





# PARISH INFORMATION BULLETIN

## PROGRAM FOR 8—14 DECEMBER 2019

<b>SUNDAY 8 DECEMBER</b>	<b>10th SUNDAY OF LUKE, Luke 13, 10-17</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy</li></ul>
<div> <b>SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL AGES</b> (A free voluntary program organised by the Church)</div> <p>Lessons take place in the building behind the church and begin at the time of Holy Communion until Church dismissal. We have classes for ages ranging from 5yrs to teenage years. Lessons are taught in a relaxed, friendly environment. Please bring your children along to learn of their rich Orthodox faith and come close to God and His Love.</p>	
<b>MONDAY 9 DECEMBER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 8.45am Service of Holy Unction</li><li>• 10.00am Meeting of Elderly Citizens in Church Hall.</li></ul>
<b>TUESDAY 10 DECEMBER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7.00pm Parishes of St Vasilios and the Presentation of our Lord, Coburg Youth Group will meet in Coburg Church Hall.</li></ul>
<b>THURSDAY 12 DECEMBER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7.00am Orthros and Divine Liturgy</li><li>• 7.30—8.30pm <div> <b>TEENAGE YOUTH GROUP (Ages 13-19)</b> In Church Hall, upstairs behind the Church <i>* ALL TEENAGERS WELCOME *</i></div></li></ul> <p>St Spyridon, Trimythous, Wonderworker</p>
<b>SUNDAY 15 DECEMBER</b>	<b>GOSPEL READING: Luke 14: 16-24</b> <b>EPISTLE READING: 2Timothy 1: 8-18</b>

## VOICE OF THE HOLY FATHERS ....

### That We Should Not Despair Even if We Sin Many Times

"Even if you are not what you should be, you should not despair. It is bad enough that you have sinned; why in addition do you wrong God by regarding him in your ignorance as powerless?"

Is He, who for your sake created the great universe that you behold, incapable of saving your soul? And if you say that this fact, as well as his incarnation, only makes your condemnation worse, then repent; and he will receive your repentance, as he accepted that of the prodigal son (Luke 15:20) and the prostitute (Luke 7:37-50).

But if repentance is too much for you, and you sin out of habit even when you do not want to, show humility like the publican (Luke 18:13): this is enough to ensure your salvation. For he who sins without repenting, yet does not despair, must of necessity regard himself as the lowest of creatures, and will not dare to judge or censure anyone. Rather, he will marvel at God's compassion."

+ St. Peter of Damaskos, "Book I: A Treasury of Divine Knowledge, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 3)*



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

"He who busies himself  
with the sins of others,  
or judges his brother  
on suspicion, has not  
yet even begun to  
repent or to examine  
himself so as to  
discover his own sins.."

—St. Maximos the  
Confessor

**Prayer is the First Step in Bearing Fruit for the Kingdom:**

Many people today think of religion as a matter of feeling or emotion that simply helps them cope with the problems of life. That may sound appealing, but it is ultimately a perspective that limits God and takes away real hope. For Jesus Christ was not born simply to change how we feel about our broken world and lives. No, He came to restore and fulfill the entire creation, including every aspect of our lives as human beings in the image and likeness of God.

That is precisely what we see in today's gospel lesson when, as the Lord taught in a synagogue on the Sabbath, He saw a woman who was bent over and could not stand up straight. She had suffered for eighteen years with this terrible condition. He said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." Then He laid hands on her and healed her, so she actually stood up straight and glorified God.

A legalistic critic took offense at this healing on the Sabbath, when no work was to be done. Christ responded by noting that everyone takes care of his donkey and ox on the Sabbath. "So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" The truth of His teaching was so clear that His critics were put to shame and the people rejoiced.

Here is a powerful image of what the Son of God has done for us by becoming a human being, for we are all like that poor woman stooped over with an infirmity and unable to straighten herself up. We live in a world of corruption, illness, pain, and death in which there are harsh realities that we cannot control.

We all have diseases of soul, of personality, of behavior, and of relationships that cripple us, that make it very difficult to follow St. Paul's advice to "walk as children of light." Like every generation since Adam and Eve, we have fallen short of God's purposes for us. We are all bent over and crippled in profound ways in relation to the Lord, our neighbors, and even ourselves.

Joachim and Anna knew all about long-term struggles and disabilities, for like Abraham and Sarah they were childless into their old age. But God heard their prayer and gave them Mary, who would in turn give birth to the Savior Who came to heal us all from the ravages of sin and death. This Tuesday is the feast of St. Anna's conception of the Theotokos which we celebrate as a foreshadowing of the coming of the Lord to set us free from the infirmities that hold us captive and hinder our participation even now in the life of the Kingdom.

The entire history of the Hebrews was preparatory for the coming of the Christ, the Messiah in whom God's promises are fulfilled and extended to all who have faith in the Savior, regardless of their family heritage. Christ did not come to privilege one nation or group over another, but to fulfill our common vocation to be in the image and likeness of God, to share by grace in the eternal life of the Holy Trinity as distinct, unique persons. He transcends the laws of nature in order to do so, enabling elderly women to conceive and bear children and a young virgin to become the mother of His Son Who Himself rises from the dead. Yes, this is a story of liberation, of breaking bonds, and of overcoming the brokenness and limitations of life in the world as we know it.

The Savior did not treat the woman in today's reading as nameless bundle of disease. Instead, Christ restored her true identity as a beloved person, a daughter of Abraham. He treated her as a cherished child of God who was not created for an existence of pain, disease, and despair, but for blessing, health, and joy. She glorified God for this deliverance, as did those who saw the miracle. Likewise, barrenness did not have the last word on Joachim and Anna. God heard their prayer and was not finished with them yet.

The good news of Christmas is that the Lord is born to do the same for us and for the whole world, to set us free from slavery and barrenness in all their forms, including the decay, corruption, and weakness that distort us all. He comes to restore us as living icons who manifest His glory and salvation in unique, personal ways. Even as the icons of the Saints portray them as distinctive persons who participate in the life of God by grace, the same should be true of us as we live and breathe in this world.

As we become less the slaves of "the unfruitful works of darkness" and more "the children of light," we become more truly ourselves and experience a joyful freedom from the sinful habits of thought, word, and deed over which we had previously been powerless. Despite the lies we hear from our culture and that we often gladly accept, evil is just the same old boring thing that leaves us empty, alone, and ashamed because we are not made for it. Sin and corruption may be packaged a bit differently in each generation, but they remain essentially the same and lead to the same end.

As St. Augustine prayed, "You have made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You." No wonder, then, that turning away from the Lord brings only disappointment, despair, and greater bondage to our own self-centered desires. Holiness, in contrast, is fulfilling and liberating, for we are made for it as those created in the image and likeness of God. The more we become like Him, the more we become truly and freely ourselves as we turn away from slavery to sin and passion in order to embrace the new life that Christ was born to bring to the world.

That is why we should all follow St. Paul's advice: "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." In other words, why should we continue to stumble along the familiar paths of darkness and decay which simply make our situation worse? That is no way to live. We have to change our course. It is time to wake up from sleep and to open ourselves to the healing and fulfillment for which we were made.

Saints Joachim and Anna did that by intense prayer for a child, and God heard them and gave them Mary. Though we do not know much about the woman bound with infirmity whom Christ healed in today's gospel reading, she was in the synagogue on the Sabbath, presumably praying for healing. We should follow their example, but that is hard to do in a world with so much noise and distraction which we often welcome into our hearts and souls. We find it so easy to fill our minds with everything but prayer, with everything but being fully present with the only One Who can set us free from bondage to corruption in all its forms. Like Joachim, Anna, and the crippled woman, we simply must devote ourselves to prayer if we are to open our lives to the healing presence and power of God.

St. Paul instructs us to "be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart." In other words, he tells us to pray and to fill our minds—and our mouths—with words and thoughts that direct us more fully into the life of Christ. Most people need words in prayer, for our minds tend to wander when we attend to God. We all know the words of the Jesus Prayer, which we can use at any time. We should know the Trisagion Prayers by heart, and we all have access to Orthodox prayer books, the Psalms, and other resources that help us focus on the Lord. But no matter what resources we have, they will do us no good if we do not use them, if we do not devote time and energy on a daily basis to prayer from the depth of our hearts.

Prayer is where the journey begins and is the means by which we open ourselves to the healing and fulfillment of our lives, to our being set free from slavery to our sins. It is how we begin to participate in the new life that Christ has brought to the world. So as we continue the Nativity Fast, let us make prayer a settled habit so that our spiritual eyes will open wide to the brilliant light of the Savior when He comes to set us free at His birth. That is how Christ will loose us from our infirmities. It is how we will overcome our spiritual barrenness and instead bear fruit for the Kingdom of God.

Fr. Philip LeMasters