



## Parish Information Bulletin

SUNDAY 6 SEPTEMBER

13th SUNDAY OF MATTHEW, Matthew 21: 33-42

- 8.00am  
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

TUESDAY 8 SEPTEMBER

*Nativity of the  
Theotokos*

- 8.00am  
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

SUNDAY 13 SEPTEMBER

Epistle Reading: Galatians 6: 11-18  
Gospel Reading: John 3: 13-17

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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.

### Nativity of the Theotokos

The first Feast of the Liturgical Year is the Birth of the Virgin Mary

Your Nativity, O Virgin, has proclaimed joy to the whole universe! The Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, has shone from you, O Theotokos!

By annulling the curse, He bestowed a blessing. By destroying death, He has granted us eternal life.

*Troparion of the Feast*

The first Great Feast to fall in the Church Year is the Nativity of the Most-Holy Theotokos. It is entirely fitting that at the beginning of the new religious year all Orthodox Christians should come before the highest example of human holiness that the Orthodox Church holds precious and venerates — that of Mary, the Theotokos and Mother of God. This day is seen as one of universal joy; for on this day — the boundary of the Old and New Covenants — was born the Most-Blessed Virgin, pre-arranged from the ages by Divine Providence to serve the mystical Incarnation of God the Word.

The first Old Testament Reading of Vespers (Gen. 28:10-17) speaks of the dream of Jacob, one of the Old Testament Patriarchs, when he fled the wrath of his brother Esau. He saw a ladder extending from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending. When he awoke, Jacob blessed with oil the stone on which he had slept and called it Bethel, meaning house of God. The Most-Pure Mother of God is seen here as that ladder between heaven and earth, uniting earth with heaven in her womb. She who carried God in her womb is truly Bethel, none other than the house of God...and the gate of heaven (Gen. 28:17).

The birth of the Most-Holy Theotokos took place in the following manner: Her father, the Righteous Joachim, was a descendant of King David, to whom God had promised that from the seed of his descendants would be born the Savior of the world. Her mother, the Righteous Anna, was the daughter of Matthan, and through her father was of the tribe of Aaron and through her mother was of the tribe of Judah. The spouses lived in Nazareth of Galilee.

Joachim and Anna had no children, and all their life they grieved about this, especially since they were now in old age. Scorn and mockery was their lot, for at that time childlessness was reckoned as a shame. But they never murmured and only the more fervently beseeched God, humbly trusting in His Will.

Once, during the time of a great Feast, the offering which Joachim took to Jerusalem to offer to God in the Temple, was not received by the priest, who reckoned that a childless man was not worthy to bring a sacrifice to God. This greatly grieved the old man and he, counting himself only a sinner among men, decided not to return home, but to flee to a place of solitude in a deserted place. Anna, having heard how her husband had been humiliated by the priest, began to fast, and in prayer sadly beseeched God to grant her a child. In the wilderness, secluded and fasting, Joachim also prayed to God about this.

The prayers of the Holy Spouses were heard. The angel Gabriel came to them and announced that a daughter would be born to them, whom the whole human race would call blessed. At the command of the Heavenly Messenger, Joachim and Anna returned to Jerusalem where, according to the promise of God, a daughter was born to them, whom they named Mary.

This child, the Most-Holy Virgin Mary, pure and virtuous, surpassed not only all men, but even the angels, being manifested as the Living Temple, "the Heavenly Gate, ushering in Christ to the Universe as the Salvation of our souls." The Nativity of the Mother of God pre-announced the approaching time when the great and comforting promise of God concerning the salvation of the human race from the slavery of the devil was to be accomplished. The Mother of the First-Born of all Creation was revealed to all of us as a merciful Intercessor to whom we perpetually run for help in all things.

- Excerpt from *These Truths We Hold*

By your Nativity,  
O Most-Pure Virgin,  
Joachim and Anna  
are freed  
from barrenness;  
Adam and Eve,  
from the corruption  
of death.  
And we, your people,  
freed from the guilt  
of sin, celebrate and  
sing to you:  
The barren woman  
gives birth to the  
Theotokos,  
the Nourisher  
of our Life.



Kontakion of the Feast

### Working in God's Vineyard

How many of us have a garden? In that garden grow fruits and mostly vegetables (tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, etc). We cook or can the vegetables or make lots of salads in the summer. We give some away to share our abundant crop with neighbours and friends. Probably we don't think of our garden like a farmer does because it's not our main source of income or livelihood. We do not depend on the crop to pay for the land. Thus, it may be difficult for us to understand Jesus' parable of the vineyard owner as told in today's gospel reading on this the 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Matthew (21:33-42). Let us briefly review the parable.

