

The New Testament.

1. The Nativity of the Holy Virgin Mary.

When the time drew near for the birth of the Saviour of the world, in the Galilean city of Nazareth, there lived a descendant of King David, *Joachim*, with his wife *Anna*. They were both pious people and were known not for their royal ancestry but for their humility and charity.

Their entire lives were permeated with love for God and people. They lived to a ripe old age but never had children, and this grieved them very much. In spite of their old age, they did not cease to petition God to send them children. They made a vow that, if a child was born to them, they would have consecrated it to the service of God. At that time, every Jew hoped that his posterity would have taken a part in the kingdom of the Messiah, that is, Christ the Saviour. Therefore, every childless Jew was held in contempt by the others, for this was considered a great punishment by God for one's sins. This was especially trying to Joachim as a descendant of King David because from his seed Christ meant to be born.

For their patience, great faith, and love for God and for each other, God sent Joachim and Anna great joy. Toward the end of their lives, a daughter was born to them. According to the command of an angel of God, She was given the name *Mary*. The birth of Mary brought a joy not only to Her parents but to all people because She was foreordained by God to be the *Mother of the Son of God, the Saviour of the world*. The Nativity of the Holy Virgin Mary is celebrated by the Holy Orthodox Church as one of its major holidays on the 8th of September (September 21 NS).

Troparion of the Feast

Thy Nativity, O Theotokos Virgin, hath proclaimeth joy to all the world; for from Thee hath dawned the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, annulling the curse and bestowing the blessing, abolishing death and granting us life eternal.

2. The Entry into the Temple of the Most-holy Virgin Mary.

When the Virgin Mary reached the age of three years, Her pious parents prepared to fulfil their promise. They called together their relatives, invited friends the same age as their daughter, dressed Her in Her finest clothes, and accompanied by the people singing hymns, they brought Her to the Temple in Jerusalem to be consecrated to God. Her friends and Mary Herself walked with burning candles in their hands. Led by the chief priest, the priests, while singing hymns, came out of the Temple to meet them.

Joachim and Anna with reverent prayers set Mary on the first step of the flight of stairs leading to the Temple. This staircase had fifteen high steps, according to the number of the psalms which the priests chanted upon entering the Temple.

There, three-year-old Mary Herself climbed the high steps without any assistance. At the top, the chief priest met and blessed Her as he always did with all who came to be consecrated to God. Then, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he led Her into the Holy of Holies. This was the most sacred place in the Temple. No one had the right to enter there except him, and he did only once a year. The Holy Spirit enlightened the chief priest with the knowledge that Mary, the chosen young girl, was worthy to enter the most sacred place. She was destined by God to become the Mother of the Son of God, Who would open the way for all people into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Fulfilling their promise, Joachim and Anna returned home, and Mary remained to live at the Temple. There She with other girls studied the Law of God and handiwork. She prayed a great deal, read the Holy Scriptures, and strictly observed the fasts. Mary lived at the Temple of God about eleven years, grew deeply devout in everything was submissive to God, and was extraordinarily meek and industrious.

The Most-holy Mary decided to consecrate Her entire life to the one God alone. For this, She vowed that She would never marry; that is She would remain a virgin forever. The Holy Spirit and holy angels protected the godly young girl.

The Entry into the Temple of the Most-holy Virgin Mary is celebrated

in the Holy Orthodox Church on the 21st of November (December 4 NS). This day is considered a great holyday, which in the hymns of the Church is called the *harbinger of God's good-will toward man*. Starting with this holyday, we begin to sing "*Christ is born...*" during Matins.

Troparion of the Feast.

Today is the prelude of God's good-will and the heralding of the salvation of mankind. The Virgin is presented openly, and She proclaimed Christ unto all. Then, with a great voice let us cry aloud: Rejoice, O Thou fulfilment of the Creator's dispensation.

The Holy Virgin Mary with Joseph.

When the Virgin Mary reached fourteen years of age, it was necessary by law for Her to leave the Temple. She either had to go back to Her parents or to marry. Joachim and Anna had already reposed by that time. The priests wanted to give her in marriage, but Mary explained to them Her vow to God — to remain forever virgin. Then, the priests, guided by God, betrothed Her to a distant relative, the 80-year-old Joseph, so that he would have taken care of Her and kept Her virginity.

Joseph lived in the city of Nazareth. He was also descended from the royal family of David. However, he was not a rich man but a carpenter.

The Holy Virgin Mary in the home of Joseph led a humble and solitary life as before in the Temple. In Her free time, She read the books of the Holy Scripture and prayed to God.

Note: Here is presented a short summary of the Birth of the Mother of God and Her childhood as described in Holy Tradition and piously preserved in the Holy Orthodox Church. (About Holy Tradition, see Part IV *On Christian Faith and Life*, in the section "About supernatural revelation by God — about Holy Tradition and Holy Scriptures.").

3. The Announcement of the Angel about the Birth of the Forerunner.

God through the Prophet Malachi foretold that before the advent

in the world of Christ the Saviour Himself, there would have appeared the *Forerunner*, that is, the Predecessor of the Saviour. The Forerunner would be a great prophet; he would proclaim to the people the imminent appearance of Christ preparing them to meet Christ the Saviour.

For the birth of the Forerunner, God chose relatives of the Holy Virgin Mary, the priest *Zacharias* and his wife *Elizabeth*. Already old, they had no children. They fervently prayed to God to deliver them from such unhappiness.

One day, Zacharias was serving in the Temple in Jerusalem. When he entered the sanctuary for the censuring, there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the table on which the incense was burning. Zacharias was confused; terror overcame him. The angel said to him, "Fear not, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness..., for he shall be great in the sight of the Lord..., and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God." He would come first; that is, he would be the Forerunner before the Lord the Saviour. "And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zacharias overwhelmed with joy, could not believe immediately, and said, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife well stricken in years." The angel answering said, "I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God and am sent to speak unto thee... behold, thou shalt be dumb and not able to speak until the day that these things shall be performed because thou believest not my words."

In the meantime, the praying people awaited Zacharias and were amazed that he delayed so long in the sanctuary of the Temple. Coming out, he was unable to speak with the people, explaining with signs. Then, everyone understood that he had experienced a vision in the sanctuary. At the end of his services for the day in the Temple, Zacharias went home.

When Elizabeth found out about the great favour God was bestowing on them, she hid her joy from people with humility and thanked God.

Note: This sacred event is described in the Holy Gospels by the Apostle and Evangelist Luke (Luke 1:5-25).

4. The Annunciation to the Holy Virgin Mary.

Six months after the appearance of the angel to Zacharias, the Archangel Gabriel was sent by God to the city of Nazareth to the Holy Virgin Mary with the glorious news that the Lord had chosen Her to be the mother of the Saviour of the world.

The Archangel appeared in the home of the righteous Joseph while Mary was reading the Holy Scriptures. He came to Her and said, "Rejoice, who art full of grace (that is, filled with the grace of God — the gift of the Holy Spirit), the Lord is with Thee: blessed art Thou among women."

Mary was troubled by the words of the angel and thought: what manner of salutation could this be?

The Archangel said to Her, "Fear not, Mary; for Thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, Thou shalt conceive in Thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and He shall reign for ever."

Mary in bewilderment asked the Archangel, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"

The angel answered Her that all this would be accomplished by the power of Almighty God. "The Holy Spirit shall come over Thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow Thee; therefore also that Holy One, which shall be born of Thee, shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, Thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible."

Then, Mary with humility said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto Me according to thy word."

And the Archangel Gabriel departed from Her.

The Annunciation of the Holy Virgin is celebrated by the Holy Orthodox Church on the 25th of March (7th of April, NS). The Feast of the Annunciation is one of the greatest feasts. The words annunciation news (in Russian and Greek means "good news" or "joyful tidings") are that the emancipation of man from sin and eternal death has begun.

Troparion of the Feast.

Today is the fountainhead of our salvation, and the manifestation of the mystery which was from eternity. The Son of God becometh the Virgin's Son, and Gabriel proclaimeth the good tidings of grace; wherefore, we also cry to the Theotokos with him: Rejoice, Thou who art full of grace! The Lord is with Thee.

Note: See the Gospel of Luke 1:26-38.

5. The Visit of the Most-holy Virgin Mary to the Righteous Elizabeth.

The Most-holy Virgin Mary having found out from the angel that Her cousin Elizabeth, wife of the priest Zacharias, would have soon gave birth to a son, hurried to visit her.

Entering the home, She greeted Elizabeth. Upon hearing this greeting, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she realized that Mary was honoured to be the Mother of God. Speaking with a loud voice she said, "Blessed art Thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of Thy womb. And whence is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?"

The Most-holy Virgin Mary in answer to the words of Elizabeth praised God and said, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour, for He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden, for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call Me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation." For about three months the Virgin Mary stayed with Elizabeth, and then returned home to Nazareth.

God also informed the righteous aged Joseph of the imminent birth of the Saviour by the Holy Virgin Mary. An angel of God appearing to him in a dream revealed that Mary would bring forth a Son by the action of the Holy Spirit as the Lord God had said through the Prophet Isaiah (cf. 7:14). "And thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins," said the angel to Joseph.

Note: See the Gospels of Luke, 1:39-56 and Matthew, 1:18-25.

6. The Nativity of John the Baptist.

Soon after the visit to them by the Mother of God, a son was born to the righteous Zacharias and Elizabeth. Neighbouring relatives of Elizabeth rejoiced with her over God's mercy. On the eighth day, according to Jewish law, a name had to be given to the infant. The gathering of friends and relatives wanted to call him Zacharias after the name of his father. But Elizabeth said, "Not so; but he shall be called John."

They said, "There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name," and they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

Zacharias asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all marvelled. His speech returned immediately, and he began praising God and prophesied by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that soon would come the Saviour, and that John would be His Forerunner to prepare people to receive the Saviour.

Fear came on all who heard about this miraculous event, and they marvelled saying about John, "What manner of child shall this be?"

The Lord guarded the child, and he grew, waxed strong in spirit, and was in the desert till the day of his showing unto Israel.

The birth of the Holy and Chief Prophet and Forerunner of Christ John is celebrated on the 24th of June (July 7, NS).

Note: See the Gospel of Luke, 1:57-80.

7. The Nativity of Christ the Saviour.

At the time of the reign in Judea of Herod, who was under the power of Rome, the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus sent out a decree that all the world should have been taxed. Every Jew had to register in his own city where his ancestors lived.

Joseph and the Virgin Mary were descended from the house and lineage of David and therefore went out of Nazareth into the city of David, *Bethlehem*. Arriving in Bethlehem, they were not able to find room in the inn and stayed outside the city, in a cave, where

shepherds drove their cattle in bad weather. In this cave that night the Holy Virgin Mary brought forth Her Child — the Son of God, Christ, the Saviour of the world. She wrapped the Divine Child in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger where they put feed for the cattle.

The shepherds in Bethlehem were the first to find out about the birth of the Saviour. On this night they were watching their flocks in the field. Suddenly an angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord was shown round about them. The shepherds were sore afraid.

The angel said to them, "Fear not. I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David (Bethlehem) a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.*"

When the angels were gone away from them, the shepherds said one to another, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing, which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us."

They came with haste and found Mary, and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. They worshipped the Child and told how they had seen and listened to the angel. Mary kept all these things in her heart.

Then, the shepherds returned to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen.

Eight days after the birth of the Saviour, His Mother with Joseph, according to the law, gave Him the name Jesus, which had been given by God through the angel.

Note: See the Gospel of Luke, 2:1-21.

Adoration of the Magi.

While Joseph and the Holy Mother of God and the Child Jesus were still in Bethlehem, *Magi* (wise men) from distant countries in the East (Persia or Babylonia) came to Jerusalem.

The Magi were scholarly people who observed and studied the stars. At that time, people believed that upon the birth of a great person there would appear in the heavens a new star. Many pagans, taught

by the Jews in dispersion, knew of the coming into the world of the Messiah, the Great King of Israel, Who was to subdue the whole world. Therefore, they waited knowing that on His birth there would appear a new star in the heavens. The wise men were pious people, and the Lord by His mercy gave them such a sign: in heaven there appeared a new, extraordinary star. Having seen this star, the wise men immediately understood that the awaited King had been born. They prepared for the journey and went to the capital of the Jewish kingdom, Jerusalem, to find out where this King was born and to worship Him.

In Jerusalem, the wise men began to ask, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east and are come to worship Him."

When King Herod heard this he was troubled. He was in everything a cruel and suspicious man. Because of one of his suspicions, he sent his own children to execution. Now, he was especially terrified, afraid that they would seize his power and hand over his royal throne to the newborn King. And all the people of Jerusalem were agitated upon hearing such news.

Herod gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people, men learned in the books of the Holy Scripture, and demanded of them where Christ should be born.

They answered, "In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the Prophet Micah."

Then, Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the young Child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again that I may come and worship Him also." In so doing, Herod thought to kill the new born King.

When they had heard the King, the wise men departed; and lo, the star which they saw in the east went before them till it came and stood over where the young Child was.

At that time, the holy elder Joseph and the Most-holy Virgin Mary with the Child lived in the city, in the house where they moved from the cave as the people after the census had begun to disperse.

The wise men came into the house and saw the young child Jesus with His mother. They fell down, and worshipped Him, and presented Him gifts: *gold*, *frankincense* (incense), and *myrrh* (expensive fragrant oil).

By their gifts, the wise men signified that the newborn child Jesus is King, and God, and man. Gold they brought to Him as King (as a tribute, or tax); incense, as God (as incense is used during worship services); and myrrh, as a man who must die (because the deceased were then anointed and rubbed with perfumed oil).

Afterward the Wise Men wanted to return to Jerusalem to Herod, but they were warned by God in a dream that they should have not returned to Herod. Then, they departed into their own country another way.

Tradition preserves the names of the wise men, who then became Christians: *Melchior*, *Gasper* and *Balthasar*. Their memory is celebrated by the Church on the day of the Nativity of Christ.

The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ is celebrated in the Orthodox Church on the 25th of December (January 7 NS). For this great feast we prepare ourselves by keeping the fast, which is called the *Nativity Fast* (or Advent).

Note: See the Gospel of Matthew, 2:1-12.

Troparion of the Feast.

Thy, Nativity O Christ our God, hath shined upon the world the light of knowledge; for thereby, they that worshipped the stars were taught by a star to worship Thee, the Sun of righteousness, and to know Thee, the Dayspring from on high. O Lord, glory to Thee.

("Those who worshipped the stars" were the wise men who studied the sky and worshipped the stars).

Kontakion of the Feast.

Today the Virgin giveth birth to Him Who is transcendent in essence; and the earth offereth a cave to Him Who is unapproachable. Angels with shepherds give glory; with a star the Magi do journey; for our sake a young Child is born, Who is pre-eternal God.

8. The Meeting of the Lord.

According to the Law of Moses, all Hebrew parents must bring their first born son on the fortieth day after birth to the Temple to be consecrated to God. It was the custom to bring a sacrifice in thanksgiving to God. The law was established in remembrance of the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt — freedom from slavery — when the first-born Hebrews were spared from death.

In fulfilment of this law, the Mother of God with Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem and brought for the sacrifice two fledgling doves.

At this time in Jerusalem, there lived an old man by the name of Simeon. He was a righteous, pious man, and he awaited the coming of the Messiah. It was foretold to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not have died before he had seen Christ the Lord. Simeon waited for the fulfilment of the promise of God for a long time. According to tradition, he lived about 300 years. Then, one day, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he went to the Temple. When Mary with Joseph brought the infant Jesus, Simeon met the Child, took Him in his arms, and glorifying God said, "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, O Master, according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples, a light of revelation for the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

Simeon called the newborn Lord as "*a light to enlighten the Gentiles*" (that is, all the tribes and nations) and "*the glory of Thy people*," — that is, "*Israel*." There are two Israels: in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, it was the chosen Hebrew people or Israelites, and in the New Testament — the whole Orthodox Christian world.

Joseph and the Mother of God marvelled at the words of Simeon. Simeon blessed them; and turning to the Mother of God, he prophesied to Her about the Child: "Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; yea, a sword shall pass through Thy own soul, also." The meaning is that She Herself would endure profound grief over Her Son when He would suffer.

There was, in the Temple, the pious widow *Anna*, a prophetess, an eighty-four year old widow, who served God with fasting and prayers night and day. She recognized the Saviour and, coming in that instant, glorified the Lord and spoke of Him to all of those in Jerusalem who awaited the coming to earth of Christ the Saviour.

When they had performed all things according to the Law of the

Lord, the Mother of God with the Child and Joseph returned home.

This event, in which Saints Simeon and Anna *met in the Temple* the infant Christ presented by the Mother of God and Joseph and glorified Him, is called the Feast of the *Meeting of the Lord* and is celebrated in the Holy Orthodox Church as one of the great feast days on the 2nd of February (February 15th NS).

The righteous Simeon is called the God-receiver, that is, he who received in his hands God the Saviour.

Note: See the Gospel of Luke, 2:22-39.

Troparion of the Feast.

Rejoice, Thou Who art full of grace, O Virgin Theotokos, for from Thee hath risen the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, enlightening those in darkness. Rejoice, thou also, O righteous Elder, as thou receivest in thine arms the Redeemer of our souls, Who also granteth unto us the Resurrection.

9. The Flight into Egypt and Return to Nazareth.

When all was fulfilled according to the Law concerning Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem, and the wise men were already on the road to their home, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Arise, and take the young Child and His Mother, and flee into Egypt, and lie thou there until I bring thee word, for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."

Joseph immediately arose, saddled his donkey, quickly gathered the necessary things, took the young Child and His Mother, and the same night went into Egypt. According to tradition, James, son of Joseph, accompanied them on this journey.

In the meantime, Herod impatiently awaited the return of the wise men. When the wise men did not return from Bethlehem, he concluded that the wise men, not finding a newborn king, were ashamed to return to Jerusalem. For the time being, Herod was tranquil.

But after forty days the news spread throughout Jerusalem that Mary had presented in the Temple Her newborn Son, and that the

aged Simeon had come to the Temple to meet this Child and had prophesied that He was the Christ. Then, Herod realized that the wise men had figured out his evil intent and had purposely avoided returning to him. He was exceedingly angry.

Not knowing how to find the Christ Child, King Herod gave the disastrous order to kill all the children that were in Bethlehem and its surroundings from two years old and under. He hoped that among these children would be killed the Christ. Thus he calculated according to the time when he had diligently questioned the wise men. The soldiers sent by Herod killed 14,000 children. Everywhere were heard the howls and screams of the mothers whose crying for their children, innocent children, killed by the order of the brutal King would never have been comforted. They were the first martyrs to spill their blood for Christ.

Soon after this, Herod was punished for his cruelty. He came down with a terrible illness. His body rotted alive and was eaten by worms, and he died in terrible torment.

After the death of Herod, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Arise, and take the young Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead which sought the young Child's life." Joseph did as he was told and took his family into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus reigned in Judea in the place of Herod, his father, and that he was just as much cruel, Joseph was afraid to go there. Being warned of God in a dream, Joseph turned aside into the parts of Galilee, into his native city Nazareth. There Joseph dwelt with the child Jesus and His Mother.

The child Jesus grew and became strong in spirit and filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. From the earliest years of His childhood, Jesus Christ exhibited unusual intelligence and remarkable sanctity in all His actions.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew, 2:13-23 and Luke, 2:40.

10. The Saviour in the Temple as a Youth.

Joseph and the Most-holy Virgin Mary went to Jerusalem, to the Temple of God, to celebrate the Passover every year. When Jesus reached the age of twelve years, they took Him with them.

At the end of the feast, Joseph and Mary went home. The boy Jesus remained in Jerusalem. Joseph and the Mother of God did not notice it, for they thought that He was coming with relatives and friends. After a whole day on the road, toward evening, they started to look for Jesus among their relatives and acquaintances but did not find Him. In great anxiety, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. After three days, they found Jesus in the Temple and were amazed. He sat among the scholars, listened to them with attention, questioned them and Himself answered their questions. His unusual intelligence and answers left them wonderstruck.

His All-holy Mother went to Him and said, "My Son! Why have You thus dealt with us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing."

He said unto them, "How is it that you sought Me? Did ye not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

By these words the boy Jesus Christ showed that He was supposed to be in the Temple of God and that He was not simply a man but the Son of God, Who came to earth for a great work which God the Father had commissioned Him to do. They did not then understand His words, but the Holy Virgin Mary kept all His sayings in Her heart.

Jesus Christ went with Joseph and His Mother to Nazareth and was subjected to them. He helped Joseph in his trade, learning carpentry, ceaselessly increasing in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man.

Note: See the Gospel of Luke, 2:41-52.

11. The Preaching of St John the Baptist.

John, son of the righteous Zacharias and Elizabeth, lived from his youth in the wilderness and spent there his time in fasting and prayer. His clothing was made of camel's hair, and about loins he wore a leather girdle, and his food was locusts (a wild plant, not insects) and wild honey.

When John reached thirty years of age, the Lord directed him to go to the valley of the Jordan River and proclaim to all the people that the Saviour of the world would soon appear, and that all should

prepare to meet Him with repentance and baptism.

John went to the region of the Jordan and started to preach, "*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,*" — that is, the time was drawing near when the long awaited Saviour would appear, Who would summon everyone to His kingdom.

For a long time God had not sent a prophet to the Hebrew people. From the time of the last prophet, Malachi, there had passed four hundred years. Therefore, when they heard of the appearance of the Prophet John and about his marvellous life and teaching, people came from all directions to hear him. Whoever believed his words and repented of their sins, John *baptized* in the river Jordan, that is, he immersed each one in the water while placing his hands on the head of the baptized. Therefore, John the Forerunner was called the *Baptist*. In the process, John required of everyone that the repentance be sincere and the correction in oneself be accompanied by good works.

The baptism of John meant that as the body is washed and cleansed by water, thus, the soul of a person who repents and believes in the Saviour is cleansed by Christ of all his sins when he is baptized into the Church.

Among those who came to John were some people who considered themselves righteous, did not wish to repent, and, indeed, were vicious and evil as, for example, were the Pharisees and Sadducees — leaders of the Hebrew people. The *Pharisees* were proud of their descent from Abraham, praised themselves for fulfilling the Law, and considered themselves worthy to enter the Kingdom of Christ the Messiah. The *Sadducees* did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and in the future life. To these people John said, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" — that is, who told you that you by your own power could escape the anger of God and eternal punishment in the future life? "Bring forth fruits worthy for repentance. And think not to say within yourselves: we have Abraham as our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Remember, every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."

Hearing these words, the people asked him, "What shall we do then?"

John answered, "He that has two coats, let him impart to him that has none; and he that has food, let him do likewise," — that is, first of all, do good.

Then, publicans, or tax collectors, came and asked, "Master, what shall we do?" The publicans collected taxes for the Romans. The Jews hated the power of the Romans. Besides that, several of the publicans collected more than was proper and oppressed the people. The Jews despised all the publicans and considered them unworthy to enter the approaching Kingdom of Christ. John said to them, "Exact no more than that, which is appointed you."

The soldiers also asked of him, "What shall we do?" It often happened that the soldiers, dissatisfied with their wages, took property that belonged to other people, treated poor people badly, and accused other people for their own profit. John said to them, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages."

Many then wondered if John was Christ the Saviour, but John explained that he was not the Christ. "*I baptize you with water,*" he said, "*but after me One mightier than I is coming,*" — that is, soon after me will come He for whom you wait — Christ, "*the latchet of Whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose;*" — that is, I am unworthy to even be His servant to take off His shoes for Him. "*He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire;*" — that is, the baptism which He will give will burn up your sins like fire and give you the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The holy Prophet John preached to many others, teaching the people who came to him.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-18; Luke 3:1-18; John 1:15-28.

12. The Baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ.

During the time that John the Forerunner preached on the banks of the Jordan River and baptized people, Jesus Christ reached thirty years of age. He also went from Nazareth to the Jordan River to John to receive baptism from him.

John did not consider himself worthy to baptize Jesus Christ and began to shrink back from Him saying, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?"

But Jesus answering said to Him, "Suffer it to be so now," — that is,

do not hold back from me now, "for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," — to fulfil everything in the Law of God and to set an example for people. Then, John obeyed and baptized Jesus Christ.

Upon completion of the baptism, when Jesus Christ came out of the water, suddenly the heavens were opened over Him; and John saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him and heard the voice of God the Father from Heaven saying, "*This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.*"

Then, John was finally convinced that Jesus was the expected Messiah, Son of God, Saviour of the world.

The Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ is celebrated in the Holy Orthodox Church as one of the great feasts on *January 6th* (January 19 NS). The celebration of the Baptism of the Lord is also called *Theophany* or the Manifestation of God because at the time of baptism God revealed Himself to people as the Holy Trinity in this way: *God the Father* spoke from Heaven, the incarnate *Son of God* was baptized, and the *Holy Spirit* descended in as a dove. Also, at the time of baptism for the first time, people could see that in the person of Jesus Christ there appeared not only man but also *God*.

The day before the feast is an established fast day. The same strict fast is observed and the same types of services are celebrated as on the Eve of Christ's Nativity (Christmas). Because the Saviour by His own baptism sanctified the water, on this feast there is a blessing of water. On the day before, water is blessed in church and on the feast itself — under the open sky, in rivers, lakes, pools and wells. This Blessing of the Waters is often called "*The Procession to the Jordan.*"

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew, 3:13-17; Mark, 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-34.

Troparion of the Feast.

When Thou wast baptized in the Jordan, O Lord, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest; for the voice of the Father bare witness to Thee, calling Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the certainty of the word. O Christ our God Who hast appeared and hast enlightened the world, glory be to Thee!

13. The Lord Jesus Christ in the Wilderness.

After His baptism, the Lord Jesus Christ went into the wilderness in order to prepare in solitude by fasting and prayer for the accomplishing of His great work for which He had come to earth. For forty days and forty nights, He was in the wilderness with the beasts, not eating any food.

Then, the Devil came to Christ and tried to seduce Him into sin with cunning questions and delusions as he does to every man.

The Devil said to Jesus Christ, as if to say, in vain do You torment Yourself with hunger, "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."

The Saviour said to him in answer, "*It is written (in the Bible), man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*" (Deut. 8:3).

Then, the Devil led Jesus Christ to Jerusalem, set Him on a pinnacle of the Temple and said, "If You are the Son of God, cast Yourself down (for You there is no danger), because in the Scripture it is written: "*He shall give His angels charge over Thee, and on their hands shall they bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone*" (Ps. 90:11,12).

But Jesus said to him, *It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*, that is, where it is not necessary, do not demand and do not expect miracles (Deut. 6:16).

After that, the Devil took Him upon a high mountain and there in the twinkling of an eye, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and said, "All these things I will give Thee, because power over them has been handed over to me, and I can give it to whomever I will. All these things I will give Thee, if Thou will fall down and worship me."

Jesus Christ said to him, "*Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve*" (Deut. 6:13).

Then, the Devil in disgrace left Jesus Christ for the time being, and immediately angels came and ministered unto Him.

Thus, the Saviour conquered temptation from the Devil and demonstrated in so doing that He came to free people from the power of the Devil without any concessions to evil.

Following the example of the fast of Christ, the Holy Orthodox

Church establishes a forty day fast, which is called *Great Lent* and begins seven weeks before Pascha (Easter) — the bright Resurrection of Christ — and also establishes other fasts. The fast enables a person to cleanse himself of evil, of sinful inclinations, to help him fix his thoughts on God and to be closer to Him.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13.

14. The Lord Jesus Christ Appears to the People.

His First Disciples.

Returning from the wilderness, Jesus Christ again went to the shore of the Jordan where John was baptizing. Seeing Jesus, John said to the people, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh upon Himself the sins of the world;" — that is, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of the God, Who for as many as a thousand years had been prefigured in sacrificial offerings. Like the innocent lambs and calves slaughter for burnt offerings, He meekly takes upon Himself suffering and death and sheds His blood for the sins of the whole world in order to save people from eternal death.

And John witnessed saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven as a dove, and He abode upon Him. And I saw and bore record that this is the Son of God."

Again the next day, John looking upon Jesus as He walked said to two of his disciples standing by him, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

The two disciples heard John spoke, and they followed Jesus. One of them was *Andrew*, who, because he was the first to follow Christ, was called the "*First-called*." The other one was *John the Theologian*. Then, Andrew brought to Jesus Christ his brother Simon. The Saviour perceiving the strong faith in him said, "Thou art Simon the son of Joan; thou shalt be called *Cephas (Peter)*;" which is, by interpretation, a stone. The following day the Saviour called *Philip*, and Philip brought to Him *Nathaniel*.

After this, Jesus Christ went to the cities and towns of the Hebrew land to preach to the people the *Gospel*, the joyful news that He was promised Messiah, came to the earth to save people from the power of the Devil, sins, and eternal death, and to give people *eternal*

salvation — the Kingdom of God.

Jesus Christ often set forth the teaching about the Kingdom of God in *parables*, that is, in images, comparisons, or examples from the daily life in order to more graphically and more fully set for His teaching. Both the visible and invisible were created by God. There exists a marvellous unity and affinity between the two worlds. Therefore, the visible world speaks to us about the law of the invisible, heavenly world. *Our entire earthy life* with all life of the invisible world is a *great parable of God about the laws of the future life* in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In order to convince people that He is the promised Messiah and Son of God, Jesus Christ performed many *miracles*, that is, unusual deeds which a person with an ordinary power could not do and which could be accomplished only by the special power of God. Many of the Jews believed in Jesus Christ, and multitudes followed after Him listening to His divine teaching. others, especially rulers of Hebrew people, Pharisees, Sadducees, elders, and priests wishing to exercise power and to rule people, having evil hearts did not wish to accept His teaching of truth and to believe that He is the Saviour; and they become the enemies of Christ.

Notes: See the Gospel of John 1:29-51; Luke 4:14-15, 32-37; Mathew 4:17, 5:23-25, 21:45-46, 26:3-4.

15. The First Miracle of Jesus Christ.

Soon after the first disciples were called by the Saviour, in the city of Cana, not far from Nazareth, there was a wedding. To this wedding were invited Jesus Christ with His Most-pure Mother and the disciples. When it came time for the wedding banquet, there was insufficient wine. The Mother of God noticed it and said to Jesus Christ, "They have no wine."

But Jesus answered, "My hour is not yet come."

From this answer, the Holy Virgin understood that the time had not yet come for Him to reveal His divine power, but She knew of the love of Her Son for the people and was sure that He certainly would help the needy; and, therefore, She said to the servants, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."

In the house, there were six large waterpots of stone for purification

of water, after the manner of the Jews. Jesus Christ ordered to fill the waterpots with water. When they were filled to the brim, He said to the servants, "Draw out now and bear to the governor of the feast."

The servants drew and bare it to the governor. The ruler of the feast tried it and saw it was the very best wine. Then, he called the bridegroom and said, "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, then that which is worse, but thou hast kept the good wine until now." The governor said this because he did not know from whence the wine came. Only the servants, who drew the water, knew.

Thus the Saviour began His miracles and revealed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

The first miracle of Jesus Christ was accomplished on the request of His Mother. From this, we can see that Her prayers for us have great power.

Note: See the Gospel of John, 2:1-12.

16. The Merchants are Banished from the Temple.

The Jews' Passover was at hand. Jesus Christ went up to Jerusalem. Upon entering the Temple, He found great disorder. There they sold sheep, bullocks and doves; money changers were sitting at their tables. The lowing of the cattle, the bleating of the sheep, the talking of the people, the quarrels about the prices, the jingle of the coins — all this gave the Temple the semblance of a bazaar rather than the house of God.

Jesus Christ made a whip of small ropes and drove all the traders with their cattle out of the Temple. He overthrew the tables of the money changers and poured out their money. He said to them that sold doves, "Take these things away; make not My Father's house a house of merchandise." No one dared to disobey Jesus.

Having seen this, the chief Jews of the Temple came in a fury. They approached the Saviour and said, "What sign showest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things?"

Jesus Christ answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days

I will raise it up." But He spoke of the temple of His body and by these words predicted that when they killed Him, He would rise in three days.

When, therefore, He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this unto them, and they believed the word of Jesus.

During Jesus Christ's stay in Jerusalem during the feast of Passover, many people, seeing the miracles which He performed, believed in Him.

Note: See the Gospel of John, 2:13-25.

17. The Conversation with Nicodemus.

Among the people struck by the miracles of Jesus Christ and believing in Him, was a Pharisee *Nicodemus*, one of the rulers of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night unknown to all, so that the other Pharisees and rulers of the Jews, who disliked Jesus Christ, would not find out about this.

Nicodemus wanted to find out if Jesus Christ really was the expected Saviour of the world, and whom He would bring into His Kingdom, that is, what a man must do to enter His Kingdom. He said to the Saviour, "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with Him."

The Saviour speaking with Nicodemus said, "Verily, I say unto Thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." Nicodemus was very astonished to think a man could be born again. But the Saviour spoke to him not about the usual physical birth but about *spiritual* birth, that is, that a man must be completely changed in soul, perfectly *good and merciful*, and that such a change in a man may be accomplished only by the power of God.

The Saviour said to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born of water (by Baptism) and of the Spirit (Who descends upon a man during Baptism), he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." The Lord explained to Nicodemus that man born only of earthly parents remains sinful, meaning, and unworthy of the Kingdom of Heaven. Having been born of the Holy Spirit, a man becomes cleansed from sin, holy. How this change in the soul of a

man is accomplished ^¾ this is work of God and is not understood by people.

Therefore, the Saviour said to Nicodemus that He came to earth to suffer and to die for people, not to a royal throne does He come but to a cross. As Moses raised a serpent in the wilderness (that is, suspended on a pole a bronze serpent to save from death the Jews who had been bitten by venomous snakes); thus, the Son of Man must be suspended (that is, thus, Christ, the Son of Man, must be hung on a wooden cross), so that all who believe in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son (through suffering and death) for the salvation of people and sent Him into the world not to judge people but to save them.

Nicodemus from this time became a secret disciple of Jesus Christ.

Note: See the Gospel of John 3:1-21.

18. The Conversation with the Woman of Samaria.

Returning from Judea into Galilee, Jesus Christ with His disciples went through Samaria, past a city called *Sychar* (in ancient times called Shechem). Before the city, on the southern side, there was a well, dug, according to tradition by the patriarch Jacob.

Jesus Christ, wearied with His journey, sat on the well to rest. It was about noontime, and His disciples went into the city to buy food.

At that time, there came to the well a woman of Samaria to draw water.

Jesus Christ said to her, "Give me water to drink!"

The words of the Saviour greatly surprised the Samaritan woman. She said, "How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans."

Jesus said to her, "If thou knewest the gift of God, (that is, the great mercy of God which He has sent to you in this meeting), and Who it is that saith to thee, 'Give me water to drink,' thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water."

The Saviour called His divine teaching the living water. As water saves the man dying of thirst, thus His divine teaching saves man from eternal death and leads him to blessed eternal life. But the Samaritan woman thought that He spoke about ordinary well water, which by them was called "living" water.

The woman with astonishment asked Him, "Sir, Thou hast nothing to draw with and the well is deep. From whence then hast Thou that living water? Art Thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank thereof himself and his children and his cattle?"

Jesus Christ said to her in answer, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

But the Samaritan woman did not understand these words of the Saviour and said, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come here to draw."

Jesus Christ, wishing the Samaritan woman to understand what He had said to her, first told her to call her husband. He said, "Go, call thy husband and come here."

The woman said, "I have no husband."

Then, Jesus Christ said to her, "Thou hast well said, 'I have no husband,' for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband. In that Thou saidst the truth."

The Samaritan woman, struck by the omniscience of the Saviour, Who revealed everything about her sinful life, now understood that it was not an ordinary man speaking. She immediately asked Him to resolve the ancient question between the Samaritans and the Jews: which faith was more correct and which service was more pleasing to God. Sir, I perceive that Thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain (by this she meant Mount Gerizim upon which were visible the ruins of the demolished Samaritan Temple); and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

Jesus Christ said to her, "*Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews.*" Until that time only the Jews had the true faith, their services alone were done correctly and pleasing to God. "*But the hour cometh, and now is when the true worshippers shall*

worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit (unseen, bodiless): and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth;" — that is, the true and God-pleasing service occurs when people worship the Heavenly Father not only with their bodies and not only by outward signs and words but with all their being — with all their soul — when they truly believe in God, love and honour Him, and by their good works and mercy to others fulfil the will of God.

Having heard this new teaching, the Samaritan woman said to Jesus Christ, "I know that the *Messiah* cometh, Who is called *Christ*; when He is come, He will tell us all things."

Then, Jesus Christ said to her, "The Messiah — *I am the One, Who is speaking to you.*"

Upon this scene came His disciples and marvelled that He talked with the Samaritan woman. Yet no man asked the Saviour about what He had spoken with her.

The woman then left her waterpot and hurried into the city. There she started to tell the people, "Come, see a Man, Who told me all things that I ever did. Is not this the Christ?" Then, they went out of the city and came to the well where Christ was.

Meanwhile, the disciples besought him saying, "Rabbi, eat." But the Saviour said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought Him food?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? I tell you, lift up your eyes and see how the fields (and the Lord showed them Samaritans — inhabitants of the city who at that time came to Him) are already white for harvest (how these people want to see the Saviour Christ, how they were inclined to listen to Him and receive Him). He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour; others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour."

The Samaritans who came from the city, of whom many believed in Him because of the words of the woman, asked the Saviour to remain with them. He went to them, and stayed there for two days, and taught them.

After this, more Samaritans believed in Him. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for

we have heard for ourselves, and we know that *He is truly the Saviour of the world, the Christ.*"

By tradition, it is known that the Samaritan woman who spoke with Christ at Jacob's well, spent the remainder of her life preaching the Gospel of Christ. For preaching faith in Christ, she suffered in the year 66 (she was thrown by tormentors into a well). The Holy Church celebrates her memory on *March 20th* (April 2 NS). Her name is the *holy Martyr Photina* (Svetlana in Russian).

Note: See the Gospel of John, 4:1-42.

Jesus Heals a Nobleman's Son.

When Jesus Christ came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed Him with faith having seen the miracles that He had done in Jerusalem at Passover. Jesus Christ came again into Cana in Galilee, where He had changed the water into wine. There came to Him a nobleman from Capernaum, who served at the royal palace, and begged the Saviour to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

Jesus Christ said to him, "Go, your son will live." The nobleman believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went home to Capernaum. As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was alive.

So he asked them the hour when he began to revive. The servants said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour, the fever left him."

The father knew that it happened when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." The nobleman and all his household believed in Jesus Christ.

From Cana, Jesus Christ went around the cities and towns of Galilee in order to preach His teaching everywhere. Preaching, He healed sickness and every kind of infirmity among the people. Word of Him spread throughout the land, and from everywhere the sick, the possessed, lunatics, and paralytics came to Him, and He healed them. He refused help to no one, and all found consolation in Him.

By the example of His life, the Saviour taught that everyone, who wishes to be in the Kingdom of God, must be kind and must do good to all and help everyone as far as each one's strength allows.

Note: See the Gospel of John 4:43-54.

19. The Healing at the Pool of Bethesda.

From Galilee Jesus Christ again went up to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover.

Not far from the Temple, by the sheep gate through which they drove the sheep for sacrifices, there was a pool with five porticoes or galleries. This pool with the galleries was called *Bethesda*, which means *house of mercy*. In the galleries beside the pool, lay many sick, blind, lame and withered. They were all waiting for the moving of the water, for an angel of the Lord went down at a certain season into the pool and stirred the water. Whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had.

Jesus Christ visited this house of mercy. There, He saw a man who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. Jesus Christ said to him, "Do you want to be healed?"

The sick man answered, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred; and while I am going, another steps down before me."

Jesus Christ said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk."

At once, the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. That day was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."

But he answered them, "The Man Who healed me said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk'."

They asked him, "Do you know Who this Man is?"

The man was not able to answer them, for he did not know Who Jesus Christ was because Christ after healing him had withdrawn into the crowd.

Afterward, Jesus found him in the Temple and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, so that nothing worse befalls you."

The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus Christ Who had healed him.

The elders of the Jews began to persecute Jesus Christ and to seek a chance to kill Him because He did this on the Sabbath. They taught that on the Sabbath it was a sin to do any work, even good deeds.

Jesus said to them, "My Father is working still, and I am working. Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of His own accord, but only what He (the Son) sees the Father doing; for whatever He (God the Father) does, the Son does likewise. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom He will. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father Who sent Him. Search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is they that bear witness of Me."

This was why the Jews sought even more to kill Him because He not only broke the Sabbath but also called God His Father making Himself equal with God.

Note: See the Gospel of John, 5:1-16.

Healing of the Man with a Withered Hand.

It came to pass also on another Sabbath that Jesus entered the synagogue (the house of meeting and prayer). There was a man with a withered hand. The Pharisees wishing to find some charge to make against the Saviour watched closely to see whether or not He would heal the sick man on the Sabbath.

The Saviour knowing their thoughts said to the man, "Rise up and stand forth in the midst."

Then, turning to the Pharisees, He said, "I will ask you one thing. Is it lawful on the Sabbath days to do good or to do evil to save life or to destroy it?"

They remained silent.

And looking round about them all, He said, "What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Then, the Saviour turned to the man and said, "Stretch out your hand."

The man extended his withered hand, and it was restored in whole like the other.

The Pharisees were filled with madness, went out of the synagogue, and took counsel among themselves how to destroy Jesus.

Jesus with his disciples withdrew from there, and many followed Him, and He preaching healed all the sick.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; and Luke 6:6-11

20. The Lord Chooses Twelve Apostles.

Gradually, the number of disciples of Jesus Christ increased. One day, while in Galilee, Jesus Christ went out into a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God. When it was daylight, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them whom He named *apostles*, that is, messengers, as He sent them to preach His teaching. The names of the twelve apostles are as follows:

1. *Simon*, whom the Saviour called *Peter*;
2. *Andrew*, brother of Simon Peter, known as the "*First-called*;"
3. *James*, the son of Zebedee;
4. *John*, the son of Zebedee, brother of James, called the *Theologian* (these two brothers, James and John, the Saviour called "*sons of thunder*" because of their fiery zeal);
5. *Philip*;
6. *Nathaniel*, son of Tolmai, and, therefore, called *Bartholomew*;
7. *Thomas*, also called *Didymus*, which means "*the twin*;"
8. *Matthew*, also known as *Levi*, a former tax collector;
9. *James*, son of Alphaeus, also known as Cleophas, called "the less, or younger, or smaller," in contrast to James the son of Zebedee;
10. *Simon*, named the *Canaanite*, otherwise known as the *Zealot*;
11. *Judas*, son of James, who also bore another name, *Lebbaeus*, called *Thaddeus*;
12. *Judas Iscariot* (from the city of Karioth), who later betrayed Jesus Christ.

To the apostles the Lord gave power to heal the sick, to cast out unclean spirits, and to resurrect the dead.

In addition to these twelve chief apostles, Jesus Christ also chose

another *seventy apostles*: Mark, Luke, Cleophas and others. He also sent them out to preach.

When the seventy apostles returned from preaching, they said with joy to Jesus Christ, Lord, "*Even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name*" (Luke 10:17).

He said to them, "*Do not rejoice that the spirits are subject unto you but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven*" (Luke 10:20). That is, do not rejoice over the miracles, which are given to you for your preaching, but rejoice over the fact that you will receive blessings and eternal life with God in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Besides the disciples, there constantly accompanied Jesus Christ some women who had been healed by Him, *Mary Magdalene* (from the city of Magdala) of whom Jesus cast seven devils out; *Joanna*, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; *Susanna*; and many others.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 10:2-14; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16; 8,1-3.

21. The Sermon on the Mount.

After choosing the apostles, Jesus Christ came down with them from the mountain heights to a level place. There, numerous disciples waited for Him and a multitude of people gathered from every corner of Israel and neighbouring places. They came to listen to Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. They all sought to touch the Saviour because power flowed from Him, and He healed everyone.

Seeing the multitudes before Him, Jesus Christ, surrounded by His disciples, went up into a mountain and sat there to teach the people.

At first, the Lord indicated His disciples, that is, all Christians must be like. How they must fulfil the law of God in order to receive blessed (that is, joyful and blissful in the highest degree) eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven. For this, He gave *nine commandments of blessedness* or *Beatitudes*. Then, the Lord gave teachings on the providence of God, on not judging others, on the power of prayer, on charity and on many others. This sermon of Jesus Christ is called the *Sermon on the Mount*.

Thus, during a clear spring day, in a gentle, refreshing breeze from

the Sea of Galilee, on the slope of a mountain covered with greenery and flowers, the Saviour gave to the people the New Testament law of love.

In the Old Testament, the Lord gave the Law in the uninhabited wilderness on Mt. Sinai. Then, a menacing, dark cloud covered the summit of the mountain; thunder rumbled, lightning flashed and the sound of trumpets blared. No one dared to approach the mountain, except Moses to whom the Lord handed the ten commandments of the Law.

Now, the Lord was open to the crowded throng of people. All were trying to draw closer to Him to touch Him or even the hem of His robe only and to receive from Him beneficial strength. No one went away from Him without being comforted.

The Old Testament law is the law of strict righteousness, and the New Testament law of Christ is the law of divine love and grace, which gives to people the strength to fulfil God's law. Jesus Christ Himself said, "*I am not come to destroy (the law) but to fulfil*" (Matt. 5:17).

The Beatitudes — Commandments of Blessedness.

Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, as a loving Father shows us the way by which people may enter the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God. To all who fulfil His laws Christ as King of Heaven and earth promises *eternal blessedness* (great joy, the highest happiness) in the future eternal life. Therefore, such people, He calls *blessed*.

1. *Blessed are the poor in spirit (humble), for theirs is (that is, given to them) the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Poor in spirit refers to those people who feel and acknowledge their sins and spiritual unworthiness. They keep in mind that without God's help, by themselves, they are not able to do good, and therefore, neither they accept praise for anything nor they are proud either before God or before people. These people are humble.

2. *Blessed are those who mourn (over their sins), for they shall be comforted.*

Those who *mourn* are people who grieve and shed tears over their sins and spiritual unworthiness. God forgives their sins. He gives them comfort even here, on earth, and the eternal joy in Heaven.

3. *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

The *meek* are people who patiently endure all misfortune without becoming obdurate, without grumbling at God and humbly bear all unpleasantness and offences from people not growing angry at anyone. They will receive possession of the heavenly dwelling place, that is, the renewed land in the Kingdom of Heaven.

4. *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.*

Those who *hunger and thirst after righteousness* are people who fervently seek righteousness as sincerely as they strive after food. They pray that God will supply water with which to cleanse them of their sins and help them live righteously (they wish to set themselves right with God). The desire of these people will be fulfilled, they will be satisfied and justified.

5. *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*

The *merciful* are people having good hearts, who are charitable and compassionate toward all as much as they are able. Such people will be pardoned by God. To them, special mercy by God will be revealed.

6. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

The *pure in heart* people are not only avoid bad deeds but strive to keep their souls pure to guard them against evil thoughts and desires. They are close to God (their souls always sense Him); and in the future life in the Kingdom of Heaven, they will be with God eternally. They will see Him.

7. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.*

The *peacemakers* are people who dislike any kind of quarrel. They themselves try to live with everyone peacefully and amicably and to reconcile one to another. They become like the Son of God, Who came to earth to reconcile sinful mankind with the righteous God. Such people will be called sons or children of God and will be especially close to God.

8. *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Those *persecuted for righteousness' sake* are people who love to live righteously according to the law of God, who suffer and endure for this righteousness all kinds of persecution, deprivation, and hardship but do not change because of them. For this, they will receive the Kingdom of Heaven.

9. *Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in Heaven.*

Here the Lord says that, if they defame you (scoff at you, attack you, disgrace you), oppress you, and falsely speak evil of you (slander or unjustly accuse you), and you endure all this because of your faith in Him, then do not grieve but rejoice and be glad because the greatest reward awaits you in Heaven, that is, the highest degree of eternal blessedness.

The Providence of God.

Jesus Christ taught that God provides and cares for all His creation but especially provides for people. The Lord cares for us more and better than the most good and intelligent father for his children. He gives help in everything that is necessary for our lives and for that, which is truly useful for us.

"Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on," said the Saviour. "Behold the birds of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow. They neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown in the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But *seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.*"

On Not Judging One's Neighbours.

Jesus Christ gave us an order not to judge other people. He said, "Judge not that you be not judged. For with the judgement you pronounce, you will be judged (if you are lenient toward the actions of other people, then God will be merciful in His judgement of you). And the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the *speck* that is in your brother's eye but do not notice the *beam* that is in your own eye? (This means: why do you love to notice in others insignificant sins and shortcomings when in yourself you do not wish to see large sins and vices?) Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye' when there is the log in your own eye? You are hypocrite! First take the log out of your own eye (try first of all to correct yourself); and then, you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye (then you will be

able to correct a sin in another without insulting or humiliating him)."

On Forgiving One's Neighbour.

"Forgive, and you will be forgiven," said Jesus Christ. "For if you forgive them their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

On Love for One's Neighbour.

Jesus Christ commanded us to love not only our neighbours but all people, even those who offend us and are malicious towards us, that is, our enemies. He said, "You have heard that it was said (by your teachers — the scribes and the Pharisees), 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and bless those who abuse you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father Who is in Heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

For if you love only those who love you or do good only to those who do good to you and help only those from whom you hope to receive something, for what is God to reward you? Do not even the sinners do the same? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Therefore, be merciful even as your Father is merciful; be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

How to Treat One's Neighbours.

As to how we must treat our neighbours always, under all circumstances, Jesus Christ gave us the rule: "*As you wish that men would do to you* (and we, of course, wish that all people would love us, treat us well, and forgive us) *do so to them likewise.*" Do not do to others that which you would not like to have done to you.

The Power of Prayer.

If we will sincerely pray to God and ask His help, then God will do everything that will serve for our true well-being. Jesus Christ said concerning this, "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it will be opened to you. Is there among you such a man who, when his son asks him for bread, would give him a stone? And when he asks for fish, would give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give good to those who ask Him!"

About Alms.

Every good work we do, we must do not to gain praise from people, not to show off before others, not for rewards from people, but for the love of God and neighbour. Jesus Christ said, "Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father Who is in Heaven. Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you (do not broadcast it as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men). Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Do not pride yourself on the good that you have done, forget about it, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father Who sees in secret all that you do for the sake of your soul will reward you openly" — if not immediately, then at His last judgement.

The Necessity of Good Works.

So that people would know that to enter the Kingdom of God it is not sufficient to simply have good feelings and wishes, but it is also necessary to have good works, Jesus Christ said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father Who is in Heaven;" — that is, it is not enough to be only believing and devout, but it is also necessary to do whatever good deed the Lord expects of us.

When Jesus Christ finished His sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one Who had authority and not as the scribes and Pharisees. When He came down from the mountain, great crowds followed Him; and by His great mercy, He performed great miracles.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew, chapters. 5, 6 and 7; and Luke 6:12-41.

22. The Power of Faith and Prayer for Others — The Healing of the Paralytic in Capernaum.

The Lord Jesus Christ taught us to pray not only for ourselves but also for others, for our neighbours; for by His love, the Lord imparts mercy to those for whom others are praying.

While in the city of Capernaum, Jesus Christ taught in one home. The inhabitants of the city, as soon as they heard that he was at the house, gathered together in such great numbers that there was no longer room for them, not even near the door. Among the number of listeners, there were Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from every village of Galilee, Judea and even from Jerusalem.

While preaching, the Saviour performed many miracles and healed the sick.

At that time, four men came bringing to Him a paralytic on a bed, and they sought to bring him in the house to the Saviour, but they found no way to make their way in because of the crowd of people.

Then, they went up on the roof, made an opening and let down the paralytic on the cot straight to the feet of the Saviour. When Jesus Christ saw the faith of the people who brought the sick man, He said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

The Pharisees and the scribes began to question in their hearts, "Who is this that speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Jesus Christ knowing their thoughts said to them, "Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say 'Rise and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, I say to you "Rise, take up your bed and go home." And immediately he rose before them, took up that cot on which he laid, and went home glorifying God for receiving mercy.

Thus, the Lord healed the sick man by the faith and prayers of his friends. When the crowds saw it, amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe saying, "We have seen strange things today; we never saw anything like this!"

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26.

Raising the Widow's Son at Nain.

One day Jesus Christ went from Capernaum to the city of Nain. Many of His disciples and a great crowd went with Him. As He drew near to the gate of the city, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his widowed mother. The unhappy woman walked and cried bitterly, and a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on the deep grief of the poor mother and said to her, "Do not weep."

He came and touched the bier on which the dead one lay (among the

Jews, the dead were wrapped in shrouds and carried on biers or stretchers to the cemetery for burial). The bearers stood still. Then, Jesus said to the dead man, "Young man, I say to you: arise!"

The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus Christ gave the resurrected youth to his mother.

Seeing this miracle, fear seized them all. They glorified God saying, "A great prophet has risen among us! God has visited His people."

Note: See the Gospel of Luke 7:11-17.

23. Parables: the Parable of the Sower.

Jesus Christ, while in Capernaum, went to the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Many people gathered around Him. He got into a small boat and sat there. The people stood on the beach, and in the boat, He began to teach them in parables.

Jesus Christ said, "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and were trodden under foot, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil; immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but soon they were scorched, and since they had no roots they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good rich soil, and grew and yielded abundant fruit."

Then, when the disciples asked Jesus Christ, "What does this parable mean?" He explained to them:

Seed is the Word of God (the Gospels).

Sower is the one who spreads the Word of God.

Soil is the heart of man.

The ground along the path where the seed fell indicates careless and profligate people, in the hearts of whom the Word of God does not have access. The Devil without trouble steals it and carries it away from them, so that they do not believe and are not saved.

Rocky ground signifies people who are inconstant and fainthearted. They willingly hear the Word of God, but it does not take hold in their souls, and they fall away from the faith at the first temptation,

grief, or persecution over the Word of God. Thorns signify people for whom everyday cares, wealth, and various vices stifle in the heart the Word of God.

Good rich soil signifies people with good hearts. They pay attention to the Word of God, treasure it in their hearts, and patiently try to fulfil everything that it teaches. Their fruit is good deeds, for which they are awarded the Kingdom of Heaven.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed.

Jesus Christ taught that the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, began and was founded on that which He established on earth, that is, the Church of Christ, which began small and then spread over all the earth. He said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field. This seed is indeed the least of all seeds; but when it is grown it is the greatest among plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches." The Saviour spoke many other parables, teaching the people.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19.

The Parable of the Leaven.

Explaining the teaching of the Kingdom of God, the Lord Jesus Christ said, "With what shall I compare the Kingdom of God? The Kingdom of God is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

This parable is short and simple, but a deep double meaning is contained in it: the *general historical* process of the salvation of people and the *individual* process of the salvation of each person.

The historical process: after the world-wide flood, three races of people descended from the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth: the Semites, the Hamites, and Japhetites. They were the three measures of meal in which Christ puts His heavenly leaven — the Holy Spirit, Who is put in all races of mankind without limitation or exclusion.

As the woman with the help of the leaven turned the meal from its usual state into bread, thus, Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit turns usual, natural people into sons of God, to the immortal life of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The process of the leavening began on the day of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, continues to our day, and will continue to the end of the age — *until all are leavened*.

The individual process: the Saviour through baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity gives heavenly leaven — gifts of the Holy Spirit, heavenly strength, to the soul of each person, that is, to the main powers of a person's soul: intelligence, feeling (heart), and will (*three measures*). All three powers of the soul of a person grow harmoniously and rise toward Heaven being filled with the light of intelligence, the warmth of love, and the glory of good works and turning individuals into sons and daughters of God, heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Lord used a woman in His example because a woman as a wife and mother lovingly prepares the homemade bread for the children and the household, whereas a male-baker prepares bread for sale distributing the income for gain. (According to Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich.)

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew: 13:33; Luke 13:20-21.

The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds.

Jesus Christ taught that in His Kingdom on earth, in the Church of Christ, until the last day of the world there would be sinners.

The Lord said, "The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his enemy came, sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.

"So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?'

"He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.'

"The servants said to him, 'Then, do you want us to go and gather them?'

"But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time, I will tell the reapers to gather the weeds first and to bind them in bundles to be burned but gather the wheat into my barn.' "

The disciples, when they were left alone with the Lord, asked Him to

explain this parable.

Jesus Christ said:

"The *Sower* of the good seed is the Son of man, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The *field* is the world. The *good seed* means the sons of the Kingdom, good, devout people who accept the teachings of Christ. The *weeds* are the sons of the Evil One, wicked, evil people. The *enemy* who sowed the weeds is the Devil. The *harvest* is the end of the world, and the *reapers* are angels.

"Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of man will send His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers and throw them into the furnace of fire; there, men will weep and gnash their teeth.

"Then, the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father," in the kingdom of eternal blessed life.

How often, at the sight of the disgraceful behaviour of immoral evil people, we ask, "Lord, why do You not punish these evil people now? Why do You allow them to use all the good things of the world? Why do they burden and oppress the good?"

To all these questions, this parable gives the answer: *let them grow together one with the other until the harvest, until the day of the Last Judgement*. Such is the will of God, because the Lord in giving man His image and likeness gives free will. Evil crops up in the world because of the work of the Devil, who constantly and cunningly sows evil in the world, who spreads among people unbelief and every kind of lawlessness. To expose all, sin might harm tender souls if they saw it.

In the free choice of good and the rejection of evil, man exalts God, glorifies God, and improves himself; and by enduring suffering from evil, he receives from God the highest reward in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In this manner, God without any coercion gives people of good will the possibility of receiving eternal, blessed life in the Kingdom of Heaven, and people of evil intent — eternal torment in Hell.

Note: See the Gospel of Matthew 13:24-30,36-43.

About the Coming of the Kingdom of God on Earth.

One day the Pharisees asked Jesus Christ, "When will the Kingdom of God come?"

The Saviour answered, "The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for, behold, *the Kingdom of God is within you.*"

This means that the Kingdom of God does not have boundaries, it is everywhere unlimited. Therefore, to look for the Kingdom of God, we do not have to go somewhere far away, overseas, to distant lands. For this it is not required of us to climb up to the clouds or descend into the depths. One must seek the Kingdom of Heaven in the place where we live, that is, where we are placed by the providence of God, because the Kingdom of God develops and ripens *within man, in the heart of a person.* The Kingdom of God is "*righteousness, peace, and joy of the Holy Spirit*" when the conscience and will of a man enter into complete harmony, joined into one with the intelligence and the will of God. Then, everything contrary to the will of God becomes loathsome to a man. The visible realization of the Kingdom of God on earth is the Holy Church of Christ. In it, everything is arrayed according to the Law of God.

Note: See the Gospel of Luke 17:20-21.

24. The Stilling of the Storm.

One day, Jesus Christ and His disciples sailed in a boat across the Sea of Galilee. Other boats were with them. During the voyage, Jesus was asleep in the stern. A great storm of wind arose. The waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already filling with water; but still, Jesus Christ slept. The disciples, terrified, woke the Lord and said to Him, "Lord! Save us, we are perishing!" Jesus Christ awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!"

Immediately, the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

Then, turning to the disciples, He said, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"

All who were there were filled with awe and said to one another, "Who is this that even the wind and sea obey Him?"

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; and Luke 8:22-25.

25. Raising of the Daughter of Jairus.

There was a Hebrew elder, a ruler of the synagogue by the name of Jairus; and at his house, his twelve-year-old only daughter lay near death.

Jairus came to Jesus Christ, fell at His feet and besought Him saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live."

Seeing the faith of Jairus, Jesus Christ went with him. On the way, they met a man sent from Jairus's house, who said to him, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more."

But Jesus on hearing this said to Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe, and she will be saved." When they came to the house, they saw a great tumult. Everyone was weeping and wailing.

The Lord said to them, "Do not weep, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." They did not understand His words and started laughing at Him knowing that she was dead. But Jesus Christ sent the crowd outside the house and, taking with Him only the girl's parents and three disciples, Peter, James, and John, entered the room where the dead girl lay. He took her by the hand and said, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say unto thee, arise."

And her spirit returned. The girl got up at once and walked. Her overjoyed parents were greatly amazed. Jesus Christ directed them to give her something to eat and strictly charged them to tell no one what had happened. But the news of this event spread through all that land.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:41-56.

26. The Beheading of St. John the Baptist.

The preaching of John the Baptist was of short duration. Having prepared people to receive the Saviour, he ended his life with a martyr's death. Soon after the baptism of the Lord, John was put in prison by the Galilean King Herod. This Galilean King, Herod Antipas, was the son of Herod the Great, who slaughtered the fourteen thousand Bethlehem infants.

John upbraided King Herod because he had married his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, even though his brother was still alive. Herodias became embittered against for this and wanted Herod to kill him. But Herod would not agree to this because he considered John to be a great prophet and feared the people. However, to appease her, he put John in prison. Herodias was not satisfied with this, especially as Herod himself listened with pleasure to the admonitions of John and often acted on his words.

About a year passed after the Forerunner's imprisonment, when Herod celebrating his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers, and officers, and a thousand leading men of Galilee. Salome, the daughter of Herodias and stepdaughter of Herod, also came to this banquet. She danced for Herod, which pleased him and his guests.

Herod said to her, "Ask me for whatever you wish," and he swore he would have given her even half of his kingdom.

She went and asked her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

Herodias answered, "The head of John the Baptist."

Salome with haste returned to Herod and said, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

Herod was exceedingly sorry; but because of his oaths and his guests, he did not want to break his word to her, and sent a soldier to the prison to cut off the head of John. The soldier fulfilled the order of the king, brought the head of John the Baptist on a platter and gave it to Salome, and Salome gave it to her mother Herodias.

When his disciples heard of the death of John the Baptist, they came, and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

The day of the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist is commemorated by the Holy Orthodox Church on the 29th of August (11 September NS) and is called the *Beheading of John the Baptist*. A strict fast is prescribed on this day in order to remind us of the strict life of St. John the Baptist for which he was blessed by God and to avoid the excesses of Herod which led to such a terrible sin. The Holy Church teaches that St. John the Forerunner is the greatest of all saints after the Mother of God.

Note: See the Gospels of St Mathew 14:1-12; St Mark 6:14-29; and St. Luke 9, 7-9.

27. The Miraculous Feeding of the People with

Five Loaves.

Soon after the death of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ with His disciples withdrew by boat to another shore of the sea. The people ran after them on foot along the shore. When the boat landed, a great throng of people had gathered. Jesus Christ seeing the crowd of people had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He began to teach them many things, spoke to them of the Kingdom of God, and healed their sick. The people so zealously listened to Him that they did not notice that the day was drawing to a close.

The disciples came to Jesus Christ and said, "This is an isolated place, and the hour is now late; send them away to go into the country and villages round about and buy themselves something to eat."

But the Lord answered the disciples, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

The Apostle Philip said to Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little."

Jesus said, "How many loaves have you? Go and see."

When they had found out, the Apostle Andrew said, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"

The Lord said, "Bring them here to me," and directed the disciples to seat the people in groups of hundreds and fifties. Then, Jesus Christ took the five loaves and the two fish and looked up to Heaven, blessed them, broke them, and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

They all ate and were satisfied. When they were filled, Jesus Christ said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost."

The disciples took up what was left over and filled twelve full baskets, and those who ate were about five thousand men not counting the women and children.

In another instance, the Lord fed four thousand men, also not counting women and children, with seven loaves and a few fish.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 14:14-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke

9:10-17; John 6:1-15.

28. Jesus Christ Walking on the Water.

After the miraculous feeding of the people with five loaves of bread, Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to get into the boat and go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida.

He dismissed the crowd and then went into the hills to pray.

Night fell. The boat with the disciples was already out on the sea beaten by the waves because a strong wind was blowing.

Before dawn, Jesus Christ knowing the distress of the disciples came to them walking on the sea. But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out in fear. Jesus Christ immediately spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear."

Then, the Apostle Peter answered Him, "Lord, if it is you, let me come to you on the water."

The Lord said, "Come."

So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind and the big waves, he was afraid, from fear his faith vanished; and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord! Save me!"

Jesus Christ immediately reached out His hand and caught him saying, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

The disciples worshipped Jesus Christ and said, "*Truly you are the Son of God.*"

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 14:22-36; Mark 6:45-56; John 6:16-21.

29. The Healing of the Daughter of the Canaanite Woman.

One day Jesus Christ went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. There came to Him a Canaanite woman of pagan faith, and she began to cry out loudly, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely possessed by a demon."

Wishing to show His disciples the strength of the faith of this woman, Jesus Christ did not answer a word to her.

Then, the disciples began to beg Him saying, "Send her away, for she is crying after us."

But Jesus answered, "I am sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

But she came and knelt before Him saying, "Lord! Help me."

Jesus Christ said to her, "Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." He said this because the Jews considered themselves the children of Abraham, children of God, and sons of the Kingdom of Heaven, and they looked upon the Gentiles as dogs. Therefore, the Saviour was intentionally addressing the Jews in this instance and equating a dog to this woman, wishing to show the Jews all the incorrectness and injustice of their attitude toward the pagans. Among the pagans, He found strong faith such as did not exist among the Jews. He called them "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Moreover, by these words, the Saviour showed the woman that He must live and do His work first of all among the Jews as they believed in the true God. Most importantly, the Saviour saw the believing heart of this woman and rejoiced that in her there was an example to show all people what faith must be.

The woman humbly answered to this, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." With these words the Canaanite woman demonstrated not only her great humility and consciousness that a pagan person could not be as close to God as those in the true faith, but conveyed by this her great faith that the merciful God extends mercy to all people.

Then, Jesus Christ said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly. Returning home, the woman found her daughter restored to health and peacefully lying in bed.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30.

30. The Confession of Peter. The Prediction of the Lord about His Forthcoming Death and Resurrection.

Then, Jesus went on with His disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way, He asked His disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" They answered, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets who has risen."

"But Who do you say that I am?" asked Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Peter answered for them all, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*"

The Saviour praised Peter for such faith and said to him, "You are Peter (a rock, according to his faith); and on this rock (on such faith that I am the Son of God) I will build My Church, and the powers of Satan shall not prevail against it. And to you Peter, I will give the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven (such power is given to My Church) that whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven" (this means: for whomever among the believers belonging to the Church, you do not forgive their sins, they shall not be forgiven by God; and for whomever, you forgive sins, they shall be forgiven by God). This is the same authority that the Saviour gave to all His other apostles (cf. John 20:22-23). He spoke firstly to Peter because the Apostle Peter was the first of them all to confess before Him his faith that He is the *Christ, Son of God*.

From this time, Jesus Christ began to reveal to His disciples that for the salvation of people He would have to suffer much from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and would be killed, and rise again on the third day.

Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him, "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to You." By these words of Peter, it was evident that he had the Jewish understanding of the Messiah and still did not understand the teaching about the salvation of people through the suffering of Christ; in him, the earthly feelings still prevailed over the spiritual. The question of Peter was like the temptation of the Devil, who also offered to the Lord earthly power instead of spiritual power, the kingdom of this age instead of the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, Jesus Christ answered, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me; for you are not on the side of God but of men." Then, He called to the multitude with His disciples and said to them,

"If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself (let him not think of his own convenience), take up his cross (sorrows, suffering, and labour sent to him by God), and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's saves it. For *what does it profit a man if he seeking to accumulate earthly blessings personally for himself gains for himself even the whole world and forfeits his soul* (making it unworthy of the Kingdom of God, of eternal life)?"

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 16:13-28, Mark 8:27-38 and 9:1; Luke 9:18-27.

31. The Transfiguration of the Lord.

In order to strengthen the faith of His disciples when they would see His suffering, Jesus Christ took three disciples, Peter, James and John, and led them up on a high mountain to pray. According to ancient Church Tradition, it was the beautiful *Mount Tabor* covered with luxurious growth from the foot to the summit.

As the Saviour was praying, the disciples slept from fatigue. When they woke up, they saw Jesus Christ transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun and His garments became white as snow and glistened as light. There, two prophets, Moses and Elijah, in heavenly glory appeared with Him, and they were talking with Jesus about the suffering and death which He would have to endure in Jerusalem. Extraordinary joy filled the hearts of the disciples during this time. Peter exclaimed, "Lord, it is well that we are here. If you wish, I will make three booths here: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah," not understanding what He was saying. Suddenly, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and they heard the voice of God the Father saying, "*This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him!*"

When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces. Jesus Christ came to them, touched them, and said, "Rise, and have no fear." When the disciples lifted up their eyes, they saw Jesus Christ as He usually appeared.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus Christ commanded them to tell no one about the vision until He was raised from the dead.

The Holy Orthodox Church celebrates the glorious Transfiguration of

our Lord Jesus Christ, on August 6th (August 19 NS). This day is one of the major feast days. By His Transfiguration, the Saviour has showed us how people become in the future life, in the Kingdom of Heaven, if they follow God's Law and how the entire earthly world would be transfigured. The Lord also reminds us that we can be transfigured even now if we lead a truly Christian life.

On the Feast of Transfiguration, after the Liturgy, fruit is brought to the church to be blessed for eating: grapes and, in general, fruit from orchards such as apples, pears, and plums in order to ask the Lord's blessing on the fruits of the harvest.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36.

Troparion of the Feast.

Thou wast transfigured on the mountain, O Christ our God, showing to Thy disciples Thy glory as each one could endure; shine forth Thou on us, who are sinners all, Thy light ever-unending through the prayers of the Theotokos. O Light-giver, glory to Thee.

Kontakion of the Feast.

On the mount Thou was transfigured, and Thy disciples, as much as they could bear, beheld Thy glory, O Christ our God; so that, when they would see Thee crucified, they would know Thy passion to be willing and would preach to the world that Thou, in truth, are the Effulgence of the Father.

The Most Important Teaching: Love for God and Neighbour.

More than once people did ask Jesus Christ which was His most important teaching in order to inherit eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Some asked because they wanted to know and others did to find a reason to accuse Him.

Thus one day, a Jewish lawyer (a man who studied the Law of God) wishing to put Jesus Christ to the test asked Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

Jesus Christ said to him, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.* This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. *You shall love your neighbour as yourself.* On these two commandments rest all the law and the prophets."

This means everything that the Law of God teaches about which the prophets spoke is contained entirely in these two major laws. That is, all the commandments of the law and its teachings speak to us about love. If we had within ourselves such love, then all the remaining laws could be abolished, for they are all subdivisions of the law about love. Thus, for example, if we love our neighbour, then we would not be able to offend him or cheat him, much less kill him, or envy him; and, in general, we would not wish him any kind of evil. On the contrary, we would pity him, care for him, and be ready to sacrifice everything for him. Therefore, Jesus Christ said, "There are no other commandments greater than these" (Mark 12:31).

The lawyer said to Him, "You are right, Teacher! You have truly said that to love God with all one's being and to love one's neighbour as oneself is much more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

When Jesus Christ saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 22:35-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28.

32. The Parable of the Good Samaritan.

One Jew, a lawyer, desiring to justify himself since the Jews considered "their neighbours" to be only Jews and all others to be held in contempt asked Jesus Christ, "And who is my neighbour?"

In order to teach people to consider every other person as their neighbour, no matter who he might be of whatever nationality, or descent, or belief; and also that we must be compassionate and merciful to all people, doing what we can to help those in need and misfortune, Jesus Christ answered him with a parable.

"A man (a Jew) was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him, and beat him, and departed leaving him half-dead. Now by chance, a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite (a Jewish church official), when he came to the place and saw him, he passed by on the other side.

"But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was. (The Jews

despised the Samaritans so much that they would not have sat at the same table with them and even tried to avoid speaking to them). When the Samaritan saw him covered with wounds, he had compassion on him. He went to him and bound up his wounds pouring on them oil and wine. Then, he set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii (a denarius was a Roman silver coin) and gave them to the innkeeper saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I repay you when I come back'."

Then, Jesus Christ asked the lawyer, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?"

The lawyer replied, "The one who showed mercy on him (that is, the Samaritan)."

And Jesus Christ said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Note: See the Gospel of Luke 10:29-37.

The parable of the *Good Samaritan* besides its direct and clear concept of *love for every neighbour* also has an allegorical, profound, and mystical meaning according to the teachings of the Holy Fathers.

The *man* going from Jerusalem to Jericho is none other than our forefather Adam and in his person — all humanity. Not remaining steadfast in the good and losing the blessedness of Paradise, Adam and Eve were compelled to leave the "Heavenly Jerusalem" (Paradise) and to wander in the world where they immediately encountered calamities and every possible adversity. The *robbers* are the diabolic powers which envied the innocent condition of man and enticed him onto the road of sin depriving our fore-parents of faithfulness to the commandments of God (of life in Paradise). The *wounds* are the sores of sin weakening us. The *priest and Levite* represent the Law given to us through Moses and the clergy in the person of Aaron, which by themselves cannot save man. The image of the *Good Samaritan* refers to Jesus Christ Himself, Who for the healing of our infirmities under the appearance of oil and wine gave to us the New Testament law and grace. The *inn* is the Church of God in which is found everything necessary for our healing, and the *innkeeper* is the pastors and teachers in the Church to whom God entrusts the care of the flock. The *morning departure of the Samaritan* is the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, and the *two denarii* given to the innkeeper are Divine Revelation kept by means of Scripture and Holy Tradition. Finally, *the promise of the Samaritan to stop at the inn on his return-trip to settle the debt* is an indication of the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth when He

shall reward every man according to his works (Matt. 16:27).

33. Jesus Christ with Martha and Mary.

Preaching to the people, Jesus Christ arrived in *Bethany*. This town is situated not far from Jerusalem beyond the Mount of Olives. Here He was received in the home of a woman by the name of *Martha*, who had a brother *Lazarus* and a sister *Mary*.

In the home of Lazarus, Jesus Christ has given the instruction that *care for the salvation of the soul is more important than all other work*. The occasion which served to illustrate this teaching was given to Him by the sisters of Lazarus. Both of them greeted Him with the same joy, but they expressed their joy differently. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to His teaching. Martha in the meantime strenuously busied herself with elaborate refreshments for Him.

Whether it was because it seemed to Martha that she could not manage to serve everyone all by herself, or whether it seemed to her that her sister did not receive Jesus Christ as she ought, Martha went to the Saviour and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."

But the Lord answered her, "*Martha, Martha you are anxious and troubled about many things* (that is, Martha's energy was directed to superfluous things, to worldly, transitory things that one could manage to do without), *but only one thing is needful* (that is, attention to the Word of God and fulfilment of His will). *Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.*"

It happened on one occasion when Jesus Christ talked with the people that one woman could not contain the joy in her soul from His words and loudly exclaimed from the crowd, "*Blessed* (fortunate in the highest degree) *is the Mother who bore You and nursed You!*"

But the Saviour said, "*Yea rather, blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it,*" — that is, those who live by the commandments of God. This was not said to imply that the Mother of God did not keep the Law of God but to emphasize the fact that even greater than Her physical care for the Saviour was Her obedience to God's word.

Note: See the Gospel of Luke 10:38-42 and 11:27-28.

34. The Saviour Accuses the Pharisees of Sin. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The enemies of Christ, the Pharisees, took counsel among themselves as to how to kill Jesus Christ. But the Saviour, aware of this, moved away from there. A large crowd of people followed after Him, and He in His tender-heartedness healed all their sick.

When the Saviour and His disciples entered one house, so many people came together that they could not even eat. Then, a blind and dumb demoniac was brought to the Saviour. The Lord healed him so that the dumb man spoke and saw. All the people were amazed and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard it, they said bitterly, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons (the Devil, Satan), that this man casts out demons."

Then, Jesus Christ said, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man; then, indeed, he may plunder his house. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand but is coming to an end. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.

"Therefore, truly I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come."

The mercy of God is without end; and if a person knows his sin and repents, then there is no sin which can overcome the great mercy of God. Sins and blasphemies from error or delusion occur often and are easily washed away by repentance.

However, whoever knowingly and persistently rejects the most saving mercy of God, which is a blessing of the Holy Spirit, and consciously calls the deeds of the omnipotent God the works of the Devil, he has no means of repentance, and without repentance there is not and can never be salvation.

The Holy Church thus determines that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is conscious, hardened opposition to the truth. The Holy Spirit

constitutes all truth (John 16:13, 14:26, 15:26), He is the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17); thus, the Lord Himself calls Him.

While He was still speaking, the Saviour's Mother and brothers came and stood outside, but they could not reach Him due to the crowd. (By "brothers" at that time, in Hebrew and in general, in the eastern custom, it was meant all close relatives.).

The Pharisees took advantage of this instance to interrupt His teaching and to provoke distrust in the people about His divine parentage and said, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, wishing to speak to You."

Then, Jesus Christ wanted to remind the people once again that He was the Son of the Holy Virgin Mary only physically; but that at the same time, He was, from eternity, the Son of God and had come to earth to save the sinful race of man, to fulfil the will of His Heavenly Father. Therefore, He Himself as well as His Most-pure Mother and all the faithful are obliged firstly to do the will of the Heavenly Father. *Thus, it is necessary to put this lofty, eternal, spiritual obligation higher than temporal, earthly ones.*

The Lord knew that His Mother kept in Her heart all His words. *She herself attentively served and fulfilled His divine teaching; setting Her as an example to all* He said, "Who are My Mother and My brothers?" And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Here are My Mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in Heaven (as My Mother fulfils it) is My brother, and sister and mother."

