

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wed: Moleben to the Theotokos 6:00 AM

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM

Great Vespers 5:30 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:30 AM | Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM

September 23, 2018 – 17th Sunday After Pentecost

Conception of St. John the Baptist

The Conception of the Venerable Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist of the Lord, John: The holy Prophet Malachi prophesied that before the Messiah's birth His Forerunner would appear, and would indicate His coming. The Jews therefore in awaiting the Messiah also awaited the appearance of His Forerunner.

In a city of the hills of Judea in the land of Palestine lived the righteous priest Saint Zachariah and his wife Saint Elizabeth, zealously observing the commandments of the Lord. The couple, however, had a misfortune: they remained childless in their old age, and they prayed unceasingly to God to grant them a child.

Once, when Saint Zachariah took his turn as priest at the Temple of Jerusalem, he went into the Sanctuary to offer incense. Going behind the veil of the Sanctuary, he beheld an angel of God standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

Saint Zachariah was astonished and halted in fear, but the angel said to him, "Fear not, Zachariah, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John." But Zachariah did not believe the words of the heavenly messenger, and then the angel said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you the good



news. 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....”

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zachariah and they were astonished that he had not come out from the Sanctuary after so long a time. And when he did come out, he was supposed to pronounce a blessing upon the people, but could not do so because he had been struck speechless. When Zachariah explained by gestures that he was unable to speak, the people then understood that he had experienced a vision. The prophecy of the Archangel was fulfilled, and Righteous Elizabeth was delivered from her barrenness, and gave birth to John, the Forerunner and Baptist of the Lord. (*from oca.org*)

Today’s Epistle Lesson – St. Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians 6:16-7:1

Brethren, what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” Therefore “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.” “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Today’s Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 5:1-11

At that time, as the multitude pressed about Jesus to hear the word of God, He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing *their* nets. Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” But Simon answered and said to Him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.” And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to *their* partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also *were* James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.” So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

I do not think there is anyone who has a drop of intelligence who does not know how Eli depended upon and loved his sons exceedingly and with what affection he was bound to them. But because he did not give precedence to and prefer the testimonies of God above his sons, together with them he was pitifully deprived not only of the priesthood, but also of life. And thus he set an example for all future generations never to dare to give precedence to the human over the divine, nor to pass over in accursed silence which enrage and provoke God, since Truth judges that silence in the face of evil or worse is a mark of approval....

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus, Who gave himself for us. For if we live in this way, it is hoped that "when Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, then you shall also appear with Him in glory." Blessed be this deification! I pray that we may not fail to attain it, nor from now on let us prefer shameful actions. The Lord says, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; but in vain they worship me," and "he who does not love me does not keep my sayings," and "I and my Father will come, etc.", and "if you know these things, you are happy if you do them."...

Will not each of us have to render an accounting to the Creator of the world for that which has been entrusted to us, whether we have administered it in a manner pleasing to Him? Accordingly, the man who had received the talent arouses fears in us; he does so, not because after receiving the talent, he did not lose it, but because he made no interest on what he had been given. If God reproaches certain people because when He slew them, then they sought Him, what shall we suffer if we do not seek Him even then, but still increase our iniquity? And why don't we fear the words: "Woe to those who draw sins to them as with a long rope, and iniquities as with a thong of the heifer's yoke" (Is. 5:18 LXX); if we turn away and lament on account of these sins as we should, we will be saved....

Therefore, I beg of you, let us not be rebuked for slowness of heart; while we still have time, let us heal our iniquity, and not be consumed by it, and end up with a pillar of salt, through our failure to learn from the experience of our predecessors. Let us fear or respect or love the One Who daily begs us, "Turn to Me," so that we may actively cause Him to turn toward us. For if we worship Him in fear, and fall at His feet and weep, He will quickly grant our prayers, and will give us courage and victory and salvation. "He shall speak true peace to His people," as soon as we turn toward Him with a sincere heart.

– St. Athanasius, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Letter 49*

Also Commemorated Today: Holy New Martyr John of Konitsa

John was born in 1785 in a place called Konitsa, which was populated by Albanian Muslims at the time. He was a Muslim of Muslim parents. His father was both a dervish and a sheik. When John was twenty years old, he also joined the order of dervishes, as there were a few tekes (Muslim dervish monasteries) in Konitsa. He moved to the city of Ioannina, Epirus, but later he moved to the town of Vrachori in the province of Aitolia, whose pasha was Haznatar Isufaravos, a friend of his father. So the pasha made John his private dervish, where he arose high in rank and fought in the battle of the Turks against the Russians in the area of the Ionian Islands.

