

continued from page 1

symbol—the Life-Giving Cross—and it fills us with joy and makes us ready to meet, inasmuch as it is possible for us, the King himself, and to render glory to His victory...All this in the midst of Lent which is like a bitter source because of its tears, because also of its efforts and despondency...but Christ comforts us who are as it were in a desert until He shall lead us up to the spiritual Jerusalem by His Resurrection...for the Cross is called the Tree of Life, it is the tree that was planted in Paradise, and for this reason our fathers have planted it in the midst of Holy Lent, remembering both Adam's bliss and how he was deprived of it, remembering also that partaking of this Tree we no longer die but are kept alive....

Thus, refreshed and reassured, we begin the second part of Lent..."

Taken from, "Great Lent" by Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY.

MARCH 24 - OUR HOLY FATHER JAMES THE CONFESSOR

He suffered for the sake of the holy icons under the Emperor Leo the Armenian (813-20). He was a monk and a brother of the Studite monastery. When the great Theodore of the Studion was sent into exile, James was given over to great tortures to force him to renounce the veneration of icons. But he remained steadfast and faithful to Orthodoxy to the end. They returned him to his monastery



beaten and tortured when the evil Emperor Leo had made a bad end. He died of his grievous injuries there in the monastery, and entered into the company of the citizens of heaven.

OUR HOLY FATHER ZACHARIAS

He was the son of Carion the Egyptian, who left wife and children to become a monk. The father took Zacharias with him, since his mother was unable to provide for him. Although younger than many of the elders in Scetis, he received greater gifts of grace than many of them. He felt as if his whole interior was aflame with the grace of God. Zacharias replied to the question of St. Macarius, 'Who is a true monk?' saying: 'He who constantly restrains himself in the fulfillment of God's commandments.' And to the question of Abba Moses: 'What does it mean to be a monk?' Zacharias took off his hat and trod it underfoot, saying: 'If a man be not so broken, he cannot be a monk.' He was a great light among the monks in the desert, and went to his peace in the Lord at an early age.

From *The Prologue from Ochrid*. Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic. Lazarica Press. Birmingham, B30 1QE England



Go Forth

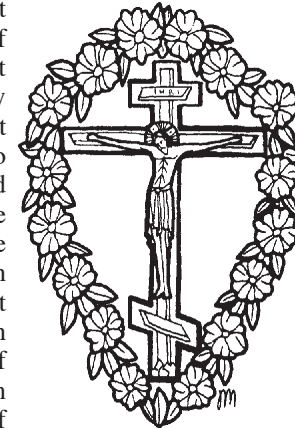
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THE THIRD SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT

"The Third Sunday of Lent is called 'The Veneration of the Cross.' At the Vigil of that day, after the Great Doxology (Matins), the Cross is brought in a solemn procession to the center of the church and remains there for the entire week — with a special rite of veneration following each service. It is noteworthy that the theme of the Cross which dominates the hymnology of that Sunday is developed in terms not of suffering but of victory and joy. More than that, the theme-songs (hirmoi) of the Sunday Canon are taken from the Paschal Service — 'The Day of the Resurrection' — and the Canon is a paraphrase of the Easter Canon.

The meaning of all this is clear. We are in Mid-Lent. On the one hand, the physical and spiritual effort, if it is serious and consistent, begins to be felt, its burden becomes more burdensome, our fatigue more evident. We need help and encouragement. On the other hand, having endured this fatigue, having climbed the mountain up to this point, we begin to see the end of our pilgrimage, and the rays of Easter grow in their intensity. Lent is our self-crucifixion, our experience, limited as it is, of Christ's commandment heard in the Gospel lesson of that Sunday: 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me' (Mark 8:34). But we can not take up our cross and follow Christ unless we have HIS Cross which He took up in order to



save us. It is His Cross, not ours, that saves us. It is His Cross that gives not only meaning but also power to others. This is explained to us in the synaxarion of the Sunday of the Cross:

