



## Parish Information Bulletin

### CHRISTOS ANESTI ! CHRIST IS ARISEN!

#### SUNDAY 24 MAY

Sunday of the Blind Man, John 9: 1-38

- 8.00am  
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

WEDNESDAY 27 MAY  
*Dismissal Feast of Pascha  
St John the Russian*

- 8.00am  
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

THURSDAY 28 MAY  
*Ascension of our Lord*

- 8.00am  
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

#### SATURDAY 30 MAY

- 8.00am  
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

#### SUNDAY 31 MAY

Epistle Reading: Acts 20: 16-18, 28: 36

Gospel Reading: John 17: 1-13

### 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.

God, for your  
sake humbled  
Himself,  
and you will not  
be humbled  
for your own  
sake?



St Macarius the  
Great

### The Ascension of the Lord

Today we reach the 40th day from our Lord's Resurrection, on which we commemorate His glorious Ascension into Heaven. In the Book of Acts, and in St. Luke's Gospel, we hear a description of how the Lord tells his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit to descend. Then, after telling them this, He is carried up into Heaven, as a cloud "receive[s] Him out of their sight."

As the disciples are standing there, dumbfounded, gazing up at the clouds and wondering what to do next, two angels appear and speak to them, saying, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Thus, the Ascension is connected with the Second Coming. Just as the Lord ascended, so He will descend when He comes again. And our hope, as Christians, is to be caught up with Him at that time, as the Apostle Paul says. Just as His resurrection makes possible and foreshadows our resurrection, so His ascension makes possible and foreshadows our ascension.

Wonderfully, gloriously, beyond all hope and expectation, Jesus has raised up our humanity - that same humanity that has been brought low in sin and corruption, disease and death. Not only has He raised it from the dead, but He has lifted up all the way to heaven, and seated it at the right hand of the Father. And so, from a hopeless situation, He has brought us to a situation where, in spite of our sinfulness, we can yet hope to be seated one day, together with Christ, there beside our heavenly Father.

For that to happen, though, we need the Holy Spirit. And to receive the Holy Spirit, we must remain in Jerusalem. "Do not depart from Jerusalem," said the Lord before his Ascension. St. Gregory Palamas points out that it's as if the Lord had said, "do not depart from peace," since Jerusalem means the place of peace. In St. Luke's Gospel, just before the Ascension, the Lord says "Peace to you" to his disciples, and His desire is that His peace remain with them always. When we reject the peace of God, we reject the presence of the Holy Spirit, and vice versa.

So we must abide in Jerusalem, seeking peace with God (that is, reconciliation through repentance and confession) and peace with one another. We must be lovers of peace - not the false peace offered by the authorities of this world, peace in exchange for accepting lies - but true peace, which comes from loving Christ above all.

Abiding in Jerusalem also means abiding in the place of prayer. At the very end of St. Luke's Gospel, we find the disciples worshipping the Lord, returning to Jerusalem "with great joy," and being "continually in the temple praising and blessing God." This feast calls us to imitate them, by setting our minds on heaven every day. We are to imitate them by joyfully approaching the labour of prayer; it is a labour, but it is meant to be a labour of love in which we praise and bless the God of love.

Thus through prayer and worship we are always with God, and Christ is always with us: "Lo I am with you always," He says. The Lord ascends from us into Heaven, and yet He remains with us. "I am with you, and no one can be against you," as the Kontakion for this feast says. In the flesh He ascends to heaven, and seats our human nature at the right hand of the Father, but through the gift of the Holy Spirit we are always united with Him, and He is always helping us.

So, we ought not to fear anything, because the Lord is with us always, no matter what, and has prepared a glorious destiny for us. We don't need to grow fainthearted as we struggle to live as Christians, because Christ has made a pathway to Heaven, and He will enable us to follow it. We can't believe the world when it tells us that the world is all there is to live for, because the fulfilment of our life and our joy is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again for us.

Rather, we must remember, each day, and every moment of each day, that Christ has risen from the dead and ascended into Heaven for us and yet has not abandoned us in any way. He has gone to prepare a place for us, but is mystically present with us. We must cling to Him, knowing that as we do so, no one can be against us; no one can destroy the indestructible life of Christ that abides in us as we abide in Him. When we proclaim His Ascension, we proclaim the promise that He will raise us up above all evil and death and everything that drags us down in this world. We proclaim the promise that His love will triumph in the end.

Christ is ascended! From earth to Heaven!

## We Must Obey in Order to See

Christ is Risen!

Seeing is believing. There are many things in life that we will not accept unless we see them with our own eyes. And there are some things that we have to learn how to see because they are not obvious to the untrained eye. It often takes experience to see something rightly, to understand its true significance. If that is true in everyday life, it is all the more the case in how we know God.

We began our celebration of Pascha several weeks ago when we saw the light of a flame in the darkness of midnight. Until the brilliant light of the Saviour's resurrection, humanity wandered in spiritual blindness as a result of being enslaved to corruption. "The wages of sin is death," and the darkness of the tomb had reigned supreme since the fall of Adam and Eve. Like the man born blind in today's gospel reading, our capacity to participate in the blessed holiness for which we were created was grossly deformed. Enslaved to the fear of death and cast out of Paradise, we were all held prisoner by the darkness of the tomb which extended to the depths of our souls.

