

Leprosy in the Bible

Leprosy in Biblical times was a terrible thing. We're not exactly sure what Biblical leprosy was. While it may have described what is known today as "Hansen's Disease," the word probably included other skin diseases, as well. Whatever it was, once a person caught it, it was considered incurable, and those diagnosed with leprosy were banned from society. But the loathing directed at lepers was not merely fear of a disease. Leprosy made a person ritually unclean. To touch a leper defiled a Jew almost as much as touching a dead person. In a sense, leprosy was a sign of God's disfavor.

Later Jewish practice prescribed that while lepers might attend synagogue, they must be the first to enter and last to leave, and must stay in a special compartment to isolate them from the other worshippers. No less than a distance of four cubits (six feet) must be kept from a leper.

To the rabbis, the cure of a leper was as difficult as raising a person from the dead. In all Biblical history only two people had been cured of leprosy — Miriam, who had leprosy for seven days as a punishment for speaking against Moses' leadership (Numbers 12:9–15), and Naaman, general of the army of Aram, an heathen from Damascus (2 Kings 5). When he obeyed Elijah's instruction to wash seven times in the Jordan River he was healed. Healing a leper had not been done in Israel for seven hundred years, and was thought to be an earmark of the Messianic Age (Luke 7:22), when leprosy would no longer afflict people.

~ From Dr. Ralph Wilson, *The Thankful Leper*

“Let us Attend!”



“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

A PARISH BULLETIN OF
ALL SAINTS ORTHODOX CHURCH
Olyphant, Pennsylvania

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24th Sunday after Pentecost

Bulletin, Sunday, 8 December 2024

**24th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST — Tone 7. 362
Martyrs of Africa (62 Clergy and 300 Laypeople) (475).**
Ven. Patapius of Thebes (8th c.). Ven. Kirill, Abbot of
Chelmogorsk (1378). Holy Apostles of the Seventy: Sosthenes,
Apollos, Cephas, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, Cæsar, and
Onesiphorus (1st c.). Martyr Anthusa, at Rome (5th c.).

Epistle: Ephesians 2:14–22

Gospel: Luke 17:12–19

*Our souls and minds are strengthened and fortified by the
regular reading of the Holy Scriptures. Daily readings can be
found on the parish's wall calendar, or online by visiting the
OCA's daily reading page <https://www.oca.org/readings>.*

Schedule

- **Wednesday, 11 December 2024. 9:00M Akathist to St.
Herman of Alaska .**
- **Saturday, 14 December 2024. 5:00–5:25PM. Fr. Paul
available for Confession; 5:30PM Panikhida for 1st Year
Anniversary of +Justin Sofranko; 6PM Great Vespers.**
- **Sunday, 15 December 2024, Sunday of the Forefathers of
Christ. 9:30AM Divine Liturgy, Followed by Agape
Coffee Hour Fellowship.**

Announcements

~ A warm welcome to all our visitors. Please join us downstairs
for Agape Coffee Hour Fellowship.

~ We are winding down our annual Christmas Drive for families
in need at Mid-Valley High School. If you have already given,
much thanks. If you wish to make a gift, please do so either this
Sunday or Next. If you desire to make a contribution please
indicate “Christmas Drive” on a giving envelope.

~ Our Thanks to all those that have come together to make
pierogi for the Nativity Season. May the Lord richly bless you
for your labors. Many blessed years.

~ The parish is collecting donations for flowers that will adorn
the Church during the Nativity Season. If you wish to give a
flower donation, please place “Christmas Flowers” on the
outside of a giving envelope.

~ Presently in our country on any given day over 600,000 people
are homeless in our nation. A little over 100,000 of those living
without a home are children. We offer up our prayers this week
for all those who live without the security of a home, in many
instances, out of our sight, that the Lord comfort and strengthen
them in their struggle. And may we find it in our hearts to give
to those in need at this time of year when need is most felt.

Sharing the Truth in a World Devoid of Hope

If you wish to share the truth of the Orthodox Faith and of Christ, who is her Head, you must give witness to the love of Christ by loving everyone. Without Christ, Orthodoxy is just another religion, devoid of the power to transform and deify the human heart. Without Christ, the Church is nothing but a human institution, no different from a political party. For the Church to be herself, Christ must be visible in the love of her bishops and priests. He must be seen in the love of her people and in the charity and kindness that are displayed by all who call themselves Orthodox.

Without Christ, our world is devoid of hope, and for others to know this Christ, they must be able to see Him in us. The light of this very Christ must shine forth through the love of His Church and be made manifest in the works of His people. Without this love, there is only darkness upon the face of our world, and the world remains without hope.

Others cannot know they need Christ if they do not see Him in us. They will not know that Christ fills hearts and transforms lives if they do not see transformation in us. If we are fearful, angry, judgmental, arrogant, or aloof, the world will see nothing in our Christian faith worth seeking.

If others do not see in you a forgiving heart, how will they know there is forgiveness in Christ? If others do not see in you a heart filled with joy, how will they know they need the very Christ whom you proclaim as your Lord and Savior? If others see you as a judgmental, narrow-minded, unhappy person, why would they be drawn to the Orthodoxy you claim is the true faith?

Cooperating with the Physician of Our Souls

Although it's imprecise, we often use anthropomorphic language when speaking about God. For example, we say God is like a mother whose sick child is in need of healing and who is not offended by the child's sickness.

Yet we can also say that God is offended by our deliberate turning from the holiness and communion with Him we were created for. Our sickness is a clear sign of the presence of sin, and this sin grieves God. This same God does not merely offer an escape from the eternal bondage of death, but invites us to enter into life in Christ here and now.

Perhaps we can say God is scandalized with the state of our soul, as a doctor might be irritated upon hearing the news that her patient has not been taking his medication. Like the doctor, God has given us a prescription whereby the healing of the darkened nous can begin to take place. Yet our Orthodox Christianity does not hold to the notion that our guilt as sinful creatures translates into punishment for sin, but rather that confession and repentance are seen in therapeutic terms.

In our fallen state, we are not sentenced to punishment but invited to be spiritually healed, for salvation is not merely an escape from punishment. God, although He can be anthropomorphically described as a judge, is in reality our Physician. The cure He provides frees us from the eternal bondage of death and gives us entrance to life in Christ in the here and now.

We are invited to share in God's divinity through the action of theosis, in which the Creator condescended to take on our humanity and shares His divinity with us. Theosis is both the transformative process by which we become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4) and the goal of that process. The goal is the attainment of union with God and is brought about by the effects of the purification of mind and body.

Theosis is the very purpose of human life, and it is achievable only through a cooperation between humans' activities and God's uncreated energies (or operations).

Sexual Sins

Sins of a sexual nature are common. Much of the struggle is directly related to the fact that people do not take advantage of having a spiritual father or mother. If you are your own guide, your struggles with sexual passions can be beyond your ability to fight, leading to despair.

Our bodies are temples that have been bought with a price. We do not, therefore, own our own bodies.

The sixties mantra of the women's movement that laid claim to the right of a woman to abort her baby is the ultimate result of the misuse of human sexuality. Much justice came out of the women's movement regarding equal pay, equal opportunity, the end to discrimination, and the right not to be sexually exploited. But the idea that a woman can make the decision to abort a child (or a man pressure her into it, which often happens) is unjust, because such a belief ignores the right of a child to life.

That a man would see sex with a woman as a right because he took her out to dinner and a movie is another example of the wrongful view of the role of sex.

Our bodies belong to God, and our sexuality should be expressed only in ways that are sanctioned by God's law. Yet no one should be embarrassed by struggles with masturbation or falling into other temptations of a sexual nature.

