

Craft Activity

Your teacher has brought a large “tree” on poster board.

We will put Zacchaeus in the tree.

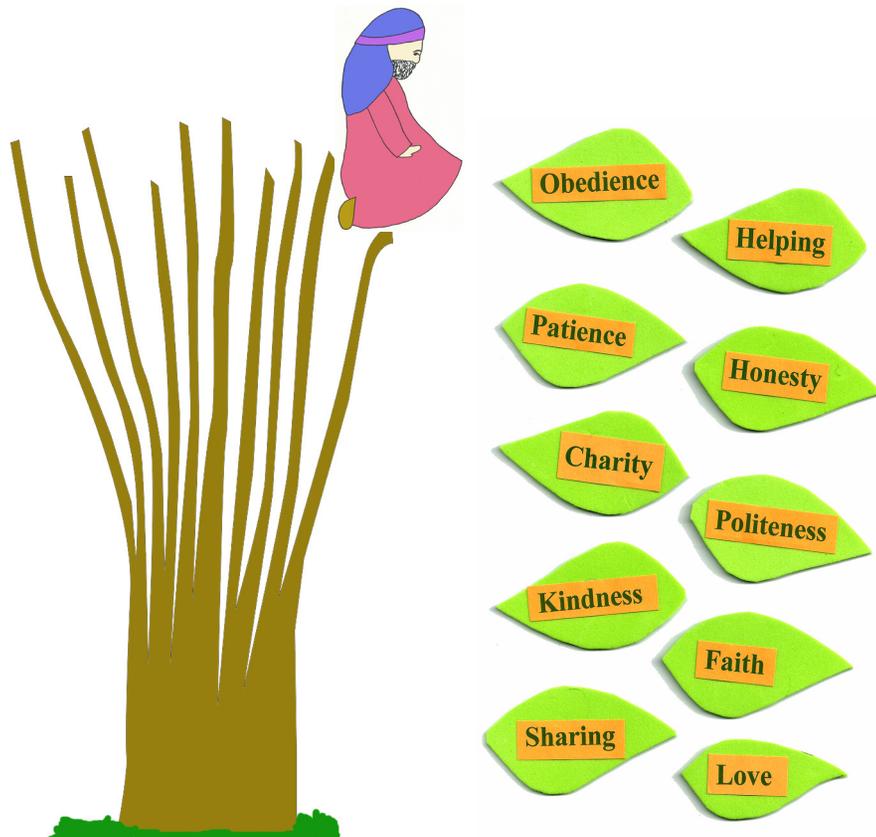
There are colored leaves for the tree.

Each leaf has the word for a virtue printed on it.

These are some of the virtues that Christ taught,
and that Zacchaeus learned.

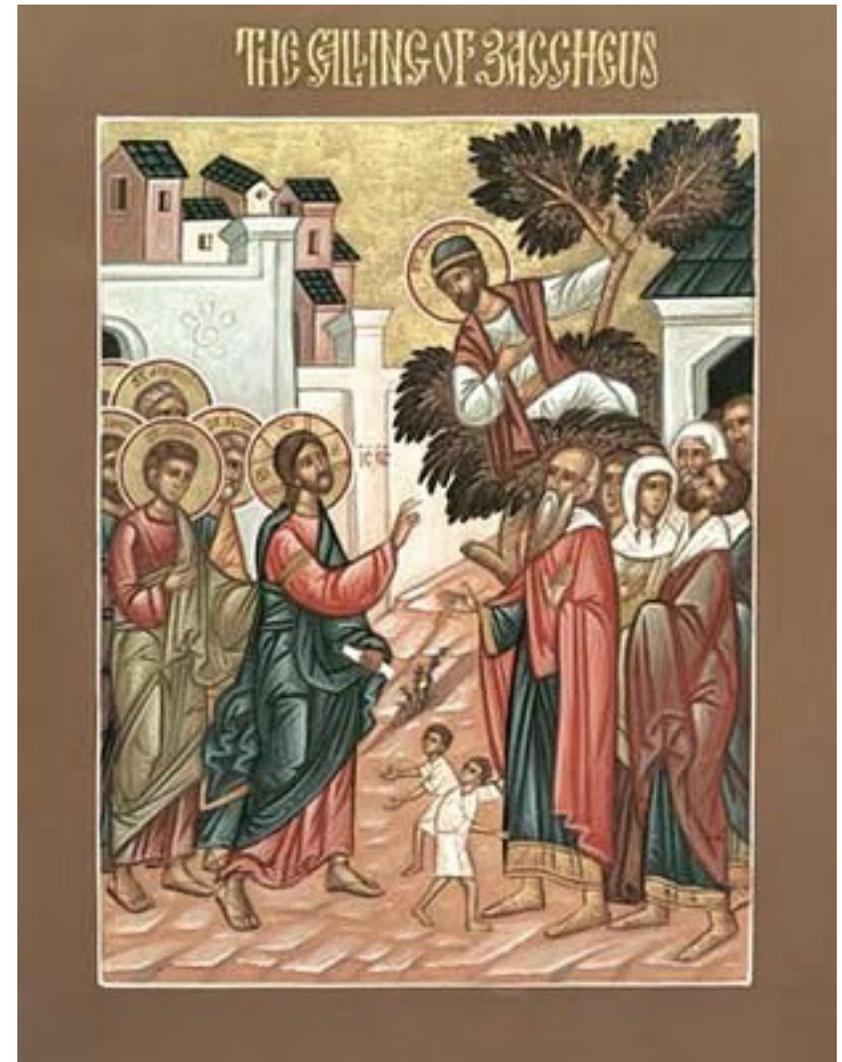
We should know these virtues too.

