



## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

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✠ **March 22, 2015** ✠

**Fourth Sunday of Great Lent**

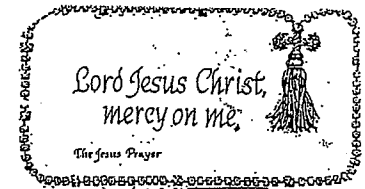
**St. John of the Ladder**

Hieromartyr Basil of Ancyra (362)

**The Fifth Week of the Fast**

You quenched all the passions  
with the dew of your ascetic  
struggles,  
kindling the lamp of abstinence  
with the fire of love and faith,  
O Father!  
Thou art a dispassionate light  
and a child of the day!

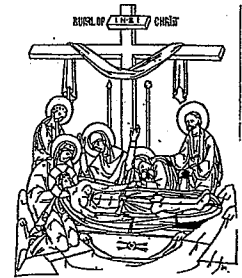
~ Ode 5, Matins



- ✠ **Tues. March 24 6:30pm Vespers with Litiya – Feast of the Annunciation**
- ✠ **Wed. March 25 10:00am Divine Liturgy~ Feast of the Annunciation**
- ✠ **Thur. March 26 6:30pm Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete (in Matins)**
- ✠ **Fri. March 27 6:30pm Matins with the Akathist to Theotokos**

## **Holy Week 2015 Schedule**

- ✠ **Sat. April 4 10:00am Lazarus Saturday Divine Liturgy**  
> Parish Workday following Divine Liturgy
- ✠ **Sat. April 4 6:00pm Palm Sunday Vespers w/ Blessing of Palms**
- ✠ **Sun. April 5 Palm Sunday Matins & Divine Liturgy (8:30am)**
- ✠ **Palm Sunday Evening - 5:00pm ~ First Bridegroom Matins**
- ✠ **April 6/7 - Holy Monday & Tuesday ~ 6:30pm Bridegroom Matins**
- ✠ **April 8 - Holy Wednesday 6:30pm Holy Unction**
- ✠ **April 9 - Holy Thursday 10:00am Mystical Supper Liturgy**  
6:30pm 12 Passion Gospels
- ✠ **Holy Friday Services** ✠ **April 10 - 10:00am Royal Hours**  
4:00pm Vespers – Shroud to the Tomb / 7:00pm - Lamentations at the Tomb  
✠ *Youth All Night Vigil at the Tomb* ✠
- ✠ **Holy Saturday ~ April 11 ~ 10:00am Divine Liturgy - The Blessed Sabbath**
- ✠ **Holy PASCHA** ✠ **Begins Saturday, April 11 at 11:30pm**  
✠ **Pascha Sunday April 12 ~ 3:00pm Paschal Agape Vespers**
- ✠ **Bright Monday April 13 ~ 10:00am Divine Liturgy w/ Procession**



**St. Porphyrios of Kavsovalyvia:**

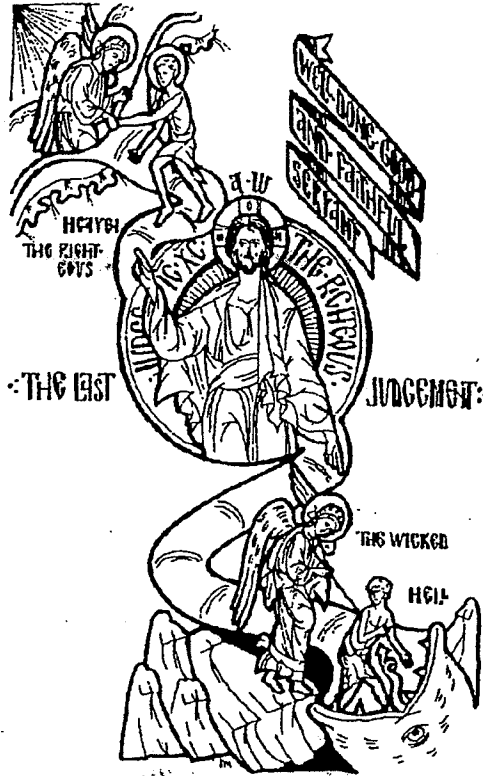
"And what is Paradise? Christ," said the Saint. "When you love Christ, then, despite your sense of sinfulness and your weaknesses, you have the certainty that you have surpassed death, because you are in communion with the love of Christ. And may God make us worthy to see the Face of the Lord, both from the earth, and from there, where we will go."

