

## 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

### St Alexander Nevsky

30 August / 12 September

**Resurrection Tropar, Tone 3:** Let the heavens rejoice / let the earth be glad / for the Lord has shown strength with His arm! / He has trampled down death by death! / He has become the first-born of the dead! He has delivered us from the depths of hell / and has granted the world great mercy.

**Troparion St Alexander — Tone 4:** Christ revealed you, O Blessed Alexander / as a new and glorious worker of wonders; / a man and a prince well pleasing to God / and a divine treasure of the Russian Land. / Today we assemble in faith and love / to glorify the Lord by joyously remembering you. / He granted you the grace of healing, / therefore entreat Him to strengthen your suffering spiritual children, / and to save all Orthodox Christians.



**Resurrection Kondak, Tone 3:** On this day thou didst rise from the tomb, O Merciful One, / leading us from the gates of death / On this day Adam exults as Eve rejoices. / With the prophets and the patriarchs they unceasingly praise the divine majesty of Thy power.

**Kontakion St Alexander, Tone 8:** We honor you as a most radiant, spiritual star, / rising up from the east; going down in the west! / As you enriched the Russian people with good works and miracles, / so now enlighten us who remember you in faith, O Blessed Alexander. / Today as we celebrate your falling asleep, we ask you to beseech the Lord / that He may strengthen his suffering servants and save all Orthodox Christians!

**Vespers:** Isa. 66:10-14; Isa. 61:1-14, 62:1-5; Isa.60:1-16

#### Matins Gospel I

#### Epistle: Corinthians 15: 1-11

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, By which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, And that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

#### HE WAS SEEN BY CEPHAS, THEN BY THE TWELVE. AFTER THAT...

#### BY MORE THAN FIVE HUNDRED BRETHREN AT ONCE... LAST OF ALL HE WAS SEEN BY ME ALSO

Having finished the discourse on spiritual gifts, he passes on to the most necessary of all: the subject of the resurrection. For in this, too, they were very unsound. And as in men's bodies when the fever lays actual hold on their solid parts - I mean the nerves and the veins and the primary elements - the mischief becomes incurable unless it receives much attention, at that time something very similar was likely to happen. The mischief was proceeding to the very elements of godliness. This is why Paul also uses great earnestness. For his discourse was not of morals ...but about the very sum of all good things. They were at variance touching the resurrection itself. The devil was taking a vehement stand against the resurrection because this was our great hope ...Paul, writing to Timothy, called it gangrene ...saying, 'Of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus, who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some' (II Tim. 2:17,18). At one time then they spoke this way, but at another time they said that the body does not rise again but the resurrection is the purification of the soul. But these things that wicked demon persuaded them to say ...to show that all the things done for our sakes are a fable. For if they were persuaded that there is no resurrection of bodies, he would have gradually persuaded them that neither was Christ raised ...Paul puts this before us with much exactness, going over all of it...

For the Saint: Gal. 5:22-6:2

## **Gospel Matthew 19: 16-26**

Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'" The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

### **THE RICH YOUNG MAN**

See in the Epistle above what kind of reading from the Apostle Paul the Holy Church has selected for us today, in order to strengthen us in a definite state of mind. Along with the Sunday Gospel reading, which serves as a support, it strengthens in us the understanding that we live here temporarily. However, we fight against such an understanding; we don't even want to think about it. But it's a fact. Yes, our life is seventy years, and if by reason of strength, eighty years; but beyond this is hardship and disease. And how many tragic cases there are when God cuts off our earthly life in the years of youth, and even in childhood.

What have the Sunday Gospel readings been saying to us during the last few weeks? They have been saying that we must be perfect, that we must be Christians, because at any time the moment may come when Christ will call us and say: "Follow Me!" (Mt. 19:21). But how are we going to follow Him if we are spiritually paralysed, if we are spiritually blind and do not see His abodes on high?

Christ saves us from these dispositions. He gives us His Church. And the Orthodox Church is always reminding us of what the Bible says: how the world of God was created, how the first people lived, how the Fall occurred. Adam did not want to go from strength to strength, from grace to grace in communion with God, but wanted to have this strength within himself. And he went away, went away into the byways of human life, and therefore lost the Tree of Life. But God the Merciful One, God the Father gives us His Son Who was incarnate of the Most Holy Virgin, Who lived the Good News of the Gospel and showed us how to fulfill the commandment: Love for God and neighbour.

