

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST ORTHODOX CHURCH

ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

A PARISH OF THE DIOCESE OF NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY

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Department of
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How Could He Be So Sure?

One of the readings for February 1, Hebrews 11:17-23, recalls a story from the Old Testament that is for some people a stumbling block: God telling Abraham, in Genesis 22, to sacrifice his only son Isaac on Mount Moriah.

For those who are eager to portray the God of Christians as a violent figure without compassion, unworthy of worship or even respect, the story in Genesis provides a good deal of ammunition. Here is God asking a father to kill his beloved son, for no apparent reason except to show his own godly power. Then the same God, the critics of Christianity say, will one day demand his own son's death on the cross. Bob Dylan included the Genesis episode in one of his songs, suggesting that God threatened severe consequences if Abraham didn't do what was commanded. Dylan puts these words in God's mouth: "You can do what you want, Abe, but the next time you see me coming you better run."

Dylan's lyrics don't reflect what really happens in the Old Testament story, with its suspense and drama. First there is the poignant description of Isaac as "your son, your only son, whom you love." Then comes the journey to the mountain, with Abraham cutting and gathering the wood for the fire that will consume the sacrifice. Young Isaac's innocent question, once the fire and wood have been prepared, chills the heart: "...but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" When Abraham actually reaches for the knife to kill Isaac, and the angel stays his hand, horror is followed by great relief.

The Letter to the Hebrews presents the story from Genesis as one example of Abraham's faith. Preceding verses describe other

Intercessory Prayers

We pray for all our fellow parishioners, and we pray especially for those who are incapable of being with us in church. Please keep in your prayers our Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Genevieve Bobenko, Mary Fechisin, Nancy Filak, Mary Hadginske, Helen Kurnewitz, Margaret Lawler, Kathleen Lazorzcyk, Marian Nagel, MaryAnn Rabakozi, Helen Rahnefeld, Anna Rozanovich, Nadia Sojka, Maryann Stagen, Eva Stashitsky, Ann Velebir.

examples, first his setting out for an unknown land that God promised, and then his living with his family as sojourners in a foreign land. His wife Sarah's faith is also described. She is old and childless, yet is given the ability to conceive "because she considered him faithful who had promised" (11:11). The result is "descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore" (11:12).

But before all those innumerable descendants came Isaac, and Abraham's faith in God's promises is the key to his willingness to sacrifice his cherished son. He had seen God fulfill His promises, and he knew "that God was able to raise men even from the dead" (11:19). God had told Abraham (Genesis 17:21) that He would establish His covenant with Isaac. So Abraham could be sure He would keep that promise as well.

This is the faith that Bob Dylan and others fail to see in the story. But the Church Father Melito of Sardis sees it as a promise to us as well as to Abraham. He writes that Christ "was bound with Isaac." Both were bound, and both were restored to their fathers. Now we can also be sure that, in ways we may not anticipate, God's promises will be fulfilled.

Birthday Greetings

Happy Birthday to **Stacy Baron Anderson** who celebrates her Birthday this Tuesday. May God grant you good health and happiness for Many Years!

Floral Offerings

Beautiful flowers for the icon of the Three Holy Hierarchs were donated by Effie, Sonya and Chris Finno in memory of the departed members of **Evanina, Firmender, Stankovci, and Finno** families. Memory Eternal! Vichnaya Pamiat!



Announcements

◆ Save the date: Our **Annual Parish Meeting** will be held on **Sunday, February 21** following the Divine Liturgy. Please plan to attend this meeting.

◆ **29th Annual Beefsteak Dinner** at Holy Assumption Church in Clifton is planned for Saturday, March 5, 2016. For reservations please call Barbara Polk @ 973-452-1233. For more information please see a flyer at the bulletin board.

Welcome Visitors

We welcome all visitors to our Divine Liturgy. It is our joy to have you with us today. If this is your first visit to our parish, we welcome you and invite you to return as often as you are able.

While Holy Communion may only be received by prepared Orthodox Christians, our non-Orthodox guests are welcome to join us in venerating the Cross, receiving blessed bread at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, and for fellowship in our Church Hall after the service.



January 31, 2016

35th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

- **9:00am** – Divine Liturgy
Epistle: Col. 3:12-16
Gospel: Mt. 25:14-30
- **Panikhida** – in memory of Eugenia, Jan, Halina, and John, offered by Walentyna and Miroslaw Szestawicki.
- **Coffee Hour** – everyone is invited for a fellowship following the service.

Schedule of Services

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1

5:00pm - Great Vespers with Litya

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2 - MEETING OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE

9:00am - Divine Liturgy

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6

5:00pm - Great Vespers

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7

9:00am - Divine Liturgy