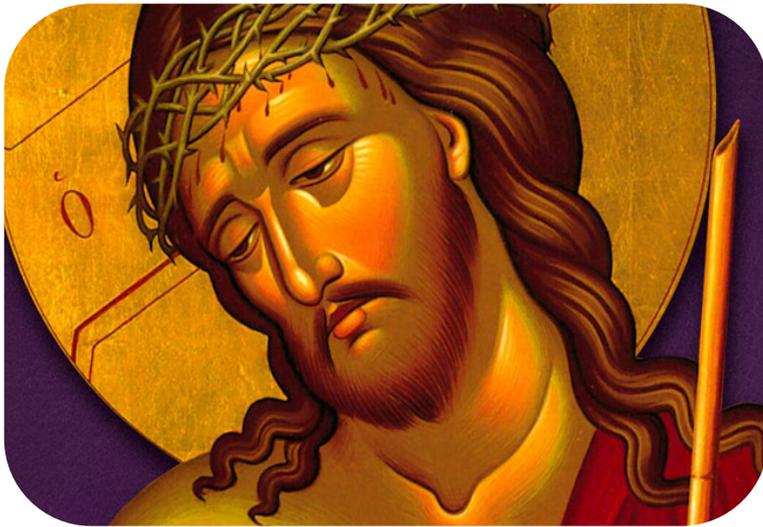


ST. INNOCENT ORTHODOX CHURCH SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

Great Lent, The Time of Renewed Devotion



Let us begin the lenten time with delight...

Let us fast from passions as we fast from food, taking pleasure in the good words of the Spirit, that we may be granted to see the holy passion of Christ our God and his holy Pascha,

spiritually rejoicing.

Thy grace has arisen upon us, O Lord, the illumination of our souls has shown forth; behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the time of repentance
(Vespers Hymns).

HOLIDAYS & SAINTS DAYS

March 3

Finding of the Precious Cross by St. Elena, mother of St. Konstantin, the Emperor

March 9

Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste

March 10 - 11

Forgiveness Sunday, Beginning of the Great Lent, Great Canon

March 12

St. Gregory Dialogus

March 17

Sunday of Orthodoxy
Ven. Aleksy, Man of God

March 25

ANNUNCIATION
MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS

March 30

Ven. John Climacus, author of
"The Ladder"

There Is A Time For Everything

Dear members of St. Innocent Orthodox Church community!

Let this be our time for prayer, forgiveness of enemies, confession of sins, renewed love for God and every neighbor, and focus on Jesus Christ crucified and raised from the dead.

Let us call brothers even those who hate us, and forgive all by the Resurrection. Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!

Pray for us especially during this holiest of times, as we in our unworthiness pray for you.

Great Lent

The season of Great Lent is the time of preparation for the feast of the Resurrection of Christ. It is the living symbol of man's entire life which is to be fulfilled in his own resurrection from the dead with Christ. It is a time of renewed devotion: of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It is a time of repentance, a real renewal of our minds, hearts and deeds in conformity with Christ and his teachings. It is the time, most of all, of our return to the great commandments of loving God and our neighbors.

In the Orthodox Church, Great Lent is not a season of morbidity and

gloominess. On the contrary, it is a time of joyfulness and purification. We are called to "anoint our faces" and to "cleanse our bodies as we cleanse our souls." It is our repentance that God desires, not our remorse. We sorrow for our sins, but we do so in the joy of God's mercy. We mortify our flesh, but we do so in the joy of our resurrection into life everlasting. We make ready for the resurrection during Great Lent, both Christ's Resurrection and our own.

<https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-church-year/great-lent> -
<https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-church-year/great-lent>

Fasting is praiseworthy and necessary in its time and place: it is better to keep to a moderate use of good and drink, avoiding satiety, indicated by a slight heaviness, and on the other hand, avoiding excessive and inappropriate abstinence. Moderation, the middle path, makes a person more capable of spiritual activity.

ST. AMBROSE OF OPTINA

St. Elena and Uncovering of the Precious Cross (March 6)



The Holy Empress Helen (Elena) uncovered the Precious Cross and Nails of the Lord at Jerusalem in 326.

At the beginning of the reign of Saint Constantine the Great (306-337), the first Roman emperor to recognize Christianity, he and his pious mother Saint Helen decided to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. They also planned to build a church on the site of the Lord's suffering and Resurrection, in order to reconsecrate and purify the places connected with the Savior's death and Resurrection from the foul taint of paganism.

The empress Helen journeyed to Jerusalem with a large quantity of gold. Saint Constantine wrote a letter to Patriarch Macarius I (313-323), requesting him to assist her in every possible way with her task of the restoring the Christian holy places.

After her arrival in Jerusalem, the holy empress Helen began to destroy all the pagan temples and reconsecrate the places that had been defiled by the pagans.