In today's Epistle the Apostle Paul shows us the true Risen Christ, Who brings us to Eternal Life. Paul himself, while still Saul, was also wandering in search of truth. He too in the beginning was searching for the earthly Christ who would free the Jews from the power of Rome. But when he was on the way to persecute the Church of God, he met Christ Himself, already after the Ascension; and here Saul became Paul. And as we heard in today's reading, he became the preacher of the Risen Christ. He became a New Testament man, who (if one can say so) brought about a great revolution in the world and transformed the whole world into the search for Christ and the striving for Life in Christ. With the name of the Apostle Paul is connected all the preaching of Christ in the entire world.

So when the Holy Church has strengthened us in the understanding that we are going toward Eternal Existence through our earthly wandering to Christ, then the Holy Church addresses us and points out: do not be mistaken. A certain lawyer came to Christ and asked:

What shall I do in order to inherit the Kingdom of God? (Today's Gospel). And Christ said, Fulfill the commandments. And when this lawyer said, From my childhood I have fulfilled the commandments, Christ saw his lack of understanding of the truth and said: Then give away everything that you have and follow Me (Mt. 19:16-21). But this man had much and trusted in this "much." Everything around him was real to him, and this reality gave him security in life. And this, what Christ was saying about future life, was not real to him. Therefore, when Christ said to him, Follow me and give away everything; he thought: how do I give it away? What will I have then? And what did he want to have? Power, strength, to be a possessor of earthly things.

The Apostle says today: what is earth? Christ leads us into Eternal Life. He saves us in an earthly way. God gives people abilities and knowledge; these are the various ways in which people pass their earthly life. But laid before them as a foundation are the Beatitudes: blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who weep, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the peacemakers, those who are persecuted (Mt. 5:3-11). See, these are all the heavenly ways. This is what the Holy Church sets before us. Speaking to us about life beyond the grave, about resurrection (not as an idea, but as real life), about the Apostle Paul and all our saints, she shows us the truth and shows us that mirage which appears to be real. But if we start to live for this reality in order to acquire earthly goods, we will find ourselves in an abyss, and everything we possess will remain here. There will be nothing that belongs to Christ.

So let us arise, brothers, answering the calls of the Holy Church today: do not abandon prayer, do not abandon fasting which gives us concentration and attention, do not neglect also your good heart which will obtain for you a revelation from God and the joy of spiritual spring which will strengthen you in Eternal Life.

*The One Thing Needful – Archbishop Andrei*

For the Saint: Matt. 11:27-30

## Saints of the Week

**30 August / 12 September - Afterfeast of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist** - Ss Alexander, John and Paul the New, Patriarchs of Constantinople - Alexander took part in the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, in place of the aged Patriarch Metrophanes, whom he then succeeded. When certain philosophers tried to dispute with him about faith, he said to one of them: 'In the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, I command you to remain silent!', and the philosopher became dumb from that moment. By his prayers, also, Arius's life was shortened. Alexander died at the age of ninety-eight, in the year 340. St John the Faster governed the Church in the days of the wicked Emperor Anastasius, an Acephalite heretic. He entered into rest in 595. St Paul IV governed the Church for five years and eight months and renounced the throne to receive the Great Habit secretly, to repent of his sins when he first supported the iconoclasts. He was the predecessor of the great Tarasius, and entered into rest in the time of Irene and Constantine, in 784;

