Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Happy Mothers Day!We don’t always honor secular holidays when we follow the liturgy, but Mother’s Day is an exception. In the US this holiday happens to fall on a Sunday and our first reading tells the story of Tabitha, also called Dorcas, from Joppa. We hear about Tabitha who is a disciple who is celebrated for her charity and good works. When she died, Peter was summoned to come without delay so he goes into a room of widows who show Peter her handiwork that she did for others and he empties the room and kneels and prays and say “Tabitha, get up” and he helps her raise up and shows others she was alive. Of course, this is mindful of the raising of Lazarus, but today the focus is on the woman. It demonstrates that the Apostles, through the power of the Holy Spirit also have power to raise people from the dead and many of the witnesses now believe. Mothers Day is modeled after the holiday is an early Christian festival known as Mothering Sunday. This was a time when faithful people would return to their mother church which typically is the main church in the vicinity of their homes for a special service. In more recent times we have Mothers’ Friendship Day where mothers gather with former Union and Confederate Civil War soldiers to promote reconciliation. At the same time, a focus entirely on giving cards and flowers and candy and other things to honor one’s mother brings us to Mother’s Day. This holiday may be difficult for those who have lost their mother, for people who wish to be mothers but are not, or who have had challenging relationships with their own mothers but expand this day to honor all women and signify them by giving them a flower. Tabitha—who was loved for having the heart of a servant—shows that “mothering” can look very different. We all know people who have a servant heart and what this does for a faith community that is steeped in love. How often do our actions, like Jesus’, point to the Father? One reason some people shun churchgoing these days is their legitimate concern that many people who call themselves Christians engage in actions that don’t always match their pious words. We are invited to make sure that our words and our deeds reflect God’s teachings to us. As with Tabitha, that might be the most effective witness we can make.

The setting for today’s story is at the portico of Soloman during the Festival of Dedication in the wintertime. This colonnade was not part of the original First Temple built by Soloman but was part of the Second Temple after the Temple was rebuilt and remodeled by Herod the Great. It was most likely named after Solomon to honor his legacy. This portico, which is located on the eastern side of the Temple Mount and overlooks the Kidron Valley and was a popular place for public gatherings, teaching, and debate. This Portico is symbol of both continuity and fulfillment and represents the connection between the Old Covenant of the Old Testament, centered around the Temple, and the New Covenant of the New Testament, inaugurated by Jesus Christ and continued by the apostles. We can view this venue as a bridge between Jewish tradition and the emerging Christian faith. The Book of Acts tells us Peter and John had healed a lame man at Solomon’s portico and preached to a large crowd that had gathered as they held the man and that the apostles perform many signs and wonders as they gathered together at this central meeting place for the early church, where the apostles demonstrated the power of the Holy Spirit through miraculous acts. It was a place where Jews and Gentiles alike could witness the power of God and hear the message of salvation, reflecting the universal scope of the Christian mission as a testament to the early believers' commitment to public witness and the transformative power of the gospel in the heart of Jerusalem. The apostles boldly demonstrate the communal aspect of the early church where they would emphasize their unity and shared faith, the same way we demonstrate this when we gather together each Sunday. All of this highlights the inclusivity of the gospel.