First, there is the landowner who plants the vineyard and sets a hedge around it. He digs a winepress and builds a tower. He leases it to vinedressers and then goes away to a far country (v.33). When the harvest time arrived, the landowner sent his servants to receive the fruits (v.34). The vinedressers mistreated the servants by beating one, killing one and stoning another. (v.35). The landowner sends additional servants to receive his fruit and they are rejected in the same manner (v.36). Finally, he sends his son, thinking that vinedressers will respect him (v.37). However, they also killed the landowner's son (v.39). Upon finishing the parable, Jesus asks the disciples, 'When the landowner comes, what will he do to the vinedressers?' (v.40). The disciples replied, 'He will destroy those wicked men 'and lease the vineyard to others who will give him his fruit in due season' (v.41).

Now, let us examine what the parable meant in Jesus' time. In other words, what lesson was Matthew the Evangelist trying to teach. Well, using other passages in Scripture and the Church Fathers, we learn that the landowner (oikodespotes lit. 'master of the house') is God the Father. The vineyard (ambelos) is the House of Israel (Is.5:7) and the Kingdom of God (v.43, the first verse after today's passage). The hedge, winepress and tower are Freedom from slavery and Inheritance of the Promised Land. Notice that just like the landowner built these three things in the vineyard, God did most of the work for the Israelites in bring them out of Egypt and into land of milk and honey. Logically, the vinedressers (georgos- lit. 'earth workers'; farmers) are the people of Israel- the Jews. The servants are the Prophets who came to make the people accountable to God but were beaten, stoned and killed. For example, Zechariah the son of Jehoiada (2Chr.24:21) was stoned and Zechariah the son of Berechiah, who was also the father of John the Baptist (Mt.23:35) was murdered and John the Baptist himself (Mt.14, Mk.6, Lk.9) was beheaded. Looking back to the prophet Isaiah, we understand that 'fruit' is justice and righteousness (Is.5:7). It is also the fulfilment of God's commandments (2Chr.24:20). The landowner's son is of course Jesus Christ who was crucified.

Understanding the meaning of the parable in Jesus' time will help us learn what the parable is telling us today. The landowner is still God the Father. The vineyard still represents the Kingdom of God. The vinedressers however are not the Jews, but us, the Body of Christ. The servants are still the prophets of Israel but also the Church Fathers, the Bishops as Chief Shepherds, the Presbyters who minister to the flock, and most importantly the Saints who model the holiness of God to us. All of these persons come into our lives to evaluate and instruct us regarding our work habits and methods. The fruit is still justice & righteousness and the fulfilment of the God's commandments. More specifically, that the fruits of the Spirit, are the good grapes (Is.5:2). They are enumerated by St. Paul, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."* (Gal.5:22-23); Of course, the Son is still Jesus Christ and He comes to evaluate and instruct and to love us. Upon hearing this parable, a child once asked, 'Why would the landowner send his son if everyone else he sent before was beaten, stoned and killed?' The answer is 'Because of the great love God has for humankind.'<sup>15</sup> *And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place* (2Chr.36:15).

As this parable is illumined for us, we must ask ourselves, 'How do we respond to God's messages that tell us when we're falling short in our responsibility to bring forth fruit?' One way to evaluate that is to realize how we treating the God's messengers. Do we beat the messenger with excuses? Do we stone him/her with insults and accusations to undermine their credibility and shift focus away from ourselves? Do we seek to kill him/her with an insatiable desire to control the situation and exert power over others? Remember, the bishops, priests, teachers and saints are sent to us by God as repeated opportunities to respond to God's message with repentance by changing our sinful ways before Christ Himself appears at the Parousia, the Second Coming, when He will render final judgment.

What happens when we continually reject God's message as we reject His messengers? When God sends His son Jesus Christ to us, we will reject Him too. Jesus says, at that end of today's passage, that the rejected stone becomes the chief cornerstone (Mt.21.42) and a couple verses later He adds, *'whoever falls on this stone will be broken, but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder'* (v.44). Our rejection of Christ leads to our destruction. This annihilation is not wrought by God but by our own words, our own deeds and our own disposition. Christ said, *'I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly'* (Jn.10:10). Let us lay hold of divine life in the vineyard of God's holy church and live our life worthy of that gift! Amen!