

GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE
**PARISH OF ST. PARASKEVI, ST. BARBARA &
ST. JOHN THE MERCIFUL**

**22 Marsden Crescent, St Albans
Tel. 9367 2860**

Parish Priest: Rev. Fr. Demosthenes Nicolaou: 0421 704 806
Email: frdemos@stparaskevi.org.au website: www.stparaskevi.org.au

PROGRAMME SEPTEMBER 2017



THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH YEAR (INDICTION) – SEPTEMBER 1ST

"Christ our God, Your kingdom is an everlasting one and Your lordship is over all. You have made all things with wisdom and have established proper times and seasons for our lives.

We give thanks to You in all circumstances and for all things.

Grant that this liturgical year be for all of us a year of grace.

Make us worthy with purity of heart always to praise you. Lord, glory to You! "

PROGRAMME SEPTEMBER 2017

Every Thursday Evening the program is as follows:

6pm: The St Ignatius children's group and choir (primary school age and up)

7pm: Paraklesis service to the Theotokos (in English)

7.45: Bible study group (for all ages), led by Fr Demosthenis

FRIDAY 1st SEPT: BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH YEAR, The 40 Virgin Martyrs,
Matins, Divine Liturgy and blessing of waters 7.30-10.00am

SATURDAY 2nd SEPT: ST MAMMAS, Matins and Divine Liturgy, 7.30-9.30am

SUNDAY 3rd SEPT: 13TH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW, Matins and Divine Liturgy 7.30-11.00am.

FRIDAY 8th SEPT: BIRTH OF THE THEOTOKOS, Matins and Divine Liturgy, 7.30-10.00am

SATURDAY 9th SEPT: SAINTS JOACHIM AND ANNA, Matins and Divine Liturgy 7.30-9.30am.

SUNDAY 10th SEPT: SUNDAY BEFORE HOLY CROSS, Matins and Divine Liturgy, 7.30-11.00am

THURSDAY 14th SEPT: EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS (Fast day), Matins and Divine Liturgy, 7.30-10.30am

SATURDAY 16th SEPT: GREATMARTYR EUPHEMIA, Matins and Divine Liturgy, 7.30-9.30am

SUNDAY 17th SEPT: SUNDAY AFTER HOLY CROSS, Martyrs Sophia, Pistis, Elpis And Agape, Matins and Divine Liturgy, 7.30-11.00am

THURSDAY 21st SEPT: Evening: English Divine Liturgy, 7.30-9.00pm

SUNDAY 24th SEPT: 1ST SUNDAY OF LUKE, St Thekla, Matins and Divine Liturgy 7.30-11.00am.

MONDAY 25th SEPT: Evening: Vespers for the Translation of St John the Theologian at the Parish of PANAGIA SOUMELA

TUESDAY 26th SEPT: TRANSLATION OF ST JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN, (Matins and Divine Liturgy at the Parish of Panagia Soumela in Keilor)

Beginning of the Church year (Indiction) Commemorated September 1

Do you know why the first day of September marks the beginning of the Church year? We are accustomed to think of January 1st as the beginning of the year. But the tradition of computing the start of a new year with autumn was common to the lands of the Bible and to all the lands around the Mediterranean. The summer harvest was at an end, the crops were stored, and people prepared for a new agricultural cycle. It was an appropriate time to begin a new year.

Many of the hymns for the first day of the Church year state that the coming year is God's to give and God's to bless -- A YEAR OF THE LORD! These hymns take their theme from Psalm 65 (64 in the Greek Septuagint), a psalm of praise to the Creator Who is awesome as the Holy Lord but who richly sustains the earth with His abundant goodness.

"Bless, O Lord, the crown (that is, the beginning) of the year with Your goodness!" The goodness of the Lord is His love, mercy and grace, The Church's prayer is that the coming year will be a year of grace, a year blessed by God. Each year can be a year of grace, a year blessed by God.

The prayers and hymns of the Orthodox Church not only recite the wonderful works of God in creation and history for our salvation but also frequently offer guidance about how to make each year a year of grace, a year of the Lord. For example, the very first hymn of the new liturgical year, chanted at Vespers in the joyful first tone, reminds us that prayerful daily dependence on God is the basic attitude of the Christian and Christian life. This hymn is also interesting because it refers to another key passage in the Bible and addresses all the Orthodox faithful.

*"O faithful, having learned true prayer from the very words and divine teachings of Christ, let us cry out to the Creator each day:
Our Father, who dwells in heaven, give us always daily bread, and forgive us our transgressions".
(Vesper Hymn, September 1st)*

Of course, this hymn is making reference to the Lord's Prayer, the "Our Father..."

