



DIAKONIA

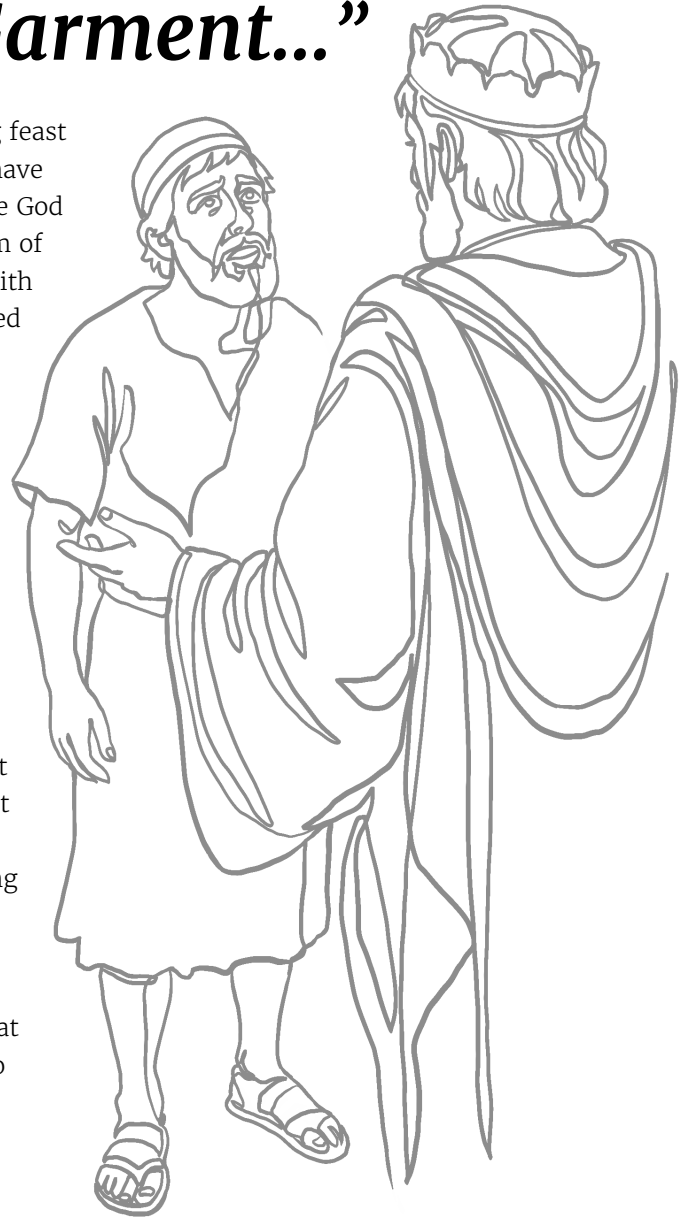
A National Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S READING | *Matthew 22:2-14*

Fr. George Parsenios (HCHC '96)

"I Have No Wedding Garment..."

Should we pity the man who was expelled from the wedding feast in today's Gospel reading? To our eyes, he might seem to have been rejected unfairly. But the man is expelled, not because God rejected him, but because he rejected God. How so? The Kingdom of Heaven is often compared to a joyous meal. When Jesus dined with the poor and downtrodden during his earthly ministry, he showed that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. These earthly meals symbolized the joyous meal that believers will share in heaven. To follow Jesus is to dine with him, on earth as well as in heaven. The King in today's parable is God the Father, who has invited people to dine with his Son. Whoever accepts the invitation has become a follower of Jesus. But being a disciple of Jesus and dining with him carries a further obligation. Judas, after all, was one of the 12 disciples who ate with Jesus even at the Last Supper. He seemed to be following Jesus, even as he plotted to betray him. The underdressed man in today's parable is not a pitiful soul who was mistreated and wronged, but a traitor like Judas, growing like a weed within the healthy harvest of the Church. For the Church Fathers, the wedding garment that he lacked is the white robe that people would put on right after being baptized. Without this garment of righteousness, the young man has rejected his Christian identity. The hymns from the first three nights of Holy Week focus on this wedding garment, especially in the notable hymn that says, "I see your bridal chamber adorned, my Savior, but I have no wedding garment that I may enter therein." Today's parable admonishes us not only to be called Christians, but actually to be Christians.



