

Saint Mary of Egypt – A Desert Meeting

Saint Mary of Egypt immediately recognized the holiness of a man she'd never seen before--the monk Zossimas--when he encountered her in the desert. She had come a long, long way to achieve that recognition of holiness in a man.

Mary ran away from her miserable home at age twelve, and took to the streets. She had been abused, neglected, and deprived of the love that would have helped her see her own worth.

Mary was strongly but darkly attracted to men. Unable to see the worth in others any more than in herself, she took perverse delight in enticing and then mocking men. For seventeen years she sold her body to any man who interested her. As Dr. Kyriaki FitzGerald has written, Mary convinced herself that she was free and living on her own terms. Yet she felt contempt and disgust for men, even as she avidly sought their embraces.

Curiosity, and the promise of new customers, impelled Mary to join the crowd boarding a ship for Jerusalem. Once there she continued to follow the crowd to the cathedral. It was the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Mary tried to enter the church, but at the threshold found herself thrust back as if by powerful arms. Shocked and distressed, she suddenly confronted the emptiness of her life.

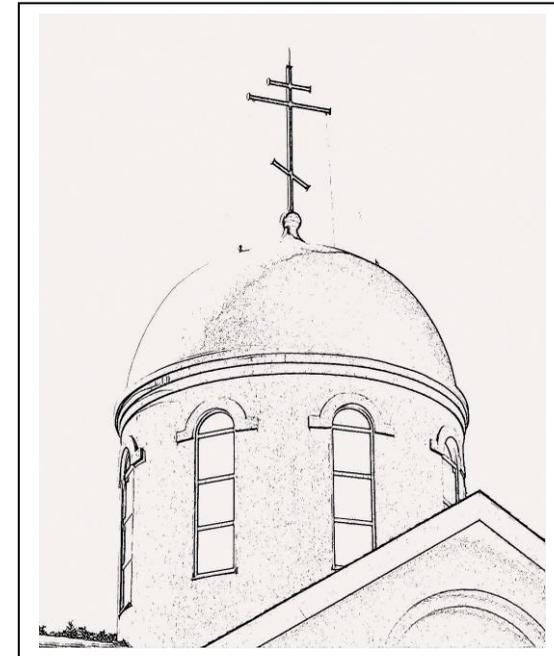
But almost at the same moment, she felt the loving gaze of the Theotokos in the icon. She begged the Mother of God to help her, to show her what her life should be. Approaching the threshold again, she felt herself drawn in rather than pushed out. Like other pilgrims, but now with her whole heart rather than idle curiosity, she worshipped at the foot of the cross. And in the midst of the throng, the Theotokos spoke words directed only to her: "Cross the Jordan, and you will find peace."

By sunset of that day, Mary had reached the Church of St. John by the Jordan, where she was baptized and received Holy Communion. The next day she crossed the Jordan, and then began her forty-seven solitary years of struggle and intense prayer.

When the monk Zossimas came upon her in the desert, Mary knew who he was at once. A beautiful scene of mutual humility and respect followed. Zossimas prostrated himself and asked for her blessing; she in turn bowed down to him and asked for his. This went on until Mary said that he, as a priest, should bless her. He answered that it is not by one's rank but by the gifts of the Holy Spirit that grace is recognized. As recipient of those gifts, the monk said, Mary should bless him. So she finally did so.

This woman who had once seen men only as objects of her lust was now able to recognize the holiness of a man she was seeing for the first time. By God's grace, Saint Mary of Egypt had, in the words of Hebrews 9: 14b, purified her conscience "from dead works to worship the living God."

WEEKLY



BULLETIN

Today is the beginning of our salvation, the revelation of the eternal mystery. The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin as Gabriel announces the coming of Grace. Together with him let us cry to the Theotokos: Rejoice O Full of Grace, the Lord is with you!

Troparion of the Annunciation to the Theotokos

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF THE ANNUNCIATION

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Rev. Fr. Michael Pejovic, *Attached Priest*

Matthew Petrides, *Senior Warden*

Reader Matthew Hascha, *Choir Director*

April 18, 2021

FIFTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT - St. Mary of Egypt

Tone 4. Ven. John, disciple of Ven. Gregory of Decapolis (9th c.). Martyrs Victor, Zoticus, Zeno, Acindynus, and Severian, of Nicomedia (303). St. Cosmas, Bishop of Chalcedon, and his fellow ascetic, St. Auxentius (815-820). New Martyr John the New of Epirus (1526). Ven. Evfimii (Euthymius), Enlightener of Karelia; and the Righteous Anthony and Felix.

Today's Readings:

Epistle: Hebrews 9:11-14 and Galatians 3:23-29

Gospel: Mark 10:32-45 and Luke 7:36-50

Upcoming Service Schedule:

Today @ 9:00am Divine Liturgy

Wednesday @ 6:00pm Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

Friday @ 6:00pm Vespers (*Lazarus Saturday*)

Saturday @ 9:00am Divine Liturgy (*Lazarus Saturday*)

Saturday @ 6:00pm Great Vespers & blessing of branches

Sunday @ 9:00am Divine Liturgy (Palm Sunday)

Sunday @ 6:00pm Bridegroom Matins

Next Sunday's Readings:

Epistle: Philippians 4:4-9

Gospel: John 12:1-18



St. Mary of Egypt

The Distinguished Diocesan Benefactors program is an essential vehicle for funding the activities and programs of our diocese. Please consider participating in the program. Brochures are located by the bulletin board in the parish hall or at the diocesan website at www.nynjoca.org.

Special Prayers

We pray for all our parish family members, but we pray especially for those who are ill and afflicted. Among them are: **Zoran Pejovic; Steven, Natalie, and Alexia May; Betty James; Manya Shark; Deryl Tczap; Rdr. John Economou; Margaret Makara; Tom Kopec; Ann Marie and Dennis Gahr, Dorothy Studier, Alex Breton, and Pauline Barnowsky.**

MANY YEARS

Birthdays this week

Thursday – Jason Price

Saturday – Kathy Diaz

Wedding Anniversaries this week

Monday – Marko & Amanda Tesla

**Please pray for vocations
to the Holy Priesthood!**

Annunciations

TODAY – We are continuing a modified and controlled **Coffee Hour** ministry. The Parish Hall is set up to accommodate social distancing. Masks are required when traveling around the hall, but not when sitting and partaking of the refreshments. The hall will be sanitized after the Coffee Hour.

TODAY – The **older Church School group** meets today for their session. There will be no Church School next Sunday.

THIS WEDNESDAY – The **Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts** will be served at 6pm. If you attend and wish to receive the Eucharist, please prepare by fasting according to the guidelines included below.

NEXT SUNDAY – **Group 1** is invited to attend Divine Liturgy. This is Palm Sunday- The Entrance of Our Lord into Jerusalem.

Confessions are heard in-person after every evening service (except for the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts), or by appointment. Additionally, confessions can still be made over the phone by appointment. Please consider coming to the Sacrament of Confession **sometime before the end of Great Lent.**

Sign-up sheets and a finalized schedule for the services of **Holy Week and Pascha** will be posted online in the next several days. In anticipation of high demand to attend the Paschal services, the Parish Hall will be available for those who are closed out from signing up. Our large screen TV will be set up to display the livestream of the services. As of now, this will apply to the Paschal Vigil and Divine Liturgy beginning at 11:30pm on Holy Saturday, and the Paschal Vespers that are scheduled for the Sunday of Pascha at 11:00am. More details will emerge in the next several days.

Grocery Gift Cards are available for purchase. Please contact Matushka Mary by email (matmaryb@gmail.com) or by phone at (848) 333-7075 to make arrangements.

Stewardship Donations may be brought to the church or mailed to the church at 360 Van Zile Road, Brick, NJ 08724. On-line donations are possible by visiting our website for a link. Many thanks for continuing to support your parish in these challenging times.

FASTING FOR THE LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS

Those who plan to attend the evening service of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts and plan to receive the Eucharist at the service, should prepare themselves as best they are able. The strict rule is that from midnight on, one should refrain from consuming any food or drink. However, one must honestly assess his/her physical limitations and adjust accordingly if necessary. Please speak with Father Gary if you have questions about the Church's fasting discipline, especially this aspect of it.