

August 29th: The Beheading of the Holy Glorious Prophet, Forerunner, & Baptist John

Readings & Hymns



Troparion, Forerunner - Tone 2

The memory of the righteous is celebrated with hymns of praise,
but the Lord's testimony is sufficient for thee, O Forerunner.

Thou wast shown in truth to be the most honorable of the Prophets,
for thou wast deemed worthy to baptize in the steams of the Jordan Him

Whom they foretold.

Therefore, having suffered for the truth with joy,
thou didst proclaim to those in hell God Who appeared in the flesh, //
Who takes away the sin of the world and grants us great mercy.

Kontakion, Forerunner - Tone 5

The glorious beheading of the Forerunner
became an act of divine dispensation,
for he preached to those in hell the coming of the Savior.
Let Herodias lament, for she entreated lawless murder,
loving not the Law of God, nor eternal life, //
but that which is false and temporal.

The Prokeimenon - Tone 7

The righteous shall rejoice in the Lord * and shall hope in Him. (Ps 63 [64]: 10)

verse: Hear my voice, O God, when I pray to Thee! (Ps 63 [64]: 1)

Epistle

§ 33: Acts 13: 25 - 32 (Forerunner)

The reading from the Acts of the Holy Apostles.

IN THOSE DAYS AS: John was finishing his course, he said,

‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he.

No, but after me one is coming,

the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’

“Brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you that fear God,
to us has been sent the message of this salvation.

For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers,

because they did not recognize him

nor understand the utterances of the prophets which are read every sabbath,
fulfilled these by condemning him.

Though they could charge him with nothing deserving death,
yet they asked Pilate to have him killed.

And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him,

they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb.

But God raised him from the dead;

and for many days

he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem,
who are now his witnesses to the people.

And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers.

The Alleluia - Tone 4

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

verse: The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in
Lebanon. (Forerunner) (Ps 91 [92]: 12)

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

verse: They that are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our
God. (Ps 91 [92]: 13)

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

Gospel

§ 24; Mark 6: 14 - 30 (*Forerunner*)

AT THAT TIME, KING HEROD HEARD OF JESUS;

(for his name was spread abroad:) and he said,

That John the Baptist was risen from the dead,

and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.

Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet,

or as one of the prophets.

But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded:

he is risen from the dead.

For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison
for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her.

For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.

Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him;

but she could not:

For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy,
and observed him;

and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.

And when a convenient day was come,

that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains,
and chief estates of Galilee;

And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced,

and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel,

Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee.

And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee,
unto the half of my kingdom.

And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask?

And she said, The head of John the Baptist.

And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying,

I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist.

And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake,

and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.

And immediately the king sent an executioner,

and commanded his head to be brought:

and he went and beheaded him in the prison,

And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel:

and the damsel gave it to her mother.

And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse,

and laid it in a tomb.

And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things,

both what they had done, and what they had taught.

Communion Hymns

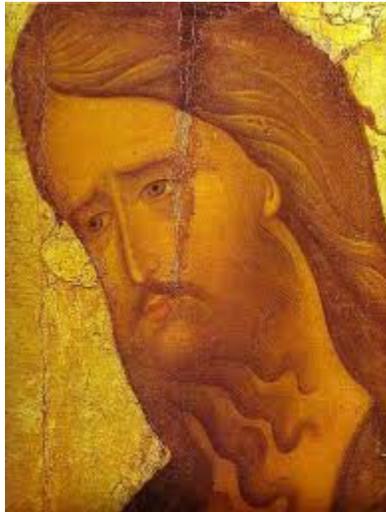
The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not fear evil tidings.

(Forerunner) (Ps 111 [112]: 6b - 7a)

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

Magnification

We magnify thee, O John, Baptist of the Savior, and we honor the severing of thy precious head.



Paramiya - Vespers Readings

Composite 8 *(Isaiah 40: 1 - 3, 9a; 41: 17b - 18; 45: 8a; 48: 20b - 21a; 54: 1)*

The reading from the prophecy of Isaiah.

Thus saith the Lord: "Comfort, comfort My people,"
says God.