In sharp contrast to that darkness, we celebrate in this glorious season of Pascha that the light of Christ shines even from the grave and extends to the darkest dimensions of our lives and relationships. To be radiant with the light of the resurrection is what it means to know God. To know Him is not merely to have religious ideas or emotions about Him, but truly to share by grace in the life of the Holy Trinity. It is to have the eyes of our souls cleansed, to have our minds illumined such that we move from darkness to light. The change is certainly not in our Lord, but in us who rise with Him from death to life, from the dark night of sin to the brilliant light of holiness.

This great blessing is not something that we give ourselves, but which our Lord has made possible as the God-Man Who unites divinity and humanity in Himself. That is how He heals us, personally taking upon Himself all the consequences of our corruption, even to the point of death, in order to conquer them through His resurrection. He brings every dimension and capability of the human person into His divine life, making us radiant with the holy glory that we share by grace. That is what it means to be truly human in His image and likeness.

When Christ spat on the ground and made clay to anoint the eyes of the blind man, He gave us a sign of how He restored us through His Incarnation, His entry into our world of flesh and blood, which was necessary for our healing. The blind man's sight was restored when he obeyed Christ's command to wash in water, which is a sign of how He illumines us in baptism. Of course, we are baptized into the Lord's death in order to rise up with Him into a life of holiness.

Our spiritual sight is not restored by denying our bodily limitations or the reality of the physical struggles that we face, whether illness, poverty, or anything else. Instead, our Risen Lord heals our souls when we offer ourselves fully to Him in obedience. The blind man in today's gospel lesson did what the Lord told him to do, walking to the pool of Siloam and washing off the clay from His eyes. He had to obey Christ's command by doing something that involved his whole person. That is how he overcame the blindness with which he had been born. Even though he thought of the Lord as only a prophet at that point, the man quickly professed faith in Him when the Lord told him His true identity. As Christ said of Himself as the Son of God to the man, "You have seen Him, and it is He who speaks to you."

As Orthodox Christians, we routinely make bold claims about seeing the true light and beholding the resurrection of Christ. We employ the sense of sight in the worship of God with icons, crosses, candles, vestments, and in many other ways. We put on Christ like a garment in baptism and are filled personally with the Holy Spirit in chrismation. We receive our Lord's Body and Blood in Holy Communion, as we participate already in the Heavenly Banquet. He is the Bridegroom and, as His Church, we are His Bride and members of His own Body. We do not think of Him as only a prophet or a righteous man, but know that He is truly the Son of God. There is no question, then, that He has restored our sight, giving us all the ability to embrace Him from the depths of our souls. He has done for us what we could never do simply by ourselves, even as someone born blind could never give himself sight.

Imagine how great our responsibility is, then, to open the eyes of our souls as fully as possible to the light of Christ. For as He is infinitely holy, there is no upward limit to the holiness to which He calls us. Even as the healing of our bodies is a process that requires our cooperation and effort, the same is true with the healing of our souls. The blind man had to exercise what little faith he had at first by obeying Christ's command. That was how he put himself in the place to receive such a miraculous blessing. And though we do not know the rest of his story, that was surely only the beginning of his journey. He had to live as one whose eyes had been opened by the mercy of the Lord.

If we are truly to enter into the holy joy of Pascha, we must follow the example of the man born blind. Our spiritual vision remains far from perfect, but our Risen Lord has given us all that we need to become radiant with His brilliant and holy light. That happens when we know and experience Him from the depths of our souls, which requires offering ourselves to Him through humble obedience in our daily lives. That means joining ourselves to His great victory over death by opening even the darkest and most difficult areas of our personalities and relationships to His healing light. There is no way to do that without living as our Lord taught, which means turning away from all that obscures His light in us, from all that keeps us captive to the darkened ways of sin and corruption that we find so appealing.

As we prepare to move from Pascha to the Ascension, let us discern where we persist in darkness and what we need to do in order to obey our Lord more faithfully as we rise with Him from the grave to the heights of heavenly glory. Let us grow in our personal participation by grace in the life of Christ by living daily as those who have beheld the glory of His resurrection and who have seen the true light. The Saviour has already done the miraculous for us by conquering death. Now it is our responsibility to respond faithfully as we open ourselves to the Light Who shines so brightly that He overcomes even the darkest tomb. And as hard as it is to believe, He will illumine even the darkest and most corrupt dimension of our lives, if we will only offer ourselves to Him in humble, trusting obedience each day.

The good news of Pascha is not confined to a season of the year, but is always the fundamental truth of our life in Christ. Now we must live as those who have been blessed to behold the glory of the resurrection. Now we must remove every obstacle to embracing personally the brilliant, radiant light of the empty tomb. Now we must live with all the holy joy of a man born blind who can finally see the light. That is what it means to know God and to be truly human in His image and likeness, for Christ is Risen! - Fr P LeMasters