In her quest for the Life-Creating Cross, she questioned several Christians and Jews, but for a long time her search remained unsuccessful. Finally, an elderly

Continued on page 5



Courage in Christ: Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (March 9)

When the pagan Licinius ruled the eastern half of the Roman Empire (307-323 AD), it was his evil intent to eliminate Christianity from the lands under his control, and especially, for fear of treason, among the troops. One of his supporters was a cruel man by the name of Agricola who commanded the forces in the Armenian town of Sebaste, in what is now eastern Turkey. Among his soldiers were forty devout Christians who wielded equally well the sword of battle and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God (Eph. 6:17). These men formed an elite bodyguard. When it came to Agricola's attention that they were Christians, he determined to force them to renounce their faith and bow down to the pagan gods. He gave them two alternatives:

"Either offer sacrifice to the gods and earn great honors, or, in the event of your disobedience, be stripped of your military rank and fall into disgrace."

The soldiers were thrown into jail to think this over. That night they strengthened themselves singing psalms and praying. At midnight they were filled with holy fear upon hearing the voice of the Lord: "Good is the beginning of your resolve, but he who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt. 10:22).

The next morning Agricola summoned them once again. This time he tried to persuade them by flattering words, praising their valor and their handsomeness. When the soldiers remained unmoved, they were again thrown into prison for a week to await the arrival of Licinius, a prince of some authority.

During this time they prepared themselves for the trial of martyrdom. One of them, Cyrion by name, exhorted his fellow soldiers:

"God so ordained that we made friends with each other in this temporary life; let us try not to separate even in eternity; just as we have been found pleading to a mortal king, so let us strive to be worthy of the favor of the immortal King, Christ our God."

Cyrion reminded his comrades in arms how God had miraculously helped them in time of battle and assured them that He would not forsake them now in their battle against the invisible enemy. When Licinius arrived, the soldiers marched to the interrogation singing the psalm, "O God, in Thy name save me" (Ps. 53), as they always did when entering upon the field of contest.

Continued on page 4

(Continued)

Licinus repeated Agricola's arguments of persuasion, alternating between threats and flattery. When he saw that words were of no avail, he ordered the soldiers sent to jail while he thought up a form of torture sure to change their minds.

After prayers that night, for a second time the soldiers heard the voice of the Lord:

"He who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live. Be bold and have no fear of short-lived torment which soon passes; endure...that you may receive crowns."

The next day the soldiers were led to a lake. It was winter and a frosty wind was blowing. The soldiers were stripped of their clothes and ordered to stand through the night in the freezing waters. A guard was set to watch over them. In order to tempt the holy warriors of Christ, warm baths were set up on the side of the lake. Anyone who agreed to sacrifice to the idols could flee the bitterly cold waters and warm his frozen bones in the baths. This was a great temptation which in the first cruel hour of the night overpowered one of the soldiers. Scarcely had he reached the baths, however, than he dropped to the ground and died.

Seeing this, the rest of the soldiers prayed the more earnestly to God: "Help us, O God our Saviour, for here we stand in the water and our feet are stained with our blood; ease the burden of our oppression and tame the cruelty of the air; O Lord our God-on Thee do we hope, let us not be ashamed, but let all understand that we who call upon Thee have been saved."

Their prayer was heard. In the third hour of the night a warm light bathed the holy martyrs and melted the ice. By this time all but one of the guards had fallen asleep. The guard who was still awake had been amazed to witness the death of the soldier who had fled to the baths and to see that those in the water were still alive. Now, seeing this extraordinary light, he glanced upward to see where it came from and saw thirty-nine radiant crowns descending onto the heads of the saints, immediately, his heart was enlightened by the knowledge of the Truth. He roused the sleeping guards and, throwing off his clothes, ran into the lake shouting for all to hear, "I am a Christian too!" His name was Aglaius, and he brought the number of martyrs once again to forty. The next morning the evil judges came to the lake and were enraged to find that not only were the captives still alive, but that one of the guards had joined them. The martyrs were then taken back to prison and subjected to torture; the bones of their legs were crushed by sledge-hammers. The mother of one of the youngest, Heliton, stood by and encouraged them to endure this trial. To their last breath the martyrs sang out, "Our help is in the name of the Lord," and they all gave up their souls to God. Only Meliton remained alive, though barely breathing.

Taking her dying son upon her shoulders, the mother followed the cart on which the bodies of the soldiers were being taken to be burned. When her son at last gave up his soul, she placed him on the cart with his fellow athletes of Christ.