As we place each leaf on the tree,
let’s talk about the meaning of each.



St. Michael's Orthodox Church, Jermyn, Pennsylvania

Zacchaeus Sunday



“Today salvation is come to this house.”

The Gospel of Luke 19:1-10

Jesus was going through the town named Jericho. Living there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a tax collector, and he was rich. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but there was a large crowd and he could not see over their heads because he was short. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him. When Jesus came to the place where Zacchaeus was, He looked up and saw him. Jesus said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, because today I want to visit at your house.” So he came down quickly, and he was happy. But when other people saw it, they all complained, saying, “Jesus has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.” Then Zacchaeus said, “Lord, I will give half of everything that I have to the poor; and if I have taken any tax money from anyone unfairly, I will return that amount times four.” Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house.” So Zacchaeus became an honest man because he knew the Lord.

Zacchaeus was a tax-collector. At that time in history, most tax collectors were **not honest** persons. Sometimes they cheated people, so the people thought they were the same as thieves. People did not like Zacchaeus because of that **sin**. But Christ brought **salvation** to him. What does that mean? It means that he changed his life after he knew Jesus. Zacchaeus is like any person who wants to know Christ. Wanting to know Christ is the first step of **salvation**.

Getting ready for Great Lent

When **Zacchaeus Sunday** comes, we begin getting ready for **Great Lent**. Before we can celebrate the Resurrection (Pascha), we must prepare ourselves. We do that by looking at our behavior and **repenting** of our sins (things that we did that were wrong). Then we do our best to improve our behavior. In that way, we become closer to Christ. The church helps us to get ready for Great Lent too, by teaching from the Bible about how people of Jesus’ time learned about Him and about the **meaning of salvation**.

Lent is a time when we become aware of our own sins and try to do better, just as Zacchaeus did. He promised to make up for his former dishonesty, by giving half of his money to the poor and by giving back four times the amount he had taken dishonestly.

The example of Zacchaeus teaches us that we should turn away from our sins and do something good. It is not enough to only say we are sorry. **Repentance** means that we should also try to **improve** our behavior and do something good for others.

Christ’s words to Zacchaeus, “Today salvation is come to this house” shows us what is meant when we speak of **Christ’s mercy**:

- * Christ accepts anyone who wants to know Him.
- * Christ forgives the sins of anyone who repents.
- * Christ’s forgiveness does not depend on who the person is or what their sins are.

Zacchaeus was short, so he climbed a tree in order to see Christ. **Shortness is used as a symbol**. The Church teaches that the **meaning of the word “sin” is to “fall short** of the mark.” The “mark” means a goal. Think of a football game where a player kicks the ball toward the goal line. If the ball does not reach the goal line, we say that where it fell was “short” by a certain amount.

In our spiritual lives, everyone’s goal is to keep the Commandments. When we make mistakes in choosing to do wrong things, we do not meet that goal. That is why the Church says that “sin” is falling short or missing the mark.

All of us have sinned and fallen short. Compared to God, each of us is very short, or small, spiritually. In order to know Christ better, we must make an effort as Zacchaeus did. Since we are so short, we can give ourselves a boost upward by keeping **good habits that are called “virtues”** and include behavior such as kindness, helping others, charity, sharing, politeness, honesty, obedience, patience, faith, and love.

We don’t have a tree to climb, like Zacchaeus did. But our **spiritual work on our good habits (virtues)** can be compared to **climbing a ladder**. In fact, an Orthodox saint, St. John Climacus, wrote an entire book, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, about how to do that. Everyone starts out by taking small steps. And the more we work on it, the higher we can move upward toward becoming the person God wants us to be. That is called spiritual growth. When we get ready for **Great Lent**, we are getting ready to make the **effort for spiritual growth**.