Both the above Vesper hymn and the Lord's Prayer set down three anchors, three great principles, necessary to make the coming year a year of the Lord, a year of grace.

The teachings of Christ are the source of truth for our lives. Our Father in heaven is a personal God who provides for all our material and spiritual needs as we ask Him by faith. Daily prayer is the way of ongoing communication and a vital relationship with God. Prayerful daily dependence on God sanctifies every moment of the day, whether we are at work, at play, at rest or in difficulty; it fills it with the presence of God and makes it God's moment.

"Christ our Lord, You who provide the rains and fruitful seasons, and hear the prayers of those who humbly seek You, accept also our requests about our needs and concerns and deliver us from worry, danger and sin.

Your mercies are as abundant as Your works. Bless all our activities, direct our steps by Your Holy Spirit, and forgive' our shortcomings.

Lord, bless the year with Your goodness and make it a year of grace for all of us. Amen."

(Matins Hymn, September 1st)

O Lord, Creator of all things, who by Your authority have established times and seasons, bless the beginning of our Church year with Your goodness; preserve Your people in peace, and through the intercessions of the Theotokos, save us. Amen.

(Dismissal Hymn, September 1st)

The worship of the Orthodox Church is rich in the Word of God. For the first day of the Church year a total of eight readings are designated, three from the Old Testament which are read during Vespers, and five from the New Testament which are read during the Matins and Liturgy. Vespers are chanted on the previous evening (that is, August 31st) because, according to the Bible and the Orthodox tradition, each new day begins after the setting of the sun.

The main Bible reading from the Divine Liturgy of September 1st is Lk. 4:16-22, a passage which marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in St. Luke's Gospel. In this reading, we see the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He reads from the Book of Isaiah in the synagogue and proclaims to the world that Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in Him.

See how the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the beginning of the Church year converge! According to Orthodox liturgical tradition, Jesus came to Nazareth to preach the good news of His mission on September 1st! This is of course not verifiable but it is spiritually significant that the Church in its worship has joined the first day of the liturgical year with the first day of Jesus' public preaching. In this fashion, the Church has Jesus speaking to us today just as He did to His contemporaries in the synagogue at Nazareth. Will we reject Him or accept Him?

Will we rebel against His Word actively, will we ignore it, or will we respond to it positively?

Christ's good news demands our faithful response of mind, heart, soul and body. The unconditional love of God, shown by the most precious gift of His Son who shed His blood on the Cross for our salvation, requires a total response on our part. St. Symeon the Stylite, whose feast day is observed on the first day of the Church year, is an example of unwavering devotion. St. Symeon for many years lived on top of a pillar (stylos, therefore he is called the "stylite") in prayer, sustained by the power of God and little else. His ascetic witness was not only a radical denial of all earthly things but also a provocative pointer to the kingdom of God.

His vigil for Christ had a powerful impact upon generations of Christians in the Orthodox tradition who were moved to commit their lives to the Lord. A martyr dies once. St. Symeon was a martyr for Christ for a period of forty years until his death (d. 459 A.D.)!

One of the hymns for the Feast day of St. Symeon compares the Saint with Christ Himself;

"O holy Father, imitating your own Lord, you ascended on a pillar as if on a cross by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord wiped away the ancient sentence against us whereas you destroyed the rebellion of corruptive passions;

He became as a lamb and you as a victim; He ascended a cross and you a pillar. Holy Symeon, intercede with Him for the salvation of our souls".

(Vesper Hymn, Feastday of St. Symeon the Stylite)

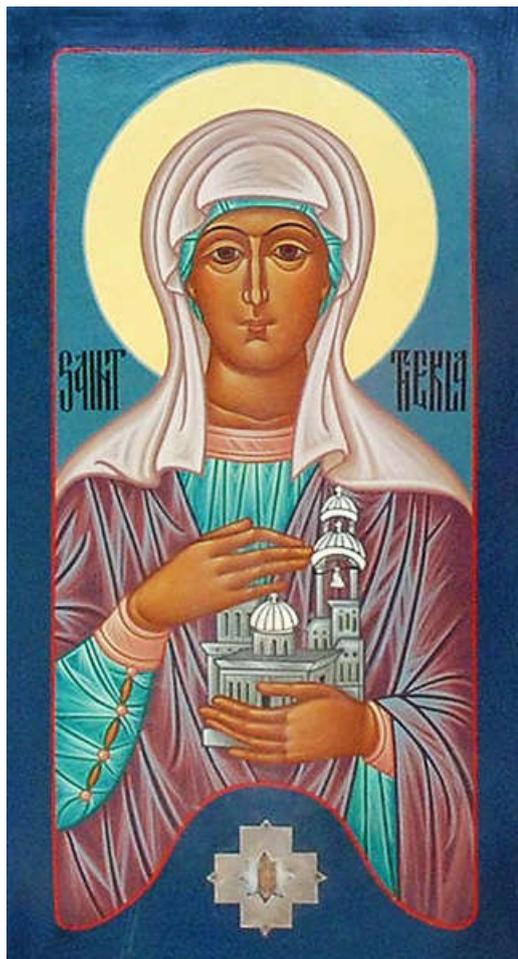
By putting before us St. Symeon's example of extreme asceticism at the beginning of the liturgical year, the church shows how seriously it takes the priority of Christ and how uncompromising our faith is about worldly values.

