



## Parish Information Bulletin

### Program for 31 July - 6 August 2022

<b>SUNDAY 31 JULY</b>	<b>7th SUNDAY OF MATTHEW, Matthew 9: 27-35</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy</li></ul>
<b>2022 SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL AGES</b> (A free voluntary program organised by the Church) <b>Lessons take place in the building behind the church and begin at 10.30am until Church dismissal.</b> 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.	
<b>PLEASE NOTE:</b> Dormition Fast: 1—14 August)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5.00pm <b>PARAKLESIS TO THE THEOTOKOS will take place daily</b> (except on 5th August which will be replaced by Vespers for the Holy Transfiguration and 14th August for Dormition of the Theotokos.)</li></ul>
<b>MONDAY 1 AUGUST</b> <i>Dormition Fast Begins</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 10.00am Meeting of Elderly Citizens in Church Hall</li></ul>
<b>FRIDAY 5 AUGUST</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5.00pm Vespers for the Holy Transfiguration of our Lord</li></ul>
<b>SATURDAY 6 AUGUST</b> <i>Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy</li></ul>
<b>SUNDAY 7 AUGUST</b>	<b>GOSPEL READING: Matthew 14: 14-22</b> <b>EPISTLE READING: 1Corinthians 1: 10-17</b>

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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 Mother of God

"The Most Holy Mother of God prays for us ceaselessly. She is always visiting us. Whenever we turn to her in our heart, she is there. After the Lord, she is the greatest protection for mankind. How many churches there are in the world that are dedicated to the Most Holy Mother of God! How many healing springs where people are cured of their ailments have sprung up in places where the Most Holy Theotokos appeared and blessed those springs to heal both the sick and the healthy! She is constantly, by our side, and all too often we forget her." ~ Elder Thaddeus

### The Transfiguration of our Lord

He took (Peter, James and John) up to the mountain, that He might show them His kingdom, before they witnessed His suffering and death...so that...they might understand that he was not crucified...because of his own powerlessness, but because it had please Him of His goodness to suffer for the salvation of the world." ~ St. Ephraim

### 7th SUNDAY OF MATTHEW, Matthew 9: 27-35

#### Transfigured Sight and Speech

It has never been hard to find people who view Jesus Christ in a many different ways. Some use His name as a curse word or otherwise mock Him. Some make Him in their own image as an advocate of whatever agenda they prize most in life. Some view Him as a teacher or prophet to be admired, but not as the Son of God to be worshiped. Today's gospel reading presents Him in a radically different way as One Who restores sight to blind beggars and the ability to speak to a man who had been possessed by a demon. Christ is not simply a miracle worker, of course, but the Saviour of the world Who, as St. Paul wrote, has welcomed us for the glory of God.

We will soon celebrate the feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, when the spiritual eyes of Peter, James, and John were opened to behold Christ's divine glory to the extent that human beings are able to do so. The blind beggars in

our gospel reading were Jews who asked for mercy from the Son of David, a Jewish term for the Messiah, who they believed to be a very righteous human being who could work miracles. Even though their faith was far from perfect, as symbolized by their blindness, the Lord had mercy on them and restored their sight. The Transfiguration displays the full meaning of this miracle, for the God-Man enables us not merely to see the things of this world, but to know His divine glory. Like the beggars, the disciples were Jews who had expected a purely human Messiah, not the Son of God. Though they did not understand Who He was until after His resurrection, they also received their sight from the Lord when their souls were flooded with the brilliant light of His divinity.

On August 1<sup>st</sup> we begin the Dormition Fast, which leads to the feast of the falling asleep in Christ of the Most Holy Theotokos on August 15. Her life on earth ended, but three days after her burial the tomb was found to be empty, as she was the first to follow her Son into the heavenly kingdom as a whole person: body, soul, and spirit. During this period, we abstain from the richest and most satisfying foods and devote ourselves to intensified prayer because we want to become more like the Theotokos, the first and model Christian who received the Saviour into her life in a unique way and stands as a shining example for us all. If we want to behold the light of Christ from the depths of our souls, we must humble ourselves and become blind to the temptation to find the ultimate meaning and purpose of our lives anywhere other than in Him.

