



SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH

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NATIVITY OF THE HOLY PROPHET, FORERUNNER AND BAPTIST JOHN

TONE 3—Seven Martyred Brothers: Orentius, Pharnacius, Eros, Firmus, Firminus, Cyriacus, and Longinus, in Georgia (4th c.). Ven. Anthony, Abbot of Dymsk (Novgorod—1224).

FIRST ANTIPHON

It is good to praise the Lord, to chant unto Thy Name, O Most High! R.: Through the inter-cessions of the Theotokos, Savior, save us! To proclaim in the morning Thy mercy, and Thy truth by night! (R.:) Upright is the Lord our God and there is no unrighteousness in Him (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (R.:)

SECOND ANTIPHON

The Lord is King, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength and has girt Himself! (R.:) Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, "Alleluia"! For He established the world which shall not be shaken! (R.:) Holiness befits Thy house, O Lord, unto length of days! (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten ...)

LITTLE ENTRANCE

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ! O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, save us who sing to Thee: "Alleluia"!

TROPARION OF THE RESURRECTION (Tone 3): Let the heavens rejoice, and the earth be glad, for the Lord hath done a mighty act with His own arm. He hath trampled down death by death, and become the first-born from the dead. He hath delivered us from the depths of Hades, granting the world great mercy!

TROPARION FOR THE NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST (Tone 4, special melody): O prophet and Forerunner of Christ God's coming to us, * all we who with longing now extol thee are at a loss to honor thee worthily. * For thy mother's barrenness and father's long silence, * by thine all-renowned and hallowed birth, were both ended, * and the Incarnation of the Son of God is preached unto all the world.

TROPARION OF SAINT ANTHONY THE GREAT (Tone 4): Like the zealous Elijah thou didst become and followed John the Baptist in his upright ways. A dweller in the wilderness, thou didst steady the world by prayer. O Father Anthony, intercede with Christ our God for our souls' salvation.

KONTAKION FOR ORDINARY SUNDAYS (Tone 4): O protection of Christians that cannot be put to shame, mediation unto the Creator most constant, O despise not the suppliant voices of those who have sinned; but be thou quick, O good one, to come unto our aid, who in faith cry unto thee: Hasten to intercession, and speed thou to make supplication, thou who dost ever protect, O Theotokos, them that honor thee.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: The righteous shall rejoice in the Lord. O God, hear my voice when I cry unto Thee.

The Reading is from the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans

(Rom 13:11-14:4) Brethren: salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinion. One believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for God is able to make him stand.

The Epistle reading prescribed for the birth of St. John the Baptist—"the greatest among those born of a woman," as the Lord himself called him—speaks about "casting off the works of darkness and putting on the armor of light." This is a metaphor drawn from military life, very apt for a spiritual warrior who showed that living with God requires discipline, constant renunciation of evil, constant vigilance, and courage to bear witness to God even at the cost of one's life.

The Baptist was renowned for his many years of seclusion from public life, and for his rigorous fasting and intense prayer—not exactly the circumstances of most Christians. It is interesting, therefore, that the Church has selected this reading, which also contains a corrective to possible misuses of the example set by St. John. In short, we hear that, far more important than the ascetic struggle is our relationship with our neighbor. The Apostle is quite explicit: **Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats.** The Lord Jesus himself was accused (hypocritically, of course) of not measuring up to the standard set by John the Baptist: **The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners."** (Luke 7:34).

Nobody in Church has any kind of standing to look down on others. As St. Paul explains, using an example from ancient society, **Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls.** Whatever we think we might "achieve" through fasting and praying must grow out of humility, and lead to increased humility: *God* is the Lord, we are not; *God* judges, we do not; our assignment for now is simply to entrust ourselves to Him, asking Him to heal our many infirmities.

As we celebrate the extraordinary figure of the holy Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist John, we receive a word of encouragement: "salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand"; and, even though we are light years away from the saintly example set before us, each one of us will be upheld, for God is able to make us stand.

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Luke

(Luke 1:1-25, 57-68, 76, 80) Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed. In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the

daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter the Temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth; for he will be great before the Lord, and he shall drink neither wine nor strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." And the people were waiting for Zacharias, and they wondered at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak to them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he made signs to them and remained dumb. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she hid herself, saying, "Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men." Now the time came for Elizabeth to be delivered, and she gave birth to a son. And her neighbors and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; they would have named him Zacharias after his father, but his mother said, "Not so; he shall be called John." And they said to her, "None of your kindred is called by this name." And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, "His name is John." And they all marveled. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea; and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him. And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people. And you, child, will be called the Prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways." And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his manifestation to Israel.