**Translation of the relics of St. Alexander Nevsky.** The Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky (in monastic schema Alexis) died on the return journey from the Horde at Gorodtsa on the Volga, on November 14, 1263, and on November 23, 1263 he was buried in the Cathedral Church of the Nativity Monastery in the city of Vladimir. Veneration of the Prince began right at his burial, where a remarkable miracle took place. The saint extended his hand for the prayer of absolution (a written document placed in the coffin). Great Prince John (1353-1359), in his spiritual testament written in the year 1356, left to his son Demetrius (1363-1389), the future victor of the Battle of Kulikovo, "an icon of Saint Alexander." The incorrupt relics of the holy Prince were uncovered, because of a vision, before the Battle of Kulikovo in the year 1380, and then they were sent forth for a local celebration. Russian commanders asked for the intercession of the holy Prince, glorified by his defense of the Fatherland, in the following times: On August 30, 1721 Peter I, after a lengthy and exhausting war with the Swedes, concluded the Nishtad Peace. On this day it was decided to transfer the relics of the holy Prince Alexander Nevsky from Vladimir to the new northern capital, Peterburg, on the banks of the Neva. Removed from Vladimir on August 11, 1723, the holy relics were greeted at Shlisselburg on September 20 of that year and remained there until 1724. On August 30, they were placed in the Trinity Cathedral of the Alexander Nevsky Lavra, where they now rest in Saint Petersburg. By an edict on September 2, 1724 a feastday was established on August 30. Archimandrite Gabriel Buzhinsky (later Bishop of Ryazan, + April 27, 1731) compiled a special service in remembrance of the Nishtad Peace, combining with it a service to Saint Alexander Nevsky. The name of the Defender of the borders of Russia and the Patron of Soldiers is famous far beyond the borders of Russia. The numerous temples dedicated to Saint Alexander Nevsky bear witness to this. The most famous of them: the Patriarchal Cathedral at Sofia, the Cathedral church in Talinin, and a church in Tbilisi. These churches are a pledge of friendship of the Russian National-Liberator with brother nations.

The Assembly of the Enlighteners and Teachers of Serbia; Our Holy Father Christopher; St Eulalius, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia; At Todi in Umbria, Ss. Terence & Flaccus, martyrs;

**31 August / 13 September - The Feast of the Girdle of the Most Holy Mother of God** - At her Dormition, the most holy Mother of God left her girdle to the holy Apostle Thomas. This girdle was later taken to Constantinople and kept there in a sealed casket in the church of the Mother of God at Blachernae, founded by the Empress Pulcheria. This casket was never opened until the time of the Emperor Leo the Wise (886-912). Leo's wife, the Empress Zoe, was taken sick in soul and, as the result of a mysterious vision, desired that the girdle of the holy Mother of God be placed upon her. The Emperor asked the Patriarch, and the casket was opened. The girdle was taken out and placed upon the sick Empress, who immediately recovered. This feast was instituted as a memorial of this wonder. One part of this girdle is to be found in Georgia, in Zugdid. This came about as follows: The daughter of the Emperor Romanus was healed by the aid of this girdle and, later, when her father gave her to King Abuchaz of Georgia, she took a part of this girdle with her. By order of the Russian Tsar Alexander I, a special church was built in Mingrelia in Zugdid, where this piece of the wonderworking raiment of the holy Mother of God is kept.; St Gennadius, Patriarch of Constantinople; The Hieromartyr Cyprian' St John, Metropolitan of Kiev; at Glastonbury, **St. Aidan, bishop of Lindisfarne, apostle of N. England who taught the Wednesday and Friday fasts (651)** - An Irish monk who had studied under St. Senan, at Iniscathay (Scattery Island). He is placed as Bishop of Clogher by Ware and Lynch, but he resigned that see and became a monk at Iona about 630. His virtues, however, shone so resplendently that he was selected (635) as first Bishop of Lindisfarne, and in time became apostle of Northumbria. St. Bede is lavish in praise of the episcopal rule of St. Aidan, and of his Irish co-workers in the ministry. Oswald, king of Northumbria, who had studied in Ireland, was a firm friend of St. Aidan, and did all he could for the Irish missionaries until his sad death at Maserfield near Oswestry, 5 August, 642. St. Aidan died at Bamborough on the last day of August, 651, and his remains were borne to Lindisfarne. Bede tells us that "he was a pontiff inspired with a passionate love of virtue, but at the same time full of a surpassing mildness and gentleness."

