long, but forked; His look is innocent and mature, His eyes gray, clear and quick.

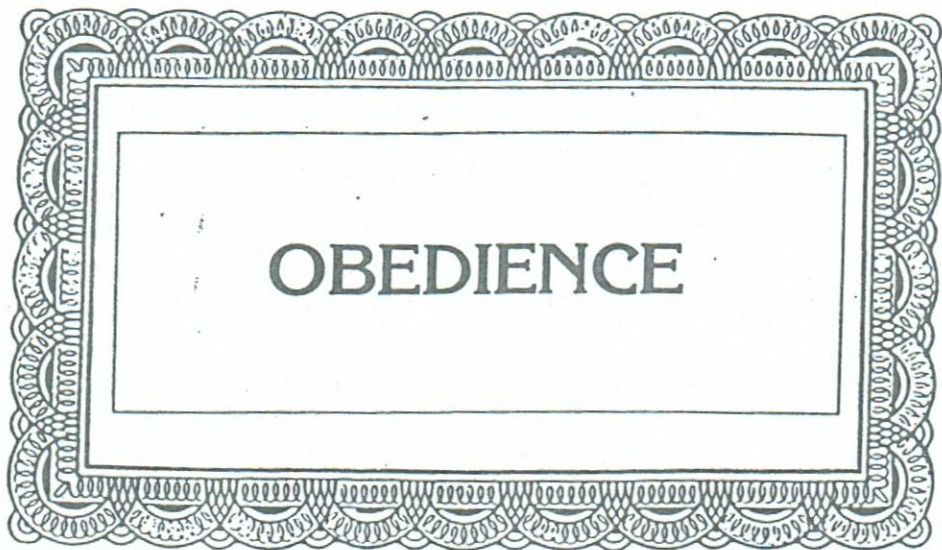
"In reproving, He is terrible, in admonishing, courteous and fair-spoken, pleasant in conversation, mixed with gravity. It cannot be remembered that any have seen Him laugh, but many have seen Him weep. In proportion of body, He is excellent; His hands and arms most delicate to behold. In speaking, very temperate, modest and wise. A man for His singular beauty, surpassing the children of men."

So ends this early day description of Christ our Saviour. Then the next time you pray before an icon of Christ, or look upon a painting of the Saviour, check the physical attributes, one by one, against the mental picture you have developed. You will find that most artists use these guidelines in their work and follow them religiously. Icon writers are just as faithful to the established norms for writing icons. They attempt to portray the spiritual qualities of the soul, not the actual physical attributes which characterize western art work.

But the most wonderful image of Christ is the one we perceive when we look at each other as faithful believers in God

*"The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." St. Luke 3:11*

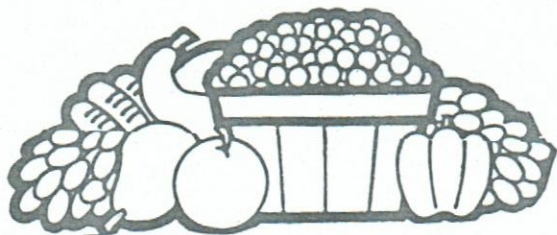




"None of those who cry out, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of God but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt 7:21).

Hear the word of the Lord. He calls us to obedience to the will of God. Please listen.

Lord Jesus, you have called each one of us to a special role in your Church. Help us to prove worthy of this vocation by our loving obedience.



## Nobody Said Her Name

*The Lord says, 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name'*

Isaiah 43: 1.

The flowers were beautiful and the music was lovely. The minister gave a thought-provoking sermon. But at this funeral no one said the decedent's name. It was never mentioned. As survivors drove to the gravesite, an adversely affected relative decided he would say a few words as the burial ceremony was concluded. This relative knew that saying and pronouncing his grandmother's name was important. He did, however go off the deep end, in telling all kinds of funny stories about things she had done and said. He just wanted to talk about her life and her family and how she touched the lives of her loved ones.

How many have not similarly felt very small and insignificant? At those times we need to recall what the revelation of God says about a person's name. We are reassured that God knows our name and calls us and invites us to salvation personally by name. We are assured of this in the Church of Jesus Christ because everything is done on a person to person, believer to believer basis. We are called to faith response in baptism by name; further we are called to our nourishment on the Body and Blood of Christ individually by name. We confess our sins and repent in the presence of our spiritual father and have significance as we are absolved and forgiven personally and individually. Just as we have personally sinned and transgressed, we are also forgiven and absolved. Since we belong to God, even our last prayers, the prayers of the interceding Church on our behalf at the funeral services for the repose of our soul are personal and individual. We are mentioned by name because a special relationship exists between our heavenly Father and each child of God. The God who knows every detail of our life, including the number of hairs on our head is the God who sees our individual value. "As for you, every hair on your head has been counted" Matthew 10:30, and the number of days we will live on earth, "Your eyes have seen my actions; in your book they are all written; my days were limited before one of them existed" Psalms 139: 16. All the sacramental Mysteries of the Church are personalized and made intimate with our heavenly Father by the mention, invocation and insertion of our name in prayer.

If you feel sometimes insignificant, as if no one knows who you are; no one knows your name, remember always, God knows, The Church in imitation of Him also knows and reminds us of our worth and dignity in his sight. Our heavenly Father does encounter and meet us personally by name!



## The Old Country Priest says...

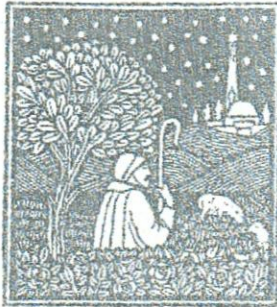
Our values develop and form our character and our character creates our destiny. When we are out of touch with our values, **We are blown about like autumn leaves without stability**, caught up in mindless routines and pursuits. But when we affirm our guiding values and live them, our lives are inspired by our deepest Orthodox beliefs.

*You know when I sit down and when I get up.*

*You know my thoughts before I think them.*

*You know where I go and where I lie down.*

*You know thoroughly everything I do.* PSALM 139:2-3



Perhaps the reason that God doesn't always give us the answer to the *whys* of our existence is that he knows we haven't got the capacity to understand the answer. In learning to depend on God, we must accept that we may not know all the answers, but we know *who* knows the answers.

## Long and Enduring Perspective

There is strength of quiet endurance as significant of courage as the most daring feats of prowess. A great writer calls our attention to one of the basic needs of our time. In the midst of social and spiritual problems when feelings run high and tempers are quick, it is easy to lose the long and broad perspective. This is the time that tests our stamina in social and spiritual relationships and our endurance in the face of all the irritating obstacles that seem to impede our progress to renewing ourselves in Christ. Our spiritual leadership must be clear thinking, steady, and forceful. We need those faithful souls who will "stand by" a positive Christ-like policy and never waver but see it through to successful completion.

This remains so very true of our task to save our souls. It is not always possible to give unremitting effort to complete some spiritual task. Too many start gloriously and end dismally. Here, again, the staying power of our faith commitment to Christ helps us carry on in the face of personal discouragement.

This same spirit of Christ characterizes a tremendous source of power in our parish. Those who flit from place to place will never be significant factors in the Kingdom of God. Others, who stand by with steady continuity of loyalty and devotion are the real builders of the Church of Jesus Christ. We have many such in our parish, whose long steady, unflinching attendance at worship and loyalty has brought us to our present spiritual strength in Christ. This is no "flash in the pan" kind of Christianity, but the steady flame that gives both light and power to the Church's program of salvation through the pull of long difficult years.

Why not offer a prayer of thanksgiving to our Lord for offering the necessary grace to be faithful and secondly, for the good souls who accepted that challenge of grace and labored and prayed in Christ to make our parish what it is today?

# **WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE**

*We bow before Your sacred image, O gracious Lord, and beg forgiveness for our offenses, O Christ our God; for You, of Your own will, deigned to ascend the Cross in Your human nature to deliver from bondage to the enemy those whom You created. Wherefore we gratefully cry out to You: "Through Your coming to save the world, O Saviour, You have filled all with joy". Troparion, Sunday of the Holy Images.*

*O Mother of God, through you in the Incarnation, the indescribable Word of God became describable, for through the divine goodness the Word spoken from eternity became an Image. May we who believe in salvation clothe ourselves with the same Image both in word and deed Kontakion, Sunday of the Holy Images.*

*Blessed are You and worthy of praise, O Lord God of our fathers, and glorious forever is Your Name. Prokimenon, Sunday of the Holy Images.*

*In you, O Woman, full of grace, the angelic choirs and the human race - all creation -rejoices. In you, O sanctified Temple, mystical Paradise and Glory of virgins, He Who is our God from before all ages became a child. For He made your womb into a throne and made it greater than the heavens. In you, O Woman full of grace, all creation rejoices. Praise be to you! Hymn Instead of "It is Truly Proper", Sunday of the Holy Images.*

*In truth, the Church of Christ is adorned with the finest ornament by the holy icons of Christ our Saviour, of the Holy Mother of God and of all the glorified saints. In keeping the icon of Christ which we praise and venerate, we do not risk being led astray. May those who do not believe this be put to confusion. For it is our kneeling before the incarnate Son and the veneration of His icon that is a glory for us Vesper Hymn, Sunday of the Holy Images.*

## The Yeast We Can Do

The metaphor of leaven or yeast has two popular and opposite but nevertheless related meanings and uses in God's revelation to us in Scripture. Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven is like leaven which, when mixed with or hidden in flour, works its way through a whole lump of dough. *The reign of God is like yeast which a woman took and kneaded into three measures of flour. Eventually the whole mass of dough began to rise* Matthew 13: 33. St. Paul, on the other hand, twice uses the metaphor of yeast as a warning. In one instance, he exhorts the Corinthians to cast out a sexually immoral man from among them, since he will corrupt the whole community of faith. *United in spirit with you and empowered by our Lord Jesus, I hand him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord* 1 Corinthians 5: 4 - 6. Similarly he cautions the Galatians against putting their faith in circumcision rather than in Christ. *I point out once more to all who receive circumcision that they are bound to the law in its entirety. Any of you who seek your justification in the law have severed yourselves from Christ and fallen from God's favor! It is in the spirit that we eagerly await the justification we hope for, and only faith can yield it. In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor the lack of it counts for anything; only faith, which expresses itself through love* Galatians 5: 4 - 6.

Among Christians today, there is often shock when an elder, pastor, or prominent member of a parish is exposed as an embezzler, adulterer, drug addict or worse. Indeed, such a revelation is rightly called a scandal, because it creates a stumbling block in the way of the Christian life and those who are Christians become disheartened, those who are not, dismiss Christianity on its basis.

"How could this happen?" we often ask when a scandal erupts. It is proposed that the metaphor of leaven provides the answer. How can we prevent such scandals in the future? Again it is proposed the answer lies in the same metaphor: a little leaven works its way through the whole lump.

### BAD YEAST

According to St. Evagrius the Solitary, one of the early Christian hermits of the Egyptian desert, our spiritual struggle can be summarized quite simply: it is because we have first failed to resist little temptations and sins that we eventually fall victim to



greater ones. Following St. John the Evangelist's warnings against succumbing to *...the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life* 1 John 2: 16, St. Evagrius identifies three frontline demons in particular: gluttony, avarice and seeking the esteem of others.

"All the other demons," he writes, "follow behind and in their turn attack those already wounded by the first three groups." Sexual promiscuity follows gluttony; anger follows a failed attempt to impress someone, and pride follows greed, since poverty, as Solomon tells us, produces its opposite, humility." "In short," St. Evagrius concludes, "no one can fall into the power of any demon, unless he has been wounded by those of the frontline."

Whether or not we agree with the delineation of St. Evagrius of the progression of sin in our lives, we can see that those who have succumbed to big temptations probably first fell to small ones. The sexually promiscuous person is likely someone who could never refrain from snacking every time he walked through the kitchen. The person with violent fits of temper has likely always been concerned to have everything his own way. The one who slanders others has probably dealt poorly with criticism of himself.

Parents can see the nature of this problem in their children. How often do phrases like "I am starving!" or "Mine!" or "She called me a bad name!" lead to "He hit me!" or "She broke it!" or "I didn't get any!"

As adults we often assume that we learned our lessons when we were young, but we may simply have become better at hiding our faults behind an aura of seeming maturity. Well written pretension is still seeking the esteem of others. Cutting in line on "Black Friday" is still avarice. Compulsive late-night snacking is still gluttony. Indeed, many of us have fallen victim to one of the simplest childhood fantasies: that being a grown-up means doing whatever we want. And this is despite the fact that we teach our children that being an adult means precisely the opposite by cheerfully bearing responsibility and doing our duty for our state in life, whether we want to or not.

## GOOD YEAST

So what can we do about our tendency to fall into sinful habits? Thankfully, the principle of leaven applies in reverse: good yeast works its way through a lump of dough as well as bad. A good first step toward keeping our little bad habits in check is

simply making ourselves aware of what they are, but even when we notice them, we may lack the necessary self-control to break them. And this, according to the ancient Church is precisely where spiritual discipline come in. They are the leaven in the Christian way of life.

According to St. Evagrius, the heart of our problem lies in two faculties of our souls: the “incensive power” and desire itself. While the force of desire is readily understood, the notion of incensive power may be unfamiliar to many. This faculty might best be thought of as our fiery-heartedness, as that which spurs us toward some end. It is the same force at work in both anger and zeal, in both conviction and hard-heartedness.

We fall into the traps of the “frontline demons” when we let our desire and incensive power run wild and unrestrained. We thus need the kind of leaven that will work in our lives to control and direct these faculties toward Godly ends. St. Evagrius knows precisely the sort of yeast needed and how it works: “the Physician of souls,” he writes, “corrects our incensive power through acts of compassion, for example, almsgiving, and purifies the intellect through prayer, and through fasting withers desire.” He is referring to the Sermon on the Mount, specifically in St. Matthew’s Gospel, where Jesus instructs his disciples about how to give alms, to pray, and to fast. These things are the leaven that makes all the difference.

In fact, in the early Church, three spiritual disciplines figured prominently in the lives of believers as the way of light and life, as opposed to the way of darkness and death. Early Christians prayed the Lord’s Prayer several times daily, fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays and eventually all through the Great Fast and the Nativity Fast, and gave alms, that is, their time, treasure, resources and energy to help others as often as possible. Thus they cultivated a mentality and spirituality that militated against temptation and evil.

St. Evagrius tells us that almsgiving keeps our incensive power from pushing us into anger, bitterness and dejection by releasing us from the power of material things that we would otherwise selfishly and stubbornly cling to. In fasting, we deny our desires, thus keeping them in check. And through prayer, we purify our minds, cleansing them from every earthly care by focusing them on God.

Through these disciplines, Christ graciously shapes us into his likeness. With this way of life, this holy way of living as habit, established, little by little we gain ever greater self-control to resist ever-greater temptations. The leaven of the three spiritual

disciplines works its way through our whole lives, so that we may, in turn be leaven to the world.

## DEAD YEAST

It would be remiss to not mention one last scriptural reference to yeast. In St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus warns his disciples, *Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy*" Luke 12: 1. Spiritual disciplines are tools to be used for a spiritual goal. They must not be pursued as an end in themselves, or to gain the notice and admiration of others. When one practices them in that way, the disciplines become dead and impotent yeast within him, chilled by the coldness of his heart.

St. Moses the Ethiopian, another Egyptian desert father, puts the spiritual disciplines in their proper place; "They are the rungs of a ladder up which the heart may climb to perfect charity." Indeed he emphasizes that the immediate goal of the Christian on the road to the kingdom of God is purity of heart, and he warns us that "travelers who miss their way still tire themselves though they are walking no nearer to their destination."

Christ warns us not to perform acts of compassion to be seen by others, otherwise we will forfeit our heavenly reward. *Be on guard against performing religious acts for people to see. Otherwise expect no recompense from my heavenly Father* Matthew 6: 1. Thus we ought not be upset if someone interrupts us while we are praying, or offers us meat while we are fasting, or declines our helping hand. Instead, we should give our attention, accept what is given us and respect the wishes of others. "The loss you incur by being irritated," teaches St. Moses, "outweighs the gain of fasting; dislike of your brother, cannot be counterbalanced by reading the Bible. These practices are all subordinate means to your chief aim, which is purity of heart or charity."

A fact too often overlooked – or even denied – in our own day is that true love is hard work. But according to the desert fathers, it is an attainable goal worth striving after. If more Christians would make a habit of pursuing the three spiritual disciplines, hiding them beneath the surface of their lives, we would hear fewer scandals in the Church and encounter fewer scandals in our hearts. When properly understood and when practiced with diligence and patience, these "rungs of the ladder of charity" will act in our hearts as yeast acts to leaven a whole lump of dough.

## Venerating Icons

There is a renewed appreciation of iconography among today's believers and it is an encouraging indication of a return to our own centuries-old traditions. Our forbears in faith accepted the practice of venerating icons. Without them our liturgical worship loses a great deal of its solemnity and splendor.

Seriously speaking, an icon is a portable sacred image, painted or better yet, "written" on a piece of wood according to the style and techniques of Church requirements. But in its broader sense, an icon is any sacred image painted, or otherwise reproduced for the purpose of veneration and respect. The holy icon should be considered a sacred object fostering devotion and piety. Through the veneration of icons we should feel closer to our Creator God and to matters divine.

Icons were utilized in the first centuries of Christianity, initially as objects of private devotion, and later exposed in Christian churches for public veneration. They provided the comfort and assurance of reminding believers God is present in unseen ways in our daily lives. Apocryphal writings of the second century relate that the icon of the Mother of God at the inspired hands of St. Luke was the initial example presented of this piety. This and other legends confirm a historical fact that in the Christian East the veneration of icons originated in the Syro-Palestinian region, the very cradle of Christianity.

It appears the very first icons were of the holy martyrs and their salutary deeds as indicated by the writings of St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory Nazianzen. Only later, some time during the fifth century were icons of the Lord and the Birthgiver of God introduced. By the sixth century Constantinople, the capital of the Empire, became a great center of sacred art. It was in Constantinople that a special style of iconography was developed which became known as the Byzantine style, eventually becoming the pride and adornment of the Church of Jesus Christ. Icons do not attempt to depict the physical characteristics of the holy event or individual portrayed. Rather, they serve to encapsulate the spiritual values, the richness of the soul, or of the event depicted.

