



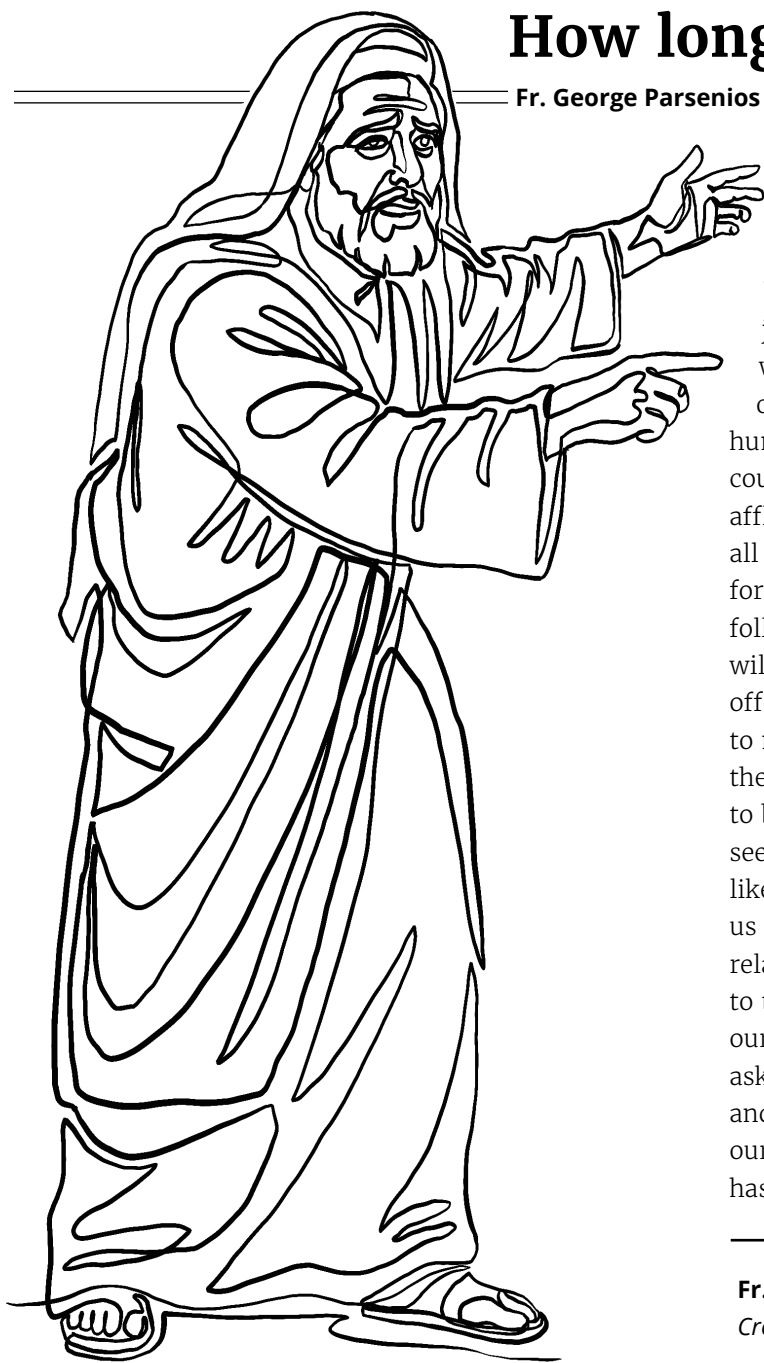
DIAKONIA

A National Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S READING - *Mark 9:17-31*

How long has he had this?