## FROM THE FATHERS...

Wherefore a man can know nothing about the judgments of God. He alone is the One Who takes account of all and is able to judge the hearts of each one of us, as He alone is our Master. Truly it happens that a man may do a certain thing (which seems to be wrong) out of simplicity, and there may be something about it which makes more amends to God that your whole life; how are you going to sit in judgment and constrict your own soul? And should it happen that he has fallen away, how do you know how much and how well he fought, how much blood he sweated before he did it? Perhaps so little fault can be found in him that God can look on his action as if it were just, for God looks on his labor and all the struggle he had before he did it, and has pity on him. And you know this, and what God has spared him for, are you going to condemn him for, and ruin your own soul? And how do you know what tears he has shed about it before God? You may well know about the sin, but you do not know about the repentance.

ST. DOROTHEOS OF GAZA,  
DISCOURSES AND SAYINGS

These, then, are the things in which you must stand firm and follow the Lord's example: be steadfast and immovable in the faith, love the brotherhood; cherish one another, be united in the truth; with the meekness



of the Lord give precedence to one another; despise no one. When able to do a work of charity, do not put it off; for almsgiving delivers from death. One and all, submit to each other's rights; you life among the Gentiles must be beyond reproach; thus by your good example you will win praise for yourselves, and the Lord will not be blasphemed on your account.

ST. POLYCARP OF SMYRNA,  
EPISTLE TO THE  
PHILIPPIANS

Fasting is acceptable to God when abstention from food is accompanied by refraining from sins, from envy, from hatred, from calumny, from vainglory, from wordiness, from other evils. He who is fasting the true fast 'that is agreeable' to God ought to shun all these things with all his strength and zeal, and remain impregnable and unshakable against all the attacks of the Evil one that are planned from that quarter. On the other hand, he who practises abstention from food, but does not keep self-control in the face of the aforesaid passions, is like unto one who lays down splendid foundations for a house, yet takes serpents and scorpions and vipers as fellow-dwellers therein.

ST. PHOTIOS THE GREAT, SERMON  
ON WED. OF CHEESEFARE WEEK

# FROM "THE LADDER" BY ST. JOHN CLIMACUS

- When the senses find the orders heavy, the more lazy decide that they would prefer to devote themselves to prayer. But when they find they are ordered to do something easy, they run from prayer as from fire.

- The Lord Who makes wise the blind<sup>1</sup> opens the eyes of the obedient to the virtues of their guide, and He blinds them to his defects. But the hater of good does the opposite.



- I have seen innocent and most beautiful children come to school for the sake of wisdom, education and profit, but through contact with the other pupils they learnt there nothing but cunning and vice. The intelligent will understand this.

- Let us look carefully and distinguish and keep alert as to when we ought to endure thankfully and silently accusations made by our pastor, and when we ought to reassure him. It seems to me that, in all cases when indignity is offered to us, we should be silent; for it is our moment of profit. But in those cases where another person is involved, we should put up a defense so as to maintain the link of love and peace unbroken.

- Those who have leapt out of obedience will tell you of its value; for it was only then that they fully realized the Heaven in which they had been living.

- He who is running towards dispassion and God, regards as a great loss any day in which he is not reviled. Just as trees swayed by the winds drive their roots deeply into the earth, so those who live in obedience get strong and unshakeable souls.

- Before our fall, the demons say that God is a friend of man; but after the fall, that He is inexorable.

