



“ORTHODOX 9” PARISHES BULLETIN

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN CANADA

Monthly Newsletter for the family of Orthodox Churches including:



St. Mary’s (the Nativity of the Holy Virgin) - NISKU

Sts. Peter & Paul - BONNYVILLE

St. John the Baptist - HOREN

Holy Ascension - CALMAR

St. Onuphrius - FOAM LAKE (SK)

Whitsuntide (Holy Trinity) - THORSBY

Dormition of Theotokos -MACNUTT (SK)

St. John the Baptist - VEGREVILLE

Sts. Peter & Paul - INSINGER (SK)



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Great Lent. Our 40 days journey to the Easter Joy



Great Lent is a season of "bright sadness" - not a time of prohibitions to death, but a real gift from the Church. It is a transition period: the sadness comes from our past, the brightness from our future. We cannot pass abruptly from our exile from God to an immediate and intimate enjoyment of His presence. A journey has to be made, which is Great Lent.

"Lent" comes from the ancient English word for Spring - that time of natural rebirth which corresponds to the process of inner spiritual regeneration which every Christian should strive to experience in his preparation for celebrating the feast of Christ's Resurrection. The Lenten season is our "spiritual spring" (Lenten Triodion), and is a time of subdued joy, a time which the Church gives us to use as our personal and corporate opportunity to come closer to the Source of divine joy - God Himself. It is a time to purge ourselves of the distractions which weigh us down the rest of the year and prevent us from experiencing the joy that comes from being in God's continual presence.

The only things which should cause us sorrow at this time are those obstacles which we ourselves place on the path to God and thus impede our journey to Him. Which are the same for every person: sloth (spiritual laziness or neglect), inordinate attachment or actual slavery to things of the body (passion), and selfishness. The Church suggests effective remedies for these universal illnesses through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and an opportunity for reconciliation with our brothers and sisters whom we have offended and, in whom God dwells, by the forgiveness ritual at the on Forgiveness Sunday as well as all through the Lent.

Let us attend! The services; the daily prayers; the special prayers of the Lent, like that of Lenten Prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian; and the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete; the life of the saints presented these days; the godly reading; the gate of our heart; the tune of our mind. Amen.

f. Yevheniy Protsenko

Lenten Prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian

by St Luke, Archbishop of Crimea



St Luke Voino-Yasenestky (1877–1961), Archbishop of Simferopol and Crimea, was a great saint of our own times.

A surgeon and medical scholar by profession, he became a bishop during fierce persecutions against the church, knowing that his path would lead to prison and exile. His numerous works are preserved for us and inspire us in the spiritual life.

O Lord and master of my life, give me not a spirit of sloth,
despair, lust of power, and idle talk.

But give rather a spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to thy servant.

Yea, O Lord and king, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my
brother or my sister. For blessed art thou unto ages of ages. Amen.

The prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian occupies a special place in the Great Lent services of the holy Church.

This prayer penetrates the heart like none other, mysteriously acts upon it, and you feel a special, exceptional divine power in it. Why is that so? Because it was poured from a heart that was perfectly purified and holy, and from a mind that was enlightened by divine grace and had become a participant in the mind of Christ. It is short, but it nevertheless contains an enormous wealth of thoughts and feelings. Extraordinarily important is the very fact that St Ephraim asks God to deliver him from everything unholy and repugnant to Him, and to vouchsafe him great virtues. Why does he ask for this?

There are people—and there were especially many during pagan times—who rely entirely upon themselves and think that everything is achievable through the powers of their minds and feelings. They do not understand that many things, in fact the most important, precious and cherished things, are not accessible to our minds and feelings. Whoever understands this understands what the apostle Paul said: *We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.* (Rom. 7. 14,15).

Thus spoke the greatest and chief apostle, recognizing his powerlessness to walk the path of goodness, profoundly understanding that his flesh, which drags him down and hinders his heart's ascent on high to God, has enormous power over him. He pined and suffered because he did not do the good that his soul desired but did the evil that he did not want.

Deeply aware of this, St Ephraim the Syrian prayed to God that He would deliver him from wickedness, that He would give him the strength to do good. The strength to do good works, like the strength to be freed from vices, is something we receive only from God. The soul of every Christian is vaguely aware of this, and that is why the prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian so touches it.

Every man has his own spirit—in his soul are the traces left by those vices in which he sins, as well as by the good that he does. It is much easier to be freed from individual vices than from the spirit of these vices. The latter is possible only gradually, with God’s help.

And so, St Ephraim the Syrian asks God not only to give him the spirit of virtues and deliver him from the spirit of his faults, but he asks that his soul would become fragrant with Christ.

1. Sloth—the mother of sin

“O Lord and master of my life, give me not a spirit of sloth...” Why does St. Ephraim the Syrian begin his prayer with a request about sloth, as if there are no worse faults?

In observing sloth or idleness from the ordinary, everyday point of view we see that sloth is contemptible and deserves all condemnation.

Sloth is a very dangerous vice, because it is the mother of many other vices. Idle people do not concentrate their thoughts on the profound seriousness of life, the huge responsibility that lies on them not only before people, but also before God Himself.

Most destructive is slothfulness in spiritual life. We know that any of our abilities left without practice are eventually lost. If a musician who has achieved perfection in his playing abandons his music for many years, he will lose that perfection. Without exercise, each organ of our body comes to a flaccid state and can’t operate. A person who always lies around loses the ability to walk. Whoever does not work with his hands brings his arm muscles to a state of flabbiness. The body’s strength wanes when physically inactive. The same can be said of the soul’s abilities. If a person does not pray, he loses the ability to pray. Whoever does not watch after his spirit and heart will become dissolute in the spiritual sense.

2. Terrible is the Spirit of Despair

What is the spirit of despair? It is what they call falling in spirit.

Of course not! Our religion is not the religion of depression, but cheerfulness, energy, strength of will and character, which has as its fruit not depression but something absolutely opposite—what the holy apostle Paul spoke of: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law* (Gal. 5:22–23).

People are often mistaken when they evaluate a person’s appearance. The true Christian does not have an appearance that would betray his joy of life. He is always peaceful, often apparently deeply immersed in thought, betraying his contemplation. His thoughts are concentrated on the eternal, on the Kingdom of God, turned to the Lord Jesus Christ—and therefore he is always serious.

Sometimes, when a person has attained to a lofty life, he can get a high opinion of himself—and then God’s grace leaves him for a time. Then he falls into a heavy, unbearable state of spirit—his heart immediately becomes empty. Instead of warmth and joy there is deep despair. The Lord does this in order to remind the [Christian] ascetic that he walks the path of Christ not through his own strength but by the grace of God. This is one source of despair.

What other sources of despair are there? Idleness is one of the mothers of despair. Idle people become jaded, everything becomes uninteresting and boring, nothing brings them joy, and their hearts become filled with despair—the terrible and dangerous enemy of our salvation.

Yet another source of despair is pessimism. If a person notices only the dark and the bad in life the despair that has taken over the mind grows to the point where the person doesn’t see anything good.

The most often-encountered source of despair is bitterness and sorrowful events that people experience in life.

How can one be freed of this? One mustn’t remember the past and keep shedding tears. The deceased is very, very far away. His soul is standing before God and the angels, rejoicing over his freedom. One has to exert every effort to be carried in thought

to that place where the dearly beloved now is. If we concentrate not on the dark and corruptible but on the eternal, the spirit of despair will go away.

Sometimes serious illnesses can throw one into despair. There are many people who do not patiently endure illnesses. But there were saints who were sick and bedridden all their lives, and yet they praised God for it. We have to remember such people and know how to accept the illnesses sent by God. We should not refuse the help of a doctor, for the wise son of Sirach says, *Honour a physician with the honour due unto him for the uses which you may have of him: for the Lord has created him* (Eccl. 38:1 KJV). A doctor is God's servant, who can relieve suffering and thereby drive away the spirit of despair.

Such are the sources and causes of despair. The main means for struggling with them, tested many years by all the saints, is prayer. There is nothing more effective than prayer, the constant asking for help from God.

Do not concentrate on the dark, sinful, and heavy; ascending on high in spirit, in your heart abide with God, in the heavenly chambers, where the dark spirits have no access.

May the Lord God have mercy on you, and may St Ephraim assist you in your prayers!

3. The Passion of Lust of Power

What is **the lust of power**? It is the desire to be always first, to have authority over others. It destroyed the archangel, the chief of all angels, making him satan. Ambition motivated all the heretics, who wanted to install their own teachings in place of the teachings of the Church and become the leaders of the Church. There have also been writers with depraved thoughts, who have corrupted whole generations.

The Lord said to His disciples and through them to us, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all (Mk. 9:35). Love of power is against the spirit of the Gospel, against the spirit of humility. Nevertheless this passion has a grip on everyone, and there is no one who is not infected with it—even little children.

This is why St Ephraim the Syrian in his great prayer asks God to save him from the corrupting spirit of ambition so contradictory to humility.

Without thinking about authority over other people, we need to delve into how we can develop our abilities and talents given to us by God, to further the development of our abilities quietly, unknown to the world. And it can turn out the way it has turned out many times, that the Lord raises such a person up to an unreachable pinnacle of glory. Remember that the Lord knows how to indicate people, to distinguish human works done according to Christ's commandments. If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.

Pray with St Ephraim the Syrian to be delivered from the serious vice of love of power!

4. The Ability to Guard the Lips against Idle Talk

The holy prophet David says in his psalm, Set, O Lord, a watch before my mouth, and a door of enclosure round about my lips (Ps. 140:3), and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself said that That every **idle word** that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment (Mt. 12:36). How serious and difficult it is to give account of every such word. And could there be anything else that could be easier to regard than words?

Our ability to say words to a significant degree makes us like unto God Himself. God created the world with a word, and the word of God has enormous, mighty power. The human word is also powerful. With a word the prophet Elias raised the dead, closed the heavens, brought rain to the earth and stopped it.

A word that leaves our lips always produces an extraordinarily profound effect not only on those around us but even on people far away from us.

The grace-filled and wise words of the saints foster righteousness in the world, create eternal goodness, while evil, sinful words bring dishonour, hatred, and enormous harm to all mankind. Words live, they are carried off like radio waves into space and pour into people's hearts and minds.

A word is a huge force that either unites or divides people. If people were deprived of words they would be like the animals, and human life would be undone. How great and profound is the meaning of the human word!

St Ephraim the Syrian prayed to God to deliver him from idle talk. He was afraid of falling, so that his tongue would not destroy him, and these wretched chatterers have no fear. People often put up with them—might as well let them chatter. They think that they are being listened to with pleasure, but everyone in the depths of their hearts is tired of them. If the tongue wags and talks idly, then the thoughts roam aimlessly, not concentrating on anything profound, true, or important. The soul hungers, the person is obnoxious to others, and causes serious harm to his own self. Such is the meaning of idle talk. Wise people who live a spiritual life never talk idly. They always tend to be silent and concentrated.

Pray to God for deliverance from this vice, and the Lord Jesus Christ will grant what we ask. We need to avoid communication with idle talkers, and seek the company of a few wise people, who only open their lips to say something beneficial. We need to be extremely attentive to ourselves, to acquire the habit of watching what our tongue says.

Compiled by f. Yevheniy Protsenko

What Bible to read?

It seems a strange question, but what meant is the best translation for a spiritual reading, which is an important installment into the holy days of the Great Lent.

“This was a great and good man”, says one translation. “Surely this man was the Son of God!”, says the Bible!

*To the pious attention of the Orthodox faithful we offer some extract from “**Biblical Studies: Too Many Bibles**” by father Daniel B. Montgomery, namely, a simple and useful table with a short description of various translations.*

“Dr. Lewis Foster, a qualified translator and professor of New Testament, has attempted to rate the various versions on the basis of accuracy, clarity (is it easy to understand?), and beauty (how is it as literature?). His rating is as follows:”

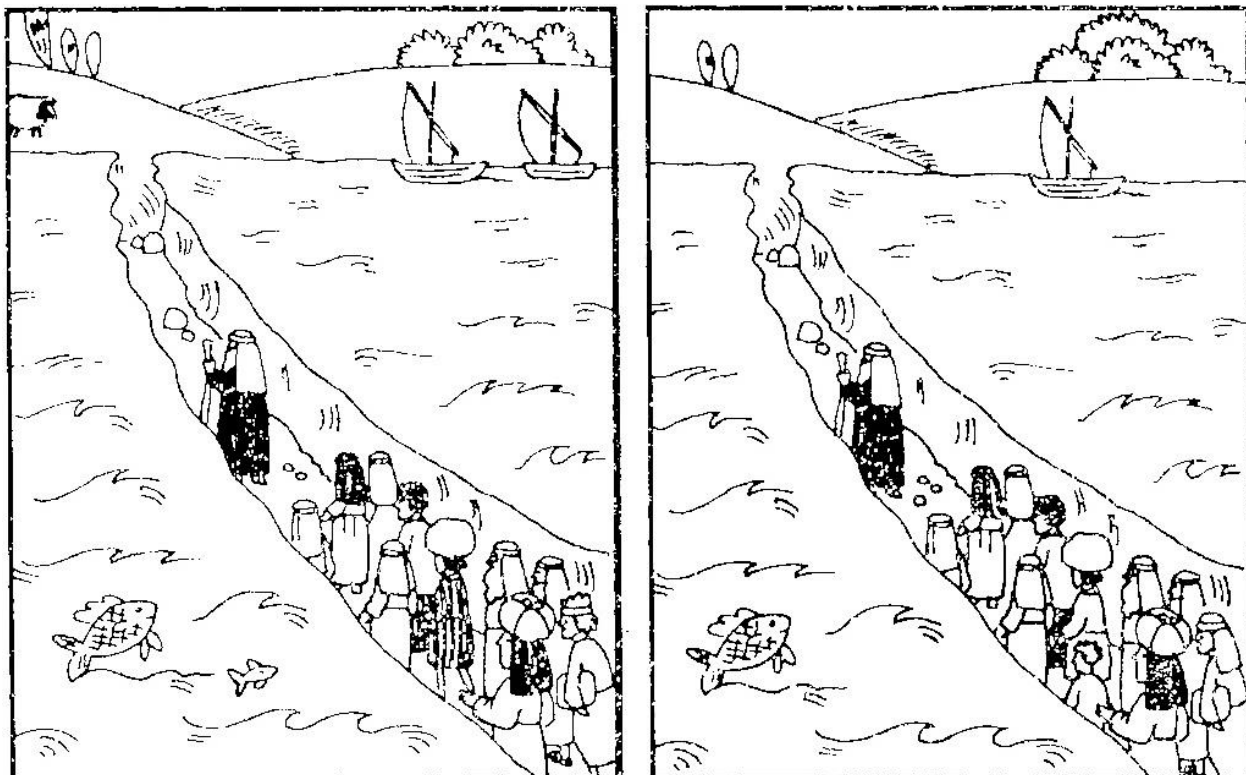
Bible Version	Accuracy	Clarity	Beauty
New American Standard Bible	Excellent	Good	Fair
King James Version	Good	Poor	Excellent
New International Version	Good	Excellent	Good
New English Bible	Fair	Good	Fair
Today's English Version	Fair	Good	Fair
Jerusalem Bible	Fair	Good	Fair
Revised Standard Version	Poor	Good	Fair
Living Bible	Poor	Good	Fair

Children's Corner: Drop in with your children and great & grand children!

Once upon a time the ancient Church, the Israelites, wandered in the desert for 40 years after fleeing the Egyptians. That was one of the prototypes of the Christian Great Lent, which lasts 40 days. During the Great Lent we should also take part in the fasting in that we should help more our parents and grand parents. Let us now help the Israelites to find their way through the desert to the Promised Land, so that our God would help our families to reach the joy of the Holy Easter!



And at the beginning of their travelling God helped them to go though the sea! It was so long ago, that some people tell about it differently, like in these two pictures. Let's find all the differences!



Announcements

Changes in the Schedule of Services. Bishop's Matthew Lenten visit.

The Holy Liturgy service at St. Mary's church is transferred/moved from the Sunday of March 15th to the Fourth Saturday of the Great Lent - March 28th, on the occasion of His Grace Matthew, bishop of Sourzh and temporary bishop of the Patriarchal Parishes in Canada, archpastoral Lenten visit to Canada, and him performing the Liturgy in our church on Saturday, March the 28th.

After the Divine Liturgy a Lenten potluck with salads and deserts will be served at St. Mary's Church Hall.

Participation in Church Singing at the Liturgy

If anyone else wants to participate in church singing during the Divine Liturgies, please ask for the helping materials from f. Evgeniy.

Invitation to the Grand Church Cleaning

Dear brothers and sisters! The Parish Council invites everyone to take part and give your helping hand in our annual church deep cleaning which will take place on March, the 21st at 9.00 am.

Lenten visitations for Confession and Holy Communion

As always, we are happy to visit everyone who cannot come to church: housebound, or in hospitals, hospices or nursing homes. We are indispensable part of our life, church and prayer! Please, let us know, if we still don't know about anyone, and we will gladly come to greet you and give you the Precious and Immortal Mysteries of Christ!

Gratitude & Acknowledgment

First of all, we want to thank you for your donations to St. Mary's Church in the past year! With your faithful financial and other contribution over the years and decades, you've demonstrated your deep commitment to our Orthodox Faith and Church. Your help make a big difference in the holy work our church has been doing!

We are also very grateful personally:

- to our praiseworthy Lady's Aid for a final big contribution, that they have done after the resignation!
- to Kevin and Ann Wasiluk for digitizing St. Mary's church ancient and present time records, as this will give us an opportunity to remember all our departed elders and keep track of our church's history;
- to Daniel and Anita Borys for donating a wonderful the cabinet for candles;
- to Alena Frankish and Cathy Krawchuk, that took up the duty of our church choir director;
- to those who keep up with the work our sisterhood used to do!

Schedule of the Visit of His Grace Bishop Matthew to Canada. March 26-30, 2020

March 27, Friday – 10.00 am – Divine Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts – St. John the Baptist church, Chipman

March 28, Saturday – 10.00 am – Divine Liturgy – St. Mary's church, Nisku

March 29, Sunday – 10.00 am – Divine Liturgy – St. Barbara's Cathedral

March 29, Sunday – 6 pm – Vespers & Akafist to Jesus Crucified – St. Barbara's Cathedral

March 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
<u>1</u> 10:00 a.m. - Divine Liturgy at Nisku. Sunday of Forgiveness (Cheesefare).	<u>2</u> Great Lent Begins Great Repentance Canon reading – St. Barbara Cathedral – 6 p.m.	<u>3</u> Great Repentance Canon reading – St. Barbara Cathedral – 6 p.m.	<u>4</u> Great Repentance Canon reading – St. Barbara Cathedral – 6 p.m.	<u>5</u> Great Repentance Canon reading – St. Barbara Cathedral – 6 p.m.	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u> 1:00 p.m. - The Annual St. Mary’s Parish meeting at Parish Hall, Nisku
<u>8</u> 10:00 a.m. - Divine Liturgy at Nisku. Triumph of Orthodoxy.	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u> Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts, St. Barbara’s Cathedral	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u> Liturgy of Presanctif. Gifts, St. Barbara’s Cathedral	<u>14</u> 10:00 p.m. - The Annual “Orthodox IX” Parishes meeting at Parish Hall, Nisku
<u>15</u> 10:00 p.m. - Divine Liturgy at St. Barbara’s Cathedral. St. Gregory Palamas.	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u> Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts, St. Barbara’s Cathedral	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u> Liturgy of Presanctif. Gifts, St. Barbara’s Cathedral	<u>21</u>
<u>22</u> 10:00 a.m. - Divine Liturgy, (Confession) Calmar. Cross Veneration.	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u> 10:00 a.m. - Divine Liturgy (Confession) at Nisku. <u>Archpastoral Service</u>
<u>29</u> 10:00 a.m. - Divine Liturgy, (Confession) Vegreville. Commemoration of St. John of the Ladder (Climacus). (After the Service - Annual Parish meeting)	<u>30</u>	<u>31</u>				