Fr. George Parsenios



In today's Gospel reading, Jesus asks the father of a sick child, "How long has he had this?" The father explains that the boy has been sick from his youth, indicating that illness is a chronic condition of the boy's being. Several people healed by Jesus endured illness for just as many years or longer. The blind man in John 9 was blind from birth, while the man healed at the Pool of Bethesda in John 5 carried his pain for 38 years. No human help could make these people whole. God alone could bring them new life. Their extreme states of physical affliction illustrate the spiritual sicknesses that characterize all of humanity. The season of Great Lent is a hospital for diseases of body and soul. Everyone recognizes that following certain diets and engaging in various exercises will make our bodies stronger. In the same way, Great Lent offers us a special diet and a catalog of spiritual exercises to make us spiritually stronger. We struggle to embrace these disciplines, though. The problem lies in our will to be healed. Effort is needed, and we are often slow to seek spiritual healing. Let us, then, interrogate ourselves like Jesus did the father in today's Gospel reading. Let us ask ourselves regarding the troubles we have in our relationships, "How long have I had this?" Then let us to turn to God and seek change. Let us also interrogate ourselves about the bad habits that cling so closely to us and ask, "How long have I had this?" Then let us turn to God and seek change in our lives, so that we are defined not by our weakness or our errors but by the new life that Christ has come to give us.

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Diakonia is made possible by a generous grant from Leadership 100

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FROM THE ORIGINAL GREEK: Martyr (Μάρτυς) What is “Martyr?”

Fr. George Parsenios



The English term “martyr” refers to someone who dies for his faith, but this is an exclusively Christian sense of the term. Before the rise of Christianity, the Greek term *μάρτυς/martys* simply referred to a witness in a legal trial, and most

New Testament texts use the term in this original legal sense. The Gospel of John, for example, refers to the testimony (martyria) of John the Baptist when leaders from Jerusalem interrogated him (John 1:19). John testifies as if in a trial. The testimony and death of a witness, however,

became linked in Christianity because Christ himself was executed after testifying before Pontius Pilate. In this spirit, the Book of Revelation refers to Jesus as “a faithful witness (*μάρτυς/martys*)...firstborn of the dead.” A man named Antipas is also called a “faithful witness” (*μάρτυς/martys*, Rev 2:13) after he died for his faith. As persecution grew, Christians were called to give witness of their faith—or their denial of it—before Roman judges. They were executed merely for testifying that they were Christians. By the time of the famous Martyrdom of Polycarp (155 AD), therefore, the term *μάρτυς/martys* no longer meant merely a witness at a trial, but a Christian who was “martyred” for professing his faith.

THIS WEEK’S LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY

Christ the Savior Church



Photo credit: J.Kordaris

Christ the Savior Church of Brooksville, Florida traces its origins to a youth camp, founded by Fr. John Liadis decades ago on a secluded property nearby. A worshipping community gradually formed in the small chapel of the camp.

In his retirement, Fr. Stanley Harakas, author, scholar and theologian, moved to the area with Presvytera Emily. Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta invited Fr. Stanley to lead the budding parish. Attendance grew, and the parish petitioned to establish the chapel as an official mission. Under Fr. Stanley’s leadership, with the support of the Atlanta Metropolis and the Leadership 100 Home Mission Parish Grant, the parish continued to grow. The community chose the name “Christ the Savior.”

Not long after, the camp property was sold, and the parish relocated to a storefront for several years. A church building on the main street of Brooksville became available. After extensive renovations which included replacing the spire with a dome, Metropolitan Alexios blessed the church before their first Divine Liturgy. Now under the inspired leadership of Fr. John Lazarek, the parish continues to thrive.



THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT: Saint John Climacus

On this Sunday of Great Lent, we remember St. John Climacus or St. John of the Ladder. He was the abbot of the Monastery of St. Katherine on Mount Sinai during the seventh century. St. John wrote *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, which is a guide to ascetic living (living a spiritually disciplined life). This book is read in every Orthodox monastery during Great Lent. In this book, St. John writes about 30 rungs of the ladder we climb in our ascent to heaven. Each rung represents a different Christian virtue (obedience, repentance, love, humility, etc.). In today's Gospel passage, we are shown that through faith in Christ all things are possible. We too need to cry as the father in today's Gospel, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." Furthermore, this passage reveals that faith to conquer our demons comes only from prayer and fasting. At this point, Christ begins to reveal to the disciples about His upcoming suffering.

Do Together: Jacob's Ladder

Read the Old Testament story about Jacob's Ladder, which can be found in Genesis 28:10- 17. The ladder represents the Theotokos. Talk about how Jesus came down the ladder to show us how to ascend it to heaven. Talk about things that help us climb the ladder to heaven and things that make us slide down.