Thus, the Lord held on high the dignity of His Most-pure Mother, Who was blessed not only in that She bore God Incarnate but even more so in that She became the first *to perfectly fulfil His divine will.*

He as the Son of God knew that His Mother now came to Him not to interfere with His preaching the Gospel about the Kingdom of God but to suffer with Him. In truth, the cruel internal pain pierced Her heart. Because of love for Her divine Son, She agonized to witness His suffering. But submission to the will of God, love for sinners, for whose redemption from eternal death Her Son and God offered himself as a sacrifice of propitiation, this submission prompted Her to accept without a murmur everything that was predestined by the plan of the Holy Trinity from the foundation of the world.

Jesus Christ as the Son of Man was pained over the grief of His Mother and as God gave Her the strength to endure this terrible ordeal. The Mother suffered over Her beloved Son surrounded by desecration and dishonour; but as the Mother of God Incarnate, She

wished to be considered worthy of bearing this supernatural suffering and in everything relying on Him. She awaited this hour with steadfastness.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 12:22-37, 46-50; Mark 3:20-35; Luke 11:14-23; 8:19-21.

The Most-holy Mother of God accomplished the supreme spiritual feat on earth, the spiritual feat of perfect humility, which is love. She either spoke the word of God or remained quiet. "During the life of Her Son, She was in the shadows," writes the author of Humility in Christ, "and in His Ascension, She remained inconspicuous. However, having now our only Intercessor in the Most Holy Mother of God, we know that Her life was better than that of any other person whoever lived on earth." After Her Dormition, She was exalted by God not only higher than all the saints who were ever pleasing to God but higher than all the hosts of Heaven, *"more honourable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim."*

Thus in the person of the Most Holy Mother of God, there are realized the immutable words of the Lord: *Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you* (Matt. 6:33; Luke 12:31).

Who is Meant in the Gospels by "Brothers" of the Lord?

Term "brothers and sisters" of the Lord, as used in the Gospels, has a meaning completely different than it is meant in contemporary terms. According to the custom of Eastern peoples of that time, as it is now kept in the life of the Arabic people living in Palestine and Asia Minor, *"brothers"* means not only the straight relation of brother but also cousins, second cousins, and, *in general, all close relatives.*

There must not have been any actual brothers of the Lord, as the Mother of God bore only one Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and was called by the Holy Church Ever-virgin because She until the birth of Christ, in giving the birth and after the birth of Christ remained the same as She vowed to God never to enter into marriage. St. Joseph was not a real husband to Her, *but he was only Her betrothed*, the custodian of Her virginity. It means that brothers and sisters of the Lord in the flesh could only be first and second cousins by maternal lineage — in the lineage of His Most-pure Mother. Blood relatives by paternal lineage did not exist for the Saviour, for He had no father in the flesh.

In the Gospel account, no clarification is given for the "brothers of

Christ" although several of them are even mentioned by name: James, Joses, Simon and Judas (cf. Matt. 13:54-56). Much has been written about the "brothers of Christ," many judgements have been made and theories have been proposed, but they all contain contradictions or lack in fact.

If these "brothers" of Christ appeared in the literal sense, that is, they were actual relatives *by flesh*, then they could have been *second cousins*. The Apostle Matthew speaks of their mother as being Mary, the mother of James and Joses, the wife of Cleophas, who appears to have been a cousin of the Most-holy Mary. The Apostle John also calls her a sister of His Mother (John 19:25).

These "brothers" of the Lord could have been pseudo "stepbrothers" by the surrogate father Joseph, Her betrothed. They could have been sons of St. Joseph from his real marriage which occurred before his engagement to the Holy Virgin Mary. There is nothing amazing about this, as, for example, according to the Gospel of Mark the genealogy of Jesus Christ is given through the lineage of Joseph, the betrothed, according to Jewish law. The words of the Jews spoken about the Saviour also indicate this possibility: "Whence hath this *Man* this wisdom, and *these* mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not His mother called Mary? and His brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this *Man* all these things?" (Matt 13:54-56). An indication supporting this position is given by the Apostle John. "His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest" (John 7:3). It is also known that the opinion that the "brothers" of the Lord are children of Joseph by his first marriage is from the most *ancient tradition*.

This ancient tradition would not have had any contradiction if the Apostle Matthew called the mother of James and Joseph not only Mary but as the Apostle John named her Mary of Cleophas, sister of His Mother (Matt.27:56; John 19:25); therefore, several scholars came to the conclusion that "brothers" of the Lord were His second cousins by blood.

But as the Holy Orthodox Church does not repudiate the ancient tradition cited above, we consider it necessary to speak about it.

In the *Lives of the Saints* on December 26, it says that *St. Joseph the Betrothed* was the son of Jacob. Jacob was the son of Matthan. But Jacob was married, according to the levirate law, to the wife of his brother Heli who died childless. The *levirate law* prescribes that if a man dies childless, his brother should take his wife and raise up seed unto his brother (Deut. 25:5-6). By this law, Joseph was the son

of Heli although according to the flesh he was the son of Jacob. That is why the holy Evangelist Luke in presenting the lineage of Christ called Heli the father of Joseph speaking of Christ thus: "*And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (**as was supposed**) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli...*" (Luke 3:23).

Church tradition indicates that St. Joseph had a wife and children. Thus, Nikiphoros, the ancient Greek historian, following St. Hippolytus says that St. Joseph was married to Salome. "But do not think he added, that this is the Salome that was in Bethlehem and was called the grandmother of the Lord. The former was a relative of Elizabeth and the Most-holy Mother of God, and the latter was a daughter of Haggai, the brother of Zacharias, the father of John the Forerunner. Haggai and Zacharias were sons of the priest Barachus. With Salome, daughter of Haggai as a wife, St. Joseph had his four sons, Jacob, Simon, Jude and Joses, and two daughters, Esther and Thamar or, as some say, Martha. The Synaxarion for the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearers adds still a third daughter by the name of Salome who married Zebedee. But George Kedrin in speaking of the two daughters of Joseph, says that one of them was Maria, who was given in marriage to Cleophas, the brother of Joseph, already after the return of Joseph from Egypt. But it seems that this Mary is the same person as Martha or Thamar (in the Georgian lists of saints among the holy Myrrh-bearing Women St., Thamar is listed under the name of Tamara). No matter what kind of daughter she was and how many daughters Joseph had; in any case, Joseph undoubtedly was married and had sons and daughters. Upon the death of his wife Salome, Joseph lived a widower for the rest of the time passing his days in chastity.

The Holy Gospels bear witness to his holy and immaculate life with the following short but laudatory words, Her husband Joseph, being a just man (Matt. 1:19). And what could be a greater witness? He was so just that his sanctity exceeded that of the other righteous forefathers and patriarchs, for who could be worthy to be betrothed to and the surrogate husband of the Most-pure Virgin Mother of God? And to whom was given the honour to become the stepfather of Christ? Truly, he was worthy of such an honour and of such an appointment on account of his perfectly virtuous life. When he was already an old, eighty years man, the Holy Virgin Mary became betrothed to him, and She was given to him for the protection of Her virginity. So he served Her with reverence and awe as the Mother of God and as his and all the world's Lady and Sovereign being assured of this by the angel who appeared to him in a dream. He also served the God-child born of Her earning a living for them by the work of his hands. St. Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten years.

35. Healing of the Man Born Blind.

It happened on one feast day in Jerusalem: after the Saviour finished His sermon and was leaving the Temple, He saw on the street *a man blind from birth*.

The Jews thought that every misfortune befalling a man was punishment for his sins. If the misfortune befell a child, then they considered that to be punishment for sins of his parents. Therefore, His disciples asked Him, "Master, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Jesus Christ answered, "*Neither this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be manifest in him.*"

When He had thus spoken, He spat on the ground and made mud of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. Then, the Saviour said to the blind man, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (as one water spring in the city was called. The word *siloam* means *sent*).

In order to heal the man blind from birth, the Saviour could have simply given the word and the blind man would have begun to see. Therefore, if He now anointed the eyes of the blind man, He did it not because a healing power was contained in the clay; but so that by touching his eyes, He would awaken in him faith and show the onlookers that the blind man received the words of the Saviour with faith.

The man blind from birth therefore went to the pool of Siloam, washed, and began to see, and he returned seeing. The neighbours and those who before had seen that he was blind were amazed and said, "Is this not the blind man who sat and begged?"

Some said, "It is he." Others said, "He only resembles him."

He himself said, "I am he who was blind."

Then, they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?"

The healed man answered, "A man named Jesus made clay, anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' I went and washed and I received sight."

Then, they said to him, "Where is He?" The healed man answered, "I know not."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now, it was a Sabbath day when Christ healed him. The Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. And the healed man said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, for He does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such wonders?"

There was a division among them. So they again said to the blind man, "What do you say about Him, since He has opened your eyes?"

The healed man said, "He is a Prophet."

The Pharisees did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight. They called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. But how he now sees, we do not know, nor we do know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age; he will speak for himself."

His parents said this because they feared the Pharisees, for the Jews had already agreed that if any one should confess Jesus of Nazareth to be Christ the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, he was to be put out of the synagogue, that is, to be considered an apostate from their faith and law. Therefore his parents, out of fear of the Pharisees, said, "He is of age, ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give God the praise; we know that this Man is a sinner;" — that is: for your healing, thank God, not that Man Who is a sinner.

The healed man said to them, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I know not; one thing I know that whereas I was blind, now I see." The Pharisees began to ask him again, "What did He do to you. How did He open your eyes?" The healed one answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you too want to become His disciples?"

The Pharisees became angry, reviled him, and said, "You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has

spoken to Moses; but as for this Man, we do not know where He comes from."

The healed man answered, "Why this is a marvel! You do not know where He comes from, and yet He opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners; but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does His will, God listens to him. Never since the world began, was it not heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing."

These simple and wise words with which no one could take issue angered the Pharisees. They said to him, "You were altogether born in sins, and you would teach us?" And they cast him out.

Jesus Christ heard that they had cast him out; and having found him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of man?"

The healed man answered, "And Who is He, Sir that I may believe in Him?"

Jesus said to him, "You have seen Him, and it is He who speaks to you."

Then, the healed one with great joy said, "Lord, I believe;" and he worshipped Him.

Note: See the Gospel of John 9:1-38.

36. The Parable of the Rich Fool.

Jesus Christ taught, "Take heed and *beware of covetousness* (that is, beware of the love of accumulating wealth, beware of the attachment to riches), *for a man's life does not consist in abundance of his possessions.*"

So that people could understand this better, the Lord told them a parable about a rich fool.

The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully, and he thought to himself, "What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?" And he said, "I will do this. I will pull down my barns and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry'."

But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

After the parable, the Lord said, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." This is what happens with everyone who gathers wealth only for himself, for his subsistence and pleasure, and not for God, or not for good works pleasing to God — neither to assist neighbours nor to relieve their suffering. Death will come to the man, and his earthly riches will not transport his soul to that brilliant future life.

"Therefore, I tell you," said the Saviour, "do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat, or about your body, what you shall put on, for life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Your Heavenly Father knows you have need of them. *Instead, seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.*" First of all take care of the salvation of your soul by fulfilling the commandments of God. Show mercy to your neighbour, deal righteously with your soul; then, you may be worthy of the Kingdom of God. Then, everything else, everything that is necessary for your physical existence, for life on earth, the Lord will provide for you.

Note: See the Gospel of Luke 12:15-31.

The Gift of Prayer.

One day Jesus Christ was praying; and when He had ceased, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples."

Jesus Christ said to them, "When you pray, say: Our Father Who art in the heavens, Hallowed be Thy name; Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Thine are the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

Note: See the Gospels of Luke 11:1-4; Matthew 6:9-13.

On Forgiving Offences: The Parable of the Unmerciful Creditor.

During one conversation with Jesus Christ, the Apostle Peter came to Him and asked, "Lord! How often shall my brother (my neighbour) sin against me (that is, if he in some way offends me), and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"

Jesus Christ said to him, "I do not say to you seven times but *seventy*

times seven;" — that is, forgive without counting to count.

To explain this better, Jesus Christ told a parable. "One man owed the king *ten thousand talents* (about ten thousand dollars). As he could not pay, the King ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him *a hundred denarii*, (about twenty dollars). Seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then, his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?' And in anger, his lord delivered him to the jailers till he should pay all his debt."

After the parable, Jesus Christ said, "So also My Heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

In this parable the king represents God. The man who owed a huge sum to the king represents us. The debt is our sins. By the fellow servants are meant those people who in some way are guilty before us (our debtors).

From this parable, it is evident that everyone, who is evil to his neighbour for some sort of fault of theirs and does not want to forgive them, does not deserve the mercy of God.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 18:21-35 and Luke 17:3-4.

The Healing of Ten Lepers.

At the entrance of one village, Jesus Christ met ten lepers. Nine of them were Jews and one a Samaritan. Their common grief united them. The lepers were forbidden to come close to people because their disease was infectious. Therefore, they stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."

Jesus Christ said, "Go and show yourselves to the priests."

The priests were to inspect those who recovered from leprosy and

testified to their right to live in cities and towns. The lepers went to the priests; and as they walked on the road, they were cleansed of the leprosy, that is, they were restored to health. One of them seeing that he was healed returned to Jesus Christ, glorified God with a loud voice, and fell at the feet of Christ thanking Him. It was the Samaritan. The Jews had left without giving thanks.

Then, Jesus Christ said, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God, except this foreigner?"

Then, turning to the thankful Samaritan, he said, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well." From this, it is clear that we must always be thankful to God for His mercy which He extends to us.

Note: See the Gospel of Luke 7:11-19.

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

Concerning people who love wealth and do not help the needy, Jesus Christ told this parable.

"There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple (garments made from expensive red material) and linen (fine white garments), and who feasted sumptuously every day. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, who was covered with sores. He desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom (the place of blessedness of the righteous, Paradise). The rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom, and he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame."

But Abraham said to him, "Son, remember that you in your lifetime received good things, but Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now, he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us."

And then the formerly rich man said to Abraham, "Then, I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of

torment."

But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets (their Holy Scripture); let them hear them."

And he said, "No, Father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent."

Then, Abraham said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

In this parable, the Lord clearly indicates that if a rich man wastes his wealth only on his pleasure and does not help the needy, does not think about his soul and its eternal fate, then he will be judged and will not receive blessedness in the future life. At the same time, he, who patiently, humbly, *without grumbling endures suffering*, will receive eternal, blessed life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Note: See the Gospel of Luke 16:19-31.

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.

Warning all of us not to become proud, boastful and not to consider ourselves righteous and better than others but rather to be humble and alert for our sins to grieve over them and to judge no one because only a humble man is raised in spirit to God, Jesus Christ has told the following parable.

Two men went up into the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other — a publican (tax collector).

The Pharisee stood up front and prayed, "God, I thank Thee that I am not like other men, extortionists, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I give one tenth of all that I receive to the priests."

But the publican standing far off would not even lift up his eyes to Heaven and beat his breast saying, "*God be merciful to me a sinner!*"

Jesus Christ said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Note: See the Gospel of Luke 18:9-14.

Blessing the Children.

Many brought their children to Jesus Christ that He might touch them, lay His hands on them and bless them. The disciples of Christ

rebuked them thinking it was not worth having the children disturb the Master.

But when Jesus Christ saw it, He was indignant, called the disciples to Him, and said, "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such is the Kingdom of Heaven. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child, shall not enter it."

Taking the children in His arms, Jesus Christ laid His hands on them and blessed them.

From this we are given to understand that innocence, guiltlessness, simplicity, and goodness of soul, which are traits mainly of children, lead men into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17.

37. The Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Tax collectors and sinners came to Jesus Christ to listen to Him. The proud Pharisees and scribes, teachers of the Jewish people, murmured about Jesus Christ for this and said, "He receives sinners and eats with them."

But Jesus Christ told several parables, which showed that God joyfully and lovingly receives every repentant sinner. Here is one of them.

There was a man who had two sons. The youngest said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that falls to me." The father granted the request and divided his property between them. Not many days later, the youngest son gathered all he had and journeyed into a far country; and there, he squandered his property in loose living. When he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. He would gladly have eaten the food that the swine ate, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to himself, he remembered his father, was filled with remorse over his deed, and thought, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with

hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants'."

Thus, he did. He got up and went to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran, and embraced him, and kissed him.

The son said to him, "Father! I have sinned against Heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet, and bring the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and make merry, for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And they began to make merry.

Now his elder son was in the field, and he came and drew near to the house; he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this meant. The servant said to him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has received him safe and sound." But the elder son was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him.

But he answered his father, "Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command. Yet you never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living wantonly, you killed the fatted calf for him!"

The father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."

In this parable, the father represents God, and the prodigal son — the repentant sinner. Resembling, the prodigal son is every person who in his soul turns away from God and pursues his self-willed, sinful life. By his sins, he destroys his soul and all the gifts: life, health, strength, capabilities — which were bestowed on him by God. When the sinner coming to himself brings to God sincere repentance with humility and hope in His mercy, then the Lord as a compassionate Father rejoices with His angels over the return of the sinner, forgives him all his sins as if they never have been made, and returns to him all His mercy and gifts.

By the story about the elder son, the Saviour teaches that all faithful Christians must with all their souls desire salvation for everyone and

rejoice over the return of the sinner not envying the love that God gives them and not considering themselves more worthy of God's mercy than the one who returns to God from his former immoral life.

Note: See the Gospel of Luke 15:11-32.

Predictions of Jesus Christ about the End of the World and His Second Coming.

Jesus Christ made predictions about what is in store in the future for our entire world and all the people. He has taught that the end of the world is coming, and that the earthly existence of the human race is going to cease. Then, He will come to earth a second time and will resurrect all people at which time the bodies of all people will again become joined to their souls and they will come back to life. Then, Jesus Christ will pronounce judgement over people rendering to each according to his works. "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God. And they that hear shall live and shall come forth from their graves: they that have done good — unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil — unto the resurrection of damnation."

The disciples asked, "Tell us when this will be, and what will be the sign of Your (second) coming and of the close of the age?" In answer, Jesus Christ forewarned them that before His coming in glory on earth, there would occur a time of suffering for people, such as has never occurred before from the beginning of the world. There will be various misfortunes: famines, floods, earthquakes and wars. Lawlessness will increase, faith will grow weak, and most people's love will grow cold. Many false prophets and teachers will appear, who will seduce people and corrupt them with their ruinous, destructive teaching. But first, the Gospel of Christ will be preached to all the corners of the earth in witness to all people.

Before the end of the world, there will be great, terrifying signs in the heavens. The sea will roar and be agitated. Loss of heart and perplexity will possess people, so that they will grow faint from fear and the expectation of disasters coming to the world. Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then, will appear the sign of Jesus Christ (His cross) in the heavens. Then, all the tribes of the earth will mourn from fear of the judgement of God, and they will see Jesus Christ coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. As lightning flashes in the heavens from the east to the west and is immediately visible from everywhere, such visible to all will the Son of God suddenly come.

About the day and the hour of His coming to earth Jesus Christ did not tell His disciples. "Of that day or that hour no one knows but only the Father," He said, and He taught to watch and always be ready to meet the Lord.

Note: See the Gospels of John 5:24-29; Matthew 24:3-44; Mark 13:3-37; Luke 17:20-37 and 21:7-36.

Parable of the Ten Virgins.

In order that people would always be ready to meet the Lord, the judgement of God, which means to be ready for death since death is the beginning of the judgement of God over men, Jesus Christ told the parable of the ten virgins. In this parable, the Lord likens us to virgins who had gathered for a marriage. According to Eastern wedding customs, the groom went for his bride, who awaited him in the home of her father. Her friends, virgins, had to meet the groom with burning lanterns in late evening, and accompany him to the fiancée.

Then, the Kingdom of Heaven shall be compared to ten virgins, said the Saviour, who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Then, all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the wise replied, "Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves." And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.

Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us."

But he replied, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you." After finishing this parable, the Saviour said, "Watch therefore (always be prepared), for you know neither the day nor the hour in which comes the *Son of man*."

The "*foolish virgins*" correspond to those careless people who know that they have to appear at the judgement of God but who do not prepare themselves for it while they are alive on earth, while death has not overtaken them. They do not repent of their sins and do not do good deeds. The "*oil in the lamps*" means good deeds, especially

works of mercy. The "*sleep of the virgins*" represents the death of people.

Our Judge ("*The Bridegroom*"), Jesus Christ, will come to earth and all the dead will awaken from the sleep of death, that is, they will be resurrected. As death finds one, prepared or unprepared for the judgement of God, so he has to appear before the judgement of God. Then, careless people will not be able to look for help from anywhere, and they will hear from Christ the bitter words, "I do not know you; depart from Me."

Note: See the Gospel of Matthew 25:1-13.

The Parable of the Talents.

Jesus Christ told yet another parable reproving our laziness and negligence.

The Son of man is like a man, who going on a journey into a far country called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to the other — two talents, to another — one talent, — according to an ability of each. Then, he went away.

One who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them; and he made five talents more. Uniformly, one who had the two talents made two talents more. But one who had received the one talent did not want to work, and he went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time, the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. The one who had received the five talents came forward bringing five talents more and saying, "Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more."

His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little. I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master."

And also, the one who had the two talents came forward saying, "Master, you gave me two talents. Here, I have made two more talents."

His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

Also, the one who had received one talent came forward saying, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow. So I was afraid, and I

went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours."

But his master answered him, "You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I have not winnowed. Then, you ought to have invested my money with the bankers; and at my coming, I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For every one who has will be given more, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness where men will weep and gnash their teeth."

Having told this parable, Jesus Christ exclaimed, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

This parable means that all people receive various gifts from God, such as life, health, strength, spiritual capacity, learning, gifts of the Holy Spirit, the good things of life, and so on, in order to use these gifts in the service of God and neighbour. All these are gifts of God and are understood in the parable under the name of talents. God knows how much each person needs, according to his ability, and therefore some people receive more, others less. He who uses the gifts of God must give an account to God at His second coming. He who uses them to the advantage of himself and others will receive praise from the Lord and eternal heavenly joy, but lazy and careless people will be condemned by the Lord to eternal suffering.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-28.

The Last Judgment.

Concerning His fearful last judgement over all people at the time of His second coming, Jesus Christ taught the following.

When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the angels are with Him, then He will sit as King on the throne of His glory. Before Him, will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate one from another: the faithful and good from the godless and evil, — as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep, the righteous, at His right hand, but the goats or sinners — at the left.

Then, the King will say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me food. I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed Me. I was naked, and you clothed Me. I was sick, and you visited Me. I was

in prison, and you came to Me."

Then, the righteous will answer Him, "Lord! When did we see Thee hungry and feed Thee or thirsty and gave Thee drink? And when did we see Thee a stranger and welcome Thee or naked and clothe Thee? And when did we see Thee sick or in prison and visit Thee?"

The King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you: as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren (for needy people), you did it to Me."

Then, He will say to those at His left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave Me no food. I was thirsty, and you gave Me no drink. I was a stranger, and you did not welcome Me; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick and in prison, and you did not visit Me."

Then, they also will answer, "Lord, when did we see Thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison and did not minister to Thee?"

But the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you: as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for Me." And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous — into eternal life.

Great and terrifying will be that day for all of us. Therefore, this judgement is called *terrible*, for our deeds, words, and our most secret thoughts and desires will be revealed to all. Then, there will be no one to help us, for *the judgement of God is just*, and each will be judged according to his deeds.

Note: See the Gospel of Matthew 25:31-46.

38. The Raising of Lazarus.

The Jewish feast of the Passover drew near; and with it, the last days of the life of Jesus Christ on earth occurred. The malice of the Pharisees and Jewish leaders reached its peak. Their hearts hardened from envy, love of power, and other vices, and they did not want to accept the simple and compassionate teachings of Christ. They awaited a convenient occasion to seize the Saviour and put Him to death; and now, the time for them had arrived. The power of

darkness set in, and the Lord was being betrayed into the hands of men.

At this time in the village of Bethany, Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, was ill. The Lord loved Lazarus and his sisters and often visited this blessed family.

When Lazarus fell ill, Jesus Christ was not in Judea. The sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord! The one whom You love is ill."

But when Jesus Christ heard it He said, "This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it."

The Saviour stayed two days longer in the place where He was. Then, He said to the disciples, "Let us go into Judea again. Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." Jesus Christ spoke to them about the death of Lazarus, and the disciples thought that He was talking about usual sleep; and since sleep at a time of illness was a good sign of recovery, they said, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he should recover."

Then, Jesus Christ told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead; and for your sake, I am glad I have not been there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

When Jesus came to Bethany, Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Many of the Jews from Jerusalem had come to Martha and Mary to console them.

Martha first heard that Jesus was coming and hurried to meet Him. Mary, in deep grief, sat in the house. When Martha met the Saviour, she said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now, I know that whatever You ask from God, God will give You."

Jesus Christ said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to Him, "I know that He will rise again in the resurrection at the last day (that is, in the general, resurrection at the end of the world)."

Then, Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Martha said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, Who is to come into the world." When she had said this, she quickly went home and quietly said to her sister Mary, "The

Teacher is here and is calling for you."

Mary, as soon as she heard this joyful news, rose quickly and went to Jesus Christ. When the Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. The Saviour had not yet come to the village but was still in the place where Martha had met Him.

Mary, when she came where Jesus was, fell at His feet saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus Christ saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply troubled in spirit and said, "Where have you laid him?"

They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus Christ wept.

When they came to the tomb of Lazarus, it was a cave, and the entrance was blocked up with a stone. Christ said, "Take away the stone."

Martha said to Him, "Lord! By this time there will be an odour, for he has been dead for four days."

Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone.

Then, Jesus lifted His eyes to Heaven and said to God His Father, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. I know that Thou hearest Me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by Me that they may believe that Thou hast send Me."

When He had said this, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." The dead man came out, His hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth, as the Jews dressed the dead.

