

## November 1 – Tuesday – Kellia Reading – Joshua 8:1-12

**Right Action: Joshua 8:1-12, especially vss. 1-2:** “The Lord said to Joshua, ‘Do not be afraid, nor be cowardly. Take all the men of war with you and arise, go up to Ai. Behold, I have given the king of Ai and his land into your hands. . . . Prepare for yourself an ambush from behind the city.’” Abba Dorotheos says, in discussing spiritual battle, “The sufferings of combat purify [a man] little by little and bring him back to the natural state.” Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos adds a caveat to this statement: “Besides man’s effort, if the Holy Spirit does not descend, the dead *nous* cannot be purified and brought to life.” Right action requires “the working together of divine grace and the human will” (Vlachos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, p. 41). If we accept that divine-human cooperation is necessary to achieve right action, we have a basis for comparing the preparations that Joshua and Israel make before battle – first at Jericho (Jos 5:13-6:5) and Ai (vss. 7:2-5), and then in the second assault of Ai which is described in the present reading (vss. 8:1-2).

As Israel prepares for the first assault at Ai, we notice a glaring omission: the people fail to seek the counsel and plan of God. This presumption invites delusion and failure. How, then, can effective action follow? In the first assault at Ai the spies are the ones who set the battle plan, rather than the Lord (vs. 7:3)!

Even Joshua fails – he sends his spies and accepts their plan without considering God. The text states plainly, “Then Joshua sent men into Ai” (vs. 2). Neither direction from God nor waiting upon the Lord are mentioned; the action is not based on His will and counsel. Let us apply this truth in everything: “Seek God, and when you find Him, call upon Him when He draws near to you” (Is 55:6)!

Now let us examine closely the Lord’s direction in the later plan of action at Ai. Before the Lord gives instruction on this occasion, Joshua opens himself to God in prayer. The Lord specifically addresses Joshua’s fear stemming from the earlier defeat. God then builds his confidence with a promise and sets forth a condition: Ai is to be a holocaust. He then gives Joshua a plan detailing an ambush for the attack (vss. 8:1-2).

Having been thoroughly chastened by his earlier defeat, Joshua now faces the same opponents and dangers as before. He knows that Ai’s warriors are able to defeat his troops. However, this time the prophet displays a right spiritual approach. He turns first to prayer. Note that the passage begins with the phrase “the Lord said. . . .” (vs. 1). Among the instructions that follow is God’s command to “arise” (vs. 1). Joshua is already in prayer, prostrate before the Lord. Clearly, the prophet is open this time around to hearing the Lord.

God knows the fear and trepidation of Joshua and his followers as a result of their earlier neglect and bitter defeat. He begins with an assurance to strengthen the prophet’s heart: “Do not be afraid, nor be cowardly” (vs. 1). The Lord then adds this promise: “I have given the king of Ai and his land into your hands” (vs. 1). God meets Joshua’s awakened trust and treats the coming action as *fait accompli*.

Along with the general conditions for a holocaust (“You shall do to Ai as you did to Jericho”), the Lord adds the gift of cattle as spoil after the engagement (vs. 2). Most significantly – and typical of all right action – God provides the basic battle plan from the start: “Prepare for yourself an ambush from behind the city” (vs. 2). Surely the obedient execution of a God-given plan will always lead to the best outcome in the end!

*Strengthen us, O Lord, in all our doings and further us with Thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued and ended in Thee, we may glorify Thy holy name.* – Prayer of Thanksgiving

## November 2 – Wednesday – Kellia Reading – Joshua 8:13-29

**Humiliation and Humility: *Joshua 8:13-29, especially vs. 17:*** “Then the Lord said to Joshua, ‘Stretch out your hand with the spear in your hand toward the city, for I have given it into your hands; and the ambush will rise up quickly from their place.’” Few of us relish the chagrin of a defeat as humiliating as the one Israel endured at Ai. If, however, we bring the right mindset to a tough problem, the result may be true spiritual gain – especially if we learn from the Lord the cause of our earlier loss. Addressing our bitter humiliation with Him may yield genuine victory, but only if we choose humility as the viable pathway. As Saint Nikolai of Zicha says, “The first exercise for a recruit in Christ’s army is practice in obedience and humility” (*Homilies* vol. 1, p. 13).

Israel’s first foray against Ai results in devastating humiliation. The death of thirty-six warriors and the flight of a seasoned military force before the advance of the enemy is the price God’s people pay for acting apart from the commanding leadership of God. In directing Israel to return to Ai, the Lord gives his people an opportunity to grow from humiliation into true humility. Every disciple of the Lord needs to realize that we cannot grow in humility unless we overcome deadly pride in ourselves. By following this sure path we grow in every virtue pleasing to God.

Humiliation and humility are not the same thing, although both derive from the root word *humus*, which means “earth.” The defeat and subsequent victory at Ai illustrates the difference. The thirty-six who fall before the defenders of Ai are a grievous humiliation for Israel and lead God’s people to His footstool. Up until that time the people had been consistently victorious. We recall Israel’s joyous psalmody as the people exulted in their victory at the Red Sea – “horse and rider He has thrown into the sea” (Ex 15:1) – and after He “smote great kings” (Ps 135:17). Just before Ai, Israel had seen the miraculous collapse of the walls of Jericho, the taking of that fortress, and its offering to God as a holocaust. Yet Ai brings defeat and humiliation.

The sequence of events reveals that pride is the sinful passion that leads to the people’s defeat in the wake of their Jericho triumph. Pride works their undoing, for they mindlessly attacked a spiritual foe without being grounded in the Lord’s will – the true source of every victory. Even Joshua, God’s own prophet, is lulled into complacency by the tide of successive victories and sends spies to Ai without first seeking the Lord (Jos 7:2). Even worse, he deploys a three-thousand-man combat team based on the advice of these spies, who are mere men. When pride is the invitation, humiliation follows swiftly, “so the hearts of the people were terrified and became as water” (vs. 7:5).

That Joshua and Israel then humble themselves is evident from their actions after their defeat. He and the elders “fell to the ground before the face of the Lord . . . and they put dust on their heads” (vs. 7:6). With the sprinkling of dried earth they acknowledge the sin of pride in their hearts and come before God with a life-giving humility.

This passage reveals the great value of humiliation, which encourages Israel to follow the Lord’s plan in humility and to find a gracious outcome through obedience. When the people execute the Lord’s tactical ruse, they defeat their pagan enemies (vss. 8:14-24). To bless them in growing spiritually, the Lord then gives “the cattle and the spoils in the city [since] everything which the sons of Israel took as spoils, they did according to the ordinance of the Lord” (vs. 25).

“The beginning of the mortification of both the soul’s desire and of the bodily members is much hard work. . . . Only when [the disciple] sees himself doing his own will does this blessed living corpse feel sorry and sick at heart . . . of using his own judgment” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 4.4, p. 21).

*O Thou Who resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble, enable us to humble ourselves under Thy mighty hand, be clothed with humility, and cast all our care upon Thee.* – Based on 1 Peter 5:5-7

## November 3 – Thursday – Kellia Reading – Joshua 24:1-30

**Choosing and Covenanting: Joshua 24:1-30, especially vs. 15:** “*But if it does not please you to serve the Lord, choose gods for yourselves today whom you will serve. . . . But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord, because He is holy.*” Ancient Israel’s covenant serves as a type of the covenant that each one of us makes with Jesus Christ, our King and God; we renew it each time we recite the Nicene Creed. At Shiloh, Israel acts as a united community. The New Israel, the Church, affirms during the Divine Liturgy what each candidate for baptism declares when uniting himself “unto Christ.” Our baptismal vows, together with our recitation of the Creed, join us to Christ amidst His people.

Joshua first gathers the people of Israel to “set them before God” (vs. 1). The priest likewise begins by presenting the Lord God of truth, the Only Begotten Son and Holy Spirit, to the person seeking baptism.

In recounting how God brought Abraham out of idolatry from “the other side of the river” (vs. 2) and “led him into all the land” (vs. 3), then brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt (vss. 4-7) and “gave [them] a land” (vs. 13), Joshua celebrates the very Lord who led them to Shiloh. In the exorcism that precedes baptism, the priest similarly asks God to act in this person in order to root out the Devil, to “crush down Satan, give . . . victory . . . over foul spirits,” and make the candidate a “sheep in Christ’s holy flock.”

After exorcism, the Church expects the baptismal candidate to “remove the foreign gods . . . and serve the Lord” (vss. 14, 18). We must “renounce Satan, and all his angels, and all his works, and all his service, and all his pride” and “unite [ourselves] unto Christ.” We vow to forsake all other gods and any type of bondage that draws us away from Him.

Father Alexander Schmemmann states that union with Christ is “more than some sort of psychological ‘unity.’ It is a profession of personal attachment to Christ . . . an enrollment in the ranks of those who serve Christ. . . . an oath similar to the one taken by soldiers” (*Of Water and the Spirit*, p. 31). For Israel, as for each Christian, covenanting with God always entails risk – if one fails to “serve the Lord” (vs. 19), He may “come and deal harshly . . . and consume you” (vs. 20). According to Father Schmemmann, the Creed implies that “each one is responsible for the whole faith” (p. 33). Thus the prayers read over the baptismal waters beseech God that the new Christian may “prove himself a child of the Light” and not of the darkness, for our God “is wonderful and glorious and terrible unto adversaries.”

At Shiloh, “Joshua established a covenant with the people . . . and gave them a law and judgment” (vs. 25). Similarly, at baptism each servant of God is anointed “unto the hearing of faith . . . that he may walk in the way of [God’s] commandments.” Each of us “is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit;” with this name God claims authority, power, and dominion over us – over our every word, deed, and commitment in this life and for the ages.

Holy chrismation seals the newly baptized child of God with “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” By God’s grace we are made *warriors invincible*, that we may be counted among Christ’s “victors . . . unto the end” – that is, “justified . . . illumined . . . sanctified” in God’s name. In baptizing with water and anointing with chrism, the Church fulfills the pledge Joshua makes to ancient Israel when he sets “a large stone” among them (vs. 26). God likewise sets the chrism of the Holy Spirit upon our bodies as a memorial and “witness in the last days, whenever [we] lie to the Lord . . . God” (vs. 27).

*Help us; save us; have mercy on us; and keep us, O God, by Thy grace that we may always commend ourselves and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God.* – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

**November 4 – Friday – Proverbs 10:8, 23; 3:13-15,17-18; 8:32, 34, 4, 12, 14, 17, 5-9; 22:20; 15:4**  
**First Reading at Vespers for Saint Raphael of Brooklyn**

**The Blessed of God: Proverbs 3:13:** “*Blessed is the man who has found wisdom, and the mortal who knows prudence.*” The Church designates this selection of verses as the first vespereal reading for the feast of a glorified hierarch such as Saint Raphael of Brooklyn. Why do we say, “The blessing of the Lord is upon the head” (vs. 10:7) of such men? Verse 3:13 quoted above provides the answer: Saint Raphael and other holy bishops found Wisdom and enriched the lives of God’s people with *her* (vss. 3:15, 16).

Referring to Wisdom with a personal pronoun clearly directs us to a Person – one who has power against evil, who can give us long life, riches, and glory, and who speaks righteously, authoritatively, and mercifully (vss. 3:14-18). The noun *sophia* or “wisdom” happens to be feminine in both Greek and Hebrew, but Holy Tradition recognizes Wisdom to be none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. For instance, the Emperor Justinian dedicated the Church of Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) in Constantinople to Jesus Christ, the Holy Wisdom of God.

If we stop to think about it, the characteristics of Wisdom in these verses readily apply to Jesus. Indeed, verses 14-18 of this passage can only describe Him.

“Nothing evil will withstand [Him]” (vs. 3:15): Satan tried to vanquish Jesus, but could not overcome Him. Sin never captivated Him; death could not hold Him. What evil can we imagine that could ever come close to defeating Him? Christ our God trampled down every evil.

“Length of days and years of life are in [His] right hand” (vs. 3:17): Lazarus the-four-days-dead came forth from the grave to enjoy more years in this life and ultimately eternal life as well (Jn 11:39-44). As God the Father “has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself” (Jn 5:26).

“In [His] left hand are riches and glory” (Prv 3:17). “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom 11:33)! Why else do we say, “Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit”? Christ is glory and bestows it (see Rom 8:18).