We have discussed where they are, now we discuss why they are there. The come together at the The Feast of Dedication, once called the Feast of the Maccabees, which is an eight-day winter festival celebrated by the Jews in the month of December or sometimes late November, depending on when it fell in the lunisolar Jewish calendar. Today, this festival is more familiarly called Hanukkah or the Festival of Lights. The history of the Feast of Dedication goes back to the [intertestamental period](https://www.gotquestions.org/intertestamental-period.html), the time between the last prophet Malachi in 400 bce to the preaching of John the Baptist to about 25 ce. Since there was no prophetic word from God during the period from Malachi to John, some refer to it as the “400 silent years.” The political, religious, and social atmosphere of Israel changed significantly during this period. During the intertestamental period, Alexander the Great defeated Darius of Persia, bringing [Greek rule](https://www.gotquestions.org/Greek-empire.html) to the world. Alexander was a student of Aristotle and was well-educated in Greek philosophy and politics. Alexander required that Greek culture be promoted in every land that he conquered. As a result, the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek, becoming the translation known as the [Septuagint](https://www.gotquestions.org/septuagint.html) (SEP tu a gent). Most of the New Testament references to Old Testament Scripture use the Septuagint phrasing. Even though Alexander allow religious freedom for the Jews, the strongly promoted Greek lifestyles. This was a challenge for Israel, since the Greek culture was very worldly, humanistic, and ungodly. Perhaps they felt it couldn’t get any worse, but it did. After Alexander died, [Judea](https://www.gotquestions.org/Judea-in-the-Bible.html) was ruled by a series of successors, culminating in the Seleucid (Saloucid) king [Antiochus Epiphanes](https://www.gotquestions.org/Antiochus-Epiphanes.html). (Antiochus Epihanies). Antiochus did far more than refuse religious freedom to the Jews. Around 167 BC, he overthrew the rightful line of the priesthood and desecrated the temple, defiling it with unclean animals and a pagan altar. After the Seleucid king [Antiochus Ephiphanes](https://www.gotquestions.org/Antiochus-Epiphanes.html) had profaned the Jewish temple and forced the Jews to abandon their sacrifices and adopt pagan rituals, a group of Jewish freedom fighters, the Maccabees, rose up, and defied the oppressive pagan regime, and overthrew the Seleucids. The temple in Jerusalem was re-dedicated to God; ever since then, the Feast of Dedication has been celebrated to commemorate this meaningful event in Jewish history. The original Feast of Dedication involved a miracle, according to rabbinic tradition. When the Jews re-entered the temple, they could only find one small, sealed jug of olive oil that had not been profaned or contaminated by the Seleucids. They used this to light the [menorah](https://www.gotquestions.org/what-is-the-menorah.html) in the temple, and though the oil was only enough to last one day, it miraculously lasted eight days—time for more oil to be made ready. This is the reason Hanukkah, is now also referred to as the Festival of Lights, lasts for eight days. To remember this miracle of provision, 8 candles are lit on the menorah and burned during the eight days of the Feast of Dedication. The lit candles reflect the Festival of Lights. Today, most Jews today do not believe in Jesus Christ as the incarnation of Yahweh. However, the Maccabees were followers of Yahweh, and Jesus’ disciples were still Jewish, even though they believed that the Great I Am had revealed himself in the person of Jesus. Clearly Christianity has its roots in Judaism, and Christians can look to the Feast of Dedication as a celebration of God’s protection and the victory he gives his faithful people who are willing to bravely continue to worship him in the face of persecution

We hear the Jews, who surrounded Jesus on the portico ask Jesus “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” These unbelievers gather around him, begging him to tell them straight out whether he is the Messiah, even as they prepare to stone him for blasphemy Jesus says he repeatedly shown them, even with all his miracles and curing people, driving out demons and raising people from the dead. Jesus said he had told them, and they still do not believe. He tells them the works that he does in his Father’s name testify to him, yet they do not believe, because they do not belong to his sheep. Jesus is the Good Shepherd and when his sheep hear my voice they will follow. I know them, and they follow me, and he gives his sheep eternal life, and they will never perish. Because he is the Good Shepherd, no one will snatch them out of his hand.  What his Father has given him is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. Then, he startles them when he says, “the Father and I are one.” At which they want to stone him and then arrest him, but he slips away like and Messiah would do before their time to bring glory to God. What do you need to believe?

We are not Jesus yet do our actions, as followers, like Jesus’ and Tabitha, point to the Father? One reason some people have turned from the church nowadays is their legitimate concern that many people who call themselves Christians engage in actions that don’t always match their pious words. Some bluntly say we are hypocrites That is because we are not Jesus, we are his sheep following him and we get tripped up by our human side. Yet Jesus accepts us for who we are. Who you are is good enough. The people who challenge us at whatever level are good enough. Jesus died for his sins and whoever believes in him will have eternal life. Our faith opens us to God’s unlimited grace son we will be righteous. Christ claims us, we do not claim Christ. Jesus invites us to make sure that our words and our deeds reflect God’s teachings to us. As with Tabitha, that might be the most effective witness we can make. Go, tend to his sheep. Go, feed his sheep.

Amen.