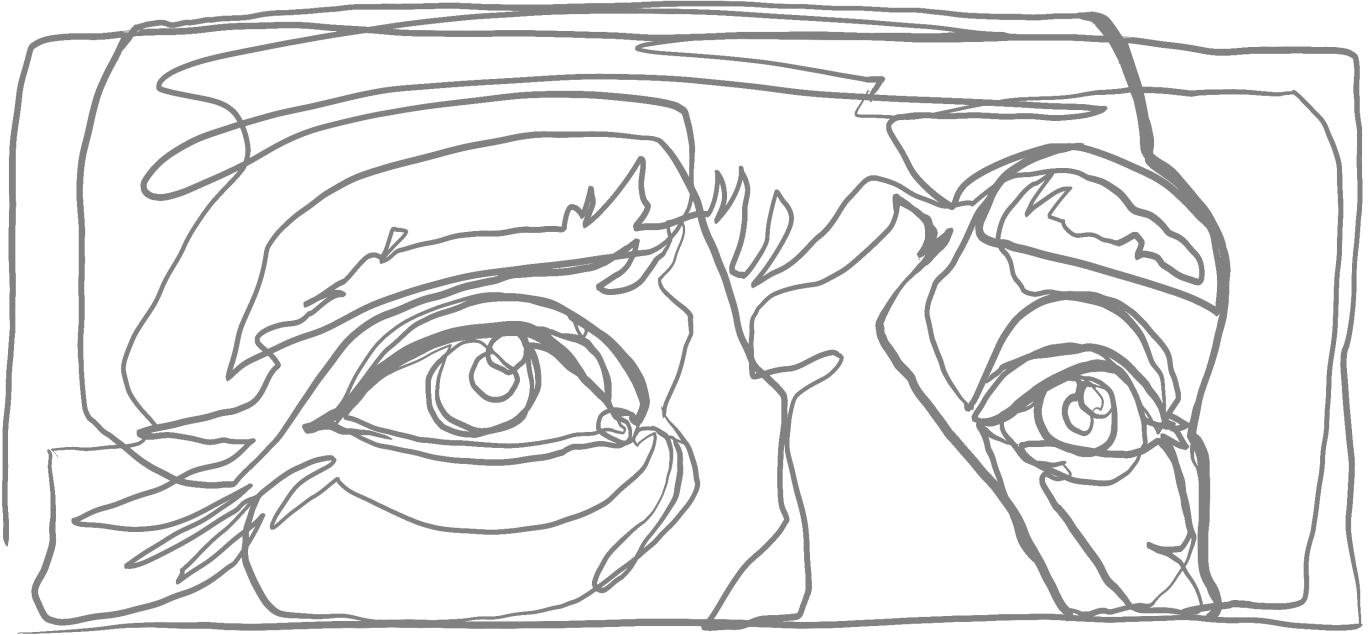




DIAKONIA

A National Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America



REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S READING - *John 9:1-38* | Fr. George Parsenios

To know or not to know? That is the question in today's Gospel reading. Several people in today's passage claim to know things but are actually ignorant. The Pharisees are the loudest about what they know. They know that Jesus is a sinner, they know the blind man is a sinner, and they know that God spoke to Moses. But as for Jesus, they know nothing about him. The parents of the blind man know things, too. They know the blind man is their son, and they know that he was born blind. But as for how he was healed, they know nothing about it. The opponents of Jesus know so many things...but only the wrong things. They are infected with a spiritual blindness, which is not like physical blindness. In physical blindness, nothing enters the eye. In spiritual blindness, everything enters our vision, but

too many things and only the wrong things. When we allow ourselves to consume too much of what is false or tempting or dark, we become like the Pharisees. We cannot recognize God standing right in front of us. We become like the parents of the blind man, who are alienated and disconnected from their child. We lose our close connection with our family. Let us strive, therefore, to close our eyes to dark influences that distract and confuse us and open them to that which uplifts and connects us to God, especially our Orthodox faith. And let us remember to be careful in our relationships, not only with our families, but with our friends and neighbors, and particularly with our fellow church parishioners. Let us forgive and be patient and be kind, so that we might all proclaim together: *Χριστός Ανέστη! Christ is Risen!*

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FROM THE ORIGINAL GREEK: Apostle (Ἀπόστολος)

What is an “Apostle?”

