



# PARISH INFORMATION BULLETIN

## PROGRAM FOR 16—22 DECEMBER 2018

<b>SUNDAY 16 DECEMBER</b>	<b>11th Sunday of Luke, Luke 14: 16-24</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7.30– 11.00am Orthros and Divine Liturgy</li></ul>
<p>***** <b>SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL AGES</b> *****</p> <p>(A free voluntary program organised by the Church)</p> <p><i>Immediately after Holy Communion until Church dismissal, in the building behind the Church, Religious Instruction lessons take place for our children. We have classes for ages ranging from 5yrs to teenage years, which are given in a relaxed, friendly environment. The understanding of our faith through the religious instruction lessons brings our children closer to God and the joy and peace of His Love.</i></p> <p><b><i>Our final Sunday School Classes for 2018 will be on Sunday 23 December. Notification of the recommencement date for classes in 2019 will be published early in 2019 in the Church Bulletin.</i></b></p>	
<b>MONDAY 17 DECEMBER</b>  <b><i>St Dionysios of Zakynthos, Holy Prophet Daniel and the Three Youths</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7.00– 9.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy</li></ul>
<b>SATURDAY 22 DECEMBER</b>  <b><i>St Anastasia, Great-Martyr</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7.00– 9.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy</li><li>• 3.45pm Service of Vespers</li></ul>
<b>SUNDAY 23 DECEMBER</b>	<b>GOSPEL READING: Matthew 1: 1-25</b> <b>EPISTLE READING: Hebrews 11: 9-10, 32-40</b>



### Telephone Contact Numbers

St Vasilios Church  
9387 7693

Fr Athanasios  
9383 4151

Fr Ephraim  
0490 378 215

Website:  
[stvasiliosbrunswick.com](http://stvasiliosbrunswick.com)

Fr Athanasios and  
Fr Ephraim  
are available at the Church  
every Monday to Friday  
**between 4.00 and 6.00pm**  
for Holy Confession and  
any spiritual need.

The devil makes  
small sins seem  
smaller in our eyes,  
for otherwise he can't  
lead us to greater  
evil."



St. Mark the Ascetic

He who inclined the heavens and came down to dwell in the Virgin is coming to be born in the flesh in the cave of Bethlehem, just as it was written.

The One who gives life to infants in the womb will be seen as a newborn Babe.

With joy, let us go out to meet Him in the uprightness of our hearts.

Orthros Service

### THE COMING OF THE LORD

"Do you ask why God was born among men?"

"Here is the reason for God's presence among men.

Our nature was sick and needed a doctor. Man had fallen and needed someone to raise him up.

He who had ceased to participate in the good needed someone to bring him back to it.

He who was shut in darkness needed the presence of life.

The prisoner was looking for someone to ransom him, the captive for someone to take his part.

He who was under the yoke of slavery was looking for someone to set him free.

Were these trifling and unworthy reasons to impel God to come down to visit human nature.....?"

- St Gregory of Nyssa

## 11th Sunday of Luke, Luke 14: 16-24

### **Advent is a Time to Accept the Invitation to the God's Great Banquet in Jesus Christ**

Today is the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers, when we commemorate all those in the Old Testament who foretold or prefigured the coming of Christ, from our first father Adam to the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. We remember today that the Incarnation of our Lord did not simply occur one day out of the blue, but was the fulfillment of God's eternal plan to bring humanity into His divine life. No one was forced, of course, to prepare for our Lord's coming. Today we honor those who responded in freedom to God's calling, who accepted His invitation to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. And in this season of Advent, we want to be like them, which is sometimes a struggle. For we all face powerful temptations to excuse ourselves from the blessing and joy of the Kingdom.

Today's gospel text reminds us of what is at stake. For when a great man invited people to a great feast, they all had better things to do. They turned down the invitation because they had land to inspect, oxen to test, or family responsibilities. So their places at the banquet were taken by the most unlikely of party guests: the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame. Strangers from the highways and hedges came to the celebration, but none of those who were originally invited tasted of the supper.

The Lord often used the image of a great feast for the Kingdom of God. This parable reminds us that many of Jesus Christ's own people, the Jews, refused to accept Him as the Messiah, refused to accept His salvation, while many of the Gentiles—the mostly unlikely people—did accept Him. But we would miss the meaning of this passage for us if we think that it refers simply to what happened long ago to other people. For we too have been invited to the Heavenly Banquet, to the life of the Kingdom of God. And unlike the people of the Old Testament, we have more than the Law and the Prophets to foreshadow the coming of Christ. We have Him, living in our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit; nourishing our souls with His Body and Blood; we are members of His Body, the Church; He is the Bridegroom and we are the Bride. The Incarnation has already occurred. Christ has united our fallen, corrupt humanity to divinity. He has brought us into the life of the Holy Trinity. We could not ask for more.

