

Parish Prayer List (Living)

(Parish)

Evangelos	Carolyn	Robert	Sharon
John	Maria	Anamay	Ron
Lawrence	Dianna	Efthalia	Denny
Anthony	Paula	Kathleen	John L.
Beverly	David	Michael	Anastasia
Nina	Walter	Nathan	Mary
Joseph	Duncan	Thecla	Michael
Reader Mark	Jason	Silouan	Susan Mary
Maximus	Emilia	Clint	George
Magdalini	Connie	Emil	John H.
Barbara	John	Pam	Gracie
Olga	Marina	Seraphim	Maria
Sophia	Danny	Katina	Jeffery
Andrea	Subdn. Gregory	Nicholas	Mary
Rachel	Katherine	Lily	Joyce

(non-Parish)

Alexandra	Rachael	Seraphim	Evdokia
Christopher	Fr. Michael	Paige and Paul	Sean
James	Nicholas B.	Karin	Meg
Barry Pierce	Rick P.	Susan K	Penny
Anna	Brian	Hugh	Raymond
Judy	Megan	Micah	Charles Kahn
Peter	Maria	Michael	Timothy
Petrese	Mary	Thomas Pappas	Lillian Pappas
Pietra & Piero	Michael	Grover	Valentina
Mike	Ron	Brian	John Howard

Parish Prayer List (Fallen Asleep)

Anastasios Pait (+8/4)

Evangelos Georgopoulos (+8/8)

Theodoros Kontos (8/29)

Mary Grace Beall (+9/2)

Mark Kesselak (+9/2)

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Thoughts from the Fathers

Today the glad tidings go forth to the world. Today sweet fragrance is wafted forth, foretelling the glad tidings of salvation; and the barrenness of our nature hath been united: for the barren one hath become a mother to the one who remained a virgin after giving birth to the Creator; from whom cometh the God in nature, taking a foreign nature and working salvation in the flesh for the lost, Christ, the Lover of mankind, and the Deliverer of our souls.

Stephen the Jerusalemite, Second of his Stichera on "O Lord, I have cried..." at Vespers, The Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos

The joy of the whole world hath shone forth to us from the two righteous ones, Joachim and Anne, verily the all-extolled Virgin, who because of her surpassing purity became a living temple of God, and alone is known as truly Theotokos. Wherefore, by her intercessions, O Christ God, send forth safety to the world, and to our souls the Great Mercy.

Germanos the Patriarch, First Sticheron of the Aposticha, Vespers of the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos

The Fathers tell us that a man gains possession of the fear of God by keeping the thought of death before his mind and remembering eternal punishment, by examining himself each evening about how he has passed the day and each morning about how he has passed the night; by never giving rein to his tongue and by keeping in close and continual touch with a man possessed of the fear of God, as his spiritual director. A brother once said to one of the elders, ‘What shall I do, Father, that I may learn to fear the Lord?’ And he said, ‘Go and become a disciple of a man possessed of the fear of the Lord.’ We chase away from us the fear of the Lord by the fact that we do just the opposite; we do not keep before us the thought of death, or punishment, nor do we attend to our own condition, or examine how we spend our time, but we live differently and are occupied with different things, pandering to our liberty, giving way to ourselves, self-indulgence - this is the worst of all, this is perfect ruin. What chases away the fear of the Lord as effectively as indulging our fancies? And when he was asked again, ‘Is it so very dangerous?’ he said, ‘Yes, there is nothing more dangerous than self-indulgence. It prepares the ground for all the vices because it chases out from the soul the fear of God.’

Saint Dorotheos of Gaza

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The Nativity of the Theotokos, September 8

In the Book of Exodus, after the Hebrew people left the land of Egypt, they wandered in the desert for some forty years before they finally came to the Promised Land. During this time, they met with God on the holy mountain of Sinai. There, they worshiped God by offering up sacrifices to Him. One of these sacrifices is described in

the 24th chapter of Exodus, and then the next passage is dedicated to a meeting that took place between God and the Prophet Moses. Moses ascends up the mountain to meet with God, and there God gives Moses some very detailed instructions regarding worship. Everything is there for how to construct the mobile worship space for the Hebrews, called the Tabernacle, including details on dimensions, building materials, tapestries, specific designs for iconography, what the priests should wear, and so on. Anyone who takes the time to read chapters 25 through 29 of Exodus could never come away with the impression that God does not care about the details of how we worship Him.

The first chapter with these instructions is dedicated to an object which is at the very center of the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was a large wooden chest covered with gold and adorned with images of angels. On it was a golden throne called the Mercy Seat. Eventually the Ark was used to contain several holy objects, including the tablets of the Ten Commandments, a bowl of the manna God sent down from heaven to feed the Hebrews, and the miraculously budding staff of Aaron, the brother of Moses. The Ark was a throne where God communed with His people. It was so holy that to touch it unworthily was to die. It was at the very center of Hebrew worship of the One True God, and it was sometimes even carried into battle with them to bring the power of God to bear in the face of Israel's enemies. The Old Testament Scriptures mention the Ark a number of times, and several rare scriptural expressions are used when referring to the Ark.

When we come to the New Testament, we see a repeat of some of these rare expressions of language, but this time, this language refers not to the Ark, not to the Temple in Jerusalem, nor to any other object. Rather, this language is used when referring to Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, the One True God. When the Gospel writers wanted to refer to the Virgin, they realized by the power of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that all the symbolism and real power that surrounded the Ark of the Old Covenant now had been transferred to the Ark of the New Covenant, the Virgin Mary herself, the Theotokos.

This is why when we come to the feasts of the Mother of God, such as we celebrate today, we often hear in the hymns quotations from the Old Testament referring to the Ark of the Covenant. In the Virgin Mary, we approach the new Ark of the New Covenant, no longer a lifeless golden box but a living, breathing human being who

mystically and physically contained within herself the Everlasting God of the Universe.

In the Old Testament, to approach the Ark of the Covenant was to approach the Lord God Himself. This was not because God could be contained within a golden box, but rather because God chose that golden box as a place of utmost holiness and divine presence on Earth. There on that Mercy Seat God communed with His people in a powerful, mystical way. And now the Lord has approached us once again, but the locus of His coming to Earth is a human woman.

And just as the Ark of the Old Covenant was carefully constructed and prepared by human hands, so, too, was the new Ark carefully prepared. But instead of the preparation of carpenters and goldsmiths, the preparation of the Virgin Mary was by her quiet and humble obedience to and cooperation with the will of God.

This is why we honor the Virgin Mary, not because we want to elevate her to the status of a goddess and worship her, but because she is the carefully prepared vessel which bore the God of the Universe, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Through her came our salvation. Through her came a new life for every human being and the whole world. Through her came union between God and man.

Therefore, we approach her today and venerate her on her birthday because we desire to approach and come close to the Son of God.

We respect her and sing about her glory because that glory is the glory of the awesome God. We call upon her here at the center of our worship just as the Hebrews placed the old Ark at the center of theirs, not because she or a golden box are to be the object of worship, but because the Ark is the place of worship, because the Ark of the Old Covenant and now the Ark of the New Covenant are the place where God has chosen to draw near to His people.

As we look upon the icon of the Holy Virgin, we see that she points us to her Son. Today, as we celebrate her birth into this world, may we hear her call to draw near to her holy Son. As we gaze upon the glory that surrounds her as more honorable than the cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim, may we be drawn into a true encounter with that glory, the glory which is God's and may also be ours if we are in union and communion with Him, just as she is.

Fr. Andrew Damick