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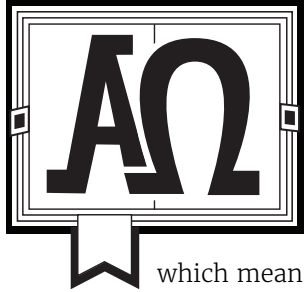
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FROM THE ORIGINAL GREEK: *Synagôgê* (Συναγωγή) What does “Synagogue” mean?

Fr. George Parsenios (HCHC '96)



Although the synagogue as an institution is entirely Jewish, the word itself is entirely Greek. Synagogue (*συναγωγή/synagôgê*) is derived from two Greek terms: *syn*, which means “with,” and *agô*, which means “gather” or “lead.” In its most basic sense, therefore, a synagogue is not a building but is literally a “gathering.” The Greek translators of the Old Testament used this word to translate the Hebrew words for “assembly” and “congregation,” and over time the term synagogue went from denoting a gathering of people to denoting the

building in which they gathered. By the first century AD, the synagogue was a fixture in Jewish life. Synagogues were used for teaching and prayer, as well as a refuge that offered hospitality and lodging to travelers and pilgrims. Synagogues were also the place where Jesus and the apostles worshipped, taught, and faced stiff opposition. The Temple in Jerusalem, with its various rites and public sacrifices, was the center of Jewish worship. When the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, Jewish religious observance focused instead on the study of the Bible and good works. Synagogues became the location for these activities, just as they continue to be today.



St. Symeon the Stylite. Public Domain.

THIS WEEK'S LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY Saint Symeon the Stylite

Ben Malian, MTS-Holy Cross 2026

September 1st is the feast day of St. Symeon the Stylite, a fifth-century Syrian monk who famously lived more than three decades atop a pillar (Greek: *stylos*). Having entered monastic life as a mere teenager, Symeon was eventually asked to withdraw from the community due to his rigorous asceticism.

Yet wherever Symeon humbly retreated to perform his spiritual labors, crowds of people sought him out. He resolved at first to mount a short pillar amidst some deserted ruins, placing himself at a distance from the curious crowds. After ascending a series of pillars, he finally settled on one pillar, roughly fifty feet high, capped only by a small, open-air platform. Symeon struggled here until his death on September 2nd, 459.

Remarkably, although Symeon was a hermit, he graciously received and counseled visitors while atop his pillar—even maintaining written correspondence with the outside world. He is said to have communicated with his contemporary, St. Genevieve of Paris, and a letter of his in support of the Council of Chalcedon (451) seems to have influenced imperial policy.

SEPTEMBER 1:

The Ecclesiastical Year

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The ecclesiastical year, which begins on the first of September, is divided between movable and fixed holy days. The movable holy days are determined by the date of Easter, the most important of all feast days. The determination of the date of Easter was definitively regulated by the decision of the First Ecumenical Council, held in Nicaea (325). Next in importance to Easter are the twelve great feasts, of which three are movable. The twelve great feasts, as they occur in chronological order after September 1, are:



1. The Nativity of the Virgin Mary (September 8)
2. The Elevation of the Life-giving Cross (September 14)
3. The Presentation of the Virgin Mary in the Temple (November 21)
4. Christmas (December 25)
5. Epiphany (January 6)
6. The Presentation of Christ in the Temple (February 2)
7. The Annunciation (March 25)
8. Palm Sunday (the Sunday before Easter)
9. The Ascension (40 days after Easter)
10. Pentecost (50 days after Easter)
11. The Transfiguration (August 6)
12. The Repose of the Virgin Mary (August 15)

Fast Days and Fast Periods

Four main fast periods are included in the ecclesiastical year. They are:

1. The Great Fast (Lent) begins on a Monday, seven weeks before Easter.
2. Fast of the Apostles varies in length from 1 to 6 weeks; it begins on Monday, 8 days after Pentecost, and ends on June 28—the eve of the feast of Saints Peter and Paul.
3. Fast of the Repose of the Virgin Mary—August 1 to 14.
4. Christmas Fast, lasting 40 days, from November 15 to December 24.