"Speak to the heart of Jerusalem,
ye priests, comfort her,
for her humiliation is increased,
her iniquity is pardoned;
for she has received from the Lord's hand
double for her sins.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

'Prepare ye the way of the Lord;
make straight the paths of our God.'

"Go up to a high mountain,
you who are proclaiming glad tidings to Zion,
lift up your voice with strength,
O herald of good tidings to Jerusalem.

Lift it up, fear not!
I the Lord God, I have heard the poor of Israel
and will not forsake them.
I will open rivers on the mountains,
and fountains in the midst of the valleys;
I will make the deserts pools of water,
and the thirsty land springs of water.
Let the heavens rejoice from above,
and let the clouds rain down righteousness;
let the earth bring forth, and let it sprout forth mercy
and cause righteousness to shine forth also.
“Declare this with a shout of joy,
and let this be known, proclaim it
to the end of the earth.
Say, ‘The Lord hath redeemed His servant Jacob!’
And if they thirst, he shall lead them through the desert,
He shall bring forth water for them out of the rock.
Rejoice, O barren one who did not bear;
break forth into singing and cry aloud,
you who have not been in travail!
For more are the children of the desolate one
than of her who has a husband.”

Composite 9 (*Malachi 3: 1 – 3a, 5 – 7a, 12a, 18; 4: 4 – 6*)

The reading from the prophecy of Malachi.

THUS SAYS THE LORD ALMIGHTY:

“Behold, I send My messenger before thy face,
who shall prepare thy way before thee, and the Lord whom ye seek,
shall come into His temple.

But who can endure the day of His coming?

For He is coming like the fire of a furnace and like the fuller’s herb;
and He shall cleanse, refining and purifying, as it were, silver and gold.

And He comes to you with judgment,

and will be a swift witness against the evil ones and against adulterers,
and against those who swear falsely by My name,
against those who withhold the hireling’s wages,
against those who oppress widows and beat orphans,
against those who avoid judgment in favor of strangers,
and against those who do not fear him,” says the Lord Almighty.

“For I am the Lord your God, and I change not; and you, the sons of Jacob,

have turned aside from the Law and have not kept it.

Return to Me, therefore, and I will return to you," saith the Lord Almighty.

"And all nations shall call you blessed,

and they shall understand that I am the Lord,

who distinguishes between the righteous and between the transgressors
on that day,

in which I shall act to spare those who love Me.

"Know, therefore, and remember the Law of Moses, My servant,

as I commanded you at Horeb, the statutes and ordinances for all Israel.

And behold, I will send to you Elijah the Tishbite

before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes,

who shall turn the heart of a father to his son, and the heart of a man to his neighbor,

lest I come quickly and smite the earth," says the Lord Almighty, God,
the Holy One of Israel.

Composite 3 (*Wisdom of Solomon 4: 7, 16a, 17a, 19 - 20; 5: 1 - 7*)

The reading from the Wisdom of Solomon.

The righteous man, though he die early, will be at rest.

The righteous man who has died will judge

the ungodly who are living.

For they will see the end of the righteous,

and will not understand what was said about him;

for the Lord will cast down the ungodly speechless to the ground

and shake them from the foundations;

they shall become desolate to the end;

they will be in sorrows,

and their memory will perish.

For they will come with fear at the thought of their sins,

and their iniquities shall stand against them to convict them.

Then the righteous man will stand with great boldness

before those who have afflicted him,

and those who have made of no account his labors.

Having seen it, they shall be troubled with much fear

and they will be amazed at his most-glorious salvation.

They will say within themselves in repentance,

in anguish of spirit they will groan and say:

"This was he whom we had sometimes in derision

and a proverb of reproach - we fools!

We accounted his life as madness,

and his end to be without honor.

How is he numbered among the sons of God?

And why is his lot among the Saints?

“Therefore, we have erred from the way of truth,
and the light of righteousness did not illumine us,
nor did the sun shine on us.

We took our fill of the paths of lawlessness and destruction,
and we walked impassible pathways,
but the way of the Lord we have not known.”

The Matins Gospel

§57 (Matthew 14: 1 - 13)

The reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

AT THAT TIME Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus,
And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead;
and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.

