



Parish Information Bulletin

SUNDAY 15 NOVEMBER
Nativity Fast Begins

8th Sunday of Luke, Luke 10: 25-37

- **8.00am**
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

MONDAY 16 NOVEMBER
St Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

- **8.00am**
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

SATURDAY 21 NOVEMBER
Entry of the Theotokos to the Temple

- **8.00am**
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

SUNDAY 22 NOVEMBER

Epistle Reading: Ephesians 2: 14-22
Gospel Reading: Luke 12: 16-21

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

THE ENTRANCE OF THE THEOTOKOS INTO THE TEMPLE

In the Torah, the first five books of the bible, we learn what great care God took in planning the temple in Jerusalem. For God describes in intricate detail what the Temple was to be like, and God carefully chose the craftsmen He wanted to do the work. God did not let the building of His temple be left to chance but He made clear His choices, and He personally guided the decisions to be made regarding the Temple, because the Temple was to be the sign of His presence on earth amidst His chosen people. The Temple was the place where God was to dwell on earth.

Are we to imagine that when our God chose the woman to be the mother of His Son, that he took any less care? That He just picked any childbearing female without regard to who she was? It seems reasonable based on the detailed description which God revealed to His people about the Temple in Jerusalem and about its consecration, that God took equal care and love in choosing Mary to be the Mother of His Son.

In the Church we have the Feast of the Entrance of the Virgin Mary into that Temple. We have the woman carefully chosen by God because of who she is – even before she conceives God's Son – now entering the Temple which God so carefully designs and decorates.

Now both the Virgin and the Temple are signs of God's loving care for the world, both are where and how God dwells on earth, and both are signs of God's presence. But the Temple in Jerusalem that massive structure of huge stones which so impressed the disciples of Christ, and whose detail and beauty was revealed by God, has long been destroyed and is no longer a sign from God. That old temple was a sign of God's presence, and yet God dwelt there only occasionally and eventually He abandoned that temple and allowed it to be destroyed. Whereas the Virgin, who is the temple in which God became incarnate, remains a sign to God's people until this day. A temple not built by hands and which cannot be destroyed by human means. She indeed and in purpose has become the eternal sign and temple of God's dwelling with us. Even though God also dwelt in her only for a short time, her role was to make the eternal God to be incarnate, something the old temple in Jerusalem could never do. Her role has become eternal. Her role was to make the eternal incarnate. She is the permanent sign of God's eternal presence on earth – a sign that cannot be destroyed, like the old and massive Jerusalem Temple could be and was.

In the original temple which Solomon built was placed the Ark of the Covenant, that sarcophagus like box over which the cherubim spread their wings. And in the Ark was kept the stone tablets on which the 10 Commandments were written. The written Word of God symbolically contained in the Ark within the Temple. But all of that, as important and holy as it was, given as gifts from God to His people, were lost in history. They did not permanently survive despite being made of stone, nor could they make permanent God's relationship with humanity. But the Virgin Mary, humble as she was, became what the Ark and Temple could not be. For in Mary, the Word of God was inscribed, not on tablets of stone, but rather becoming incarnate in her womb – the Word became flesh, not stone. And this incarnation of the Word of God is the one which has become the eternal sign of God's presence. The Ark and Temple described in the Torah were temporary, and were but a preparation for the reality which came in Mary's womb – the incarnation of the Son of God. And Mary and Her Son are the permanent sign of God's Word in our midst – something that even those tablets of stone could not become.

The 10 Commandments, given to us by God, are not the permanent sign of God's presence with us, but rather it is the incarnation of the Word of God – Jesus Christ who is our Saviour and redeemer.

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The only means
by which you can
spend the day
in perfect holiness,
peace,
and without sin,
is the most sincere,
fervent prayer
as soon as you rise
from sleep in the
morning.
It will bring Christ into
your heart,
with the Father and
the Holy Spirit ..."



St John of Kronstadt

Jesus is for us what the tablets of stone could never be – our salvation, our way of union with our God.

God's Word is a living Word – it is Jesus Christ, not a tablet of stone, not a book in print, but a human who is God incarnate. And God's true temple turns out not to be a massive and beautiful building of permanent stone and marble and granite, but a beautiful woman who God chose because of what He saw in her. God's plan was not that His Word become stone, but rather that His Word become flesh. God's salvation occurs not by God becoming etched into a rock, but by His becoming human so that we humans can be united to Him. God in the flesh, God united to humanity, not law written on stone which is our salvation. We Christians give thanks for the incarnation which is our salvation. That is why we so honor the Virgin.

