

Week Four: Advent - The Coming of Christ

Read Luke 13:10-17

Next Sunday we hear the story of another handicapped person, a crippled woman whom Christ heals.

Think about how you feel when you meet person who has a handicap or deformity. How do you think he or she feels? As you read this story think about how Jesus loved all people and how he approached them.

When and where did Jesus meet the crippled woman?

What was her handicap?

By what two actions did Jesus heal her?

Why was the Synagogue official angry? How do you interpret this? Can you give an example of something similar today?

Put into your own words Jesus' answer.

How did the healed woman react?

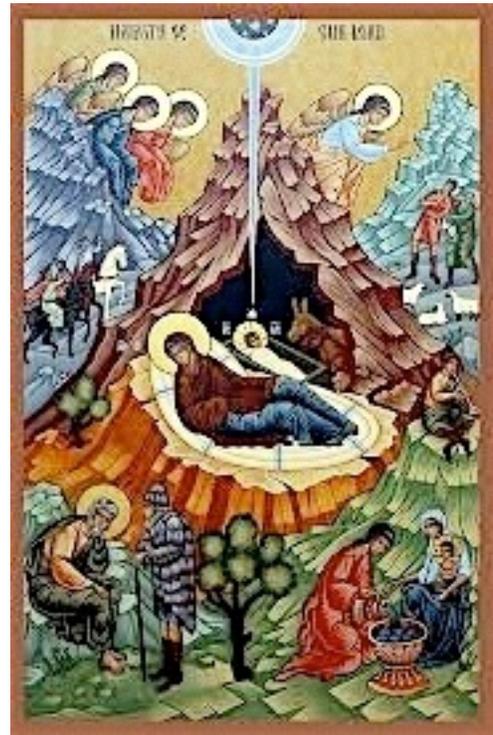
How did the people react?

What do you suppose the regular attendance of the crippled woman to the synagogue indicated about her feeling regarding her handicap?

How can we treat persons with a handicap and help them to be relaxed and useful? Can you give an example?

A Meditation

We are easily shocked by any good work which is not "according to the rules"... Church people are especially prone to the temptation to denigrate and condemn all that is not of "their" orthodoxy. Let this gospel about the crippled woman and the synagogue official teach us to become humble enough, amenable enough to all light from above to admit — with joy and gratitude — the good that can be done through other channels than those which, rightly or wrongly, we consider "proper." May God make us able, when



faced by any “healing on the Sabbath,” to feel what the people who surrounded Jesus felt: “All the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.”
From Year of Grace of the Lord, pp 50-51

Saint Nicholas: On Friday, December 6th, we celebrate the feast of Saint Nicholas, one of the most popular saints. He was a Bishop of Myra in Asia Minor in the fourth century. He was known for his generosity, his love for children and the poor, his care of the sick and his gift-giving. Here is the hymn of his feast:

The truth of your deeds has set you before your flock as a standard of faith, an example of meekness and a teacher of self-control. Thus you acquired greatness through humility and spiritual wealth through poverty. O Father and Hierarch Nicholas, intercede with Christ our God, that He may save our souls.

Dismissal Hymn of the Feast of saint Nicholas

His esteem spread throughout Europe and December 6th became a day of gift giving and a day to help those in need. Due to government intervention to disallow the celebration of saints feast days in parts of Europe, this tradition was shifted to Christmas day. Also the idea of generosity and gift giving was transformed by commercial interests into “Santa Claus”, a distortion of the life of Saint Nicholas, but one that to this day brings delight to children everywhere.

Christmas is truly a feast for children and we too must become like children to be able to rejoice in the wonder of Christmas. This is the celebration of the indescribable wonder of the eternal all powerful God coming to us in humility as a defenseless and vulnerable babe.

Looking upon Christ, who humbles Himself, let us be lifted up from the passions that drag us down; having learned in faith and good zeal not to think lofty things, let us be humbled in spirit; that by exalted works we may exalt Him who is being born.

Triode of Compline of the Forefeast, third hymn of the ninth Ode

Read Luke 6:17-23 which is the Gospel reading on his feast day.

Why do people come to Jesus?

Why did they try to touch Him?

What does Jesus call His followers in each of the beatitudes?

What does Jesus promise:

- a. to the poor
- b. to the hungry
- c. to those who weep
- d. to the persecuted

Who are warned by Jesus?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Why do you think Jesus praises the “have nots” and warns the “haves”? Are all the poor good and all the rich evil? What makes the difference?

Match some of the virtues of Saint Nicholas with the qualities exalted in the beatitudes. How can they be associated with the Christmas season?

Now is the time when we begin to prepare for Christmas day. We buy gifts, decorate our workplaces and homes, we sing carols, we bake special goods to give to our friends, and are overtaken by the excitement and joy of this season.

Enjoy the Western Christmas carols. Here are some hymns from our Orthodox Tradition

*Christ is born, give Him glory!
Christ comes from heaven, go out and meet Him!
Christ is on earth, be exalted!
O all the earth, sing to the Lord!
O people, sing praises in gladness,
for He has been glorified!*
First Hymn of Christmas Katavasias

*Today the Virgin is on her way to give birth to the preeternal Logos
Rejoice, O inhabited earth, when you hear the good news!
With angels and shepherds, glorify Him
Who chose to appear as a new-born babe, the preeternal God.*

The Christmas tree has become a traditional symbol of this season. Now is the time that many will begin to decorate their tree. When you choose a live or freshly cut tree your room is filled with the fragrance of the evergreen branches. When decorated with lights the twinkle in a darkened room bring joy to our hearts from Christmases past. But it should also be a reminder of God’s love, which is everlasting like the evergreen tree is green through all seasons.

This is not a tradition that goes back to the early days of Christianity, but has been a feature of the celebration of this season for about 1000 years. It was the Nordic peoples who brought evergreen trees into their homes in dark periods of winter to bring them the gift of strength. It was in the 7th century when Saint Boniface used the evergreen to teach that the everlasting nature of the evergreen reminds us of the eternal life we can have in Christ. Also, the triangular shape reminds us of the three persons of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The shape of the tree points towards

heaven, the lights remind us that Jesus is our hope and light in a dark world and the star on the top helps us think of the three wise men who took off from far away lands to come and see their king. As you decorate your tree give thanks to God for all these wonderful senses and for His everlasting love and light.

A suggestion: If you know of someone who sees the putting up of a tree as too much work or is not able to due to a handicap, purchase a small real or even artificial tree and then involve others in decorating it. Use your creativity as you join together in this project.

You may want to consider filling your Christmas tree this year with small icons or symbols that represent the Nativity story. Add cards with your favorite Bible verses. Have your children make their ornaments to be hung on the tree.

Meditation:

During the Christmas season God's love and His message of new hope comes to us through the beauty and peace of the incarnate Christ. Yet the good news of God's love may be entirely missed, and Christmas may be an unfulfilled dream, amidst the hectic bustle of cleaning, shopping, writing, calling, decorating, baking and visiting. The basic reason for an unfulfilled Christmas is that we focus on ourselves, how to please each other, how to feel good and how to secure happiness with all the things we regard as necessary. Yet only Christ can give us a true Christmas. Only His presence in our hearts can bring happiness, peace, joy, warmth and security. Cling to Christ evermore closely during the Christmas season. Take the time to pray and to establish your spiritual and practical priorities. Let Christ come with you from home to school, from kitchen to shopping center, from Church to business office.

Prayer:

Christ our God, who has made it possible for us to pray together and who promised that when two or three are gathered in Your name You will give them what they ask: Do now fulfill our requests, insofar as it is good and according to the special need of each, granting us in this world the knowledge of Your truth and in the world to come eternal life. For You are a loving God and to You we give glory, to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

I will make you all my kinsmen, if you keep My commandments, says Christ to mankind as He comes forth from a pure womb. Granting us peace, He commands us to have lowly thoughts, and to recognize Him as Lord and to sing: We highly exalt You forever!

Triode of Compline of the Forefeast, second hymn of the eight Ode

Which commandments are most difficult for you to keep?

What can you do to give extra effort to keep these during this preparatory period?

Reference: *A year in the Lord Liturgical Bible Studies* by Theodore Stylianopoulos and *Meditations for Advent: preparing for Christ's Birth* by Vassilios Papavassiliou