But unfortunately, we often act like those who refused to attend the great banquet in today's gospel lesson. That is, we get so fixated on the cares and worries of daily life that we become blind to the great blessing and glory to which our Lord invites us. The problem is that we make false gods of our possessions, work, family, relationships, and other cares. Instead, of seeing that these good things have their proper and healthy place only when we offer them to the Lord—and that they all provide opportunities to grow in holiness, we tend to choose them instead of God.

So we would rather worry than pray; we would rather obsess about our problems and fears than serve our neighbors, forgive those who have offended us, and find healing for the damage that our sins have done in our own lives. Instead of making our life a Eucharist, instead of offering every bit of who we are to the Lord for blessing and fulfillment, we try to live on our own terms. And when we do, we turn away from the greatest blessing of all, from participation in the eternal life of our Lord and His Kingdom. And consequently we shut ourselves out of the great banquet of God and turn away from the unspeakable glory that is ours in Christ Jesus.

The problem is not with our possessions themselves, or our work, or marriage and family life. These are all blessings from the Lord; no, the problem is with us. As we never tire of saying in the Orthodox Church, we have disordered desires and broken relationships that make it so easy for us to make false gods of other people, of our daily responsibilities, our hopes and dreams in life, and just about everything else. Envy, pride, anger, lust, greed, and other passions tempt us mightily to believe that satisfying our self-centered desires really is more important than loving and serving God and neighbor. And if we are not careful, these temptations will lead us to become like the people in the gospel lesson who really believed that they had better things to do than to share in the great joy of the Lord's banquet.

Christmas, of course, is a banquet, a great feast. It is a celebration of our salvation in the God-Man Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God Who became a human being in order to unite our fallen, corrupt humanity with divinity, to bring us from mortality to immortality. No matter how the Nativity Fast has gone for us so far, we all have a choice whether we will use the ten days to prepare to enter more fully into the blessed truth and reality of the Incarnation. And it's clear what we need to do: to confess our sins and repent, as we do in the Sacrament of Confession that we should all take during Advent; to be generous to the needy and kind to the lonely; to fast in a way appropriate to our spiritual strength and life circumstances; to pray, to open our hearts, souls, and minds to God deliberately and regularly in prayer; to be mindful, refusing to dwell on unhealthy thoughts or to act in ways that do not show the love of Christ; and to say the Jesus Prayer as often as we can, especially when our minds are inclined toward something that we know is not pleasing to the Lord.

No, these spiritual disciplines won't make us saints overnight and we won't do them perfectly. But that's not really the point. Instead, these disciplines are our way of accepting the invitation of our Lord to the banquet of His Kingdom, of offering our cares, worries, and relationships for blessing and fulfillment. They are how we fight our passions, resist our temptations, and do what we can to prepare to receive Him at Christmas. They are what Advent is all about.

We have less than two weeks left before Christmas. We could say that the shepherds, wise men, and angels are on their way to Bethlehem. We should be on our way also. The preparation for the feast will soon begin. Will we be ready? Will we accept the invitation to the feast? I certainly hope so. For we stand at the end of a very long line that goes back to Adam, the first-created; that extends through Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Ruth, David, Bathsheeba; Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; that includes Joachim, Anna, and the Theotokos.

The good news of Christmas is that in Christ Jesus, the fulfillment of all God's promises are extended to people like us, who are blinded and sickened with sin, who suffer from the pain, weakness, and corruption of life in the world as we know it, and who are not yet perfect. In the Babe of Bethlehem, even people like you and me are invited to take our place with the Holy Forefathers and Foremothers of Christ in the heavenly banquet and to become participants in the Divine Glory.

Now is the time to get ready for His coming, to put aside our excuses, to set right what has gone wrong in our lives, and to prepare to receive Him with the fear of God and faith and love at the great feast of Christmas. Unfortunately, some did not recognize Him at the first Christmas. King Herod tried to kill him, and so many who should have known better rejected the Lord during His earthly ministry, even crucifying Him as a blasphemer and a traitor. Yes, some really did turn down their invitations to the blessedness of the Kingdom, preferring political and religious power to Christ's salvation.

Nothing that we do will probably be so dramatic, but the same thing is at stake: Will we make our marriages, our finances, our work, our friendships, and our life plans points of entry into the joy of the Lord? Will we accept our Savior's invitation not to be distracted from receiving the eternal life that He has brought to the world? Our response will be shown by what we do with the last next ten days of Advent.

Fr. Philip LeMasters