



## SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese  
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### TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

9 December 2018

*TONE 3, Eothonon 6—The Conception by Righteous Anna of the Most-holy Theotokos. Prophetess Anna (Hannah), mother of the Prophet Samuel (ca. 1100 B.C.). St. Sophronius, Archbishop of Cyprus (6th c.). St. Stephen the “New Light” of Constantinople (10th c.).*

#### FIRST ANTIPHON

*It is good to give praise unto the Lord, and to chant unto Thy Name, O Most High! **Refrain:** Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O 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! **Refrain:** Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, Alleluia! **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 the Great Mercy.

TROPARION OF THE CONCEPTION OF THE THEOTOKOS (Tone 4): Today the bonds of barrenness are broken, God has heard the prayers of Joachim and Anna. He has promised them beyond all their hopes to bear the Maiden of God, by whom the uncircumscribed One was born as mortal Man; He commanded an angel to cry to her: “Rejoice, O full of grace, the Lord is with you!”

TROPARION OF SAINT ANTHONY THE GREAT (Tone 4, Russian): 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 THE CONCEPTION OF THE THEOTOKOS (Tone 3): All the world doth celebrate \* Anna's conception \* on this day with festive joy, \* because it came to pass through God; \* for by divine grace she hath conceived \* her that beyond words conceives the Word of God.

## TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

*Prokeimenon: God is wondrous in His saints, the God of Israel! Bless God in the congregations*

*From Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*

Brethren, Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children—but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: "Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband." Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

## TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

*The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Luke*

(Luke 13:10-17) At that time, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. And when Jesus saw her, He called her and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity." And He laid His hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrite! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" As Jesus said this, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by Him.

It is always good to be reminded that Jesus Christ was not a Christian: theologically, He does not "belong" to us—it is we who belong to Him; but also in a basic, historical, sense, He was a first-century Jew, who was addressed as "rabbi" by both his disciples and his opponents, who was circumcised (and we still celebrate the Lord's Circumcision on January 1), who kept the Sabbath,

went to the Jerusalem Temple and worshipped in synagogues regularly. Today's Gospel says that he was **teaching in the synagogue**.

Nevertheless, this rabbi from Nazareth not only teaches the Law, he also heals miraculously; and, through both teaching and healing, claims extraordinary authority in interpreting the Law. The teaching we receive from today's Gospel is captured best by the famous phrase in Mark 2:27, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath!"

Evidently, this applies just as much to us, Orthodox Christians. It is quite easy to idolize the externals of our faith—rules of worship, rules of piety, rules of Church discipline—and to treat them as independent realities, venerable in themselves. The Lord reminds the Pharisees (*and us*) that all religious laws and practices are only means to an end: they are meant to shape our awareness of God and to reorder our lives in relation to God. Ultimately, one's closeness to God is measured in the sensitivity towards all those created in the image of God. All "religion" that renders one callous and inattentive to the fellow human beings is delusion.

As for the miraculous healing—a chronic illness goes away "at once"—the Gospel speaks about more than just this extraordinary incident. We hear that the woman was "crippled *by a spirit*," so that "she was bent over, completely unable of standing erect," and then that "*Satan* had her bound for eighteen years." The crippled state of the woman is an image of fallen humanity: crippled, infirm, hopelessly under the power of the evil one. Like the woman, we receive, with the advent of the Lord, the truly Good News—may we receive it and make it ours—"you are set free of your infirmity!"

## A WORD ON THE CONCEPTION OF MARY THE THEOTOKOS

Throughout the Eastern Roman empire, from as far back as the fifth century, a feast day was observed on December 9, celebrating the conception of the Theotokos by Joachim and Anna. There was no attempt on the part of the hymn writers of the early church to suggest that there was any other miracle than the conception in the face of prolonged sterility and very old age. This feast day soon became popular with Western Christians, and by the 8th century was celebrated on 8th December.

In the course of time some Western churchmen began teaching that Mary was, from the moment of her conception, "miraculously innocent" of the guilt of original sin. This teaching was bitterly disputed (it was opposed, for instance, by such prominent figures as Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure). Eventually however, in 1854, those who accepted the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception gained the attention of the Pope Pius IX, who effectively ended all the controversy about it by officially promulgating it as an official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The official statement reads as follows: "*The doctrine which declares that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore must be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful of the Roman Catholic Church.*"

In order to understand the position of the Orthodox Church on this teaching we must begin with understanding the Orthodox concept of original sin, as opposed to that of Roman Catholicism.

The Roman Catholic teaching of original sin is based in part on the writings of Blessed Augustine of Hippo, a great thinker and churchman of the fifth century who stated that each human being at the moment of conception shares in the *guilt* of Adam's disobedience. In medieval Western Christianity this original sin was believed to be transmitted in a physical sense through sexual intercourse and conception. It thus became important that Mary be preserved from this supposed "taint." Hence the creation in the ninth century of the doctrine of the "*immaculate* conception."

This doctrine of the Immaculate Conception separates Mary from the rest of the human race, even implying her being exempted from death (which is why many Roman Catholics have a real difficulty with the notion that the Theotokos really, truly *died*, even though she was the first to be raised from the dead by Christ). The "immaculate conception" of Mary would also make it impossible for Christ to inherit from her the common state of fallen human nature.

The Orthodox Church has kept alive the original understanding of the early Church as regards "original sin." The early Church did not understand "original sin" as having anything to do with transmitted guilt but with inherited and shared mortality. Because Adam sinned, all humanity shares not in his guilt but in the same human nature, now become mortal. In the orthodox understanding, original sin is not something that we are guilty of personally, but the mortal state, alienated from God, in which all sons of Adam are born. As humans we sin, and our own guilt is because of our own personal sin. In Orthodox eyes, Mary is human, and through her, God became fully human as well; and there is simply no original guilt from which Mary would have to be somehow excepted.

Often those advocating the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, have sought to discover it in Orthodox writers of the Middle Ages or in Orthodox hymns. It is true that saintly theologians and hymnographers of the Church, such as St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Andrew of Crete, or St. John Damascene, sometimes refer to Mary as having been "prepared," and "sanctified," and who hail her as the "immaculate one," are thinking in the context of the Orthodox view of original sin, not the Augustinian one. We hold that Mary was sanctified through her extraordinary life of prayer and purity in the Temple and through her response to Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation, "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord" (Luke 1:38), which immediately allowed the Word of God to take abode in her and make her into the living temple of God.

During this Advent season, the Orthodox Church frequently remembers the Virgin Mary as a gift of humanity to God, through whom God gave Himself back to humanity. One of our Christmas hymns asks "What shall we offer You, Christ, You Who for our sakes appeared on earth as a man? Every creature which You have made offers You thanks ... We offer You a Virgin Mother. O God before all ages: have mercy on us."

*Edited from an article in "The Word" Magazine.*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Today:** memorial for George (Georgiades).
- **Next Sunday, December 15, 12:30-1:30 pm:** *Sunday School for Adults.* Fr. Bogdan will speak about "The Son of Man and Ancient of Days Born Today in Bethlehem: Learning the Faith from Prophet Daniel and the Tradition of the Church." Come and bring a friend!

### *Remember in your prayers*

LIVING: Norma; grieving Serbanescu and Becker families; Gabriel; Ion, Marius & Katherine (Stan); Karen (Jane Best's daughter); Elisabeth, Chris and Jillian; Sula; Stella & Dimitrios; 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); Edith (Humphrey); Diane.

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