Without the help of a spiritual father or mother, abstinence can seem impossible, especially given the powerful drive of our sexual nature and the pressures of our society to express our sexuality freely. For young men or women who are bombarded with the tales of the sexual exploits of their friends, the struggle for purity can seem impossible. This is one more reason we need to surround ourselves with friends who are committed Christians and who know the importance of living lives centered on Christ. Again, frequent confession with one's spiritual father or confessor is a tool that can make all the difference in our struggle to be free of sinful passions and triumphant in our goal of purity before the Lord, who loves us so.

The Purpose of Our Sexuality

Our sexuality is a gift from God and is meant to feel good, but it is also a gift that has been given for a purpose. Through sexuality, our species increases, and through it a man and a woman become one. The sexual act between a husband and a wife is meant to unite them as one flesh, bringing them closer to each other in a bond of love. For this gift to be used in any other way is to trespass against God's intent.

Because our sexual drive is so powerful, it can be hard to control without the help of an experienced spiritual guide. In an age when sexual expression is seen as one's right and when many believe that people cannot be fulfilled if they are not sexually active, keeping oneself chaste can be a daunting task indeed. If everyone is doing it, how can it be wrong?

It is illogical for Christians to be selective about which commandments they are going to keep. We don't steal, because we know it is against God's commandments, and we don't murder another person, because we know all life is precious. Yet some of us think nothing of coveting another man's wife or sleeping with someone for the sake of personal pleasure. With such an attitude, an unborn child is dispensable because she is the inconvenient result of an evening of sexual gratification and would be costly to support.

Our human sexuality is a sacred gift from God. For the celibate monk or nun, this is a gift from God that we offer back to Him as a sign of our love and of our desire to be united completely to the Lord of lights. To the unmarried, sexuality is a gift saved for the marriage bed, where one gives of oneself to one's spouse.

SUNDAY

Tenth Sunday of Luke
Abstain from meat and dairy products.

Ephesians 2:14-22
Luke 13:10-17

DECEMBER 8

The Lord is not tired of hearing us complain all the time. He is tired of our sins, not our turning to Him for help. He wants us to call upon Him all the time and to pour out our hearts to Him. Prayer should not be something that is said and forgotten. You stand in front of an icon, recite your prayers, and go about your business. That is not prayer.

Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica †

HOLY APOSTLES OF THE SEVENTY: SOSTHENES, APOLLOS, CEPHAS, TYCHICUS, EPAPHRODITUS, CAESAR, AND ONESIPHORUS. The Seventy Apostles were chosen by Jesus Christ to preach. Sosthenes was the head of the Jewish synagogue in Corinth. During the riot against Apostle Paul, Sosthenes suffered a beating. Paul converted him to the faith in Christ and later he became Bishop of Colophon in Asia Minor. Apollos was a scholar from Alexandria who taught in Corinth. He converted many, and some sources place him as Bishop of Caesarea. He preached on the island of Crete. Cephas was Bishop at Colophon in Pamphylia. Tychicus was from Asia Minor and was a disciple and companion of the Apostle Paul. During Paul's imprisonment, Tychicus delivered Paul's Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians. He became the first Bishop of Neapolis in Cyprus according to one tradition. Epaphroditus was also a close companion of Apostle Paul and was the Bishop of Andriaca. Caesar was Bishop of Dyrrhachium in the Peloponnesus. These Holy Apostles all died peacefully. Onesiphorus was Bishop at Colophon and later at Corinth. He died a martyr in the city of Parium, near Ephesus.



COMMEMORATIONS: Apostles of the Seventy: Sosthenes, Apollos, Cephas, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, Caesar, and Onesiphorus; Patapios of Thebes; Anthusa, at Rome; Cyril, founder of Chelmogorsk Monastery (Karelia); Sophronius I, Bishop of Cyprus; Parthenios of Chios; Budock, Bishop of Dol; Valerius, Bishop of Trier.

MONDAY

Conception by St. Anna of the Most Holy Mother of God
Abstain from meat and dairy products.