Jesus said to them, "Unbind him and let him go." Then, many of the Jews, who had been there and seen this miracle, believed in Jesus Christ. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. The enemies of Christ, the chief priests and the Pharisees were troubled and fearing that all the people would believe in Jesus Christ, gathered a council and decided to kill Jesus Christ. Word of this great miracle began to spread all over Jerusalem. Many Jews went to the home of Lazarus to see him and having seen believed in Jesus Christ. Then, the chief priests and scribes plotted to kill Lazarus. But Lazarus, after his resurrection by the Saviour, lived a long time and was later a bishop on the island of

Cyprus.

Note: See the Gospel of John 11:1-57 and 12:9-11.

This great miracle of the Saviour, the raising of Lazarus, is commemorated by the Holy Orthodox Church on the Saturday of the sixth week of the Great Fast (the eve of Palm Sunday).

39. The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.

Soon after the raising of Lazarus, six days before the Jewish Passover, Jesus Christ made a triumphal entry into Jerusalem to show that He was the true Christ the King and was going to death voluntarily.

When they drew near to Jerusalem, coming to the village of Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus Christ sent two of His disciples saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you; and immediately, you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it to me. If any one says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs it'."

The disciples went away and found it as He had told them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put their garments on the colt, and Jesus sat on it.

In the meantime in Jerusalem, they learned that Jesus, the One Who raised Lazarus from the dead after four days, was coming to Jerusalem. Crowds of people, gathered from everywhere for the feast of the Passover, went to meet Him. Many took off their outer garments and spread them on the road before Him. Others cut palm branches, carried them in their hands and spread them on the road. And all the people, who went before and who followed, cried out with joy, "*Hosanna (Salvation) to the Son of David! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord;*" — that is, worthy of praise is the One Who comes in the name of the Lord, sent from God. "*King of Israel! Hosanna in the highest!*"

When He drew near to Jerusalem, the Saviour looked upon it with sorrow. He knew that the people would reject Him, their Saviour, and that Jerusalem would be destroyed. Jesus Christ wept over it and said, "If you have known, even you, at least in this day, the things *which belong* unto your peace! but now they are hid from your eyes;" — that is, you stubbornly close your eyes to all of God's

favour bestowed on you. "For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will cast up a bank about you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children with you, and they will not leave one stone upon another because you did not know (did not want to acknowledge) the time of your visitation (the time when the Lord visited you)."

When Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem, the entire city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?"

The crowds answered, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee," and told them about how He had called Lazarus forth from the tomb and raised him from the dead.

Jesus entered the Temple and again, as in the first year of His teaching, drove out all who sold and bought in the Temple, saying to them "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers."

The blinds and the lames came to Him in the Temple, and He healed them. The people, seeing the wonderful things Jesus Christ did, began to praise Him even more. Even little children being in the Temple cried out, "*Hosanna to the Son of David.*"

The chief priests and the scribes were indignant and they said to Him, "Do you hear what they are saying?"

Jesus Christ said to them, "Yes, have you never read: '*Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast Thou perfected praise*'?" (Ps. 8:3). Jesus Christ taught daily in the Temple; and when evening came, He went out of the city. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people sought an opportunity to destroy Him, but they could not, for all the people were very anxious to hear Him.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 21:1-17; Mark 11:1-19, Luke 19:29-48; John 12:12-19.

The triumphant Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem is celebrated by the Holy Orthodox Church on the last Sunday before the bright feast of Pascha. This is one of the great feasts, and it is also called *Palm Sunday* because on this feast during the All-night Vigil service, or at Matins, blessed branches of palms, pussy willows, or other early spring growth are distributed to the faithful. In ancient times, the king was met with green branches when he was returning in triumph after victory over his enemies. And we holding in our hands the branches of the first blossoms of spring glorify the Saviour as the Victor over death because He raised the dead and on this very day

entered Jerusalem to die for our sins and to rise again thereby saving us from eternal death and eternal torment. The branches serve for us then as *a symbol of the victory of Christ over death* and should remind us of the future resurrection of all of us from death.

Troparion of the Feast.

In confirming the common Resurrection, O Christ God, Thou didst raise up Lazarus from the dead before Thy passion. Wherefore, we also, like the children bearing the symbols of victory, cry to Thee, the vanquisher of death: Hosanna in the highest; blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.

40. The Parable of the Wicked Tenants.

Speaking in the Temple, the Lord Jesus Christ turning to the high priests, scribes, and elders of the people told them this parable.

There was a Landowner, Who planted a vineyard, set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country.

When the season of fruit drew near, He sent his servants to the tenants to get His fruit; and the tenants took His servants and beat one, killed the other, and stoned another. Again, He sent other servants, more than the first, and they did the same.

Afterward, He sent His only Son to them saying, "They will respect my Son."

But when the tenants saw the Son, they said to each other, "This is the Heir. Come, let us kill Him, and have His inheritance." And they took Him, and cast Him out of the vineyard, and killed Him."

Having told the parable, the Saviour asked them, "When, therefore, the Owner of the vineyard comes, what will He do to those tenants?"

They said to Him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give Him the fruits in their season."

The Lord Jesus Christ emphasized their answer, saying, "Therefore, I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation which will produce the fruits of it."

Then, the chief priests and Pharisees with the elders understood that the Saviour was speaking about them. In a rage, they tried to arrest Him, but they feared the multitude because the multitude considered Him to be a prophet.

The explanation of this parable is thus: The *Householder* is God. The tenants are the Jewish people chosen by God to preserve the true faith. The *hedges* around the vineyard are the commandments of God given through Moses. The *wine press* where the juice of the grapes flows is the sacrifice in the Old Testament covenant prefiguring the death on the cross of Jesus Christ; the *tower* is the Temple in Jerusalem. The *overseers* are the chief priests, scribes, and elders of the Jewish people. The *servants* of the Householder are the holy prophets. *The Son of the Householder* is the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. Standing at the head of the Jewish people, the chief priests, scribes, and elders had received the power to prepare the people to accept the Saviour, but they used this power only for their own benefit. God sent prophets to them, but they persecuted and killed them. Thus, they turned out to be murderers of prophets and then murderers of the apostles. Their Saviour they rejected; and leading Him out from their city, they crucified Him. Therefore, the Kingdom of God was taken away from them and given to another people; the Church of Christ was opened to all nations.

The Question Concerning Tribute to Caesar.

The Lord Jesus Christ continued to teach in the Temple, and the Jewish elders took counsel among themselves how to entangle Him in His speech in order to accuse Him in front of the people or before the Roman authorities.

Having thought up a crafty question, they sent several Pharisees to the Saviour from among their young apprentices and Herodians, recognized lawyers of Roman authorities. Pretending respect, they began flatteringly to say to Him, "Master, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God truthfully, and favour no man, for you do not regard the position of men. Tell us then, *is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?*"

The enemies of Christ who thought up this tricky question reasoned thus: if Jesus Christ answers that it is appropriate to pay the tribute, then he calls upon Himself indignation among the people, as the Jews recognized only God as their king. They considered it to be unlawful and against God's will to be subject to a foreign king, moreover a heathen, and only by coercion they did render tribute to Caesar. If Jesus Christ answered that it was not necessary to pay tribute to Caesar, then in that case, He would immediately be guilty

before the Roman authority as one who stirred up the people against the Roman powers, against Caesar.

But Jesus Christ knowing their malice said to them, "Why do you tempt Me, you hypocrites? (Hypocrites — people who affectedly, for some advantage, try to present themselves before others as pious and virtuous) Show me the money for the tax."

They brought Him a denarius, a Roman coin.

The Saviour asked, "Whose likeness and inscription is on it?"

They said, "Caesar's."

Then, Jesus Christ said to them, "*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.*" This means, give back to Caesar that what you receive from him, pay tribute to him for that which you use from him (money, armies, etc.), submit to him in everything that is not against God's commandments, paying taxes is a sign of submission, a legal obligation and necessity. But at the same time, steadfastly fulfil everything that God requires from us in His commandments and lovingly serve Him; for to God, you owe your existence, your very life.

The answer of the Saviour amazed them all by the wisdom and unusual simplicity, so that the questioners fell silent and went away in shame.

The Question Concerning the Resurrection.

After this, having beforehand composed their argument, some Sadducees, those who say that there is no resurrection, came to the Saviour. They thought that they could catch Him with a question and said, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry his widow and raise up children for his brother.' Now, there were seven brothers among us. The first married, and died, and having no children, left his wife to his brother. So too, the second and third, down to the seventh, did. After them all, the woman died. In the resurrection therefore, to which of the seven will she be wife? For they all had her."

But Jesus Christ answered them, "You are wrong because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in Heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, '*I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.* He is not the God of the dead but of the living.' "

In that time, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were no longer living on earth; it followed that if God still nevertheless called Himself their God, that meant they were alive for Him, or He would be calling Himself God of the nonexistent.

Again, when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at the answer of Jesus Christ. Some of the scribes answered, "Teacher! You have spoken well."

About the Divinity of Christ the Messiah.

The Pharisees, standing at that time at some distance, now gathered together and came closer to Jesus Christ, but they did not dare to ask Him any question. Then, Jesus Christ Himself turning to the gathered Pharisees asked them a question saying, "*What do you think of the Christ? Whose Son is He?*"

The Pharisees immediately answered, "David's."

The word "son" in Hebrew meant not only son in the proper sense but also line of descent. Therefore, the expression "Son of David" meant in the lineage of David.

Jesus Christ again asked, "How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls Him Lord saying, '*The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at My right hand, till I put Thy enemies under Thy feet?*' If David thus called Him Lord, how is He his Son?"

No one was able to answer Him a word. The Pharisees, not understanding the Scriptures in spirit and truth, did not understand that Christ as God-man was of the lineage of David only by His human nature; but by His divine nature, He always existed, for He is, as *Son of God, existing from eternity.*

From that day, no one dared to ask Him any more questions. Thus was the scholarly pride of man disgraced before the divine wisdom of the Saviour. Multitudes of people listened to the Lord with rejoicing.

Then, Jesus Christ turned to His disciples and the crowds; and in a formidable speech before them all, He clearly exposed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the scribes and predicted woe to them.

Jesus Christ with grief said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You shut the Kingdom of Heaven against men, for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You tithe mint, and

dill, and cumin (things of little worth) and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, and mercy, and faith. These, you ought to have done without neglecting the others. You are blind guides straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel!" This means that they painstakingly care for trivial things; but important matters, they leave unattended.

"You outwardly seem to the people to be righteous; but inwardly, you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness... "

This was the last admonition of the Lord, the last attempt to save them from the terrible judgement. But on their faces there was no repentance; but rather, there was repressed anger toward the Saviour.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 21:33-46, 22:15-46; and 23; Mark 12:1-40; Luke 20:9-47.

The Widow's Coin.

At the entrance to the Temple of Jerusalem, there was placed a treasury, that is, a collection box, in which worshippers put their freewill offerings for the Temple.

Jesus Christ sat down opposite the treasury and watched the multitude putting their offering into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums.

A poor widow came and put in two copper coins, which make a penny, the smallest denomination of money. Such a gift might seem to people scarcely worthy of notice. But the Lord, who sees into men's hearts, pointed out to His disciples precisely this humble gift of the poor woman. The Lord valued her gift for its internal worth. Having called His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in *more than all* those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living." She contributed her last coin and, by so doing, consecration to God everything that she had.

Note: See the Gospels of Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4.

41. The Betrayal by Judas.

On the fourth day after His triumphant entrance into Jerusalem,

Jesus Christ said to His disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of man will be delivered up to be crucified."

On this day, which in our reckoning was Wednesday, the chief priests, scribes, and elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and took counsel together in order to arrest Jesus Christ by stealth and kill Him; but not during the feast, as there were many people gathered. They did not want a tumult among the people.

One of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, was very greedy for money and the teachings of Christ had not corrected his spirit. He went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver Him to you?" They were glad and promised him thirty pieces of silver.

From that moment, Judas sought an opportunity to betray Jesus Christ in the absence of the people.

Note: See the Gospels of Matt. 26:1-5 and 14-16; Mark 14:1-2 and 10-11; Luke 22:1-6.

42. The Mystical (Last) Supper.

On the fifth day after the Lord's entrance into Jerusalem, which, according to our reckoning, was Thursday (on Friday evening, the first day of unleavened bread, they sacrificed the Passover lamb), the disciples came to Jesus saying, "Where will you have us prepare the Passover for you to eat?"

Jesus Christ said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him and, wherever he enters, say to the householder, 'The Teacher says where is My guest room, where I am to eat the Passover with My disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. There, prepare for us."

He sent two of His disciples, Peter and John. They went and found it as He had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

That evening, Jesus Christ knowing that He would be betrayed that night came with His twelve apostles to the prepared upper room. When they were seated at the table, Jesus Christ said, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I

tell you I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God." Then, He rose, laid aside His garments, and girded Himself with a towel. He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

When He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and resumed His place, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example that you also The Washing of the Disciples' Feet should do as I have done to you."

By this example, the Lord demonstrated not only His love for His disciples but also taught them humility, that is, not to consider it beneath oneself to serve someone even though he may be of lesser status.

After eating the Old Testament Jewish Passover, Jesus Christ established on this evening the sacrament of Holy Communion. Therefore, the occasion is called in the Orthodox Church the "Mystical Supper."

Jesus Christ took bread, blessed it, broke it in pieces, and giving it to the disciples said, "*Take, eat; this is My Body, which is broken for you for the remission of sins;*" that is, for you, It will be handed over to suffering and death for the forgiveness of sins. He took a cup of wine; and when He had given thanks to God the Father for all His mercy to the race of mankind, He gave it to the disciples saying "*Drink of it, all of you; for this is My Blood of the New Covenant, Which is poured out for you for the remission of sins.*"

These words indicate that under the appearance of bread and wine the Saviour taught His disciples that it was His own Body and own Blood which on the next day He gave up to suffering and death for our sins. How the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of the Lord is a mystery, incomprehensible even to the angels, and is therefore called a *mystery*.

After giving the Eucharist to the apostles, the Lord gave the commandment to always perform this sacrament. He said, '*Do this in remembrance of Me*' (I Cor. 11:25). This sacrament is performed by us now and will continue to be performed until the end of the age; in the divine service, it is called the *Liturgy*.

During the sacramental Last Supper, the Saviour has revealed to the apostles that one of them would betray Him. They were very

sorrowful and bewildered. Looking at one another, in fear they began to ask after one another, "Is it I, Lord?" Judas said, "Is it I, Master?" The Saviour quietly said to him, "You have said it," and no one heard it. John was reclining next to the Saviour. Peter beckoned to him and said, "Tell us who it is of whom He speaks." John, lying close to the breast of the Saviour, quietly said, "Lord, who it is?" Jesus Christ quietly answered, "It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I shall have dipped it." So when He had dipped the morsel in a dish with salt, He gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, and said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly."

Now no one at the table knew why He said this to him. Some thought, because Judas had the money bag, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast;" or he was told to give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel, he immediately went out, and it was night.

Jesus Christ continued to talk with His disciples and said, "Little children, yet a little while, I am with you. A new commandment, I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you. By this, all men would know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another. Greater love has no man than this that he gives his life for his friends. You are My friends if you fulfil that I have commanded you."

During this conversation, Jesus Christ foretold to the disciples that they all would be offended because of Him that night; all would scatter leaving Him alone. The Apostle Peter declared, "Though they all to be offended because of You, I would never be offended."

Then, the Saviour said to him, "Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny Me three times and will say that you do not know Me."

But Peter more vehemently began to assure Him saying, "If I must die with You, I would not deny You." So said all the disciples. Nevertheless, the words of the Saviour saddened them. Comforting them, the Lord said, "Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God (the Father) and believe in Me (the Son of God)."

The Saviour promised His disciples that He would send from His Father another Comforter and Teacher instead of Himself, that is, the *Holy Spirit*. He said, "I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, the Spirit of truth, Whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He abides with you and will be in you." That means that the Holy Spirit must be with all true believers in Jesus Christ and in the Church of Christ. "Yet a little while, and the world will see Me no

more, but you will see Me; because I live (I am life, and death cannot conquer Me), you will live also... The Comforter (the Holy Spirit) Whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. The Holy Spirit, even the Spirit of truth, *Who proceeds from the Father*, He will bear witness of Me. You also are witnesses because you have been with Me from the beginning" (John 15:19, 26-27).

Jesus Christ also predicted to His disciples that they would have to suffer much evil and persecution from people because they (the disciples) believe in Him. "In the world, you have tribulation; but be of good cheer," said the Saviour, "I have overcome the world" (conquered evil in the world).

Jesus Christ concluded His conversation with a prayer for His disciples and for all who believe in Him, so the Heavenly Father may keep them in steadfast faith, in love, and they may be in unity among themselves.

When the Lord finished the supper during the conversation, He stood with His eleven disciples; and when they had sung a hymn, He went forth across the Kidron valley to the Mount of Olives, into the garden of Gethsemane.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 26:17-35; Mark 14:12-31; Luke 22:7-39; John 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18:1.

43. The Prayer of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Entering the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus Christ said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go yonder and pray." Taking with Him Peter, James, and John, He went deep into the garden, and He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then, He said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch with Me." And going a little farther, he fell on His face and prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as Thou wilt."

Having prayed thus, Jesus Christ returned to the three disciples and found them sleeping. He said to them, "So you could not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation." Again, for the second time, He went away and prayed. And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were

heavy, and they did not know what to answer Him.

So, leaving them again, He went away and prayed for the third time saying the same words. And there appeared to Him an angel from Heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling from His brow to the ground.

And when He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and said, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

While He was still speaking, Judas, the betrayer, came with a great crowd with lanterns, and torches, and weapons. It was a band of soldiers and some officers sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to seize Jesus Christ. Judas spoke with them, "The One I shall kiss is the man; seize Him."

He came up to Jesus at once and said, "Hail, Master!" And he kissed Him.

Jesus Christ said to Him, "Friend, why are you here? Would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?" These words of the Saviour were for Judas the last appeal to repentance.

Then, Jesus Christ knowing all that was to befall Him came forward to the throng and said to them, "Whom do you seek?"

From the crowd they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth."

The Saviour answered, "It is I."

From these words, the soldiers and officers drew back and fell to the ground. When they had recovered from fear and rose, they tried in confusion to seize the disciples of Christ.

The Saviour again said, "Whom do you seek?"

They said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

"I told you that I am He," answered the Saviour. "So, if you seek Me, let those men go."

So the band of soldiers and the officers seized and bound Jesus Christ. The apostles wanted to defend their Teacher. Peter having a sword drew it, and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear.

But Jesus Christ said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath, for all who take the sword shall perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? How then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so? Shall I not drink the cup (of suffering) which the Father has given Me (for the salvation of people)?"

Having said this, Jesus Christ touched the ear of Malchus, the wounded servant, healed him, and voluntarily gave Himself into the hands of His enemies.

In the crowd of hired soldiers, there were also chief priests, and captains of the Temple, and elders of the Jews. Jesus Christ turning to them said, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the Temple, you did not lay hands on Me. But this is your hour and the power of darkness."

The soldiers, who had seized the Saviour, led Him to the high priest. Then, the apostles forsook the Saviour and fled in fear. Only two of them, John and Peter, followed Him at a distance.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 26:36-56; Mark 14:32-52; Luke 22:40-53; John 18:1-12.

44. The Sanhedrin's Judgement of Jesus Christ.

First the soldiers led the bound Jesus Christ to the old high priest Annas, who at that time was not serving in the Temple and lived in retirement. This chief priest interrogated Jesus Christ about His teaching and His disciples in order to find some fault in Him.

The Saviour answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the Temple where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing secretly. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. They know what I said."

One of the officers of the high priest, standing by, struck Jesus on the cheek and said, "Is that how You answer the high priest?" The Lord turning to him said to this, "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike Me?"

After questioning by the high priest Annas, the bound Jesus Christ

was sent through the courtyard to Annas' son-in-law, the high priest Caiaphas.

Caiaphas was the high priest that year. He had advised the Sanhedrin to kill Jesus Christ saying, "You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish."

The holy Apostle John, pointing out the *importance of this sacred rank of high priest*, explains that in spite of his criminal design the high priest Caiaphas involuntarily prophesied about the Saviour that He would have to suffer for the redemption of the people. Therefore, the Apostle John said, *He did not say this of his own accord but "being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation."* And here he adds, *"And not for the nation only (for the Jews, because Caiaphas spoke only about the Hebrew nation), but to gather into one the children of God (the Gentiles), who are scattered abroad"* (John 11:49-52).

At the house of the high priest Caiaphas that night, there gathered many members of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin as the highest court of law usually had to convene in the Temple by day. Elders and Jewish scribes also came. All of them had agreed in advance to condemn Jesus Christ to death. But to do this, it was necessary to find some sort of guilt punishable by death. And since no one could find any sort of guilt in Him, they hired false witnesses to make untrue accusations against Jesus Christ. Many such false witnesses came forward. But they were not able to say anything that could condemn Jesus Christ. At last, two such false witnesses came forward and said, "We heard Him saying, 'I will destroy this Temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands'." But such testimony was not enough to condemn Him to death. To all these false witnesses, Jesus Christ made no answer.

The high priest Caiaphas stood up and said, "Have You no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against You?" Jesus Christ was silent.

Caiaphas said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, tell us if You are Christ, the Son of God."

To this question, Jesus Christ said, "I am, but I tell you hereafter you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Then, the high priest tore his robes as a sign of indignation and horror and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? You have now

heard His blasphemy (that is, He being a man calls Himself the Son of God). What is your decision?" They all answered in one voice, "He deserves death."

After this, they gave Jesus Christ into custody. Some began to spit on Him. The men who were holding Him mocked Him and beat Him. Others, covering His face, struck Him and with laughter asked, "Prophecy to us, You Christ, who is it that struck You?" All these insults, Jesus Christ endured without murmuring.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 26:57-68; 27:1; Mark 14:53-65, 15:1; Luke 22:54, 63-71; John 18:12-14, 19-24.

45. The Apostle Peter's Denial.

When they led Jesus Christ to the high priest's house, the Apostle John, who was known to the high priest, entered the court, but Peter remained outside at the door. Then, John spoke to the maid who kept the door and brought Peter in.

The maid, seeing Peter, said to him, "Are you not also one of the disciples of this Man (Jesus Christ)?"

Peter answered, "No."

The night was cold. The officers kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat warming themselves. Peter also warmed himself with them. Soon another maid seeing him as he sat in the light warming himself said to the guards, "This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth."

But Peter again denied it saying "Woman, I do not know him."

After an interval of about an hour still, another insisted to Peter, "Certainly, you also were with Him; for your accent betrays you. You are a Galilean." One of the servants of the high priest, a kinsman of the man, Malchus, whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?"

Peter began to invoke a curse on himself and swear, "I do not know this Man of Whom you speak." While he was still speaking, the cock crowed and reminded Peter of the words of the Lord how He had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny Me three times." The Lord being among the guards in the court turned and looked at Peter. The gaze of the Lord penetrated the heart of Peter.

Shame and repentance seized him, and he went out from the court and wept bitterly over his grievous sin.

From that moment, Peter never forgot his fall. St. Clement, a disciple of Peter, tells how Peter throughout all his remaining days at the midnight crowing of the cock fell on his knees and in a flood of tears repented of his denial although the Lord Himself immediately after His resurrection forgave him. The ancient traditional teaching preserved that the eyes of the Apostle Peter were red from frequent and bitter weeping.

Note: See the Gospel of Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:55-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27.

The Death of Judas.

Friday morning came. Immediately, the chief priests with the elders and scribes convened their council. They brought Jesus Christ and again condemned Him to death for calling Himself Christ, the Son of God.

When Judas, His betrayer, found out that He was condemned to death, he understood all the horror of his act. Perhaps, he did not expect such a sentence or supposed that Christ would not permit it or would deliver Himself from His enemies in some miraculous way. Judas understood to what his love of money had led. Tormenting guilt seized his soul. He went to the chief priests and elders and brought back the thirty pieces of silver saying, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood."

They said to him, "What is that to us? See to it yourself" (that is, you yourself must answer for your deed).

But Judas did not want to humbly repent in prayer and tears before the merciful God. Cold despair and depression overcame his soul. Throwing down the pieces of silver in the Temple before the chief priests, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. The chief priests taking the pieces of silver said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury since they are blood money." So they took counsel and bought with it the potter's field to bury strangers in. Therefore, that field (a cemetery) has been called in Hebrew Akaldema, which means "field of blood."

Then, was fulfilled what had been spoken by the Prophet Jeremiah saying, "And they took thirty pieces of silver, the price of Him on Whom a price had been set by the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field."

Note: See the Gospel of Matthew 27:3-10.

46. The Trial of Jesus Christ before Pilate.

The chief priests and Jewish elders having condemned Jesus Christ to death were not themselves able to carry out their sentence without confirmation from the ruler of the region, the Roman governor in Judea. At this time the Roman governor in Judea was *Pontius Pilate*.

On the occasion of the feast of Passover, Pilate was in Jerusalem and was living not far from the Temple in the *Praetorium*, the house of the main court, the praetor. In front of the praetor was built an open platform, which was called *Lithostrotos*, and in Hebrew and Aramaic, *Gabbatha*.

Early in the morning, on Friday, the chief priests and elders of the Jews led the bound Jesus Christ to trial before Pilate, so that he could confirm the death sentence handed over to Jesus. But they themselves did not enter the Praetorium in order not to defile themselves before Passover by being in the house of a gentile.

Pilate came out to them on the Lithostrotos, "the Pavement," and seeing the members of the Sanhedrin asked, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"

They answered, "If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have handed Him over to you."

Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and judge Him by your own laws."

They said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death;" and they began to accuse the Saviour saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ the King."

Pilate asked Jesus Christ, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus Christ answered, "You have said so" (which means, "Yes, I am King").

When the chief priests and the elders accused the Saviour, He answered nothing. Pilate again asked Him, "Have you no answer to

make? See how many charges they bring against You."