On this Sunday, the third Sunday of Lent, we celebrate the veneration of the honorable and Life-Giving Cross, and for this reason: inasmuch as in the forty days of fasting we in a way crucify ourselves...and become bitter and despondent and

failing, the Life-Giving Cross is presented to us for refreshment and assurance, for remembrance of our Lord's Passion, and for comfort...We are like those following a long and cruel path, who become tired, see a beautiful tree with many leaves, sit in its shadow and rest for a while and then, as if rejuvenated, continue their journey; likewise today, in the time of fasting and difficult journey and effort, the Life-Giving Cross was planted in our midst by the holy fathers to give us rest and refreshment, to make us light and courageous for the remaining task...Or, to give another example: when a king is coming, at first his banner and symbols appear, then he himself comes glad and rejoicing about his victory and filling with joy those under him; likewise our Lord Jesus Christ, who is about to show us His victory over death, and appear to us in the glory of the Resurrection Day, is sending to us in advance His scepter, the royal

continued on back page

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Go Forth...and teach all nations. (Matthew 28:19)

MARCH 26 - ARCHANGEL GABRIEL

The Archangel Gabriel was chosen by the Lord to announce to the Virgin Mary about the Incarnation of the Son of God from Her, to the great rejoicing of all mankind. Therefore, on the day after the Feast of the Annunciation, the day on which the All-Pure Virgin is glorified, we give thanks to the Lord and we venerate His messenger Gabriel, who contributed to the mystery of our salvation.

Gabriel, the holy Archistrategos (Leader of the Heavenly Hosts), is a faithful servant of the Almighty God. He announced the future Incarnation of the Son of God to those of the Old Testament; he inspired the Prophet Moses to write the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament), he announced the coming tribulations of the Chosen People to the Prophet Daniel (Dan. 8:16, 9:21-24); he appeared to St Anna (July 25) with the news that she would give birth to the Virgin Mary.

The holy Archangel Gabriel remained with the Holy Virgin Mary when She was a child in the Temple of Jerusalem, and watched over Her throughout Her earthly life. He appeared to the Priest Zachariah, foretelling the birth of the Forerunner of the Lord, St John the Baptist.

The Lord sent him to St Joseph the Betrothed in a dream, to reveal to him the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God from the All-Pure Virgin Mary, and warned him of the wicked intentions of Herod, ordering him to flee into Egypt with the divine Infant and His Mother.

When the Lord prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane before His Passion, the Archangel Gabriel, whose very name signifies "Man of God" (Luke. 22:43), was sent from Heaven to strengthen Him.

The Myrrh-Bearing Women heard from the Archangel the joyous news of Christ's Resurrection (Mt.28:1-7, Mark 16:1-8).

Mindful of the manifold appearances of the holy Archangel Gabriel and of his zealous fulfilling of God's will, and confessing his intercession for Christians before the Lord, the Orthodox Church calls upon its children to pray to the great Archangel with faith and love.

The Synaxis of the Holy Archangel Gabriel is also celebrated on July 13. All the angels are commemorated on November 8.

From Lives of Saints, Orthodox Church in America

From the time God created man, he repeatedly used angels and archangels to communicate his divine

messages to man. We don't know the names of his angelic host save only three—Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. The first two are archangels; the third is an ordinary angel.

Archangel Gabriel, whose feast the Church commemorates on March 26 of each year, figures quite prominently as a messenger of the Most High. By God's decision of all the myriads of the angelic host, it was he whom God sent to earth to announce very important news concerning man's salvation.

First, it was he who cheered Daniel with the gladsome news that in "seventy weeks" the Messiah, the Savior, would be born.

Second, it was he again who appeared to priest Zacharias to tell him the almost unbelievable news that Elizabeth, his wife, though quite advanced in age, had conceived a son, the well-known Saint John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus.

The third time he appeared was for the purpose of announcing the greatest news the world has ever heard—the birth of Jesus, the long-awaited Savior. This news, however, was not to be given to the public. Only one



person would receive this message, in fact, the very person God had singled out to become the Savior's mother.

Yes, it was Gabriel who told the blessed Virgin Mary that she was to give birth to Jesus—a message whose fulfillment later on was to have the greatest impact in all human history.

How did Gabriel carry on his angelic appearances? As indicated in the Holy Bible, not with terror or overwhelming manner, but with gentleness.

REFLECTIONS:

"Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone" (Colossians 4.6).

PRAYER:

Lord, by the power of your grace make anything that comes out of my mouth be good news and decent thoughts. Guard my lips from saying vulgar, foolish things that are offensive to my fellow human beings and degrading to me. But help me in anything I say to be constructive, kind and joyous. Amen.

From The Champions of the Church.
Dennis Michelis. Holy Cross Orthodox Press. Brookline, MA 02146