- I saw two men traveling to the Lord by the same way and at the same time. One of them was old and more advanced in labors; but the other was his disciple, and soon outran the elder and came first to the sepulcher of humility.<sup>2</sup>

- In the case of cowardly and slothful people, the falls that occur after our call are hard to bear; they crush the hope of dispassion and persuade us to regard our hav-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Psalm 145:8.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John 20:4.

ing barely risen from the pit of sin as a state of blessedness. Look, look! For certainly we do not return by the way we went astray, but by another shorter route.

- As a hard stone with sharp corners has all its sharpness and hard formation dulled by knocking and rubbing against other stones, and is made round, so in the same way, a sharp and curt soul, by living in community and mixing with hard, hot-tempered men, undergoes one of two things: either it cures its wound by its patience, or by retiring it will certainly discover its weakness, its cowardly flight making this clear to it as in a mirror.

- An angry person is a willful epileptic, who due to an involuntary tendency keeps convulsing and falling down.

- Sometimes singing in moderation successfully relieves the temper. But sometimes, if untimely and immoderate, it lends itself to the lure of pleasure. Let us then appoint definite times for this, and so make good use of it.

- In many people, mourning has been the precursor of blessed dispassion, and it prepared, ploughed, and discarded sinful matter.

- Tears over our departure produce fear. But when fear gives birth to fearlessness, joy dawns. But when constant joy is obtained, holy love bursts into flower.

- Practice gives birth to perseverance, and perseverance culminates in understanding; but that which is accomplished with understanding is not easily eradicated.

- The fruit of spurious compunction is self-esteem, and the fruit of praiseworthy compunction is consolation.

- Let us rest assured that the remembrance of death, like all other blessings, is a gift of God; since how is it that often, when we are at the very tombs, we left tearless and hard; and frequently when we have no such sight, we are full of compunction?

- Do not wish to assure everyone in words of your love for them, but rather ask God to show them your love without words. Otherwise time will not suffice you for both intimacies and compunction.

- The holy virtues are like Jacob's ladder, and the unholy vices are like the chains that fell from the chief Apostle Peter. For the virtues, leading from one to another, bear him who chooses them up to Heaven; but the vices by their nature beget and stifle one another.

- Remembrance of wrongs is the consummation of anger, the keeper of sins, hatred of righteousness, ruin of virtues, poison of the soul, worm of the mind, shame of prayer, cessation of supplication, estrangement of love, a nail stuck in the soul, pleasureless feeling cherished in the sweetness of bitterness, continuous sin, unsleeping transgression, hourly malice.

- He who has put a stop to anger has also destroyed remembrance of wrongs; because childbirth continues only while the father is alive.

- Hypocrisy is the mother of lying, and often its occasion. For some define hypocrisy as none other than meditation on falsehood, and an inventor of falsehood which has a reprehensible oath intertwined with it.

- A lie is the destruction of love, and a false oath is a denial of God.

# The Annunciation

*"God sought a 'ladder...'"*

From VENERATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY, by Protopresbyter Michael Polsky (1950) Serialized in *The Shepherd*, November 1997

Why was it that for His Incarnation God chose precisely the Virgin Mary from Nazareth? Like is drawn to like.

The Son of God, by the will of God the Father and the action of the Holy Spirit, could only take up His abode in such a Virgin, and could only receive human nature from such a human being, who was worthy thereof, and who according to the qualities of her soul was fitted to receive God in herself. From the account of the Annunciation to the All-holy Virgin it is clear that it was just such a Virgin that God sought, and that He found her in Mary.

With regard to the purposes of the Incarnation of God, Mary was the best of all women on earth ("Blessed art thou among women") and among all the tribes and generations of mankind ("All generations shall call her blessed").

That she might receive God in herself and might minister at the "mystery of piety," which is the appearance in the world of "God in the flesh" (I Tim. 3:16), - Mary was already sufficiently prepared on the day of the Annunciation.

