

The forerunner role of the family

Noteworthy is also the end of the prophecy of the Archangel Gabriel to Zachariah: "the child who will be born will make those fathers, who on account of sin ended up uncaring for their children, to obtain again a heart full of loving care for them. And those who on account of sin became disobedient, he will make them obtain the prudence of the righteous ones. And so he will prepare a people to receive the Lord as its savior".

It is impressive that the basic element of preparation for the reception of the Messiah is the building of a correct family, and mainly the securing of a healthy loving care of parents for their children. Only thus are people able to obtain healthy senses, in order to recognize the coming Savior of the world and their true Father and to love Him.

May the intercessions of the holy parents Zachariah and Elizabeth, which are put forth by the Church today, on the birthday of their holy child, support and enlighten today's parents in the edification of homes, which will have as their primary aim, the eager hospitality of the Lord, who visited and made deliverance to his people". Amen.

Archim. B.

SUNDAY, JUNE 24, 2018 4TH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW, *Nativity of the Forerunner John the Baptist, Elizabeth, Mother of the Forerunner, Panagiotis the New Martyr, Athanasios Parios*

TONE OF THE WEEK : *Tone Three*

EOTHINON : *Fourth Orthros Gospel*

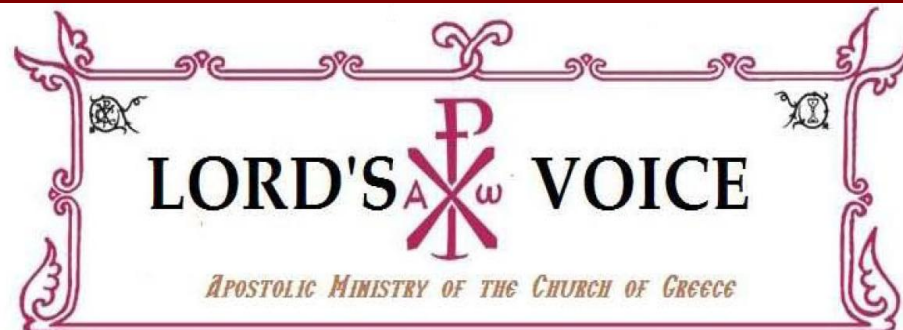
EPISTLE READING: *Romans 13:11-14; 14:1-4*

GOSPEL READING: *Luke 1:1-25, 57-68, 76-80*

NEXT SUNDAY, JULY 1, 2018 5TH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW, *Cosmas & Damian the Holy Unmercenaries Constantine the New Martyr of Cyprus, Aaron and Julius the Martyrs of Caerelon, Germanus, Bishop of the Isle of Man.*

EPISTLE READING: *Corinthians 12:27-31; 13:1-8*

GOSPEL READING: *Matthew 8:28-34; 9:1*



66TH YEAR JUNE 24 2018 PAMPHLET #25 (3395)

“THE OFFSPRING OF THE BARREN WOMAN”

Our Church, aside from the Nativity of Christ, celebrates the birthdays of only two people: of the Most Holy Theotokos and of the Precious Forerunner. And it is natural for the birthday of him to be celebrated, whom the Lord Himself glorified as the greatest “of those born among women”.

The fruit of prayer

It has been very correctly said that the upbringing of a child begins...long before he is born. For “the apple to fall under the apple tree,” the apple tree first needs much care and correct development. The parents who granted us Saint John the Forerunner were “both just and blameless before God, keeping all His commandments”. Only God knows how many toils and how many tears of prayer, John was the fruit of.

Saint Theodore the Studite, referring to the joyous promise of the Archangel Gabriel to Zachariah that he would have a son, cries out: “O angel-brought promise, who are the fruit of so many persistent prayers! Zachariah has obtained that, for which he was beseeching with such fervor! He became after fruit-bearing prayer the revival of the barren womb of Elizabeth, and her longing to have a child was satisfied!”

And naturally the human disbelief of Zachariah to the announcement of the Archangel does not lessen essentially his piety and his trust in the almightiness of God. Saint Theodore justifies him saying that because he was disturbed, he kept a reserved attitude. Because joyous announcements, which give the message of the realization of unusual expectations of the soul, when they are suddenly heard, usually bring disturbance”. The question “how will I be assured about that which you are telling me” does not come from disbelief, but from the necessity to ascertain the truth

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE 1:1-25, 57-68, 76-8

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilos, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed. In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth; for he will be great before the Lord, and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." And the people were waiting for Zacharias, and they wondered at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak to them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he made signs to them and remained dumb. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she hid herself, saying, "Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men." Now the time came for Elizabeth to be delivered, and she gave birth to a son. And her neighbors and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced

with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they would have named him Zacharias after his father, but his mother said, "Not so; he shall be called John." And they said to her, "None of your kindred is called by this name." And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, "His name is John." And they all marveled. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea; and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him. And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways." And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

Is there a gene of holiness?

The Archangel said something to Zachariah, which could scandalize some people: "your son will become great before God... And he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while he is still in his mother's womb". It would be a big mistake, to conclude from this prophecy, that - even some people-have been destined by God to be holy and consequently to go in glory to paradise without them being asked and obviously without any preparation of their own! This would mean that God to some people abolishes the free will and consequently He did not make everyone in His image! O woe, the blasphemy!

For what reason then did Saint John select to spend his whole life in the desert? Saint Ignatius Brianchanninov stresses that the Precious Forerunner followed this way of ascetical manner of life, precisely in order to safeguard and preserve the grace of the Holy Spirit, which he received as a gift from the holy life of his parents. The fact that Saint John is the greatest saint after the All-Holy Theotokos, was not a given, but was the fruit of the cooperation of the grace of God with his own harsh struggle. And this majesty of his holiness was sealed from, his voluntary acceptance to be imprisoned and to seal, with his martyrical blood, his obedience to the will of God.

Judas had also richly received the grace of the Holy Spirit from Christ, and in the beginning he was also granted to perform miracles in the name of his teacher. Voluntarily allowing himself however to be enslaved to the passion of avarice, he lost everything! And many other great strugglers in the spiritual life and former charismatics fell from the grace of God, because they did not pay attention to the Apostle Paul's forewarning: "whoever thinks that he is standing well, let him pay attention that he not fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).