The golden age of iconography began in the middle of ninth century and ended with the beginning of the thirteenth century. Unfortunately, due to the iconoclastic controversy, from 725 to 842, almost all primitive icons were destroyed by the barbarism of non-believers. Today, the best holy icons of those days are preserved at the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, which was built by Emperor Justinian I in the sixth century.

Iconographic reproduction, reaching various people and cultures necessarily became subject to some changes according to the needs and genius of particular countries. Thus, throughout the centuries, we can recognize various schools of icon writing which constitute the national heritage of given places.

An icon does not represent divinity, but by its symbolic pictorial language, it testifies to the participation of believing Christians in divine life. Thus, the icon becomes a manifestation of divine life among men and women, a transfigured vision of divine mysteries, a dimension of the invisible, indeed, a true theology in color. Icons representing the saints, also, to some extent share in their sanctity and glory because they reflect the sought after presence of God in living souls. Consequently, they become vessels of grace, showing the working of God's grace in individual souls, present and working in their relics. St. John Damascene offers this explanation and understanding: "The saints, during their earthly life, are filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit. After their departure the same grace remains in their souls as in their bodies. The very same grace is present and active in their sacred image and icons and testifies to the reality of God among us."

Thus the holy icon becomes a means of communion with the saints and a source of special grace and even of miracles. This explains the existence of many miraculous icons, through which the Lord, the Birthgiver of God and the saints continue to bestow blessings and to work wonders in the lives of those who seriously venerate them.

In the Old Covenant, due to the danger of idolatry, our heavenly Father forbade Jews to worship the carved image of likenesses of any creature (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 4). In the first centuries, Christians, too, in face of paganism and prevalent idolatry, adhered to these Mosaic Ordinances. The frescoes from the second and third centuries found in the catacombs served only as decoration. But later, when Christian theology was sufficiently developed and readily understood, the Fathers of the Church were inspired to admit the public veneration of icons. The iconoclastic fury of Emperor Leo III the Isaurian (+741), during which the leading defenders of icons were St. Germanos of

**Constantinople and St. John Damascene, made the Church define her teaching. In reply, at the seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicea (787) the teaching of the Church concerning the veneration of icons was solemnly proclaimed.**

**The Fathers of the Council explained that the veneration of icons, theologically, was based on the mystery of the Incarnation, since in the person of Jesus Christ we received revelation not only of the Word of God, but also of the Image of God, as attested to by St. Paul saying that “Jesus is the image (icon) of the invisible God Colossians 1: 15. Jesus himself testified, “...to see me is to have seen the Father John 14: 9.**

**The Mosaic Law was a temporary provision against idolatry because of the immaturity of faith understanding, which in time, lost its relevance, lost until the mind of faith, exposed to the example of the truth of Jesus Christ was brought to maturity. Jesus, by assuming human flesh, revoked the prohibition of the Old Covenant since He became the visible image or icon of the eternal God, manifesting God’s glory on his countenance. Jesus, by his Resurrection, also glorified his human nature, which reflected his divinity and was triumphant in it. In creating man in his own image and likeness, God, after the fall of Adam and Eve, restored our human nature to its pristine beauty and glory. The honor given to an icon is only veneration and not adoration which is ascribed only to the Blessed Trinity alone. The honor extended an icon is by a bow, a kiss, a prayer, incense or the burning of a candle is relative because it acknowledges what the icon represents and passes on to him/her who is represented on it, to its prototype, not the actual icon of wood itself.**

**Our ancestors honored and venerated holy icons not only in their churches, but in their homes as well. This traditional and praiseworthy devotion is highly recommended to our families and faith communities in the form of an Icon Corner. Hopefully this practice will continue to win support and become a prayer shrine for the entire family, particularly during this holy time whose purpose is to restore our holy practices and customs.**