And perhaps that is why some who think salvation comes from God's Word written on stone tablets find it difficult to honor the Virgin Mother of God.

And in the Feast of the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple we celebrate in thanksgiving this Virgin who is God's temple, the Theotokos, who becomes for us the mother of our salvation. A permanent sign of God's abiding love – a sign now eternal in heaven, eclipsing all the temple could ever be. And we honor her for what she has become to the entire world.

More honourable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, she gave birth to God the Word.

True Theotokos, we magnify you.

-Fr Ted Bobosh

NATIVITY FAST

As of today, all Christians are called upon to begin the great fast for the Great Feast of our Lord's Nativity. We are reminded why this fast was set by the Holy Fathers.

In the Old Testament, Moses fasted for forty days in the desert of Egypt with no food and no water in order to receive the Law, the Ten Commandments, we on the other hand, fast for forty days, not like Moses who did so without food and drink at all, but just abstaining from certain food on certain days, and this; not simply to receive the Law like Moses, but the Lawgiver Himself; Christ our Almighty God, so fasting is the very least we can do. Fasting should also be combined with other things such as prayer, repentance and confession, receiving the Holy Gifts, helping people in need, and feeding poor people.

Let us all with God's help, try to start fasting as of today and we will begin to see how much it will affect our lives, but to do so we must try to believe in what we are doing, we must ask God to help us believe, we must ask for His help and great mercy so that our hearts may become the same cave which our Lord Jesus Christ will be born in. May Christ Bless you all and may he forgive us. Amen.

-Hieromonk Sozomenos

Saints Constantine & Helen Parish and Holy Chapel of Saint Nektarios, Birmingham, UK.

NOVEMBER 16

Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew

He was a Galilean, the son of Alphaeus, and was originally named Levi. He was a tax-collector (an occupation despised by the Jews of Palestine) until he met the Lord, who said to him, "Follow me." From that day he was one of the disciples.

After the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Apostle was appointed to bring the Gospel to his fellow Jews, for whom, according to the Church's tradition, he wrote down the Gospel for the first time, in the Aramaic language, eight years after the Ascension. Some years later, this book was translated into Greek by St James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem. No copy in the original language has survived.

Later, St Matthew travelled to Parthia and the city of Hierapolis (on the Euphrates river) to proclaim the Gospel to the pagans there. One tradition holds that he reposed in peace in that region at a great age. Another tradition holds that he was martyred by a king of that region, who later repented and was baptized, taking the name Matthew. The king then cast down the idols and established the Christian faith in his realm.

When St Matthew is portrayed in icons, the likeness of a man is shown with him, one of the four living creatures spoken of in the first chapter of Ezekiel. St Irenaeus writes that the man symbolizes Christ's Incarnation.

A MEDITATION ON ALMSGIVING

Christ commanded his disciples to give alms. To "give alms" means literally "to do" or "to make merciful deeds" or "acts of mercy." According to the Scriptures, the Lord is compassionate and merciful, longsuffering, full of mercy, faithful and true. He is the one who does merciful deeds (see Psalm 103).

Acts of mercy are an "imitation of God" who ceaselessly executes mercy for all, without exception, condition or qualification. He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Mercy is a sign of love. God is Love. A deed of merciful love is the most Godlike act a human being can do. "Being perfect" in Matthew's Gospel corresponds to "being merciful" in Luke's Gospel. "Perfection" and "being merciful" are the same thing. To love as Christ loves, with the love of God who is Love, is the chief commandment for human beings according to Christianity. It can only be accomplished by God's grace, by faith. It is not humanly possible. It is done by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Acts of mercy must be concrete, physical actions. They cannot be "in word and speech, but in deed and truth" (First letter of John and letter of James).

Acts of mercy are acts done to Christ himself who was hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, in prison and sick in the form of being wounded for our transgressions on the cross, taking up our wounds, and dying our death. Christian acts of mercy must be sacrificial. By this, we understand that we must not simply give to others what is left over. We have to be sharing our possessions with others in ways that limit ourselves in some way (The Widow's Mite). And, acts of mercy should be done without qualification or condition to everyone, no matter who, what or how they are (Parable of the Good Samaritan).

-Fr. Thomas Hopko