

The Arena



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"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

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PASTOR'S COLUMN

by Fr. John Strickland

One of the most distinctive features of the Orthodox rite of marriage, known formally as "crowning," is the placing of crowns on the heads of the man and the woman. These crowns carry a great deal of symbolic meaning, expressing the Church's vision of marriage.

On the one hand, they represent martyrdom. The early Church appropriated the imagery of athletic contests and physical "training" (asceticism, from which word we derive "asceticism") when speaking about the act of "bearing witness" (*martyria*) to Jesus Christ. The crown was the reward given to successful contestants in the athletic arenas of the ancient world, and so it came to be associated with Christian martyrdom. The crown was also, of course, a symbol of exaltation. It was what rulers wore. Both of these elements are borne by the symbolism of marriage, and they are inseparable.

The Christian vision of life is one grounded in our calling to be imitators of God. Jesus Christ, "the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person" (to quote Heb. 1:3), revealed that in this world true glory and honor can only be acquired through a love grounded in humility. He demonstrated this on the cross. But, strikingly, as he did so he also used the language of glorification. In John's Gospel, for instance, Christ speaks of his coming Crucifixion in this way: "The hour is

come, that the Son of man should be glorified" (John 12:23). The same Gospel also speaks of Christ being "lifted up," that is, exalted, upon the cross. To be like God, then, is to participate in the extreme humility of the cross. This is a paradox, to be sure. But it is the unavoidable and necessary Christian way of life.

And so, for the great majority of us who are called to marriage, it is necessary to bear witness to Christ in our relationships to our spouses. We must die to our own selfish desires and expectations. We must sacrificially love the other, that he or she might taste of the very love of God himself. This is why the Church places crowns on the heads of those being married. It reminds them, and those praying with them, that marriage is truly a "sacrament." That is to say, marriage is given to us by God as a way of entering into his kingdom. For this reason, the service begins (after the preliminary rite of betrothal) with the exclamation "Blessed is the kingdom . . ." This is the way toward eternal life itself. And having placed the crowns on the heads of husband and wife, the people sing the prokeimenon, which summarizes so well the Church's understanding of marriage:

"Thou hast set upon their heads crowns of precious stones; they asked life of thee and thou gavest it them."

1 PARISH AND LOCAL EVENTS

CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS:

- Sept. 1** Moleben for the New Year @ 7pm
- Sept. 5** Vespers @ 6pm
- Sept. 6** Divine Liturgy 9:30am
Coffee Hour: Potluck Theme – Cafeteria Classics
Crowning of Benjamin McGinnis and Marie Pylypzczuk at St. Paul Antiochan Church in Brier @ 3pm
- Sept. 7** Eve of Nativity of Theotokos: Festal Vigil @ 7pm
- Sept. 8** NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS
Divine Liturgy @ 7am
- Sept. 10** Bible Study @ 7pm
- Sept. 12** Vespers @ 6pm
- Sept. 13** Eve of the Elevation of the Cross
Baptism of Paul Strickland @ 8:30am
Divine Liturgy @ 9:30am
Coffee Hour: Collins, Gribble, Kirmeyer, Lorelli
Festal Vigil @ 6pm
- Sept. 14** ELEVATION OF THE HOLY CROSS (strict fast)
Divine Liturgy @ 7am
- Sept. 16** Parish Council meeting @ 7pm
- Sept. 17** Studies in Orthodoxy @ 7pm
- Sept. 19** Resurrectional Vigil @ 6pm

- Sept. 20** Baptism of Ana Gigitashuli @ 8:30am
 Divine Liturgy @ 9:30am
 Coffee Hour: Adams, Homiak, Martilla, McGinnis (☺)
- Sept. 24** Bible Study @ 7pm
- Sept. 26** Resurrectional Vigil @ 6pm
- Sept. 27** Divine Liturgy @ 9:30am
 Coffee Hour: Bibireata, Gilmore, Rebne, Strickland