God saves man, but not without man, He seeks him who will receive Him. And God sought in the world for a person through whom He might come amongst men.

God sought a "ladder" which would unite heaven with earth (Genesis 28:12).  
God sought a "thorn bush" which would not be burned by the presence of His Divinity (Exodus 3:2).  
God sought an "ark" - not one in which to place the tablets of the Law, but for the Word Incarnate Himself (Genesis 10:5).

He sought a "golden vessel" for the manna, the Bread that came down from Heaven, for His Son (Heb. 9:4; John 6:33).

He sought a "sanctuary" and "tabernacle," in which He might "take up His abode among men" (Exodus 25:8).

The time came for the Incarnation of God, and the ancient "figures for the time then present" (Heb. 9:9) were realized in the tabernacle and ladder with a soul in the bush, and ark and vessel which had a soul - in the Virgin. For a long time, through many generations the faith was fostered, and at the last in Mary it achieved its highest development and perfection, its final limit and fulfillment.

She remembered the ninety year-old Sarah, who bore a son, when her husband was a hundred years old. She knew that Sarah had wrongfully doubted the fulfillment of God's promise: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14). And the childless Rebecca received twins of God in no other way save by the fervent prayer of her husband (Gen. 25:21). The grief-stricken Rachel had children only by God's mercy (Genesis 30:22). The mother of Sampson conceived him only after the annunciation from the Lord's Angel (Judges 13:2-3). Hannah (Anna) gave birth to Samuel after many afflictions, prayers and warm tears, in accordance with the prophecy of the High Priest Eli (I Kings 1:2-17).

Finally, her kinswoman, Elizabeth, who had been called barren, conceived John the Baptist in her old age (Luke 1:36). But all these holy women had husbands, and God's great help was manifested through natural human powers. For this reason, at the Angel's greeting, Mary posed the question: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" And then she makes a last effort of faith and the most exalted that is possible to man: that God overcomes the laws of nature and does whatsoever He wills. She believes that without a husband, by the "power of the Most High," she will have a Son.

The faith of the All-holy Virgin was marked by perfect selflessness and complete forgetfulness of self. To be pregnant in her

condition as a virgin betrothed to an elder for the very purpose of guarding her virginity,\* this entailed grieving the holy elder Joseph, to appear to have changed her calling, to subject herself to disgrace and dishonor before men, and even to a death sentence according to the law. But the power of her faith was so strong that such considerations did not restrain her, even though the danger was later to be manifest in actuality when the godly elder desired to put her away, surrendering her to the will of God and to personal responsibility for her action (Matthew 1:19). Her trust in God was without limit, and from this trust there was born humility and submission to God along with a courage and a fearlessness, which empowered her for this greatest of struggles.

The Angel testified to the Virgin: "Thou hast found grace with God" (Luke 1:30). Before the Angel's greeting, throughout the course of her young life, she had found God's mercy. In what way? How? Evidently, through faith, obedience and humility. By these virtues - which are the very essence of the holy nature common to all mankind and are the spiritual strength of the woman - with which, in her battle with the devil, she, by the dispensation of God, struck him, in his spirit of faithlessness, disobedience and pride, on the head. By the power of these virtues, even the "seed of the woman," Jesus Christ, conquered the devil. He, Who was to appear among men as an example of humility, as the path to salvation - "I am meek and lowly of heart" (Matt. 11:29) - and by a humility which was precisely that of a human nature and not only of the Divine, He was to conquer the devil (Matt. 4:1-10). He had to receive that human nature, soul and body, from the most humble handmaiden of the Lord. Christ, "the seed of the woman" (Genesis 3:15), so that He might crush the serpent in the head, had to be authentically the seed of the woman, the bearer of a true humility taken from her common human nature. It was precisely for this reason that "He looked upon the lowliness of His handmaiden" and "exalted" her "of low degree" (Luke 1:48, 52).

