

Remember that the Lord is in every Christian. When your neighbour comes to you, always have great respect for him, because the Lord is in him, and often expresses His will through him. 'It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure' (Phil. 2:13). Therefore, do not grudge anything to your brother, but do unto him as unto the Lord; especially as you do not know in whom the Lord will come and visit you; be impartial to all, be kind to all, sincere and hospitable. Remember that sometimes God speaks even through unbelievers, or disposes their hearts towards us, as it happened in Egypt when the Lord gave Joseph favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. (Gen. 39:21).

Saint John of Kronstadt

Sunday 8 September 2012 is the Sunday before the Feast of the Exaltation of the Venerable and Life-Giving Cross and the Feast of the Nativity of the Holy Theotokos

Matins Gospel: Luke 1:39-49, 56

Epistle: Galatians 6:11-18

Gospel: John 3:13-17

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

When Thou didst descend unto death, O Life Immortal, then didst Thou slay Hades with the lightning of Thy Divinity. And when Thou didst also raise the dead out of the nethermost depths, all the powers in the Heavens cried out: O Life-giver, Christ our God, glory be to Thee.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Galatians 4:22-27; Luke 8:16-21
Synaxis of the Holy Ancestors of God; Martyr Severian

Tuesday: 2 Corinthians 5:15-21; John 3:16-21
Martyrs Menodora, Metrodora & Nymphodora; Empress Pulcheria

Wednesday: 2 Corinthians 6:11-16; John 12:19-36
Theodora of Alexandria; Righteous Euphrosynus

Thursday: 2 Corinthians 7:1-10; John 11:47-54
Apodosis of Nativity of the Theotokos; Hieromartyr Autonomos

Friday: Hebrews 3:1-4; John 12:25-36
Forefeast of the Exaltation; Temple of the Resurrection

Saturday: John 12:28-36; 1 Corinthians 1:18-24; John 19:6-11, 13-20, 25-28, 30
Elevation of the Holy Cross; Commemoration of the 6th Ecumenical Council



Archbishopric of Good Hope,
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

8 September 2013

Turning to the Cross of Christ

Today, as well as being the Feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God, is the Sunday before the Feast of the Elevation of the Venerable and Life-Giving Cross. Today's Gospel helps us to prepare for this Great Feast by focusing our attention on Jesus' words in Saint John's Gospel. In it He tells us how God sent His Son to us to save us, for He wishes all to be saved and to have eternal life.

In this Gospel Jesus Christ uses Old Testament imagery and applies it to Himself. When the people of Israel were afflicted by snake bites while wandering in the desert, God commanded Moses to fashion a bronze serpent so that everyone who looked at it would be healed. This healing was a foreshadowing of the ultimate healing that we find in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Just as looking at the serpent enabled the Israelites to be healed, so we need to look to the Cross of Christ in order to find healing and salvation.



The Gospel tells us that God desires our salvation, but it also tells us that we need to respond to Him. God will not force salvation on us; instead we need to acknowledge our own need for healing and turn to Him. The Fathers tell us that, just as the people of Israel had to leave behind their slavery in Egypt, so we need to turn our backs on sin and to enter into the promised land of salvation. By looking to the Cross, we seek to be healed from our sins as we seek the vision of God's Glory that is displayed on the Cross of Christ.

Even if we have thousands of acts of great virtue to our credit, our confidence in being heard must be based on God's mercy and His love for men. Even if we stand at the very summit of virtue, it is by mercy that we shall be saved.

