

23 SEPTEMBER
± Conception of the Forerunner

VESPERS

Lord I have cried

Tone 4

O Lord, I have cried to you, listen to me;
O Lord, listen to me.
O Lord, I have cried to you, listen to me;
Note the voice of my plea when I cry to you.
O Lord, listen to me.

² Let my prayer be directed before you like incense,
the raising of my hands be an evening sacrifice.
O Lord, listen to me.

S6: O Lord, if you mark offences, who will stand?
But there is forgiveness with you.

S5: O Lord, I have waited for you for your name's sake;
my soul has waited for your word,
my soul has hoped in the Lord.

As the godly Zachariah sacrificed within the holy temple and offered up the petitions of the people to the Benefactor and all-merciful One, he saw the holy angel who cried to him, "Your prayer and petition have been heard. O priest, take courage and believe in me, for you will have a son, the holy Forerunner, who will be greater than all those born from women. *He will be* greater than Ilias in power and will go before Christ. X2

S4: Let Israel hope in the Lord
from morning watch until night,
from morning watch.

S3: For there is mercy with the Lord
and abundant redemption with *him*.

He will redeem Israel from all his offences.

Zachariah replied, "You appear strange to me in sight and manner; strange in words and in report. For I have come to ask for the salvation of the people and not to acquire a son as you proclaim. I find you opposed to their request and fear you do not tell the truth. For how will what you say be believed? The limbs of Elizabeth have died and I am already aged. These are sure signs that I must not believe your words." X2

S2: Every nation, praise the Lord;
every people, acclaim him!

S1: For his mercy is strengthened over us
and the truth of the Lord remains for ever.

"O Zachariah, why do you not believe my words? Why do you say that I bear false news? As an archangel of God I stand with you; what I have been commanded is what I say to you. But since you were faithless and have not believed, you will be dumb and speechless until you see the divine fulfilment of my words. When Elizabeth has given birth to the voice and great Forerunner of the Word, your tongue will be loosened and you will bless the God of Israel. X2

Glory: Tone 6

Today the fruit of prayer, John the Forerunner, comes into bud from an infertile womb. O wilderness, give glory! Dance, all people! See, the herald of repentance begins to take flesh in his mother's womb. O lovers of the feast, come and exult in his glorious conception as we cry out, "You are greater than those born of women. Do not cease to intercede for those who faithfully honour your divine conception so that we may receive forgiveness of sins and great mercy.

Both now:

Most holy Virgin, who will not bless you? Who will not sing about your most pure childbearing? O pure *Lady*, the uniquely-fathered Son shone timelessly from the Father, but was ineffably incarnate from you. He was God by nature, but became man for our sake. He was not divided into two persons, but known as one in two natures.

1

O honourable and all-blessed Lady, implore him to have mercy on our souls.

Phos Ilarón

P/D: Wisdom! Stand upright!
O Jesus Christ, joyful light of the holy glory
of the immortal, heavenly, holy, blessed Father,
when we come to the setting of the sun
and see the light of evening,
we praise God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

For it is right at all times to worship you
with voices of praise,
O Son of God *and* Giver of life.
Therefore the world glorifies you.

Prokeímenon
Of the Day

Ektení

Prayer

O Lord, allow us this night to be guarded from sin. Blessed are you, O Lord, God of our fathers! Praised and glorified be your name for ever. Amen. O Lord, let your mercy be on us, for we have hoped in you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes. Blessed are you, O Master; make me understand your statutes. Blessed are you, O Holy *One*; enlighten me with your statutes. O Lord, your mercy lasts for ever; do not overlook the work of your hands. To you belongs worship, to you belongs praise, to you belongs glory, to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and to ages of ages. Amen.

Plirotiká

Prayer

P: Peace be with you all. R: And with your spirit
D: Bow down your heads to the Lord. R: To you, O Lord.

P: For blessed and glorified is the power of your Kingdom, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and to the ages of ages. *Amen*.