For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison
for Herodias' sake,
his brother Philip's wife.

For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.

And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude,
because they counted him as a prophet.

But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them,
and pleased Herod.

Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.

And she, being before instructed of her mother, said,

Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger.

And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with
him at meat,

he commanded it to be given her.

And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.

And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel:
and she brought it to her mother.

And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart:

and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities.

Full Kontakion on the Beheading of John the Baptist - Tone 5

*by Venerable Romanus the Melodist**

Prooimion I:

Worthy praise is due thee, Forerunner,
 Since thou didst die for eternal life
 As one who hated the temporal life.

Prooimion II:

The glorious beheading of the Forerunner¹
 became an act of divine dispensation,
 for he preached to those in hell the coming of the Savior².
 Let Herodias lament, for she entreated lawless murder,
 loving not the Law of God, nor eternal life, //
 but that which is false and temporal.

Ikos 1

The birthday feast of Herod appeared wicked to everyone,
 Since, in the midst of the banqueters, the head of the Faster
 Was brought in as a dish of food.
 Grief was mixed with joy, and bitter wailing was joined with laughter
 When the platter bearing the head of the Baptist
 Came into the sight of all, as the child had asked.
 And because of their wantonness, lamentation fell on all
 Of those dining at that time with the king;
 For this gave no pleasure to them nor to Herod himself;
 For it is written that he was sorry, but not with genuine grief³
 But a false and temporal.

Ikos 2

For Herod did not remain in a state of grief nor prolong it,
 But he took thought of just what he had before; and at
 once acted impiously
 In order that he might enjoy the one whom he seduced.
 For the adulteress, not the maiden, sought to cut off the head
 of the offspring of the barren woman
 Indeed, she quickly before the beheading revealed
 Her plan to her daughter, when she called out to her:

* Translation of Prooimion II is the current OCA translation, the rest of the text is translated by Marjorie Carpenter, "Kontakia of Romanos Byzantine Melodist volume II On the Christian Life", University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1973. pp. 25 - 32. Slightly adapted to match OCA translations.

1 Matt. 14; Mark 6: 14.

2 *Acta Pilati* (N. T. Apoc., James, ed.), XXI, XXII.

3 Matt. 14: 9; Mark 6: 26-29.

Herodias

“Come, my child, join in the celebration for thy mother,
 For I have a secret word to disclose to thee.
 I shall make my plan clear to thee: I desire to destroy
 The son of Zacharias,⁴ for he gave me a blow that was
 Lasting and not just temporary.”

Ikos 3

When the young girl heard the very wicked scheme,

Child

She shuddered and cried out: “O mother, what a terrible suffering
 Is thine. Give up this incurable thing,
 For if thou wishest to find a cure, thou makest for thyself
 a more difficult wound.
 With inner reflections, put thy suggestions to rest;
 May it never become the destruction of our race,
 For thou art not the only one who will receive doom from it,
 But also Herod, and I, and our descendants.
 If John dies, all things become dead,
 And we are buried alive, leaving behind an evil memory, which is
 Eternal and not temporary.”

Ikos 4*Herodias*

“What has happened to thee, my child? What suddenly is
 the matter with thee?
 Why didst thou spare John and prefer to thy mother
 The one who hates our life?
 Perhaps, my child, thou art ignorant of what he suggested to
 Herod about me,
 When he said, ‘It is not allowed that thou hast the wife
 Of Philip, thy brother; put her away!’⁵
 Therefore I wish to cut off the inconvenient freedom of speech
 Of the daring fellow, if I have the opportunity.
 I shall destroy his tongue or, rather, his head,
 And then I shall not grieve, for I possess in safety
 My life, which is transitory.”

Ikos 5*Child*

“We shall be sinning, mother, not against others, but against

4 Mark 6: 24 ; Matt. 14: 8.

5 Mark 6: 17; Matt. 14: 4; Luke 3: 14-20.

ourselves and our life.

Just as Jezebel, wishing to destroy the righteous Elijah,⁶
 Rather destroyed herself.
 Elijah earnestly and John lawfully accused us.
 The hermit spoke out with sternness,
 Giving advice to Herod: 'It is not allowed.'
 The Tishbite, with gentleness, shut out
 The clouds from Ahab; for it did not rain.
 Therefore, my lady, now bury thy scheme
 And destroy this pit, lest thou commit a dishonor
 That is eternal and not transitory."

Ikos 6

Herodias

"Learn from me, thou wicked girl; do not try to advise me
 Before thou hast learned everything in full. Now it eludes thee;
 Thou dost not understand, nor art thou able to,
 For truly the Baptist continues to insult me, and if he seems to live,
 Everyone will assume freedom of speech against me
 And say against me what he wishes
 As though I were some chance person, not as the queen,
 As the wife of an ordinary individual, and not of an august person;
 But peace, my child, I know better than thee and many people
 What is expedient; I know how to possess honor
 That is lasting and not temporary."

Ikos 7

Child

"I ask thee, mother, when dost thou plan that this be brought about -
 In daylight, or in darkness? For thine impious scheme
 Is more worthy of night.
 By whom will it be accomplished? Who would not grow numb at slaying
 a prophet of Christ?"

Herodias

"Thou, as daughter, go along with the one who bore thee
 To destroy my enemy and become my right arm."

Child

"I beg of thee, mother, let not the earth receive the harmless blood
 Of the wise man from wretched me.
 As Zacharias was slain, now John is to be cut off;
 Indeed, I shall not be of service, never shall I receive a wound

⁶ III [I] Kings 18: 2-5; 19: 2.

That is eternal and not temporary.”

Ikos 8

Herodias

“Is John to be given preference by thee, O wretched and miserable one,
Over the one who bore thee in her bosom? Does the Baptist
Appear to thy folly in greater need?
Is it not to shame my breasts, which gave thee nourishment?
Would that they had not!
For why did I, against my own interests, seek to nourish her
Who, through her rebellion, would be hostile to me ?
Why was I constrained to union with the king
For the sake of saving the one who would be giving me distress?
But why do I distress myself in advance? Let my command be done,
And what I wish will be accomplished; and though
thou art unwilling,
thou wilt do
My will for the time being.

Ikos 9

Herodias

“Now I shall keep still, and I shall not show the miserable girl
what I am planning;
She who was brought into the world for my punishment will never
See and understand the undertaking that is on my heart.”
While these things were considered and said many times by the mother,
The daughter remained in silence.
But the mother whispered to her husband,
Herodias
Saying, “Husband, it is the time of thy birthday;
Make it a day of joyous festivity;
Let us rejoice in thine old age, for thy brother,
Taking my youth, wickedly destroyed me
For life for a time.”

Ikos 10

Herod, then, beguiled by the words of the plotter,
Broke into a hearty laugh, and, stupid fellow, he raised
His voice as he laughed and said:

Herod

“My wife and consort, in this thy love charm I take pleasure.
Then, if I shall celebrate my birthday,
What gift wilt thou give me that is worthy of me ?”

Herodias

“What shall I offer thee? Myself, thy servant, and again
 I shall have my daughter dance for thee,
 She has given thee much pleasure, and truly I shall enliven for thee
 thy birthday, a day, O king, that thou wilt pass
 In passing pleasure.”

Ikos 11

The thrice-accursed day of his wretched birth
 Was coming to a close for the lawless one, a day that
 Job himself cursed as he spoke,
 Just as Zacharias mentioned: “That day will be darkness and not light.”⁷
 And if this was said about the day
 Because the light for those in darkness was on the cross,
 Still it was appropriate for Herod’s day,
 Since on that day a friend of light was slain.
 Indeed, he who slew him is not; but he who was slain is,
 And after death he speaks and draws all men to life,
 Which is everlasting and not temporary.

Ikos 12

After Herod uttered all these words, he became master of himself
 For the rest of the time that occurred on his birthday;⁸
 As is written, he prepared a great feast
 For his friends and the nobles, the commanders and advisers,
 all of them together.
 When the meal was joyfully completed,
 And as the feasters were happily banqueting,
 Suddenly the table was turned into a snare,
 And the food became an offense for them,
 Since once they knew the hidden snare of the Baptist,
 They did not utterly destroy it, but continued to behold it
 For a transitory pleasure.

Ikos 13

When she saw that all were drunk, the extremely tricky Herodias,
 As she found the occasion that she sought, said to herself:

Herodias

“See the time that I have been searching for;

⁷ Zech. 14: 6.

⁸ The construction is not clear, and the meaning depends on an unusual translation of the phrase ἑαυτοῦ ἐγένετο; with the genitive the verb means “to belong to,” “to be master of.” The verb συμφορασάσης seems to modify ἡμέρας and not the qualifying τῶν γενεσίων.

Now what I wanted will be accomplished, and the one who calls me
 adulteress will be put to death.
 Come, now, my child, I shall on this day offer thee⁹
 As a very fine gift to Herod who is obedient to us.
 Go, my child, make merry with thy dancing
 The king and all his friends;
 Turn the heart of his majesty toward us,
 And soon, just like the drawn bow we shall gain honor
 That is lasting and not temporary."

Ikos 14

With these words, the wicked woman changed the mind of the little girl,
 And when she was adorned for the shameful deed,
 she cast around her
 Dishonor as a cloak.
 The friends of Herod greatly praised the beauty of the maiden.
 As they recognized the indomitable will and the purpose
 Of the mother, they secretly said:

Feasters

"Do ye see the intention of the harlot, Herodias,
 How she wants to show the child she has produced as like herself?
 She has not been satisfied with her own shame,
 But she has defiled her own child before us
 For our passing pleasure.

Ikos 15

Feasters

"True is the saying of wisdom: 'The children of adulteresses
 will be without issue,¹⁰
 And the seed of the lawless couch will be destroyed in the end.'¹¹
 Just so with this young girl.
 For the time being she is shamed; after a short time and many times more,
 she will do worse."
 While all these things were said secretly,
 The wicked deeds came after these words,
 For the young maiden, as she danced in the midst
 Of the revelers, filled their mouths with cries:
 "O king Herod," they said, "how graceful

⁹ Mark 6: 21-25.

¹⁰ Similar but not identical words are found in Lev. 20: 10: "Adulterer and adulteress shall surely be put to death." The Greek, translated literally is: "The children of adulteresses will be without issue, and the seed of the lawless will be destroyed in the end."

¹¹ I Cor. 6: 9.

Is this dancer! She has in her spirit
A mode of movement of passing pleasure."

Ikos 16

King

The king, overcome by the praise of all who admired the maiden,
Then swore before all: "Whatever thou askest of me,
I shall give thee
In return for this dance."

Child

The child came up to her mother and said to her: "What shall I ask him?"

Mother

"Ask him, my child, for the head of John the Baptist,
Since I am in want of this alone."

Child

"Woe is me, mother; would that my feet had been cut off
And that I had not run to find out from thee;
Would that I had been gagged and had not asked thee
What it was appropriate to do; would that I had kept silent
Forever and not for a time."

Ikos 17

And so, it was necessary for the maiden to speak; but she did not utter
any of these things clearly,¹²
For it was a bitter weed from thistle-bearing earth and bitter root
And it bore fatal disease.
Herod, when he tasted it, did not spit it out, but held it within him.
Therefore, since he did not digest it, he disgorged murder
And vomited forth the beheading of the divine Forerunner.
These deeds created a punishment for the one who did the murder
And bestowed honor on those who revered the beheaded one.
For the slayer was destroyed, but the faithful who did him honor
Are still alive and procure for themselves life
That is eternal and not temporary.

Ikos 18

O son of a priest and child of a barren prophetess,
John, creature of the desert, when we remember thy fasting
Give us strength that we may fast.
Let us become imitators of thee, indeed to the extent in which

¹² The line's meaning is not clear; I suppose the idea is that the child said what she had been told to say but could not express a clear pronouncement.

each of us has the strength,
For the stomach is not the master of anyone of us,
But we are always in control of the stomach,
According to Paul: "Food is for the stomach,
And the stomach is for food."¹³ We are Christ's.
As He fasted voluntarily, He took away from us
The ancient hunger that Adam felt as a craving
For temporary pleasure.



13 1 Corinthians 6: 13