The funeral-pyre burned out leaving

only the martyrs' bones. Knowing that Christians would collect these relics to the eternal glory of the martyrs and their God, the judges ordered them to be thrown into the nearby river. That night, however, the holy martyrs appeared to the blessed bishop of Sebaste and told him to recover the bones from the river. Together with some of his clergy, the bishop went secretly that night to the river where the bones of the martyrs shone like stars in the water, enabling them to be collected to the very last fragment. So also do the holy martyrs shine like stars in the world, encouraging and inspiring believers everywhere to be faithful to Christ even to the end.

Thus they finished the good course of martyrdom in 320, and their names are: Acacius, Aetius, Aglaius, Alexander, Angus, Athanasius, Candidus, Chudion, Claudius, Cyril, Cyrion, Dometian, Domnus, Ecdicius, Elias, Eunoicus, Eutyches, Eutychius, Flavius, Gaius, Gorgonius, Helianus, Herachus, Hesychius, John, Lysimachus, Meliton, Nicholas, Philoctemon, Priscus, Sacerdon, Severian, Sisinius, Smaragdus, Theodulus, Theophilus, Valens, Valerius, Vivianus, and Xanthias.

The Troparion of the Forty Martyrs in Tone 1

Those noble soldiers of the Master of all let us honor, for they were united by their faith as they passed through fire and water, and being enlisted by Christ they entered to divine refreshment. Now those pious warriors stand and intercede with Christ God for those who cry out. Glory to Him that hath given you strength. Glory to him that hath crowned you. Glory to Him that made you wondrous, Holy Forty Martyrs.

St. Elena and Uncovering of the Precious Cross (Continued)

Hebrew named Jude told her that the Cross was buried beneath the temple of Venus. Saint Helen ordered that the pagan temple be demolished, and for the site to be excavated. Soon they found Golgotha and the Lord's Sepulchre. Not far from the spot were three crosses, a board with the inscription written by Pilate (John 19:19), and four nails which had pierced the Lord's Body.

Now the task was to determine on which of the three crosses the Savior had been crucified. Patriarch Macarius saw a dead person being carried to his grave, then he ordered that the dead man be placed upon each cross in turn. When the corpse was placed on the Cross of Christ, he was immediately restored to life. After seeing the raising of the dead man, everyone was convinced that the Life-Creating Cross had been found. With great joy the empress Helen and Patriarch Macarius lifted the Life-Creating Cross and displayed it to all the people standing about.

Source: www.oca.org

Venerable Alexis the Man of God

On March 17, the Orthodox Church commemorates the life of Venerable Alexis the Man of God.

For people of worldly concerns, it can be difficult to understand the life and interests of this man. The internal connection of his life events violates the common standards of a successful life. Alexis (Aleksy), a "Man of God" who lived in 4th century, in Edessa, Mesopotamia, as a beggar, and who shared the alms he received with other poor people, did not look or act like a prosperous man.

Nevertheless, his humility and his love to God led this native Roman citizen to a great spiritual success. An Eastern saint, whose veneration was later transplanted to Rome, became one of the most respected saints in Russia and his story is one of the most important narratives of the Russian culture. In the book of the 18th century, a blind soldier tells the spiritual verse about Venerable Alexis to a traveler who, on his journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow, meets enormous injustice and cruelty that affects every Russian during the reign of Catherine the Great. In the 19th century, a world famous composer Rimsky-Korsakov wrote a cantata about St. Aleksy. In the 1900s, Mikhail Kuzmin, a prominent Russian poet, wrote a play about the life of St. Alexis. The spiritual poem about a beggar was so close to the hearts of common Russian peasants whose life was hard in all times.

I remember the face of my great grandmother, who read by heart the verse about Aleksy to me, a very little girl.

She looked sad and serious, she shared with me his sufferings and cried over them like he was her close relative. Indeed, it was a sad story of a man who refused from the family wealth and a beautiful young wife and fled to the far lands to be poor, humiliated, accepting offerings even from his own household slaves, who had been sent to look for him but did not recognize him. Interesting enough, the question "why did he do that" was never discussed between us. Both my great grand mother, an 80-year old woman who spent all her life farming, raising three girls in the hardships of the WWII, and me, a city girl of 5 years old, we knew: he did it to be close to God.

Even living in disguise at his parental home, the saint continued to fast and he spent day and night at prayer. He humbly endured insults and jeering from the servants of his father. The cell of Alexis was opposite his wife's windows, and the ascetic suffered grievously when he heard her weeping. Only his immeasurable love for God helped the saint endure this torment.

Oh, how I wanted that someone would recognize him, and his sufferings would be over! How I wanted that he would reveal himself to his family in glory. And they would hug him, and love him, and everyone would be happy. As a modern child I demanded a real happy end! But the story was unmercifully far from any of my favorite fairy tales and according to the Saint's Life, Saint Alexis dwelt at the house of his parents for seventeen years and, on the day of his death, the saint wrote certain things that only his wife and parents would know. He also asked them to forgive him for the pain he had caused them. And died. At this point, my Mamasha always sighed sadly and made a solemn face...