Fr. George Parsenios



When the followers of Jesus go out as missionaries, they are called his 12 Apostles. The Greek word *ἀπόστολος*/*apostolos* is derived from *apo* which means “from” and from *stello* which means “to send.” An apostle is someone sent on a very specific mission. Prior to the word’s Christian usage, it could refer to things sent on a mission as well as people. A naval fleet, for example, would sometimes be called an “*apostle*.” More commonly, *apostolos* referred to a political leader

dispatched as an emissary. The term carries precisely this sense when Jesus sends out (*apostello*) his apostles in Mark 6. The apostles are commissioned to share the Gospel message. This is their singular and special mission: to spread the Good News. Although the 12 are the core group of those sent to share the teaching of Christ, Jesus dispatches a further group of 70 apostles in Luke 10. St. Paul was also given the title Apostle following the ministry of Jesus, and the Church has recognized many other saints as being “equal to the Apostles,” such as Saints Constantine and Helen. All of these apostles, both during and after the ministry of Jesus, shared the same special commission.



THIS WEEK’S LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY

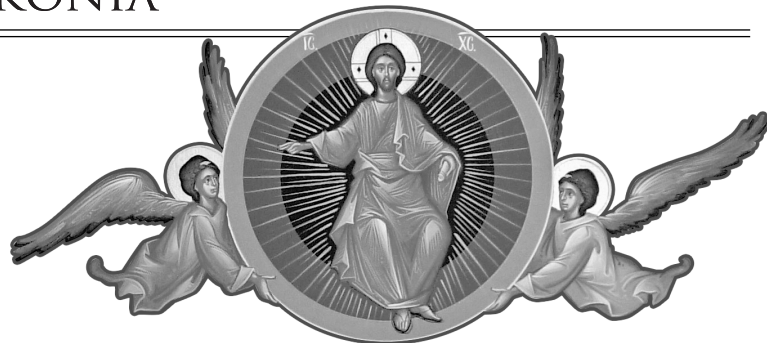
Byzantium Becomes Constantinople

Menios Papademetriou, PhD Director of Archives

Herodotus spoke of Byzantium as a prosperous, well-fortified and strategic center of trade connecting the Black and Aegean Seas, but the Emperor Constantine saw it as a strategic center for power situated at the crossroads of the world. After six years of construction, a great city arose on the foundations of Byzantium and it was declared the New Rome and imperial co-capital and dedicated to the Virgin Mary on May 11, 330 in the Church of the Holy Peace. Within a century it came to be known as Constantine’s city—Constantinople. Renowned as the Queen City, it was protected by the Queen of heaven and its famous defense systems: A massive chain across the mouth of the harbor to prevent enemy ships from entering and its impenetrable walls. These defenses repelled dozens of sieges for over a thousand years and failed only twice—first during the Fourth Crusade in 1204 and finally to the world-shaking power of Ottoman cannons after 53 days of siege on May 29, 1453.

Graphic: Mosaic Icon of the Theotokos hold Jesus Christ, with Emperors Constantine and Justinian in the Church of Agia Sophia

THURSDAY, MAY 21
THE FEAST OF THE ASCENSION:
A Call to Look Up
and Go Forth



Each year, forty days after the Resurrection, we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension. On this day, we remember the day the Risen Lord led His disciples to the Mount of Olives, blessed them, promised the coming of the Holy Spirit, and then ascended into heaven. The Ascension is a feast of hope, purpose, and mission.

The Scriptures tell us that on the day of His Ascension, Jesus entrusted His disciples with a mission, known as the Great Commission, to be His witnesses, to, "...make disciples of all nations...." He instructed them to proclaim repentance, forgiveness, and new life in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. He promised that although He would no longer be visibly present among them, He would remain with them always, empowering them through the Holy Spirit.

The icon of the Ascension helps us to visualize this mystery. Jesus ascends in glory, blessing the world, while holding the scroll of divine teaching. He is not distant or detached. He reigns as the living Head of the Church, guiding and sustaining her. Below Him stands His mother, the Theotokos, calm and prayerful, surrounded by the apostles. Together, they represent the Church. They remain on earth, sometimes confused or uncertain, yet rooted in prayer and filled with expectation. Saint Paul is also present in the icon of the Ascension, though he was not there historically. His inclusion reminds us that the Church is always growing, always being enriched by new witnesses called by Jesus Christ.



A CALL TO ACTION

The Ascension invites us to live as witnesses where God has placed us. Choose one simple, intentional act as you move through each day.

At home: Commit to a moment of prayer each day—alone or with your family. Light a candle and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your words and actions. Practice forgiveness or patience where it has been difficult.

At school or work: Be Christ's witness through integrity and kindness. Speak truthfully, work honestly, and look for one person who may be discouraged. A listening ear, a word of encouragement, or an act of quiet service can bear great fruit.

In your parish or community: Reach out. Call someone you haven't spoken to in a while, invite a friend back to church, or offer your time to serve.



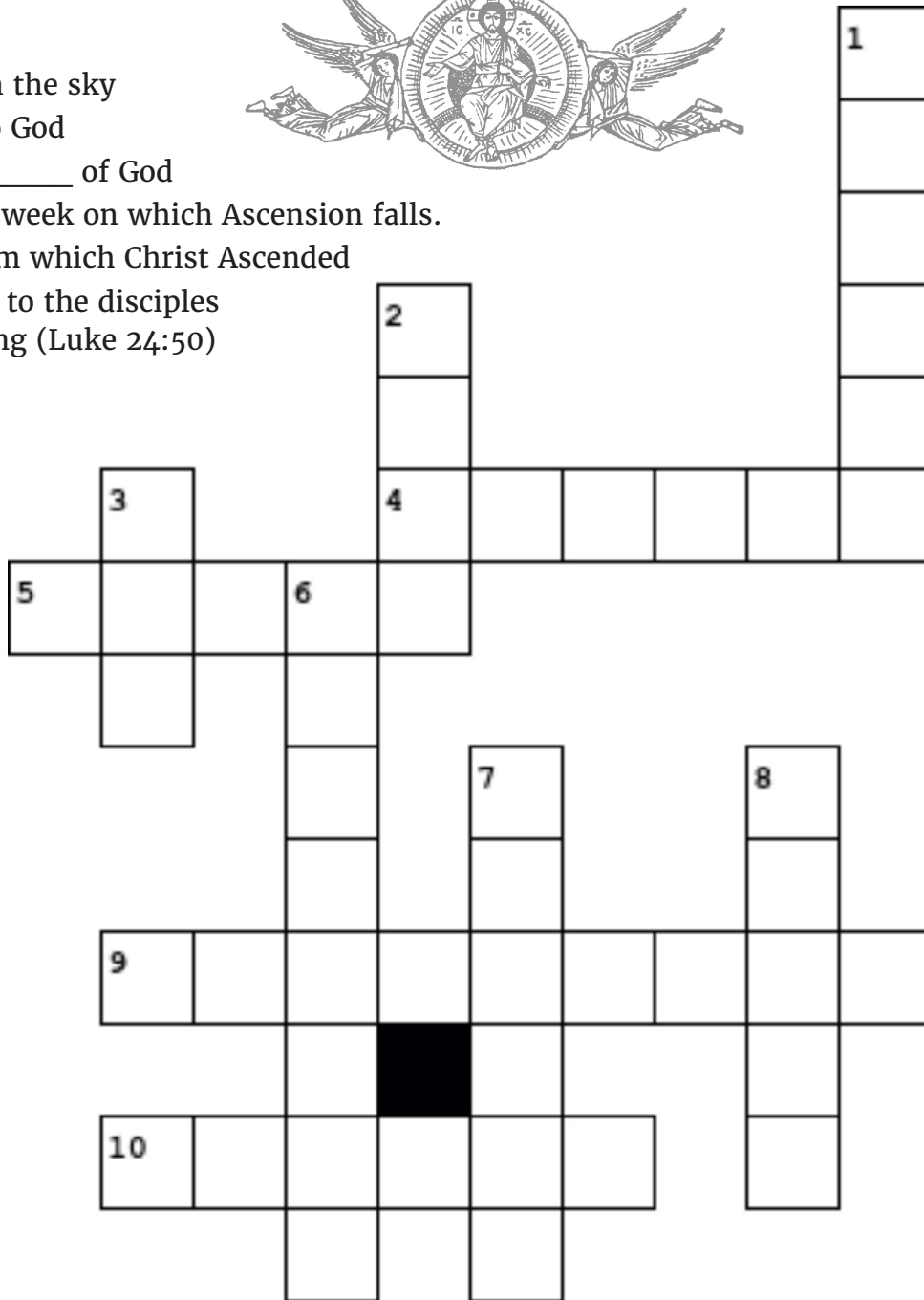
The Ascension

ACROSS

4. Who spoke to the disciples after Jesus ascended
5. How many days after the Resurrection did Jesus ascend?
9. The followers of Jesus who watched Him ascend.
10. Where is God's throne?

DOWN

1. Fluffy things in the sky
2. How we talk to God
3. Jesus is the _____ of God
6. The day of the week on which Ascension falls.
7. The Mount from which Christ Ascended
8. What Jesus did to the disciples before ascending (Luke 24:50)



1. clouds 2. pray 3. son 4. angels 5. forty 6. Thursday 7. Olivet 8. bless 9. disciples 10. heaven