Human nature in her was actually prepared for the saving Divine act by humility, the moral quality which is most important for the raising

up again of humanity which had fallen through pride. "And upon him will I look," says the Lord, "on him that is humble and broken of heart, and trembleth at My words" (Es. 66:2). And He looked upon her and made her a new throne of the Divinity, because He Himself said of His dwelling-place: "I dwell in the high heaven and the holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit" (Es. 57:15). Thus, the deeds and words of God closely correspond and are true to each other, and the All-holy Virgin Mary with the particular qualities of her character was distinctly and clearly indicated in the Sacred Scriptures in the strength of those qualities, which were not in her circumstantially, nor accidentally, nor as being commonly found among all virgins, with all their inadequacies, but that she might participate in the work of the salvation of mankind.

That which Eve threw off course and marred in her soul, Mary corrected, and raised up within herself and was made "amenable" to the Lord Himself, she responded to God's purposes, she prepared the human nature within her to offer it as a gift to God for His work of salvation. All that could be done by human efforts for her personal sanctity Mary did, leaving to the Divine energies only the salvation of her nature unto life eternal, which salvation was worked in Christ for all mankind.

In her humanity was prepared, made ready for the reception of God, given in her all that it could be given: all the faith, all the humility, all the love towards God, all its perfection was offered to God as a gift. More than this it could not offer. After this there could only be the descent of the Divinity upon a soil tilled and made ready. And God perceived on the ground the beautifulness of man, and that in her, and so in her He found for Himself a place, where He might unite the earthly and the heavenly. The golden vessel for the heavenly manna was readied, and the tabernacle, in which God would dwell, was set up, the ark was made for the Word of God, the new tablets [i.e. as in the tablets of stone on which the Law was inscribed by God.].

The Virgin Mary - it is she who is the objective of the Old Testament Church. If the race of

man was prepared to receive the Savior, for the coming of God upon earth, then it was prepared in her, that it might offer her. She is the one, through whom it was possible to receive Christ on earth. All the righteousness of the Old Testament Church was concentrated in her. She is the most exalted of all and the holiest that the Old Covenant could achieve in awaiting the Messiah. The race of man had to give of itself the New Eve, the new mother of mankind, one being saved and faithful, in place of one unbelieving and sinning. Thus the All-holy Virgin is the culmination and embodiment of all that had gone before in the Old Testament Church.        ✕ ✕ ✕

**Footnote: \* On Her Ever-Virginity:**

That the All-holy Virgin remained unhusbanded [i.e. a virgin] forever is perfectly apparent from her question: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" This question would have been misplaced, if it was generally possible that she would enter into a marriage with Joseph. She said nothing about this. Although she was "betrothed to a man" (Luke 1:27), in reality there was no possibility of her marrying Joseph. This question had already been decided: if she was already betrothed, it would normally have been possible to be married in the shortest possible time, and yet she says, "I know not a man." Joseph was not her husband, and could not be such. The betrothal itself was only for the securing of her remaining unmarried forever, and was actually for the guardianship of Mary's virginity. Joseph was not only not contemplated as a husband; she did not even think of him or of the possibility of a quick marriage, such as would normally follow a betrothal. But there was no husband, and entering into a marriage was ruled out completely. She was betrothed to the elder Joseph and already destined to perpetual virginity. And Mary, of course, knew why she had been given over to the Temple, that she had been dedicated to God by her parents and had been born after they had given a vow

regarding her dedication to God. The future mother of the Lord could not violate this dedication. And she remained a virgin both before and at the Nativity of her Son. Perceiving her to be with child, the righteous Joseph "was minded to put her away privily," not wishing to subject her to the condemnation of society, but being warned of an angel, he left the Virgin alone and decided to be called the husband of Mary and the father of her Son, although in reality neither of these things had ever been so.

