



## Parish Information Bulletin

### Program for 11—17 August 2024

<b>SUNDAY 11 AUGUST</b>	<b>7TH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW, Matthew 9: 27-35</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>7.30am</b> Orthros and Divine Liturgy</li><li>• <b>5.30pm</b> Paraklesis to the Theotokos</li></ul>
<b>2024 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>MONDAY 12 AUGUST</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>5.30pm</b> Paraklesis to the Theotokos</li></ul>
<b>TUESDAY 13 AUGUST</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>5.30pm</b> Paraklesis to the Theotokos</li></ul>
<b>WEDNESDAY 14 AUGUST</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>5.00pm</b> Service of Vespers for Dormition of the Theotokos</li></ul>
<b>THURSDAY 15 AUGUST</b> <b>DORMITION OF OUR MOST HOLY LADY</b> <b>THEOTOKOS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>7.30am</b> Orthros and Divine Liturgy</li></ul>
<b>SUNDAY 18 AUGUST</b>	<b>GOSPEL READING: Matthew 14: 14-22</b> <b>EPISTLE READING: I Corinthians 1: 10-17</b>

### 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.

### PANAGIA

In Orthodox tradition, the mother of God (Theotokos) is also referred as Παναγία (all-holy). In the Gospel of St. Luke, Mary is referred as “kecharitomenē” full of Grace (Lk. 1:28). She is God’s favoured one. She has found favour with the Lord (Lk. 1:30); her child is called holy (Lk. 1:35).

St. Hippolytus states, without apparent need for explanation, “God the Word descended into the holy Virgin Mary.” St. Epiphanius, in the fourth century, recognizes that Mary is “mother of the living” and that she possesses an uncommon holiness. He states that Mary not only is properly prepared to receive the Word in her womb; she was “graced in every way.”

The mother of God, the all-holy one, constantly prays and intercedes along with all the saints of our Church for the salvation of all. Mary having experienced unjustifiable suffering and grief under the cross of her Son constantly intercedes to Our Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of all, but salvation comes only from God. If this is the case, why then do we pray to her and the saints? As Orthodox Christians we pray for each other and seek the prayers of others on our behalf. This mutual intercession is an essential characteristic of being Christian. To the Christian believer death is not the final barrier, and so the bond of mutual intercession extends beyond the grave. We pray, therefore, for the faithful departed as well as for the living, and we ask those who fallen asleep to pray for us – not knowing exactly how such prayers prove effective, yet confident that in the sight of God’s mercy no prayer offered in faith can ever be wasted. And among all the faithful departed whose prayers we ask, to whom should we turn more frequently and more fervently than to the Holy Virgin?

The meaning, to an Orthodox Christian, of the Virgin’s intercession for the needs of humankind is most beautifully expressed by the title “joy of all who sorrow”, applied to her in eastern devotion:

Thou art the joy of all who sorrow,  
The champion of all who suffer wrong.  
Food to the hungry,  
Comfort to strangers,  
A staff to the blind,  
Visitor of the sick,  
Protection and aid to all in trouble,  
And the helper of orphans.

## Homily for the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen  
Glory to Jesus Christ!

"Blessed are those who hear the word of God, and keep it!" (Lk 11: 28) Sometimes we might come away with the impression, that in this verse, the Lord sounds a little dismissive of His own mother.

But, really, the opposite is true. That is why this verse is read on feast days of the Mother of God. Listen to what Jesus says about the "other Mary", at the beginning of our Gospel:

"And she (Martha) had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.' And Jesus answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.'" (Lk 10: 39-42)  
Think about this, what was it again that Mary was doing?

And near the end of the Gospel reading, there was a woman praising the Lord's mother, and rightly so. But perhaps, she was praising her for more worldly reasons? For having been the woman who nurtured, and raised the Lord. Perhaps not realizing Who the Lord was. Just thinking, "what a good boy she brought up! He turned out well! So well educated, so well spoken!" But, the Lord as always, wants to lift our minds up to a higher level. He wants us to not to look at things in a superficial way. Many are the mothers who love and raise their children well; and in most things just as well as the Mother of God did for her Holy Son, Jesus. But what sets the Mother of God apart from the rest of us? Jesus tells us, at the end of our Gospel reading: "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God, and keep it!" The Mother of God humbly sat at the Lord's feet, and heard His word, and she KEPT it! That means, she didn't just try to memorize His holy words, but she consciously lived each day of her life by them.

And today, we the Church, honour her falling asleep, or Dormition, whom the Lord honoured. St. Gregory Palamas, in his homily on the Dormition, says; "If 'precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints'; (Ps. 115:5 Lxx), and 'the memory of the just is praised' (Prov. 10:7 Lxx), how much more fitting is it for us to celebrate with highest honours the memory of the ever-virgin Mother of God, the Holy of Holies, through whom the saints receive their hallowing? That is exactly what we are doing today by commemorating her holy Dormition and passing away, through which, having been made a little lower than the angels, she rose incomparably higher than the angels, archangels, and all the heavenly powers above them, because of her nearness to the God of all..." (The Homilies pp 289-90).

How important is the Mother of God to us, and for us? Let us listen to this small section from one of the "Prayers of Light" which are read by the priest at the start of vespers: "O Thou who, with never-silent hymns and never-ceasing songs of glory, art hymned by the holy powers; Fill our mouths with thy praise, that we may magnify thy holy name. And grant unto us part and inheritance with all those who fear thee in truth and *keep thy commandments*, through the intercessions of the holy Theotokos and all thy saints." You can almost picture this heavenly scene taking place non-stop.

Where is she now? In the Psalms we read: "The queen stood at Your right hand in apparel interwoven with gold, and adorned and embroidered with various colours." (Ps. 44:10 Lxx). St. Gregory Palamas again explains to us the meaning of these words: "and you should take this garment interwoven with gold to mean her divinely radiant body, adorned with every type of virtue. For at present she is the only one who has a place in heaven with her divinely glorified body in the company of her Son....if a soul which has the grace of God dwelling within it goes up to heaven when released from this world, as we believe and is evident on many accounts, how can that body which not only received within it the pre-eternal, only begotten Son of God, the ever-flowing fount of grace, but was also plainly seen to bear Him, fail to be taken up from earth to heaven?" (Ibid: pg. 292.) Here he is obviously speaking of her bodily assumption after her death.

Isn't it true that we, who are so worldly-minded and, compared to Christ, so bound to sin; even we honour our own mothers? And we remember all that they've done for us, and given to us? If they have passed on from this life, we remember their day of passing. If they are still in this life, at least on Mother's Day we recognize them and wherever they are we send them our expressions of love. If we, who are made in the image of God do at least that much, just think how much more our Lord does for His own mother? What honour He gives her?

Referring again to the homily of St. Gregory Palamas on the subject: "The Mother of God is so much closer to God than others who draw near to Him that she is able to intercede more powerfully than any of them, and by this I mean not just human beings but even all the ranks of angels. Isaiah writes of the highest order of angels in heaven, 'And the seraphim stood round about him' (Isa. 6:2 Lxx), whereas David says of the Mother of God, 'Upon they right hand did stand the queen' (Ps. 45:10). Do you notice the difference in their standing? You can also see from this the difference in honour between the seraphim's rank and hers, for the seraphim are 'round about' God, but only the Queen of all stands beside Him." (Ibid: pp. 294-95.)

We know in the Church, that Christ is the Author of Life, the Giver of Life, the Creator of Life, the Source of Life. He is the Word of God, Who existed before the ages, "Light of Light, true God of true God, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man." In the Church we know, that the Lord did not use the Mother of God as some sort of utilitarian earthly tool, to accomplish His irresistible Will. She was someone who was foreseen, prophesied, and lived a holy life dedicated to God, out of love for God. Long before she knew she would become the Mother of God, she was a very special, one-of-a-kind woman, who would be seen by God as worthy of being His own mother! She cooperated with Him in the salvation of mankind. She, together with the Holy Spirit, is the source of the Source of Life! And as one who so loved God, she is so very much loved by Him. And as we know in the Church, we have a very strong and fervent hope, protection, and advocate in her!

And now, from the end of St. Gregory's homily, part of a prayer to the Mother of God: "Therefore, O Lady, generously share your mercy and your graces with all your people, your inheritance. Rescue us from the terrors that encompass us. See how many dangers of all kinds afflict us, from our own people, and from strangers, from within and without. Through your power turn everything for the best. Bring mutual calm between fellow-citizens at home, and drive away those who attack like wild beasts from outside. Bestow your aid and healing on us to counteract our passions, and give our souls and bodies abundant grace sufficient for every need. And if we are unable to contain it, increase our capacity and give us more, that saved and strengthened by your grace we may glorify the per-eternal Word, who took flesh from you for our sake, together with His Father without beginning and the life-giving Spirit, now and forever and unto unending ages. Amen." (Ibid Pg. 297). Glory to Jesus Christ!  
by Fr. John Karcher <https://stnicholasportland.org>