**St. Eanswythe, abbess of Folkestone, grand-daughter of king St. Ethelbert of England, (c.640)** - is remembered for the simple life in which she gave up all the pleasures of the World. Once, the King of Northumbria asked to marry Eanswythe. At that time her father was building an oratory for her and one of the beams to be used was three feet too short. Eanswythe set the King a task to complete in order to win her hand in marriage. If the Kings gods could, by his prayers, lengthen the beam then she would marry him. The King failed and went away filled with shame. Eanswythe however, approached the beam, made a prayer, and the beam lengthened to the required size. This was the first miracle. The nearest water to the oratory was a good distance away and had to be brought by hand. Eanswythe therefore went to the spring a mile or so away in the village of Sweeten. Using a stick she made the water follow her, up and down over cliffs and rocky summits, to her Oratory, where it delivered abundant water for men and animals. In the third miracle the young virgin placed an interdict that the birds should stop settling on the nearby fields and consuming the produce. So it was - the birds obeyed. She performed still further miracles. She restored a blind woman's sight, made a mad man sane and restored health in others from various diseases. King Eadbald consented to allowing her to found a monastery where she served as its abbess. Hers was the first convent in England. The Abbey was destroyed by the Danes; the church built in its place became an "alien" Priory of Lonlay I'

Abbeye(Orne) in 1095; then about 1838 the Monks were moved by William de Avaranches to the site of the present church. Less than a century later a great rebuilding took place. It was finally rebuilt as we see it today between 1856 and 1874. In art, Saint Eanswythe is portrayed as a crowned abbess with a book and two fish.

**1 / 14 September – The Beginning of the Church's Year** - The First Ecumenical Council decreed that the Church's year should begin on September 1st. The month of September was, for the Jews, the beginning of the civil year (see Exodus 12:2), the month of the gathering of fruits and the bringing to God of sacrifices of thanksgiving. It was at the time of this feast that the Lord Jesus went into the synagogue in Nazareth, opened the Book of the Prophet Isaiah and read the words: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; because He hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance' (Is. 61:1-2; cf. Luke 4:16-21). This month of September is also noted in the history of Christianity because it was during September that Constantine the Great was victorious over Maxentius, the enemy of the Christian faith, a victory followed by the granting of freedom of confession of the Christian faith throughout the whole Roman Empire. For a long time, the civil year in the Christian world was reckoned in the same way as the Church's year, from September 1st, but it was later changed to January 1st, first in western Europe and then also in Russia in the time of Peter the Great;

**Our Holy Father Simeon Stylites (the Elder) and his mother St. Martha** - born in Syria of peasant parents, he fled from them at the age of eighteen and became a monk. He gave himself to the strictest asceticism, sometimes fasting for forty days. After that, he followed a particular ascesis, until then unknown: standing day and night on a pillar in unceasing prayer. His pillar was at first three metres high, then one of six metres was built for him, then eleven, eighteen and finally twenty. His mother, Martha, came to see him twice, but he would not receive her, saying to her from his pillar: 'Don't disturb me now, Mother dear, if we are to be worthy to meet in the next world.' St Simeon endured innumerable assaults from demons, overcoming them all by prayer. He worked great miracles, healing the sick by his prayers and his words. People from all sides gathered around his pillar: rich and poor, kings and slaves. He helped them all, restoring bodily health to some, giving comfort and instruction to others and denouncing some for their heretical faith. The Empress Eudocia was thus turned from the Eutychian heresy back to Orthodoxy. Simeon lived in asceticism during the reigns of the Emperors Theodosius the Younger, Marcian and Leo the Great. This first Christian stylite and great wonderworker, St Simeon, lived for seventy years, and entered into rest in the Lord on September 1st, 459. His relics were taken to Antioch, to the church dedicated to his name; St. Joshua the Son of Nun.