But Jesus made no further answer, so Pilate wondered in amazement. Pilate entered the Praetorium again and called Jesus, asking Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

Jesus Christ answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?"

"Am I a Jew?" answered Pilate. "Your own nation and the chief priests have handed You over to me. What have You done?"

Jesus Christ answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight that I might not be handed over to the Jews, but My kingdom is not from here."

"So You are a king?" asked Pilate.

Jesus Christ answered, "You say that I am a king. For this, I was born; and for this, I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears My voice."

From these words Pilate recognized that before him stood a preacher of the truth, a teacher of the people, and not an agitator against the power of Rome.

Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And not waiting for an answer, he went out again to the Jews on the Lithostrotos and told them, "I find no crime in this man."

The chief priests and elders were agitated saying, "He stirs up the people teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to here."

Pilate having heard mention of Galilee asked, "Is He in fact a Galilean?" When he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to the court of the Galilean King, Herod, who by chance was himself in Jerusalem at that time. Pilate was glad to rid himself out of this unpleasant case.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 27:2,11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-7; John 18:28-38.

Jesus Christ Before King Herod.

The Galilean King, Herod Antipas, who had put John the Baptist to death, had heard a great deal about Jesus Christ and had desired to see Him for a long time. When they brought Jesus Christ to Him, he was very glad, for he was hoping to see some miracle done by Him. Herod questioned Him at some length, but the Lord made no answer.

The chief priests and the sentries stood vehemently accusing Him.

Then, Herod with his soldiers having treated Him with contempt and mocked Him arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe as a sign of His innocence and sent Him back to Pilate.

From that very day Pilate and Herod became friends; for before this, they had been at enmity.

Note: See the Gospel of Luke 23:8-12.

47. Pilate's Last Judgment over Jesus Christ.

When they again brought the Lord Jesus Christ to Pilate, a large crowd of people, chiefs, and elders had already gathered there. Pilate then called together the chief priests, rulers, and the people saying to them, "You brought me this Man as One Who was perverting the people; and after examining Him before you, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against Him. I sent Him to Herod, and Herod also found nothing done by Him to deserve death. I will therefore chastise and release Him."

The Jews had the custom at the feast of Passover of releasing to the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. Pilate using this occasion said to the people, "You have the custom that at Passover I should release to you one prisoner. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" Pilate was sure that the people would ask for Jesus because he perceived that it was out of envy and malice that the chief priests had delivered Him up.

While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man, for I have suffered much over Him today in a dream."

In the meantime, the chief priests and the elders stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release to them Barabbas. Barabbas was a notorious criminal, who had been thrown into prison with his companions for an insurrection started in the city and for murder.

Then, the people, persuaded by the elders, began to shout, "Release to us Barabbas!"

Pilate desiring to release Jesus addressed them once more, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you: Barabbas or Jesus, called Christ?"

They all shouted, "Not Him, but Barabbas!"

Then, Pilate asked them, "Then, what shall I do with Jesus, Who is called Christ?"

They shouted, "Let Him be crucified!"

Pilate again said to them, "Why, what evil has He done? I have found no crime deserving death; I will therefore chastise Him and release Him."

But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him! Let Him be crucified!"

Then, Pilate, thinking he could arouse compassion from the people for Christ, ordered the soldiers to scourge Him. The soldiers led Jesus Christ to the courtyard, stripped Him, and cruelly beat Him. Then, they arrayed Him in a purple robe (a short purple robe without sleeves and fastened on the right shoulder), placed a plaited crown of thorns on His head, and put in His right hand a reed instead of the royal scepter. They began to mock Him. They knelt down in homage before Him and said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on Him and, taking the reed, struck Him on His head and face.

After this Pilate led Him to the Jews and said, "Behold, I bring Him out to you that you may know that I find no crime in Him." So Jesus Christ came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them "Here is the Man!" With these words, Pilate meant to say, "Look at how He is tortured and disgraced," thinking that the Jews would take pity on Him. But not such were the enemies of Christ. When the chief priests and officers saw Jesus Christ, they cried out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no crime in Him."

The Jews answered him, "We have a law; and by that law, He ought to die because He has made Himself the Son of God."

When Pilate heard these words, he was even more frightened. He entered the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?"

But the Saviour gave him no answer.

Pilate therefore said to Him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release You and power to crucify You?"

Then, Jesus Christ answered, "You would have no power over Me

unless it had been given you from above; therefore, he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." After this Pilate more vigorously sought to release Jesus Christ.

But the Jews cried out, "If you release this Man, you are not Caesar's friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar." When Pilate heard these words, he decided it was better to condemn an innocent man to death than to risk the danger of royal disgrace before the Emperor.

Then, Pilate brought Jesus Christ out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called the Pavement and said to the Jews, "Here is your King!"

But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!"

Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." Pilate seeing that he was gaining nothing but rather that a riot was beginning, took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves" (let the blame fall on you).

All the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" Thus the Jews invoked upon themselves and their descendants responsibility for the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, unless they repent. Then, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and delivered Jesus Christ to them to be crucified.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew, 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39-40 and 19:1-16.

The Road to Golgotha.

Since Jesus Christ was condemned to be crucified, He was handed over to the soldiers. Again, they beat, insulted, and mocked Him. After they had made fun of Him, they took off the purple robe and dressed Him in His own clothing. The condemned person had to carry his own cross to the place of crucifixion; thus, the soldiers laid the cross on the shoulders of the Saviour and led Him to the place intended for crucifixion. The place was a hill, which was called Golgotha or the place of the skull. Golgotha was situated west of Jerusalem not far from the city gate called the Judgment Gate.

A great multitude of people followed Him. The road was hilly. Exhausted by beating and lashing, worn out by spiritual suffering, Jesus Christ could hardly walk and several times fell from the weight of the cross. When they went out of the city gate where the road began to go uphill, Jesus Christ was unable to continue carrying the

cross. The soldiers came upon a man who was compassionately watching Christ. It was *Simon, a Cyrenian*, returning from work in the country. The soldiers seized him and compelled him to carry the cross of Christ.

Among the people who followed Christ were many women who wept and lamented for Him. Jesus Christ turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the women who never had children.' Then, they will begin to say to the mountains: fall on us, — and to the hills: cover us."

Thus, the Lord predicted the terrifying misfortune, which would befall Jerusalem and the Jewish people soon after His earthly life.

Note: See the Gospel of Matthew 27:27-32; Mark 15:16-21; Luke 23:26-32; John 19:16-17.

48. The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus Christ.

Hanging on a cross was the most disgraceful, agonizing, and cruel form of death penalty. In those times, such a death penalty was imposed only on the most hardened criminals: thieves, murderers, instigators of rebellion, and felons. The torture of a crucified man is impossible to describe. Besides unbearable pain in every part of the body, the crucified underwent the ordeal of terrible thirst and spiritual suffering until dead. Death was so slow that many suffered on the cross for several days. Even the executioners, habitually brutal people, could not keep their composure while looking at the suffering of a crucified man. They prepared a beverage by which they tried to quench his unbearable thirst; or by adding various substances, they tried to temporarily dull consciousness and alleviate the suffering. By Jewish law, a crucified man was considered cursed. The chiefs of the Jews wanted to disgrace Jesus Christ forever by condemning Him to such a death.

When they brought Jesus Christ to Golgotha, the soldiers offered Him sour wine to drink, mingled with bitter substances to lessen the suffering. The Lord, when He tasted it, did not wish to drink it. He did not want to lessen the suffering. This suffering, He took upon Himself voluntarily for the sins of all people; thus, he wanted to bear it consciously to the end.

When all was ready, the soldiers crucified Jesus Christ. It was about midday, by Jewish reckoning — the sixth hour of the day. When they crucified Him, He prayed for His tormentors, saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

They crucified two robbers with Jesus Christ: one on His right and one on His left. Thus, the scripture of the Prophet Isaiah was fulfilled: "*He bared the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors*" (Is. 53:12).

According to the order of Pilate, a title plate was attached to the cross over the head of Jesus Christ indicating His guilt. On it, there was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, "*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*;" and many read it. Therefore, the sign did not please the enemies of Christ. Thus, the chief priest went to Pilate and said, "Do not write 'King of the Jews' but write that He says 'I am King of the Jews'."

Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

In the meantime, the soldiers who had crucified Jesus Christ took His garments and began to divide them among themselves. The outer garment they divided in four parts, one for each soldier. The tunic (the inside garment) was seamless, woven from top to bottom. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." And having cast lots and sitting, the soldiers guarded the place of execution. This fulfilled the ancient prophecy of King David, "*They parted my garments among them; and for my clothing, they cast lots upon my vesture*" (Ps. 21:19).

His enemies did not cease to insult Jesus Christ even on the cross. Those who were bypassing derided Him wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You, Who would destroy the Temple and build it in three days, save Yourself and come down from the cross."

So, also, the chief priests with the scribes and the elders mocked Him saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. If He is the King of Israel, let Him come down now from the cross, so we can see; and then we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now if He desires Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God'."

Following their example the pagan soldiers, who sat near the crosses and kept watch over the crucified, taunted Him saying, "If you are King of the Jews, save Yourself!"

Even one of the crucified thieves, who was to the left of the Saviour,

railed at Him saying, "If you are the Christ, save Yourself and us!"

But the other thief, on the right, rebuked Him saying, "Do you not fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation (the same torture and death)? We are indeed justly condemned; so we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Having said this, he turned to Jesus Christ with the prayer, "*Remember me, Lord, when You come into Your kingdom.*"

The merciful Saviour accepted the sincere repentance of this sinner indicating such wonderful faith in Him and answered the wise thief, "*Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.*"

Standing by the cross of Jesus, there were His mother, the Apostle John, Mary Magdalene, and several other women who revered Him. It is impossible to describe the grief of His mother seeing the unbearable suffering of Her Son. When Jesus Christ saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His mother, "*Woman, behold Your Son!*" Then, He said to John, "*Behold your Mother!*" And from that hour the disciple took Her to his own home and cared for Her until the end of Her life.

Meanwhile, during the suffering of the Saviour on Golgotha, there occurred a great sign. From the hour that the Saviour was crucified, from the sixth hour (about 12 o'clock noon by our calculation), the sun darkened, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour (three o'clock in the afternoon by our calculation), until the Saviour died.

This remarkable, worldwide darkness was noticed by pagan historians, the Roman astronomer Flegontus and Junius Africanus. A noted philosopher from Asia, Dionysius the Areopagite, in Egypt in the city of Heliopolis at the time, observed the sudden darkness and said, "Either the Creator is suffering or the world is coming to an end." Later Dionysius the Areopagite converted to Christianity and became the first bishop of Athens.

About the ninth hour Jesus Christ cried out with a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" which means, "*My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*" These were the beginning words from the 21st psalm of King David in which David clearly foretold the suffering on the cross of the Saviour. By these words the Lord for the last time reminded people that He is the true Christ, Saviour of the world.

Some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, He is calling Elijah." Others said, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him."

The Lord Jesus Christ knowing that all was now finished

pronounced, "*I thirst.*" Then, one of the soldiers at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with vinegar, put it on a stick, and raised it to the parched lips of the Saviour. When He had received the vinegar, the Saviour said, "It is finished;" — that is, the promise of God was fulfilled, the salvation of the human race was accomplished.

Then, He crying with a loud voice said, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit." And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

In the same hour, the veil of the Temple covering the Holy of Holies was torn in two from the top edge to the bottom, and the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had reposed were raised. Coming out of the tombs after His resurrection, they went to Jerusalem and appeared to many people.

When the centurion (chief of the soldiers) and the soldiers who were with him keeping watch over the Saviour saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "*Truly this was the Son of God.*" All the multitudes that had assembled to see the sight in fear began returning home beating their breasts.

Friday evening came. At that hour, it was necessary to partake of the Passover meal. The Jews did not want to leave the bodies on the cross on the Sabbath because it was the Passover Sabbath considered a feast day. Therefore, they asked Pilate permission to break the legs of the crucified so that they would die more quickly and might be removed from the crosses and taken away. Pilate gave permission. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. When they came to Jesus Christ they saw that He was already dead, and thus they did not break His legs. One of the soldiers, in order to leave no doubt that He was dead, pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 27:33-56; Mark 15:22-41; Luke 23:33-49; John 19:18-37.

49. The Taking Down from the Cross and Burial of the Saviour.

When evening had come, soon after everything had been done, a respected member of the council, a rich man named *Joseph of Arimathaea*, went to Pilate. Joseph was a disciple of Jesus Christ but

secretly from fear of the Jews. He was a good, righteous man, not participating in the council's condemnation. He asked Pilate for permission to take down the body of Christ from the cross and bury it.

Pilate wondered if He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether He was already dead. When he learned from centurion that it was so, he granted Joseph the body for burial.

Joseph having bought a shroud (a linen cloth for burial) went to Golgotha. Another secret disciple of Jesus Christ and a member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus, went also. He brought with him expensive fragrant oil for burial, which was composed of myrrh and aloes.

They took down the body of the Saviour from the cross, anointed Him with the spices, wrapped Him in the funeral shroud, and laid Him in the new tomb, in the garden next to Golgotha. This tomb was a cave which Joseph of Arimathaea had hewn in the rock for his own burial, and in which no one had ever yet been laid. There, they laid the body of Christ since this tomb was close to Golgotha, and they had little time because of the Jewish day of preparation for Passover. They rolled a large stone before the door of the tomb and departed.

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Younger and of Joses, and other women were there and saw where the body of Christ was laid. Returning home, they bought expensive myrrh to anoint the body of Christ as soon as the first day of the great feast was over. On the first day they rested according to the commandment.

The enemies of Christ did not rest, in spite of their great feast. On the next day, on Saturday, the chief priest and the Pharisees, breaking the peace of the Sabbath, gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor (as they dared to call Jesus Christ), while He was still alive, said, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore, order the sepulchre to be made secure until the third day lest His disciples go and steal Him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead' making the last fraud worse than the first."

Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go make the tomb as secure as you can." So the chief priests and Pharisees went to the tomb of Jesus Christ and carefully inspected the cave, made it secure by sealing the stone, and set a guard at the tomb.

While the body of the Saviour lay in the tomb, He descended

spiritually into Hades, the temporary dwelling place of souls before the Resurrection of Christ, to the souls of people who had died before His suffering and death. All the souls of righteous people, who awaited the coming of the Saviour, He liberated from Hades.

Notes: See the Gospels of Mathew 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42.

The Passion of Christ is commemorated by the Holy Orthodox Church the week preceding *Pascha*. This week is called *Passion Week*. This entire week, Christians should spend in fasting and prayer.

On *Great Wednesday* of Passion Week, the betrayal of Jesus Christ by Judas Iscariot is commemorated.

On *Great Thursday* evening during the evening service, which is Matins for Great Friday, the twelve passages of the Gospel relating to the suffering of Jesus Christ are read.

On *Great Friday during Vespers*, which is served at two or three o'clock in the afternoon, the burial *shroud*, the holy image of the Saviour lying in the tomb, is carried from the altar and placed in the middle of the church. This is done in memory of the removal of the body of Christ from the cross and His burial.

On *Great Saturday during Matins*, while all the bells are rung and while the hymn "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us" is sung, the shroud is taken in procession in memory of the descent of Jesus Christ into Hades, when His body remained in the tomb, and his victory over hell and death.

We prepare ourselves for Passion Week and the holiday of Pascha by fasting. This fast continues for forty days and is called the *Great Fast*.

In addition to these weeks, the Holy Orthodox Church fasts every *Wednesday* and *Friday*, except during certain weeks in the year; on Wednesday in memory of the betrayal of Jesus Christ by Judas, and on Friday in memory of the suffering of Jesus Christ. We express faith in the power of the suffering on the Cross for us by Jesus Christ, by making the sign of the Cross when we pray.

50. The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

After the Sabbath, during the night on the third day after His suffering and death, the *Lord Jesus Christ resurrected by the power of His divinity*. His body was transformed. He left the tomb unseen by the guards, *without* rolling away the stone or breaking the seal placed by the Sanhedrin. From that moment on the guards unknowingly guarded an empty sepulchre. Suddenly there occurred a great earthquake. An angel of the Lord descended from Heaven. He rolled back the stone from the entrance to the tomb of the Lord and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning and his raiment white as snow. The soldiers standing guard at the tomb were terrified and became like dead men. Regaining consciousness after the fright, they dispersed.

On this day, the first day of the week, at dawn when the Sabbath rest had just ended, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna, Salome, and other women took the fragrant myrrh which they had prepared and went to the tomb of Jesus Christ to anoint His body. They had not had time to do this during the burial. The Church calls these women the holy Myrrh-bearers. They still did not know that a guard had been placed at the tomb of the Lord and that the entrance to the cave had been sealed. Therefore, they did not expect to meet anyone there and said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb?" The stone was very large, and Mary Magdalene walking ahead of the other Myrrh-bearing women arrived at the tomb first. The sun had not yet risen, and it was dark. Seeing that the stone was rolled away from the tomb, Mary hastened to Peter and John and said, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we know not where they have laid Him." Hearing these words, Peter and John immediately ran to the tomb with Mary Magdalene following after them.

At this time, the other women, who had been walking with Mary Magdalene, arrived at the tomb and also saw that the stone was rolled away. They suddenly saw a shining angel sitting on the stone. Turning to them, the angel said. "Fear not, for I know that you seek Jesus, Who was crucified. He is not here, for He is risen as He said when He was with you. Come; see the place where the Lord lay. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead."

They entered into the tomb and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. They saw, however, an angel in white garments seated on the right side of the place where the Lord had lain, and they were struck with fear.

The angel said to them, "Be not afraid. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, Who was crucified. *He is risen*; He is not here. Behold the place

where they laid Him. Go your way, tell His disciples and Peter (who by his denial fell from the number of the disciples) that He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see Him, as He told you."

While the women stood in perplexity, behold, two angels stood by them in dazzling apparel. Since they were frightened, the women bowed their faces to the ground in fear.

The angels said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen. Remember how He told you while He was still in Galilee that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise?"

Then, the women remembered the words of the Lord. They went out and fled from the tomb, for they were overcome by fear and trembling. Then, in awe and with great joy, they ran to tell His disciples. On the road, they said nothing to anyone since they were afraid. When they reached the disciples, the women told them everything that they had seen and heard. However, these words seemed to the disciples like an idle story, and they did not believe them.

In the meantime, Peter and John ran to the tomb. John outran Peter and reached the tomb first but did not enter the tomb. Stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there. Then, Simon Peter came and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying and the covering, which had been on Christ's head; it was not lying with the linen clothes but rolled up in a place by itself. Then, John, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw all of these and believed in the resurrection of Christ. Peter marvelled over the incident. Then, the disciples went back to their homes.

When Peter and John left, Mary Magdalene, who had followed after them, stayed at the tomb. She stood weeping outside the tomb; and as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting one at the head and one at the feet of where the body of the Saviour had lain. The angels said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

Mary Magdalene answered to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." Saying this, she turned around and saw Jesus Christ standing, but because of her extreme grief and tears and of her conviction that the dead do not rise, she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus Christ said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?"

Supposing Him to be the gardener, Mary Magdalene said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

Then, Jesus Christ said to her, "*Mary!*"

The familiar voice brought her out of her grief to her senses, and she realized that before her stood the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. She exclaimed, "*Teacher!*" and with indescribable joy cast herself at the feet of the Saviour. In her joy, she did not fully grasp the majesty of this moment.

Jesus Christ showing her the holy and great mystery of His resurrection said, "Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren (the disciples) and say to them: I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God."

Then, Mary Magdalene hurried to His disciples and related the news that she had seen the risen Lord and what things He had said to her. *This was the first appearance of Christ after His resurrection.*

On the way, Mary Magdalene met Mary, mother of James, also returning from the tomb of the Lord. When they went to tell the disciples, suddenly Jesus Christ Himself met them and said, "Rejoice!"

They ran, took hold of His feet and worshipped Him. Then, Jesus Christ said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me." *Thus, the risen Christ appeared a second time.*

Mary Magdalene with Mary, the mother of James, went to the eleven disciples and all the others, who were grieving and weeping, and announced their great joy. However, hearing from them that Jesus Christ was alive and that they had seen Him, they still did not believe.

After this, Jesus Christ appeared separately to Peter and convinced him of His resurrection. *This was His third appearance.* Only then, many people did cease to doubt the reality of the resurrection of Christ although there remained unbelievers among them.

The Holy Church confesses from ancient times that before the other appearances, *Jesus Christ gladdened His Most-holy Mother* by announcing His resurrection to Her through an angel. Concerning this, the Holy Church sings

The Angel cried unto Her Who is full of grace: O pure Virgin, rejoice!, and again I say, rejoice!, for Thy Son is risen from the grave on the third day, and hath raised the dead, O ye people, be joyful!

Shine, shine, O New Jerusalem, for the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee; dance now and be glad, O Sion, and do Thou exalt, O pure Theotokos, in the arising of Him Whom Thou didst bear.

Meanwhile, the soldiers, who were guarding the tomb of the Lord and dispersed in fear, went to Jerusalem. Several of them went to the chief priests and told them all that had taken place at the tomb of Jesus Christ. When they had assembled with the elders, they took a counsel. Due to their stubbornness, the enemies of Jesus Christ did not want to confirm His resurrection and made up their minds to conceal this event from the people. They bribed the soldiers with money and said, "Tell the people, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' If Pilate will hear about it, we will quiet him and keep you out of trouble." So the soldiers took the money and did as they were directed; and this story has been spread among the Jews, so that many of them have believed in that to this present day.

The deception and falsehood of this story is evident to everyone. If the soldiers had been asleep, then they would not have seen what had happened; and if they had seen what had happened, it means they were not asleep and could have detained the thief. The guard is meant to keep its duty. No one could really believe that all the guard, which was composed of several people, could fall asleep. If all the soldiers had fallen asleep, they would have been subjected to strict punishment. Then, why were none of them punished but left alone and even rewarded? How were the terrified disciples, who were locked in their houses out of fear and did not have weapons, able to decide to undertake such a daring venture against armed troops? Furthermore, why would they have done it since they themselves had lost faith in the Saviour? Besides, how could they roll away the large stone without waking everyone? All this is quite impossible. On the contrary, the disciples themselves thought that someone had stolen the body of the Saviour; and only after seeing the empty tomb, they understood that after a theft, it would not have been left so. Finally, why did the leaders of the Jews not search for the body of Christ and not punish the disciples? Thus the enemies of Christ tried to cover an act of God with a coarse fabrication of lies and deceit, but they turned out to be powerless against the truth.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 28:1-15; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12, John 20:1-18. See also I Corinthians, 15:3-5.

51. The Appearance of the Risen Jesus Christ to Two Disciples on the Road to Emmaus.

Toward evening of that very day in which Jesus Christ resurrected and appeared to Mary Magdalene, Mary, mother of James, Peter, and two disciples of Christ from the Seventy, Cleophas and Luke, were going from Jerusalem to a village named *Emmaus*. Emmaus was situated about seven miles from Jerusalem.

On the road, they were talking to each other about all the things that had recently happened in Jerusalem, about the suffering and death of the Saviour. While they were talking about all that had happened, Jesus Christ Himself drew near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. Jesus Christ said to them, "What is this conversation you are holding with each other as you walk, and why are you so sad?"

Cleophas answered Him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem, who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

Jesus Christ said to him, "What things?"

They said to Him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, Who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death and crucified Him. We had hoped that He was the One to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find His body, and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see."

Then, Jesus Christ said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?"

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. The disciples were amazed as everything became clear to them. As they drew near to Emmaus, Jesus Christ appeared to be going further. But they constrained Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward

evening, and the day is now far spent." So Jesus Christ went in to stay with them. When He was at table with them, He took the bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to them. Then, their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him, but He vanished out of their sight. This *was the fourth appearance of the resurrected Christ*. Cleophas and Luke in great joy said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn with joy within us while He talked to us on the road, while He explained to us the Scriptures?" They rose that same hour and despite the late time of day, returned to Jerusalem where they found ten disciples gathered together, all except the Apostle Thomas, and those who were with them. All of them joyfully met Cleophas and Luke and said, "The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon!" Then, Cleophas and Luke told what had happened on the road to Emmaus, how the Lord Himself had walked with them and talked, and how they recognized Him in the breaking of bread.

Note: See the Gospels of Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-35.

52. The Appearance of the Lord to the Apostles.

As the apostles were talking with the disciples of Christ, Cleophas and Luke, just returned from Emmaus, the door of the house where they were gathered was locked from fear of the Jews; suddenly Jesus Christ Himself stood among them and said to them, "*Peace be unto you.*"

They were startled, and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit. Jesus Christ said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me and see; for a spirit has no flesh and bones as you see that I have."

Saying this, He showed them His hands, and feet, and rib. The disciples were overjoyed seeing the Lord. Due to their great joy, they marvelled only but still did not believe. To strengthen their faith, Jesus Christ said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

The disciples gave Him a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb. Jesus Christ took it and ate before them. Then, He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."

Then, He opened their minds to comprehend the Scriptures. Finishing His conversation with His disciples, Jesus Christ for the second time said, "*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you.*" And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive sins, they are forgiven by God. If you retain sins, they are retained.*"

This was the fifth appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ on the first day of His glorious resurrection giving all His disciples great, inexpressible joy. Only Thomas, one of the twelve disciples, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. When the other disciples told him that they had seen the risen Lord, Thomas said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in His side, I will not believe."

Note: See the Gospels of Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-45; John 20:19-25.

53. The Appearance of the Lord to the Apostle Thomas and the Other Apostles.

Eight days later, His disciples were again in the house and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut as at the first time. Jesus Christ came and stood among them and said, "*Peace be unto you!*"

Then, turning to Thomas, He said to him, "Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side. Do not be faithless but believing."

Then, Thomas exclaimed, "*My Lord and My God!*"

Jesus Christ said to him, "*Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.*"

Note: See the Gospel of John 20:26-29.

