

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

Children's Sunday School 9:30 AM | Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.

July 21, 2019 – 5th Sunday After Pentecost | Prophet Ezekiel

The Holy Prophet Ezekiel lived in the sixth century before the birth of Christ. He was born in the city of Sarir, and descended from the tribe of Levi; he was a priest and the son of the priest Buzi. Ezekiel was led off to Babylon when he was twenty-five years old together with King Jechoniah II and many other Jews during the second invasion of Jerusalem by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar.

The Prophet Ezekiel lived in captivity by the River Chebar. When he was thirty years old, he had a vision of the future of the Hebrew nation and of all mankind (Ez. 1). The prophet beheld a shining cloud, with fire flashing continually, and in the midst of the fire, gleaming bronze. He also saw four living creatures in the shape of men, but with four faces. Each had the face of a man in front, the face of a lion on the right, the face of an ox on the left, and the face of an eagle at the back. There was a wheel on the earth beside each creature, and the rim of each wheel was full of eyes.

Over the heads of the creatures there seemed to be a firmament, shining like crystal. Above the firmament was the likeness of a throne, like glittering sapphire in appearance. Above this throne was the likeness of a human form, and around Him was a rainbow.



According to the explanation of the Fathers of the Church, the human likeness upon the sapphire throne prefigures the Incarnation of the Son of God from the Most Holy Virgin Mary, who is the living Throne of God. The four creatures are symbols of the four Evangelists: a man (St Matthew), a lion (St Mark), an ox (St Luke), and an eagle (St John); the wheel with the many eyes is meant to suggest the sharing of light with all the nations of the earth. During this vision the holy prophet fell down upon the ground out of fear, but the voice of God commanded him to get up. He was told that the Lord was sending him to preach to the nation of Israel. This was the beginning of Ezekiel's prophetic service.

The Prophet Ezekiel announces to the people of Israel, held captive in Babylon, the tribulations it would face for not remaining faithful to God. The prophet also proclaimed a better time for his fellow-countrymen, and he predicted their return from Babylon, and the restoration of the Jerusalem Temple.

There are two significant elements in the vision of the prophet: the vision of the temple of the Lord, full of glory (Ez. 44:1-10); and the bones in the valley, to which the Spirit of God gave new life (Ez. 37:1-14). The vision of the temple was a mysterious prefiguring of the race of man freed from the working of the Enemy and the building up of the Church of Christ through the redemptive act of the Son of God, incarnate of the Most Holy Theotokos. Ezekiel's description of the shut gate of the sanctuary, through which the Lord God would enter (Ez. 44: 2), is a prophecy of the Virgin giving birth to Christ, yet remaining a virgin. The vision of the dry bones prefigured the universal resurrection of the dead, and the new eternal life bestowed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The holy Prophet Ezekiel received from the Lord the gift of wonderworking. He, like the Prophet Moses, divided the waters of the river Chebar, and the Hebrews crossed to the opposite shore, escaping the pursuing Chaldeans. During a time of famine the prophet asked God for an increase of food for the hungry.

Ezekiel was condemned to execution because he denounced a certain Hebrew prince for idolatry. Bound to wild horses, he was torn to pieces. Pious Hebrews gathered up the torn body of the prophet and buried it upon Maur Field, in the tomb of Sim and Arthaxad, forefathers of Abraham, not far from Baghdad. The prophecy of Ezekiel is found in the book named for him, and is included in the Old Testament.

St Demetrius of Rostov (October 28 and September 21) explains to believers the following concepts in the book of the Prophet Ezekiel: if a righteous man turns from righteousness to sin, he shall die for his sin, and his righteousness will not be remembered. If a sinner repents, and keeps God's commandments, he will not die. His former sins will not be held against him, because now he follows the path of

righteousness (Ez. 3:20; 18:21-24). [The prophet Ezekiel is commemorated on July 23 on the Greek calendar – Ed.] (*from oca.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 10:1-10

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them." But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*) or, "'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 8:28-9:1

At that time, when Jesus had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed *men*, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. And suddenly they cried out, saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" Now a good way off from them there was a herd of many swine feeding. So the demons begged Him, saying, "If You cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine." And He said to them, "Go." So when they had come out, they went into the herd of swine. And suddenly the whole herd of swine ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and perished in the water. Then those who kept *them* fled; and they went away into the city and told everything, including what *had happened* to the demon-possessed *men*. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged *Him* to depart from their region. So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