Apósticha

Tone 6

The holy priest and prophet went into the Holy of Holies *where* the holy angel before him. As it is written, he addressed him and said, "Your petition has been heard. Now the infertility of Elizabeth is brought to an end and she will bear you a son, John the Forerunner. *He will be* an ambassador, a lamp of the Sun a prophet of the Most High, and the voice of the Word and Divine Son who will come from the Virgin.

S1: My child, you will be called a prophet of the Most High,
to go before the Lord to prepare his ways. Lk 2
"Tell me clearly, how will I know this?" answered the blessed elder.
"For as you see I am full of days and Elizabeth is infertile. How do you utter words beyond nature? O man, I am amazed and now suspect that you do not speak the truth. Depart, for I ask for the salvation of the people and not to acquire a son. Such a thing cannot be believed."

S2: To worship him in holiness and justice
all the days of our life. Lk 2

"I am Gabriel, Archangel of God Almighty," the bodiless one said to the elder. "Now since you did not believe my words, be dumb and practice silence. And when your wife has given birth to you, the trumpet of the Word, the Spirit will illuminate your speech and you will cry out clearly, "O child, you will be called the prophet of the Most High in order to prepare his ways with grace since he is well pleased.

Glory: Tone 6

O Baptizer, you came as an angel from an infertile womb. You lived in the desert from the very *moment* of your swaddling clothes. You were revealed as the seal of all the prophets, for you were made worthy to baptize in the Jordan the one whom they saw in various ways and foretold in figures. You heard the voice of the Father come from heaven and bear witness to his sonship. You saw the Spirit in the form of a dove draw down the voice on the one who was baptized. Since you are greater than all the prophets, do not cease to intercede for us who celebrate your memory in faith.

Both now:

O Theotokos, you are the true vine who came into bloom for us with the Fruit of Life. O Lady we pray you, together with the Forerunner and all the saints to intercede with him so that he may have mercy on our souls.

Song of Simeon

B/P: O Master, now let your servant depart in peace
according to your word,
² for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared before all peoples,
³ a light of revelation for *the* nations
and *the* glory of your people Israel.

Triságon Prayers

Apolytikia

Tone 4

Hail, O previously infertile *woman*! You have conceived the light of the Sun who will illuminate the whole inhabited earth which has been darkened by blindness. Hail, Zachariah and cry out with boldness, for the prophet of the Most High desires to be born!

Tone 4

O Theotokos, the mystery hidden from eternity and unknown to the angels, is revealed to those on earth through you. God was incarnate from you in a union without confusion and freely endured the cross for us by his own will. He raised the first-formed man and has saved our souls from death.

Dismissal

ORTHROS

God is the Lord Ps 117

R: God is the Lord and has appeared to us.
Blessed is the one who comes in the Lord's name. *Ps 117*
S1: Thank the Lord, for he is good,
for his mercy lasts for ever.
S2: All the nations surrounded me,
but I opposed them in the Lord's name.
S3: This *is* the Lord's doing
and it is wonderful in our eyes.

Apolytikia

Tone 4

Hail, O previously infertile *woman*! You have conceived the Light of the Sun who will illuminate the whole inhabited earth which has been darkened by blindness. Hail, Zachariah and cry out with boldness, for the prophet of the Most High desires to be born!

Tone 4

O Theotokos, the mystery hidden from eternity and unknown to the angels, is revealed to those on earth through you. God was incarnate from you in a union without confusion and freely endured the cross for us by his own will. He raised the first-formed man and has saved our souls from death.

Small Litany

P: For yours is the might, and yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and to the ages of ages. *Amen*

Kathisma 1

Tone 5

Elizabeth has been freed from infertility; the Virgin remains a virgin though conceiving in her womb at the cry of Gabriel. John the Forerunner leaps in his mother's womb and knows in advance his God and Master become incarnate within the Virgin's womb for our salvation.

Glory: Both now:

Hail, holy and divinely trodden mountain! Hail, living bush not consumed by fire! Hail, only bridge from the world to God which guides the dead to eternal life! Hail, unblemished maiden! You gave birth to the Salvation of our souls without a man.

Kathisma 2

Tone 4

The sacred Forerunner has been born; *he is* the dove who loves the wilderness. He preaches repentance and shows the incarnate Christ. He is the intercessor for all sinners and always helps all those who are tossed by storms. O Christ, save your world through his prayers.