For young children, the game Chutes and Ladders can be helpful in illustrating this point.

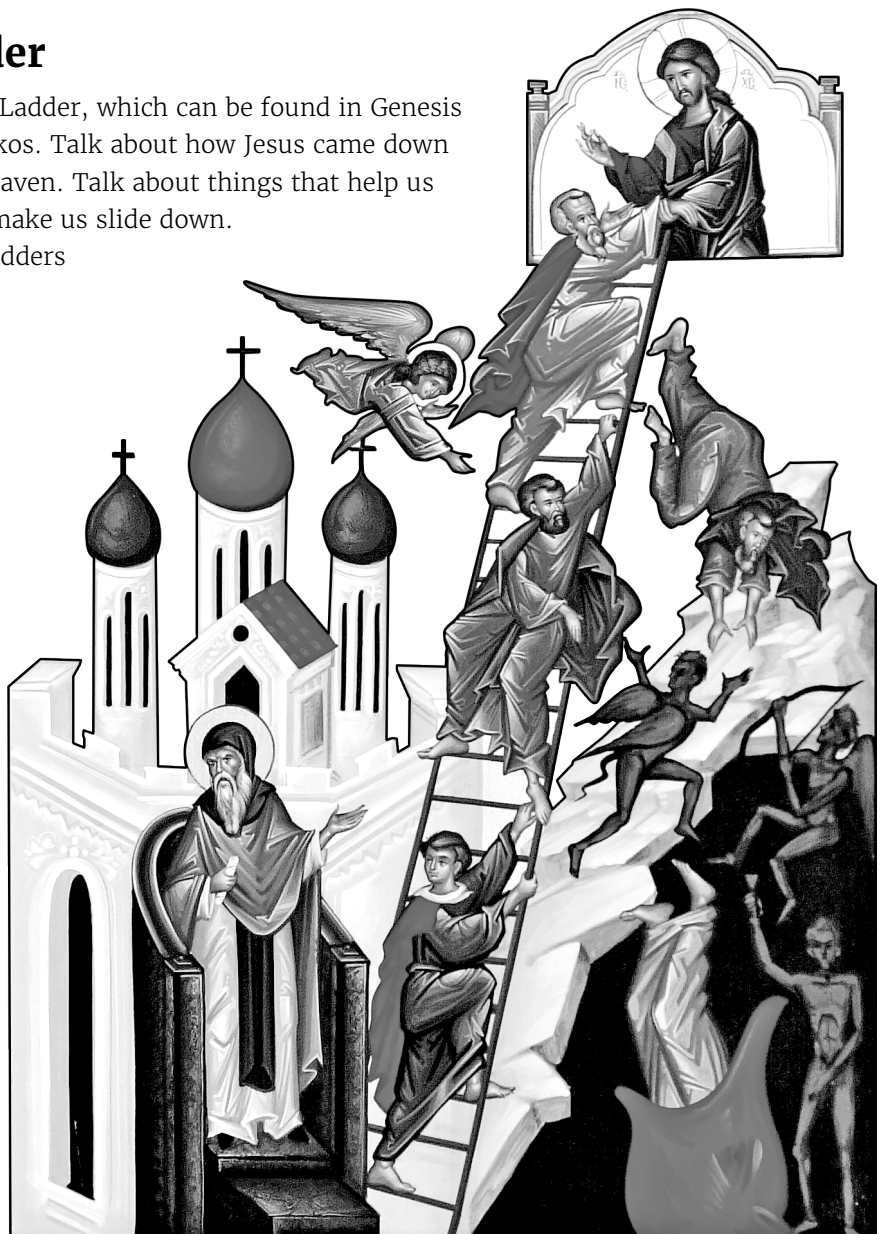
Icon of the Ladder of Divine Ascent

This is a very vivid icon. It shows people ascending toward heaven with angels helping them. It also shows demons pulling people off the ladder, causing them to fall into the pits of hell. It can be a great discussion starter, especially for teenagers. Consider making copies of this icon for each family member as a reminder of their spiritual ascent and the demons that will be trying to prevent it.