“Righteousness proceeds from [His] mouth, and [He] carries law and mercy upon [His] tongue” (Prv 3:18): We know that “Christ Jesus . . . became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30).

“Counsel and safety are mine; discernment is mine, and strength is mine” (Prv 8:14): No other counselor provides so sure a path to safety, discernment, and strength as Christ. As God the Father advises, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Mk 9:7).

“I love those who love me, and those who seek me shall find me” (Prv 8:17). Note that the Lord Jesus not only commands us to hearken to Him and to seek Him diligently, but also promises that when we do so we shall find Him: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7). Countless souls tell us, “It is so!”

In this age the world chases after knowledge and information technologies are growing all around us, yet Wisdom is ours if we will only heed Him! “Obey me, for I speak sacred things, and from my lips I will bring forth things that are true” (Prv 8:6). Yes, the Lord Jesus teaches us to know Him as the true, unique Wisdom: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). “I will not leave you orphans . . . because I live, you will live also” (Jn 14:18-19).

*Thou art baptized. Thou art illumined. Thou hast received anointment with Holy Chrism. Thou art washed: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* – Chrismation Prayer

**November 5 – Saturday – Proverbs 10:31-11:12**  
**Second Reading at Vespers for Saint Raphael of Brooklyn**

**Undying Hope: Proverbs 10:31-11:12, especially vs. 3:** “When a righteous man dies, he leaves regret, but the destruction of the ungodly is immediate and brings joy.” The arrival of Father Raphael Hawaweeny in New York in 1895 ignited hope in the hearts of Arab Christian immigrants in North America: now their ancient faith could become an active presence in the scattered communities where they had settled. During his twenty years of ministry as a priest and bishop, Saint Raphael established thirty parishes in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. At the time of his repose in February 1915, the Church was able to rejoice in the fruits of his labor as the “good shepherd of the lost sheep in America.” Even as the faithful mourned his death, they knew that what this servant of God had fostered would not perish, for a “city stays upright in the good things of the righteous” (vs. 9).

Saint Raphael’s life encourages us to meditate on the undying nature of our hope in Christ. In this fallen world, countless hopes and expectations have turned into nothing more than dust and ashes. Our desires may be dashed by others, or by the relentless forces of nature, the seductive snares of short-sighted human imagination, and the unforeseen convergence of events. We might agree with Shakespeare’s Macbeth that “life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more.”

Alongside its dismal chronicles, history also records promises realized in the form of valuable discoveries and lasting achievements that benefit our race. What men envision does not always disappoint, and yet our best human striving remains finite, fixed within the inescapable boundaries of change and mortality. How remarkable, then, to discover a faith unquenchable even in the face of death – an undying hope!

The ancient people of God, living among the nations of the fertile crescent, were blessed with an unheard-of confidence. Their neighbors never looked to their gods in hope, only with fear. Although the Israelites knew about unrealized dreams, when God promised them freedom from slavery they saw their masters drown before their eyes in the Red Sea. God promised them their own land, and they won it. God chastened their sins with seventy-years of exile and slavery in Babylon, but then restored them to their land as a free nation.

God plants hope in the breasts of His people, which causes Israel not only to “look to the Lord” but also to “wait for God my Savior” (Mic. 7:7). They affirm before God: “Thou art my hope from my youth” (Ps 70:4). The nation learns to sing in its darkest hours, “O Lord, the steadfast endurance of Israel, You deliver us in the time of evils” (Jer 14:8). God shows His people that “He is our helper and our defender” (Ps 32:20). And at a certain time, undying Hope Himself is born among us, a Savior who is stronger than death.

This true helper and defender joins Himself to our mortal flesh, “as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever” (Lk 1:55). He dies our common death in order to trample down death by death, and gives us “the riches of the glory of [the] mystery . . . which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). We who walk in Christ bear Solomon’s truth on our lips: “When a righteous man dies, his hope does not perish” (Prv 11:6)!

*O Christ, our Immortal King and our God, establish our souls where the just repose; the mercies of God, the kingdom of heaven and remission of our sins, for we do hope in Thee. –Funeral Service*

**November 6 – Sunday – Wisdom of Solomon 4:7-15,  
Third Reading at Vespers for Saint Raphael of Brooklyn**

**Grace and Mercy: Wisdom of Solomon 4:7-15, especially vs. 15:** “*The Lord’s grace and mercy are with His elect, and . . . He watches over His holy ones.*” Grace and mercy are two divine energies by which we know God; through them, love for our Father in heaven is ignited within us. When we contemplate the great mercy of Christ, who gave Himself for our salvation and extends eternal life to us, it evokes love and gratitude. This love, in turn, impels us to strive for sanctification and theosis. Thus we discover that the grace and mercy of God are at work in us, completing our paltry efforts to attain the godliness He has revealed. That is mercy and grace!

As we seek to embrace God’s grace and mercy in our lives, we do well to contemplate the life of Saint Raphael of Brooklyn. While he was still in the womb, the mercy of God spared him and his parents during an anti-Christian riot in Damascus, Syria. The family fled to Beirut and there, at his baptism, the child was named for the great Archangel Raphael.

As a young boy he did exceptionally well in school, but financial circumstances forced him to discontinue his education. However, the mercy of God provided a benefactor who helped him gain entrance to the patriarchal school in Damascus. By God’s grace he graduated with distinction and chose to be tonsured a monk. He then applied to the Ecumenical Patriarch’s school of theology on the island of Halki. When the school’s doctors examined him, they declared him too thin and weak for the hardships of study. Acting again with mercy, God provided an intermediary who secured the young monk’s admission. The patriarch himself was moved by God to provide for Saint Raphael’s daily needs.

After three years of study at Halki, Saint Raphael graduated and was ordained. Shortly afterwards, he was assigned to live in Moscow as a representative of the Patriarchate of Antioch. God in His grace led Saint Raphael a few years later to serve as an instructor in Greek and Arabic at the Russian seminary in Kazan. While there, he was called to minister to a group of Arab Christian immigrants in the New World. He arrived in New York in 1895 to serve a congregation in Brooklyn. However, he also traveled constantly across the United States, Canada, and Mexico, seeking out the lost sheep of Christ among the Syrian immigrants.

The Holy Synod of Moscow approved a plan to ordain him as bishop for the Syrian Vicariate in America in 1904. Over the next eleven years, he cared for his people in Brooklyn and founded many other parishes in North America. He was like a vessel pouring out God’s grace and mercy across the continent, exhausting his own health in the process of fulfilling his mission.

In 1911, the Russian Orthodox Archbishop Platon publicly honored Bishop Raphael with these words: “This day . . . is beautified by the intelligence, wisdom, zeal, concern, piety, perseverance, and the patience of our brother Bishop Raphael. . . . Have you not worked in the Lord’s field so that your seeds have brought forth fruits and yielded ten-fold? Have you not made Orthodoxy and piety to grow, and preached the faith and the Gospel of salvation? . . . Have you not visited the United States, Canada, and Mexico, preaching, counseling, teaching, and performing services? . . . Have you not suffered grief, persecution, hunger, nakedness, even arrest, for Christ’s sake? And in all this you stood firm” (Antiochian Archdiocese, *Our Father Among the Saints, Raphael of Brooklyn*, p. 60-1). Saint Raphael was a true vessel of grace and mercy!

*O thrice-blessed Raphael, having received grace from God, thou didst let thy light shine so brightly . . . that all of those who had been in darkness gave glory to our Father in heaven.* –Festal Verse for Saint Raphael

**November 7 – Monday – Joshua 5:13-15**  
**First Reading at Vespers for the Holy Archangels**

**Bodiless Powers – Manifestations: Joshua 5:13-15, especially vs. 13:** “Then it came to pass, when Joshua was at Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing before him with a sword drawn in his hand.” According to Saint Nikolai of Zicha, “That the angels are constantly involved in this world is testified to, clearly and unmistakably, in Holy Scripture” (*Prologue From Ochrid* vol. 4, p. 172). This short passage from the Book of Joshua supports this assertion. At the same time, these verses reveal how to respond to the presence and activity of the bodiless powers who are ever near us. God reminds us to be alert, for they are with us and aiding us, He discloses what to expect from the angels and, lastly, He indicates how we are to honor the bodiless ones.

Let us consider first the situation of Joshua, the prophet and warrior of God. He “was at Jericho” (vs. 13), reconnoitering, praying, considering the plan of attack, and pondering the word of God that he had received: “Every place on which you tread with you feet, I will give it to you, as I said to Moses” (Jos 1:3). God’s prophet obeys the word from the Lord by leading the people across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. He prepares them by circumcision and a celebration of Passover. Now the stark reality of engagement confronts him as he stands before the looming walls of the fortress city of Jericho. Lifting up his eyes and looking at the defenses, he sees “a man standing before him with a sword drawn in his hand” (vs. 13).

Before Joshua stands the Archangel Michael, “chief captain of the host of the Lord” (vs. 14), who appears to him as God’s anointed leader of the army of the Lord’s people on earth. Saint Michael appears in human form, in a manner accessible to Joshua’s heart and mind: as a soldier, a warrior ready for battle with sword in hand (vs. 13).

We mortals, fashioned of the stuff of earth, readily apprehend a fellow human being when we meet one, despite any differences in race, ethnicity, appearance, or gender. God knows this perfectly well, and thus the supreme revelation of truth is the incarnation of God the Son: “In these last days [He has] spoken to us by His Son” (Heb 1:2). God speaks to us in such a way that we may comprehend those things He wishes us to know.

In this appearance, Archangel Michael comes in a form quite specific to Joshua’s immediate situation. He is dressed as a soldier ready for combat, like Joshua himself. So obvious is this fact to Joshua that he immediately inquires, “Are you for us or on the side of our adversaries?” (vs. 13). Because Joshua is absorbed in the military mission given to him by the Lord, God presents His earthly commander with the chief of His heavenly hosts.

What can we learn from this encounter? Whenever we are obediently engaged in a labor to which God has called us, giving His work our undivided attention and considering its concrete elements in prayer and reflection, the Lord faithfully sends a messenger to encourage us. Note that the archangel comes to Joshua while he is carrying out God’s commands on the plains of Jericho. God is more likely to send angelic support – whether in a form visible to our bodily eyes, or only to the eyes of the heart – at those moments when we are actively engaged in His work in this world.

In the interaction between the archangel and Joshua, we also observe the proper response when encountering a messenger of God. “Joshua fell on his face upon the earth and said to him, ‘O Master, what do you command your servant?’” (vs. 14). Joshua knows that he must be reverent, honoring the angel and the ground he stands on as Moses had done earlier at the burning bush (Ex 3:5). May God help us to hallow and reverence the bodiless ones who speak to us on His behalf.

*O Lord our help, who knowest we can do nothing without Thee, assist and guide us through Thy holy angels that we may accomplish those tasks to which Thou hast called us.* – Prayer Before Commencing Any Task

**November 8 – Tuesday – Judges 6:2, 7, 11-24**  
**Second Reading at Vespers for the Holy Archangels**

**Bodiless Powers, continued – Messengers: Judges 6:2, 7, 11-24, especially vss. 22-23:** “Now Gideon perceived this was the Angel of the Lord. So Gideon said, ‘O Lord, my Lord! For I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face.’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Peace be with you, do not fear, you shall not die.’” The Greek word which translates into English as “angel” is the common term for a courier or messenger. Here the angel who appears to Gideon is identified more specifically as “the Angel of the Lord” (vss. 11).

To Gideon, who is hiding inside a winepress, the angel’s friendly greeting, “The Lord is with you” (vs. 12), does not alert him at first that his visitor is one of the bodiless powers. In fact, when the angel calls him “you mighty man of the armies,” Gideon expresses the pain he suffers under “the hand of Midian” (vs. 2). The Midianite pillaging weighs heavily upon him, complicating his wheat harvest. He cannot thresh out in the open, but conceals his activities behind the walls of a winepress to avoid the marauders. Thus he offers the angel this poignant retort: “If the Lord is with us, why then have these evils come upon us?” (vs. 13).

Gideon’s perilous situation, and that of his neighbors, leads him to doubt that the Lord is indeed *with him* (vs. 12). How readily we conclude, because we find ourselves in degrading or demeaning circumstances, that God is neither present nor active in our lives. For this reason, one of the chief works of the bodiless powers is to get our attention and confront us in our despondency.