There is no merrymaking or party revelry on the eve of the beginning of the new Church year. It is an eve which does not call for wine and song but for contemplation, reflection and prayer. It is a time to pause and refresh the spirit and meditate on the new year before us. It is also a suitable time for us as Orthodox Christians to recommit our lives to Christ our God.

Adapted from A year of the Lord, Vol 1 by Prof. Theodore Stylianopoulos

Website: <http://www.orthodoxa.org/GB/orthodoxy/feasts/indictionGB.htm>

The Life of St. Thekla (commemorated on the 24th September)



The Life of St. Thekla, a disciple and companion of the Apostle Paul in 1st century. She is given the title "Equal-to-the-Apostles" because she accompanied St. Paul in founding churches because her witness converted so many others to Christ, and she was the first woman martyr for the Christian Faith.

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According to ancient Syrian and Greek manuscripts, Saint Thekla was born into a prosperous pagan family in the Lycaonian city of Iconium (present-day Konya in south-central Turkey) in A.D. 16. When she was 18 years old and betrothed to a young man named Thamyris, Saint Paul the Apostle and Saint Barnabas arrived in Iconium from Antioch (Acts 14). Thekla's mother Theokleia prohibited her from joining the crowds which gathered to hear Paul preach. But

Thekla found that if she sat near her bedroom window she could hear his every word. Thekla sat there for three days and three nights listening to Paul preach the word of God. She was particularly touched by his call to chastity. As it became apparent that Thekla was becoming interested in the new Faith, Theokleia and Thamyris went to the governor of the city and complained about Paul and his preaching. To pacify them and the other outraged citizens of Iconium, the governor had Paul imprisoned to await trial.

When Thekla learned of Paul's arrest she secretly went to the prison, and using her golden bracelets to bribe the guard, gained admittance to his cell. When she saw the Apostle, she knelt before him and kissed the chains which bound his hands and feet. She remained there a long time listening to his message of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

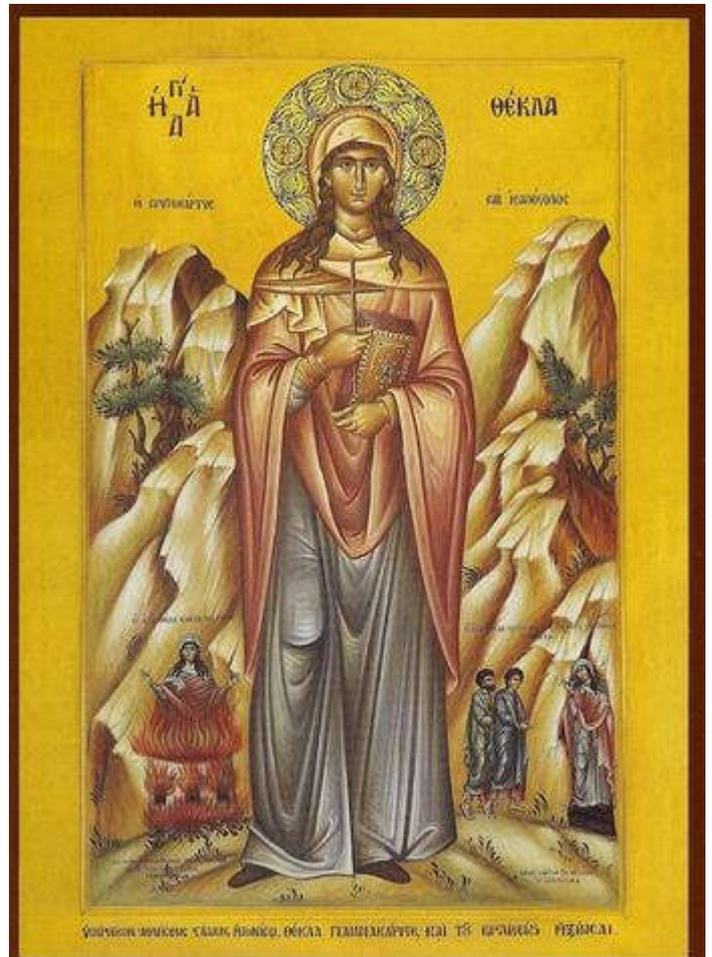
Being concerned at Thekla's prolonged absence, Theokleia and Thamyris asked her servant if she knew where she was. The servant said that Thekla had gone to visit an imprisoned stranger. Theokleia and Thamyris knew at once that she was with Paul. They decided to go again to the governor, this time demanding immediate judgement for the Apostle. After the governor chastened Paul for the disturbances he had caused in the city, he had him stoned and expelled from

