

Think About It ...

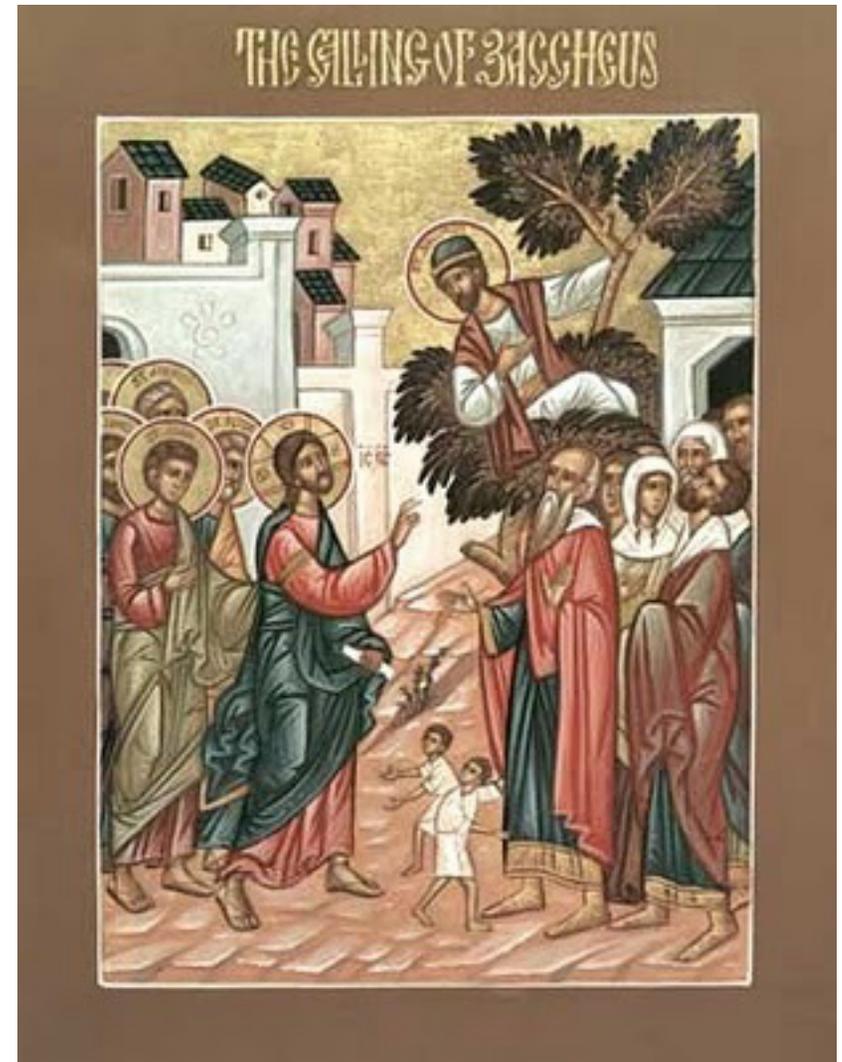
1. The story of Zacchaeus is told to prepare people spiritually for:
R G A E T L T N E _____
1
2. People did not like Zacchaeus because he was known as a:
I S N R E N _____.
3. Wanting to know Christ is the first step of:
N S O A L V I A T _____
2
4. When we are sorry for our sins we should also make an effort to
E I P M R V O _____ our behavior.
4
5. Christ S F E O G R I V _____ anyone
who repents of his or her sins.
6. T S S E N H S R O _____ is used
in this Gospel lesson as a symbol of our sins.
7. The Orthodox Church teaches that the opposite of sins are good
habits that are called T E V R S I U _____
3
8. Our efforts to have good habits can be compared to climbing a:
R L D A D E _____.

Use the letters above the numbers in the answers to find the answer to the following question.

The title of a famous book that St. John Climacus wrote to help people to overcome sinful habits and increase virtues (good habits) is *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. What does the word “ascent” mean?

1 2 3 4

Zacchaeus Sunday



“Today salvation has come to this house ... for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

(Gospel of St. Luke 19:10)

The Gospel of Luke 19:1-10

Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner." Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Preparing for Great Lent

Zacchaeus Sunday begins the movement **toward Great Lent**. Before we celebrate The Resurrection (Pascha), we enter a time of preparation called Great Lent, when we **examine** our lives, **repent** of our sins, and make an **effort** to become closer to Christ. The church prepares us for Great Lent too, by teaching from the Bible about how people of Jesus' time learned about Him and about the meaning of salvation.

Zacchaeus was a tax-collector. At that time in history, most tax collectors were **not honest** persons. Sometimes they cheated people, so they were considered the same as thieves. Zacchaeus was not liked because of that **sin**. But Christ brought salvation to him. His life was changed because he wanted to know who Jesus was. Zacchaeus represents any person who makes an effort to know Christ. Wanting to know Christ is the first step of **salvation**.

Lent is a time when we become aware of our own sins and make an effort 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 obtained 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 to make up for any hurt we caused to 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.

After the Great Doxology at most Sunday Matins, the Dismissal Hymn of the Resurrection "Today salvation has come to the world" is sung. This shows that the words that Christ said to Zacchaeus were not for Zacchaeus alone. Salvation is available to **every person** in the world who seeks Christ.

Zacchaeus was short, so he climbed a tree in order to see Christ. **Shortness is used as a symbol** in this Gospel lesson. 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 the right or the wrong things, we do not succeed in meeting that goal. That is why the Church defines "sin" as 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, faithfulness, 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 prepare for **Great Lent**, we are getting ready to make the **effort for spiritual growth**.