Galatians 4:22-27; Luke 8:16-21

DECEMBER 9

God knows all those who belong to Him, always, no matter where they hide you, even if they squeeze you into some storage room, into some basement. When people want to make you invisible and totally insignificant by disregarding you and discarding you, God watches you. He knows you. He singles you out. You are His. Don't worry! What a great consolation this can be. God knows me. I am His. He knows me.

Elder Athanasios Mitilinaios †

CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION IN THE HOLY CITY. Emperor Constantine and his mother Helen built the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem and had it consecrated in the year 336. However, in the year 614, the Persians set fire to it and destroyed it. Twelve years later, Abbot Modestus, who would later become the Patriarch of Jerusalem, rebuilt it. In 934, the Saracens set fire to part of the church on Pascha, and again thirty-five years later, the Muslims set fire to the dome, stealing all the sacred objects in the church, and they martyred the patriarch in the flames. Then in 1010, the Muslims destroyed the church down to its foundation. Eighteen years later, Emperor Argyros of Constantinople began construction of a more modest version of the original church, which was completed in 1048. Fifty-one years later, the Crusaders stormed Jerusalem, and they ruled for eighty-eight years. The church has remained intact since its last reconstruction.



COMMEMORATIONS: Conception by St. Anna of the Most Holy Theotokos; Prophetess Anna (Hannah), mother of the Prophet Samuel; Stephen "the New Light" of Constantinople; Narses of Persia; New Martyr Priest Sergius Mechev of Moscow; Sositheus of Persia; Valeria of Aquitaine; Anthimus of Sofia, fool-for-Christ; Leocadia of Toledo, Spain; Commemoration of the Founding of the Church of the Resurrection at Jerusalem; *Unexpected Joy* Icon of the Mother of God.

TUESDAY

Abstain from meat and dairy products.

DECEMBER 10

2 Thessalonians 1:10-2:2
Mark 8:22-26

You look into a mirror so that you may know what is in your face, whether there are any blemishes in it, and having seen the blemishes, you cleanse them. Let the pure life of Christ be a mirror to your soul, look into it often and know what is in your soul... For in it you will see what is contrary to the life of Christ, and you will cleanse it all like blemishes with repentance and contrition of heart.

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

MARTYRS MENAS THE MELODIUS, HERMOGENES, AND EUGRAPHUS OF ALEXANDRIA. Menas was a renowned orator and a high officer under Emperor Maximian during the early fourth century. He was sent by the emperor from Athens to Alexandria to quell an uprising between the Christians and pagans. Instead, Menas declared he was a Christian and began preaching the Christian faith. When Maximian heard about this, he sent Hermogenes to Alexandria to put the saints on trial and purge the Christians from that city. Menas suffered many tortures. They cut out his tongue, severed his feet, and blinded him, but Jesus appeared to Menas in prison and healed him. Hermogenes was amazed at the saint's endurance and miraculous healings and believed in Christ. Maximian himself then came to Alexandria. He had Menas and Hermogenes tortured, but they endured courageously. Maximian personally stabbed Eugraphus, the secretary to Menas, and then gave orders to behead Menas and Hermogenes. Their relics were placed in an iron chest and thrown into the sea. The chest miraculously floated to Constantinople, where a bishop received foreknowledge of their arrival.



COMMEMORATIONS: Menas the Melodius, Hermogenes, and Eugraphus, of Alexandria; Hieromartyr Theoteknos; John, King of Serbia, and his parents Stephen the Blind and Angelina Brancovich; Gemellos of Paphlagonia; Martyrs Marianos and Eugenios; Athanasios of Methoni; Thomas Dephourkinos of Mt. Kyminas; Joasaph of Belgorod; Sergius and Anna of Sreznevo.

WEDNESDAY

Strict Fast

DECEMBER 11

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Mark 8:30-34

Until a man's earthly life finishes its course, the struggle between sin and righteousness continues within him up to the very departure of the soul from the body. No matter how high a spiritual and moral state one might achieve, a gradual or even headfirst and deep fall into the abyss of sin is always possible. Therefore, communion of the holy Body and Blood of Christ, which strengthens our contact with Him and refreshes us with the living streams of the grace of the Holy Spirit flowing through the Body of the Church is necessary for everyone.

St. John Maximovitch

SYNAXIS OF ALL SAINTS OF GEORGIA. This date has been set aside for the commemoration of the saints whose lives are known, and for the nearly three hundred saints who are only known by name, their deeds having been lost in history, as well as the countless ascetics and martyrs whose names and deeds are known only to God. St. George of the Holy Mountain wrote, "From the time we recognized the one true God, we have never renounced Him, nor have our people ever yielded to heresy." Most Georgian people are named after a saint commemorated on this day, and they beseech the saint to intercede before the Lord on their behalf.



COMMEMORATIONS: Daniel the Stylite of Constantinople; Mirax of Egypt; Barsabas of Ishtar, and 10 companions in Persia; Aeithalas and Acepisus at Arbela; Nicon "the Dry" of the Kiev Caves; Theophanes Ilimsky of Perm and Solikamsk, and 2 priests and 5 laymen; Nomon of Cyprus; Martyrs Terence, Vincent, Emilian, and Bebaia; Leontios of Monemvasia; Luke the New Stylite of Chalcedon; Nikephoros Phokas, Emperor of the Romans; Synaxis of All Saints of Georgia; Repose of St. Kuksha of Odessa.

DECEMBER 8th

1. Our Holy Father Patapius.

Born and brought up in the Faith and in the fear of God by pious parents in the Egyptian city of Thebes, he early perceived and rejected the empty vanity of the world and went into the Egyptian desert, where he devoted himself to cleansing his heart from every worldly thought and desire for the sake of divine love. When his virtues became known among the people, they began to come to him and seek relief from their troubles. Afraid of human glory, which darkens a man's mind and separates it from God, Patapius fled from the desert to Constantinople, for this wonderful saint thought that he could more easily hide himself from men in the heart of a city than in the desert. He built himself a hut close to the Blachernae church and there, enclosed and unknown, took up again his interrupted life of asceticism. But the light cannot be hidden. A child, blind from birth, was led by divine Providence to St Patapius and begged him to offer a prayer that he might be given his sight and look upon God's creation, and praise God all the more. Patapius had pity on the suffering child and prayed to God, and the child saw. Through this miracle, Patapius's godly life became known throughout the entire capital, and people began to turn to him for healing, comfort and teaching. Patapius healed one eminent man of dropsy after blessing him with a cross and anointing him with oil. Making the sign of the Cross in the air, he freed a youth from an unclean spirit which had cruelly tormented him, and the evil spirit went out of God's creature like smoke, uttering a great cry. He made the sign of the Cross over a woman who had sores on her breasts all filled with worms, and she was healed. St Patapius worked many other miracles, all through prayer in the name of Christ and by the power of the Cross. He entered into rest in great old age, going to the Kingdom of God in the seventh century.

2. The Holy Apostles Sosthenes, Apollos, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, Onesiphorus, Cephas and Caesar.

All these are commemorated on January 4th with the other lesser

apostles. St Apollos is also commemorated on September 10th, St Onesiphorus on September 7th, and Cephas and Caesar on March 30th. St Sosthenes was Bishop of Caesarea and Tychicus succeeded him in the same city. Epaphroditus was bishop in Colophon in Pamphylia, Cephas in Iconium and Caesar in the Peloponnese. They all preached the Gospel of Christ with burning love, and endured suffering for His name's sake before they entered into the Kingdom of eternal joy.

3. The Holy Martyrs in Africa.

They suffered for the truth of Orthodoxy in the reign of Gunerik of the Vandals (477-484), at the hands of the heretical Arians. Two priests were burned, sixty had their tongues torn out and three hundred laymen were beheaded. All of them suffered terribly, but they overcame falsehood by their deaths, and Orthodoxy was strengthened and was handed down to us pure and untarnished. The Lord crowned them with crowns of glory in His immortal Kingdom.

* * *

FOR CONSIDERATION

He who entrusts himself completely to God is led by Him towards salvation, and is used by Him for the good of many others. St Nicolas, entrusting himself to the will of God, fled from human vanity, from his town of Patara, and came to the city of Myra in Lycia, where he knew no-one and was known by none. With no means at all of supporting himself (for, although he had been rich, he had abandoned everything), without acquaintance and without any plan, he went unnoticed about the city, waiting for God to direct his footsteps. At that time, John, the archbishop of the city, died and the Synod that was assembled for the election of a new archbishop could not agree on any one candidate. Finally, the members of the Synod decided to fast and pray that God would show them who was most worthy of the position. God heard the

prayers of His servants, and disclosed to them who was the most worthy. While the presiding bishop was standing at prayer, a man appeared to him, clothed in white, and told him to go out early and stand in front of the church, awaiting the first man to arrive for morning prayer. 'Make him archbishop; he is called Nicolas', he said. The bishop informed the others of what he had heard and seen, and he went to the church early the next morning and waited. St Nicolas, who was accustomed to rising early to pray, came to the church. Seeing him, the bishop asked: 'What is your name, my son?' Nicolas was silent. The bishop asked him again, and this time he answered: 'I am called Nicolas, and am your lordship's servant.' Then the bishop took him by the hand and, leading him into the Synod, said: 'Receive, my brethren, your pastor, whom the Holy Spirit has anointed and who has been elected not by a human Synod but by divine Providence.'

TO PONDER

Let me ponder on the first brotherhood of men upon earth (Gen. 4):

1. How Cain and Abel were the first brothers on earth.
2. How Abel was chaste and God-fearing, and Cain envious and self-willed.
3. How the envious Cain slew the chaste Abel.

HOMILY

— on the curse of sinful works.

'Cursed is the earth in thy works'
(Gen. 3:17).

After Adam and Eve's sin, God pronounced a punishment, not immediately but after waiting some time for their repentance. This is shown in the conversation into which God entered with Adam after his sin: 'Where art thou?', God asked Adam, and when Adam said that he had hidden himself on account of his nakedness, God

asked him again: 'Who told thee that thou art naked?' Instead of repenting, Adam began to accuse his wife. It was after that, that God pronounced His punishment. Upon the serpent, which had served as the devil's instrument, there fell a general curse. The woman was condemned to bring forth children in sorrow and that her will be subjected to her husband. It is not so much a curse as a punishment with hope. Man was condemned to till the earth. But what do the words mean: 'Cursed is the earth in thy works'? Did God curse the earth with the same general curse as He did the serpent? Not at all. The earth is cursed only in the sinful works of man. Because of man's sin, the earth brings forth thorns; because of sin, infertility exists; because of sin, there are droughts, floods, earthquakes, and harmful plagues of insects, of locusts, of caterpillars and of sicknesses. But it is evident, because the earth brings forth good fruit also, that the earth was not cursed in its entirety. God has always blessed, through the prayers of the righteous, those fruits of the earth necessary for human life, and even the angels of God, as Abram's guests, ate of the earth's produce (Gen. 18:1-8). For in what way is the earth, and all the rest of God's creation on earth except for the serpent, guilty of Adam's sin? However, 'the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together with us until now' (Rom. 8:22). It does not groan and travail because of a curse upon itself, but because of the sinful works of man that are cursed.

Oh, my brethren, let us be ashamed of our sin, which has brought suffering to God's innocent creation.

O our gracious God, forgive us our past sins and preserve us from future ones. O our merciful God, have mercy on all Thine innocent creation, which suffers because of us, and alleviate its suffering. To Thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.