Well, the story had a happy end but once again, not it terms of an ordinary story. Archbishop Innocent heard the Voice that ordered to him to find the relics of Aleksy. His body was discovered and placed in the center of the city. The emperor and the Pope carried the body of the saint into the church, where it remained for a whole week, and then was placed in a marble crypt. Fragrant myrrh began to flow from the holy relics, bestowing healing upon the sick. THIS was a happy end for every Christian, understandable for every poor farmer, grieving widow, and disabled veteran. This was the real justice and the true hope that was given to people after the Aleksy death as it was given to the humanity after the Christ death and resurrection.

Five Byzantine Emperors, four Emperors of Trebizond and numerous eastern European personalities have adopted his name. There are churches bearing his name in Greece and Russia but also the other orthodox countries. Through the centuries his story teaches, united and guides all of us on our path of Christianity.

Diana Gratigny

The Feast Of Annunciation (March 25)

The biblical story of the Feast of the Annunciation is found in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke (1:26-39). The Archangel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary, who was living in Nazareth, and said to her, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you." Mary was perplexed and wondered what kind of greeting this was.

The angel told her not to be afraid, for she had found favor with God. He said, "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Mary responded to the angel by asking how this could happen since she had no husband. The angel told her that the Holy Spirit and the power of God would come upon her, and that the child to be born of her would be called holy, the "Son of God."

The angel then proceeded to tell the Virgin Mary that her cousin Elizabeth had conceived a son in her old age (John the Baptist), and affirmed that with God nothing is impossible.

In faith and obedience to the will of God, Mary replied to the angel, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be according to your word." Upon her response, the angel departed.

It is on the Feast of the Annunciation, that Orthodox Christians commemorate both the divine initiative of God, whereby He took on flesh from the Virgin for our salvation, and the human response, whereby Mary freely accepted the vocation offered to her. He elected to become man, and He

desired to do this with the willing agreement of her whom He chose as His mother. Mary could have refused, for she was not a passive instrument, but an active participant with a free and positive part to play in God's plan for our salvation. Thus, when on this and other feasts the Orthodox Church honors the Theotokos, the Mother of God, it is not just because God chose her but also because she herself chose to follow His will.

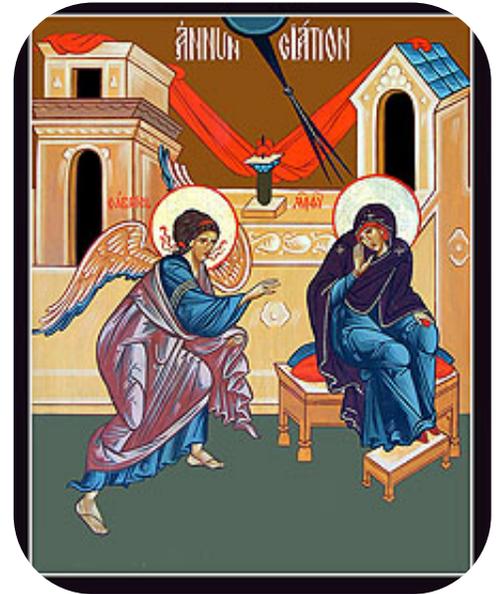
The Feast of the Annunciation of the Theotokos is celebrated with the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom which is conducted on the morning of the Feast and preceded by a Matins (Orthros) service. A Great Vespers is conducted on the evening before the day of the Feast. Scripture readings for the Feast are the following: At Vespers: Genesis 28:10-17; Ezekiel 43:27-44:4; Proverbs 9:1-11. At the Matins: Luke 1:39-49, 56. At the Divine Liturgy: Hebrews 2:11-18; Luke 1:24-38.

The Feast of the Annunciation in the Greek Orthodox Church also marks a day of national celebration for the people of Greece and those around the world of Greek descent. It was on March 25, 1821 when Greece officially declared its independence and began the revolution that would eventually give the nation its freedom after 400 years of rule by the Ottomans. In addition to the services for the Feast, festivities and parades are held and official proclamations are offered throughout the world in recognition of Greek Independence Day.

Source:

<https://www.goarch.org/annunciation> -

<https://www.goarch.org/annunciation>



Troparion — Tone 4

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!

Kontakion — Tone 8

O Victorious Leader of Triumphant
Hosts! / We, your servants, delivered
from evil, sing our grateful thanks to
you, O Theotokos! / As you possess
invincible might, set us free from every
calamity / So that we may sing: Rejoice,
O unwedded Bride!

Preparing the Family for Great Lent *by Elissa Bjeletich*

Great Lent is the path back home to Paradise. Because of their sins, Adam and Eve were cast out of Paradise, but through repentance and fasting, we find our way home: we take the journey to Pascha, when Christ will trample down death by death and break down the gates that closed us out of Paradise. How glorious! We are invited to prepare for that journey right now, and to take it in just a few weeks – the journey home to God. We should be trembling with anticipation and joy at the prospect!