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

- 1) In what year did the Orthodox Church in America receive her autocephaly?
- 2) What is the oldest Orthodox monastery in America?
- 3) Which of the following quotes from Saint Paul are not to be found in I Corinthians (the liturgical reading of which Epistle the Church completes this month)?
 - A) "But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness . . ."
 - B) "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."
 - C) "For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread."
 - D) "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

READINGS AND RAMBLINGS

****This is a new column designed to present your contributions. As the title suggests, this column will contain everything from suggested reading and book reviews to topics of personal and communal interest. In short, this column is what we, the parishioners of St. Katherine Mission, want it to be. **Please email submissions to Emily Lorelli – ekslorelli@gmail.com.******

SIMPLICITY by Molly Sabourin (From her blog – **Close to Home: One mother's quest for patience, peace, and perseverance**)

Back in my Bible college days it wasn't unusual to, while grabbing a third helping of Apple Jacks from the student cafeteria cereal bar, be confronted out of nowhere by classmates and professors with invasive inquiries such as, "So, how is your walk?" Meaning my Christian walk. How was I doing in terms of growing and maturing spiritually? One hundred percent of the time my answer was, "Fine." Never mind that I'd all but stopped attending church and had taken to sleeping in on Saturday mornings instead of participating in the women's Bible study being held in the common area of our dorm floor.

With but a grin and a nod and maybe a, "Praise the Lord," thrown in for good measure, I could avoid the discomfort of being prayed over right there on the spot and keep my lack of joy, and disillusionment, to my own burnt-out self. I was having what you might call a "crisis of faith" – a condition not all that uncommon among twenty-something, life-long believers. I was annoyed by the cliché-ness – the "Got Jesus?" t-shirts, the "What would Jesus do?" bracelets, key chains, breath mints, white-faced mimes reenacting Christ's Passion (silently, of course) on the streets of Chicago.

Secretly, I'd already begun the literally scary as hell process of inwardly distancing myself from not necessarily my childhood convictions but rather an expression of those convictions I was becoming increasingly less and less devoted to. And yet that evangelical sub-culture was all I'd ever known, the only language I spoke, my only means, I assumed, for gaining access to God. I couldn't bear to reveal publicly the gnawing misgivings I felt for sure would be read as a sign of my capriciousness, as dangerous, and worst of all as a betrayal of those I cared for and respected. "Hey, I'm struggling here!" I thought near constantly beginning in the spring of 1996. But you wouldn't have known it by looking at me or conversing with me because I (and I hardly think I'm alone in this) would bend over backwards for the approval and admiration of my peers, which in that particular context was easily garnered with a few strategically placed references to God's omnipotence, grace and awesomeness.

Fast-forward thirteen years, through thirteen years of significant transitions. I am married now and wearing a tri-bar cross around my neck (representative of my commitment to the Orthodox Christian Faith I have converted to). I drive a mini-van. That's right, I'm a mom. I am Orthodox. I am immensely grateful for these developments in my life, but still get so utterly flustered sometimes when it comes to those inevitable periods of despondency and insecurity within motherhood and faith that seem always to precede both humility and enlightenment. With each new stage and trial I tend to panic, failing to pace myself one inch by prayerful inch at a time (Learning curve, schmearning curve - I can and will overcome and master all of it instantaneously!). Instead of factoring in my uniqueness – unique temperament, vulnerabilities, circumstances and background, when working out with fear and trembling my salvation, I chase vigorously after a one-size fits-all ideal, pieced together by yours truly from a smorgasbord of characteristics I've observed in others, representing to me what defines a "good" mother, a "good" Orthodox Christian.

