



## Parish Information Bulletin

### Program for 21—27 April 2024

<b>SUNDAY 21 APRIL</b>	<b>5TH SUNDAY OF LENT, St Mary of Egypt, Mark 10: 32-45</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>7.30am</b> Orthros and Divine Liturgy</li><li>• <b>6.30pm</b> Service of Lenten Vespers Holy Monastery Axion Esti, Northcote</li></ul>
<b>2024 SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL AGES</b> (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.	
<b>MONDAY 22 APRIL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>9.00am</b> Service of Holy Unction</li><li>• <b>10.00am</b> Meeting of Elderly Citizens in Church Hall</li><li>• <b>5.00pm</b> Service of Great Compline</li></ul>
<b>TUESDAY 23 APRIL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>5.00pm</b> Service of Great Compline</li></ul>
<b>WEDNESDAY 24 APRIL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>8.00am</b> Service of Pre-sanctified Liturgy</li><li>• <b>5.00pm</b> Service of Great Compline</li><li>• <b>7.00pm</b> Service of Pre-sanctified Liturgy IN ENGLISH</li></ul>
<b>THURSDAY 25 APRIL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>5.00pm</b> Service of Great Compline</li><li>• <b>8.00—9.00pm</b> ➡ <b>TEENAGE YOUTH GROUP 2024</b> <b>ALL TEENAGERS WELCOME</b> Join the group and learn about your faith, make friends, enjoy refreshments, in a friendly, relaxing environment. * In Church Hall, upstairs behind the Church</li></ul>
<b>FRIDAY 26 APRIL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>5.00pm</b> Service of Small Compline and Canon of Lazarus</li></ul>
<b>SATURDAY 27 APRIL</b> <i>Saturday of Lazarus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>7.30am</b> Orthros and Divine Liturgy</li></ul>
<b>SUNDAY 28 APRIL</b>	<b>GOSPEL READING: John 12: 1-18</b> <b>EPISTLE READING: Philippians 4: 4-9</b>

#### ST MARY OF EGYPT

On the Fifth Sunday of Lent we celebrate the Feast of St. Mary of Egypt, a harlot who became a saint.

St. Mary was a runaway child who went to Alexandria and became a prostitute. In the course of her life, out of curiosity, she once joined a throng of pilgrims who travelled to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14) and there she did not cease to lead others to sin. However, when she tried to enter into the Church of the Holy Resurrection, an unseen power prevented her from doing so, once, twice, three times, while others around her entered freely. Taking this as a personal sign to her from God, she was cut to the heart by a profound awareness of her own sinfulness. She immediately repented and decided to change her life, embracing the monastic life for over four decades and becoming a saint of the Church. From harlot to saint by the grace of God!

Her Feast is set on the Fifth Sunday of Lent,

*"while the end of Lent is near, so that idlers and sinners may be aroused by repentance, having as an example this saint"*

(Festal Commemoration, Fifth Sunday of Lent).

...../

#### Telephone Contact Numbers

St Vasilios Church  
9387 7693

Fr Athanasios  
9383 4151

Fr Ephraim  
0490 378 215

Website:  
[stvasiliosbrunswick.com](http://stvasiliosbrunswick.com)

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.

A hymn celebrates the example of her conversion with these words:

*Once you were defiled with every impurity,  
but today through repentance you have become  
the Bride of Christ. Desiring the life  
of the angels, you have cast down the  
demons with the weapon of the Cross.  
Therefore, O glorious Mary, you have been  
made a bride of the Kingdom.*

Matin Hymn,

The Fifth Sunday of Lent      Source: *A Year of the Lord*, Theodore Stylianopoulos

### 5TH SUNDAY OF LENT, St Mary of Egypt, Mark 10: 32-45

We come today to the fifth and final Sunday of Great Lent, before we embark on the journey to Golgotha, which begins with the raising of Lazarus and the humble entrance of Christ into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

As we have seen, each Sunday of Lent is dedicated to a particular theme:

1 On the first Sunday, we celebrated not just the victory of Orthodoxy over heresy, but the way in which the theology of icons reminds us of how the entire material world now partakes in the divine life of God by virtue of His incarnation. In other words, how orthodoxy is inseparable from orthopraxy, how physical asceticism is inseparable from the spiritual progress of the soul.