**2 / 15 September – Fast Day - The Holy Martyr Mamas** — He was born in Paphlagonia of eminent Christian parents, Theodotus and Rufina, who were thrown into prison for the name of Christ. In the prison, Theodotus was the first to die, and Rufina, after giving birth to a son, soon followed her husband, and the new-born child was left in the prison beside the bodies of his parents. God the Provider sent His holy angel to a noble widow, Ammia, whom the angel told in a dream to go to the prison and take the child. Ammia asked the city governor's permission to bury the dead and take the child into her own home. The child was dumb until the age of five, and then his first word was 'Mama', because of which he was given the name Mamas. At school, he showed an unusual brightness, and, being brought up at home in a Christian spirit, did not conceal his faith but confessed it before his contemporaries, mocking at the idols. In the time of the Emperor Aurelian, there was a vicious persecution of Christians, and the pagans did not spare even Christian children. Mamas was fifteen years old when he was taken before the Emperor. The Emperor told him to deny Christ only with his lips. To this Mamas replied: 'I shall not deny my God and King Jesus Christ either in my heart or with my lips.' The Emperor ordered that he be beaten, burned with torches and finally thrown into the sea, but an angel of God saved him and took him to a high mountain near Caesarea. There he lived in solitude and prayer, and fierce wild beasts were tamed by his holiness. He was eventually found there by the persecutors and put again to torture. Overcoming both the power of fire and the fierceness of wild beasts, holy Mamas was stabbed with a trident by a pagan priest. He thus gave his holy soul to the God to whom he had remained faithful in all his sufferings. Many of the sick have been healed by his relics. St John the Faster, Patriarch of Constantinople; St Eleazar; The Feast of the Kaluga Icon of the Mother of God.

**3 / 16 September – The Hieromartyr Anthimus** - Born in Nicomedia, he was brought up from childhood as a true Christian. 'His body was mortified, his spirit humble; jealousy was uprooted, anger tamed, sloth banished.... he had love for all and was at peace with all, had a good understanding with all, was filled with zeal for the glory of God and was open to all.' It is not surprising that a man of such virtues was made a bishop. St Anthimus worked as a bishop in Nicomedia at the time of a harsh persecution of Christians under the two wicked Emperors Diocletian and Maximian. Streams of Christian blood were spilled, especially in Nicomedia. One year, on the feast of the Nativity of Christ, twenty thousand martyrs were burned in one church (see Dec. 28th). This happened during Anthimus's episcopate. The persecution did not end with this, but continued, and many Christians were thrown into prison and kept there for torture and death. St Anthimus withdrew to a village, Omana, not to escape death but to be able thence to strengthen his flock in the path of martyrdom, that none should draw back through fear. One of his letters to the Christians in prison was seized and taken to the Emperor Maximian. The Emperor sent twenty soldiers to find Anthimus and take him. The grey-beard, discerning this, went out to meet the soldiers, brought them into his house as his guests and only then revealed that he was Anthimus. The soldiers, amazed at his kindness, urged him to hide, and said that they would tell the Emperor that they had been unable to find him, but Anthimus replied that he dared not allow God's Law to be violated by a lie in order to save his life. So he set out with the soldiers. On the way, all the soldiers came to faith in Christ and were baptised by Anthimus. Brought before the Emperor, Anthimus was submitted to harsh and long-drawn-out torture, and was finally beheaded with an axe. He glorified God and entered into rest in the Lord at the beginning of

the fourth century. The Holy Martyr Vasilissa; St Joannicius, Archbishop and first Patriarch of Serbia; Our Holy Father Theoctistus.

**4 / 17 September - Fast Day - The Hieromartyr Babylas** - This 'great and wonderful man, if one can call him a man', as St John Chrysostom expresses it, was archbishop in Antioch in the time of the wicked Emperor Numerian. This Numerian made a peace-treaty with some barbarian king, who was of better character and a greater lover of peace than himself. As a sign of his sincere desire for a lasting peace, the king gave his little son to be brought up at Numerian's court. One day, Numerian butchered the boy and offered him as a sacrifice to the idols. Still hot from his wicked shedding of innocent blood, this evildoer went to a Christian church to see what was happening there. Holy Babylas was at prayer with the people. He heard that the Emperor was coming with his retinue and intended to enter the church. Babylas stopped the service, went out in front of the church and told the Emperor that, as an idolater, he was not permitted entry to the holy church where the one, true God was worshipped. Speaking of Babylas, Chrysostom says: 'Who else in the world would he fear, having with such authority withstood the Emperor? By this he taught kings not to spread their power further than the measure given them by God, and also showed the clergy how to use their authority.' The shamed Emperor turned back, but planned revenge. The following day, the Emperor summoned Babylas, and began to berate him and bid him offer sacrifice to idols, which the saint, naturally, steadfastly refused to do. The Emperor then bound him with chains and threw him into prison. He also tortured three children: Urban, aged twelve, Prilidian, aged nine and Hippolinus, aged seven. Babylas was their spiritual father and teacher, and they had stayed near him out of love for him. They were the sons of a Christian woman, Christodoula, who herself suffered for Christ. The Emperor first ordered that each child be beaten with the number of blows that totalled his age, and then had them thrown into prison. Babylas, in bonds, was present at the beheading of the children, giving them courage, and then laid his honoured head under the sword. He was buried by Christians in the chains in which he was bound at his death, in one grave with the three children. Their holy souls flew off to the company of heaven, and their wonderworking relics remained to be of support to the faithful, along with the enduring witness of their heroism in the Faith. They suffered in about 283. The Holy Prophet Moses; The Holy Martyrs Marcellus and Cassian; Translation of the relics of Ss. Cuthbert & Birinus, bb, to Durham, England