Individual fast days include the feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross (September 14), the Beheading of St. John the Baptist (August 29), and the eve of Epiphany (January 5), as well as all Wednesdays and Fridays. There is no fasting, however, between Christmas and Epiphany, during the tenth week before Easter, the week after Easter and the week after Pentecost. Fasting as practiced in the Orthodox Church means abstinence from meat, fish, dairy products, olive oil, and wine. Total abstinence is reserved for the fast of several hours prior to receiving Holy Communion.

Excerpted from a longer article found here: www.goarch.org/-/the-calendar-of-the-orthodox-church



FAITH IN ACTION

Review the upcoming Church calendar and commit to observing one feast day and one fasting period more intentionally through prayer, worship, or an act of charity.



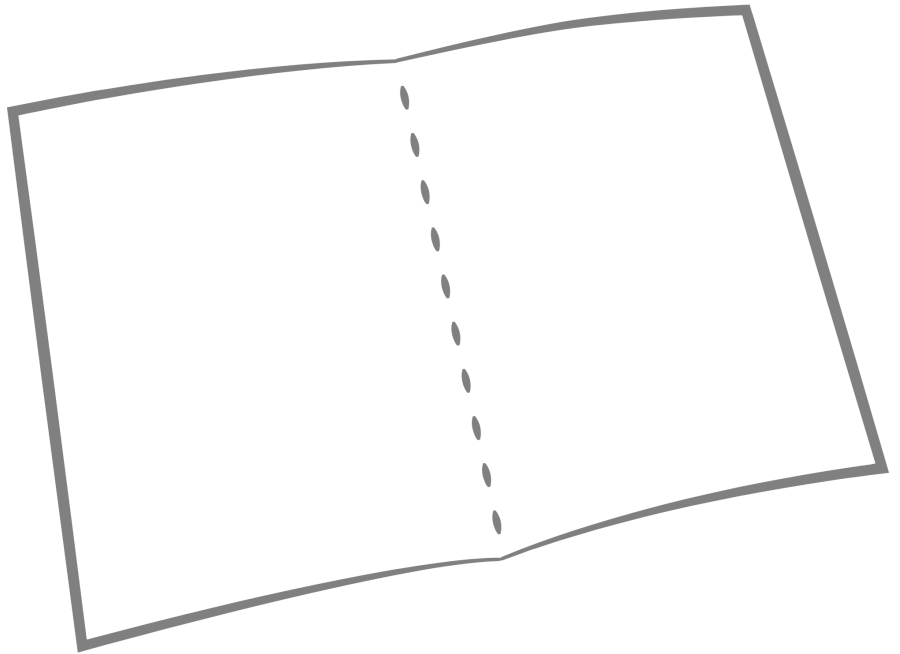
SEPTEMBER 8:

Nativity of the Theotokos

Happy birthday, Panagia! The Nativity of the Theotokos, celebrated on September 8, is the feast day that celebrates the birth of the Virgin Mary. On this day, we remember how her parents Saints Joachim and Anna prayed faithfully to God for a child. God heard their prayers and blessed them with a daughter, Mary. From the very beginning of her life, Mary was chosen by God for a special purpose: to become the Mother of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This feast is a joyful celebration because Mary's birth was the beginning of God's plan for the salvation of the world. Through her humble obedience and love for God, she became the living temple who carried Christ within her.

Just For Kids!
(...and the young at heart)

To honor her, take some time to write Mary a birthday card!



Then, inside the empty present, draw or write a gift you would like to give her to celebrate her special day.