That is precisely what the Theotokos did by saying “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word” in response to the message of the Archangel Gabriel that God had chosen her to be the virgin mother of His Son. In that moment, she opened her life fully and completely to Him. Despite seeing Christ rejected and killed, the Theotokos always remained faithful, refusing to abandon Him at His crucifixion and being one of the myrrh-bearing women who went to anoint His dead body. She was the first to hear from the angel the news of resurrection, even as she was obviously the first to hear of His incarnation in her womb. Especially during the Dormition Fast, we focus on becoming like her in spiritual vision.

In today’s gospel reading, the Lord also cast a demon out of a man and restored his ability to speak. This fellow was a Gentile, which is why the people responded, “Never was anything like this seen in Israel,” while “the Pharisees said, ‘He casts out demons by the prince of demons.’” St. Paul made clear to the Christians in Rome, both Jewish and Gentile in heritage, that “together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” No longer enslaved to idolatry with their mouths unable to glorify God, Gentiles may know and glorify the Lord every bit as much as the descendants of Abraham, for the ancient promises extend to all who have faith in the Messiah. The Holy Spirit has united the divided tongues of the tower of Babel such that people of all cultures and backgrounds may join together in the praise of God as members of the household of faith.

Sight and speech are both profoundly important human abilities. Christ restored sight to many blind people and often used images of light, darkness, and vision to convey the good news of salvation. The point was not simply to describe the importance of seeing things in this world, but ultimately to call us to know Him through union in holiness from the depths of our souls. Precisely because she was so radiant with the divine light, the Theotokos could proclaim the prophetic words of the *Magnificat*, which begins: “My soul magnifies the Lord; And my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; Because He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid; For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.” She spoke truthfully in light of her spiritual clarity and experiential knowledge of God.

Except when we fall into hypocrisy, our words generally reveal the true state of our souls. Perhaps that is why the Scriptures contain many warnings about the dangers associated with running our mouths. We read in the Psalms, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.” (Ps. 141:3) Christ taught that we will have to give an account for every idle word that we speak, “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matt. 12:36) It is not what goes into our mouths, but what comes out of them that defiles us. (Matt. 15:11) As St. James wrote, the tongue is small, powerful, and very difficult to control: “It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.” (Jas. 3:6) When we speak words of cursing, condemnation, and corruption, we reveal our spiritual blindness, our lack of full transparency before God.

Of course, we should monitor our speech as best we can, and it is better to keep our mouths shut when we have an evil thought about someone than to share it with them or others. More fundamentally, however, we should see our wicked words as a symptom of the sickness of our souls. In order to gain the spiritual integrity to speak only in ways that glorify God and bless others, the light of Christ must fill our hearts. We must become radiant with the gracious divine energies if we are to speak in a way that manifests the holiness of God.

Let us use the Dormition Fast to become more like the Theotokos in receptivity to the Lord as we unite ourselves to Him in holiness. We must be transfigured from the depths of our souls, as she is, if we are to gain the strength necessary to glorify God and bless our neighbours in all that we say and do. That is why we must humble ourselves by fasting in order to gain strength to redirect our hearts from gratification of self-centred desire to their true fulfilment in God. That is why we must become fully present before God in prayer each day as we open ourselves to His presence in our lives. That is why we must focus on serving our neighbours and not on pleasing ourselves. That is why we must confess and repent of sins that keep us wedded to the darkness. By persistently orienting ourselves to God in this way, we will become more personally receptive to the gracious divine energies and gain the spiritual clarity to behold the glory of the Lord and to speak and act accordingly. The Feast of Christ’s Transfiguration calls each of us to nothing less than to be transfigured in holiness and shine brilliantly by grace with the light of heaven. Let us look to the Theotokos as the greatest example of a human being doing precisely that.

- Fr. Philip LeMasters