Iconium. The governor then admonished Thekla for her foolishness and commanded her to return home with her mother and fiancé. When Thekla announced that she had vowed to remain a virgin for the sake of Christ, her mother became enraged and asked the governor to threaten Thekla with severe punishment. The governor complied with this wish and ruled that Thekla was to be burned at the stake unless she renounced her faith in Christ.

When Thekla refused to renounce her Heavenly Bridegroom, she was taken to the arena for punishment. As she was tied to the stake she saw a vision of Jesus Christ which gave her strength to face the flames. The fire was lit, but as the flames came near Thekla a thunderstorm suddenly arose and a great torrent of rain and hail came down from heaven and extinguished the flames. Embarrassed because his plan had failed, the angry governor released Thekla but commanded that she must leave Iconium at once.

Upon her release, Thekla went to the outskirts of the city where she rejoined Paul. She told him of her trial and miraculous escape from punishment and asked for baptism. Paul refused to baptize Thekla, saying that this would be accomplished in God's own way and time. Paul and Thekla then departed from the region of Iconium and traveled to Antioch in Syria. As they were entering the city a young nobleman named Alexander saw Thekla. Being entranced by her beauty he rushed forward and tried to seduce her, but Thekla fought him off, thus disgracing him in front of his crowd of friends. Alexander went to the governor of Antioch and complained that this wandering girl had disgraced him, a nobleman, in public. He demanded that she be punished with death. The governor complied and ruled that Thekla would face the wild beasts in the arena. Thekla's only reply was that she be allowed to preserve her virginity unto death. Her wish was granted and she was given into the care of the noblewoman Tryphaena, a relative of Caesar, until the time of punishment.

When Thekla was taken to the arena, a lioness was set free to attack her. But to the astonishment of the crowd, the lioness approached the Saint and sat tamely at



her feet. A bear was then released, but as it came close to Thekla the lioness rose up to defend her and killed the bear. A large lion was then released. The lioness again came to Thekla's defense killing the lion, but losing her own life also. Then all the cages were opened and a large number of wild animals charged at the defenseless Thekla. After crossing herself and praying for courage, the Saint noticed a large tank of water which was nearby, containing the aquatic animals. She climbed into the water, asking that she might be baptized by Christ as she did so. Seeing that the beasts were unable to harm Thekla, Alexander asked that the Saint be given over to him for punishment. He tied her to two large bulls in the hopes that they would pull her asunder. But when the bulls charged off in opposite directions, the ropes which held Thekla to them were miraculously loosened and she was spared. Seeing that no harm could be done to Thekla, the authorities released her. She went to the home of Tryphaena where she remained for eight days preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ and converting Tryphaena and her entire household. When she departed from Antioch, Tryphaena gave her a treasure in gold and precious jewels.

After she left Antioch, Thekla journeyed to Myra where she rejoined Paul. She informed him of all that had occurred, including her baptism and asked that she might be permitted to spend the remainder of her life as an ascetic. Paul gave her his blessing and she departed, leaving with Paul all the gold and jewels that Tryphaena had given her so that he might distribute them among the poor and needy.

Thekla then traveled again to Syria where she went up into the mountains for a life of prayer and solitude. Many years later a young pagan found her praying in an isolated canyon and resolved to harass her and spoil her virginity. As he approached her and blocked her only exit to safety, she prayed that her Bridegroom would protect her as He had so many times in the past. At that moment, the canyon wall was miraculously split allowing her to escape through a narrow crack in the rock.

Saint Thekla continued her life of asceticism and then peacefully fell asleep in Christ at the age of 90. Shortly after her death a community of virgins went to live in her mountain cell, building a small chapel to enshrine her body. This Convent of Saint Thekla still exists today near the village of Ma'loula, Syria.

Because of her many sufferings for the Faith the Church counts her as a "Protomartyr". And because she converted so many people to Christianity she is also known as an "Equal-to-the-Apostles".

Website: http://www.antiochian.org/life_of_thekla