

St. Catherine's Newsletter

Assumption Greek
Orthodox Church

Lent, 2011



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What is Lent?

by Nikos Chulos Saarinen

What is Lent? To me Lent is when we show our love for God by making some of the same sacrifices that Jesus made in his forty days in the desert. Although Jesus didn't eat or drink for a whole forty days, and most people just avoid meat and dairy products on Wednesday and Friday, it is still a sacrifice in honor of God. But Lent is different for everyone. For some people Lent is just a reason to skip meat and dairy products. For others it has no meaning whatsoever and they do not follow the fasting rules. And then there are those who are completely into it and know exactly why meat and dairy products are not eaten on these days and they follow the fasting rules. Lent takes place forty days before Easter. During these forty days we are supposed to be on extra good behavior. In the past, Lent for me has meant going to church on days other than Sunday, fasting, extra good behavior, and spending more time with my family by doing things such as going to the Lenten Retreat. The Lenten Retreat is just a gathering of church members in one place and making arts and crafts, getting involved in fun activities, and basically just a warm welcome to Lent. This is what I think is the meaning of Lent.

Into the Desert: Take the 40-Day Lenten Challenge

There is a Lenten blog that's designed to motivate, challenge and inspire you to grow in Christ during Lent. Visit www.youth.goarch.org and click "Youth Department Blog" to join in this 40-Day Lenten Challenge. This is the official blog of the Greek Orthodox Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries.



A pokreatiko Glendi Jungle Safari



ASK FATHER.....

by Very Rev. Fr. Timothy Bakakos

Question: † Why is the Bible divided into 2 parts, Old and New Testaments, and what are the differences between the two?

The Bible is a Book that has two main divisions in - the Old Testament and the New Testament. Even though there are these distinct parts of the Bible - it still has only one theme - *redemption*. The Old and New Testaments comprise the Christian Bible, Christianity's set of Holy Scripture, while only the Old Testament is adhered to by the Jews. The Bible, as we Orthodox Christians view it, details what Jews and Christians believe is their creator God's participation in human history.

The **Old Testament** comprises the first two-thirds of the Christian Bible. It contains all the Jewish scriptures compiled until about 400 B.C., roughly about 400 years before the birth and ministry of Jesus Christ. The first five books of the Old Testament — Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy — comprise the *Pentateuch*, or *Torah* for Jews.

These books tell the creation story, the story of the fall and how sin entered the world, and of God's first intervention in the history of man. It also tells the story of Moses and the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, their emergence as a people and their wanderings in the desert for 40 years, until they reached Canaan. The Jewish Law is also covered in these books.

Other books of the Old Testament, *Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel, Kings I and II, Chronicles I and II, Ezra and Nehemiah* all cover Israel's early history. These books detail the nation's history as it formed from a band of nomads into a premiere world power. The books also detail the fall of Israel, its captivity in Babylon and return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.

The Old Testament Books like *Esther, Ruth, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon* are called "wisdom and devotional literature." They do **not** relate history so much as they illustrate the work of God among His people and how He relates to His people. The *Book of Psalms* comprised the hymnbook of the Jews and of the early Christian Church. The *Book of Proverbs* is a collection of wise thoughts and sayings that still have merit.

The **New Testament** arrived, like its predecessor, the Old Testament, in bits and pieces. The New Testament is entirely concerned with the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It also speaks and gives account of the emerging first century Christian Church, exhortations on living a Christian life, and talks about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Christians believe Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and this is a vital point in understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, according to Christianity.

The four Gospels — *St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John* — all deal exclusively with the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. *St. Matthew* especially draws parallels between the Old Testament and Christ's life in his Gospel.

St. Luke is also the author of the Book of Acts, which covers the Early Church. *St. Paul* is prominent as he is the author of many of the Epistles, or Letters, to various churches where he had ministered. These letters are full of advice and wisdom on living a Christian life. The Pastoral Epistles written by *Peter, John, James and Jude* follow, with the *Book of Revelation* closing the New Testament, describing the end of the world and the final Coming of Jesus Christ.

In short, ***the Old Testament focuses on the history of the Jews, while the New Testament focuses on Jesus Christ and the birth of the Christian Faith.*** The New Testament always shows how the God of the Old Testament completed His redemptive work in the person of Jesus Christ, who died to atone for the sins of all mankind. While Jews believe the Messiah has not yet come, to Christians, the Old Testament is very closely linked with the New Testament. The New Testament is the fulfillment of God's plan for mankind!