I was baptized into the faith when I was near bursting with my first child; over the coming eleven years, I would bear six children, so Great Lent came and went, but I was not really able to properly fast. When finally the pregnancies and the nursing were finished, I was able to fast, but now I had a house full of children and a husband, and I had to learn how to fast myself while figuring out how to cook healthy meals that they would eat. It was so hard. I found myself more focused on food than ever – which of course is the opposite of what fasting should be. It was painful. While I loved Pascha, when the Triodion was opened and I could see that Great Lent was on the horizon, I was not filled with joyful anticipation for the journey ahead. I wasn't excited. I was filled with dread.

Over the years, I have relaxed. I have come to see that the food cannot be the central question of the fast, and I've learned to try to fast without even knowing I'm doing it. Probably my collection of good Lenten cookbooks and go-to recipes helps as well; reading Melissa Naasko's book, *Fasting as a Family*, really helped me think about my Lenten kitchen and feeding my family in a whole new way.

And as my children have gotten older, I have come to see that the fast is a little bit different for each of us. First, every year is different. We find ourselves in different places every year (spiritually, developmentally, emotionally, physically, medically). The basics of the fast are consistent: we must attend more services, we must pray more, we must fast, we must give more of ourselves, we must seek more nourishment for our souls. But what those things *mean* might vary from year to year and from person to person.

As Lent approaches, I like to sit down with my kids and hand them each **a piece of paper with a cross on it**: the cross divides the paper into four sections, which correspond to the four areas of effort during Great Lent: fasting, almsgiving, study and prayer/worship. I ask each of my kids to prayerfully consider those four areas, and then we sit together and talk about how they will make that effort in the coming season. Mostly, we all have the same answers, but here and there someone needs something different, and that's ok.

It's really important, I think, that as children grow into adults they take charge of their Lenten efforts. Ultimately, the fast should be an offering. In the liturgy, we offer up wine and bread and we offer up our hearts, and God transforms them. During the fast, we are offering up our efforts and our repentance and our hearts, and praying that God will transform them! Simply following the rules of the fast is what the Pharisees do, but making a heartfelt offering is what we Christians must do if we hope to participate in this amazing divine transformation. By inviting the kids to work out what their fast will look like, we begin to establish that this is their personal offering to God.

My younger children will add **the Prayer of St. Ephraim** to their daily prayers for Great Lent. They love the prostrations, and it's such a simple and beautiful prayer. We usually talk about the vocabulary words in the prayer early in the fast, but once they've got a few words, the prayer is so simple and direct that it just makes sense to them. I like to print up several copies of the **Lenten Prayer of St Ephraim** to set around the prayer corner, though the kids quickly learn it by heart. The older kids might choose to increase their personal prayer rules more than this, but I find that St. Ephraim's prayer is beloved by all ages.

This year for the study portion of our fast, we'll be doing daily Lenten meditations together. My friend, Kristina Wenger, and I have been writing **a weekly podcast for families**, and this book follows that format. We tell a short kid-friendly story from Scriptures or from a Saint's life, and then we follow it with questions – some easy questions just to get the kids talking, and then a question that invites the whole family into deeper conversation. *Tending the Garden of Our Hearts: Daily Lenten Meditations for Families* is available as a book, ebook or audiobook (*yep, I'm on Audible! How cool!*) I'll be reading through this book with my own family this year, exploring Lenten themes and learning engaging stories that we can carry with us. There are a few parishes reading the meditations together this year – I may gather a group of friends and see if we can't take this journey together! For more information on *Tending the Garden of Our Hearts'* Lenten resources, including free podcasts that follow the book but are simplified for the youngest audiences, check out **our website!**

The full text with active links to pintables could be found on the site <http://antiochian.org/>

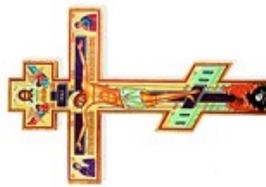
Follow the title of an article.

SUNDAYS OF GREAT LENT

Great Lent ends on Palm Sunday, the Entrance of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into Jerusalem. Following Palm Sunday, Holy Week begins. It is a week of strict fasting and deep thinking about the events that precede Pascha, the Resurrection of our Lord.

Third Sunday

Adoration of the Cross



On this Sunday, the Cross is carried out of the Sanctuary as a reminder to us of Christ's suffering at the Cross and of our call to be brave in the trials of our lives.

Second Sunday

Saint Gregory Palamas



Through his writings, this Saint gives every Christian the opportunity to be enlightened with the light of Mount Tabor.