All the testimonies of scripture and the festivals of the church imitate the marvelous splendor of the star. For the stars are firmly established in the heavens; they are known better in relation to each other, and brilliantly shine their light upon

the entire sphere of the earth. For the same star which is seen by those in India is not hidden from the sight of the Scythians; it shimmers over land, illuminates the sea, and serves as a pilot for those who sail. And even though we may not know their names on account of their numbers, we nevertheless marvel at their splendor on account of their beauty. So it is with each of the saints. For even though their relics are enclosed within tombs, their power under heaven is not restricted. And you can learn that this is true from the scriptures. Palestine contains the relics of Abraham, and yet his hut rivals paradise itself. For the same God who appeared in paradise to pass a sentence on Adam was welcomed as a stranger in the tent of the patriarch. A single tomb enshrines the bones of Joseph, but the whole world is astounded by his struggle against the Egyptian woman. The tomb of Moses is nowhere to be found, and yet after his death he bears witness to the one who tore the Red Sea asunder with a rod. We do not know where Isaiah is buried, and yet through his prophecy the whole church cries out: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son." (Is. 7:14) Daniel is buried in Babylon, and yet he cries out through all the earth: "Behold one is coming upon the clouds of heaven as the Son of man." (Dan. 7:13) The children in the company of Ananias likewise fell asleep in Babylon, and yet through them the whole world shouts out loudly: "O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord." (Dan. 3:58) Ezekiel is buried in Persia, and together with the cherubim he cries out: "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place." (Ez. 3:12) The devil, therefore, gained nothing by putting Adam to death in paradise, for through death, God opened up to the righteous the gate of confidence.

...Abel is commemorated on account of his sacrifice. Enoch is remembered as well-pleasing to God. Melchisedek is proclaimed as the image of the Son of God. Abraham is extolled on account of his faith. Isaac is praised as a type of Christ. Jacob is called blessed on account of his wrestling. Joseph is honored on account of his chastity. Job is called blessed on account of his patient endurance. Moses is acclaimed as the giver of the law. Joshua the son of Nun is commemorated as a general. Sampson is blessed as one who spoke intimately with God. Elijah is testified on account of his zeal. Isaiah has been reckoned a theologian. Daniel is proclaimed for his understanding. Ezekiel is admired as a seer of ineffable mysteries. David is heralded as the father of the mystery of the incarnation according to the flesh. and Solomon is admired for his wisdom. but there is nothing as exalted as Mary the Theotokos, for the same on whom all the prophets beheld enigmatically in their visions she carried incarnate in her womb. For what could possibly have hindered the unspeakable dispensation of the Word of God? The swelling of pregnancy and the physical changes of the body? But the Word is a stranger to swelling and changing. Confinement within the womb? But the

divinity is uncircumscribable. The defilement of the body? But in what he created without pollution he became flesh, and from there he was born without defilement; indeed, such love resounds to the glory of the King. Childbirth? But childbirth did not diminish the One who is without beginning. His becoming man? But the divine nature did not undergo any change. His having a mother according to the flesh? But he did not cease being motherless according to his divinity. Lying swaddled in a manger? But he was not stripped of the bosom of the Father. His presence in the cave? But the Trinity was never absent from its throne. Thus there is nothing in all the world like Mary the Theotokos. Traverse all creation in reflection, O man, and try to see if there is anything greater or even equal to the Holy Virgin Theotokos. Go round the earth and come back; scan the seas; examine the air; scrutinize the heavens with your mind; consider carefully all the invisible angelic powers, and see if there is anything so marvelous in all creation. For the "heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 18:1); the angels perform their duties in fear; archangels tremble as they worship; the cherubim shudder unable to endure his presence; the seraphim, borne about on their wings, are unable to draw near and cry out in terror, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of his praises." (Is.6:3) The sea could not endure the sound of his voice; the clouds in terror became a vehicle for his Ascension; the sun shuddered unable to endure his maltreatment on the cross; Hades in fear vomited forth its dead; the gatekeepers of Hades trembled when they saw him; the Mount (Sinai) fumed with smoke at the presence of his approach; the bush burst into flames unable to withstand the sight of him; the Jordan shivered and turned back; the Red Sea, dreading the rod as a sign of the Lord, was rent asunder and again grew calm; the rod of Aaron on account of the image of the incarnation blossomed contrary to the laws of nature; the fire in Babylon stood in awe before the number of the Trinity. Count up the miracles, and marvel at the victory of the Virgin, for he whom all creation praises in fear and trembling she alone admitted ineffably into the bridal chamber of her womb.