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ASK FATHER.....continued

by Very Rev. Fr. Timothy Bakakos

Similarities

- Both the Old and New Testaments were all written by men - even the two books that bear the names of women - Ruth and Esther.
- The theme of both Old and New Testaments is redemption, and in both, redemption occurs through faith. The Redeemer is the same in the Old Testament and the New - though it was not as clear in the Old. God always had the plan of sending His Son to become the Redeemer by dying for the human race.
- Also, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the blood of sacrifice is necessary for redemption.
- Another similarity is that the Bible begins with a tree, the Tree of Life - from which mankind is forbidden to partake after they sinned, and the Bible ends with the Tree of Life - offered freely to the redeemed to partake of its fruits.
- It also begins with man and God walking together in fellowship in the beginning, and once again, after God's working to redeem man, in the end, forever.

The Main Difference Between The Two

All of the differences can be summed up by saying that the Old Testament begins the *teaching, or revelation*, while the New Testament *finishes (or completes) that same revelation*. In other words, the story is incomplete without the New Testament. The complete revelation of God to man, and of God's finished work of man's redemption, is completed in Christ - Who is God in the flesh. The New Testament is God's infallible record of what Christ has done - and will yet do.

Other Differences Between the Two

1. The *Old Testament* deals largely in pictures and types. Much of the truth about Christ that is in the Old Testament was hidden or unknown until Christ came. It is through the *New Testament* that finally reveals what many of the things in the Old Testament meant.....and that is with the coming of Jesus Christ.
2. In the *Old Testament*, once the Temple was built, God lived and was considered to be "in" in the Temple. But in the *New Testament*, God lives in the heart of each believer - close and personal, showing that the fellowship with God has been restored.
3. The *Old Testament* begins with God calling out a people/nation to Himself (Genesis 12), while the *New Testament* shows Him beginning with that nation, through 12 Jewish apostles, and calling unto Himself the whole world.
4. The *Old Testament* largely deals with the Law of God, but in the *New Testament*, the focus is on the grace of God. This is not because God had changed in any way, but it was because the complete Sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins had been accomplished - Christ died for our sins.
5. The *Old Testament* shows God remaining largely hidden, and access to Him could only be gained through the Temple, and with an animal sacrifice. The *New Testament* shows that Christ has given every believer free access to the Throne of God.

Finally, the difference between the two is further illustrated in the Bible by an incident that occurred just after Christ died on the Cross. In the Temple, there was a thick curtain, behind which only the High Priest could enter once a year. When Christ died, this curtain was ripped from the top to the bottom *without* human hands. This miracle showed to all who saw it that God would no longer remain hidden away behind these pictures, but now every man could have full access to God through Christ by faith.

St. John Chrysostom Oratorical & Fine Arts Festival

at the Assumption Sunday Church School

What is Fasting?

By Estelle Bastounes

What is Fasting,
A diet for the soul?
What is dieting,
A fast for the body?
No, fasting is,
To better your soul, your spirit.
It is to help you,
Get closer to God.
Dieting is simply
Earthly.
It is to better your body,
Not your soul, your spirit.
And,
Who am I to choose,
Between bettering
Soul or body.
Both is nice, but
If I was to choose only one,
I would choose fasting.

Q: Obesity is defined as excessive body weight in relation to height. What are other types of excess and imbalance that can be addressed by spiritual disciplines?
By Christen Massouras

In today's world, many teenagers and adults have looked to dieting in order to feel better about themselves and their body image, but many times fail due to a lack of discipline and being able to see permanent results. The act of fasting in the Orthodox Church disciplines the soul, mind, and body, and in the process makes us grow closer to God. Dieting is used by many people to help achieve a "model" image of themselves; but we as Orthodox Christians need to understand that in an age of increasing obesity we must become more aware of our inner spirit as well as our outer body. By disciplining ourselves through fasting, we can learn to slowly stop the obesity epidemic in our society, while at the same time enriching and cleansing our souls.

Teenagers and young adults have been brainwashed by the media into thinking that their bodies will never look, or be, good enough. In supermarket checkout stands, you view magazines criticizing celebrities for being too fat or too skinny. Dieting attempts to make people feel good about themselves and their outside appearance. Dieting provides various options, from all fruit to low carb diets, and there seems to be a thousand ways to feel better about ourselves through these different diets. However, dieting alone does not discipline our bodies to behave a certain way; rather it forces our bodies to conform into an ideal shape. Many diets do not succeed because the people trying to lose weight lack a certain discipline, and then jump to the next "craze" in dieting in order to try again to lose their desired weight, without success.