**Icon of the Unburnt Bush** - This beautiful Icon calls to mind the burning Bush which Moses saw, but which was not consumed by the flames. The Prophet Moses is also commemorated on this day. On the Icon is a representation of the Mother of God with Her Child. She holds a ladder on which is sometimes represented St John of the Ladder, the ascetic who wrote a great spiritual treatise called "The Ladder." This richly meaningful Icon depicts the Mother of God Who contained within Her Womb the Eternal God Who is Fire, and yet was unconsumed, like the Unburnt Bush. She is a true Ladder by which we ascend to Heaven, as the Son of God took His Body from Her. The Prophet David is also depicted in the Icon, as the Ancestor of the Most Holy Theotokos and of Christ. He foretold the coming of the Messiah, especially through his Psalms. Many Icons of the Feasts of the Orthodox Church have depictions of David for the fact that his Psalms are used throughout to celebrate the events of our salvation. This icon has been known for its miracles of preservation from fires in Churches and homes.

**5/ 18 September - The Holy Prophet Zacharias** - He was the father of St. John the Forerunner. Zacharias was the son of Barachias, from the lineage of Abia, of the sons of Aaron. Zacharias was a high priest who held the eighth degree of service in the Temple at Jerusalem. His wife Elizabeth was the daughter of Sophia and sister of St. Anna, who was the mother of the Holy Theotokos. During the reign of King Herod the child-slayer, Zacharias was serving one day at the Temple of Jerusalem according to his turn. An angel of God appeared to him in the sanctuary, and Zacharias had great fear. The angel said to him: Fear not, Zacharias (Luke 1:13), and announced that Elizabeth would bear a son, in answer to their prayers. But both Zacharias and Elizabeth were old. When Zacharias doubted the words of the heavenly herald, the angel said: I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God (Luke 1:19). Zacharias was struck dumb from that hour, and could not speak until his son was born and he had written on a tablet: His name is John (Luke 1:63). Then his speech returned, and he magnified God. Some time later, when the Lord Jesus had been born and Herod began to slaughter the children of Bethlehem, he sent men to find and kill the son of Zacharias-for Herod had heard all that had happened to Zacharias, and how John had been born. Upon seeing the soldiers coming, Elizabeth took John into her arms-he was a year and a half old at that time-fled from the house with him, and ran to a rocky and desolate place. When she saw the soldiers following her, she cried out to the mountain: "O mountain of God, receive a mother with her child!" and the rock opened and hid the mother and child. Then Herod, enraged that the child John had not been slain, ordered that Zacharias be slain before the altar. The blood of Zacharias was spilled on the marble and dried solid as stone, and remained as a witness to Herod's evil deed. In the place where Elizabeth hid with John a cave opened, water flowed out of it, and a fruit-bearing palm grew, all by the power of God. Forty days after the death of Zacharias, the blessed Elizabeth died. The child John remained in the wilderness, fed by an angel and protected by God's providence, until the day he appeared at the Jordan; The Holy Martyrs Juventius and Maximinus; Seventy Holy Martyrs; Venerable Athanasius