Angels are unseen messengers who dispel our spurious assumptions by offering us the word of God. The angel comes to Gideon to help him accept the Lord’s plan for Israel. Let us consider what kind of messages our own guardian angels bring: warnings to avoid dangers, calls to worship or prayer, counsel in choosing among various options, support for following what is God’s highest and best in life.

However, angels have a multitude of barriers to cross in order to deliver God’s word to our hearts and minds. We can be quite dense spiritually! Often, the angels have to assure us that we are hearing a genuine bidding or message from God.

Gideon is told to “go . . . and you shall save Israel from the Midianites” (vs. 14). Like many who hear the word of the Lord, however, his response is to question, for he does not trust God to complete what is lacking in him. Moses asks, “Who am I?” (Ex 3:11). Isaiah sees only his sins (Is 6:5). Gideon calls himself “the smallest in my father’s house” (Jgs 6:15). The angels, as God’s messengers, are tasked to bring us God’s encouragement, to assure us that He will empower us for carrying out that which He asks us to do (vs. 16).

The Lord Jesus assures us that not even a hair of our head shall perish (Lk 21:18). But note what often happens after an angel comes to quiet our mind and heart. While we may understand the potential of the word he brings from God, agitation and fear may still arise (Jgs 6:22). In the end, God speaks directly to Gideon (vs. 23), but only after the weak man of Manasseh arrives at the firm knowledge that he has received a true messenger from the Lord, not a demon or a fantasy of his own making.

If we cry out in our fear and hesitation, we discover that the Lord is not indifferent to our struggles. Indeed, Christ our God “like His brethren. . . Himself has suffered, being tempted” (Heb. 2:17-18). God speaks peace and dispels fear so that we may act. He prepares us to worship Him and to offer ourselves in His service (Jgs 6:24).

*Through the intercession of Thy holy angels and the power of Thy Spirit, lift us to Thy presence, O Lord, that we may be still, honor Thee as God, and serve Thee with peace of heart.* – Episcopal Book of Common Prayer

**November 9 – Wednesday – Daniel 10:1-21**  
**Third Reading at Vespers for the Holy Archangels**

**The Powers of Heaven: Daniel 10:1-21, especially vs. 13:** “*But the prince of the Persian kingdom withstood me twenty-one days, and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me. . . .*” The Church assigns this passage because it names the Archangel Michael twice, in verses 13 and 21. However, this chapter as a whole discloses a great deal not only about him, but all the powers of heaven.

The chapter serves as the prologue to an extended “word,” i.e., vision (vs. 1), introducing the final two chapters of Daniel. These verses, along with the rest of the Book of Daniel, are the earliest apocalyptic writings found in Holy Scripture. The word *apocalyptic* derives from the Greek and implies a “revelation” or “unveiling” of future events that are presently hidden, except to the one who receives the word – in this case, the Prophet Daniel.

Daniel lived in exile in Mesopotamia after Judah was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (see Jer 46:1-3). He deliberately seeks a vision (Dan 10:1-3) to help him “understand what will happen to [his] people in the last days” (vs. 14). In this passage, a heavenly word comes to him with great force. Although “Daniel alone saw the vision, . . . a great astonishment fell upon [those with him], and they fled in fear” (vs. 7). The angelic person who meets the Prophet is dazzling and “the sound of his words . . . like the voice of a multitude” (vs. 5-6). Daniel is “troubled” and falls face down on the ground (vs. 9); he observes that “my splendor was turned into corruption, and I retained no strength” (vs. 8).

Who is this person that speaks to Daniel, touches him, and sets him back on his feet (vss. 10-11)? One of the Church Fathers understands him to be the pre-incarnate Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, sent by God the Father (vs. 11). Other fathers believe that he is the Archangel Gabriel, mentioned elsewhere in Daniel (8:16; 9:21). The radiant *man* who speaks to Daniel certainly has the authority of God (vs. 10:12). Note that there is a prince – an archangel – who is loyal to the heavenly man who delivers the word and vision of God to Daniel concerning “what will happen to your people in the last days, for the vision is for days yet to come” (vs. 14).

We also note that the heavenly man comes to Daniel despite his difficulties with “the prince of the Persian kingdom [who] withstood me twenty-one days” until the Archangel Michael, “one of the chief princes, came to help me” (vs. 13). Verse thirteen thus discloses another role of the angelic leaders: to serve as heavenly defenders of entire nations, much as our personal guardian angels care for the welfare of each and every baptized Christian.

The Church provides this reading at vespers for the Synaxis of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel and All the Bodiless Powers of Heaven. As the title of the feast suggests, this day is for celebrating the active work of the angels on behalf of the Church.

Most Orthodox temples display icons of the two chief archangels on the deacon doors, located at either end of the iconostasis, which lead into the altar area. These icons remind us that the bodiless powers protect God’s holy nation, i.e., His very own people who are at work in this age to “proclaim the praises of Him Who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pt 2:9).

How blessed we are to have such powerful heavenly allies who are active on our behalf, for the entire Church, for our nations and this confused world! Let us pray that they save us “from straits, temptations and perils and every need” (verse for the feast).

*O Holy Archangels, deliver us from all dangers as marshals of the heavenly hosts.* –Vespers Hymn for the Feast

**November 10 – Thursday – Kellia Reading – Judges 2:1-5, 11-23**

**Being Tested: Judges 2:1-5, 11-23, especially vss. 16-17:** “Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges and the Lord saved them from the hand of those who plundered them. But even so, they would not listen to their judges, but instead they played the harlot with other gods and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do so.”

This passage serves as a kind of a prelude to the Book of Judges. Initially, “the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to the place of weeping and to Bethel and to the house of Israel” (vs. 1). He brings a word from the Lord: “I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land I promised your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; nor shall you worship their gods, but you will destroy their graven images and you shall tear down their altars.’ But you did not obey My voice, for you did these things” (vss. 1-2).

The angel further declares God’s judgment: “I will not drive them out before you, and they shall become as snares, and their gods shall be a cause for stumbling for you” (vs. 3). Yet even as the people weep and sacrifice to God, they still “did evil before the Lord and served the Baals” (vs. 11).

The text clearly specifies that the angel speaks to Israel at the *place of weeping* (vss. 1, 5) rather than at Gilgal, where the people first entered the land (Jos 4:19). At Gilgal they set up twelve stones “that all the nations of the land might know that the power of the Lord is mighty; and that [they] might worship the Lord . . . in every age” (vs. 4:24).

Again, the angel waits to deliver God’s judgment until he comes to Bethel, which is earlier called “the house of God . . . and the gate of heaven” (Gn 28:17). It was at Bethel that the Lord promised the land to them, so that they might be a blessing to “all the tribes of the earth” (vs. 14). Now, however, it becomes *the place of weeping* (Jgs 2:1), for God’s people have joined the pagans in worshipping “other gods from among the gods of the nations all around them,” which “provoked the Lord to anger” (vs. 12).

The Lord’s promise remains, but now His people must weep, for they have forsaken “the Lord God of our fathers.” The promises that the Lord gives us in Christ are far greater than any land, and yet they too require us to shed tears because of our sins, and to struggle to attain life-giving purity.

Why does the Lord decide to test Israel’s walk before Him (vss. 21-23)? Surely it is because they “did evil before the Lord and served the Baals” (vs. 11). Sin is always the cause of the trials which the Lord allows to come upon His people. The Baals [Baalim] were gods worshiped by the Canaanites, who believed that these deities governed human fertility. Prostitution was a regular part of their worship, along with occasional infant sacrifice. Their goddesses or “Ashtoreths” (vs. 13) included Astarte and Aphrodite, whose worship included lascivious practices such as sodomy, bestiality, and infanticide.

No wonder *serving* these gods “provoked the Lord” (vs. 12). We find their counterparts in the world today, which serves them with lust and the performance of abortions. Like the world of ancient Israel, our society is saturated with the *snares* of sensuality – but Christ asks us to remain “unspotted from the world” (Jas 1:27).

Just as the Lord leaves idolatry in place in order to test His ancient people, He allows hedonism to flourish today so that we may choose to “keep the ways of the Lord” (Jgs 2:22). Once, “the Lord raised up judges” to save Israel (vs. 16); now He provides the Church, Holy Scripture, and the sacraments for our salvation.

*O my Lord, may Thy communion cause all evil and passion to flee away from me as from fire, through the intercession of all the saints, the bodiless powers, and of Thy pure Mother.* – Postcommunion Prayer of Saint Symeon the Translator

## November 11 – Friday – Kellia Reading – Judges 3:12-30

**Saviors: Judges 3:12-30, especially vs. 20-21:** “Then Ehud said, ‘I have the word of God for you, O king.’ So Eglon arose from his throne near him. At the moment he arose, Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. . . .” Media coverage of terrorism and retaliatory killings is a constant in our day. The killing of Eglon by Ehud thus raises a question: is this act an assassination, a murder, or an execution? Ehud says he has “the word from God” (vs. 20), which implies execution by divine command. These chilling words surely have a familiar ring!

However, God never commands Ehud, as judge, to use any means necessary to free Israel. And yet the Lord does *raise up* Ehud as *a savior* (vs. 15). What should we make of this statement? Let us delve more deeply into this question by examining the terms *raised up*, *savior*, and *judge*.

To rightly understand the Book of Judges, we must interpret the events described in the book within the context of God’s plan to give the land of Canaan to His ancient people (Jos 1:2-6) – and His overarching plan to restore mankind to Himself. His plan for Israel entails the “dispossession” and “destruction” (Dt 31:3) of the Canaanites living in the land, because of their sinful way of life (Gn 15:16, Dt 9:5). No quarter or accommodation may be given (Dt 7:2-5).

Nor does God hesitate to judge Israel severely (Jgs 2:3) when the people neglect His command to “utterly destroy them” (Dt 7:2). He firmly declares, “I will never break My covenant with you” (Jgs 2:1), even as He punishes them. God lets His people suffer eighteen years under the Moabites until He “greatly distressed them” (vs. 15). After they have tasted bitterness, the Lord then “raised up judges” to deliver them (vs. 16).

The judges consistently lead Israel to fulfill God’s command to dispossess and destroy. The present account fits this plan perfectly: Ehud not only executes Eglon, but also calls for and leads an uprising. He sounds the trumpet to arms “in the mountains of Ephraim” (vs. 3:27), directs the people to seize the fords of the Jordan, subdues Moab “that day under the hand of Israel,” and kills “ten thousand” of them (vs. 30). Within the great mystery of His plan for the salvation of mankind, God raises Ehud up for this very purpose.

When God *raises up* someone, He often does so with a saving purpose. He “raised up” the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar to administer punishment and correction (Jer 25:8-9). God tells even Pharaoh: “For this very reason were you preserved, that I might display in you My strength, and that My name might be declared in all the earth” (Ex 9:16). When King Solomon does evil, the Lord raises up Hadad the Edomite as his adversary – yet He assures survival of the lineage of David (3 Kgs 11:11-14).

The incarnation of God the Word is described as an act whereby God “has raised up a horn of salvation for us” (Lk 1:69). Of Christ’s Resurrection, Scripture says, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus [who was] murdered by hanging on a tree” (Acts 5:30) in order to bring about “our justification” (Rom 4:22-24).

When God raises up a judge, a prophet, a king, or a savior, His purpose is always to deliver His people. He raises up judges so that ancient Israel will not fall into despair. If God’s *raising up* leads to the death of Israel’s enemies, these cannot be classed as assassinations or murder, but rather as the execution of God’s plan for all men.

When terrorists who slaughter innocent people claim to be raised up by God, we must ask who has been saved by their acts. And who is the god that raised them up? Certainly it is not the Lord God revealed in Christ Jesus. God raised up our Savior in order to trample down death by death for the salvation of all mankind – for all men.

*Thou, in Thine exceeding great love, hast made us alive together with Christ, raised us up by Thy grace together with Him, and dost seat us in heavenly places in Him.* – Ephesians 2:4-6

**November 12 – Saturday – Proverbs 10:8, 7: 3: 3:13-15, 17-18; 8:32, 34, 4, 12, 14, 17, 5-9; 22:20; 15:4**  
**First Reading at Vespers for Saint John Chrysostom**

**Christ the Wisdom of God: *Proverbs 10:8, 7: 3: 3:13-15, 17-18; 8:32, 34, 4, 12, 14, 17, 5-9; 22:20; 15:4, especially vss. 10:8, 7:*** “*The remembrance of the righteous is with eulogies. . . . The blessing of the Lord is upon the head of the righteous man.*” It nurtures our souls to read these selected verses from Proverbs on the feast of a great hierarch of the Church who knew Divine Wisdom intimately and served Him faithfully. These verses reveal the nature of true servants of Divine Wisdom, those whom we call the *righteous*.

