



Parish Information Bulletin

Program for 23—29 May 2021

CHRISTOS ANESTI ! CHRIST IS ARISEN!

SUNDAY 23 MAY

Sunday of the Paralytic, John 5: 1-15

- 7.30am
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

2021 SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL AGES

(A free voluntary program organised by the Church)

Lessons take place in the building behind the church and begin at 10.30am 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.

MONDAY 24 MAY

- 8.45am
Service of Holy Unction
- 10.00am
Meeting of Elderly Citizens in Church Hall.

WEDNESDAY 26 MAY

- 5.00pm
Paraklesis to the Theotokos

THURSDAY 27 MAY St John the Russian

- 7.30am
Orthros and Divine Liturgy
- 7.30—8.30pm

TEENAGE YOUTH GROUP

ALL TEENAGERS WELCOME

Join the group and learn about your faith, make friends, enjoy refreshments, in a friendly, relaxing environment.

➤ In Church Hall, upstairs behind the Church

SUNDAY 30 MAY

GOSPEL READING: John 4: 5-42
EPISTLE READING: Acts 11: 19-30

Telephone Contact Numbers

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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.

St. John the Russian, the New Confessor of Prokopion and Evia

"The Holy Confessor John the Russian was born in Little Russia around 1690, and was raised in piety and love for the Church of God. Upon attaining the age of maturity he was called to military service, and he served as a simple soldier in the army of Peter I and took part in the Russo-Turkish War. During the Prutsk Campaign of 1711 he and other soldiers were captured by the Tatars, who handed him over to the commander of the Turkish cavalry. He took his Russian captive home with him to Asia Minor, to the village of Prokopion.

The Turks tried to convert the Christian soldiers to the Moslem faith with threats and flattery, but those who resisted were beaten and tortured. Some, alas, denied Christ and became Moslems, hoping to improve their lot. St John was not swayed by the promise of earthly delights, and he bravely endured the humiliation and beatings.

His master tortured him often in the hope that his slave would accept Islam. St John resolutely resisted the will of his master saying, "You cannot turn me from my holy Faith by threats, nor with promises of riches and pleasures. I will obey your orders willingly, if you will leave me free to follow my religion. I would rather surrender my head to you than to change my faith. I was born a Christian, and I shall die a Christian."

St John's bold words and firm faith, as well as his humility and meekness, finally softened the fierce heart of his master. He left John in peace, and no longer tried to make him renounce Christianity. The saint lived in the stable and took care of his master's animals, rejoicing because his bed was a manger such as the one in which the Savior was born.

From morning until late evening the saint served his Turkish master, fulfilling all his commands. He performed his duties in the winter cold and summer heat, half naked and barefoot. Other slaves frequently mocked him, seeing his zeal. St John never became angry with them, but on the contrary, he helped them when he could, and comforted them in their misfortune.

The saint's kindness and gentle nature had its effect on the souls of both the master and the slaves. The Agha and his wife came to love him, and offered him a small room near the hayloft. St John did not accept it, preferring to remain in the stable with the animals. Here he slept on the hay, covered only by an old coat. So the stable became his hermitage, where he prayed and chanted Psalms.

St John brought a blessing to his master simply by living in his household. The cavalry officer became rich, and was soon one of the most powerful men in Prokopion. He knew very well why his home had been blessed, and he did not hesitate to tell others.

Sometimes St John left the stable at night and went to the church of the Great Martyr George, where he kept vigil in the narthex. On Saturdays and Feast days, he received the Holy Mysteries of Christ.

During this time St John continued to serve his master as before, and despite his own poverty, he always helped the needy and the sick, and shared his meager food with them.

One day, the officer left Prokopion and went to Mecca on pilgrimage. A few days later, his wife gave a banquet and invited her husband's friends and relatives, asking them to pray for her husband's safe return. St John served at the table, and he put down a dish of pilaf, his master's favorite food. The hostess said, "How much pleasure your master would have if he could be here to eat this pilaf with us." St John asked for a dish of pilaf, saying that he would send it to his master in Mecca. The guests laughed when they heard his words. The mistress, however, ordered the cook to give him a dish of pilaf, thinking he would eat it himself, or give it to some poor family.

Taking the dish, St John went into the stable and prayed that God would send it to his master. He had no doubt that God would send the pilaf to his master in a super natural manner. The plate disappeared before his eyes, and he went into the house to tell his mistress that he had sent the pilaf to his master.

After some time, the master returned home with the copper plate which had held the pilaf. He told his household that on a certain day (the very day of the banquet), he returned from the mosque to the home where he was staying. Although the room was locked, he found a plate of steaming pilaf on the table. Unable to explain who had brought the food, or how anyone could enter the locked room, the officer examined the plate. To his amazement, he saw his own name engraved on the copper plate. In spite of his confusion, he ate the meal with great relish.