First Sunday

Triumph of Orthodoxy



On this Sunday in 842, the heresy of iconoclasm that contradicted the Orthodox Faith was defeated.

Fourth Sunday

Venerable John the Ladder



This Sunday honors the 7th century saint, the author of The Ladder, where he describes the levels of spirituality.



Fifth Sunday

Venerable Mary of Egypt



The life of St. Mary of Egypt is an example to us of God's mercy to sinners, seen through her sins and conversion.

On the preceding Wednesday, the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete is served during Vespers.

Sixth Sunday

The Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem – Palm Sunday



The day before this feast is called Lazarus Saturday, in honor of the time Christ rose after Lazarus was in his tomb for three days. This event reminds Christians about our inevitable resurrection from the dead by Christ.

On this Sunday, Christ's glorious Entrance into Jerusalem is remembered. The citizens of Jerusalem came to meet Him and welcomed Him with palm branches saying, "Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"

After this Sunday, Holy Week begins, and after Holy Week is Pascha, the Resurrection of Christ.

Feed The Parents: Lent for Families With Special Needs

by Summer Kinard

There's no shortage of advice for how to give things up for Lent, how to read extra books for Lent, and how to eat simpler foods for Lent. But parents of children with special needs can't use much of that advice. Instead, we have to resist these opportunities to overcommit by seeing them for what they are to us: opportunities to overextend our resources.

This Lent, resist the temptation to overfunction. You're a person who probably spends most of his or her time caring for your children or fretting over how to meet their needs. For you, overdoing it a bit is normal and often necessary.

Don't add anything to your to-do list unless it feeds you. How can you tell what will feed you? Look for what will lower your stress and build up your most important relationships. Some examples of how to evaluate and address common Lenten pressure points:

Caffeine. Giving up coffee might not be good for you. It might wreck the fragile balance you've brought to your days. Having coffee or tea with a friend or spouse once a week, though, might lower your stress and build up important relationships.

Fasting. Changing your family's food routine in a dramatic way might be a recipe for disaster. Consult your priest as needed, and consider ways you can be kinder –starting with kindness to yourself and people in your household. If the goal of fasting is to learn about the unending love of God, look for ways to apply the love even if your family's needs make ordinary food changes impossible or inadvisable.

Almsgiving. It might help to ignore requests from organizations during Lent. Almsgiving is meant to be between two persons, so ignore organizations without guilt this season. Instead, focus on small, real ways you can help someone like you. Can you afford another weighted blanket like the one that helps your child sleep? Donate one to a foster home or domestic violence shelter. Do you know another parent in a special needs family? Send them a card in the mail. Focus on the personal aspect of almsgiving, whether you are able to give money or resources to relieve another person's suffering or take a few precious minutes to let another parent know you're thinking of them.

Social media. Maybe the people who announce that they're leaving social media for Lent have already vacated your timelines. If not, make sure you have an email address or other contact option for the ones you'd like to keep in touch with. Social media is one of the best technologies for breaking the social isolation that comes with special needs parenting. If you want to limit screen time or be kinder or mindful or read only notifications, go ahead. But be realistic about your unusual schedule and heavily demanding family life. Will you be able to talk to friends without social media? If not, you will probably want to keep your accounts up.

Attending More Church Services. It might seem scandalous at first, but I'm going to suggest that you try to go to a few of the extra evening services without your children. See if a trusted friend or your spouse can stay home with the kids for a few nights during Lent so you can go and soak up the beautiful prayers without dividing your attention as much as usual. Trade childcare duties with another special needs parent or your spouse so that each parent gets to go to a service or three without the children. This doesn't mean you should neglect taking the kids to church in general. It means that all those extra services in Lent are an opportunity to feed the parents.

Going to Church in Lent With The Kids. The Sunday service will probably be longer by at least a few minutes. Prepare for the longer service by reading the Gospel at home before you go to church in case you have to walk the kids around more. Consider making a quiet activity to give the children during the extra prayer times. (My Church Bag Tour has some ideas.)

Reading More Books. Reading a book with friends sounds lovely, but when it's a daily habit or on a tight group schedule, special needs parents frequently fall behind and drop out. If you want to add reading, try finding times when you can read aloud from a beautiful book. Parents can feed each other by reading aloud in this way. Audiobooks might help, as well. If you join a reading group, tell the group leader ahead of time that you will probably not be able to keep up. That way you don't feel guilty when your kids need you more one week and you don't get to the assigned reading. Discussion time when you only listen can help you when you get a chance to read the book later.

Silence. If you cannot maintain silence in your home because of your children's needs, find a few minutes when you can be quiet on purpose. It's hard when you feel the weight of responsibility to help kids with complicated communication needs to talk, but intentional quiet for 5 or 20 minutes at a time won't set your child back. If you decide to be quiet in the middle of the day, you might use a visual timer (like this one that I love–affiliate link) to let the kids know when you'll be back to speaking.

Prayer Routines. Some people will encourage you to add a simple 45 minute prayer routine to your day in Lent. Those

Feed The Parents

(Continued)

people aren't familiar with special needs life, so it's best just to thank them and move along. Prayer is a great practice. But you need to be fed, not to fall asleep reading prayerful poetry. I recommend praying in a way that your kids can see, too. Even if you're not used to doing so, go to your holy icons or wall cross and say out loud that you need help. Just ask for help. Let the kids hear you and see you do it. Say "thank you for helping us," and walk away to go about your business. Add that routine of walking over and praying in that place, and you will give yourself a gift. You will start to let go of your burdens when you ask God for help, because you will have a physical routine along the lines of dropping your prayers into a spiritual key hook or dresser, the same way you put your keys and wallet in the same place when you get home each night.

Prayer Lists. Another way to pray that doesn't ask you to overfunction is to go to that prayer corner and tell God you're there, no matter how you feel. Offer whatever you have –exhaustion, frustration, anger, inadequacy, brokenness, sadness, regret, repentance, joy, mixed feelings, ambitions, jealousy, crankiness, laughter, gratitude, grief, fear – all of it, no matter what you're feeling, to God as if God is listening. That will help you know that God is listening, and that will help you listen for God, too. If someone asks you to pray for them, offer yourself to God like this first. Then tell God about the person's needs. Ask God to help. Then let it go.

Be kind to yourselves. God loves us. God is with us right here amongst our still-not-potty-trained sticker charts, our occupational therapy tools, our instructional posters, our special feeding equipment, our sensory regulation tools, our stacks of books and games, our hopes, our rocking chairs. Ask for help. Build relationships. Do what feeds you. Resist the temptation to overfunction. Good Lent to y'all!

Source: <https://summerkinard.com/>

Quick Pancakes For Cheesefare (Forgiveness) Sunday

3 eggs
2-4 tbsp sugar
4 caps warm milk
2 ½ cups flour
½ tsp salt

Mix eggs, sugar and salt with hand mixer or a whisk, add warm milk, and mix well. Add flour and whisk till your batter will have buttermilk consistence.

Heat a skillet or crepe pan over medium heat. Coat the cooking surface with a thin layer of oil or butter.

Pour a thin layer of batter onto the prepared cooking surface; swirl the pan to assure even coverage.

Cook the crepe until browned on the bottom, 1 to 2 minutes; flip the crepe and continue cooking until the other side is browned. Serve with sour cream, jam, cottage cheese, honey, syrup, or caviar (if you have any). Hot tea is the most desirable drink for this meal. Quick pancakes could be served for breakfast, lunch or dinner.

Lenten Lark Cookies For The Holy Forty Martyrs' Day

3 cups flour
3 tbsp oil (any)
½ cup sugar
1 tsp salt
2 cups warm water
1 tbsp dry yeast

Dissolve yeast in warm water; add salt, sugar and oil. For better dough, add 2 tbsp. vodka (optional). Add flour. Mix all ingredients well and leave in a warm place for about an hour.

Shape cookies in a form of birds, let them rest for 30 minutes, and bake cookies at 385F for 20-30 min.



Venerable John Climacus of Sinai, Author of "The Ladder" (March 30)

Saint John of the Ladder is honored by Holy Church as a great ascetic and author of the renowned spiritual book called THE LADDER, from which he is also called "of the Ladder" (Climacus).

The saint called his work THE LADDER, for the book is "a fixed ladder leading from earthly things to the Holy of Holies...." The thirty steps of spiritual perfection correspond to the thirty years of the Lord's age. When we have completed these thirty steps, we will find ourselves with the righteous and will not stumble. THE LADDER begins with renunciation of the world, and ends with God, Who is love (1 John 4:8).

Although the book was written for monks, any Christian living in the world will find it an unerring guide for ascending to God, and a support in the spiritual life. Saints Theodore the Studite (November 11 and January 26), Sergius of Radonezh (September 25 and July 5), Joseph of Volokolamsk (September 9 and October 18), and others relied on THE LADDER as an important guide to salvation.

The twenty-second step of THE LADDER deals with various forms of vainglory. Saint John writes: "When I fast, I am vainglorious; and when I permit myself food in order to conceal my fasting from others I am again vainglorious about my prudence. When I dress in fine clothing, I am vanquished by vanity, and if I put on drab clothing, again I am overcome by vanity. If I speak, vainglory defeats me. If I wish to keep silence, I am again given over to it. Wherever this thorn comes up, it stands with its points upright.

A vain person seems to honor God, but strives to please men rather than God.

People of lofty spirit bear insult placidly and willingly, but only the holy and righteous may hear praise without harm.

When you hear that your neighbor or friend has slandered you behind your back, or even to your face, praise and love him.

It is not the one who reproaches himself who shows humility, for who will not put up with himself? It is the one who is slandered by another, yet continues to show love for him.

Whoever is proud of his natural gifts, intelligence, learning, skill in reading, clear enunciation, and other similar qualities, which are acquired without much

Whoever is not faithful in small things (Luke 16:10), is also unfaithful in large things, and is vainglorious.

It often happens that God humbles the vainglorious, sending a sudden misfortune. If prayer does not destroy a proud thought, we bring to mind the departure of the soul from this life. And if this does not help, let us fear the shame which follows dishonor. "For whoever humbles himself shall be exalted, and whoever exalts himself shall be humbled" (Luke 14:11). When those who praise us, or rather seduce us, start to praise us, let us recall our many sins, then we shall find that we are not worthy of what they say or do to honor us."

In THE LADDER Saint John describes the ascent toward spiritual perfection, which is essential for anyone who wishes to save his soul. It is a written account of his thoughts, based on the collected wisdom of many wise ascetics, and on his own spiritual experience. The book is a great help on the path to truth and virtue.

The steps of THE LADDER proceed gradually from strength to strength on the path of perfection. The summit is not reached suddenly, but gradually, as the Savior says: "The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force" (Mt.11:12).

Saint John is also commemorated on the fourth Sunday of Great Lent.

In Russia, on March 30, people baked special Lenten cookies in a form of a ladder or a bird with the ladder. The number of stairs differed from region to region, but the most widespread numbers were 7 and 30.



Lenten Ladder Cookie Dough for the 4th Sunday of Great Lent

2-2½ cups rye flour

1/3 cup of hot water

3 tbsp. honey

1/3 oil (olive or canola, or any other vegetable oil)

pinch of salt

Whisk well hot water and oil, add honey, salt

and slowly add rye flour. Shape cookies as ladders with 7 stairs. Bake cookies at 380F for 15-20 min. Eat them the same day.

It's Russian Mardi Gras: Time For Pancakes, Butter And Fistfights *by Maria Godoy, NPR*

Nothing says party like pancakes and butter. At least, not if you happen to be in Russia this week.

The country is in the midst of celebrating Maslenitsa, an Eastern Slavic folk holiday that takes place the week before the start of Great Lent (this year, it starts March 4). Though now tied to the Christian calendar, Maslenitsa has roots in ancient Slavic sun worshippers – it originally marked the end of winter and advent of spring. And, like Mardi Gras, it involves a whole lot of feasting before the Lenten fast – with blinis, Russian pancakes, as the food of choice.

Topped with sour cream, caviar, berries or jam, blinis are everywhere, anyway you like them. Why blinis? Their round shape and warmth were meant to symbolize the sun. And they're usually drenched in butter (the festival, whose name derives from "maslo," the Russian word for butter, is also known as "Butter Week").

"Everyone goes crazy with the buttered food" and the blinis, says Anton Fedyashin, a professor of Russian history at American University. He says he has attended 10 or so Maslenitsa festivals since the collapse of the Soviet Union. "You eat them as often as possible." The holiday is observed in other Slavic Orthodox European countries, he says, but "nowhere more elaborately than in Russia."

Pancakes are king during Maslenitsa, but there's more to the festival than just food. Sleigh rides, snowball fights, family gatherings and general merrymaking are all part of the tradition, with prescribed activities for each day of the week. Indeed, a Google search turned up plenty of Maslenitsa traditions – some of which seemed too wild to believe at first.

Organized fistfights? They're real – apparently, they're meant to celebrate Russia's fighting spirit. Our Moscow correspondent, Corey Flintoff, confirms there's a fight on the schedule of events at a park in the Russian capital this Sunday.

Dancing bears? Yep, in some places. Bears are considered a symbol of Russia. And performing bears are an old tradition among Russian Gypsies, also known as Roma, says Galina Aleksandrovna Komissarova of the Russian Cultural Center in Washington, D.C. The bears, she notes, are "not obligatory."

Celebrations were more muted during the Soviet era, usually taking place at home. But in recent years, the festivities have become more elaborate public events.

It all culminates on Sunday, when, across Russia, people will ask for forgiveness from their fellow man (sometimes even from strangers). In some regions, the grand finale calls for pyrotechnics: A straw effigy of a woman, "Lady Maslenitsa," meant to represent winter (the word for "winter" is feminine in Russian), is burned to bid the season a



fiery goodbye. Others make do with ice sculptures of "lady winter".

Of course, this being Russia – where alcoholism has been called a "national disaster" – no holiday would be complete without plenty of alcohol. "Eating and drinking, blini and sour cream and caviar," notes Komissarova, "that is the main thing."

Source: <https://www.npr.org/>