Those who eulogize the righteous do so because they discern the Lord’s blessing upon these saints who found true Wisdom incarnate in the God-Man Jesus Christ. Surely the profits gained from Him are better than gold, silver, precious stones, long life, riches, and glory.

Showing mercy in all His words and deeds, the Lord Jesus spoke with authentic righteousness. Indeed, let us hearken to Him, for He teaches us everything necessary to understand this life. He gives knowledge, understanding, counsel, salvation, strength, and discernment to everyone who loves Him in return. He truly loves those who love Him. If we are astute, we receive instruction from Him, obey him, and learn those things that are true, righteous, and never crooked, false, or twisted. The Lord Jesus is the very source of wisdom and true knowledge. When we put our hope in Christ and guard our relationship with Him, we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

In the Gospels, Jesus tells of a field where an incredible fortune lies buried, awaiting discovery and appropriation (Mt 13:44). Blessed is the man who finds that hidden treasure buried in the field – signifying the heart – and sells all he has to obtain a small place at the feet of the Lord of all. Such a person is blessed for recognizing Truth when he comes face to face with Him. When we find Christ we grasp the insignificance of every treasure – gold, silver, precious stones – in comparison to the Eternal One.

The tempter leaves the Lord Jesus when he discovers that he can neither resist nor overcome Him (Lk 4:13)! However, the wise fishermen know Him, discern the value of His call, and follow Him, for He bestows “length of days and years of life” from His right hand (Prv 3:17).

Righteousness, law, and mercy proceed from His mouth. If there is any doubt in our hearts, then let us search His words with our hearts, not merely with our minds. We will hear “sacred things . . . and . . . true” from His lips (vs. 8:6). There is no aspect of the Law of God that Christ does not uphold. He affirms all that was given through Moses and the prophets, placing it in true perspective with these two simple commandments: “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37, 39). Christ our Wisdom comes to fulfill the Law and the prophets (Mt 5:17).

The humble and meek, the repentant, and the poor in spirit always find a place at His feet, for their tears are acceptable and their cries are heard by Jesus our Lord (Lk 7:38; 23:42). Only the hypocrites and the self-righteous do not need Christ as their Savior (Mt 23:12). Many discover that “no man ever spoke like this Man” (Jn 7:46). Listen well, for “in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence” (Eph 1:7-8).

*O all-compassionate Jesus! Receive now this small supplication as Thou didst receive the widow’s two mites; keep us from all enemies and rescue us who cry unto Thee. Alleluia!* – Akathist to Our Sweetest Lord Jesus Christ

**November 13 – Sunday – Prv 10:32; Wis 6, 7, 8, 9 (selected), Tone 4**  
**Second Reading at Vespers for Saint John Chrysostom**

**Saint John Chrysostom – Early Days: *Wisdom selections, especially Proverbs 10:32 and Wisdom of Solomon 8:21*:** “*The mouth of a righteous man distills wisdom. . . . So I entreated the Lord and besought Him, and with all my heart. . . .*” Saint John Chrysostom was born in 347 AD in the ancient city of Antioch, which today lies just inside the borders of Turkey. His mother was widowed in her early twenties but devoted herself to her son, refusing further prospects of marriage.

Following his elementary schooling, Saint John received traditional training in the classical Greek poets, writers, and orators. He continued his studies under the tutelage of the famous and distinguished professor of rhetoric, Libanios, a pagan who was also a friend and admirer of the apostate Emperor Julian. Like his father before him, Saint John seemed destined to pursue a career in government service.

However, as he completed his studies with Libanios, a marked change occurred in Saint John’s interests. The selected verses that form the present reading capture the spirit of this change. He longed to know wisdom (see Wis 6:12-14) as a result of his ardent study of the Holy Scriptures. His new interest was largely due to the influence of Bishop Meletios the Confessor, who served many of the Christians in Antioch. Appropriately, it was from this bishop that the young student sought baptism.

The principal point in the first group of verses from the Wisdom of Solomon is that the initiative for a relationship between Wisdom and those who desire her belongs to *Wisdom*. For Wisdom “is easily perceived by those that love her [and]. . . . found by those who seek her” (vs. 6:12), for “she comes upon those who long to know her” (vs. 13).

God actively reaches out to mankind, a truth made known to the faithful. As the Apostle Paul says of the Lord Jesus: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). That the initiative in the divine-human relationship lies with the Holy Spirit is plain, for Paul also says that “one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor 12:11). Hence, “he who keeps watch for [Wisdom] will soon be free from worry” (Wis 6:15).

In Wisdom of Solomon 8:2-21, we are given a ready glimpse into the mind of those who earnestly search for divine wisdom: “I loved her and sought her from my youth” (vs. 2). Written in the first person, these verses give voice to those who, like Saint John, are drawn to Holy Wisdom. The true spiritual explorer becomes infatuated with Wisdom, for “she is the initiate of the knowledge of God” (vs. 4). Being “of God,” Wisdom knows His mysteries and loves His works. In turn, Wisdom’s disciples learn the virtues of “self-control, discernment, righteousness and courage” (vs. 7).

Thus we see how the young Saint John was led to “[entreat] the Lord and besought Him, and with all [his] heart” (vs. 21) that he might be baptized. Can you not hear the young man crying out to the Lord, “Give me the wisdom that sits by Your throne, and do not reject me from among Your servants” (vs. 9:4)? Saint John’s prayer was heard, as his life attests. From his early days, Wisdom from on high led him in labor and taught him thoroughly what is *well-pleasing* to God (vs. 10).

*O Giver of life, Thou fount of all wisdom, give unto us, thine unworthy servants, the grace that Thou hast shed upon the apostles, the martyrs and all the saints in their struggles.* – Orthros for Saint John Chrysostom

**November 14 – Monday – Wisdom of Solomon 4, 6, 7, 2**  
**Third Reading at Vespers for Saint John Chrysostom**

**Saint John Chrysostom – Martyrdom: Wisdom Selections, especially Wisdom of Solomon 2:20-21:** “Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for there shall be a visitation because of his words. So they reasoned these things and were led astray, for their malice blinded them.” As Archbishop of Constantinople, Saint John Chrysostom preformed many outstanding works in the new capital of the Roman Empire. Saint Nikolai of Zicha summarizes his achievements: “He governed the Church for six years as Patriarch with unequalled zeal and wisdom, sending missionaries to the pagan Celts and Scythians and purging the Church of simony, deposing many bishops who were given to this vice. He extended the Church’s charitable works, wrote a text for the Holy Liturgy, put heretics to shame, denounced the Empress Eudoxia, interpreted the Scriptures with his golden mind and tongue, and left to the Church many precious books of sermons” (*Prologue From Ochrid* vol. 4, p. 192).

The present reading captures the spirit of Saint John’s life as well as his incalculable contribution to Orthodox Christianity. Sadly, he was often forced to endure the jealousy and political intrigues that have left a dark blot on the history of mankind, including the Church itself at times. Three particular verses (Wis 2:10-12) remind us of the abrupt tragedy that befell Saint John’s life and ministry, while another verse forms a fitting epitaph: “His soul was pleasing to the Lord; therefore He took him early from the midst of evil” (vs. 4:14).

Verses 7:15-29 inspire us to recall the brilliant teaching of Holy Scripture which earned Saint John the title *Chrysostom* (“golden mouth”). He knew both Old and New Testaments, and his sermons delivered at Antioch – where he served as deacon for five years and priest for eleven – and Constantinople are among the finest expositions ever given on Holy Scripture. When we read the recorded works of Saint John, we hear Solomon’s prayer coming from the lips of Saint John: “God grant me to speak according to His purpose and to think worthily of what I was given, for He is also the guide of wisdom and the corrector of the wise” (vs. 15).

In 397 AD, two imperial officials spirited Saint John from the city of his birth and brought him to Constantinople, where he was consecrated as the twelfth bishop of that city. He was just under fifty years of age. His ascetic understanding of the faith is revealed in his sermons, for he often spoke out against frivolities such horse racing and theatre, which were popular diversions in the city. For years Saint John was warmly received by Emperor Arkadios and the Empress Eudoxia, yet his sharp rebukes of the wealthy eventually cooled relations between them. His outspokenness also played into the hands of his ecclesiastical enemies, particularly Patriarch Theophilos of Alexandria.

In 400, an ecclesiastical quarrel in Alexandria came to Saint John’s attention. He strove to mediate, but Patriarch Theophilos turned his efforts against him. Saint John was removed as Patriarch of Constantinople by imperial command as a result of this political intrigue (Wis 2:11-12). He went into exile briefly in 403. Restored to the patriarchate in 404, he was once again exiled and sent to the isolated mountain city of Koukousos. After some time he was marched to an even more desolate spot on the south coast of the Black sea. There, in illness and exhaustion, he reposed. In the “mysteries of God” (vs. 2:22), his relics were brought back to Constantinople thirty years later in triumph. The great archbishop was vindicated and glorified as a saint by the Church.

*As grace shining forth from thy mouth like fire, hath illumined the universe, O Father John Chrysostom, intercede thou with the Word, Christ our God, to save our souls.* – Troparion of Saint John Chrysostom

## November 15 – Tuesday – Kellia Reading – Micah 1:1-16

**Christ Jesus as Testimony: *Micah 1:1-16, especially vs. 2:*** “*Hear these words, O people! Give heed, O earth, and all that is in it. For the Lord God shall be among you for a witness against you, the Lord from His holy house.*” In one short sentence, the Prophet Micah announces the coming of God the Lord to dwell among the peoples of earth. Historically, we know that two millennia ago God indeed came into the world – as Christ our King and God.

Yet we now look back even further in time to the age of Micah. Eight hundred years before Christ’s birth, Micah prophesied His coming. How awesome to realize that for centuries God fully intended to “come down and tread upon the high places of the earth” (vs. 3). What a marvel! For thousands of years (actually, from eternity), God planned to come among us – and He did so in a most wonderful way. He predicted His coming to Micah, and He came. He is here, for “Christ is among us!” Surely we know Him in the Divine Liturgy!

The name of this prophet means *one who is from God*. Even his name announces the divine plan: Christ our God will come. Micah is sent by God, like many prophets of old, to prepare the world to receive the Son of God. When the Lord Jesus comes, He testifies that “all things have been delivered to Me by My Father” (Mt 11:27). Consider the Lord’s message, for it increases wonder that God truly is with us!

Origen, who lived in the second century after the Lord’s birth, begs us to consider the implications of Jesus’ statement, “I have proceeded and come from God” (Jn 8:42). Let us add these words of Christ to yet another statement from Micah: “The Lord God shall be among you for a witness against you, the Lord from His holy house. For behold, the Lord is coming out of His place. He will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. The mountains will shake under Him, and the valleys will melt like wax before the fire, like water pouring down a steep incline” (Mi 1:2-4). Jesus’ statement, “I have . . . come from God” corresponds to Micah’s prophecy, “the Lord is coming out of His place” (vs. 3), for when God the Son proceeds from the Father, He comes out of the place where God is.

What testimony, then, does Christ bring at His coming? Anticipating His departure from this world (His imminent Passion and Resurrection), He says, “It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged” (Jn 16:7-11). Micah foreshadows all of this as well, adding to our awe and wonder.

Micah tells why Christ will come and describes the implications of His appearance. He warns of calamities that are coming “for the transgression of Jacob and the sin of the house of Israel” (Mi 1:5). All of men’s sins, past and present, are known to God. Micah warns the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah; likewise, by the Holy Spirit, he and our Lord are still warning us today of the dangers of not believing in Him. But Christ in His kindness teaches us how to be made righteousness before Him, through our repentance and His grace. He prepares us for the sure judgment against the evils of this world, “a calamity of grief” (vs. 11). Let us heed the warning of Micah, Christ the Lord, and God the Holy Spirit!