Lord I Believe; Help My Unbelief

Challenge your family to use the plea of the father in today's Gospel passage as a prayer throughout their day. Remind your children that we should constantly be calling on God to help us.



Link: <https://www.goarch.org/sundays-of-great-lent>



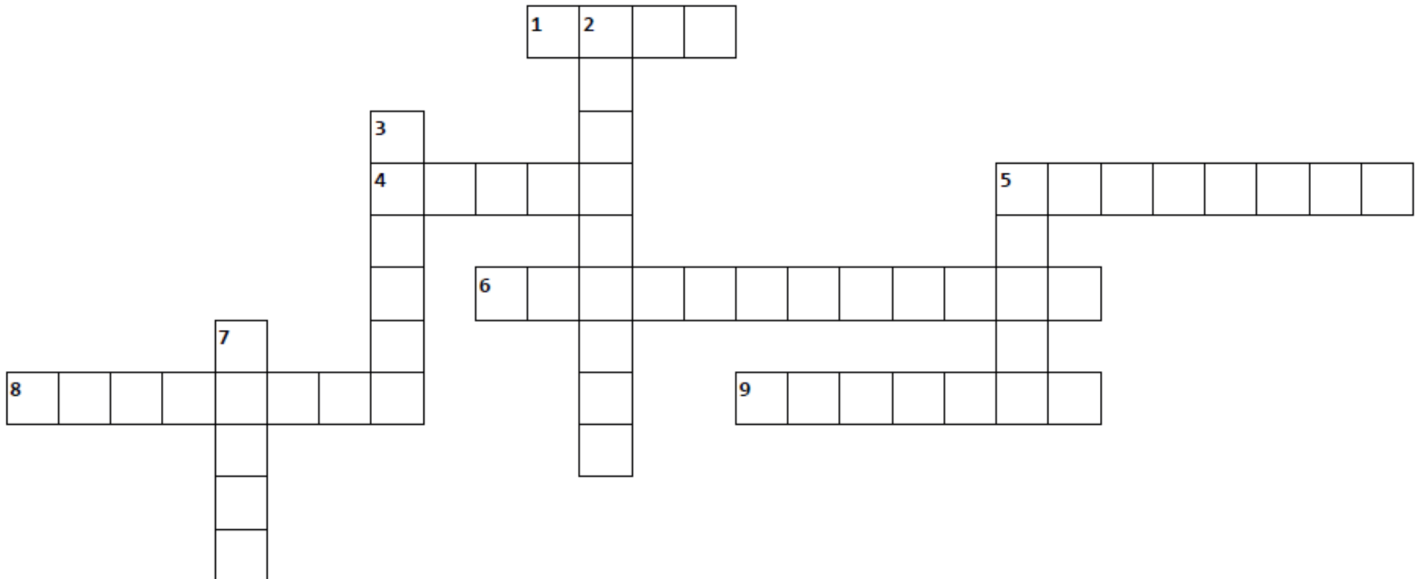
Just For Kids!

(...and the young at heart)

MARCH 25: The Annunciation

The Feast of the **Annunciation** is celebrated on March

25. On this day, Orthodox Christians remember when the **Archangel** Gabriel visited the Virgin Mary. Gabriel brought amazing news: God had chosen **Mary** to become the mother of **Jesus**, our Lord and Savior. At first, Mary felt **confused** and unsure. But the angel told her not to be **afraid** because God was with her. **Gabriel** explained that Mary would have a son named Jesus, who would be the Son of God and whose kingdom would last forever. Mary **wondered** how this could happen, but the angel said that the Holy Spirit would come to her and that nothing is impossible for God. Mary showed great **faith** and said, "Let it be according to God's word." Christians honor this feast because God **chose** Mary—and Mary freely chose to follow God's plan.



ACROSS

1. the person God had chosen to be the mother of Jesus
4. Mary showed great _____
5. at first, Mary felt this way
6. This event on the Church calendar is call the _____
8. Mary wondered how this could happen
9. The name of the archangel who came to Mary

DOWN

2. Gabriel is one of these
3. Gabriel told Mary not to feel this way
5. Mary freely _____ to follow God's plan
7. Gabriel told Mary that she would have a son with this name