When the officer's family heard this story, they marveled. His wife told him of how John had asked for a plate of pilaf to send to his master in Mecca, and how they all laughed when John came back and said that it had been sent. Now they saw that what the saint had said was true (Compare the story of Habakkuk, who miraculously brought a dish of pottage to Daniel in the lions' den [Dan. 14:33-39], in the Septuagint).

Toward the end of his difficult life St John fell ill, and sensed the nearness of his end. He summoned the priest so that he could receive Holy Communion. The priest, fearing to go to the residence of the Turkish commander openly with the Holy Gifts, enclosed the life-giving Mysteries in an apple and brought them to St John.

St John glorified the Lord, received the Body and Blood of Christ, and then reposed. The holy Confessor John the Russian went to the Lord Whom he loved on May 27, 1730. When they reported to the master that his servant John had died, he summoned the priests and gave them the body of St John for Christian burial. Almost all the Christian inhabitants of Prokopion came to the funeral, and they accompanied the body of the saint to the Christian cemetery.

Three and a half years later the priest was miraculously informed in a dream that the relics of St John had remained incorrupt. Soon the relics of the saint were transferred to the church of the holy Great Martyr George and placed in a special reliquary. The new saint of God began to be glorified by countless miracles of grace, accounts of which spread to the remote cities and villages. Christian believers from various places came to Prokopion to venerate the holy relics of St John the Russian and they received healing through his prayers. The new saint came to be venerated not only by Orthodox Christians, but also by Armenians, and even Turks, who prayed to the Russian saint, "Servant of God, in your mercy, do not disdain us."

Once, the Turks had sacked the church with St. John's body while it was in in Asia Minor. They then proceeded to throw the Saint's body into the fire to burn it. However, they soon saw the Saint appear as if he were alive and arise and walk amidst the flames; the Turks then fled in fear. This is the reason that the Saint's body is darkened to this day from the smoke of the flames. However, it nonetheless remained utterly incorrupt and wonderworking.

SUNDAY OF THE PARALYTIC

The first two Sundays after Easter Sunday gave us the mystery of the Resurrection to contemplate, from various aspects. The third, which is called the 'Sunday of the Paralytic', seems—as do the two Sundays after it—foreign to the cycle of the Resurrection. This Sunday is dedicated to commemorating a miracle which, historically, belongs to the early days of Jesus' ministry. But the Church meditates on it today because it is one of the 'very great' miracles (if we can be allowed to distinguish between major the minor miracles); we mean that, from the seriousness of the illness that was cured, from the length of time it had lasted, from the circumstances which surround the healing, the miracle worked on the paralytic's behalf bears witness to the Saviour's authority over the human body in a particularly impressive way. On the Saturday evening, at vespers for this Sunday, the choir sings: 'O Christ, compassionate God. Thou didst come and heal the afflicted man'. Moreover, Jesus' power to heal is intimately linked with the Resurrection; for it proclaims that he who can overcome death in his own body has power over all human flesh. Our Lord can heal the paralytic, because he himself can rise from the dead. And that is why the commemoration of this healing can, if not chronologically, at least spiritually, find a place at Easter time.

The account of the healing of the paralytic is read at the liturgy, as the gospel for Sunday (John 5. 1-15). In Jerusalem, near the pool of Bethesda. Jesus sees a crowd of the ill and infirm who are waiting for the water to be moved by an angel of the Lord: this phenomenon happened at certain intervals, and, after its occurrence, the first sick person to step into the water was healed. Amongst these sick people is a man who has suffered from paralysis for thirty eight years". Jesus asks him if he wants to be healed. He answers that he has no one to help him down to the pool and that he is always overtaken by others. Jesus says to him:

'Rise, take up thy bed and walk'. The man is healed immediately. The Jews protest because the healing has taken place on the Sabbath. Jesus finds the man in the Temple and says to him: 'Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee'.

The immediate significance of this gospel is Jesus' sovereign power over illness. A secondary significance which the gospel points to is the connection between physical illness and sin: we are not told clearly that this man was ill because he had sinned, but Jesus says that he has and that if he sins again, a more terrible consequence will follow. We can indeed be thankful that God, in his mercy, does not always allow our repeated sins to have such distressing repercussions on our bodies! ¹

¹ *The Year of Grace of the Lord*, by a Monk of the Eastern Church

At the pool near the Sheep Gate a man lay in sickness. Seeing You, Lord, he cried out;
"I have no man to put me in the pool when the water is stirred!"...
And the Saviour, moved by compassion, said to him: "For you I became man;
for you I took on flesh — and you say I have no man? Take up your bed and walk!"

Vesper Hymn, Sunday of the Paralytic