Akathist Saturday

Sister Agnes Knapik

"Gabriel the Archangel shall come openly to you, O all-blameless One, and he shall exclaim to you: 'Rejoice, O Deliverance from the curse, and the One who raises the fallen! Rejoice, O you who alone was chosen by God!' "

Matins for Akathist Saturday: Sticheron at the Praises

The beautiful Akathist Hymn, which is chanted at the Matins on this fifth greatfast Saturday, warms our hearts with its poetical expressions of love and respect for Mary, the Most Holy Godbearer. The Most Pure Virgin Mary's love for Her Divine Son and her perfect obedience to the will of God are given us today as part of our greatfast meditation.

In the preamble hymn, the Holy Archangel Gabriel is astounded. He witnesses heaven coming down to earth as the Word of God is formed in Mary's womb. "Rejoice, O you through whom joy will shine forth, O you through whom the curse will disappear!" is the Archangel's response as God miraculously takes the form of a servant.

When Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, the Holy Precursor John the Baptist—yet unborn—recognizes Mary's embrace. In a leap of joy within his mother Elizabeth's womb, he cries out to her, "O favor of God to mortals, O trust of mortals before God!"

Filled with awe, the humble shepherds of Bethlehem look upon Mary holding the newborn Christ. "Rejoice, O Mother of the Lamb and Shepherd!" They recognize that her Son will be not only the Lamb sacrificed for us, but He will also be our Good Shepherd.

The Magi perceive Mary as the "Mother of the Star without setting, the one who guides the faithful toward Wisdom, the light of those who search the Trinity." We must likewise understand that the Most Holy Virgin will lead us to a deeper union with Christ, her Son and our God.

Our holy father Saint Gregory of Nyssa compares Eve with Mary. "Woman was defended by woman. The first opened the way to sin, the present one served to open the way to justice. The former followed the advice of the serpent, the latter brought forth the Slayer of the serpent and brought to light the Author of Light. The former introduced sin through the tree, the latter brings grace in through the tree."

The Akathist Hymn attempts to articulate our love for the Most Holy Mother of God, for she gave birth to Christ Who redeemed us through His Precious Cross and by His Holy Resurrection. As we reflect upon the role of Mary in our redemption, may her faithfulness inspire us to a greater fidelity to Jesus our Savior.

SCRIPTURE READINGS: Hebrews 9:1-7
Luke 1:19-49, 56