Since we are celebrating the birth of St. John the Baptist, we read from the Gospel of Luke, where the story is recorded. Leaving aside the sequence of events, let us notice that this Gospel begins and ends in the Temple. In chapter 1, Luke begins his account by telling us of what occurred one day, when a certain priest went into the temple to burn incense, according to the custom of the priesthood (Luke 1:8-9). And Luke's last chapter tells us that, after the Lord's Ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy and stayed continually at the temple, praising God (Luke 24:53).

John was born to a priestly family, and, under normal circumstances, he would have exercised his priesthood, serving like his father in the Temple. The Christian faith is the heir and fulfilment of what used to happen in the Temple, namely meeting the Lord. True, it is no longer the Lord in a partial and anticipatory appearances to a select few, but the Lord in the flesh, who meets us where we are: in the flesh, here and now, on a Sunday morning and each hour of our lives. And when we confess that we are looking for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come," we are confessing that the Church awaits the Day when "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Rev. 21:22).

Of course, Saint John was a prophet—the greatest and last of the prophets of Israel, who saw and touched the Awaited One, the Messiah. Today's Gospel also teaches about how we are to receive the

prophetic ministry of the Old Testament. First, Zechariah receives a prophetic oracle (“Do not be afraid, Zacharias ... Elizabeth will bear you a son ... you shall call his name John ... he will be great before the Lord ... he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord ... to make ready for the Lord a people prepared”). When Zechariah cannot bring himself to receive the oracle as true, he is reduced to silence—a pedagogical inducement to renounce disbelief—until the unbelievable will become manifest before his very eyes. When we embrace the word of God, we are simply catching up with the reality that God brings about. When we confess that we are looking for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, we are beginning to take hold of what God has already decreed for us: resurrection and life eternal.

Finally, we note that the Evangelist mentions the Holy Spirit: when his tongue is finally loosened, “Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying ...”; similarly, when St. John’s mother, Elizabeth meets the (also pregnant) Theotokos Mary, “Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41); and the Elder Symeon, “moved by the Spirit, went into the temple courts ... and took the baby in his arms ...” (Luke 2:25-28). Most importantly, the Archangel says about St. John, “he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb!”

And yet ... here is a story from the earliest times of the Christian Church. When St. Paul arrived in the city of Ephesus, “there he found some disciples and asked them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ They answered, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ So Paul asked, ‘Then what baptism did you receive?’ ‘John’s baptism,’ they replied. Paul said, ‘John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them ...” (Acts 19:2-6). There is much to learn here. For now, let us only note that as a holy prophet, as baptizer of the Lord and his forerunner, St. John is, indeed, great. How much greater, unbelievably greater, is what we have received in Baptism: *the seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit!*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sts. Peter and Paul (Ukrainian) Church are inviting us to join them for their Patronal Feast.

- Thursday, June 28, at 4 PM: Great Vespers
- Friday, June 29, 9 AM: Festal Orthros; 10 AM: Divine Liturgy

The St. John (Maximovich) Orthodox Mission of Cranberry invites us to attend their First Feast Day. Services will be held at the Cranberry Community Park (111 Ernie Mashuda Drive, Cranberry Township).

- Friday, June 29: Great Vespers at the Jaycees Shelter.
 - Saturday, June 30, 9:30 AM (Hours) and 10 AM (Divine Liturgy) at the Lion's Shelter.
- Lunch will follow after Liturgy. After lunch Fr. Ignatius will give a talk: "Saint John (Maximovich): A Saint for Our Time and Place." Participants will be free to enjoy playground and ball fields all day!

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Silviu and the Serbanescu family; newborn Jubilee Mae; Sula; Stella & Dimitrios; Ion, Marius & Katherine; Norma; Christine (Abraham); Daniel (Sipos); Venetia (Chrissi’s mom); Barbara (Dollie’s daughter); Maura; Ann; Ed, Peter, John, Jonathan and Joanna; Andrei; John, Janet, Christy (relatives of Jean); Stelian (Cezar’s father); Laura and Stephen, newly married.

DEPARTED: Ross (Chrissi’s friend); Richard Johns; Viorica; Bishop Antoun; Vito (DiPento); Miltiades; Jim and Marion (Raimondi); Stephanie (Yazge); Job; George (Georgiades); Abie (Abraham).