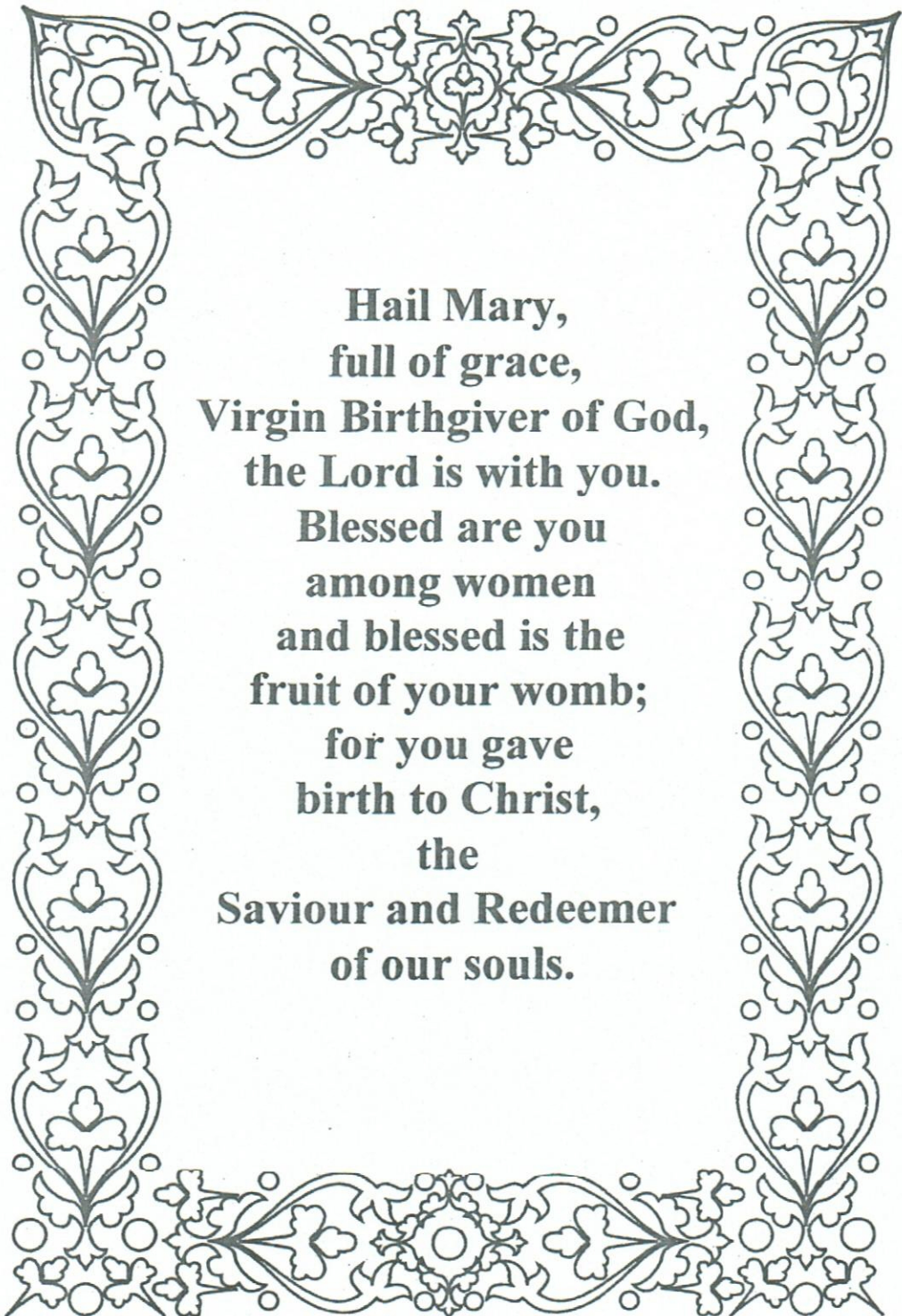
## Why We Confess Our Sins

During the Great Fast most parishes make a special effort to encourage Orthodox believers to celebrate the sacramental Mystery of Reconciliation, generally described as Confession of sins. This is an excellent time to be reconciled with our heavenly Father and his mystical Spouse, the Church.

The Gospels provide numerous example of the ministry of Jesus Christ among us to forgive sins. While only our God can forgive sins, the Church is his instrument and vehicle through which forgiveness is achieved. On Pentecost, Jesus shared with the Apostles his power to forgive sins: "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" John 20: 21 – 23. Today priests and bishops continue this ministry of service to the people of God.

What do we expect when going to confession? The penitent will be greeted in prayer by the confessor/priest, who thereby encourages the penitent to contrition. The penitent confesses and admits his or her sins; the priest offers prayerful encouragement or guidance for the person's moral and spiritual growth. A penance is recommended so that when a person is tempted to sin he will recall the penance, fulfill it, hopefully then being led by the sincerity of his prayer to avert and avoid the temptation to sin. Once sincerely confessed, the sins of the penitent are forgiven and absolved by the power of the keys given to the apostles. "I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be forgiven in heaven Matthew 16: 19.

The presence of the priestly confessor is necessary as a representative of the Body of Christ who enjoys the strength and power of reconciliation when we are sincere. When we sin, it is not only an offense against the purity and integrity of our God who constantly calls us to sanctity and holiness, but also an assault on the virtue of the teaching Church. Sin separates us from God, from faithful believers, and from our true selves as created in God's image. Many people experience great peace, security of soul and spiritual consolation after making a good and true confession of their failures in achieving sanctity. Their encounter with a loving, merciful and saving God gives them renewed strength of soul and an ability to turn towards the source of salvation and away from the values of the lost and depraved world which embodies sin and separation. Confession of sin restores us to the family of God, which is life eternal!




**Hail Mary,  
full of grace,  
Virgin Birthgiver of God,  
the Lord is with you.  
Blessed are you  
among women  
and blessed is the  
fruit of your womb;  
for you gave  
birth to Christ,  
the  
Saviour and Redeemer  
of our souls.**



## ✠ M A R Y ✠

“For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.”

(Lk 1:48)

 For two thousand years the Church has preserved the memory of the Virgin Mary as the prototype of all Christians—the model of what we are to become in Christ. Mary was truly pure and unconditionally obedient to God. The tradition of the Church holds that Mary remained a virgin all her life (see note on Mt 12:46–50). While lifelong celibacy is not a model for all Christians to follow, Mary’s spiritual purity, her wholehearted devotion to God, is certainly to be emulated.

Mary is also our model in that she was the first person to receive Jesus Christ. As Mary bore Christ in her womb physically, all Christians now have the privilege of bearing God within them spiritually. By God’s grace and mercy we are purified and empowered to become like Him.

The honor we give to Mary also signifies our view of who Jesus is. From early times the church has called her Mother of God (Gr. *Theotokos*, lit. “God-Bearer”), a title which implies that her Son is both fully man and fully God. As His Mother, Mary was the source of Jesus’ human nature; yet the One she bore in her womb was also the eternal God.

Therefore, because of her character and especially because of her role in God’s plan of salvation, Christians appropriately honor Mary as the first among the saints. The archangel Gabriel initiated this honor in his address to her: “Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!” (Lk 1:28). This salutation clearly indicates that God Himself had chosen to honor Mary. Her favored status was confirmed when she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was then six months pregnant with John the Baptist. Elizabeth greeted Mary with these words: “Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb! But why *is* this *granted* to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Lk 1:42, 43). And Mary herself, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, predicted the honor that would be paid her throughout history: “For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed” (Lk 1:48).

In obedience to God’s clear intention, therefore, the Orthodox Church honors Mary in icons, hymns, and special feast days. We entreat her, as the human being who was most intimate with Christ on earth, to intercede with her Son on our behalf. We ask her, as the first believer and the Mother of the Church, for guidance and protection. We venerate her—but we do not worship her, for worship belongs to God alone.

In Matins, Vespers, and all the services of the hours of prayer, we sing this hymn, which expresses Mary’s unique place in creation.

It is truly right to bless you, O Theotokos, ever-blessed and most pure, and the Mother of our God. More honorable than the cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim, without defilement you gave birth to God the Word: True Theotokos, we magnify you.



## TYPES OF MARY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Types of both Christ and Mary, His Mother, fill the Old Testament. Indeed, most of the Old Testament types of Mary—a natural consequence of her essential role in the Incarnation of her Son, Jesus Christ—reveal the awesome marvel of her womb which contained the almighty God. Referring to Genesis 2:9, the hymnography of the Church sees the garden of Eden as a type of Mary: “Rejoice, . . . O living Paradise, having the Lord, the Tree of Life, in your midst” (Akathist Hymn). The burning bush beheld by Moses in the wilderness (Ex 3:1–6) is one of the most often mentioned types of Mary. For example, “She is the Bush springing from barren ground [her mother, St. Anna, had been barren] and burning with the immaterial fire that cleanses and enlightens our souls” (Small Vespers, Nativity of the Theotokos). St. John of Damascus observes, “The burning bush is an image of God’s Mother . . . If, therefore, the ground where the image of the Theotokos was seen by Moses is holy ground [Ex 3:5], how much more holy is the image itself?”

The tabernacle in the wilderness, where God dwelt among the wandering Israelites (Ex 25:1–27:19), also prefigures Mary: “The tabernacle that is to hold God, the sanctuary of the glory, has chosen to dwell in the holy temple” (Matins, Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple). Another hymn from this service addresses her as “O Holy of Holies,” identifying her with the most holy inner place of the tabernacle and the temple (Ex 26:33; 3Kg 8:6).

Other Old Testament types of Mary relating to the Lord dwelling in her womb include the jar of manna (Ex 16:33, 34); Aaron’s rod that budded (Nm 17:16–23); the tablet of the Law “written with the finger of God” (Ex 31:18); the ladder reaching from earth to heaven (Gn 28:10–17); the fleece that received the dew (Jdg 6:36–38; see Ps 71:1–6); the tongs bearing the live coal (Is 6:6); and the fiery furnace in Babylon (Dan 3:19–50). Concerning this last image, the hymnographer St. Cosmas of Maiuma writes, “The furnace moist with dew was the image and figure of a wonder past nature. For it burned 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” (Matins, Nativity of Christ).