On account of Mary all women are blessed. No longer does the female stand accused, for it has produced an offspring which surpasses even the angels in glory... now the assembly of women is admired: Sarah is praised as the fertile seedbed of nations; Rebeccah is honored as a shrewd purveyor of blessings; Leah also is admired as the mother of the ancestor of Christ according to the flesh; Deborah is praised because she overcame nature and fought as a leader in combat; Elizabeth is also called blessed because she conceived in her womb the leapings of the Forerunner of grace; and Mary is venerated for she became a mother, a servant, a cloud, a bridal chamber, and the ark of the Lord. A mother, for she gave birth to the one who willed to be born. A servant, confessing her nature and proclaiming

the grace. A cloud, for by the Holy Spirit she conceived him to whom she gave birth without pain. A bridal chamber, for the Word of God pitched the tent of the mystery of the incarnation in her as in a wedding hall. An ark, containing not the Law, but bearing in her womb the Giver of the Law. Because of this, let us say to her: "Blessed are you among women." You, who alone healed the pain of Eve. You, who alone wiped away the tears of her who was groaning. You, who alone bore the redemption of the world. You, who alone were entrusted with the treasury of the pearl. You, who alone conceived without pleasure and gave birth without pain. You, who alone brought forth Emmanuel, as he himself desired. "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." The fruit, not the seed. The flower, not the passion. The radiance of God, not a creature. The one who sits on the throne with the Father, not a slave. The sun, not the sand. The one who receives worship, not a creature. The ransom, not the debtor. "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." In place of all, the prophet alone suffices to praise you, crying out: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb": he uttered the miracle, but kept silent as to how it came about. "And shall bear a son": he proclaimed the birth, but did not adulterate the relation. "And they shall call his name Emmanuel": he uttered the mystery and thundered forth the name, "which means: God is with us." He declared that the one who was born is God, and thereby stopped the mouths of the Jews. "God is with us," and error is extinguished. "God is with us," and circumcision is abolished. "God is with us," and the demons are put to flight. "God is with us," and the devil is defeated. "God is with us," and the baptismal font gives birth without tiring. "God is with us," and kings become pious. "God is with us," and the churches are filled with crowds. "God is with us," and death becomes but sleep. "God is with us," and the dead, leaping up in freedom, cry out: "Not a messenger, nor a minister, but God himself came and saved us." To Him be the glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

– St. Proclus, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Homily 5, On the Holy Virgin Theotokos*

Also Commemorated Today: Ven. Simeon of Emessa the Fool-For-Christ, and his companion Ven. John

The Monks Simeon, Fool-for-Christ, and his Fellow-Ascetic John were Syrians, and they lived in the sixth century at the city of Edessa. From childhood they were bound by close ties of friendship. The older of them, Simeon, was unmarried and lived with his aged mother. John, however, although he was married, lived with his father (his mother was dead) and with his young wife. Both friends belonged to wealthy families. When Simeon was thirty years old, and John twenty-four, they made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Venerable and Life-Creating Cross of the Lord. On the journey home the friends spoke of the

soul's path to salvation. Dismounting their horses, they sent the servants on ahead with the horses, while they continued on foot.

Passing through Jordan, they saw monasteries on the edge of the desert. Both of them were filled with an irrepressible desire to leave the world and spend their remaining life in monastic struggles. They turned off from the road, which their servants followed to Syria, and they prayed zealously that God would guide them to the monasteries on the opposite side. They besought the Lord to indicate which monastery they should choose, and they decided to enter whichever monastery had its gates open. At this time the Lord informed Igumen Nikon in a dream to open the monastery gates, so that the sheep of Christ could enter in. In great joy the comrades came through the open gates of the monastery, where they were warmly welcomed by the igumen, and they remained at the monastery. In a short while they received the monastic tonsure.