And after the Nativity of her Son, Mary remained a virgin in the strength of that dedication of hers from infancy, and of her betrothal to the husband-guardian of her virginity, and in the strength of the present dedication [i.e. at the Annunciation - ed.] and of her being chosen, which thing excelled nature, at the Birth of Christ. This last was a strengthening for the unwedded Mary and for Joseph.

The Word of God shows that the Son Who was born, her "firstborn," was also the last and only Son of those parents, who had been foretold of His birth from on high, through the angels; ... the All-holy Virgin, who after giving birth, just as before the Birth and at the Birth, remained a virgin. The prophecy concerning the Incarnation of God was fulfilled in her; "this gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut" (Ezekiel 44:2).

In the Word of God, the Virgin Mary is everywhere called "the Mother of Jesus," "His Mother" (John 19:25; Acts 1:14) and nobody else's mother. There was another Mary, "the mother of James the Less and Josias" (Mark 15:40; Luke 24:10), who are called His brethren (Mark 6:3) because of the kinship of the two mothers. This was as cousins apparently; "the sister of His mother, Maria the wife of Cleopas" (John 19:25) was the mother of the second cousins of Jesus, who had lived with Him in Nazareth.

## LENT IS A GIFT!

So many people under various influences have come to think of Lent as a kind of self-inflicted inconvenience. Very often in Lent we hear these conversations: "What do you give up for Lent?" It goes from candy to, I don't know what. There is the idea that if we suffer enough, if we feel the hunger enough, if we try by all kinds of strong or light ascetical tools, mainly to "suffer" and be "tortured" so to speak, it would help us to "pay" for our absolution.

But this is not our Orthodox faith. Lent is not a punishment. Lent is not a kind of painful medicine that helps only inasmuch as it is painful.

Lent is a gift! Lent is a gift from God, a gift which is admirable, marvelous, one that we desire. Now a gift of what? I would say that it is a gift of the essential – that which is essential and yet which suffers most in our life because we are living lives of confusion and fragmentation, lives which constantly conceal from us the eternal, the glorious, the divine meaning of life and takes away from us that which should "push" and, thus, correct and fill our life with joy. And this essential is thanksgiving: the acceptance from God of that wonderful life, as St. Peter says "...Created out of nothing...", created exclusively by the love of God. For there is no other reason for us to exist; loved by Him even before we were born, we were taken into His marvelous light. ~ Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent*

## About Fasting and Prayer

"This kind can come out by nothing, but prayer and fasting" (St. Mark 9:29)

This is the saving prescription of the greatest Physician of human souls. This is the remedy tried and proved. Another remedy for lunacy, there is not. What kind of sickness is that? That is the presence and dominance of an evil spirit in a man, a dangerous evil spirit who labors to eventually destroy the body and soul of man. The boy whom our Lord freed from an evil spirit; this evil spirit that had hurled him at times in the fire, at times in the water just in order to destroy him.

As long as a man only philosophizes about God he is weak and completely helpless against the evil spirit. The evil spirit ridicules the feeble sophistry of the world. But, as soon as a man begins to fast and to pray to God, the evil spirit becomes filled with indescribable fear. In no way can the evil spirit tolerate the aroma of prayer and fasting. The sweet-smelling aroma chokes him and weakens him to utter exhaustion. In a man who only philosophizes about faith, there is spacious room in him for the demons. But in a man who sincerely begins to pray to God and to fast with patience and hope, for the demon it becomes narrow and constricted and he must flee from such a man. Against certain bodily ills there exists only one remedy. Against the greatest ill of the soul, demonism, there exists two remedies, which must be utilized at one and the same time: fasting and prayer. The apostles and saints fasted and prayed to God. That is why they were so powerful against evil spirits.

O gracious Jesus, our Physician and Helper in all miseries, strengthen us by the power of Your Holy Spirit that we may be able to adhere to Your saving precepts concerning fasting and prayer for the sake of our salvation and the salvation of our fellow men.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.