The Appearance of Jesus Christ to the Apostles beside the Sea of Tiberias.

According to the instruction of Jesus Christ, His disciples went to Galilee. There they took up their usual business. One day Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel (Bartholomew), the sons of Zebedee, James, and John, and two other of His disciples fished all night in the Sea of Tiberias (Sea of Galilee) and caught nothing. Just as day was

breaking, Jesus Christ stood on the beach, yet the disciples did not know it was He.

Jesus Christ said to them, "Children, have you any fish?"

They answered, "No."

Jesus Christ said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." The disciples cast the net on the right side of the boat and now they were not able to haul it in due to the quantity of fish.

Then, John said to Peter, "*It is the Lord!*"

When Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, sprang into the sea, and swam to shore, to Jesus Christ. But the other disciples came in the boat dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land. When they reached land, they saw a charcoal fire there with fish lying on it and bread.

Jesus Christ said to the disciples, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." Peter went and hauled the net full of large fish (a hundred and fifty three of them) ashore; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus Christ said to them, "Come and eat." Now, none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus Christ took the bread and gave it to them, and also the fish.

When they had finished eating, Jesus Christ showed Peter that He would forgive him his denial and elevate him again into the company of His chosen Apostles. Peter by his denial had sinned more than the other disciples. Therefore, the Lord asked him, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than the other disciples do?"

Peter said to Him, "Yes, Lord. You know that I love You."

Jesus Christ said to him, "Feed My lambs."

A second time Jesus Christ said to Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?"

Peter again answered, "Yes, Lord. You know that I love You."

Jesus Christ said to him, "Feed My sheep."

Finally, Jesus Christ said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?"

Peter was grieved because the Lord asked him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know everything; You know that I love You."

Jesus Christ said to him, "Feed My sheep."

Thus, the Lord helped Peter to make amends for three times for denying Him three times and to witness his love for Him. After each of his answers, Jesus Christ returned him in the presence of the other apostles to the apostolic calling and made him a pastor of His sheep.

After this, Jesus Christ said to Peter, "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you will be old, *you will stretch out your hands* and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go." The Saviour said this to show Peter by his death he would glorify God. He would accept a martyr's end through crucifixion. After this Jesus Christ said to Peter, "Follow me."

Peter turned and saw John following them. When Peter saw him, he asked "Lord! What about this man?"

Jesus Christ said to him, "If it is my will that he remains until I come, what is that to you? Follow Me." The saying spread abroad among the brethren that this disciple was not to die although Jesus Christ did not say that.

Note: See the Gospel of John, chap. 21.

The Appearance of Jesus Christ to More than Five Hundred Disciples.

Now, as Jesus Christ had directed them, the eleven apostles went to the mountain in Galilee. There more than five hundred disciples came to them. Then, Jesus Christ appeared before them all. Seeing Him they worshipped Him, but some of them doubted.

Jesus Christ came and said to them, "All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; lo and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Amen."

Then, Jesus Christ appeared separately to James.

Thus, in the course of forty days after His resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to His disciples, giving much conclusive evidence of His

resurrection, and He talked with them about the Kingdom of God.

Notes: See the Gospels of Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-16 (not in English versions); I Corinthians 15:6-8; and the Acts of the Apostles 1:3.

Christ is Risen!

The great event, *the Glorious Resurrection of Christ*, is celebrated by the Holy Orthodox Church as the greatest of all feast-days. It is the Feast of Feasts and celebration of celebrations. This Feast is called *Pascha* (Greek for "Passover"), that is, the day on which is *accomplished our passage (Passover) from death to life and from earth to Heaven*. The celebration of the Resurrection of Christ continues for a whole week, and services held in the church are celebrated more festively than on all other days. On the first day of the Feast, Matins begins at midnight. Before the beginning of Matins, the celebrants, vested in brilliant robes, together with the faithful, accompanied by the ringing of bells, carrying burning candles, the cross and icons, proceed around the church emulating the Myrrh-bearing women who proceeded to the tomb of the Saviour in the early morning. During the procession, everyone sings, "*Thy Resurrection, O Christ Saviour, the angels hymn in the heavens; vouchsafe also us on earth with pure hearts to glorify Thee.*" The first exclamation of Matins is made before the closed doors of the church while the festal hymn "*Christ is Risen...*" is repeated many times; and then while singing the hymn they enter the church. The services continue all night with open Royal Doors signifying that now, by the Resurrection of Christ, the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven are opened for all. On every day of this great feast we greet one another with the brotherly kiss and the words, "*Christ is Risen!*" and answer with the words, "*Truly He is Risen!*" We greet each other in this way and exchange coloured eggs, which symbolize the new, blessed life revealed from the tomb of the Saviour. Bells ring all week. From the first day of Holy Pascha until vespers of the Feast of the Holy Trinity, no one is permitted to kneel in church or to make prostrations.

On the first Tuesday after Bright Week, the Holy Church extending the gladness of the Resurrection of Christ to those who died in the hope of the general resurrection especially commemorates the dead; and therefore, this day is called "*Paschal Soul Day.*" On this day, the Liturgy is celebrated with commemoration of the dead. On this day, it is customary to visit the graves of one's close relatives. This custom differs in some aspects among local churches.

Besides this, the day of the Resurrection of Christ is celebrated by us on every *Sunday* of the year.

Troparion for the Feast of Pascha.

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and on those in the tombs bestowing life.

Kontakion for the Feast of Pascha.

Though Thou didst descend into the grave, O Immortal One, yet didst Thou destroy the power of Hades. And didst rise as victor, O Christ our God, calling to the myrrh-bearing women: Rejoice! And giving peace unto Thine Apostles, Thou Who dost grant resurrection to the fallen.

54. The Ascension of the Lord.

When the day of the Jewish Pentecost drew near, the disciples of Christ returned from Galilee to Jerusalem.

On the fortieth day after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they were all together in one house. Jesus Christ appeared to them and spoke with them saying, "Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation. He, who believes and is baptized, will be saved, but he, who does not believe, will be condemned. And these signs accompanies those who believe: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Then, the Saviour said to the disciples that soon the Holy Spirit would come upon them, and until that time He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem. He said, "I send the promise of My Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high; for John baptized with water; but before many days, you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Conversing with the disciples, the Saviour led them out of the city as far as Bethany to the Mount of Olives. The disciples, overjoyed with the words of the Saviour, surrounded Him and started to ask, "Lord,

will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

The Saviour said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

When He had said this, Jesus Christ lifted up His hands and blessed His disciples. While He blessed them, He parted from them, and He was lifted up to Heaven; and soon, a cloud took Him out of their sight.

Thus our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ascended in His physical body to Heaven and sat down at the right Hand of God the Father. His human soul and body took on the indivisible glory with His divinity. In His divinity, He always is and will be in Heaven and everywhere.

The disciples worshipped the ascended Lord and for a long time continued to stand and gaze into Heaven after Him. Then, two angels in white robes appeared before them and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into Heaven? This Jesus, Who was taken up from you into Heaven, will come to earth in the same way (that is, in the flesh) as you saw Him go into heaven."

After this the disciples of Jesus Christ returned to Jerusalem with great joy and stayed there together awaiting the descent of the Holy Spirit. All of them, together in soul, spent the time in prayer and were continually in the Temple of God praising and thanking God. With them, there were several women and Mary, the Most-holy Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, with their relatives.

In those days, the apostles prayerfully, by casting lots, chose from among the other disciples of Christ the twelfth apostle, *Matthias*, to take the place of Judas the betrayer, who perished.

Ascended to Heaven, Jesus Christ according to His own promise invisibly always comes to earth among those who believe in Him, and He will come again to earth in a visible form to judge the living and the dead who will then rise from the dead. After this, the new life will begin, the life of the next age, another, eternal life, which for true believers and pious people will be completely blessed but for disbelievers and sinners will be a time of great torment.

Notes: See the Gospels of Mark 16:15-19 and Luke 24:46-53; Acts of the Apostles 1, 2:4-26.

The Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ is celebrated by the Holy Orthodox Church as one of the Great Feasts on the fortieth day after Pascha.

Troparion of the Feast.

Thou didst ascend into glory, O Christ our God, having gladdened Thy disciples with the promise of the Holy Spirit; and they were assured by the blessing that Thou art the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world.

55. The Descent of the Holy Spirit.

The tenth day after the Ascension of Jesus Christ was the fiftieth day after the Resurrection of Christ. It was the Jews' great feast of Pentecost, which commemorated the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai.

All the apostles, the Mother of God, the other disciples of Christ, and other of the faithful were all together in one room in Jerusalem. It was the third hour of the day by the Hebrew reckoning of hours, according to our system — nine o'clock in the morning. Suddenly a sound came from Heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. There descended on them tongues that looked like fire, which rested on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak languages previously unknown to them. Thus the Holy Spirit, according to the promise of the Saviour, descended on the apostles in the form of *tongues of fire* as a sign that He gave the apostles the ability and zeal to preach the teachings of Christ to all peoples. He descended in the form of fire as a sign of the power to cleanse sins and to sanctify and warm souls.

On the occasion of the feast of Pentecost, there were in Jerusalem many Jews who had come from various nations. Hearing the noise, a great multitude of people came together around the house where the disciples of Christ were. They were all bewildered and asked each other, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? How is that each of us hears his own native language? How are they able to tell in our languages the mighty works of God?" In disbelief they said, "They are filled with new wine."

Then, the Apostle Peter standing with the eleven said that they were

not drunk, but the Holy Spirit had descended upon them, and that had been prophesied by the Prophet Joel, and that Jesus Christ, Whom the Jews had crucified, had risen from the dead, ascended into Heaven, and poured out on them the Holy Spirit. Finishing this sermon about Jesus Christ, the Apostle Peter said, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus, Whom you crucified."

The sermon of Peter moved those who heard it so much that many more started to believe in Jesus Christ. They asked Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; then, you shall also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

So those who believed in Christ readily accepted baptism, and there were added by that day about three thousand souls. Thus, the building of the Kingdom of God on earth, the holy Church of Christ, began.

From the day of the descent of the Holy Spirit the Christian faith quickly began to spread with the help of God, and the number of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ multiplied. Instructed by the Holy Spirit, the apostles preached boldly to all about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, about His suffering for us and resurrection from the dead. The Lord helped them with many great miracles which were performed by the apostles in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. At first, the apostles preached to the Jews and then dispersed to various countries to preach to all people. To perform the sacraments and to preach Christianity, the apostles established *bishops*, *presbyters*, and *deacons* by the laying of hands on them.

This grace of the Holy Spirit, which was clearly conferred on the apostles in the form of tongues of fire, is now conferred in our Holy Orthodox Church invisibly in its sacraments, through the successors to the apostles, the pastors of the Church, its *bishops* and *priests*.

Note: See the Acts of the Apostles 2:14-23.

The Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles is celebrated by the Holy Orthodox Church as one of the greatest feast-days on the fiftieth day after Pascha because the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles on the fiftieth day after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is therefore called *Pentecost* or *Holy Trinity Day*; for from this day, the action of the Holy Trinity was revealed to the world, and people learned to venerate and glorify the three Persons of the one God: *the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit*.

On this feast-day it is customary to decorate the church and its hall with greenery and to hold flowers during the Liturgy expressing thus our joy and thanksgiving to God for His Holy and Life-giving Spirit, which renews people and gives them birth through baptism into a new life. The flowers and greenery signify life.

The day following Holy Trinity Day is called Spirit Day and is devoted to glorification of the Holy Spirit.

Troparion of Pentecost.

Blessed art Thou, Christ our God, Who hast shown forth the fishermen as supremely wise, by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit, and through them, didst draw the world into Thy net. O Lover of mankind, glory be to Thee.

56. The Life of the First Christians.

Soon after the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles Peter and John went into the Temple for prayer at the ninth hour or, in our terms, three o'clock in the afternoon, the hour of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. At the gate of the Temple, which was called Beautiful, there sat a beggar, lame from birth. He stretched out his hand to the apostles and asked for alms.

The Apostle Peter said to him, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." He took him by the right hand and pull him up.

Immediately, the feet and ankles of the lame man became strong. He started to walk and entered the Temple with the apostles. All the people were filled with wonder at this great miracle, and ran to the portico, called Solomon's, where the apostles were. Here the Apostle Peter delivered a second sermon about the risen Lord. Many of those who heard his word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

The many great miracles performed by the Lord through the apostles and the abundant gifts of the Holy Spirit, which moved through them, excited in the believers reverential fear and, at the same time, joy and happiness. They tried in everything to fulfil the commandments of Christ and to live holy and pure lives. The believers gathered in the Temple every day and listened to

preaching of the apostles; and on *the day of the Resurrection*, the first day of the week, Sunday, they gathered in homes for the breaking of bread — the sacrament of Holy Communion. All of them were united in great love, so it was as if they had one heart and one soul. Many sold their possessions and asked the apostles to distribute the money received to the poor. All of the believers gave thanks to God. For their love and good deeds they gained the respect and love of the surrounding people, and the number of believers was increasing daily.

With time, all the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ began to be called *Christians*, and the teaching and life by faith in Christ — *Christianity*.

Note: See Acts of the Apostles 2:42-47; 3; 4; 11:26.

57. Persecution of the Christians by the Jews. The First Martyr St. Stephen.

The glory and victory of Christianity and its rapid spread gave a rise to fear and envy among the Jewish leaders. They began to pursue the Christians, to arouse the simple Jewish people against them and to accuse them to the Roman authorities. The Jews seized Christians, threw them into prisons, and killed them.

The first one to suffer at the hands of the Jews in Jerusalem was St. Stephen, one of the first deacons. He is called the first martyr since he was the first among all tortured for Christ.

For preaching about the Saviour, the Jews cast him outside the city and began to stone him to death. He prayed saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," and then with the words, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them," he died.

By killing St. Stephen and many others of the faithful, the Jews were still not able to weaken faith in Christ. On the contrary, by doing this, they greatly kindled its spread among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Because of the persecution, Christians dispersed into Judea, Samaria, and other countries; and everywhere they went, they preached about the Lord Saviour and His teaching. No power in the world could stop the victorious spread of Christianity, for faith in Christ is the true faith. The teaching of Christ is divine teaching, and life according to the faith and teaching of Christ is a true holy life, the Kingdom of God. The Heavenly Father strengthened the faithful,

the Saviour was with them, and they were comforted by the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

Note: See Acts of the Apostles 6; 7; 8:1-2,4.

The Conversion of Saul.

When they stoned St. Stephen, the first martyr, one Jewish youth by the name of Saul, who guarded the clothing of the people stoning St. Stephen, approved of this murder. Saul was against Christians and took part in persecuting them. He entered Christians' homes, seized them and delivered them to prison thus tormenting the Church of Christ. Not satisfied with persecuting Christians in the land of the Jews, he asked the high priest for a permission to go to the Syrian city of Damascus to search for Christians there and to take them bound to Jerusalem to be judged and martyred.

While Saul was going to Damascus and drew near the city, he was suddenly overcome by a light from Heaven. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?"

Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?"

The Lord said, "I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting. It is difficult for you to kick against the spur."

Saul in fear and trepidation said, "Lord! What are You ordering me to do?"

The Lord said to him, "Rise and enter the city to which you are going; there you will be told what you are to do."

The men who were travelling with him stood speechless hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul arose from the ground. When his eyes were opened, he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. He spent three days in prayer and neither ate nor drank.

Now, there was at that time a disciple at Damascus, one of the seventy apostles of the Lord, named Ananias. The voice of the Lord ordered him to go to the house where Saul was and to lay his hands on him to restore his sight. The Apostle Ananias went to Saul, and when he laid his hands on him something like scales fell from the eyes of Saul; and immediately, he regained his sight. Then, he arose and was baptized by Ananias. The baptism of Saul took place in the year 37 A.D.

Saul took the name *Paul* and became an outcast by preaching faith in Christ. Then, the Lord Jesus Christ again appeared to Paul and

ordered him to go to the pagans and to preach the Christian faith.

The Apostle Paul ended his life as a martyr. For his great apostolic labours like the Apostle Peter, he is called by the Church *foremost among the apostles*.

Note: See Acts of the Apostles 8:1-3; 9:1-30; and 22:17-21.

58. The Dormition of the Mother of God.

The Most-holy Mother of God after the Ascension of Jesus Christ continued to live on earth several years. One Christian historian says — ten years, and another — twenty-two years. Apostle John the Theologian, according to the instructions of Jesus Christ, took Her into his home and cared for Her with great love as Her own son until the end of Her life. The Most-holy Mother of God became a mother to all twelve of the apostles in general. They prayed with Her with great joy and were comforted to listen to Her instructive conversations about the Saviour. When the Christian faith had spread to other lands, many Christians came from distant countries to see and listen to Her voice.

Living in Jerusalem, the Mother of God loved to visit those places where the Saviour had frequented and where he had suffered, died, rose from the dead, and ascended to Heaven. She prayed at these places weeping, remembering the suffering of the Saviour, and rejoicing at the places of His Resurrection and Ascension. She often prayed that Christ would soon take Her to Himself in Heaven.

One day, when the Most-holy Mary was praying thus on the Mount of Olives, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Her with a branch from a date palm in Paradise and told Her the joyful news that in three days She would finish Her earthly life, and the Lord would take Her to Himself. The Most-holy Mother of God silently rejoiced over this news. She told Her adopted son, John, and began to prepare for Her end. At that time, the other apostles were not in Jerusalem, as they had dispersed to other countries to preach about the Saviour. The Mother of God wanted to bid farewell to them, and so the Lord in a miraculous manner gathered all the apostles to Her, except Thomas, transporting them by His omnipotent power.

Grief befell them over losing the Mother of the Lord and their own spiritual Mother when they learned why God had gathered them. But the Mother of God comforted them promising not to leave them and

all Christians after Her death and promising also to pray for them. Then, She blessed them all.

At the hour of Her death, an extraordinary light shone in the room where the Mother of God lay. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, surrounded by angels, appeared and received Her pure soul.

The apostles buried the pure body of the Mother of God according to Her wishes in the Garden of Gethsemane where the body of Her parents and the righteous Joseph were buried. At the funeral, many miracles were performed. By touching the deathbed of the Mother of God, the blind regained their sight, demons were driven away, and all sorts of illnesses were cured. Crowds of people followed Her most pure body. Jewish priests and leaders tried to break up this holy procession, but the Lord invisibly protected it. One of the Jewish priests, by the name of Athonius, ran up, seized and tried to overturn the bier on which the body of the Mother of God was laid. But an invisible angel chopped off both his hands. Athonius, struck by such a wondrous miracle, repented and the Apostle Peter healed him.

Three days after the burial of the Mother of God, the absent Apostle Thomas arrived in Jerusalem. He was greatly saddened that he had not been able to say farewell to the Mother of God; and with all his heart, he desired to venerate Her most pure remains. The apostles felt so sorry for him that they decided to go and roll away the stone from the tomb to give him the possibility to venerate for the last time the body of the Mother of God. But when they opened the tomb, Her most holy body was not found, but only one piece of burial shroud was there. The amazed apostles returned to the house together and prayed to God to reveal to them what had become of the body of the Mother of God. In the evening, at the end of dinner during prayer, they heard angelic singing. Looking up, the apostles saw in the air the Mother of God surrounded by angels and in the radiance of heavenly glory. The Mother of God said to the apostles, "Rejoice! I am with you always and will pray for you before God."

The apostles exclaimed to Her in joy, "Most-holy Mother of God, help us!"

Thus the Lord Jesus Christ glorified His Most-holy Mother. He resurrected Her and took Her most holy body to Himself and set Her higher than all His angels.

Note: A full description of the Dormition of the Mother of God is found in Church Tradition and preserved by the Holy Orthodox Church.

The Dormition of our Most-holy Lady Mother of God is celebrated by

the Holy Orthodox Church as one of its major feasts on the 15th of August (28th of August NS). Preceding this feast, there is a two-week fast beginning from the 1st of August. This feast is called the *Dormition* ("falling asleep") because the Mother of God died quietly as if She was falling asleep and, more importantly, because of the short sojourn of Her body in the grave. After three days, She was resurrected by the Lord and ascended into Heaven.

Troparion of the Feast.

In giving birth Thou didst preserve Thy virginity; in Thy dormition Thou didst not forsake the world, O Theotokos. Thou wast translated unto life, since Thou art the Mother of Life; and by Thine intercessions dost Thou deliver our souls from death.

59. The Apostolic Council in Jerusalem.

When Christianity had spread throughout the known world and multitudes of pagans began to accept the Christian faith, some Christians were troubled. Christians of Jewish background held that Christians from pagan religions had to strictly observe the rituals of the Law of Moses. As a prerequisite, it should be necessary to turn them first to the Jewish faith because otherwise they could not be saved. This led to heated disagreements among the Christians.

No single apostle was able to resolve such an important question alone. It was determined by the holy apostles together with the presbyters or priests in harmony with the commandments of Christ (cf. Matt. 18:17) to convene the first *Apostolic Council* in Jerusalem in the year 51 A.D.

After long discussions, the issue was settled by the words of the Apostle Peter. He arose and said that the Lord having elected him in the early days to preach to the gentiles did not make any distinction between Jews and gentiles but to all gave the Holy Spirit; and therefore, Christians converted from pagan religions did not have to keep the rituals of the law of Moses. "We believe," the Apostle finished his speech, "*that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

The speech of the Apostle Peter created a deep impression and was then strengthened still more after the Apostles Paul and Barnabas related what signs and wonders God had done through them among

the Gentiles.

After this, the Apostle *James*, the "brother of the Lord," arose to address those present at the council. The last word belonged to him as to bishop of the Jerusalem Church and to president of the council (first among equals). His opinions were furthermore important because he himself was a strict adherent of the Law and received for this not only from Christians but also from Jews themselves the epithet "*righteous*." Honour was accorded him by his position in the Church, first bishop of Jerusalem, placed there by the Lord Himself. St. James led a strict ascetic life, and he wore a gold name plate which was worn only by the chief priests. He spent whole hours alone in the Temple praying for his people. In Jerusalem, he was honoured and respected by the people.

St. James approved the opinion of the Apostle Peter. He showed that it was in agreement with prophecy (Amos 9:11-12) and consequently with divine providence. He proposed, "we should not trouble those of the gentiles, who turn to God, with keeping the rituals of the Law of Moses; but they must refrain from idol worship, from fornication, and from things strangled and blood. They should not do to others what they do not want done to themselves."

This proposal of the Apostle James was accepted by the apostles, presbyters, and the whole Council unanimously as a resolution of the Council. It was made known to all Christians in a Council decree, which began with the words, "*It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...*"

Thus the Apostolic Council showed Christians that the decree of the Council, in agreement with the word of the Lord (John 16:13;14:16), is established by the Holy Spirit. This letter of the Apostolic Council brought great joy and comfort to the Christians.

Note: See Acts of the Apostles 15:1-35.

The Preaching Labours of the Apostles.

In a short time the apostles of Christ by their preaching, which was inspired in them by the Holy Spirit, won multitudes of pagans to Christ, simple and unsophisticated people, as well as scholars and even kings. The apostles suffered much difficulty in their holy work enduring much grief and need. All the apostles, except John the Theologian, met a martyr's end. The Apostle John the Theologian died in exile at a great old age. The number of Christians grew from year to year, even after the deaths of the apostles, and the Christian faith spread to all the ends of the earth.

The apostles preached mostly verbally; but in order that the teaching of Christ be better preserved, several of them under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote it down in books. Therefore, these books are called the *Holy Scriptures*, as were the books of the prophets before Christ.

Two of the twelve apostles, *Matthew* and *John*, and two of the seventy apostles, *Mark* and *Luke*, each wrote a book about the life of Christ the Saviour on earth and His teaching. These four books are called the *Gospels* ("good news") because they preserve the teachings of Christ which the Saviour Himself called the Gospel. The apostles who wrote them were called the Gospel writers or *Evangelists*.

The Evangelist Luke wrote another book, the *Acts of the Apostles* or the deeds and labours of the apostles. This book records how the apostles spread the Christian faith in the first years.

Others of the apostles: *James*, son of Alphaeus, *Peter*, as well as *John* the Theologian and *Jude* (Judas), the brother of James, wrote seven general epistles, letters to Christians all over the world, and taught in these letters how to believe and to live according to the teachings of Christ. One of the letters is by the Apostle James, two — by Peter, three — by John, and one — by Jude.

The Apostle *Paul* wrote fourteen epistles to distant churches and people.

The Apostle John the Theologian, in addition to the Gospel and three epistles, wrote still another book, the *Apocalypse* or *Revelation*. In this book, there is found the future destiny of the Christian Church and of the whole world.

Of course, the apostles did not write in the books everything they taught and had heard from the Saviour. The Evangelist John the Theologian himself wrote, "But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

The teachings and rules which the apostles conveyed to the Christians by their words and example firmly preserved Christianity. These teachings, which are given to them orally and only later written down by the saints, are called *Apostolic* or *Holy Tradition*.

Together with the apostles and after them, *apostolic men* or disciples of the apostles preached the Gospel. These pastors, teachers and

fathers of the Church of Christ, spread and strengthened the Church of Christ by their speaking, writing, and by their holy lives.

60. The Lives of the Apostles.

The holy foremost-of-the-Apostles Peter (Simon) preached first in Judea and then in Antioch, in Bithynia, in Asia, in Cilicia, also throughout Italy and in Rome itself. In Rome, he was crucified head down by order of the Emperor Nero. The Apostle Peter and the Apostle Paul, as the apostles who laboured more than all the others in preaching the Christian faith, are called *the holy foremost-of-the-Apostles* by the Holy Church.

The holy foremost-of-the-Apostles Paul (Saul) preached in many countries beginning in Jerusalem and ending in Rome, the capital of the world. In Rome, he was beheaded by Emperor Nero.

The holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called preached within the boundaries of what later became Russia. He erected a cross on a Kievan hill and predicted the future enlightenment of Russia by the Christian faith. He preached on the shores of the Black Sea and in other countries. In Byzantium, he was ordained by the laying of hands on the bishop Stachys, one of the seventy disciples. In the city of Patras in Achaea (Greece), pagans crucified him on a cross formed in the shape of the letter X, which thus came to be known as *the Cross of St. Andrew*.