*Let Thy compassions quickly go before us, O Lord, for we are become exceedingly poor. Help us, O God our Savior; deliver us, and be gracious unto our sins, for Thy name’s sake.* – Sixth Hour Prayer

## November 16 – Wednesday – Kellia Reading – Micah 2:1-13

**Shed No Tears: Micah 2:1-13, especially vs. 9-10:** “Draw near to the everlasting mountains. Arise and depart, for this is not a final resting place for you on account of uncleanness; you have been utterly destroyed by corruption.” There are many devotees of the idolatrous cult of technical know-how. This cult’s worship is widespread; its creed is recited against all difficulties, conflicts, and ills. Its dogma asserts that testing, technology, and statistical methodologies alone can provide all the help that mankind requires.

Many tragic and deadly problems hold the world in thrall: epidemics, wars, inexcusable hunger, repression, crime, despotism, and the loss of arable land and clean water. Many of these are intractable problems that technical solutions alone cannot fix. Now Micah the prophet comes to announce God’s saving intention: “Those leading my people will be cast out of their luxurious homes . . . [and] driven out because of their evil practices” (vs. 9). The eternal God, who knows all hearts in every age, clearly states what is acceptable to Him. He does not temporize with wrongdoing, but rather brushes aside our rationalizations and shallow pleas for mercy and relief.

Technology and social engineering cannot correct people who *devise wickedness* and *scheme evil* on their beds. “At daybreak they put their plan into action, for they did not lift up their hands to God” (vs. 1). Indeed not! Such people covet others’ property and “plunder[ed] orphans; they oppress[ed] families” and separate “a man and his inheritance” (vs. 2). Our greatest problems have spiritual roots: we disdain to lift our hands to God, worshipping and opening our hearts to His grace, which alone makes our works wholesome and worthy. Human methods alone will never solve our problems apart from a meek spirit and a pure heart (Mt 5: 5, 8). Men must repent, confess, and put “on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24).

The prophet proclaims that God is *devising evils* against those who will not *walk upright* (Mi 2:3) – those who choose spiritual bankruptcy, selfishness, and ill-founded methods to satisfy their desires. These sins indict anyone who would measure his fields by line and lot to establish ownership, when every field and all material wealth belong to God. When these sinful men come weeping at their losses, God tells us, “Do not shed tears, nor even weep over these things,” for they “provoked the Spirit of the Lord” (vss. 6-7) and “resisted against His peace” (vs. 8). God’s indictment penetrates the heart!

The Lord Jesus also diagnoses this illness: “The hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed” (Mt 13:15). God’s prophet offers this remedy: “Draw near to the everlasting mountains” (Mi 2:9). Saint Jerome explains that these “are the mountains. . . . in which we must take refuge after the abomination of desolation shall stand in the holy place” (ACCS, OT vol. 14, p. 154) – in other words, that holy, healing place offered to all by God.

Reliance on human solutions to mankind’s intractable problems is bound to fail. Life will only become uglier and more bitter. We find wisdom when we quit trying to solve *problems of the heart* by technical means, for scientific methods alone never will relieve spiritual disorder. God alone can free the remnant of Israel and deliver the “sheep in trouble . . . from their captors” (vs. 12). By means of His salvation, His people “will break through the gate of captivity, and their king [Christ] comes out before their presence. And the Lord shall lead them” (vs. 13).

*For our deliverance from all tribulation, wrath, danger and necessity, help us; save us; have mercy on us and keep us, O God, by Thy grace.* – Litany of Supplication

## November 17 – Thursday – Kellia Reading – Micah 3:1-12

**Two Kinds of Prophets: Micah 3:1-12, especially vss. 7-8:** “‘The prophets will be laughed to scorn. And all the people will speak evil of them, because there will be no one heeding them.’ Surely I shall strengthen myself in the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of power, to proclaim to Jacob his ungodliness and to Israel his sins.” God’s people – especially those genuinely seeking true faith, heeding the Holy Spirit, and humbling themselves before the Lord – honor the Prophet Micah. These faithful readily discern the difference between a true prophet and a false one. As a result, Micah’s writing and preaching form part of Holy Scripture.

Like Isaiah, Micah cannot hold his peace for the sake of Jerusalem (Is 62:1; Mic 3:8). Faced with deceiving prophets who either speak peace for personal gain or stir up war amidst God’s people (vs. 5), Micah is compelled to deliver whatever scathing words God gives him. He *strengthens himself in the Spirit of the Lord* to call ungodliness and sins to account (vs. 8).

Let us read carefully and discern what it means to speak God’s word prophetically. In these verses Micah reveals the nature of true prophecy, speaking directly to people’s sins, foretelling the outcome of evil-doing, and rebuking false prophets. We must always remember that this kind of outspoken truth-telling is dangerous, as many martyrs through the ages have revealed.

Compare the content of Micah’s preaching with that of the false prophets. Micah dares to speak *for* the Lord: “‘Hear these things, O heads of the house of Jacob. . . . Is it not for you to know judgment?’” (vs. 1). This rhetorical question should fill the “heads of the house of Jacob” with trepidation! This honest man cannot bear to see the rulers of his nation using their positions of power to *devour* the livelihood of those they govern, treating people like so much “meat for [their own cooking] pot” (vs. 3).

False prophets soothe us by proclaiming peace, seeking to distract us from the exploitation of corrupt rulers. And if “nothing [is] put in their mouths,” they foment visions of war (vs. 5). They devise prophecies and proclamations out of their own imagination. As Micah notes, however, their words amount to nothing more than “darkness instead of prophecy” (vs. 6). He understands that charlatan prophets avoid truth and speak to in order to please those in power who profit them.

As a true prophet, Micah cannot help but foresee the outcome that will befall the people (vss. 4, 9-11) and the disgrace that will ultimately come down upon the false prophets who “lead my people astray” (vs. 5). To overlook evil and feign assurance when God clearly holds leaders and His people accountable for wrong-doing is a grievous sin. Micah foretells a dark future for those who prophesy lies: “The seers of dreams will be put to shame, and the prophets will be laughed to scorn. And all the people will speak evil of them, because there will be no one heeding them” (vs. 7).

Micah is forthright. He tells us, “Surely I shall strengthen myself in the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of power, to proclaim to Jacob his ungodliness and to Israel his sins” (vs. 8). He thus speaks boldly against rulers “who build up Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with injustice” (vs. 10), as well as those who take a *bribe*, “give answers for pay,” and “prophesy for money” (vs. 11).

*O Master, before we return to the earth, make us worthy to turn again to Thee. Set the depth of Thy compassions against the multitude of our offenses, cleanse our hearts and save us. – Kneeling Prayers of Pentecost*

## November 18 – Friday – Kellia Reading – Micah 4:1-13

**The New Age Manifest: Micah 4:1-13, especially vs. 7:** “*And I shall make her who has been broken into a remnant, and her that was rejected into a strong nation. So the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion henceforth and forever.*” After the five introductory verses of chapter 4, the tenor of Micah’s prophecy begins to shift. Whereas previously the prophet announces divine judgment against exploitation, theft, and abuse among the people of God, now he forecasts a new age that the Lord God shall manifest.

In the eight verses that follow the chapter’s introduction, God describes the new day that Micah has announced. The Lord declares that He shall no longer reject (vs. 6) but shall reign (vs. 7). In place of war (vs. 3), alarm (vs. 4), and everyone walking in his own way (vs. 5), in place of bruises, rejection (vs. 6), calamity, and travail (vs. 9), the Lord Himself shall redeem His people out of the hand of enemies (vs. 10).

To understand the change that Micah proclaims, we must consider the dominant imagery in this chapter. The primary cluster of images centers on “the mountain of the Lord” (vss. 1, 2), which refers to Mount Zion (vs. 7) as well as to the city of Jerusalem (vss. 2, 8). The first two references are to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the ancient center of Israel’s worship and the focal point of cultural, and national life in the capital. (The Hebrew word for “hill” or “mount” is *tsyon*, which is rendered into English as Sion or Zion). The unity of these images is clarified when the nations say, “‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. They will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (vs. 2).

The Holy Fathers understand these images as referring to Christ and the Church, the Body of Christ. In Christ the faithful experience the Church that is established and exalted above all the “hills” of this world: religions, ideologies, cultures, and philosophies. But we also recall the halting process by which the nations are coming closer to the true faith that Micah prophesies – to learn God’s way and walk in His paths (vs. 2). The Church rebukes raw strength and war (vs. 3). Other peoples may choose to “walk each one in his own way,” but God’s way is choosing “to walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever” (vs. 5).

“That day” (vs. 6) – the day of the Lord, the Kingdom of God, the Eighth Day – is the time when God will reverse all the tragic ills strewn across mankind’s history. The Church is the remnant whom He will receive and over whom He will reign. His dominion, known in part now, shall come fully (vs. 8). In the past we have known woes, yet we cannot say that our King and God was not been with us – He is with us even now.

God encourages His Church to receive the pain of this world while drawing ever nearer to Him, for “from that place the Lord your God shall redeem you from the hand of your enemies” (vs. 10). We must realize that the world’s powers “do not know the thoughts of the Lord nor perceive His counsel” – and yet in the end “He gathered them like sheaves for His threshing floor” (vs. 12). Thus the “daughter of Zion,” Christ’s Holy Church, will go out into the world in spiritual strength, drawing all nations to God that we may “dedicate their abundance to the Lord and their strength to the Lord of all the earth” (vs. 13).

*Our Father, Thou hast two places for me to dwell; one of joy in the heavens and one of sorrows in hades. Raise me to the joy above or take me to hades. Only let Thy will be done!* –Elder Joseph the Hesychast

**November 19 – Saturday – Exodus 40:1-5, 9-10, 16, 34-35**  
**First Reading at Vespers for the Entrance of the Theotokos**

**Entrance of the Theotokos: Exodus 40:1-5, 9-10, 16, 34-35, especially vss. 1-3:** “Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘On the first day of the first month, the new moon, you shall set up the tabernacle of testimony. You shall put in it the ark of the testimony and cover the ark with the veil.’” A hymn offered at Vespers for the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple declares: “Today the living temple of holy glory, the glory of Christ our God, who alone is blessed and undefiled, is presented in the Mosaic Temple, to live in its holy precincts. Wherefore, Joachim and Anna rejoice now with her in spirit, and the ranks of virgins praise the Lord with songs honoring His Mother.” The “living temple” of whom this hymn speaks is the Ever-Virgin Mary, the birthgiver of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The hymn describes Mary’s entrance as a three-year-old child into the precincts of the Temple in Jerusalem, where she took up residence and remained for the duration of her youth. The details of this celebrated occasion are recorded in two extra-canonical gospels. Anonymous works attributed to apostles of the Lord, they were most likely penned in Syria sometime between the second and fourth century AD.

The better-known Protoevangelion of James begins with Mary’s conception and birth. Her conception comes as God’s response to the fasting, prayers, and devout life of her heretofore barren parents. Anna, her mother, who has remained childless during decades of marriage, vows before an angel of the Lord: “If I beget either male or female, I will bring it as a gift to the Lord my God; and it shall minister to Him in holy things all the days of its life” (*ANF* vol. 8, p. 362-3). Meanwhile Joachim, her husband, keeps a forty-day fast in the desert. Afterwards, an angel tells him, “The Lord God hath heard thy prayers. Go down hence; for, behold, thy wife Anna shall conceive.”

Anna brings forth a daughter, Mary. When the child is a year old, “Joachim made a great feast and invited the priests, and the scribes, and the elders and all the people of Israel; and they blessed her, saying: O God of our fathers, bless this child, and give her an everlasting name to be named in all generations.” At the celebration of her third birthday, Joachim says, “Invite the daughters of the Hebrews that are undefiled, and let them take each a lamp, and let them stand with the lamps burning, that the child may not turn back, and her heart be captivated from the Temple of the Lord.”

At the Temple, the child enters joyfully as “the priest received her, and kissed her, and blessed her saying. . . . In thee on the last of the days, the Lord will manifest His redemption to the sons of Israel. And,” the narrative notes, “Mary was in the Temple of the Lord as if she were a dove that dwelt there” until she turns twelve. At this point she is placed under the care of the noble widower, Joseph, who takes responsibility to guard her under the Lord’s hand.

