

## **Adult Catechism Class February 2, 2015**

### **Part 1: Scripture Readings:**

**Luke 4:1–13:** And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

**Mark 14:33–39:** And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.

### **Part 2: Preparing for Easter (Great Lent)**

This great period of Lent before Easter is called by the Orthodox Church, Tesseractoste (Quadragesimal), which comes from the word forty (the 40 days of "fasting"). This Institute of the 40 days of Lent precedes the Resurrection of Christ. The celebration of the Resurrection of Christ does not fall on the same date each year, but according to the determination of the position of the moon and spring equinox, which is based on the original setting during the last Events of the life of Christ on earth. This 40-day period of Lent is not just a period of "abstinence" from foods, but primarily from personal iniquities. Abstinence from foods (fasting) alone is a means of attaining virtue; it is not an end in itself. During the period of fasting one makes a special attempt to evaluate his calling as a Christian; to listen to the voice of the Gospel and heed its commandments; to accept the constant invitation to enter Christ's Kingdom. It is an open invitation to everyone willing to enter; who believes in Christ and repents his iniquities; who makes an "about face" directly to Christ. During the period of the Great Lent the awakening of the spirit of man comes about through inspiration from the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. It is a time of self-examination and preparation, and of taking an inventory of one's inner life. He and Christ know his exact condition. At this time one sees himself in the mirror of the Gospel - how he looks. One finds the means and ways to correct and improve himself.

Lent is a period of time when one delves into himself with the light of the Holy Spirit in order to rid himself of the impediments which hold him back. It is a period when one strengthens his faith by more prayer and devotional life.

Great Lent is a period of time when the people are more conscious of their spiritual character. The passages of the Gospels and the Epistles, the hymnology and prayers, the spirit of the Church - all endeavor to help the Christian cleanse himself spiritually through repentance. "Repent" is the first word Jesus Christ spoke in His proclamation to the people, as the epitome of His Gospel. Repentance is the main motivation of the Christian which acts to free him from sin. One's recognition of his sin, his contrition over it and lastly his decision to make an about-face change of his attitude are the steps of repentance. For one can learn to recognize iniquities from the Bible and the teachings of the Church. During the period of Lent the Christian is called to self-examination and self-control by the radiance of the Event of the Resurrection of Christ. This is why the Church designated such a period of time be observed before this great feast day.

The four weeks which precede Great Lent are considered preparatory, a forerunner to Lent. These four weeks, along with the eight weeks of Lent, are characterized by the Church as Triodion, meaning "thrice-hymns", a name which has no bearing on the substance of Lent itself

### **Part 3: What do we do during the Great Lent?**

Repentance is not "giving up": it is a turning back to God whom we realize is the very source and goal in our life. He is our life. By repentance we realize we aren't where we should be; we are far from our Father. Our happiness, our wholeness, our sense of identity, well-being and joy flow from being close to God, who is the very center of our lives. So Lent, the time for repentance, is the time to rediscover this truth, to be convinced of it and make it more of a conscious reality in our everyday lives. In Pascha, the Easter mystery, Christ gives us a chance to be "born again" as children of God: as complete men and women possessing the life, grace and joy of God, which completes and heals our nature as human beings.

Live a Lenten style of life. Remember the basics: you are trying to turn more fully to God (repentance) and taste more fully the beauty and dignity that are yours as a child of God. You must think about that – which means eliminating some distractions – and seriously turn to Him. The church has three traditional helps for this: fasting, prayer and almsgiving.

These three practices during Lent are recommended by the Scriptures and Tradition. They get to the very root of repentance, which is turning back to God. They help strip away the glitter of a false self, a false view of the world and others (secularism) and aid in discovering our true identity, our relation to God, others, the world and ourselves. Fasting helps us discover our true hunger for God at the root of our being and our total dependence on Him as the source of our life and strength. Serious prayer puts us in communion with Him. Almsgiving helps us share God, His gifts and ourselves with others, establishing a true communion with them in the Lord.