The holy Apostle James, the son of Zebedee, preached in Jerusalem and was the first of the apostles to suffer for Christ. On orders from the Judaeen King Herod Agrippa, he was beheaded in Jerusalem.

The holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian after torture in Rome was sent in exile to the Isle of Patmos. St. John lived longer than all the other apostles and died peacefully in Asia, in the city of Ephesus. According to tradition, the apostle by his own desire was buried alive by his disciples. When, soon after burial, Christians came to open his grave, the body of St. John was not to be found.

The holy Apostle Philip preached in Asian countries with the Apostle Bartholomew and his sister Miriam. In Phrygia, a province of Asia Minor, in the city of Hierpolis, he met a martyr's death. He was crucified head down.

The holy Apostle Bartholomew (Nathaniel) at first preached together

with the Apostle Philip in Syria and Asia; after that, he went to India and translated the Gospel of Matthew into the Indian language. Later, he preached in Armenia where he suffered a martyr's death in the city of Albanopolis.

The holy Apostle Thomas, called Didymus ("the twin"), preached in many Asiatic countries and went to India where he met a martyr's end for Christ. He was pierced with spears and then beheaded with a sword.

The holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew preached for a long time in Judea and then in all parts of Ethiopia (later: Abyssinia, Nubia, Kordofan, Darfun; and now: Ethiopia and the Sudan). He was killed by the sword in one of the cities of ancient Ethiopia.

The holy Apostle James, the son of Alphaeus, preached in Syria, Egypt, and in other countries. In one of these, he was crucified on a cross suffering a martyr's death for Christ.

The holy Apostle Judas, the brother of James, also called Thaddeus or Lebbaeus, preached in Judah, Galilee, Samaria, and Idumea, in Arabia, Syria, and Mesopotamia. In Persia, he was hung on a wooden cross and shot with arrows.

The holy Apostle Simon the Zealot, a Canaanite, preached in Mauritania in Africa. He was also in England (formerly called Britannia). For preaching faith in Christ, he was crucified on a cross, according to one source, in Georgia on the order of the Georgian King Aderhi; and according to another source — in Persia.

The holy Apostle Matthias was chosen from the seventy to take the place of the fallen Judas. He preached in Judea and in outer Ethiopia. Returning to Judea, he suffered for Christ being first stoned and then beheaded.

The holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark was from among the seventy apostles and laboured with the Apostle Peter. He also preached on the shores of the Adriatic Sea. He received a martyr's end in Alexandria by being dragged behind a chariot along the stones in the city streets.

The holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke was from among the seventy apostles and laboured with the Apostle Paul. He later preached in Egypt and ended his spiritual feat with a martyr's death by hanging.

The holy Apostle James the Righteous, one of the seventy, was the first bishop of Jerusalem as it was established by the Lord Himself. He is called the "Brother of the Lord." According to tradition, he was

the son of Joseph the Betrothed by his first marriage. St. James was thrown from the roof of the Jerusalem Temple by the Jews and then killed by a blow on the head. This was about 62 A.D.

The holy Apostle James was the first who to formulate the order of the Divine Liturgy, which was the foundation for liturgies by St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom that we celebrate now. The Liturgy of St. James is now celebrated in Jerusalem and elsewhere on his feast day.

61. The Worldwide Persecution of Christians. The Destruction of Jerusalem.

During the course of the first three centuries, Christians endured almost constant persecution, first — from the unbelieving Jews and then — from pagans.

The Jews, who did not accept the Saviour promised by God, the Lord Jesus Christ, but rather condemned Him to death with crazed shouts of "Let His blood be upon us and on our children" and who also killed many Christians, were finally punished for all their lawlessness. Jerusalem and the Temple of God were destroyed to their foundations by the Roman soldiers when the Jews arose in revolt. This happened in 70 A.D. as the Lord had *prophesied*. The place where the first Temple of God had stood was ploughed under, so that *not a stone was left upon a stone*.

The Jewish people were scattered all over the world. More than a million Jews were annihilated. Tens of thousands of them were sold into slavery. In their place, inhabitants of other nations settled in Palestine and again built up the ruined cities among which was the city of Jerusalem. The Christian faith began to flourish among the pagans.

The spread of the Christian faith among the pagans provoked persecution of the Christians by pagan Roman emperors. Adherents of the pagan faith convinced the Emperor that Christians were enemies of the state, enemies of the Emperor himself and of all the mankind as a whole. Persecution of the Christians was so cruel that it is difficult to describe. The Christians underwent the most terrifying tortures imaginable.

The first cruel persecution began in the year 64 after the birth of Christ, under the Emperor Nero. Nero burned the city of Rome for

his amusement and laid the whole blame on the Christians. By his command, the Christians were tracked down, seized, and given up to be torn to pieces in the circus by wild animals. They dressed them in animal skins and set dogs on them, crucified them on crosses, poured tar over them and burned them instead of torches at night to light Nero's garden. The Apostles Peter and Paul suffered during this persecution in Rome. In 67 A.D., Paul was beheaded by the sword and Peter was crucified on a cross; but by his own special request, he was crucified head down because he did not consider himself worthy to die the same death as the Lord Jesus Christ.

The most terrible was the last persecution of Christians under the Emperor Diocletian. This persecution lasted from 303 A.D. to 313 A.D. At that time, a hundred thousand Christians were killed with the greatest variety of torments. During this persecution, the Holy Scriptures were seized and burned.

At the time of the persecution Lactantius, a noted Christian writer and teacher of philosophy in Nicomedia wrote, "If I had a hundred mouths and a breast of iron, still I would not be able to enumerate all the various kinds of torments endured by the believers."

They tortured in one place from ten to one hundred men in a day. Many of the exhausted and mutilated were revived by medical care so that they could be tortured again. They tortured Christians without regarding sex or age. "I myself was an eyewitness of it," wrote the historian *Eusebius*. "The iron implements became blunt and broken, and the executioners themselves were wearied and had to take turns to relieve each other."

But the suffering and spiritual feats of the martyrs strengthened and spread the Christian faith among other people. Many pagans seeing the faith and feats of the Christian martyrs and the miracles springing from them were themselves convinced of the truth of the Christian faith and accepted Christianity. The more they persecuted and tortured the Christians, the more the Christian faith was strengthened.

62. The End of Persecutions and the Finding of the Cross.

The persecution of the Christians ceased only in the beginning of the fourth century, under the Roman Emperor *Constantine the*

Great.

The Emperor Constantine himself was conquered by the power and the glory of the sign of the Cross of Christ. One day, on the eve of a decisive battle, he and all his soldiers saw a cross of light in the sky with the inscription, "By this sign you will conquer" (in Greek, NIKA). The following night the Lord Jesus Christ Himself appeared with the Cross in His hand and told him that by this sign he would conquer the enemy and directed that each soldier's shield be monogrammed with the holy Cross. Constantine fulfilled the command of God and conquered the enemy. He placed his empire under the protection of the saving sign of Christ. He took Christianity under his protection and proclaimed faith in Christ to be the state religion. He outlawed punishment by crucifixion and issued laws favouring the Church of Christ. For his merit and zeal in propagating the Christian faith, Constantine the Great with his mother Helen received the title of *Holy Rulers, Equal-of-the-Apostles*.

Equal-of-the-Apostles Emperor Constantine desired to build God's churches on the Christian holy places in Palestine, the places of the birth, suffering, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and others, and to find the Cross on which the Saviour was crucified. His mother, the Equal-of-the Apostles St. Helen, took upon herself the task of fulfilling the Emperor's wishes with great joy.

In 326 A.D., Empress Helen journeyed to Jerusalem. She devoted much labour to finding of the Cross of Christ since the enemies of Christ had hidden the Cross burying it in the ground. Finally, she was directed to an elderly Jew by the name of Judas, who knew where the Cross of the Lord was. After much questioning and conversation, they induced him to reveal its location. It seemed that the holy Cross had been thrown into a cave and heaped over with debris and dirt; and above it, there had been built a pagan temple. Empress Helen ordered the building to be torn down and the cave — unearthed.

When they uncovered the cave, they found three crosses in it and apart from them lay a sign with the inscription, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." It was necessary to find out which of the three crosses was the Cross of the Saviour. The Patriarch of Jerusalem, Macarius, and Empress Helen firmly hoped and believed that God would show them the Cross of the Saviour.

On the advice of the Patriarch, they brought the crosses one at a time to a very sick woman. From two of the crosses, nothing happened; but when they brought the third cross, she immediately became well. It happened that at this moment a dead man was

carried by on the way to his burial. They brought the crosses one at a time to the dead man; and when they brought the third cross, the dead man revived. By this means, they found the Cross of the Lord through which the Lord worked miracles and showed the *life-giving power* of His Cross.

The Empress Helen, the Patriarch Macarius, and all the people with them thankfully venerated the Cross of Christ and kissed it with great joy. Christians after finding out about this great event gathered in a crowd of innumerable people at the place where the Cross of the Lord had been found. Everyone wanted to approach the holy life-giving Cross; but because of the size of the crowd, that was impossible. Thus, all began to ask at least to be able to see it. Then, the Patriarch stood on a high place; and in order to make it visible to all, he lifted it up several times. The crowd seeing the Cross of the Saviour bowed and exclaimed, "Lord have mercy!"

The holy Equal-of-the-Apostles Emperor Constantine and Empress Helen built a vast and splendid church in honour of the *Resurrection of Christ*. They also built churches on the Mount of Olives, in Bethlehem, and in Hebron at the Oak of Mamre.

The Empress Helen sent a portion of the Cross of the Lord to her son, Emperor Constantine; and another portion, she left in Jerusalem. This precious remnant of the Cross of Christ is still kept at the present day in the Church of the Resurrection of Christ at the Holy Sepulchre.

After finding the Life-giving Cross of the Lord, Judas, who had shown the location of the Cross, became a Christian. Later for his virtuous life, he was ordained a bishop with the name Cyriacus and was raised to the position of Patriarch of Jerusalem. He suffered for Christ under Julian the Apostate. The memory of St. Cyriacus the holy martyr is celebrated *October 28th* (November 10th NS).

In remembrance of the finding of the Cross of Christ and Its elevation, the Holy Orthodox Church established the feast of *the Exaltation of the Honourable and Life-giving Cross of the Lord*. This feast is one of the great feast-days and is celebrated on *September 14th* (September 27th NS).

During the All-night vigil service, at Matins, the Cross is carried out for veneration. While singing the great doxology, the priest dressed in full vestments and carrying on his head the Holy Cross decorated with flowers carries it during the singing of "*Holy God...*" from the altar to the middle of the church and places it on a lectern. During the thrice-repeated singing of the festal hymn, "*Save O Lord, Thy*

people...," the priest censes the Holy Cross. Then, during the singing of, "*Before Thy Cross we bow down, O Master, and Thy holy Resurrection we glorify,*" everyone venerates and kisses the Holy Cross. Decorating the Holy Cross with greenery and flowers signifies the conviction that through It, through the suffering and death of the Saviour on It, eternal life is given to us. On this feast day, strict fasting is observed to deepen reverence for the memory of the Saviour's suffering by crucifixion and for cleansing us from sins.

63. New Enemies of Christianity.

In spite of the decisive victory of Christianity over the pagans, they still attempted to advance against Christianity again during the reign of Emperor *Julian the Apostate*.

Julian was a son of a brother of Constantine the Great. When he became Emperor, although he was first brought up as a Christian, he began to worship idols and declared himself as a pagan and vigorously oppressed Christianity. Inaugurating persecution of the Christians, Julian decided to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem for the Jews, and he funded the project. But the Lord defended the holy faith. Christians as well as pagan writers record an earthquake and balls of fire that sprang out from under the earth and put a stop to Julian's attempt to re-establish the Jerusalem Temple. Even those stones which had been preserved underground from the former Temple were cast up, so that in the full sense of the phrase not one stone remained on another stone.

Thus, the pagan *Ammianus Marcellinus*, a contemporary of Emperor Julian and his advisor, wrote, "Terrible balls of flame, which were often expelled from the foundation, made that place inaccessible burning repeatedly those who worked there; in this manner, this enterprise was halted spontaneously driving away persistent workmen," (Bk 23, chap. 1).

A contemporary and schoolmate of Julian, *St. Gregory the Theologian*, in a speech against Julian, said that at this time in heaven there appeared a blazing cross and the clothing of onlookers was imprinted with crosses. Many foreign observers, as the historians write, gathered to look at the spectacle of the struggle with the mysterious spontaneous fire.

The enemies of Christianity had to confess their powerlessness, but they did not repent of their evil. In a battle with the Persians, an

enemy's arrow struck Julian. Dying, he mournfully cried out, "*You have conquered me, Galilean!*" as he called the Lord Jesus Christ.

After the death of Julian the Apostate, all the following Roman Emperors took care to affirm Christianity throughout the empire.

In the seventh century, there began new suffering for the Christians in the East. In 614 A.D., the Persian King *Chosroes* seized Jerusalem and turned over ninety thousand Christians to the Jews for punishment. Patriarch Zacharias and many other Christians were led off to captivity. They burned the Church of the Resurrection, stole the treasures of the church, and carried the *Cross of Christ* into Persia. Fourteen years later, in 628 A.D., the Greek Emperor Heraclius conquered the Persians, returned all the captive Christians led by the Patriarch Zacharias; and the Holy Cross was returned with honour to Jerusalem.

Rejoicing and thanking God, the Emperor Heraclius wanted to bring the Cross to Jerusalem in person. But at Golgotha, an invisible power blocked the Cross, and the Emperor was powerless to carry on. Then, the Patriarch Zacharias showed the Emperor that the Son of God, the Heavenly King, carried the Cross to Golgotha in humility and disgrace. The Emperor humbly listened to the Patriarch, took off his royal robes, and carried the Holy Cross barefooted into the church on Golgotha where the Patriarch again elevated the Holy Cross above the people.

Soon after this great event, the false prophet *Mohammed* appeared in Arabia. Suffering from childhood with epilepsy, a nervous disorder, and hallucinations (falsely taken as visions), he himself believed in his calling to found a new religion; and at age forty, he began his preaching. In the year 632 with his followers, he conquered Mecca, his birthplace in Arabia, and established his religion. Then, his followers by the power of arms subjugated Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and even Jerusalem. Gradually, Islam (the teachings of Mohammed) spread more and more, and the Greek empire grew weaker and weaker. Finally in the middle of the 15th century (1454 A.D.), under the Emperor Constantine XI (Constantine Drageses Palaeologus), the Turks conquered Constantinople.

64. The Ecumenical Councils.

Among Christians, there sometimes appear people who incorrectly expound on Christian teachings and who want their incorrect

teaching to be binding on the whole Church.

The Church calls such false teaching *heresy* and the false teachers — *heretics*. When general persecution of the Christians ceased, heresies' especially started to trouble the life of the Church. The Devil, unable to defeat the Church from without, began to attack it from within.

Following the example of the Apostles, councils of bishops, pastors, and teachers of the Church from the whole known world were convened for the struggle against the heretics and for the instruction of all Christians in the correct *Orthodox* faith

When it was necessary to resolve the question whether Christians converted from pagan religions should fulfil the ceremonies of the laws of Moses, the Holy Fathers gathered at *the Apostolic Council of 51 A.D.* in Jerusalem (see Acts 15:1-35). So also, the fathers of the Church, *the bishops* to whom the *apostles transferred their power* received by laying on of hands, gathered at the Councils when some sort of teaching contrary to Christian faith arose.

These general conferences of the entire Christian world, called *Ecumenical Councils*, maintained the truth of Christ by the guidance of the Holy Spirit and participation of the whole Christian Church. There have been seven Ecumenical Councils.

At the *First* and *Second* Ecumenical Councils, *the Symbol of Faith* or *Creed* was composed. The Creed is a short statement of all the tenets of the Orthodox Christian faith. Every Orthodox Christian is obliged to know it. We sing it at the Divine Liturgy and recite it during our morning prayers.

The *Seventh* Ecumenical Council defended and affirmed the veneration of holy icons.

65. The Schism of the Roman Church. The Enlightenment of the Slavs.

Not long after the period of the Ecumenical Councils, the Western part of the Church fell away from the Ecumenical Orthodox Church and formed what eventually has become known as the Roman Catholic Church.

This is how it happened. After the Apostles installed their successors

to guide the Church, the bishops, who had an equal degree of priesthood, had different powers. Bishops of the smaller cities were subordinated to the bishops of the larger cities, who were called *metropolitans*. The metropolitans in turn were subordinated to the bishops in the capital cities, who were called *patriarchs*. The highest power in the Church belonged to councils to which even the patriarchs were subordinated.

In ancient times, there were five patriarchs: the patriarchs of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The Patriarch of Rome came to be known as a pope. For a long time other bishops were also thus named. The word "pope" means father.

All five patriarchs had equal rights and did not claim authority outside their own patriarchate. None of them was higher or lower than another; and only in honour; the Roman patriarch did come first because of the prominent position of Rome as the capital of the empire. Over the course of time, however, the Roman pope expanding his realm began to strengthen in power and sought to subordinate all the other patriarchs to himself, so that the pope might become the sole head of the Christian Church. Such a claim by the Roman pope was recognized to be un-canonical. This along with the change in the Creed was a chief cause of the separation of the Western church from Orthodoxy.

Subsequently, the Protestant confessions separated from the Roman Catholic church. At about the time of the fall of the Roman Church, the Ecumenical Orthodox Church was enlarged by the entrance of the Slavic people, who were converted to Christianity.

The first missionaries to the Slavs were Sts. *Cyril* and *Methodius*, the brothers, who selflessly laboured to spread the Christian faith among the Slavs. They composed the Slavonic alphabet and translated the Holy Scriptures and service books into the Slavic language.

After their death, Christianity became firmly established among the Bulgarians and Serbians; and later, all the Russian people were baptized into the Christian faith.

The Baptism of Russia.

The land of Russia became a Christian country almost a thousand years after the appearance of our Saviour in the world. Before that time, people in the Russian land worshipped idols and were pagans. The main idols were the sun god and the god of thunder and lightning, Perun. Besides these, there were many lesser gods to protect the household, the courtyard, water, woods, and etc. In the

lives of these pagans, there were many superstitious, false beliefs, savage customs, and even human sacrifice to idols.

According to tradition, *the holy Apostle Andrew the First-called* preached the Gospel in *Scythia*, in the land which later became Russia. Having climbed the Kievan Mountains, he placed a wooden cross there and prophesied that in this land the true faith of Christ would shine.

The holy Apostle Andrew missioned the future land of Russia from the south to the north, from the Kievan Mountains to Novgorod, and was even on the island of Valaam. The latest historical evidence testifies to this. Local northern Russian tradition shows that the Apostle Andrew the First-called, enlightener of the Scythians and the Slavs, came from Kiev to Novgorod. From there, he travelled along the Volga River to Lake Ladoga and then — to Valaam where he blessed the mountain with *a stone cross*. He destroyed the temples of Veles and Perun and converted to the Christian faith the priests of the idols and the pagan inhabitants of the island laying at Valaam the foundation for confession of faith in Christ. Several of his disciples who had accompanied him remained as pastors for the newly gathered flock of Christ.

In the ancient manuscript "Opoved" kept in the library of the Valaam monastery, mention of this is made: "St. Andrew of Jerusalem came to Goliad, Kosoch, Roden, Scythe, Scythia, and Slavonia via contiguous meadows (steppes), reached Smolensk and the home guard at Scothe of the Great Slaviansky. Leaving Ladoga, he went by boat over the stormy, turbulent lake to Valaam placing stone crosses and blessing everywhere with the sign of the Cross. His disciples, Silus, Phirsus, Elisha, Lukoslav, Joseph, and Cosmas, set missions everywhere and all the rulers came from Slovensk and Smolensk. Many pagan priests were baptized, and the temples of Perun and Veles were destroyed and obliterated."

Another ancient document, "*Vseletnik*" (All the Years) of the Kievan Metropolitan Hilarion, 1051 A.D., affirms the travels of St. Andrew the Apostle on Valaam.

In the "*Vseletnik*," it is written, "November 30th. St. Andrew the All-praised, First-called Apostle and Standard-bearer of the Church we extol; and for of old, he came to Kiev, Smolensk, Novgorod, Dpyzino and Valaam."

Evidence supports that which the oral and written tradition of Valaam affirms, that the Orthodox Christian faith was established on Valaam by St. Andrew the Apostle. Whether Christianity continued on Valaam without interruption until the time of the founding of a

monastery is impossible to determine positively.

Evidence from the ancient manuscript "*Opoved*" suggested that on Valaam after the Apostle Andrew, there existed a continual governmental organization with its *vetche* (popular assembly in ancient Russia) as it was in Novgorod. Valaam was known in foreign lands; and in times of danger, people sought safety there. A stone cross of St. Andrew the Apostle was kept there until the time of St. Sergius of Valaam, which indicated the existence of Christianity. Before the founding of a monastery on it, Valaam belonged to the Slavs and probably existed in civic unity with Novgorod. On Valaam, traces of the Orthodox Christian faith remained until the time of St. Sergius although paganism continued along side Christianity.

The first of the Russian princes to be baptized, according to tradition, were the Kievan princes Ashold and Dir in 867 A.D. Almost a hundred years after them, the wise Russian princess *Olga* noticing the chaste lives of Kievan Christians was influenced by the truth of their faith and accepted holy baptism in 957 A.D. She travelled to Constantinople with a large retinue, was baptized by the Patriarch himself, and took the name Helena. Returning home, she tried to persuade her son Svyatoslav to convert to Christianity, but he being by nature a rigorous military man did not consent.

God provided Christian enlightenment to the Russian land through Prince *Vladimir*, grandson of Olga. At first, Vladimir was a zealous pagan and led an unchaste life. In his presence, two Christians, Theodore and John (father and son), were sacrificed to idols becoming the first martyrs of Russia. Vladimir soon sensed the total emptiness of paganism and began to think about another, better faith.

When it became known that a Russian prince was seeking another faith, representatives of various religions began to come to him: Mohammedans, Jews, German Catholics, and Greek Orthodox. The Greek Orthodox representative made the deepest impression on Vladimir. In concluding his conversation, he showed Vladimir a picture of the Last Judgement.

Vladimir said, "It would be good to be with the righteous that are on the right side."

"Be baptized, and you will be with them," answered the representative.

Prince Vladimir consulted with his boyars, members of the Russian aristocratic order, who advised him to send ten wise envoys to the various countries to discover which faith was the best.

The envoys visited the countries from which the representatives had come. Returning to Kiev, they told the prince everything they had seen, and they praised the Greek Orthodox faith. They said that there was neither faith better than the Greeks' nor such people as they. "When we stood during the service in the Greek Church, we were not sure whether we were on earth or in heaven," they said. And then it came to be that having tasted sweetness, they no longer wanted the bitter. Having found the Greek Orthodox faith, they no longer wanted to worship their idols.

The boyars remarked to Vladimir about this, "If the Greek Orthodox faith was not better than the others, then your grandmother, Princess Olga, would not have converted to it, for she was the wisest of people."

Then, Prince Vladimir finally decided to accept the Orthodox faith. But as a pagan, he considered it would be humiliating to ask the Greeks about it. So, about a year later, he sent a military expedition against Greece and took the city of Korsun. The city of Korsun or Cherson was located in the Crimea, at that time — part of the Greek empire. He then demanded of the Greek Emperors Basil and Constantine, co-rulers at the time, that they hand over to him their sister Anna. The Emperors answered that they could not give their sister to a pagan. Then, Vladimir explained to them his desire to convert to the Christian faith and asked them to send Princess Anna and also a priest to baptize him. The Emperors immediately sent a priest to Korsun accompanied by the Princess Anna. It happened at that time that Vladimir's eyes began to fail so badly that he became blind. Princess Anna advised Vladimir to be baptized immediately. Vladimir took the advice of the princess and was baptized taking the name Basil. No sooner, had he been baptized and emerged from the font than the scales fell from his eyes, and he was able to see. Vladimir recovered physically and spiritually and in joy exclaimed, "Now I have found the true God!"

Prince Vladimir married Princess Anna and returned to Kiev. A contingent from Greece came with him consisting of a metropolitan, six bishops, many priests, and everything they needed for the services of the Church. This was in the year 988 A.D.

First, Vladimir suggested to his twelve sons that they be baptized, and they were. After them, many boyars were baptized. Finally, Vladimir ordered all the inhabitants of Kiev to come on a designated day to the Dnieper River; and there in the presence of the prince, the spiritual mystery of Holy Baptism was performed. Prince Vladimir joyously directed his gaze to Heaven, prayed to God that the Lord Who had made Heaven and earth would bless the Russian

people, grant them to know Him, the true God, and would strengthen the true faith in the Russian people. On this great day, Heaven and earth rejoiced.

Having converted to Christianity, Vladimir changed in every way. From a coarse and savage pagan, he became a pious and merciful Christian. He ordered all the poor people to come to his royal court and receive there everything they needed: food, clothing, and even money. Furthermore, carts were loaded with bread, meat, fish, vegetables, honey, and kvass and sent around to the cities and villages for all the sick and needy who were unable to come.

The people loved their *Grand Prince* and nicknamed him "Beautiful Sun;" and as to the sun, the people turned to him and with him walked toward God.

The Holy Church numbers Grand Prince Vladimir and Princess Olga among its saints. Prince Vladimir received the title of *Equal-of-the-Apostles* for his apostolic zeal.

With the help of God, Orthodox Christianity soon spread from Kiev and flourished throughout the Russian land. The Russian people embraced the Orthodox faith with all their soul and were spiritually enlightened by it. All the arts, schools, monasteries, literature, the whole of Russian culture, spiritual as well as secular, was inspired by Orthodoxy. The light of Christ shone over the country, and it became known forever as Holy Russia, and the people, "The Russian Orthodox people."

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