Saint John Chrysostom

The Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos

Today we celebrate the birth of the Mother of God, or Theotokos, one of the twelve Great Feasts of the Church. Most of the direct references to her birth come from one of the apocryphal gospels, the *Protevangelium of James*, which have been taken up and further developed in the liturgical texts of the Church. However, although the Scriptures do not refer to the actual birth of the Mother of God, they are full of indirect references to it, for the whole history of the Old Testament is a preparation for the coming Christ into our world. And a key part of this preparation was the preparation of the one who was to give birth to the Son of God. In the words of Saint Photios the Great:



After God had bestowed on man the enjoyment and mastery over everything in the Garden, it was meet for him who was entrusted with so great authority to be disciplined and trained with some command. However, after transgressing this command, the Creator did not overlook His creatures though they had plunged themselves into such great error. It was needful, therefore, that one Person of the Trinity become man, to make it manifest that the recreation too, like the creation, was their own work. Incarnation entailed a pregnancy and a mother. So it was needful that a mother should be prepared down below for the Creator, for the recreation of shattered humanity. She was to be a virgin, just as the first man had been formed of virgin earth; so the recreation too should be carried out through a virgin womb, and that no transitory pleasure, even lawful, should be as much as imagined in the Creator's birth; for the Lord suffered to be born for the deliverance of him who was a captive of pleasure.

Who then was worthy? Clearly it was she who this day strangely issued from Joachim and Anna, the barren root. It was needful, yea needful, that she who from the very cradle had by a superior reason preserved her body pure, her soul pure, her thoughts pure, should be marked out to be the Creator's Mother.

It was needful that she who had been brought to the temple as an infant, who had trodden the untrodden places, should appear as a living temple for Him Who gave her life. It was needful that she who had been born in a wondrous manner from a sterile womb, and had removed her parents' reproach, should also make good the failure of her forefathers; for she, the descendent, was able to repair the ancestral defeat, who brought forth the Saviour of our race by a husbandless birth, and molded His body.

Today the barren gates are opened and the virgin Door of God comes forth. Today grace begins to bear its first fruits, making manifest to the world the Mother of God, through whom things on earth are joined with heaven, for the salvation of our souls.

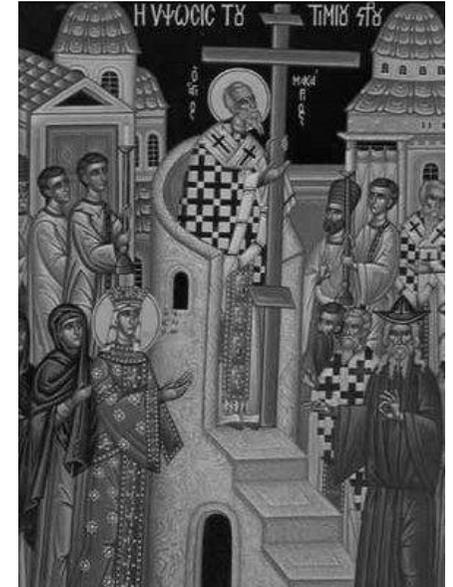
From Vespers for the feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos

The Exaltation of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross

On Saturday we celebrate the Great Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. On this day we commemorate two specific incidents. The first is the finding of the Cross upon which Christ was crucified by the Empress Helena during her travels in Palestine in 326 A.D. On reaching Golgotha she ordered that the pagan temple be destroyed and when this was done three crosses were found on its site. Uncertain which one was the Cross of the Lord, they were placed on a dying woman who was miraculously healed when the True Cross touched her. The second incident commemorates the recovery of the True Cross in 628 A.D. after it had been captured by the Persians.

This feast is a day of fasting and repentance. The Cross is placed in the centre of the Church, and is surrounded by flowers and basil. As we venerate the Cross, we prostrate ourselves before the Lord, pledging Him our loyalty and pleading for His mercy.

The Cross was originally an instrument of torture and death, and it reminds us of the sufferings of Christ and of His great love for us, a love that the world could not understand. However, it is also a sign of His victory over death. Through His death on the Cross, Jesus Christ has conquered death and so Saint Paul tells us that we find our glory in the Cross of Christ.



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

Apolytikion for the Feast

"But I say to you," the Lord says, "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute you." Why did he command these things? So that he might free you from hatred, sadness, anger and grudges, and might grant you the greatest possession of all, perfect love, which is impossible to possess except by the one who loves all equally in imitation of God.

Saint Maximus the Confessor