God gave us material gifts as gifts over which we are to be responsible stewards. You are to use those gifts – and the gifts that you are – sacramentally. All things are potentially sacramental, since they are intended for communion with God and with each other. When we share the goods of the earth in love, we are "in communion", in fellowship in and with the Lord.

How are you handling your material possessions? They are not ends in themselves, but they are to produce that communion.

For four Sundays before Lent starts we think about our need for God, about repentance and fasting, God's judgment and our need to forgive one another. Lent actually begins on Clean Monday the day after the last of these pre-Lenten Sundays, Cheese-Fare Sunday. And since the Church day always begins at sunset, our first Lenten service is on Sunday evening. We have the beautiful Forgiveness Vespers, at which we are reconciled with each other before beginning the Lenten journey and usually have the opportunity for the sacrament of penance. We don't have Ash Wednesday. The Western Church begins the holy season on Wednesday with their proper services. The Eastern Churches start two days earlier because we use a different counting system to arrive at the traditional forty days.

The Western lent consists of forty days – excluding Sundays – leading up to Easter Sunday. The Eastern Churches keep forty days without interruption leading up to Lazarus Saturday, the first day of Holy Week. This accounts for the different starting times.

#### **Part 4: Who do we commemorate during the Great Lent?**

1) *SUNDAY OF THE TAX COLLECTOR AND PHARISEE (John 1:43-52)*. The repentance of the tax collector is the basis of Christian life; it is the passage into the Kingdom; it is the reestablishment of the image of God in the soul of His creature. The attitude of the tax collector made him a steward of divine gifts. Repentance and confession of faith is the same two-sided coin.

2) *SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON (Luke 15:11-32)*. Despite the characterization in this Parable, its main subject is the warm parental love of the Father. The father's love was unbroken and firm for his prodigal son. His love was shown more at the return of his son than in the beginning, despite the fact that his son squandered his "properties".

3) *SUNDAY OF MEAT (Matthew 25:31-46)*. The Last Judgment will be made according to the good works of each person as a result of his faith in and worship of God. These good works are directed to the "least", those in need, as Christ Himself says, "as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me", (v. 45). This Sunday is traditionally the last day before Lent that the believer eats meat.

4) *SUNDAY OF CHEESE (Matthew 6:14-21)*. The Gospel passage of the day refers to the manner of praying, fasting, almsgiving and all good works. These are to be done in secret, without boasting. The name of this Sunday, "Cheese", implies that the fast of this week is the gradual transition from eating meat to the strict fast of Lent, which starts the next day, Monday.

5) *FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT - SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY John 1:43-52*. This Sunday commemorates the return of the Icons into the churches, according to the decision of the Seventh Ecumenical Synod (787). The Church determined that this celebration would take place each year on the first Sunday of Lent, as the Sunday of Orthodoxy, starting March 11, 843. On this Sunday every year the triumph of the faith of Orthodoxy is celebrated with ceremony.

6) *SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT - ST. GREGORY PALAMAS (Mark 2:1-12)*. This Sunday commemorates the life of St. Gregory Palamas (14th century). The Church dedicates this Sunday to St. Gregory for his orthodox faith, theological knowledge, virtuous life, miracles and his efforts to clarify the orthodox teaching on the subject of Hesychasm (from the Greek, meaning quiet.) He maintained the Orthodox doctrine that it remains impossible to know God in his essence (God in himself), but possible to know God in his energies (to know what God does, and who he is in relation to the creation and to man), as God reveals himself to humanity.

7) *THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT - ADORATION OF THE CROSS (Mark 8:34-38; 9:1)*. This Sunday commemorates the venerable Cross and the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The Cross as such takes on meaning and adoration because of the Crucifixion of Christ upon it. Therefore, whether it be in hymns or prayers, it is understood that the Cross without Christ has no meaning or place in Christianity. The adoration of the Cross in the middle of Great Lent is to remind the faithful in advance of the Crucifixion of Christ. On this Sunday the Adoration of the Cross is commemorated with a special service following the Divine Liturgy in which the significance of the Cross is that it leads to the Resurrection of Christ.

8) *FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT - ST. JOHN OF THE CLIMAX (Mark 9:17-31)*. This Sunday commemorates St. John of the Climax (6th century) who is the writer of the book called The Ladder (climax) of Paradise. This book contains 30 chapters, with each chapter as a step leading up to a faithful and pious life as the climax of a Christian life. The spirit of repentance and devotion to Christ dominates the essence of this book, along with the monastic virtues and vices.

9) *FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT - ST. MARY OF EGYPT (Mark 10:32-45)*. This Sunday commemorates the life of St. Mary of Egypt, who is a shining example of repentance from sin through prayer and fasting. She lived a sinful life for many years, but was converted to a Christian life. She went into the wilderness to live an ascetic life for many years, praying and fasting in repentance of her previous sinful life, and dying there. The Church commemorates St. Mary for her recognition of her own sins as an example of how one can free oneself from the slavery and burden of wrongdoings.

10) *PALM SUNDAY (John 12:12-18)*. This Sunday commemorates the triumphant entrance of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem received Christ as a king, and, therefore, took branches of palms and went out to meet Him, laying down the palms in His path. The people cried out the prophecy of Zechariah: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel" (v. 13; of Zechariah 9:9).

11) *HOLY WEEK*. This is the time when Christians who went through the whole period of Lent in prayer and fasting approach the Feast of Feasts to celebrate the Passions of Christ and His

Resurrection. During the entire Lent the faithful try to practice and live the ideals and standards of this period in the light of Easter. This is why the Hymnology of the entire period of Lent, especially during Holy Week, refers to the Resurrection of Christ as the center of the Christian Faith. Each day of Holy Week is dedicated to the Events and teachings of Christ during His last week on earth.

### **Part 5: Major Feast Day during month of February**

**February 2: Presentation of Christ in the Temple (The Encounter)** This feast, celebrated on February 2, is known in the Orthodox Church as The Presentation of Christ in the Temple. Another name for the feast is The Meeting of our Lord. Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews and observed their religious customs. An important custom was for the couple to take their first-born son to the Temple. The baby was taken to the Temple forty days after his birth and was dedicated to God. When Jesus was forty days old, Mary and Joseph took Him to the Temple in Jerusalem. They were not wealthy, so they took two turtle doves with them to offer as a sacrifice at the Temple. As they arrived at the Temple, Mary and Joseph were met by a very old man named Simeon. He was a holy man and was noted as a very intelligent scholar. God promised Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. When Simeon saw Jesus, he took the baby in his arms and blessed the Lord and said: "Lord, now let Your servant go in peace according to Your promise, because my eyes have seen Your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory to your people Israel." Also, in the Temple was Anna the Prophetess. She had been a widow for many years. Anna was about eighty-four years old and spent her time in the Temple worshiping, fasting, and praying. When she saw the Christ Child she praised God and spoke of him to all who were awaiting the Messiah.

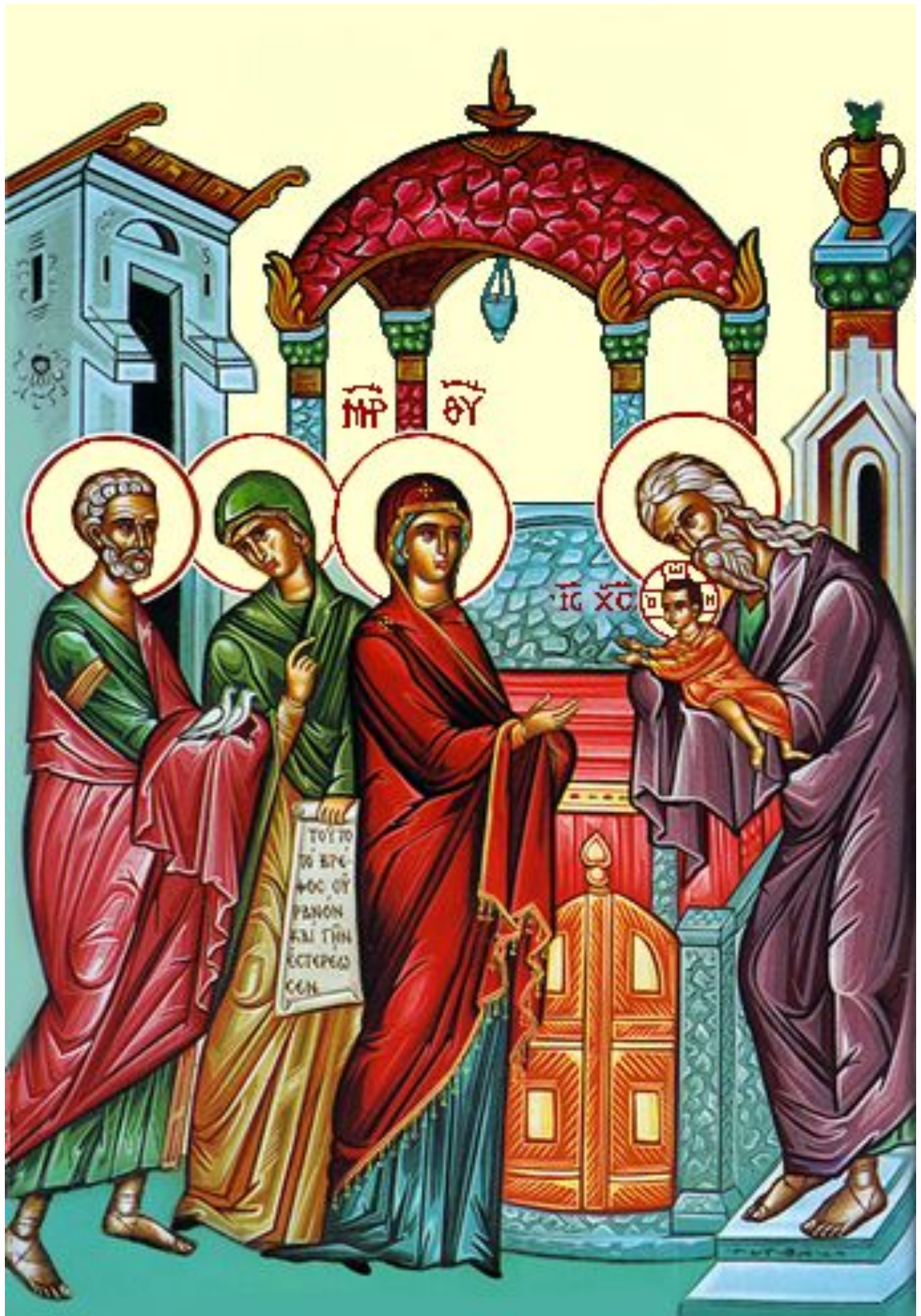
**Tropar of feast (Tone 1):** Hail, Mother of God, Virgin full of grace. From you has shown forth the Son of Justice, Christ our God, shining upon those who are in darkness. Rejoice also, you just Elder Simeon, for you received in your arms the Redeemer of our souls who has given us Resurrection.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and for ever and ever, Amen.

**Kondak of feast (Tone 1):** O Christ our God, through your birth You sanctified the Virgin's womb, and blessed, as it was proper, the hands of Simeon. Today, You have come to bring us deliverance. Give peace to nations at war and strengthen our civil authorities, for You alone love mankind.

### **Part 6: Homework for Next class on February 23:**

1. Read the following Scriptures: 1 Cor 3: 14-15, Mt 22: 13-14 , Matthew 5: 11-12
2. Pray at home, at church, and with your families.



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