

Date: April 2, 2024

Subject: BURL-Choir 3rd Sunday of Great Lent Weekend NOTICE

Dorogiye!

This Saturday/Sunday, the third of Great Lent, the Church celebrates a special Veneration of the Cross. This year, the commemoration of the Annunciation of our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary falls on the same days.

The attached Tropar / Kondak text sheet contains the special prayers that will be sung.

Brief summaries about the Veneration of the Cross, and Annunciation of our Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary are provided below.

(Note: unless otherwise indicated, all dates are “old style”.)

**** VENERATION OF THE CROSS

On the third Saturday-Sunday of Great Lent, during the All-night Vigil after the Great Doxology, the Holy Cross is brought forth from the Altar and placed in the center of the church for the veneration by the faithful. During the prostrations made before the Cross (which often contains a portion of the True Cross) the church chants, "Before Thy Cross, we bow down, O Master, and Thy holy Resurrection we glorify." (Krestu Tvoyemu . . .) This hymn is also chanted at the Liturgy instead of the Trisagion. The Church has placed this event in the middle of Great Lent in order that the recollection of the suffering and death of the Lord might inspire and strengthen those fasting for the remainder of the ascetic struggle of the fast. The Holy Cross remains out for veneration throughout the week until Friday, when, after the hours and before the beginning of the Presanctified Liturgy, it is returned to the Altar. Thus, the third Sunday and fourth week of Great Lent are termed those of the "Adoration of the Holy Cross."

**** ANNUNCIATION OF OUR MOST HOLY LADY, THE THEOTOKOS AND EVER-VIRGIN MARY

The Feast of the Annunciation is one of the earliest Christian feasts, and was already being celebrated in the fourth century. There is a painting of the Annunciation in the catacomb of Priscilla in Rome dating from the second century. The Council of Toledo in 656 mentions the Feast, and the Council in Trullo in 692 says that the Annunciation was celebrated during Great Lent.

The Greek and Slavonic names for the Feast may be translated as “good tidings.” This, of course, refers to the Incarnation of the Son of God and the salvation He brings. The background of the Annunciation is found in the Gospel of Saint Luke. The Troparion describes this as the “beginning of our salvation, and the revelation of the eternal mystery,” for on this day the Son of God became the Son of Man.

The Archangel Gabriel was sent by God to Nazareth in Galilee. There he spoke to the undefiled Virgin who was betrothed to Saint Joseph: “Hail, thou who art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

In contrast to Eve, who was readily deceived by the serpent, the Virgin did not immediately accept the Angel's message. In her humility, she did not think she was deserving of such words, but was actually troubled by them. The fact that she asked for an explanation reveals her sobriety and prudence. She did not disbelieve the words of the angel, but could not understand how they would be fulfilled, for they spoke of something which was beyond nature.

Then said Mary unto the angel, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"

"And the angel answered and said unto her, 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: therefore also that which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible.' And Mary said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.' And the angel departed from her."

In his Sermon 23 on the day of the Annunciation, Saint Philaret of Moscow boldly stated that "the word of the creature brought the Creator down into the world." He explains that salvation is not merely an act of God's will, but also involves the Virgin's free will. She could have refused, but she accepted God's will and chose to cooperate without complaint or further questions.

The icon of the Feast shows the Archangel with a staff in his left hand, indicating his role as a messenger. Sometimes one wing is upraised, as if to show his swift descent from heaven. His right hand is stretched toward the holy Virgin as he delivers his message.

The Virgin is depicted either standing or sitting, usually holding yarn in her left hand. Sometimes she is shown holding a scroll. Her right hand may be raised to indicate her surprise at the message she is hearing. Her head is bowed, showing her consent and obedience. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon her is depicted by a ray of light issuing from a small sphere at the top of the icon, which symbolizes heaven. In a famous icon from Sinai, a white dove is shown in the ray of light.

There are several famous icons of the Annunciation. One is in the Moscow Kremlin in the church of the Annunciation. This icon appeared in connection with the rescue of a prisoner by the Mother of God during the reign of Ivan the Terrible. Another is to be found in the Dormition Cathedral in Moscow. It was originally located in Ustiug, and was the icon before which Saint Procopius the fool prayed to save the city from destruction in 1290. One of the most highly revered icons in Greece is the Tinos icon of the Annunciation.

The Annunciation falls during Lent, but it is always celebrated with great joy. The Liturgy of Saint Basil or Saint John Chrysostom is served, even on the weekdays of Lent. It is one of the two days of Great Lent on which the fast is relaxed and fish is permitted (Palm Sunday is the other).