



ST. NEKTARIOS ORTHODOX CHURCH March 2013

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BY THE WATERS

A unique part of our entrance into Great Lent is the singing of Psalm 136/7 on the three Sunday's preceding the beginning of the Fast. This is a psalm of exile sung by the children of Israel as they were held captive by the Babylonians. It is in this condition, that we hear the psalmist say:

By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that had taken us captive, required of us a song; and they that had carried us away required of us a hymn, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.' How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

How keenly do we feel this reality of being in a strange land? Do we feel this at all or are we comfortable with the world around us. At the heart of the Christian message is the fact that we are pilgrims, sojourners passing on to the Kingdom, where the voice of those who feast is unceasing. During Great Lent, we are given the opportunity to see, to hear, to taste, and to feel the reality of our exile. Everything within the Church takes on a different tone, a somber yet sublime aesthetic that opens for us the opportunity of repentance.

Oftentimes, we may feel that during Great Lent, we are being taken captive by the Church, that we are being forced into exile from what we really desire, our lusts and our passions. And maybe we long for and desire the time when we can return to this world and the ease of food and relaxation. Perhaps that is the point for us. The Church *does* captivate us with the increase in services, the rigors of fasting and prayer, the demands it places on us as "slaves to Christ." And perhaps we sit on the shore and lament the loss of our world with all of its pleasures and distractions

and wait for the time of our return.

If I can offer any advice, it would be; do not waste this time. Do not spend all of Great Lent longing for the end and the return to "normal" life. If you long for something, long for repentance. If you desire something, desire the joy of Pascha and the resurrection. If you are impatient for anything, be impatient in your zeal for greater and greater virtue. Do not waste this time. *How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?*

Fr. David

PREPARING FOR GREAT LENT

Some thoughts on Great Lent and how to prepare and participate:

- **Services** – We have a more intense Lenten schedule of services. Please participate. At the outset we gather to hear the *Canon of St. Andrew* (3/18-3/21) and its robust penitential verses. Weekly, we will also gather to receive the Presanctified Gifts on Wednesdays to sustain us in our efforts.
- **Fasting** – The Church's "rules" on fasting are pretty clear. However you choose to participate, be **consistent** and **realistic**. "A sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken heart."
- **Prayer** – Because all of us struggle with daily prayer, Great Lent is an opportune time to recommit to prayer, especially interceding for others. Whatever, your rule of prayer might be, again, be consistent.
- **Alms** – Giving alms is healing for us as Christians. Seek out persons who are in need and give of yourself, not necessarily or only monetarily, but personally. God rewards a cheerful giver. Always.

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS

March 25

The Feast of the Annunciation is one of the earliest Christian feasts, and was already being celebrated in the fourth century. There is a painting of the Annunciation in the catacomb of Priscilla in Rome dating from the second century. The Council of Toledo in 656 mentions the Feast, and the Council in Trullo in 692 says that the Annunciation was celebrated during Great Lent.

The Greek and Slavonic names for the Feast may be translated as “good tidings.” This, of course, refers to the Incarnation of the Son of God and the salvation He brings.

There are two main components to the Annunciation: the message itself, and the response of the Virgin. The message fulfills God’s promise to send a Redeemer (Genesis 3:15): “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; he shall crush your head, and you shall lie in wait for his heel.” The Fathers of the Church understand “her seed” to refer to Christ. The prophets hinted at His coming, which they saw dimly, but the Archangel Gabriel now proclaims that the promise is about to be fulfilled.

The Archangel Gabriel was sent by God to Nazareth in Galilee. There he spoke to the undefiled Virgin who was betrothed to St Joseph: “Hail, thou who art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be

called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

In contrast to Eve, who was readily deceived by the serpent, the Virgin did not immediately accept the Angel’s message. In her humility, she did not think she was deserving of such words, but was actually troubled by them. The fact that she asked for an explanation reveals her sobriety and prudence. She did not disbelieve the words of the angel, but could not understand how they would be fulfilled, for they spoke of something which was beyond nature.

Then said Mary unto the angel, how shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: therefore also that which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible.’ And Mary said, ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.’ And the angel departed from her” (Luke 1: 34-38)."

In his Sermon 23 on the day of the Annunciation, St Philaret of Moscow boldly stated that “the word of the creature brought the Creator down into the world.” He explains that salvation is not merely an act of God’s will, but also involves the Virgin’s free will. She could have refused, but she accepted God’s will and chose to cooperate without complaint or further questions.



The icon of the Feast shows the Archangel with a staff in his left hand, indicating his role as a messenger. Sometimes one wing is upraised, as if to show his swift descent from heaven. His right hand is stretched toward the holy Virgin as he delivers his message.

The Virgin is depicted either standing or sitting, usually holding yarn in her left hand. Sometimes she is shown holding a scroll. Her right hand may be raised to indicate her surprise at the message she is hearing. Her head is bowed, showing her consent and obedience. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon her is depicted by a ray of light issuing from a small sphere at the top of the icon, which symbolizes heaven. In a famous icon from Sinai, a white dove is shown in the ray of light.

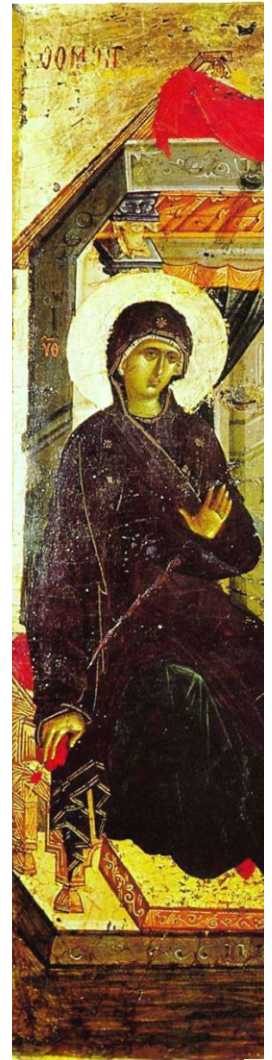
The Annunciation falls during Lent, but it is always celebrated with great joy. The Liturgy of St Basil or St John Chrysostom is served, even on the weekdays of Lent.

(from www.oca.org)

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March 2013

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
27	28	29	30	31	1	2 Catechism 4:30 Great Vespers 6:30
3 Divine Liturgy 9:30	4	5	6 Vespers 6:30	7	8	9 Catechism 4:30 Confession 5:30 Great Vespers 6:30
10 Divine Liturgy 9:30 Meatfare	11	12	13 Vespers 6:30	14 Choir Practice 7:00	15	16 Catechism 4:30 Confession 5:30 Great Vespers 6:30
17 Divine Liturgy 9:30 Cheesefare Forgiveness Vespers	18 Great Canon 7:00	19 Great Canon 7:00	20 Great Canon 7:00	21 Great Canon 7:00	22	23 Catechism 4:30 Confession 5:30 Great Vespers 6:30
24 Divine Liturgy 9:30 Sunday of Orthodoxy	25 Feast of the Annunciation Vesperal Divine Liturgy 6:30	26	27 Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts 6:30	28 Choir Practice 7:00	29	30 Catechism 4:30 Confession 5:30 Great Vespers 6:30
31 Divine Liturgy 9:30 St. Gregory Palamas						



“Today is the beginning of our salvation, the revelation of the eternal mystery! The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin as Gabriel announces the coming of Grace. Together with him let us cry to the Theotokos: Rejoice, O Full of Grace, the Lord is with You!”

Troparion for the Feast of the Annunciation of our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary