

The Arena



Volume 1, Issue 9
December 2008

NEWSLETTER CONTENTS

Pastor's Column	1
Parish & Local Events	2
Catechetical Challenges	3
The Little Church	4
Lives of the Saints	5
Wisdom of the Fathers	7
The Orthodox Faith	12
Hymnography	14
Troparia & Kontakia	14
Name Days	16
Prayer Requests	16

"All who love the martyrs, raise up a divine and worthy hymn, honoring the most wise Katherine, for she preached Christ in the arena"

Kontakion to Saint Katherine

The Newsletter of
SAINT KATHERINE THE GREAT
MARTYR MISSION
ORTHODOX CHURCH OF
AMERICA

138 5th Avenue Kirkland, WA 98033
(425) 889 4558 info@stkatherine.org
Editor: Emily Lorelli ekslorelli@gmail.com

PASTOR'S COLUMN

Words from our Archpastor Metropolitan JONAH (published earlier this year).

So, what is the vision of the Orthodox Church in America, and thus her identity, vocation, and mission? It is nothing other than Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. This vision is revealed to us when we celebrate the Eucharist, and the Eucharist, in turn, sends us on our mission: to bring Christ's Gospel to America in all its Orthodox integrity. We do not need the ways of the corporate world (vision- and mission-brainstorming, etc.) to determine this. Rather, we need prayer and discernment – together as the body of the Church, and in particular on the part of our Holy Synod of archbishops and bishops – in order to renew the vision of the Kingdom and to preach and proclaim the unity that exists in Christ by the Holy Spirit and constitutes us as the Church.

This vision is not about programs, institutions, administrations, budgets, or bureaucrats. Even less is it about the personal ambitions, agendas, or self-aggrandizements of bishops, clergy, lay leaders, or anyone else. It is only about Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. All the concrete projects we undertake, all the offices and positions of authority and responsibility, flow from this source. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well" (Matthew 6 : 33).

If as an organization we had lost our vision, then we would have ceased to be the Church. But this is not the case here. That vision, and the grace to actualize and incarnate it, is bestowed at every Eucharist.

The blessed and ever-memorable Father Alexander Schmemmann clearly saw and clearly articulated the Kingdom of God, imparted in the Eucharist, as the focal point of the Church's life. It was this clarity of vision which gave such great strength to his leadership. We need to get back in touch with that vision. We must return to our first love. It is the Liturgy that gives us our identity and sends us on our mission, renewing our vocation to be the Body of Christ – the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church in the world. . . .

Our vision as Orthodox Christians is always first and foremost Jesus Christ. His message is our message: the coming of the Kingdom. His life is our life. His mission is our mission: the salvation of all mankind and its union with the Father in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Our task in the midst of this is constantly to repent, to have this vision renewed in us, and to purge our lives of everything contrary to the vision and incarnation of Christ in our lives. These are the marks of Christ; and if we share His life, we also share these marks.

1 PARISH AND LOCAL EVENTS

CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS:

December 7: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy with Bishop Benjamin @ 9:15

December 8: Confessions 4-6pm

December 11-14: "Face to Face" Icon-writing workshop w/ Kh. Heather Sommer

December 11: Opening talk for Icon retreat by Fr. Tom Tsalgalakis @ 7pm

December 12: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy at St. Spiridon @ 9am

December 13: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy at St. Herman @ TBA
Catechesis @ 4pm

December 14: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy at St. Elizabeth @ TBA

December 15: Confessions 4-6pm

December 17: Parish Council 7pm

December 18: Hierarchal Orthodox Studies @7pm

December 22: Confessions 4-6pm

December 24: Royal Hours @ 9am
Vespers w/ Liturgy of St. Basil @ 1pm
Festal Vigil @ 6pm

December 25: Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ
Divine Liturgy @ 9am

January 1: Orthodox Studies @ 7pm

January 5: Vespers w/ Liturgy of St. Basil @ 9am

January 6: Theophany of Our Lord

Divine Liturgy @ 9am w/ procession to Lake Washington and Great Blessing of Waters

CATECHETICAL CHALLENGES (Our Catechumens can answer them. Can you?)

- 1) What passage from Scripture is being quoted in the words that appear on the Gospel in our new icon of Christ Pantokrator?
- 2) From where in the Old Testament does the prophecy come that is quoted in Matthew 1: 23, and read at the First Royal Hour on Christmas Eve: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel"?
- 3) Whose "synaxis" is commemorated in the Orthodox liturgical calendar on the day following the Nativity of our Lord?

Answers for December on back page

Answers for October

- 1) From what yearly feast do we take the hymn known as the Evlogetaria ("Blessed are thou, O Lord, teach me thy statutes"), sung at Sunday Matins? (Hint: It is not a coincidence that the hymn is sung as we prepare to hear the Resurrectional Gospel).
Answer: From Matins for Holy Saturday (served on Holy Friday evening)
- 2) Which Ecumenical Council declared that Christ possesses two natures, one divine and one human?
Answer: Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon (451)
- 3) Where did Saint Tikhon the Confessor (commemorated on October 9) serve as a missionary before being elected Patriarch of Moscow?
Answer: The United States of America (from 1898-1907)

✝ THE LITTLE CHURCH

by Patty Rebne

"The Little Church" means to give our parish practical encouragement in bringing the Church home. I don't have the answers—I have a lot of questions! If you have topics you would like to read about, or suggestions for the "answers", send them along. I will include them in the next column. My email address is patty.r@comcast.net.

Last month, we looked at why we burn candles when we pray. This month, we look at this question sent by a fellow parishioner: "I received a piece of cotton that was used to capture myrrh from a myrrh-streaming icon. What is the best way to preserve this myrrh-soaked cotton for display?"

Treat this gift as you would any blessed item—for example, you keep holy water in a vessel set aside for it. Find a box or container that you can keep the myrrh-laden cotton in, and keep it in your prayer corner. You can anoint family members with the myrrh as part of your prayer time, asking God for blessing or healing.

Next month we will be entering the Christmas season; the next column will look at some of the practices which will help us bring Church life home and make our hearts ready for the Nativity of Christ.

THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

December 4th: St. John of Damascus

Saint John of Damascus was born about the year 680 at Damascus, Syria into a Christian family. His father, Sergius Mansur, was a treasurer at the court of the caliph. John had also a foster brother, the orphaned child Cosmas (October 14), whom Sergius had taken into his own home. When the children were growing up, Sergius saw that they received a good education. At the Damascus slave market he ransomed the learned monk Cosmas of Calabria from captivity and entrusted to him the teaching of his children. The boys displayed uncommon ability and readily mastered their courses of the secular and spiritual sciences. After the death of his father, John occupied ministerial posts at court and became the city prefect.

In Constantinople at that time, the heresy of Iconoclasm had arisen and quickly spread, supported by the emperor Leo III the Isaurian (717-741). Rising up in defense of the Orthodox veneration of icons [Iconodoulia], St John wrote three treatises entitled, "Against Those who Revile the Holy Icons." The wise and God-inspired writings of St John enraged the emperor. But since the author was not a Byzantine subject, the emperor was unable to lock him up in prison, or to execute him. The emperor then resorted to slander. A forged letter to the emperor was produced, supposedly from John, in which the Damascus official was supposed to have offered his help to Leo in conquering the Syrian capital.

This letter and another hypocritically flattering note were sent to the Saracen caliph by Leo the Isaurian. The caliph immediately ordered that St John be removed from his post, that his right hand be cut off, and that he be led through the city in chains.

That same evening, they returned the severed hand to St John. The saint pressed it to his wrist and prayed to the Most Holy Theotokos to heal him so that he could defend the Orthodox Faith and write once again in praise of the Most Pure Virgin and Her Son. After a time, he fell asleep before the icon of the Mother of God. He heard Her voice telling him that he had been healed, and commanding him to toil unceasingly with his restored hand. Upon awakening, he found that his hand had been attached to his arm once more. Only a small red mark around his wrist remained as a sign of the miracle.

Later, in thanksgiving for being healed, St John had a silver model of his hand attached to the icon, which became known as "Of the Three Hands." Some unlearned painters have given the Mother of God three hands instead of depicting the silver model of St John's hand. The Icon "Of the Three Hands" is commemorated on June 28 and July 12.

When he learned of the miracle, which demonstrated John's innocence, the caliph asked his forgiveness and wanted to restore him to his former office, but the saint refused. He gave away his riches to the poor, and went to Jerusalem with his

stepbrother and fellow-student, Cosmas. There he entered the monastery of St Sava the Sanctified as a simple novice.

It was not easy for him to find a spiritual guide, because all the monks were daunted by his great learning and by his former rank. Only one very experienced Elder, who had the skill to foster the spirit of obedience and humility in a student, would consent to do this. The Elder forbade John to do anything at all according to his own will. He also instructed him to offer to God all his labors and supplications as a perfect sacrifice, and to shed tears which would wash away the sins of his former life.

Once, he sent the novice to Damascus to sell baskets made at the monastery, and commanded him to sell them at a certain inflated price, far above their actual value. He undertook the long journey under the searing sun, dressed in rags. No one in the city recognized the former official of Damascus, for his appearance had been changed by prolonged fasting and ascetic labors. However, St John was recognized by his former house steward, who bought all the baskets at the asking price, showing compassion on him for his apparent poverty.

One of the monks happened to die, and his brother begged St John to compose something consoling for the burial service. St John refused for a long time, but out of pity he yielded to the petition of the grief-stricken monk, and wrote his renowned funeral troparia ("What earthly delight," "All human vanity," and others). For this disobedience the Elder banished him from his cell. John fell at his feet and asked to be forgiven, but the Elder remained unyielding. All the monks began to plead for him to allow John to return, but he refused. Then one of the monks asked the Elder to impose a penance on John, and to forgive him if he fulfilled it. The Elder said, "If John wishes to be forgiven, let him wash out all the chamber pots in the lavra, and clean the monastery latrines with his bare hands."

John rejoiced and eagerly ran to accomplish his shameful task. After a certain while, the Elder was commanded in a vision by the All-Pure and Most Holy Theotokos to allow St John to write again. When the Patriarch of Jerusalem heard of St John, he ordained him priest and made him a preacher at his cathedral. But St John soon returned to the Lavra of St Sava, where he spent the rest of his life writing spiritual books and church hymns. He left the monastery only to denounce the iconoclasts at the Constantinople Council of 754. They subjected him to imprisonment and torture, but he endured everything, and through the mercy of God he remained alive. He died in about the year 780, more than 100 years old.

St John of Damascus was a theologian and a zealous defender of Orthodoxy. His most important book is the Fount of Knowledge. The third section of this work, "On the Orthodox Faith," is a summary of Orthodox doctrine and a refutation of heresy. Since he was known as a hymnographer, we pray to St John for help in the study of church singing.



Discourse on the Nativity of Christ

by Saint Gregory Thaumaturgos, Bishop of Neo-Caesarea

Brethren, we behold now a great and wondrous mystery. Shepherds with cries of joy come forth as messengers to the sons of mankind, not on their hilly pastures with their flocks conversing and not in the field with their sheep frolicking, but rather in the city of David Bethlehem spiritual songs exclaiming. In the highest sing Angels, proclaiming hymns Archangelic; the heavenly Cherubim and Seraphim sing out praises to the glory of God: "Holy, Holy, Holy..." Together all do celebrate this joyous feast, beholding God upon the earth, and mankind of earth amidst the heavens. By Divine providence the far distant are uplifted to the highest, and the highest, through the love of God for mankind, have bent down to the far distant, wherefore the MostHigh, through His humility, "is exalted through humility." On this day of great festivity Bethlehem hath become like unto heaven, taking place amidst the glittering stars are Angels singing glory, and taking the place of the visible sun -- is the indefinable and immeasurable Sun of Truth, having made all things that do exist. But who would dare investigate so great a mystery? "Wherein God doth wish it, therein the order of nature is overturned", and laws cannot impede. And so, of that which was impossible for mankind to undertake, God did aspire and did descend, making for the salvation of mankind, since in the will of God this is life for all mankind.

On the present joyous day God hath come to be born; on this great day of arrival God is become That Which He was not: being God, He hath become Man, so to speak as though removed from Divinity (though His Divine Nature be not divested of); in being made Man, He hath remained God. Wherefore, though He grew and flourished, it however was not thus as it were by human power to attain to Divinity nor by any human ability to be made God; but rather as the Word, by miraculous sufferance, wherein He was incarnated and manifest not being transformed, not being made something other, not deprived of that Divine Nature which He possessed previously. In Judea the new King is born; but this new and wondrous nativity which pagan Gentiles have come to believe, the Jew have eschewed. The Pharisees comprehended incorrectly the Law and the prophets. That which therein was contradictory for them, they explained away mistakenly. Herod too strove to learn of this new birth, full of mystery, yet Herod did this not to reverence the new-born King, but to kill Him.

That One, Who did forsake the Angels, Archangels, Thrones, Dominions, and all the constant and luminous spirits -- He alone having come a new path, does issue forth from an inviolate of seed virginal womb. The Creator of all comes to enlighten the world, indeed not leaving His angels orphaned, and He appears also as Man, come forth from God.

And I, though I see by the NewBorn neither trumpets (nor other musical instruments), nor sword, nor bodily adornments, neither lampadas nor way-lamps, and seeing the choir of Christ composed of those humble of birth and without influence -- it doth persuade me to praise of Him. I see speechless animals and choirs of youth, as though some sort of trumpet, songfully resonant, as though taking the place of lampadas and as it were shining upon the Lord. But what shall I say about what the lampadas do light? He -- is the verymost Hope and Life Itself,

He is Salvation Itself, Blessedness Itself, the focal point of the Kingdom of Heaven. He is Himself borne as offering, so that there would in power transpire the proclamation of the heavenly Angels: "Glory to God in the Highest," and with the shepherds of Bethlehem be pronounced the joyous song: "And on earth peace, good-will to mankind!" Born of the Father, in His Person and in His Being passionless, now in a manner dispassionate and incomprehensible He is born for us. The praeternal birth, He alone Who was born dispassionately doth know of; the present birth, is supernaturally known only by the grace of the Holy Spirit; but in both the first birth truly, and in the present birth in kenotic humbling, actually and immutably God was born from God, but He -- is also Man, having received flesh of the Virgin. In the highest of the One Father -- He is One, the Only-Begotten Son of the One Father; in kenotic humbling Unique of the unique Virgin, the Only-Begotten Son of the one Virgin... God suffereth not passions, in being born God of God; and the Virgin did not suffer corruption, since in a manner spiritual was born the Spiritual. The first birth -- is inexplicable and the second -- is insurmiseable; the first birth was without travail and the second was without impurity ... We know, Who now is born of the Virgin, and we believe, that it is He, born of the Father praeternally. But what manner of birth it was we would not hope to explain. Neither with words would I attempt to speak of this, nor in thought would I dare to approach it, since the Divine Nature is not subject to observation, nor approachable by thought, nor containable by the hapless reasoning. Needful only is to believe in the power of His works. The laws of corporeal nature are evident: a married woman conceives and gives birth to a son in accord with the purpose of marriage; but when the Unwedded Virgin gives birth to the son miraculously, and after birth remaineth a Virgin, -- then is manifest and higher corporeal nature. We can comprehend what exists according to the laws of corporeal nature, but afront that which is beyond the laws of nature, we fall silent, not through fear, but moreso through sin-wrought fallibility. We must needs fall silent, in silent stillness to reverence virtue with a worthy reverence and, not going beyond the far limits (of word), to be vouchsafed the heavenly gifts.

What to say and what shalt I proclaim? To speak more concerning the Virgin Birth-Giver? To deliberate more on the miraculously new birth? It is possible only to be astonished, in contemplating the miraculous birth, since it overturns the ordinary laws and order of nature and of things. About the wondrous works (of God) one might say in brief, that they are more wondrous than the works of nature, since in nature nothing begets itself by its own will, though there be the freedom thereof: wondrous therefore are all the works of the Lord, Who hath caused them to be. O, immaculate and inexplicable mystery! That One, Who before the very creation of the world was the Only-Begotten, Without-Compare, Simple, Incorporeal, is incarnated and descends (into the world), clothed in a perishable body, so that He be visible to all. For if He were not visible, then by what manner would He teach us to keep His precepts and how would He lead us to the invisible reality? It was for this therefore that He became openly visible, to lead forth those of the visible world to the invisible. Far more so do people reckon their eyesight as more credible a witness than mere hearsay; they trust that which they see, and doubt that which they see not. God willed to be visible in body, to resolve and dispel the doubts. He willed to be born of the Virgin, not to initiate of Her something unneeded and wherein the Virgin knew not the reasons of the matter, but rather the mystery of His birth is an immaculate act of goodness, wherein the Virgin Herself asked of Gabriel: "How can this be, in that I know not a man" -- to which

She received in reply: "The Holy Spirit shalt come upon Thee, and the power of the MostHigh shalt overshadow Thee" (Lk 1:34-35). But in what manner did the Word, Who was God, therefore issue forth from the Virgin? This -- is an inexplicable wonder. Just as a goldsmith, having obtained the metal, makes of it a thing suitable for use, thus did Christ also: finding the Virgin immaculate both in spirit and in body, He assumed of Her a spirit-fashioned body conformable to His intents, and was arrayed in it, as in clothing. On this wondrous day of the Nativity the Word was neither afraid nor ashamed to issue forth from the virginal womb, nor did He consider it unworthy of Himself to assume flesh from His creation -- so that the creation, made the attire of the Creator, should be esteemed worthy of glory, and so that mercy should be made known when revealed, from whence God through His goodness hath descended. Just as it would be impossible for an earthen vessel to appear before it be clay in the hands of the potter, so likewise would it be impossible for the perishable vessel (of human nature) to be renewed otherwise, to make it the attire of the Creator, Who is garbed in it.

What more to say, what shall I expound on? The new wonders do strike me with awe. The Ancient of Days is become a Child, to make people children of God. Sitting in glory in the Heavens, because of His love for mankind, He now layeth in a manger of dumb beasts. The Inpassionate, Incorporeal, Incomprehensible One is taken by human hands, in order to atone the violence of sinners and the iniquitous and free them of their slavery, to be wrapped in swaddling cloths and be nourished on the knees of Woman, so that shame be transformed into honour, the impious to be led to glory, and in place of thorns a crown. He hath taken on my body, so that I be made capable to have within myself His Spirit -- He hath appropriated unto Himself (my nature), being garbed in my body, and doth give unto me His Spirit, so that I, giving and in turn receiving, might discover the treasure of life.

What shall I say and what proclaim? "Behold, a Virgin in womb shalt conceive and She shalt give birth a Son, and they will call Him the name Emmanuel, in interpretation: God is with us [S nami Bog / Meth' hemon ho Theos / Nobiscum Deus]" (Mt 1:23). The saying here deals not with something for future whereof we might learn to hope, but rather it tells us about something that already has occurred and it awes us with something that already has been fulfilled. What formerly was said to the Jews and fulfilled amidst them, is now thus amidst us realised as an occurrence, whereof we have received (this prophecy), and adopted it, and believed in it. The prophet says to the Jews: "Behold, a Virgin shalt conceive" (Is 7:14); for Christians however, the saying devolves upon the fulfilling of the actual deed, the full treasure-trove of the actual event. In Judea a Virgin gave birth, but all the lands of the world accepted Her Son. There -- was the root of the vine; here -- the vine of truth. The Jews squeezed the wine-press, and the Gentiles have tasted of the sacramental Blood; those others planted the kernel of wheat, and these thrive by the grain harvest of faith. The Jews were pricked to death by the thorns, the Gentiles are filled by the harvest; those others sat beneath the tree of desolation, and these -- beneath the tree of life; those expounded the precepts of the Law, but the Gentiles reap the spiritual fruits. The Virgin gave birth not Herself of Herself, but as willed He needing to be born. Not in corporeal manner did God act, not to the law of the flesh did God subordinate Himself, but the Lord of corporeal nature manifested Himself to appear in the world by a miraculous birth, in order to reveal His power and to show, that in having been

made Man, He is born not as a mere man, -- that God is made Man, since for His will nothing be difficult.

On the present great day He is born of the Virgin, having overcome the natural order of things. He is higher than wedlock and free from defilement. It sufficed that He the preceptor of purity should shine forth gloriously, to emerge from a pure and undefiled womb. For He -- is That Same, Who in the beginning did create Adam from the virgin soil, and from Adam without wedlock did bring forth for him his wife Eve. And as Adam was without wife before that he had a wife, and the first woman then was brought into the world, so likewise on the present day the Virgin without man giveth birth to That One, about Whom spake the prophet: "He -- is Man, who is he that doth know Him?" The Man Christ, clearly seen by mankind, born of God, is such that womankind was needed to perfect that of mankind, so that perfectly would be born man for woman. And just as from Adam was taken woman, without impairment and without diminishing of his masculine nature, so also from woman without man was needed to bring forth a man, similar to the bringing forth of Eve, so that Adam be not extolled in that without his means woman should bring forth woman. Therefore the Virgin without cohabitation with man gave birth to God the Word, made Man, so that in equal measure it was by the same miracle to bestow equal honour to both the one and the other half -- man and woman. And just as from Adam was taken woman without his diminishing, so likewise from the Virgin was taken the body (Born of Her), wherein also the Virgin did not undergo diminishing, and Her virginity did not suffer harm. Adam dwelt well and unharmed, when the rib was taken from him: and so without defilement dwelt the Virgin, when from Her was brought forth God the Word. For this sort of reason particularly the word assumed of the Virgin Her flesh and Her (corporeal) garb, so that He be not accounted innocent of the sin of Adam. Since man stung by sin had become a vessel and instrument of evil, Christ took upon Himself this receptacle of sin into His Own flesh so that, the Creator having been co-united with the body, it should thus be freed from the foulness of the enemy, and man thus be clothed in an eternal body, which be neither perished nor destroyed for all eternity. Moreover, He that is become the God-Man is born, not as ordinarily man is born -- He is born as God made Man, manifest of this by His Own Divine power, since if He were born according to the general laws of nature, the Word would seem something imperfect. Therefore, He was born of the Virgin and shone forth; therefore, having been born, He preserved unharmed the virginal womb, so that the hitherto unheard of manner of the Nativity should be for us a sign of great mystery.

Is Christ God? Christ is God by nature, but not by the order of nature did He become Man. Thus we declare and in truth believe, calling to witness the seal of intact virginity: as Almighty Creator of the womb and virginity, He chose an unshameful manner of birth and was made Man, as He did will.

On this great day, now being celebrated, God hath appeared as Man, as Pastor of the nation of Israel, Who hath enlivened all the universe with His goodness. O dear warriors, glorious champions for mankind, who did preach Bethlehem as a place of Theophany and the Nativity of the Son of God, who have made known to all the world the Lord of all, lying in a manger, and did point out God contained within a narrow cave!

And so, we now glorify joyfully a feast of the years. Just as hence the laws of feasts be new, so now also the laws of birth be wondrous. On this great day now

celebrated, of shattered chains, of Satan shamed, of all demons to flight, the all-destroying death is replaced by life, paradise is opened to the thief, curses be transformed into blessings, all sins forgiven and evil banished, truth is come, and they have proclaimed tidings filled with reverence and love for God, traits pure and immaculate are implanted, virtue is exalted upon the earth, Angels are come together with people, and people make bold to converse with Angels. Whence and why hath all this happened? From this, that God hath descended into the world and exalted mankind unto Heaven. There is accomplished a certain transposition of everything: God Who is perfect hath descended to earth, though by Nature He remaineth entirely in the Heavens, even at that time when in His wholeness He be situated upon the earth. He was God and was made Man, not negating His Divinity: He was not made God, since He was always such by His very Nature, but He was made flesh, so that He be visible to everything corporeal. That One, upon Whom even the Heaven-dwellers cannot look, chose as His habitation a manger, and when He came, all around Him became still. And for naught else did He lay in the manger, than for this, that in giving nourishment to all, He should for Himself extract the nourishment of infants from maternal breasts and by this to bless wedlock.

On this great day people, leaving off from their arduous and serious affairs, do come forth for the glory of Heaven, and they learn through the gleaming of the stars, that the Lord hath descended to the earth to save His creation. The Lord, sitting upon a swift cloud, in the flesh wilt enter into Egypt (Is 19:1), visible fleeing from Herod, on that very deed which inspires the saying by Isaiah: "On that day Israel wilt be third amidst the Egyptians" (Is 19:24).

People entered into the Cave, thinking not at all about this beforehand, and it became for them an holy temple. God entered into Egypt, in the place of the ancient sadness there to bring joy, and in the place of dark gloom to shed forth the light of salvation. The waters of the Nile had become defiled and harmful after infants perished in it with untimely death. There appeared in Egypt That One, Who upon a time turned the water into blood and Who thereafter transformed these waters into well-springs of the water of rebirth, by the grace of the Holy Spirit cleansing away sins and transgressions. Chastisement once befell the Egyptians, since in their errors they defied God. But Jesus now is come into Egypt and hath sown in it reverence for God, so that in casting off from the Egyptian soul its errors, they are made amicable unto God. The river waters concurred worthily to encompass His head, like a crown.

In order not to stretch out in length our discourse and briefly to conclude what is said, we shall ask: in what manner was the passionless Word made flesh and become visible, while dwelling immutably in His Divine Nature? But what shall I say and what declare? I see the carpenter and the manger, the Infant and the Virgin Birth-Giver, forsaken by all, weighed down by hardship and want. Behold, to what a degree of humiliation the great God hath descended. For our sakes "impoverished, Who was rich" (2 Cor 8:9): He was put into but sorry swaddling cloths -- not on a soft bed. O poverty, source of all exaltation! O destitution, revealing all treasures! He doth appear to the poor -- and the poor He maketh rich; He doth lay in an animal manger -- and by His word He sets in motion all the world. He is wrapped in tattered swaddling cloths -- and shatters the bonds of sinners having called the entire world into being by His Word alone.

What still should I say and proclaim? I see the Infant, in swaddling cloths and lying in the manger; Mary, the Virgin Mother, stands before it together with Joseph, called Her husband. He is called Her husband, and She -- his wife, in name but so and seemingly wedded, though in fact they were not spouses. she was betrothed to Joseph, but the Holy Spirit came upon Her, as about this the holy evangelist doth speak: "The Holy Spirit shalt come upon Thee, and the power of the MostHigh wilt overshadow Thee: and He to be born is Holy" (Lk 1:35) and is of the seed of Heaven. Joseph did not dare to speak in opposition, and the righteous man did not wish to reprove the Holy Virgin; he did not want to believe any suspicion of sin nor pronounce against the Holy Virgin words of slander; but the Son to be born he did not wish to acknowledge as his, since he knew, that He -- was not of him. And although he was perplexed and had doubts, Who such an Infant should be, and pondered it over -- he then had an heavenly vision, an Angel appeared to him and encouraged him with the words: Fear not, Joseph, son of David; He That shalt be born of Mary is called Holy and the Son of God; that is: the Holy Spirit shalt come upon the Immaculate Virgin, and the power of the MostHigh wilt overshadow Her (Mt 1:20-21; Lk 1:35). Truly He was to be born of the Virgin, preserving unharmed Her virginity. Just as the first virgin had fallen, enticed by Satan, so now Gabriel bears new tidings to the Virgin Mary, so that a virgin would give assent to be the Virgin, and to the Nativity -- by birth. Allured by temptations, Eve did once utter words of ruination; Mary, in turn, in accepting the tidings gave birth to the Incorporeal and Life-Creating Word. For the words of Eve, Adam was cast out of paradise; the Word, born of the Virgin, revealed the Cross, by which the thief entered into the paradise of Adam. Though neither the pagan Gentiles, nor the Jews, nor the high-priests would believe, that from God could be born a Son without travail and without man, this now is so and He is born in the body, capable to endure suffering, while preserving inviolate the body of the Virgin.

Thus did He manifest His Almightyness, born of the Virgin, preserving the virginity of the Virgin intact, and He was born of God with neither complication, travail, evil nor a separation of forsaking the immutable Divine Essence, born God from God. Since mankind abandoned God, in place of Him worshipping graven images of humans, God the Word thus assumed the image of man, so that in banishing error and restoring truth, He should consign to oblivion the worshipping of idols and for Himself to be accorded Divine honour, since to Him becometh all glory and honour unto ages of ages.

Amen!



THE ORTHODOX FAITH

An excerpt from Fr. Hopko's *The Orthodox Faith: Doctrine, Volume I*

Sources of Christian Doctrine: The Saints

The doctrine of the Church comes alive in the lives of the true believers, the **saints**. The saints are those who literally share the holiness of God. "Be holy, for I your God am holy" (*Lev 11:44; 1 Pet 1:16*). The lives of the saints bear witness to the authenticity and truth of the Christian gospel, the sure gift of God's holiness to men.

In the Church there are different classifications of saints. In addition to the holy fathers who are quite specifically glorified for their teaching, there are a number of classifications of the various types of holy people according to the particular aspects of their holiness.

Thus, there are the **apostles** who are sent to proclaim the Christian faith, the **evangelists** who specifically announce and even write down the gospels, the **prophets** who are directly inspired to speak God's word to men. There are the **confessors** who suffer for the faith and the **martyrs** who die for it. There are the so-called "**holy ones**", the saints from among the monks and nuns; and the "**righteous**" those from among the lay people.

In addition, the church service books have a special title for saints from among the ordained clergy and another special title for the holy rulers and statesmen. Also there is the strange classification of the **fools for Christ's sake**. These are they who through their total disregard for the things that people consider so necessary -- clothes, food, money, houses, security, public reputation, etc. -- have been able to witness without compromise to the Christian Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven. They take their name from the sentence Of the Apostle Paul: "We are fools for Christ's sake" (1 Cor 4:10; 3:18).

There are volumes on lives of the saints in the Orthodox tradition. They may be used very fruitfully for the discovery of the meaning of the Christian faith and life. In these "lives" the Christian vision of God, man, and the world stands out very clearly. Because these volumes were written down in times quite different from our own, it is necessary to read them carefully to distinguish the essential points from the artificial and sometimes even fanciful embellishments which are often contained in them. In the Middle Ages, for instance, it was customary to pattern the lives of saints after literary works of previous times and even to dress up the lives of the lesser known saints after the manner of earlier saints of the same type. It also was the custom to add many elements, particularly supernatural and miraculous events of the most extraordinary sort, to confirm the true holiness of the saint, to gain strength for his spiritual goodness and truth, and to foster imitation of his virtues in the lives of the hearers and readers. In many cases the miraculous is added to stress the ethical righteousness and innocence of the saint in the face of his detractors.

Generally speaking, it does not take much effort to distinguish the sound kernel of truth in the lives of the saints from the additions made in the spirit of piety and enthusiasm of the later periods; and the effort should be made to see the essential truth which the lives contain. Also, the fact that elements of a miraculous nature were added to the lives of saints during medieval times for the purposes of edification, entertainment, and even amusement should not lead to the conclusion that all things miraculous in the lives of the saints are invented for literary or moralizing purposes. Again, a careful reading of the lives of the saints will almost always reveal what is authentic and true in the realm of the miraculous. Also, the point has been rightly made that men can learn almost as much about the real meaning of Christianity from the **legends** of the saints produced within the tradition of the Church as from the authentic **lives** themselves.

HYMNOGRAPHY: NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

Troparion to Saint Katherine

Your virtue shining like rays of the sun, illumined the unbelieving philosophers; as the moon gives light to those who walk by night, you drove away the darkness of unbelief. Condemning the tyrant, you brought the empress to faith. O blessed Katherine, divinely chosen bride, you hastened to the heavenly bridal chamber to stand, with the angels, before the Bridegroom. He has bestowed upon you a royal crown. Pray for us who keep your most honored memory.

Kontakion to Saint Katherine

All who love the martyrs, raise up a divine and worthy hymn, honoring the most wise Katherine, for she preached Christ in the arena; and treading upon the serpent, she destroyed the knowledge of the philosophers.

Irmos 1 from the Canon for the Nativity of our Lord (also sung at Matins throughout Advent Fast following the Great Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos)

Christ is born, glorify him! Christ comes from heaven; go to meet him! Christ is on earth; be exalted! Sing to the Lord, all the earth! And praise him in gladness, O people, for he has been glorified!

First hymn from the stichera for Lord I Call at Vespers for the Nativity of our Lord

Come, let us greatly rejoice in the Lord as we tell of this present mystery. The middle wall of partition has been destroyed; the flaming sword turns back, the cherubim withdraw from the tree of life, and I partake of the delight of Paradise from which I was cast out through disobedience. For the express image of the Father, the imprint of his eternity, takes the form of a servant, and without undergoing change he comes forth from a mother who knew not wedlock. For what he was, he has remained, true God; and what he was not, he has taken upon himself, becoming man through love for man. Unto him let us cry aloud: God born of a virgin, have mercy upon us.

TROPARIA & KONTAKIA: DECEMBER

December 7: St. Ambrose

Troparion - Tone 4

In truth you were revealed to your flock as a rule of faith,
an image of humility and a teacher of abstinence;
your humility exalted you;
your poverty enriched you.
Hierarch Father Ambrose,
entreat Christ our God
that our souls may be saved.

Kontakion - Tone 3

You shone forth with divine doctrine eclipsing the deception of Arius,
shepherd and initiate of the mysteries, Ambrose.
you worked miracles through the power of the Spirit,
healing various passions;
righteous father, entreat Christ our God to grant us His great mercy.

December 14: Holy Forefathers

Troparion - Tone 2

Through faith You justified the Forefathers,
betrothing through them the Church of the gentiles.

These saints exult in glory,

for from their seed came forth a glorious fruit:

She who bore You without seed.

So by their prayers, O Christ God, have mercy on us!

Kontakion - Tone 6

You did not worship the graven image,

O thrice-blessed ones,

but armed with the immaterial Essence of God,

you were glorified glorified in a trial by fire.

From the midst of unbearable flames you called on God, crying:

Hasten, O compassionate One!

Speedily come to our aid,

for You are merciful and able to do as You will.

December 21: Forefeast of the Nativity of Our Lord

Troparion - Tone 4

Prepare, O Bethlehem, for Eden has been opened to all!

Adorn yourself, O Ephratha, for the tree of life blossoms forth from the Virgin in the cave!

Her womb is a spiritual paradise planted with the Divine Fruit:

If we eat of it, we shall live forever and not die like Adam.

Christ comes to restore the image which He made in the beginning!

Kontakion - Tone 2

He who holds the earth in the hollow of His hand

now is beheld in Bethlehem wrapped in swaddling bands.

We offer pre-festal hymns to His Mother, who maternally rejoices

having held to her bosom the Son of God.

December 28: Afterfeast of the Nativity of Our Lord

Troparion - Tone 4

Your Nativity, O Christ our God,

Has shone to the world the Light of wisdom!

For by it, those who worshipped the stars,

Were taught by a Star to adore You,

The Sun of Righteousness,

And to know You, the Orient from on High.

O Lord, glory to You!

Kontakion - Tone 3

Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One,

And the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One!

Angels with shepherds glorify Him!

The wise men journey with a star!

Since for our sake the Eternal God was born as a Little Child!

PARISHIONERS' NAME DAYS – DECEMBER

PRAYER REQUESTS

Note: If you wish to have someone included on our parish prayer list for remembrance during the divine services, please notify Fr. John before the end of the month. This list will in most cases be cleared at the beginning of each month.

Please keep the following people in your prayers this month:

LIVING

Charles
Robert
Mark
Sarah
David
Patricia
Flore
Allan Simeon
Emily and the child to be born of her
Olga and the child to be born of her
Yelena and the child to be born of her
Cat. Deborah
Patricia
Arne
Child Ben
Heather Mary and the child to be born of her
Elaine

DEPARTED: