



Parish Information Bulletin

Program for 5—11 December 2021

SUNDAY 5 DECEMBER

10th SUNDAY OF LUKE, Luke 13: 10-17

- 7.00am— Orthros and Divine Liturgy
- 10.00am—Divine Liturgy
- 7.00PM— Divine Liturgy

MONDAY 6 DECEMBER

St Nicholas the Wonderworker

- 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.

SUNDAY 12 DECEMBER

GOSPEL READING: John 10: 9-16

EPISTLE READING: Ephesians 5: 8-19

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.

The Conception by St. Anna of the Most Holy Theotokos

December 9

For many years, the Righteous Joachim and Anna could not conceive as Anna was barren and for this, they were treated harshly by many around them. Childlessness in that time was considered a punishment from God for their sin. This did not stop the righteous ones from praying for a child, promising to dedicate it to God. When the couple were of an advanced age, the Archangel Gabriel announced to them that they would bear a child. Truly, the Righteous Anna bore the Most Holy Theotokos on this day, the beginning of the salvation of mankind.

A miracle of St Nicholas the Wonderworker of Myra

A ship was once sailing from Egypt to Myra when a violent storm arose, churning up the sea.

The sails were torn, and it seemed that the vessel itself would be crushed by the mighty waves.

The passengers were in despair of their lives when they remembered the great hierarch Nicholas.

Although none of them had ever seen him, they had heard that he was the quick helper of those who call on him in misfortune, so they turned to him in prayer, begging his assistance.

The saint immediately appeared, announcing, "You called for me, and I have come to help you!"

He took the helm and began piloting the ship, calming the storm, as once did the Lord, Who said, *He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also.*

Because he was a faithful servant of God, Nicholas gave commands to the wind and sea and they obeyed him. Sped by a fair wind, the boat reached Myra, and the passengers disembarked, hoping to see the holy Bishop.

They met the saint on his way to church, and recognizing their benefactor, fell at his feet, thanking him.

The wondrous Nicholas did not merely deliver them from danger of physical death, but took thought for the salvation of their souls as well.

Because he was clairvoyant, he perceived that some of the passengers were defiled by fornication, which estranges a man from God and causes him to neglect the Lord's commandments.

"Children," he said to them, "I beseech you to correct your hearts and thoughts, so that you may be pleasing to God. Consider that although we may reckon ourselves to be righteous and frequently succeed in deceiving men, we can conceal nothing from God. Let us therefore strive to preserve the holiness of our souls and to guard the purity of our bodies with all fervor." [...]

So saying, the blessed one, like a loving father, let them depart in peace.

Saint Nicholas' countenance resembled that of an angel, splendid with divine grace. A brilliant ray shone from his face, as from Moses', so that those who looked at him were astonished.

Whoever was oppressed by some affliction or passion of soul had only to lay eyes on the saint, and his sorrow was eased at once.

As for those who conversed with him, they soon found themselves advancing on the path of virtue.

Not only the faithful but unbelievers as well were moved to compunction and directed their steps toward salvation when they heard his sweet lips speak; the evil of unbelief implanted in their hearts since childhood was uprooted, and in its place the word of truth was sown.

Dimitri of Rostov (1651-1709; Russian Orthodox): The Life of Our Father Among the Saints Nicholas the Wonder-worker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia from The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, Volume 2: October, compiled by St. Demetrius of Rostov @ Chrysostom Press.

Straightening Ourselves to Our Full Height

And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to wandering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day? And when He had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him (Luke 13:10-17).

A woman who for eighteen years could not straighten herself was healed by the Divine power of the Lord Saviour. This instance, related by the Evangelist Luke, reminds us of the miraculous healing that takes place with every person who encounters Christ on his life's path.

The lives of many of us in this world are such that, over the years, we gradually buckle under the weight of the load entrusted to us. This might be the load of earthly cares, experiences, and insoluble problems; this might be the cross that has been placed upon our shoulders: the sickness that has visited us, or the share of trials that has befallen us; this might be the sins with which we lack the strength to cope. We bend under the weight of all this.

It sometimes seems to us that there is nothing in this world apart from the difficult earthly situation in which we find ourselves. Until she was healed by Christ, the bowed woman saw only the patch of ground under her feet. In just the same way, we often do not see that which is above us, or even that which is on the same level with us, only seeing that which is under our feet. Immersed in earthly affairs and worries, we forget that, beside that tiny scrap of land given to us by lot, there exists something infinitely greater and more beautiful: the whole world with its expanses of land and sea; the sky with its luminaries and stars; and, finally, the Heavenly Kingdom, to which we are all called, for an abode has been prepared therein for each one of us.

By coming to church, we have the opportunity to come into contact with this higher, other reality in our own living experience. The Church helps us to straighten ourselves up spiritually, to forget the earthly and remember the heavenly, to turn away from the material and the "here," and to turn towards the spiritual and the "there."

By healing the bowed woman, the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrates what He expects of each one of us. He expects us to stand before Him in our full height, that we would grow, as the Apostle Paul says, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13); that we would straighten up, spread our wings, and draw in a deep breath. The Lord wishes us to be mindful of our lofty, heavenly calling: to be children of God, to be inhabitants of the heavenly city, of the Jerusalem on high.

It often happens that people of faith bend under the weight of their own sins. It sometimes also happens that they are bowed down to the earth under the burden of their repentance for the sins they have committed. Their experience of remorse for what they have done does not give them the strength to correct themselves; it does not inspire them towards the ascetic struggle of moral self-improvement, towards the fulfilment of God's commandments, towards active virtue; it only casts them down into a despondency even greater than that which they experienced before recognizing their sins.

A spiritual error lies at the root of such "repentance." The Lord does not want us to buckle under the weight of our feelings of personal unworthiness. When we approach the Holy Chalice we confess sincerely and wholeheartedly our faith that the Lord has come "to save sinners, of whom I am chief." If we do not have such a feeling, then we cannot worthily partake of Communion; if we consider even a single person to be worse than ourselves, this means that we are not yet ripe for an encounter with Christ. But in recognizing ourselves as sinners, and in seeing the whole abyss of wickedness that lies within us, we should not therefore give way to despondency and despair. We should remember that, as St. Isaac the Syrian says, no human sin – no matter how grievous – can overpower the mercy of God. All our sins taken together, in the words of St. Isaac, are like a handful of sand thrown into the ocean of God's mercy, where it dissolves and disappears without a trace.

The Church gives us the opportunity to focus not on ourselves, but on God; to reorient our attention away from ourselves, in our own circumstances of life, and towards the Heavenly Kingdom, of which we can become a part. Regardless of all of our sins and of our inability to rise to the level at which Christians should live; regardless of the fact that we are unable to fulfil Christ's commandments, which, so it seems to us, exceed human strength – regardless of all of this, we still have the opportunity for continual spiritual renewal here, in the Church, through Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, through prayer, and through the divine services.

The Church grants us new strengths for us to grow spiritually, to advance from strength to strength, to straighten ourselves up more and more, becoming ever less mindful of the earth and turning all the more to Heaven. The closer a person comes to God, the more he perceives his own sinfulness; yet the perception of God's nearness simultaneously increases in him. And then repentance becomes a joy, like recovery after a long illness, like straightening up after many years of being deformed and crooked.

Let us walk together with Christ, and together with one another, on the straight path, not halting for a day, an hour, or a minute! Let us ascend to the habitations of the Heavenly Kingdom, where a place awaits each one of us, if only we will prove ourselves worthy of God!

Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev)