

The Conception of St. John the Baptist

Gal. 4:22-27

Luke 5:1-11

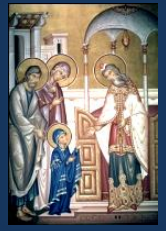
In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This morning's Gospel account tells recounts for us the recruiting of the disciples by our Lord Jesus Christ. Of course this is very early in His public ministry. He has thus far presided at the Wedding Feast in Cana where, at the behest of His Mother, He changed water into wine. He has gone to the River Jordan to be baptized by St. John the Forerunner. He has fasted for forty days on the mount and been tempted by the Evil One. And He has made his "inaugural announcement" in the Synagogue of Nazareth and been driven out by His own townspeople.

Now, however, the Lord is ready to gather to Himself those followers who will be closest to Him in His public ministry and will carry His message throughout the world after His passion, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. So here, on the shores of Lake Gennesaret, which is one of the other names for the Sea of Galilee (called by the Romans the Sea of Tiberias), the Savior worked a miracle—the wondrous and huge draft of fish, and then called Simon—whom we will come to know as Peter, the chief leader of the apostles—and the others to His side.

At first St. Peter addressed Jesus as "master"—a title that would only be used for teachers and rabbis and therefore a term of respect. But *after* the miracle of the fish he then called Him "kyrios", Lord. This is an important "change" that has taken place in the mind and heart of Peter because, as we heard in the Gospel, Peter asked Him to depart from him because he is a sinner. He recognized somehow the divinity and sinlessness of Christ and felt completely unworthy.

Historically speaking, this calling of the first followers of Christ was the beginning of a movement that would end with the founding of a Church, the Church of Jesus Christ, a Church which we believe has continued through time and subsisted in the Orthodox Christian Church. Now, this wasn't just some effort on the part of Jesus and His disciples to do something "good", to start some nice charitable association or organization—which is what many today think the Church and parishes are basically all about. *Rather, it was the establishment of the Mystical Body of Christ, that "Ark of Salvation" upon which all those wishing to be saved must travel through the rough seas of this life.* And the "head" of this Mystical Body is Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity Himself, and none other—not a patriarch, not a pope, not a metropolitan, not a bishop or a priest, but the Very and True Son of God Incarnate for our sake.



The calling of Peter is very important and needs to be examined a bit more closely because he was indeed, as I said, the leader of the sacred Twelve, both during the earthly life of the Redeemer and afterwards, until his, Peter's, own martyrdom some decades later. This meant that he presided in love over the other Apostles. But he was not an infallible pope or universal ecclesiastical ruler, as we can clearly see from the account of the Council of Jerusalem recorded in the Book of Acts. Nor was he even the first bishop of Rome! In fact, according to Orthodox knowledge, St. Peter was never a bishop in Rome at all, although he was indeed martyred there. But he did indeed journey to Rome, as he also traveled to many other places, in order to both preach the Gospel and, especially, strengthen the Christians already living and suffering in those cities and towns. But he was not the only one "called" and commissioned on that day by the lake; so were the others.

We notice, of course, that when the Lord called Peter, the fisherman was at first somewhat reluctant. He's really not sure. He doesn't jump at the chance to become a disciple of this wondrous new teacher. He knows that this man, Jesus, is more than a "typical" man, but he also knows that he's being asked to leave his family and his work as a fisherman, give up all, and begin a new life! So he is hesitant, not yet understanding what this is all about. Brothers and sisters, there is something in this for each and every one of us to think about this morning, for in this Gospel narrative you and I are also hearing, today, the call of Christ, summoning us to obedience, asking us to follow Him.

Of course probably all of us have already made a decision to obey God. Many times! Over and over! But here I'm not speaking of regrets and repentance and empty promises to "do better" in our lives, but of a firm and absolute submission to the Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, and Him crucified and risen—a decision to obey Him in *all* things and in *all* areas of our lives, no matter how difficult, how annoying, or how complicated such obedience is. I suspect that is a decision that few of us have ever actually made because we are pretty much satisfied with ourselves and with things the way they are.

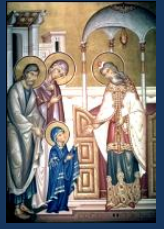
But so many people in our world are wounded and broken and depressed before they ever hit bottom and finally give themselves up totally to God. We live our lives so confident that we know and understand everything and can handle our lives and our problems ourselves, without reference to God...and then, sooner or later, catastrophe occurs. But you see, disaster comes because we have followed our own inflated will rather than seeking out and obeying the will of Lord. Yet all throughout the New Testament Christ made it perfectly clear, over and over, that obedience to Him should be the primary goal of *every single moment of every day*. We remember how, during the divine services of Great Lent, the Church reminds us very forcibly of the disaster that overtook Adam and Eve when they refused to obey God. Are we any different, any better?

September 23, 2012

Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young

Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple Skete



This is one of the great lessons of this morning's Gospel. So, brothers and sisters, let us not ruminate sentimentally over the calling of the disciples by Christ at the lake, important as that was, but let us focus on the obedience that the Lord was requiring of those men when He summoned them, and how, although hesitant at first, they obeyed. Let them be our examples, our models, and our inspiration as we continue our own journey through life.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.