There is one time tested way, centuries old, and often overlooked, that can purify and discipline our body and soul, that can make us feel better inside and out; and that way is through fasting. Fasting is an important part of an Orthodox Christian's life throughout the year and prior to important feast days. What is fasting? According to Goarch.org, "Fasting is a way of emptying ourselves from the cares and concerns of this world—A means of preparation and conditioning, which will enable us serve God and grow closer to Him."

In my own personal way, I like to think of fasting as being much like a marathon runner who prepares and conditions for a marathon. Like running a marathon, Orthodox Christians must prepare for the goal of receiving communion and truly experiencing special feast days. In order to run a marathon, one can not possibly be able physically run the long miles ahead of them without preparation, so they need to condition. A marathon runner should run several miles, gradually adding additional miles as time passes, in order for him to build up his endurance. Like a marathon runner, Orthodox Christians need to condition their spirit and awareness by fasting. Fasting prepares our souls for communion like running prepares our legs for a marathon. Once we receive communion, we must again prepare ourselves for our next communion, just as a marathon runner prepares for his next race. We as Orthodox Christians need to continuously fast in order to receive communion, and to give us strength in our everyday lives. Fasting gives us the strength to achieve a stronger connection with God and to stay away from the devil and temptation.

According to [A Lenten Cook Book for Orthodox Christians](#), "By fasting, Moses, the seer of God and the elders of Israel, was prepared to ascend the mountain in the desert and behold the Glory of God. Fasting, therefore, should always be understood as a thing most necessary in our battle with the evil one. A man who calls himself a Christian, and does not fast, is not a man at all." God has given us all the opportunity to discipline our minds and become closer to him. By fasting we will have a stronger faith in God and will be able to purify our souls.

In a world with a rising rate of obesity, we as Orthodox Christians need to understand how to become more disciplined for ourselves and for our bodies. Obesity occurs because there is a lack of mental discipline for our body, while fasting is an act of discipline for our soul. Many people who have become more and more obese have tried many times in their lives to diet. Going on a diet many times forces people to create a different body for themselves without first establishing a set discipline, thus leading to almost certain failure in the future. The act of fasting disciplines Orthodox Christians the right way, by fueling both our souls and bodies, and thus helping us become healthy both inside and out.

In an age of widespread obesity in this country, the people of America must learn the spiritual discipline of fasting to help establish a healthy routine. Many Americans believe that losing weight is as easy as taking a dieting pill with automatic results. Like anything else in life, however, a dieter must learn discipline and patience to achieve permanent goals. Fasting allows Orthodox Christians reach even higher goals, those ideals of becoming closer to God and the Church. If the Americans of today are able to learn and keep this spiritual discipline instead of dieting with the latest fad, they will reach their goals with the bonus of receiving both a healthier inner spirit and outward appearance.

Who would have thought that the answer to our obesity epidemic rested with the early Fathers and in the teachings of our Orthodox Church?

By Nikos Chulos Saarinen

What is the difference between fasting and dieting? The difference is that fasting is done out of love for God and faith in Him, and dieting is not. Another thing that makes fasting different from dieting is that when you fast it is the thought that counts. For example, a relative of mine who, for health reasons, does not give up food when she fasts, but instead she gives up coffee and chocolate, which are big sacrifices for her. When we fast it is in remembrance of Jesus's 40 days in the desert and all we have to do is show God that we care and that we can make sacrifices too, just like Jesus.

Dieting can be a way to make ourselves look younger and better and it might not have anything to do with God or Jesus. Unlike fasting when you diet it is not the thought that counts but what you actually get done. Even if you try very hard and make a good effort it doesn't matter unless you actually eat the right things and don't eat the wrong things. Although it is ok to diet, you should not include fasting as part of your diet because it is taking advantage of a religious deed.

Despite the fact that you should not consider fasting the same thing as dieting, dieting can have a religious purpose. It can have a religious purpose because, for example, if your weight is blocking you from doing religious deeds such as helping people who are in need of help, then you should lose weight, but for religious purposes and not to just make you look better. I think that this should be the real reason why people diet, so that they can help others with their problems and issues and that looks aren't everything. When you go up to heaven God is not going to care what shape or size you are. He is only going to care about what kind of person you really are deep down inside of you heart. This is what I think is the difference between fasting and dieting.

The purpose of the Saint John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival is to give young people an opportunity to learn and speak about their beliefs, their Church and their heritage which strengthens their understanding and appreciation of their identity as Greek Orthodox Christians. Students from grades 7-12 may participate by entering an essay, poem, speech or icon. Winners from our parish go on to compete at the Metropolis level at St. Nectarios Church on April 30, 2011.