The assigned vesperal reading from Exodus describes the arrangement of the very first Tabernacle of the Lord. In keeping with the Lord’s word to the Prophet Moses, which indicates its devotion as the holy place for the worship of God, it is anointed to “become holy” (vs. 9). Moses is commanded to place the ark of the testimony deep in the heart of the tabernacle, screened off and utterly separated from common view with a great veil (vs. 3). These arrangements form a type of the life of the Holy Virgin Mary herself, the “Maiden of God, the Theotokos” who was “forechosen from all generations for the abode of Christ, King of All.”

*Let us praise her with songs who hath been manifest as Theotokos, for today she is offered to the Lord in the Temple as a child, as spiritual fruit to the righteous God.* – Canon of the Feast

**November 20 – Sunday – Third Kingdoms 8:1, 3-7, 9-11, Tone 5**  
**Second Reading at Vespers for the Entrance of the Theotokos**

**The Most Holy Place:** *Third Kingdoms 7:51; 8:1, 3-7, 9-11, especially vs. 6:* “Then the priests brought in the ark to its place, into the inner sanctuary of the temple, to the holy of holies, under the wings of the cherubim.” This vesperal reading, like the one that precedes it, directs our hearts to the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant within the “inner sanctuary” or most holy place of the ancient Temple of the Lord. The imagery in these passages further invites the heart to reverent worship before the Lord our God, who chose the Ever-Virgin Mary, the Most Holy Theotokos, as His resting place when He came to dwell among us.

This second reading also reminds us of the significance of Mary, who is as much a human being as any member of our race. Her humanity was necessary so that when “the power of the Highest” overshadowed her (Lk 1:35), Christ would receive from her a complete human nature, exactly like ours in every respect – except that He alone was without sin (Heb 4:15).

What do we know about the Temple, which we now recognize as a type of the Virgin Mary? Its essential design was given to the Prophet Moses by God on Mount Sinai (see Ex 40). Israel’s greatest kings provided for it (3 Kgs 7:37) and her finest craftsmen constructed it, sparing nothing. The best that the ancient people of God could fashion from their accumulated treasures went into that building – and yet in every respect the Temple remained a fabrication of mortal, fallible men.

We note that “when Solomon finished building the house of the Lord” (3 Kgs 8:1), the ark of the Lord was brought “to its place, into the inner sanctuary of the temple, to the holy of holies” (vs. 6). Under the Old Covenant, the ark contained “the two stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant Moses put there at Horeb” (vs. 9). The ark was unique, a tangible sign of the Lord’s bond with His people, affirming that He was their God forever.

Under the New Covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ, son of Mary, mediates between God and His people as their eternal Savior. All who “were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). Therefore we rejoice, saying without hesitation, “Christ is in our midst: He is and He ever shall be.”

God selected the finest, best, and most pure among women to be His mother in the flesh. By taking up residence *in the inner sanctuary* of her body, the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, transformed Mary’s womb into a *most holy place*, a throne for Himself. We have in Him – and through her – an indestructible bond between our race and God. He is far beyond the gaze of both angels and men, yet we can look upon the face of Christ Jesus and behold for ourselves the Godhead, precisely as He said to Philip (Jn 14:8-9).

For these reasons the Church, over centuries of liturgical, theological, and historical development, has defended the use of the title *Theotokos*. It combines *Theos*, which means God, with *tokos*, “bringing forth” or “birth-giver” – in other words, Birthgiver of God. The *ark* that God placed in her womb differed radically from the ark placed in the sanctuary of the Temple. In Mary, God Himself became Incarnate: the Man for all men.

As we celebrate Mary’s entrance into the Temple, we are reminded that the priests of old “could not stand there ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house” (3 Kgs 8:11). Let us likewise us fall down before the God who set aside His glory to be born of the Virgin, and now calls us to magnify her who contained the Uncontainable.

*More honorable than the cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim, thou who without stain bearest God the Word, and art truly Theotokos, we magnify thee.* – Refrain of the Magnificat

**November 21 – Monday – Ezekiel 43:27-44:4**

**Third Reading at Vespers for the Entrance of the Theotokos**

**The Mystery of the Theotokos: Ezekiel 43:27-44:4, especially vs. 2:** “So the Lord said to me, ‘This gate shall be shut. It shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it; because the Lord God of Israel will enter by it; therefore, it shall be shut.’” Uncreated from before time –eternally begotten of God the Father, without mother – Christ condescended to enter time as a man. He was born to a human mother, the Most Holy Theotokos, the birthgiver of God. This temporal entrance into the world by God, the Eternal Word, is ineffable.

“He humbled Himself” (Php 2:8) and “was seen with our [human] eyes . . . and our hands have handled . . . the Word of life” (1 Jn 1:1). This truth cannot be explained by means of human language. Metropolitan Hierotheos calls the Incarnation inexpressible, “because there is an enormous difference between the uncreated and the created. . . . The union of created human nature with uncreated nature in the Person of the Word is . . . where the mystery is seen, as well as the impossibility of man’s reason to interpret it” (Vlachos, *Feasts of the Lord*, p. 338).

No doubt inspired by contemplation of the Incarnation, Saint John of Damascus writes, “Without abasement He humbled His unhumiliated height” (p. 340). This image leads us to consider the particulars of Christ’s humility (the cave, the manger, birth in the flesh) as reflected in the ecstatic vision of Saint Andrew of Crete: “O strange wonder! God in a woman’s womb, He whose throne is heaven and whose footstool is the earth. God in the womb, the supracelestial sharer of the everlasting throne of the Father” (p. 340).

“The Son and Word of God became a full man, assumed the whole human flesh in order to deify it,” says Metropolitan Hierotheos. “But this took place outside the laws of nature. Therefore, in a troparion of the Church we are told: ‘Having conceived God in ways past understanding, O Maiden, thou hast escaped from the ordinances of nature.’” (p. 346-7). Here we encounter not only the mystery of the Incarnation, but a tandem mystery: the person of the Theotokos herself.

The Prophet Ezekiel was permitted to speak of this mystery of the Theotokos in the midst of His sweeping vision of the Messianic age, which includes a perfect new Temple (Ez 40:1-48:35). In symbolic language, the prophet foretells the mystery inherent in the Theotokos, whose name constitutes the entire mystery of the economy of God for the salvation and deification of man. She is the “sanctuary” (vs. 44:1) that “the Lord, the God of Israel” enters (vs. 2) and the “temple” that the glory of the Lord fills with His ineffable presence (vs. 4).

Metropolitan Hierotheos continues, “For just this reason the Holy Fathers insist on the theology concerning the person of the Theotokos and sing her praises and glorify her. She is the key to the experience of the Incarnation of the Word of God, as well as the deification of man. . . . All that has been said should help us to our personal annunciation. The good news is that after the Incarnation of Christ there is the possibility of our becoming members of the deified Body of Christ.”

The Holy Virgin, without blemish, was deified when she conceives Christ. Her entry into the earthly Temple prepared her to serve as the gate of entry that “no man shall pass through . . . because the Lord God of Israel will enter by it; therefore, it shall be shut” (vs. 2). Let us ever seek her prayers, for God offers to us the grace of Christ’s indwelling and the hope of attaining the true Fruit for which Eve grasped sinfully.

*Today the Virgin . . . is led to the temple, to become the habitation of God the King of all, who sustains our life. Today . . . the most pure Sanctuary is led into the Holy of Holies.* – Orthros for the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos

## November 22 – Tuesday – Kellia Reading – Micah 5:1-15

**The Messiah's Impact: Micah 5:1-15, especially vs. 3:** *“And He shall stand and see, and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, and they will dwell in the glory of the name of the Lord their God, for now they will be magnified unto the ends of the earth.”* The Prophet Micah forecasts a new age for Judah and Jerusalem in which the people of God will be exalted “above the hills” (Mi 4:1) – that is, above every nation and movement that captures men’s hearts and souls. In that future time there will be peace, drawing people of many nations to worship the Lord and “walk in His paths” (vs. 4:2). The Church Fathers understand this prophecy as a forecast of the age of Christ and His Church.

The prophet continues with assurances to the people of God. They may be “blockaded by a siege” and smitten “with a rod upon the cheek” (vs. 4:14), yet God will radically change their condition so that they will “be magnified unto the ends of the earth” (vs. 5:3). Yet the ancient people of God still feared disaster. Some wondered if perhaps a major delusion had been exposed by Micah’s prophecy. Perhaps the promise given to David the King was false after all (“I say to you, a man from [your sons] shall not fail to sit on the throne of Israel” – 3 Kgs 2:4). Israel seemed helpless before the great powers of the age and appeared headed for obliteration.

Just as he spoke earlier of the grim reality facing God’s people, Micah now delivers God’s reaffirmation of the promise to King David: out of Bethlehem of Judah “shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler of Israel” (Mi 5:1). . . . “and all your enemies will be completely cut off” (vs. 8). Micah proclaims the Messiah, a savior who will bring renewal and salvation to God’s people and the entire world. To this day, the Jewish people still look for the Messiah. Yet from earliest times Christians have proclaimed that Jesus Christ fulfills the prophecy of the Righteous Micah.

Christ was born in Bethlehem (vs. 2). Many Jews of the first century assumed that He was born in Nazareth. They wondered how he then could be the Messiah, asking, “Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?” (Jn 7:41-42). Only those acquainted with the events that took Jesus’ family away from Nazareth at the time of His birth knew that He “came forth” from Bethlehem.

“His goings forth were from the beginning, even from everlasting” (Mi 5:1). This amazing discovery came to the disciples who followed the Lord Jesus and served under Him for three years. After the Resurrection, the Holy Spirit led them to recognize Him as the very “Word [who] was with God, and . . . was God” (Jn 1:1). They knew of his birth from the Virgin Mary “at the appointed time,” and that “the remnant of their brethren will return to the sons of Israel” (Mi 5:2).

Micah’s prophecy becomes clear when illumined by Christ. The true Israel, the Church, brings peace and deliverance from the Assyrians (vs. 5). – and also from communists, fascists, secularists, and all who oppose the Lord and His Church. Indeed, the Body of Christ is the “remnant of Jacob” of which Micah speaks (vs. 6). God repeatedly enables the Church to survive affliction. The Church, which stands against the very gates of Hell, has seen the destruction of many *strongholds* (vs. 10), *sorceries*, *soothsayers* (vs. 12), and those deluded persons who “did not heed” God (vs. 14).

*Glory to Thee, Who hast shown us the light. O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father that takest away the sin of the world, Thou only art the Lord, O Jesus Christ! – Great Doxology*

**November 23 – Wednesday – Isaiah 43:9-14**  
**First Reading at Vespers for Great Martyr Catherine**

**Seven Declarations: Isaiah 43:9-14, especially vs. 10:** “‘I am a witness,’ says the Lord God, ‘and My Servant whom I chose, that you may know and believe, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no other God, nor shall there be after Me.’” In this reading “the Lord God . . . the Holy One of Israel” (vs. 14) makes seven declarations to His conquered people who are living in exile in Babylon. Defeated and enslaved, they nevertheless hope to regain their freedom and return home. In declaring Himself, God reminds His people that He chose them for Himself, never permitting them to worship strange gods. He promises to accomplish their release from bondage and restore them to their land.

We are God’s people today and the direct heirs of those slaves. Thus the seven declarations that God makes in this passage reveal truths that we, too, need to understand, for we are His people who say, “I believe in one God. . . .”

First, God calls Himself a *witness* (vss. 10, 12). He challenges every nation and people to testify as to what they believe concerning existence from the beginning of time to the present – a testimony He Himself offers handily (vs. 9). He is able to test every claim to truth and prove His own declarations. Given the vast accumulation of research into the nature of the universe and life’s mysteries, God’s claim to be *the* reliable witness is striking, to say the least.

Second, our Lord declares, “I am God” (vs. 11) – the only God, before whom there is no other, nor was there ever another, “nor shall there be after Me” (vs. 10). All other gods are nothing compared to Him, for He is the ever-existing One (vs. 11).

Third, our God is the “one who saves” (vs. 11). In comparison to “foreign” gods, He is the only and unique One who delivers and rescues. Further, as our incarnate Lord Jesus, He overcomes the enemy that no other has mastered, trampling down death and bestowing life even on those in the tombs!

Fourth, God our Savior denounces and exposes the fraudulent claims of other so-called gods, cleansing our hearts and minds of every allegiance except to Him (vs. 12). Fifth, He reminds us there has never been a time when anyone or anything “can deliver [us] out of [God’s] hands” (vs. 13). We may apply the term *invincible* when we speak of Him at work on our behalf, for nothing can reverse His work, neither sin nor evil, great men and nations, even death.