After remaining at the monastery for a certain time, Simeon desired to intensify his efforts, and to go into the desert to pursue asceticism in complete solitude. John did not wish to be left behind by his companion, and he decided to share with him the work of a desert-dweller. The Lord revealed the intentions of the companions to Igumen Nikon, and on that night when Saints Simeon and John intended to depart the monastery, he himself opened the gates for them. He prayed with them, gave them his blessing and sent them into the wilderness.

When they began their life in the desert, the spiritual brothers at first experienced the strong assaults of the devil. They were tempted by grief over abandoning their families, and the demons tried to discourage the ascetics, subjecting them to weakness, despondency and idleness. The brothers Simeon and John remembered their monastic calling, and trusting in the prayers of their Elder Nikon, they continued upon their chosen path. They spent their time in unceasing prayer and strict fasting, encouraging one another in their struggle against temptation.

After a while, with God's help, the temptations stopped. The monks were told by God that Simeon's mother and John's wife had died, and that the Lord had vouchsafed them the blessings of Paradise. After this Simeon and John lived in the desert for twenty-nine years, and they attained complete dispassion (apathia) and a high degree of spirituality. Saint Simeon, through the inspiration of God, considered that now it was proper for him to serve people. To do this, he must leave the desert solitude and go into the world. St. John, however, believing that he had not attained such a degree of dispassion as his companion, decided not to leave the wilderness. The brethren parted with tears. Simeon journeyed to Jerusalem, and there he venerated the Tomb of the Lord and all the holy places. By his great humility the holy ascetic entreated the Lord to permit him to serve his

neighbor in such a way that they should not acknowledge him. Saint Simeon chose for himself the difficult task of foolishness for Christ. Having come to the city of Emesa, he stayed there and passed himself off as a simpleton, behaving strangely, for which he was subjected to insults, abuse and beatings. In spite of this, he accomplished many good deeds. He cast out demons, healed the sick, delivered people from imminent death, brought the unbelieving to faith, and sinners to repentance.

All these things he did under the guise of foolishness, and he never received praise or thanks from people. Saint John highly esteemed his spiritual brother, however. When one of the inhabitants of the city of Emesa visited him in the wilderness, asking for his advice and prayers, he would invariably direct them to “the fool Simeon”, who was better able to offer them spiritual counsel. For three days before his death Saint Simeon ceased to appear on the streets, and he enclosed himself in his hut, where there was nothing except for bundles of firewood. Having remained in unceasing prayer for three days, Saint Simeon fell asleep in the Lord. Some of the city poor, his companions, had not seen the fool for some time. They went to his hut and found him dead.

Taking up the dead body, they carried him without church singing to a place where the homeless and strangers were buried. While they carried the body of Saint Simeon, several of the inhabitants heard a wondrous church singing, but could not understand from whence it came. After Saint Simeon died, Saint John also fell asleep in the Lord. Shortly before his death, Saint Simeon saw a vision of his spiritual brother wearing a crown upon his head with the inscription: “For endurance in the desert.” *(from oca.org)*

...And They're Off!!

Fr. Joseph blessed our campers (and their ride) as they headed off to Camp Nazareth before liturgy last Sunday (*below*).





IOCC
RACE TO RESPOND

BALTIMORE RUNNING FESTIVAL 2019

Do you want to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable families around the world? Join our IOCC team at the Baltimore Running Festival on October 19, 2019, and help raise money for those in need in places like Ethiopia, Greece, the Holy Land, and around the world. For the past six years at the Baltimore Running Festival, IOCC's team has included a wide range of participants, from kindergarteners to an Orthodox priest and retired grandmothers! All abilities of walkers and runners are welcome, as there is a range of participation options: a 5K, Team Relay, Half Marathon, and Full Marathon. Signing up is easy at www.iocc.org/baltimore.

Social Team for July 28

Team 6 is up next week – Tucker, Blaydoe M., Woods, Wright RC. Thank you!

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan 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, Presbyteria Katie Baker and family, Dn. Steve Hall, Santiago Alzugaray, 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.)