Glory: Both now:

All-pure *Lady*, you alone gave birth to the Creator of all and alone adorn the human race. Rescue me from the snares of the false devil by your childbearing, set me on the rock of the will of Christ and pray earnestly to the one who was incarnate from you.

Small Litany

P: For blessed is your name, and glorified is your kingdom, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. *Amen*

Psalm 50

O God, have mercy on me in your abundant mercy
and wipe out my offence through your great compassion.
⁴ Wash me thoroughly from my lawless act
and cleanse me from my sin.
⁵ For I know my lawlessness
and my sin is always before me.
⁶ I have sinned against you alone
and done this evil before you
^{6b} so that you might be justified in your words
and overcome when you are judged.
⁷ For see, I was conceived in lawlessness
and my mother gave birth to me in sin.
⁸ For see, you have loved truth
and revealed to me the hidden and secret *things* of your wisdom.
⁹ You will sprinkle me with hyssop and I will be clean;
you will wash me and I will become whiter than snow.
¹⁰ You will make me hear about joy and gladness;
the humbled bones will rejoice.
¹¹ Turn your face from my sins
and wipe out all my lawlessness.
¹² O God, create a pure heart within me
and renew an upright spirit within me.
¹³ Do not banish me from your presence
or remove your Holy Spirit from me.
¹⁴ Restore the joy of your salvation to me
and make me firm with your directing Spirit.
¹⁵ I will teach the lawless your ways
and the ungodly will return to you.
¹⁶ O God, set me free from the guilt of blood;
O God of my salvation,
my tongue will rejoice in your justice.
¹⁷ O Lord, you will open my lips
and my mouth will proclaim your praise.
¹⁸ For if you had wanted sacrifice, I would have given it;
you will not be pleased with burnt offerings.
¹⁹ Sacrifice for God is a broken spirit;
God will not despise a broken and humbled heart.
²⁰ O Lord, be good to Zion in your pleasure
and let the walls of Jerusalem be built.
²¹ Then you will be pleased with a sacrifice of justice,
with an offering and burnt sacrifices;
then they will offer calves on your altar.

Kontákion

Tone 1

The great priest Zachariah rejoices greatly with his wife Elizabeth, for she has conceived John the Forerunner. The angel announced him in gladness and we honour him as the Forerunner of God's grace.

Íkos

Let us open up the Holy Gospel which the marvellous Luke wrote for us. Let us think about the venerable and radiant conception of the Forerunner John. We read that the just and elderly Zechariah entered the Temple in order to cense the Holy of Holies on the day appointed for his service. Gabriel arrived and announced the good news with the words, "Great priest, in spite of your years, you will have a son. He will be the prophet, predecessor, voice, herald, polished lamp-stand and forerunner of God's grace.

Synaxáron

Today we celebrate the conception of the holy renowned prophet, forerunner and Baptist John. Elizabeth was at length able to conceive in her old age. The story reminds us of Sarah and Anna in the Old Testament. On the Twenty Third the one who went before his Master was conceived six months before him.

Together with him we remember:
Just Women Xanthippi and Polyxéne C2
Virgin Martyr Irais of Alexandria C4
Abbot Adomnan of Iona C8
O God, have mercy on us through their holy prayers. Amen.

Katavasías

1: I will open my mouth and be filled with the spirit. I will sing a song to the Queen and Mother. I will come, rejoice in the feast and praise all her glory.

3: O Theotokos, living and inexhaustible fountain, in your divine glory spiritually establish your choir which is assembled in chorus. Make them worthy to receive crowns of glory in your mercy.

4: The counsel of God cannot be scrutinised. The Most High was incarnate from a Virgin. The prophet Habakkuk foresaw this and cried, "Glory to your power, O God!"

5: O Virgin, all creation was fearful at your divine glory, for you knew no man, yet bore the God of all. You held in your womb the Eternal Son who grants peace to those who praise you in song.

6: O believers, let us clap our hands in festivity and fulfil the most precious feast. Since we know God through the Theotokos, let us glorify the one who was born from her.

7: The godly youths worshipped the Creator rather than the creature. They courageously trampled on the flames and joyfully sang, "Blessed are you, most praised Lord, the God of our fathers."

8: Let us praise, bless and worship the Lord. The *Lord* who was born from the Theotokos saved the holy children in the furnace. The one who was then prefigured has now been born on earth and gathers all creation to sing, "All you works of the Lord, bless the Lord and exalt him above all for ever.

Ode 9

My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour. R:

R: *You are* more honourable than the Cherubim
and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim.
You gave birth to God the Word without defilement;
O true Theotokos, we glorify you.

² For he has regarded his servant's humility;
see, from now all generations will call me blessed. R:

³ For the Almighty has accomplished great *things* for me

and his name is holy.

His mercy is from generation to generation
on those who fear him. R:

⁴ He has accomplished strength with his arm
and scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. R:

⁵ He has put down the mighty from *their* thrones
and exalted the humble.

He has satisfied the hungry with good *things*
and dismissed the rich with nothing. R:

⁶ He has helped his servant Israel
in remembering his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and his seed for ever. R:

9: Let every earthborn mortal be radiant and spiritually leap for joy. Let the ranks of angelic powers celebrate as they honour the holy feast of the Theotokos and cry, "Hail, O pure and blessed Ever-virgin who gave birth to God!"

Small Litany

P: For all the powers of heaven praise you, and to you we send up glory, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and to the ages of ages. *Amen*

Exaposteilária

Tone 2

The glorious Conception of the Forerunner announces beforehand the King who is soon to be born from the Virgin, for this child himself is born from infertile Elizabeth and the aged elder and priest Zachariah. O Lord, save and have mercy on the whole human race through their prayers, together with those of the Theotokos and John your Baptizer.

Those of us who have been saved from the ancient curse through your divine child bearing, cry out to you in joy and thanksgiving with the holy Archangel's greeting, "Hail! Hail, all pure *Lady*, virgin Theotokos, the rescuer of Adam! Hail, O revered *Virgin* through whom we escape death! Hail, for through you we gain the Kingdom of Heaven!

Praises

Tone 1

Let everything with breath praise the Lord.
Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise him in the heights.
To you, O God, is due a song.

Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his powers.
To you, O God, is due a song.

S4: Praise him with cymbal and dance;
praise him with strings and flute.

S3: Praise him with tuneful cymbals;
praise him with joyful cymbals.

Let everything with breath praise the Lord.

O prophet, forerunner and baptist John, creation rejoices in your conception. Your divine birth announces to us the birth of the Master. Therefore those of us who are on earth rightly praise you in unison. X2

S2: My child, you will be called a prophet of the Most High,
to go before the Lord to prepare his ways. Lk 2

The angel found conception by an infertile woman to be a wonderful testimony and he offers it to Mary as a confirmation. Therefore we praise Elizabeth who once was infertile, together with her husband, Zachariah, and John.

S1: To worship him in holiness and justice
all the days of our life. Lk 2

The divinely-prepared lamp of the eternal Light, the friend of the Bridegroom, the great morning star of the Sun of glory, the living

voice of the Word of God, the Forerunner of the presence of the Lord, is now conceived at the announcement of an archangel.

Glory: Both now: Tone 8

Elizabeth conceived the Forerunner of grace; the Virgin *conceived* the Lord of glory. The mothers embraced each other and the baby in the womb leapt for joy; the servant praised the Master from inside. The mother of the Forerunner marvelled and at once cried out, "And why is this granted to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? It is so that he may save a despairing people, for he is the greatly merciful *Lord*."

Great Doxology

Glory to you who have shown us the light!
glory to God in the highest!
Peace on earth and goodwill to men!

² We praise you, we bless you, we worship you,
we glorify you, we thank you for your great glory,

³ O Lord King, heavenly God, almighty Father,
O Lord, only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ,
and you, O Holy Spirit!

⁴ O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sin of the world;
have mercy on us,
for you take away the sin of the world.

⁵ Receive our prayer,
for you sit on the right of the Father,
and have mercy on us.

⁶ For only you are holy, only you are Lord,
O Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

⁷ I will bless you every day
and always praise your name for ever and ever. Ps 144

⁸ O Lord, allow us this day
to be guarded from sin.

⁹ Blessed are you, O Lord God of our fathers!
Praised and glorified be your name for ever. Amen. Daniel 3

¹⁰ O Lord, let your mercy *be* on us,
for we have hoped in you. Ps 32.

¹⁶ Blessed are you, O Lord!
Teach me your statutes. X3 Ps 118

¹² O Lord, you have been our refuge
from generation to generation. Ps 89

I said, "O Lord, have mercy on me;
heal my soul, for I have sinned against you." Ps 40

¹⁴ O Lord, I have fled to you;
teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Ps 142

¹⁵ For with you is the source of life
and in your light we will see light. Ps 35

¹⁶ Stretch out your mercy
to those who know you. Ps 35

Triságion

Apolytícion

Tone 4

Hail, O previously infertile *woman*! You have conceived the Light of the Sun who will illuminate the whole inhabited earth which has been darkened by blindness. Hail, Zachariah and cry out with boldness, for the prophet of the Most High desires to be born!

LITURGY

Antiphon 1 Ps 91 Tone 5

S1: It is good to thank the Lord
and make melody to your name, O Most High.

R: At the prayers of the Theotokos, Saviour, save us!

S2: To announce your mercy in the morning
and your truth by night,

S3: For the Lord our God is upright
and there is no injustice in him.

S4: Glory: Both now:

Antiphon 2 Ps 92 Tone 2

S1: The Lord reigns *and* is clothed with majesty;
the Lord has put on power and clothed himself.

R: Save us, O Son of God. You are wonderful in your saints.
We sing to you, "Alleluia!"

S2: For he founded the world which will not be moved.

S3: O Lord, holiness is right for your house
to length of days.

S4: Glory: Both now:
Monogenes

Antiphon 3 Lk 2 Tone 4

S1: Come, let us rejoice in the Lord,
and shout with joy to God our Saviour.

R: Hail, O previously infertile *woman*! You have conceived the Light of the Sun who will illuminate the whole inhabited earth which has been darkened by blindness. Hail, Zachariah and cry out with boldness, for the prophet of the Most High desires to be born!

S2: Let us enter his presence with thanksgiving
and gladly cry to him with psalms,
for the Lord is a great God
and a high king over all the earth.

Entrance Ps 94

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ.
Save us, O Son of God.
You are wonderful in your saints.
We sing to you, "Alleluia!"

Apolytíkia

Tone 4

Hail, O previously infertile *woman*! You have conceived the Light of the Sun who will illuminate the whole inhabited earth which has been darkened by blindness. Hail, Zachariah and cry out with boldness, for the prophet of the Most High desires to be born!

Of the Church

Kontákion

O unfailing protection of Christians and unchanging mediator before the Creator, do not despise the prayers of us sinners, but in your goodness extend your help to those of us who faithfully cry to you, "O Theotokos, you always protect those who honour you, so hurry to intercede for us and hasten to plead for us."

Triságion

Prokeimenon Ps 63 Tone 7

R: The just will rejoice in the Lord.
S: O God, listen to my voice when I plead with you;

Apóstolos

From the Letter of Paul to the Galatians (4:22-27)

Brothers, it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. ²³ But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. ²⁴ Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, who bears children for slavery; she is *called* Hagar. ²⁵ Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶ But the Jerusalem above is free and she is our mother. ²⁷ For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren *woman* who cannot give birth! You who are not in travail, break out and shout, for the children of the desolate *woman* are many more than the children of the one who is married."

Alleluia Ps 91 Tone 4

S1: The just will flourish like a palm tree
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

S2: Those who are planted in the house of the Lord
will blossom in the courts of our God.

Gospel

From the Holy Gospel according to Luke (1:5-25)

At that time in the days of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was infertile; and they were both well on in years. Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshippers were praying outside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous - to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well on in years." The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time." Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realised he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak. When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favour and taken away my disgrace among the people."

Communion Ps 111

The just will be in everlasting remembrance. Alleluia!