2 On the second Sunday, we celebrated the memory of St Gregory Palamas. Put simply, what distinguished the theology of St Gregory and the hesychasts from that of their Western-minded opponents, was the idea that the person who is “pure in heart” can experience God directly through his divine energies. This is attested to the experiential knowledge of the Orthodox saints, especially in the vision of God’s uncreated light. In other words, the Kingdom of God is something that we begin to experience in the here and now, as are the fruits of our spiritual labours.

3 On the third Sunday, the Veneration of the Cross reminded us of Paradise, the Tree of Life, and the transformative power of God.

4 And the fourth Sunday referred to St John of Sinai, author of the Ladder of Divine Ascent, which is the instruction manual showing us how we are able to attain to these things, as we make our way along the path of repentance; that is, of our reorientation.

Today, the Church puts before us the example of a person who embodies all of these ideas. As we know from her Life, which was written down by St Sophrony of Jerusalem, St Mary of Egypt was someone who had entirely devoted her life to sin. She didn’t sin, as many do, simply because it was convenient, comfortable, easy, or because she experienced moments of weakness. On the contrary, she sacrificed and toiled for sin, she went hungry and lived in poverty and squalor just to have the opportunity for sin. Why? Because she loved sin, and she found in sin the purpose of her life, the meaning of her existence; and not only in her own sin, but in occasioning the fall of others. Every lost soul was for Mary a victory and a source of satisfaction. In other words, we are not just talking about a person who struggled with the temptations and sins of the flesh, but about a demonic way of being.

It was *this* kind of person who found herself in Jerusalem on the day of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross, and decided to enter the church in order to see the True Cross, which was there for veneration. She pushed her way through the crowds outside, and reached the doors of the church. The others passed through the door unhindered, but Mary was unable to enter. She tried again, pushing her way through the crowds, but she was stopped by some invisible force, and she was unable to pass the threshold. She had come to see the Cross of the Lord, the Tree of Life, but found the doors of Eden closed shut.

At this point, for the first time in her life, she came to, and she realised where she was and what she had done. And she began weeping and sighing from the depths of her heart. And I tell you this: with the very first teardrop, with the first sigh, or rather with the first *thought* of true repentance, she already received the forgiveness of God for an entire life of sin. Such is the love of God. He does not hesitate to forgive. He waits for our return, he seeks us, and with the first opportunity, with the first hint and movement of repentance, he rushes in to embrace us.

After this, Mary could enter the church, where she venerated the True Cross, the Lord’s instrument of transformation. And forty-seven years later, when the priest Zosimas found her in the desert, that sinner walked on the water, that prodigal spoke with God as it were face to face, and the feet which previously hastened to cause the fall of the faithful now did not touch the ground as she stood in prayer. The demon of the flesh had become an angel in the flesh.

So, what can we learn from this with regards to our own spiritual life? The first is not to trust in our own strength and abilities. When Mary had tried to enter the church with her own strength, pushing her way through, she was unable to get in. As soon as she let go and put her trust in the Lord, however, she passed through unhindered.

Salvation is not a product of human works, but is a free gift of God’s love. As we say in the prayers of St Basil’s Liturgy, “Not through our own righteousness (for we have done no good deed on earth), but because of Thy mercies and bounties”.

Yes, a great struggle was needed in order for Mary to heal from her former passions – she had spent seventeen years in sin and had to struggle for seventeen whole years in the desert in order to remove all the remnants of her former life from her heart – but this struggle does not take place with our own strength, but with the casting off of our own ego. Just as Mary left all behind, and went into the desert without adequate food, clothing or protection, we also have to leave behind the comfortable familiarity of the passions, without taking anything with us, without placing any hope in our own strength, but rather drinking from the cup which Christ drank and being baptised with the baptism he was baptised with, as today’s Gospel says. In other words, we also have to endure crucifixion, a crucifixion of our ego and pride “with its passions and lusts”. Because the goal of this struggle is not for *me* to achieve something, but for me to be in a position to receive and partake in what God has already done for us. The door to Paradise is open, but narrow, and if we carry with us a big ego, we will not be able to pass through.

Fr Kristian Akselberg

<https://www.standrewsgreekorthodoxcathedral.co.uk>