Panagia, a Light in My Life

By Marika Maggos

Think about your mom, yiayia, or motherly figure in your life. Did a smile spread across your face? Our mothers take care of us and teach us valuable lessons. We look up to them, with admiration in our eyes. The Most Holy Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary, is the Mother of God and the mother of all of us. Therefore, she is an illuminating example, especially to me.

Mary was born to Joachim and Anna on September 8, obedient and dedicated to God. She was brought to live at the temple, at age three. It is said Mary spent her days in the Holy of Holies praying constantly and weaving. As a young girl, she devoted herself and her virginity to God. Mary was known for her significant humility. She always thought herself unworthy to ever be the Virgin prophesized by Isaiah, while around her Jewish women dreamed of becoming the Mother of the Messiah. The Virgin Mary also had outstanding faith in the Lord. At the Annunciation, Mary was a little confused after Archangel Gabriel told her she would be the Mother of God. Still, she replied, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be according to your word." She was not afraid while Joseph was contemplating whether to divorce her. The role of the Theotokos is intercession. She gave birth to Jesus and took part in his first miracle at the wedding in Cana, proclaiming, "They have no wine." On August 15, the Dormition of the Theotokos, Panagia once again shows her faith by saying on her deathbed, "Be it unto me immediately according to Your word," and giving her spirit to Jesus.

I was named after the Theotokos, and look up to her. Since I was a little girl, she has always amazed me. By her example, I strive to achieve obedience, devotion to God, humility, and a strong faith. When I have the urge to disrespect my parents, I think of Panagia and her utmost obedience, to hold me back. I dedicate myself to God by singing in the choir at church. While colleges become more selective, teachers push us to brag about our grades and accomplishments. While I hope to go to a good college when the time comes, it is important to me to possess humility. The Theotokos did not associate herself with temptations either, but gave herself to the Lord. As a teenager, I am going to find myself in very tempting situations. I will face many challenges as an adult, too. Visualizing Panagia, and her faith in God, will provide me the support I need to do the right thing. I pray to Panagia when I have troubles. It extinguishes my fears. Others ask for intercession from the Theotokos, too. For example, my home parish, Assumption church, holds the vespers for the feast on August 15. Hundreds of people continuously stream in throughout the service, lighting candles and bringing flowers to place before her icon. You can see the burdens carried on some of these people's faces. Yet, by the end of the service, those burdens have been washed away and replaced with radiance.

The Theotokos is above all other saints. We Orthodox Christians contain notable love, reverence, and respect for her. She is an inspiration in my life. Know and believe that Panagia has touched each and every one of us. She will forever protect us and provide us with the strength we need in our lives! Most Holy Theotokos, save us.

INFO

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HOURS
MATINS — 8:30 AM
DIVINE LITURGY—
10:00 AM

We're on the web!
www.assumptionchicago.org

The St. Catherine's Newsletter was created in 2007 by a Sunday School student. It serves to inform, educate, and entertain the children of the Assumption Greek Orthodox Church community. All are welcome and encouraged to contribute to the newsletter.

If you are interested in writing an article, sending in a self written piece of work, or just for more information... PLEASE CONTACT: Very Rev. Fr. Timothy Bakakos — FrTimothy@assumptionchicago.org or Dr. Evie Maggos — demags@aol.com

SAVE THE DATE
Sunday Church School
Easter Party
Sunday, May 1, 2011

MAIL TO:

List the titles given to the five Sundays of Great Lent and first Sunday of Holy Week

1. (3/13/11) _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. (4/17/11) _____

Name: _____ Grade: _____

Return to St. Catherine's Narthex by Sunday, April 10, 2011

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Spotlight on Sunday Church School



Our precious Little Lambs (children under 3) and their parents meet in a classroom off St. Catherine's chapel for stories, snack, games and crafts. They include: Christopher and George Demos, Georgia Godellas, Emily Kaemerer, Christina Kanel, Sofia Kouvelis, Sophia Lucas, Pearl and Ruby Miller, Evan Skoulikaris and Alayna Vlagos.

We welcome new families to the Sunday Church School! They are: Taki & Wendy Miller and daughters Ruby and Pearl (Little Lambs class), Chris & Helen Torchia and son Anton (2nd grade) and George & Luiza Siomos and son Kosta (7th grade).

Our Lenten Retreat was held Saturday, March 19th. We learned about the Beatitudes, did crafts, had lunch, worshipped together and played games.