During the battle John came into contact with many Orthodox Christians and decided to become an Orthodox Christian himself. He removed his dervish attire and sought baptism, yet no one would baptize him out of fear. The pasha eventually was transferred, but John did not go with him.

Because he was unable to be baptized in Vrachori, John went to the island of Ithaca where he was able to be baptized and at that time was given the name John. Returning to the mainland he married an Orthodox woman and became a rural guard, avoiding Muslims as much as possible.

His father eventually heard of his son's apostasy and sent two dervishes to persuade John to return to his Muslim faith. The messengers failed due to the steadfast faith of John. However news spread in the village that John was a former Muslim and dervish, causing the local Muslims to bring charges against him.

Soldiers were eventually sent by the muselimi of Vrachori to arrest John. When he was asked to identify himself, John replied: "I am an Orthodox Christian and my name is John."

The muselimi replied: "Aren't you the young dervish, the son of the sheik of Konitsa?"

"Yes I am," answered John, "but now I am an Orthodox Christian and I will die as an Orthodox Christian."

"You were deceived by your wife," countered the muselimi, "and changed your faith. But come to your senses now and make a confession of your old faith and then you will see how much you will be honored by me."

John dismissed what the muselimi said to him and said: "Don't think, muselimi, that I will be so foolish and dumb as to leave the holy faith of the Orthodox Christians and be blinded again to come to the faith of Islam."



For this confession John was sentenced to be beheaded. Before his decapitation John requested that his hands be untied. His request was honored, so he made the sign of the Cross and said: "Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom." He then bent his head and it was cut off. This occurred near a tree of the Church of Saint Demetrios in Agrinio which still stands today.

The muslimi did not acknowledge John to be either a Muslim or a Christian, thus not allowing him to be buried in either faith's cemetery. His head and body were thus thrown into a stream near the Church of Saint Demetrios. Influential Christians bribed the aga who gave them permission to gather the body of the martyr to give him a proper

burial. However the aga ordered them to give no formal service or ceremony for John, and the Christians promised to not do so and merely buried him in a field.

Thus John the former Muslim sacrificed his life for the love of Jesus Christ in Vrachori, Vellas, Epirus on September 23, in the year 1814. Many years later a child would hear voices coming from the tree trunk where the martyrdom took place, and this occurred daily until Priests came and did a Sanctification Service.

The holy skull and relics of Saint John were brought to the Holy Monastery of Prousou in Evrytania sometime between 1814 and 1821, by the priest Cyril Kastanophylle and placed in a secret place. The years passed and knowledge of his whereabouts had become forgotten. His relics were confirmed to be his on January 4, 1974 when the monks of the monastery opened the crypt allegedly belonging to him. As soon as the monks moved the stone of the crypt, and indescribable fragrance filled the room, and they glorified God. Inside they found a skull and relics belonging to an unknown Saint. After an investigation of the place, they found a tile on which was written: "ΙΣ ΧΣ ΝΙΚΑ (Jesus Christ Conquers). Here is the former Ottoman John, who was martyred on behalf of Christ at Vrachori on 1814 September 23." The finding of his sacred relics is celebrated annually on January 4th.

There is a small chapel dedicated to Saint John near the tree of his martyrdom where his feast is celebrated annually with a transfer of his relics for a few days. This chapel was established on 26 October 1983. (from johnsanidopoulos.com)

Was Zechariah, the Father of John the Baptist, a High Priest?

By John Sanidopoulos

According to the entire tradition of the Church, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was the High Priest who entered the Temple in Jerusalem on the Day of Atonement in September and received a revelation from an Angel of the Lord. St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite informs us that it is for this reason that the Church celebrates the conception of John the Baptist on September 23rd and his birth on June 24th, nine months after the conception. Since the Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus was conceived six months after John was conceived, the Church celebrates the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary on March 25th and the Birth of Christ nine months later on December 25th. Forty days later, on February 2nd, Jesus was presented to the Temple. Hence, according to St. Nikodemos, the immovable liturgical calendar of Despotic Feasts of the Orthodox Church revolves around the fact that Zechariah was the High Priest who entered the Temple on the Day of Atonement in September and received a revelation from an Angel of the Lord.

That Zechariah was a High Priest is testified to us not only by the early Protoevangelium of James, but also by many Church Fathers and writers, such as Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine, Ambrose, Theodoret, Dionysius the Areopagite, Venerable Bede and Theophylact among others, not to mention the hymnography, iconography and entire tradition of the Church. What took place annually on the Day of Atonement is described in Leviticus 16, while the Gospel of Luke only describes the parts mentioned in Leviticus 16:12, 13, and 17. According to Chrysostom, the fact that December 25th was chosen as the day for the Lord's Nativity to be celebrated was an ancient custom even for his time in the West and received by the East around the year 376, at which time it spread rapidly throughout the Church. Chrysostom says this date could be observed in the Roman archives from the time of the census of Emperor Augustus, which survived up until that time. If this is true, and Chrysostom is convinced it is, then it gives more reasons to believe that the conception of John occurred in late September during the time of Atonement. Also, Chrysostom states that Zechariah was High Priest based on the fact that he was in the Temple alone burning incense while the people were praying outside, which only took place on the Day of Atonement, as testified in Hebrews 9:1-7.

The objection arises that Luke merely says Zechariah was a "Priest" and not a High Priest. Yet it was common for the High Priest to only be referred to as a Priest. For example, Aaron who was High Priest is referred to as being a Priest numerous times in Numbers and also in Leviticus: "...they must be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons who is a priest" (Lev. 13:2). David prophecies of Christ the High Priest: "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek" (Ps. 110:4).

Even St. Paul calls Christ a Priest: "And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears" (Heb. 7:15).

A few verses later Paul refers to Christ as "High Priest", indicating the interchangeability of the title. This is even carried down through the tradition of the Church, as we see in Gregory the Theologian's and John Chrysostom's writings on the Priesthood, where Priest is used in fact to describe the High Priest, or Bishop. Lastly, it is assumed by many that the Gospel of Luke was written to the High Priest Theophilus (37-41 A.D). If this is the case, that Luke refers to Zechariah as a Priest could merely mean a familiarity on the part of Theophilus as to who Zechariah truly was as well as his duties.

It is also argued that if the Archangel Gabriel appeared to the right of the Altar of Incense from where he proclaimed the good news to Zechariah, and this Altar was outside the Holy of Holies in the Holy Place, then Zechariah never entered the Holy of Holies as was customarily done on the Day of Atonement. However, both are true. It was part of the ritual for the Day of Atonement for the High Priest to cense within the Holy of Holies with a golden censer, and the vision of the Archangel Gabriel could very well have taken place after this censuring was completed and he returned to the Holy Place where the Altar of Incense was located.

Another objection is that the Hebrew and Roman records do not mention Zechariah as being High Priest at this time, therefore there is no support to the assumption that Zechariah was High Priest. However, when we examine the list of High Priests under the Romans, when they were chosen annually according to Roman law, and perhaps by lot according to Jewish tradition, we know there is a gap between the High Priests from 3 B.C. to 6 A.D. when we cannot say for sure who served as High Priest during that time and for how long, keeping in mind also that Herod had killed High Priests and appointed his own. Similarly, we know Herod murdered thousands of innocent people, as Josephus mentions, and even though it is not mentioned that he killed the innocent children at the time of the birth of Jesus or Zechariah in the Temple for not divulging the whereabouts of his infant son John (Matt. 23:35), it is a safe assumption that he at least could have. Also, Josephus even mentions that during the High Priesthood of Matthias another High Priest was appointed for a day to celebrate the Day of Atonement, though his name is given as Joseph. This could indicate however the lack of information about the records of High Priests at this time and how they changed so frequently in the time of Herod. Besides, as St. Nikodemos mentions, under Emperor Titus the records of the Temple were destroyed, so any information we have from this time is scant or missing completely.

What about the fact that Zechariah was said to be a Priest in the division of Abijah (a descendent of Eleazar, the son of Aaron) and chosen by lot to burn incense in his appointed order, which according to II Chronicles was usually a service performed twice a year by Priests for a week at a time? This can be clarified by the fact that all this is indeed true, that Zechariah was indeed a Priest of the division of Abijah, but that he was chosen by lot could very well indicate that he was chosen by lot to be High Priest at some point in time, and that he was to burn incense is one of the primary duties for the Day of Atonement, which at this time could have been during his appointed order as a Priest, thus indicating the contextual reason as to why Zechariah is called a Priest by Luke.

It is important to note that Luke says that after performing his service and receiving the vision of the Angel, Zechariah exited the Holy Place to find the multitudes worried (1:21-23). Consider one detail pertinent but lacking in this story: When the High Priest would offer incense in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he would say a brief prayer before exiting. If the High Priest was to die inside, the other Priests on duty would have to retrieve his body without entering the Holy of Holies. Therefore, the prayer of the Priest needed to be brief, lest the people grow concerned about his predicament, since his body could not be retrieved from the Holy of Holies (unless they pulled him out by a rope attached to him) nor could they enter the Holy Place when the incense was offered.

Two Jewish texts illustrate this:

Mishnah, Yoma 5.1: "He did not make the prayer long so as to frighten Israel."

Jerusalem Talmud, Yoma 42c (regarding an incident that happened to a High Priest, Shim'on the Righteous who served as High Priest around 200 B.C.): "Once a certain high priest made a long prayer and [his fellow priests] decided to go in after him - they say this high priest was Shim'on the Righteous. They said to him: 'Why did you pray so long?' He said to them: 'I was praying that the temple of your God would not be destroyed.' They said to him: 'Even so, you should not have prayed so long.'"

So, when Zechariah exited the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place in late fashion, the people waiting outside would have naturally been worried. When the Angel of God appeared before Zechariah while he was offering the incense, he "was troubled when [Zechariah] saw [Gabriel], and fear fell upon [Zechariah]" (1:12). This was a natural reaction from Zechariah, as any activity out of the ordinary in the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place may have spelled death for the High Priest. But the Angel assured him to not be afraid, and that his prayer [according to Chrysostom, this prayer was for the remission of the sins of the people] had been answered (1:13) [it was answered with the birth of John who would be the prophet

of the Messiah]. Luke does not say that Zechariah prayed. It is assumed by Luke that his reader, Theophilus, who was probably a High Priest, would have understood the procedure.

Lastly, there are three ancient accounts of divine visions that took place in the Temple of Jerusalem, and a close reading of all three show a common narrative (Ant. 11:326-328, Ant. 13:282- 283, and Luke 1:5-23). The first two were written by Josephus in his Antiquities that refer to Jaddus the High Priest and Hyrcanus the High Priest, while the last refers to the story of Zechariah by Luke the Evangelist. There are sufficient differences between these three narratives to conclude that Luke is not directly dependent upon Josephus or vice-versa. Yet there are haunting similarities which suggest the possibility that both Josephus and the author of Luke-Acts may have known and used a common High Priestly narrative tradition. Among the similarities is that all three took place in the Temple after a sacrifice of (*continued from page 7*) some sort and bore a message of salvation for the people. In his excellent work on Hellenistic apologetic historiography Gregory Sterling observes the common intellectual heritage shared by Josephus and the author of Luke-Acts as Hellenistic Jewish apologists for their respective communities, Jewish and Christian. Now if this is true, then it would be safe to assume that since the other visions in the Temple were given to High Priests, why should not Zechariah be a High Priest as well? (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

***NOTE* - Fr. Joseph is out of town from Sept. 17-26; if you need a priest in the interim, contact Fr. Peter Zarynow at 301-299-5120. We will pray the 3rd/6th Hour on Sunday, Sept. 23 at 9:30, followed by a deacon's service with Eucharist at 10:00. The usual service schedule will resume with Confession and Vespers on Saturday, Sept. 29.**

Annual Parish Picnic

We will be holding our newly instituted Annual Parish Picnic on Sunday, October 14 following Divine Liturgy, rain or shine. We will need picnic-style foods: meats, sides, drinks, and desserts. There is a sign-up sheet in the narthex. We look forward to seeing you there!

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Grace Bishop GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Santiago Alzugaray, Alicia Barosio and family, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Tucker Karl and family, Robert & Pam Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Alexander Shostko, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectaros and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)