The miracle of the Virgin Birth is another prominent theme among the Old Testament types of Mary. One of the most striking of these is found in Ezekiel 43:27–44:4, the only Old Testament passage read at all four of the major Feasts of the Theotokos. This reading tells about the east gate of the heavenly temple remaining shut even as the Lord God of Israel, and He alone, goes in and out through it. This is prophetic of the Lord entering Mary’s womb and being born nine months later with her virginity remaining intact. Hence in various hymns the Church proclaims her as “the Gate that looks towards the East,” “the Gate through which none may pass,” and “the East Gate . . . [who] awaits the entrance of the Great Priest.”

Another such image occurs in Daniel 2:45, where the Theotokos is the mountain out of whom a stone (that is, Christ; 1Co 10:4) is cut “without hands.” This refers to Christ’s birth from the Virgin, untouched by a man.

Mary is the culmination of the whole history of the ancient Hebrews. She is the perfection to which all of faithful Israel aspired through the long centuries of preparation for the coming of the Messiah, beginning with the promise given to Abraham: “God promised to our forefather Abraham that in his seed the Gentiles would be blessed [Gn 22:18], O pure Lady; and through thee today, the promise receives its fulfillment” (Matins, Annunciation).

## **WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE**

*Today is the fountain-head of our salvation and the revelation of an eternal mystery; the Son of God becomes a Virgin's Son, and Gabriel announces this grace. Therefore, let us exclaim with him to the Mother of God: "Hail, O Woman full of grace, the Lord is with you!" Troparion, Feast of the Annunciation of the Mother of God.*

*O Mother of God, we, your servants, sing a hymn of thanks to you, a hymn of triumph to a valiant leader, for you have delivered us from peril that we may cry out to you: "Hail, Bride and Maiden ever-pure!" Kontakion, Feast of the Annunciation of the Mother of God.*

*Day after day, announce the salvation of our God Prokimenon, Feast of the Annunciation of the Mother of God.*

*Gabriel came to you, O Maiden, and disclosed God's plan which was from all eternity. He joyfully offered you his greetings and cried out: "Hail, O land without human seed! Hail, O bush, untouched by fire! Hail, O depth no human eye can fathom! Hail, O bridge that leads up to heaven! Hail, O fleece receiving the heavenly manna! Hail, O dissolution of the curse! Hail, O Maiden who returned Adam to grace! The Lord is with you." Vesper Hymn, Feast of the Annunciation of the Mother of God.*

*Today Gabriel made the announcement to the Woman full of grace and said: "Hail, O Bride and Maiden ever pure! Do not be disturbed by my appearance, do not be dismayed; I am an archangel. The serpent deceived Eve in the days of old; now I bring you glad tidings: You shall give birth to the Lord, O Pure One, and you shall remain a virgin" Vesper Hymn, Feast of the Annunciation of the Mother of God.*

*Today is the announcement of joy, today is the virginal festivity, today heaven is joined to earth, Adam is renewed, Eve is released from sorrow, the dwelling place, our own substance, has become God's temple, a portion of it is deified. What a marvel! The way of condescension is incomprehensible, and the manner of conception ineffable. An angel is a minister of the marvel; a virginal womb receives the Son; the Holy Spirit is sent; the Father on high is well pleased. The plan has been made by agreement, by which and through which we have been saved. Intercede with Him for the salvation of our souls Vesper Hymn, Feast of the Annunciation of the Mother of God.*

## THE MIRACLE OF ST. THEODORE

Each year, the first Saturday of the Great Fast is dedicated to the memory of St. Theodore the Tyro (Recruit), who was a soldier in the Roman army during the reign of the Emperor Galerius in the early years of the 4th century. A devout Christian, Theodore was ordered to offer sacrifice to the Roman idols, just like the other soldiers. When he refused, Theodore was thrown into prison. After being deprived of food for a lengthy period of time, Theodore was taken before the governor and given one last opportunity to renounce Christ. When he continued to profess his belief in his Lord and Savior, Theodore was subjected to severe torture and ultimately executed.

Some fifty years later, the Emperor Julian the Apostate wanted to torment the Christians in Constantinople. During the first week of the Great Fast, he commanded one of his military leaders to sprinkle all of the food in the market place with the blood offered to idols so that it would be defiled in the eyes of the Christians. This fiendish plot was foiled, however, when St. Theodore appeared in a dream to Archbishop Eudoxius, imploring him to warn his flock not to purchase anything in the market place, but rather eat only a dish of cooked wheat mixed with honey - which is known as kolyva. Through the intercession of this great martyr, the Christians of Constantinople were spared the indignity of eating the tainted, desecrated food.

Shortly thereafter, Patriarch Nectarius of Constantinople declared that the first Saturday of Lent would be forever dedicated to the memory of St. Theodore the Tyro. It is a common practice in many Orthodox parishes to bless kolyva in church that day and share it with one another in remembrance of this miracle.