Sixth, He is “the Lord God who redeems you” (vs. 14) and all who know that they are enslaved and need to be freed. He is the One who saves us from self and every form of bondage. For this reason our good and gracious God proclaims, denounces, works, and witnesses that He is the almighty and invincible Savior of our lives, hearts, and souls.

Seventh, as God declared of old, so He promises today: “For your sake I will send to Babylon and arouse all who flee” (vs. 14). Let us examine the record, taking up His challenge: “Search the scriptures . . . these are they which testify of Me” (Jn 5:39). Here we discover the only qualification that God makes when witnessing to us – will we be aroused? Will we heed His call? Will we witness, as He does, that we are slaves in Babylon, enmeshed in sin, in need of a savior and redeemer? The onus is on us to flee our bonds and run to Him who truly saves.

Christ our God says plainly, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (Jn 8:12). He likewise witnesses to us concerning Himself: “I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me” (Jn 8:18). Let us allow Him to arouse and wake us! Believe in His promise!

*O Lord, guide me in the way of Thy righteousness; because of mine enemies, make straight my way before Thee, for with the shield of Thy good pleasure hast Thou crowned us! – Psalm 5:7, 13*

**November 24 – Thursday – Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9**  
**Second Reading at Vespers for Great Martyr Catherine**

**Worthy of God: Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9, especially vs. 5:** “For God tested them and found them worthy of Himself.” The holy Apostle Paul asserts that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). He draws on the psalms of King David and the words of David’s wise son, King Solomon, to support this affirmation: “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one” (Rom 3:10-12; cf Ps 13:1-3; 52:1-3; Eccl 7:20).

How, then, is it possible to say of anyone that he or she is worthy of God? Who can possibly be found worthy of God, as stated in the Wisdom of Solomon? Let us take note that today’s passage is read at Great Vespers for the feasts of many saints and martyrs. Does this association suggest that God finds worthy only those who died for Christ? This speculation has merit, but let us not be too hasty. We are wise to search more deeply and refuse to be satisfied with an overly simple answer.

The life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria reports that this beautiful and learned maiden fell asleep after praying before an icon of the Virgin Mother and Child. She beholds the Queen of the angels holding the holy Child, as on the icon. No matter which way she looks, however, she cannot see the Lord’s face, for He turns away toward His Mother.

In Catherine’s dream, the Theotokos declares to Christ, “Behold, my Child, how fair and virtuous is Your handmaiden Catherine!” To this Christ replies, “No, she is black and unsightly. I cannot bear to look upon her.” The Lord counsels Saint Catherine to return to the elder who gave her the icon.

The holy elder instructed her at length in the mysteries of the Christian faith, after which she was baptized. Subsequently Catherine dreamed again of Christ. Again His Mother asks the Lord, “Is this maiden acceptable to You, my Son?” To this Christ answers, “She pleases me greatly, for she is now as fair and delightful as she once was black and unsightly, as wealthy and wise as she was formerly poor and foolish. I truly love her, and wish to take her as My bride forever” (*Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints* vol. 3, p. 544-6).

The rest of the account describes how the pagan authorities tested Catherine’s new-found faith, and how she influenced many witnesses to embrace Christ and even die for His sake. Her life corroborates Solomon’s saying that God tests the souls of the righteous “like gold in a furnace and accepted them as a whole burnt offering” (Wis 3:6).

Saint Catherine’s prayer at the time of her execution sheds further light on our search to understand how we, who fall short of divine glory, might be deemed *worthy of God*. “O Lord Jesus Christ my God, I thank Thee that Thou has set my feet upon the rock of patience and hast guided my steps. . . . Remember, O Lord, that I am flesh and blood, and do not permit cruel inquisitors to bring to light before Thy dread judgment seat the sins I have committed in ignorance, but do Thou wash them in my blood” (p. 561). She presents her love and devotion to the Lord without neglecting her unworthiness.

Now we take a step closer to the fullness of God’s teaching in this reading: “The faithful shall continue with Him in love, because grace and mercy are upon His elect” (vs. 9). Our love of Christ and our willing commitment to Him are met by the *grace and mercy* of God. God and trust together wrap “the garment of righteousness” around every servant of Christ who comes forth from the baptismal waters, unworthy though we are.

*Vouchsafe unto me a robe of light, O Thou who clothest Thyself with light, Christ our God.* – Sacrament of Holy Baptism

**November 25 – Friday – Wisdom of Solomon 5:15-6:3**  
**Third Reading at Vespers for Great Martyr Catherine**

**War Against Madmen: Wisdom of Solomon 5:15-6:3, especially vs. 20:** “*And creation will fight with Him against the senseless.*” We must exercise care as we read this passage, lest certain assumptions and filters implanted by our education distort our interpretation and obscure what is in plain view. In particular, we encounter several terms in these verses that are easy to misread or overlook.

Note, first of all, that Solomon describes God’s care for a *community*, which he calls “the righteous” (vs. 15). The Lord Most High rewards His people with eternal life (vs. 15); He gives them dignity, crowns them with beauty, shelters and protects them “against His enemies” (vss. 16-17). Note that the pronouns referring to “the righteous” are always plural: *their, they, them*. Solomon is not speaking of individuals; these pronouns refer to a distinct group or community whose collective name is *the righteous*.

Secondly, following the rule that “whoever is the enemy of my beloved is my enemy,” we can identify the opponents of the righteous as enemies of God, regardless of whether they are called “His enemies” (vs. 17) or merely “the senseless” (vs. 20). As soon as Solomon finishes describing how God bestows gifts, rewards, crowns, shelter, and protections on the righteous (vss. 15-16), he goes on to show that God’s goodness translates into warlike action against His enemies in defense of His people, when it is required (vss. 19-23).

Who are the enemies of God and His People? The term “enemies” is so broad that it fails to offer much insight, but the word *senseless* is rich with meaning in the original Greek. When we consult different English translations of the same Greek word, we get different results. “Senseless” also implies *unwise* (Brenton), *madmen* (Revised Standard Version), *frenzied foes* (New English Bible), *reckless* (New Jerusalem Bible), and *foolhardy* (New American Bible).

The bottom line is that the Lord does not brook the reckless acts of lawless madmen, wreaking senseless waste in foolish frenzy, “lay[ing] waste all the earth,” and overturning legitimate government (vs. 23). God responds to such acts in warfare mode, beginning with mobilization (vss. 17-20) and culminating in strategic moves and tactical actions (vss. 20-22). This picture is rounded out with a summary of the disastrous outcomes that will surely fall upon His opponents (vss. 22-23).

The people of God are the Lord’s very special treasure. The Prophet Zechariah describes God’s loving care for His people in a passage that foretells the coming of Christ: “He has sent Me out after glory to the nations that plundered you, for the one who assails you is as one who assails the apple of His eye” (Zec 2:12). The Prophet David says, “He that worketh evil shall not dwell near Thee, nor shall transgressors abide before Thine eyes. Thou hast hated all them that work iniquity; Thou shalt destroy all them that speak a lie” (Ps 5:3-4).

The Lord offers a concluding caution to those who “rule over multitudes” and “over a multitude of nations” (Wis 6:2). We may easily recognize such people, for their faces are familiar, be they kings, presidents, judges, generals, or terrorist leaders. The greatest danger for those in high position is inattentiveness, ignorance, arrogance, *pride*, and *power* without understanding (vss. 1-3). These vices become deadly if they are not curbed before God. The truly great humble themselves, rule over their passions, and heed the word of the Lord. Beware of those who do not! The Lord carefully searches their works and examines plans drawn up behind closed doors (vs. 3). Since He allows our leaders to exercise power and lordship (vs. 3), He can also take it away in a flash.

*O Lord save thy people, and bless Thine inheritance; granting to Thy people victory over all their enemies, and by the power of Thy Cross, preserving Thy Kingdom.* – Troparion of the Holy Cross

**November 26 – Saturday – Kellia Reading – Micah 6:1-8; 7:1-2, 7-9, 18-20**

**God's Case and Our Hope: Micah 6:1-8; 7:1-2, 7-9, 18-20, especially vs. 6:8:** *"He has shown you, O man, what is good. Or what does the Lord seek from you but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to be ready to walk with the Lord your God?"* The collected prophecies of Micah play a role similar to that of the Forerunner and Baptist John. They prepare the way through the daunting wilderness of our sins and lead to the saving path created by the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord and Savior – the wondrous new life in Christ. Micah clearly states God's case against us, on the one hand, while on the other he assures us of our hope in Christ, the true promises sworn "to our ancestors from days of old" (vs. 7:20).

Micah records the charges that God presents – incriminating evidence in His case against His ancient people, and in fact against all men. But the Lord does not rest His prosecution with a catalog of wrongdoings. He challenges and confronts us by exposing the darker element of our ingratitude: "O My people, what have I done to you? How have I grieved you? Answer Me!" (vs. 6:3). In verses 6:4-7 the Lord reviews Israel's failures – the sins His people have thrown in His face, so to speak, and which are akin to sins we know all too well.

Recalling His faithfulness to His ancient people, God says, "For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage" (vs. 6:4). This is exactly what He promises Abraham He will do (Gn 15:13-16). He first teaches the nation through Moses how they (and we) should live (Mi 6:4) and how to honor His blessings upon mankind. The Lord restrains the Prophet Balaam from cursing Israel (vs. 6:5) and has him announce that "a Man shall come forth from [the] seed" of God's people to "rule many nations and His kingdom shall be . . . exalted" (Nm 24:7). Yes, the reference is to the God-Man, Jesus Christ our Lord and our Savior.

God's people desperately sought to appease the Lord, to "devote [themselves] to the Most High God . . . [and] reach Him with burnt offerings [of] year-old calves" (vs. 6). But God is not impressed by men's ritual washing away of sins, nor is His accusation leveled against ancient Israel alone. Truly, His case applies all men, even those of us in the Church: "He has shown you, O man, what is good. Or what does the Lord seek from you but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to be ready to walk with the Lord your God?" (vs. 8).

The question is, how may we ready ourselves to walk with our God? Micah realizes that we are unworthy of approaching God, let alone standing beside Him. He cries out, appropriately, "Woe is me, O my soul!" (vs. 7:1). Like Saint Paul centuries later (Rom 3:23), Micah finds us awash in the sin that clings to our fallen race: "There is no one upright among the men" (Mi 7:2). Micah is left, as we all are, with only one sure foundation before God: "But I will look to the Lord. I will wait for God my Savior, for my God will hear me" (vs. 7:7).

Let us heed Micah's words; now is the time. We can face down our enemy. When we were captured, he delighted in our fall. Repudiate him now: "Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy, for though I have fallen, yet will I arise, because even if I should sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me" (vs. 7:8). As Saint Paul says: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light" (Eph 5:14). Now we "endure the wrath of the Lord, for [we] sinned against Him," yet let us rejoice – Christ "will bring [us] out into the light, and [we] will perceive his righteousness" (Mi 7:9). No matter what our present state, God will "return and . . . subdue our transgressions, and all our sins will be cast into the depths of the sea" (vs. 19).

*O merciful Lord, look down from the height of Thy holy dwelling place on us who await Thy rich mercy. Visit us with Thy goodness, and confirm our life in Thy sacred commandments.* – Archimandrite Sophrony of Essex

**November 27 – Sunday – Kellia Reading – Ruth 1:1-14, 19-22**

**A Family Saga – Trust: Ruth 1:1-14, 19-22, especially vs. 14:** “Then they lifted up their voices and again wept. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and returned to her people, but Ruth followed her.” The last half-century yields some painful statistics concerning the vulnerability and struggles of families in contemporary society. The data reinforces the need for healthy marriages and nurturing approaches to child-rearing if we are to produce men and women with strong, God-fearing personalities. The saga of the Book of Ruth says much about family relationships – the true matrix for fostering God-pleasing and life-bearing people.

The opening chapter of Ruth directs our attention to the importance of trust in restoring life after family bonds have been disrupted. The reading affirms that it is possible to continue living in love and hope and with purpose, as long as life and breath remain. The experience of poverty, the loss of a spouse or child, divorce, or the inexorable weakening of old age may force us to look beyond our individual resources. We must ask basic questions: Can we trust our own capacity to carry out the myriad tasks required for keeping our fragmented family together? Can we find meaning in life after everything that we worked for is shredded by catastrophe? Can we trust others enough to set them free to work out their lives apart from us? Can we rely on the diminished energy of old age if we find ourselves alone, without the comfort of a supportive community and loving relationships?

In simple agrarian societies the threat of famine hovers constantly. Persistent bad weather or social chaos can quickly bring whole regions to the verge of starvation. Even the “scientific” twentieth century saw this sort of privation occur on every continent. Hoping for survival, migration and relocation are forced upon families already weak and debilitated by hunger.

Why famine came to Judah in the time of Elimelech is not told, but he trusted in emigration as the way to save his family (vs. 3). He left his kin and his heritage in the Lord and traveled to a foreign land. Although the Moabite language is similar to Hebrew, the Moabites worshiped a false deity, the idol Chemosh, rather than the one true God. Elimelech ventured into circumstances where he and his family were considered outsiders and aliens.

Elimelech’s death left behind a widow and two sons to manage the family’s subsistence farm. Naomi trusted in the few meager family holdings, her own personal skills, and the abilities of her two sons to make a go of life in Moab as a widowed mother. She found the trust needed to survive, and the family thrived. Soon her sons “took for themselves wives of the women of Moab” (vs. 4).

However, the shocks of this life are never over. “Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband” (vs. 5). Naomi relies on her strength to manage the family farm so long as she has two sets of male hands to handle all the work. But three widows cannot begin handle these tasks by themselves. When the demands of farming in a rudimentary economy prove to be too much, she heeds reports from Bethlehem of Judah and makes plans to return to the community of her extended family (vss. 6-7).

Still, Naomi trusts sufficiently in herself and in her young daughters-in-law to first set them free among their own people. She encourages them to “go, return each to her mother’s house. May the Lord have mercy on you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me” (vs. 8). One daughter chooses to turn back, placing her trust in her family heritage but “Ruth followed her” (vs. 14). This daughter-in-law trusts in the life she has found with Naomi. Thus, by the providence of God, the two arrive in Bethlehem where Ruth will contribute to God’s plan of salvation for all men.

*O Lord our God who rulest over our souls and bodies, in whose hand is our breath and all our ways, grant us so to trust Thee in this life that we lose not Thy heavenly Kingdom.* – prayer from the Funeral Service

## November 28 – Monday – Kellia Reading – Ruth 2:1-23

**A Family Saga – Kindness: Ruth 2:1-23, especially vs. 20:** “Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, ‘Blessed is he of the Lord, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living, and the dead! . . . This man is a relation of ours, one of our close relatives.’” The Book of Ruth provides us with an example of God’s kindness at work, when a godly landowner of Judah benevolently helps an immigrant woman who is gleaning his fields at harvest-time. Shakespeare tells that such kindness comes from God, dropping “as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath [so that] earthly power doth then show likest God’s when mercy seasons justice” (*The Merchant of Venice*). Saint Paul says, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, *kindness*” (Gal 5:22).

How often we meet kindness in the servants of God! The pagan Syrians learned that the kings of Israel, as God’s rulers, were likely to be kind. When the son of King Hadad was hiding from the armies of Israel, he said, “I know the kings of Israel to be merciful kings. Let us put sackcloth around our waists . . . and go out to the king of Israel; perhaps he may spare our lives” (3 Kgs 21:31). We should be humbled and blessed by God’s many kindnesses.

Kindness is manifested in the events that surround the dialogue between Ruth and Boaz, particularly when he protects and aids her while she is working (Ru 2:8-9). When Ruth thanks him graciously, he kindly praises her for “all that you have done with your mother-in-law since the death of your husband and how you have . . . come to a people whom you did not know yesterday or the day before. May the Lord repay your work” (vss. 2:11-12). We observe that Ruth does not eat every bit of grain that Boaz gives her at the mid-day meal, but carefully takes the gift back to share with Naomi (vs. 18). Naomi also has kind words for the generosity and kindness of Boaz (vs. 19). All of these acts inspire us to embrace this virtue from our hearts, for we witness the providential grace of our compassionate, merciful God as He works through kind words and benevolent deeds.

Let us examine four specific acts of kindness recorded in this passage. First is the “going-beyond-what-is-required” of Boaz, when he invites Ruth to the meal he provides specifically for his hired reapers. (Part of the harvesters’ pay comes in the form of a free mid-day meal. However, there is no such provision for those who, under Mosaic law, are allowed to glean the fields for personal survival, per Leviticus 19:9-10 and Deuteronomy 24:19). Out of kindness, Boaz gives Ruth bread and vinegar, i.e., wine, for sopping (Ru 2:14). He also gives her parched grain, which is the customary benefit for the hired workers, yet she is a beggar, not one of Boaz’ employees. His acts might seem reasonable and fair, but they stem from gracious kindness – a true *going beyond*.

Second, Boaz makes sure that Ruth can gather extra grain as she gleans, for he orders his harvesters not to “rebuke her” (vs. 16). He is under no obligation to see that she obtains any wheat while gleaning (vs. 22). His order is another sign of kindness, of *going beyond* any formal requirement or obligation.

Third, let us consider Naomi’s comments concerning Boaz’ generosity. She kindly draws attention to the fact that Boaz *noticed* Ruth’s need (vs. 19). Even more, she extends kindness with this additional comment: “Blessed is he of the Lord, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!” (vs. 20). Naomi calls attention to the man’s dedication to the ways of God!

Fourth, Naomi’s words also bless the Lord’s outstretched hand, lavish in mercy and ready to help (vs. 20). Indeed, Naomi perceives God’s compassion in Boaz’ kindness. Her words teach us to attend to our motives whenever we offer kindness. Let us make sure that our benevolence always flows from our love for and union with the merciful God, who ever treats us kindly.

*Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God. O continue Thy loving-kindness unto them that know Thee, Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal.* – The Doxology

## November 29 – Tuesday – Kellia Reading – Ruth 3:1-18

**A Family Saga – Submission: Ruth 3:1-18, especially vs. 5:** “*And Ruth said to her, ‘I will do everything you say.’*” This chapter of Ruth presents a type of the experience of the candidate who unites himself to Christ in holy baptism. The candidate is presented to the priest – that is, to Christ – by a sponsor, thus expressing his desire to “flee unto [God’s] holy name, and . . . take refuge under the shelter of [His] wings.” The priest breathes in the face of the candidate, making the sign of the Cross on his brow and breast, and says, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” The priest then lays his hand upon the candidate’s head to indicate that he is worthy to be united to the flock of God’s inheritance – to bow down before Him and submit to Him as King and God. In this way every soul submits himself or herself to Christ, opening the way to enter His bridal chamber.

Here we find the foreigner, Ruth, laboring in the fields of Boaz, learning the character of Naomi’s *near kinsman* (vs. 12). She receives exceptional favor and kindness as she gleaned after his harvesters. Likewise, the inquirer comes to the Church and encounters the grace, kindness, and mercy of Christ our Savior. Illumined by the Holy Spirit, he is led to submit to Christ as King and God. In Christ he finds the great Lord of the harvest who, with “His winnowing fan . . . in His hand,” cleans out the threshing floor in order to gather “His wheat into the barn” (Mt 3:12). He knows true redemption!

In the type, Ruth receives instruction by the grace of the Holy Spirit through the person of Naomi, her mother-in-law. Naomi tells her how to be espoused to the godly Boaz: “Daughter, shall I not seek rest for you, so that it will be well with you?” (Ru 3:1). Saint Augustine notes a parallel step when approaching the Church, Christ’s Body, to be joined to the Lord among all the faithful: “Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee” (*Confessions*).

The Moabite woman “came softly and uncovered his feet” (vs. 7), thus modestly placing herself in submission to Boaz and expressing her desire to be united to him as his bride. Each servant of Christ in like manner places himself beneath the Lord’s feet, for God the Father has seated our Savior at His right hand “till I make Your enemies Your footstool” (Mt 22:44). Ruth seals her desire to join herself to God’s people by prostrating herself and being united to a son of Judah, just as each baptismal candidate renounces Satan and comes under the dominion of the Son of God, bowing down before Him.

When Boaz encounters Ruth near him at midnight and learns who she is, he welcomes her desire that he should “take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a close relative” (Ru 3:9). In effect she is telling him, “As near kinsman, you are in the position to unite me, the childless widow, to yourself and thereby make me a woman of Judah.” Desiring to be a member of Christ, the catechumen is declared “worthy to take refuge under the shelter of [His] wings,” to be united to Christ and become a true member of the Jerusalem and Israel that is above (Mt 23:37).

As a type of our Lord Jesus Christ, Boaz speaks kindly to the younger Ruth, blesses her, and calls her *daughter* (Ru 3:10), just as the Lord speaks kindly to each one who seeks Him. Boaz promises his readiness for marriage, but states that he must fulfill the law of God completely – he must first see whether a nearer kinsman would exercise his right (vs. 13). Christ states that He, too, comes “under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Gal 4:4-5).

*I behold Thy bridal chamber, richly adorned, O my Savior; but I have no wedding garment to worthily enter. Make radiant the garment of my soul and save me.* – Bridegroom Service of Holy Week

**November 30 – Wednesday – Kellia Reading – Ruth 4:1-17**

**A Family Saga – Duty: *Ruth 4:1-17, especially vs. 6:*** “*I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it.*” As we read the present passage, let us keep uppermost in our minds the virtue of duty. Under Mosaic law, there was a duty to redeem a family’s land rights in order to prevent property from being sold outside the clan (Lv 25:23-28). God ordered this redemption to reinforce a principle involving the entire Promised Land: “Land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine. . . . You shall grant a ransom of the land” (vss. 23-24).

Elimelech died while living in Moab, far from Bethlehem (Ru 1:3). The expectation that his sons would retain a claim on the family property in Bethlehem is threatened by their untimely deaths. How can the this allotment of land be permanently sustained by Elimelech’s extended family (see Lv 25:25-28)? Naomi lacks the means to protect the land of her deceased husband, and thus the rights to Elimelech’s family property are endangered.

We do not know whether Naomi was forced to sell this land because of poverty, or whether Elimelech had already sold it before his death in Moab. Whatever the case, Naomi’s return imposes an obligation on the extended family to buy it back. Hence Boaz declares that “the field which was our brother Elimelech’s” needs to be redeemed (Ru 4:3). He understands the duty owed to family.

Boaz goes to the city gate, where public business is transacted. There he approaches the nearest kin of Elimelech. He states the matter to this relative by saying: “Buy it back in the presence of the inhabitants and the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am next after you” (vs. 4). This relative may have been willing, but then Boaz reminds him of a further obligation: “You must take [Ruth] as well, so as to raise up the name of the dead through his inheritance” (vs. 5). Setting duty aside, the next of kin declines to marry Ruth and redeem the land: “I cannot redeem it myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance” (vs. 6).

This refusal passes the duty of redemption on to Boaz, who is next in line within the clan. Thus, before legal witnesses, Boaz undertakes the dual obligation on behalf of Elimelech and his descendants (vss. 9-10). Boaz’ decision now becomes a matter of public record. The witnesses seal his action with a benediction (vss. 11-12). Their prayer is reminiscent of the Orthodox marriage service: “Bless them, O Lord our God, as Thou didst bless Abraham and Sarah. Bless them, O Lord our God as Thou didst bless Isaac and Rebecca.” Righteous obligations, whether marital, familial, communal, or applicable across God’s creation, stand before the Lord’s judgment. To Him we answer for all that we say and do.

The philosopher Aristotle observes, “We become what we are as persons by the decisions that we ourselves make.” Ruth chooses to leave her native land and become one of the people of God. Naomi directs Ruth to Boaz with a proposal of marriage (vss. 3:1-4), and her daughter-in-law chooses to obey (vs. 3:5). Boaz chooses to “perform the duty” if he is able (vs. 13). The nearest kinsman, on the other hand, declines the duty of redemption when he learns that it entails marriage to Ruth (vs. 4:6).

Thus, through God’s providence, Ruth and Boaz become the great-grandparents of the great King and Prophet David. They are immortalized in Scripture for their trust, loyalty, industry, kindness, submission, and duty, all of which make them worthy ancestors-in-the-flesh of Christ our God.

*Let us all celebrate the memory of the revered forefathers, extolling their lives by which they were made great and ask of Christ our God that we may walk in their holy footsteps.* – Sticheron from the Sunday of the Forefathers