It can be lonely, I tell you, and embarrassing to struggle. Behind closed doors, I agonize over a rebellious son or daughter, my doubts increase in strength and number and overtake me, I give in, once again, to the same old tired temptations. Being imperfect, having children who are imperfect, makes me (I hate to admit it) feel ashamed. And then there is the added burden of trying to maintain a reputation I have fostered with such care and diligence. I forget too easily that all of those moments in which I find myself way in over my head are imperative for becoming more and more dependent on Christ's direction and mercy.

But what will my neighbors, my co-workers, my fellow parishioners think if word gets out that I screw up, like *all the time*? Even worse, how do I go on if the intensely personal cross I am asked to carry is misinterpreted, generating negative assumptions about my degree of piety, my mothering know-how or my intentions? Could it be, I've been asking myself lately, that the forfeiting of my pride – the

pride that flares up like a flame burning my insides every time I say something stupid, every time I fail to control one of my children's outbursts, every time my beliefs, as an Orthodox Christian, are scorned – is the key to my freedom? How much more of a blessing I could be to those around me if, instead of being so tethered to my self-esteem, I just put myself out there, as is (un-glossified, un-airbrushed) – as a walking, talking, breathing manifestation of God's continuous compassion. Because those most acutely aware of how many, many times they've been forgiven, are far more apt to forgive and really love, themselves, without judgment or stipulations.

The opinions of others about us, wrote Father Alexander Elchaninov, - this is the mirror before which we all, almost without exception, pose. A man moulds himself in order to be such as he wishes to appear to others. But the real man, as he is actually is, remains unknown to all, often himself included, while what acts and lives is a figure invented and dressed up by his own imagination. This tendency to deceive is so great that, distorting his very nature, a man will sacrifice his own self – the unique and inimitable element present in every human personality.

But how great is the attraction we feel whenever we meet a person free of this cancer, and how much we love the complete simplicity and directness of children, who have not yet entered into the realm of self-consciousness! Yet we have the alternative of struggling consciously to return from this evil complexity to simplicity. In any case, when we become aware of the presence of this evil in us, the task is already half accomplished.

Complexity versus simplicity. Self-protection, self-promoting, self-assurance, self-loathing, self-justification, blah, blah, blah (whew! How exhausting!) versus fruit-bearing, peace-rendering, soul-healing self-denial. If there is one thing we all share, it is our longing to be understood. That woman in your parish with the crying baby on her hip receiving annoyed glances from those who prefer it quiet while worshiping, may very well be seconds away from tears and your warm smile and, "Boy have I been there too," could make the difference between her staying and feeling welcome or leaving in despair. Your priest, who may be working a full-time job and raising a family, could surely benefit from, and become energized by, a little more appreciation and support from his flock. Think of how liberating it would be if instead of getting our feathers all ruffled by those who disagree with our positions, those who flaunt their accomplishments, those who belittle us, we prayed for Christ to correct our thoughts immediately, in the moment. Imagine if envy held no sway over our words or actions.

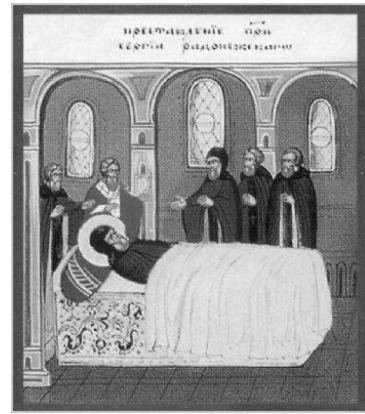
I am sorry, my brothers and sisters, if I ever been anything but forthright with you, if I have ever presumptuously summarized you, if I have ever purposefully painted an overly rosy, inauthentic picture of myself or my skills or my family and you experienced even a twinge of discouragement because of it. There is already too much heartache in this world, too much hatred, too much fighting against us in our quest to become more Christ-like. Distrusting the power of Jesus' Resurrection by declaring our true selves, or anyone else, un-redeemable is tragically and unnecessarily crippling. We are all in this together, friends. Let us uplift one another, always.

[CLOSE TO HOME can also be heard on Ancient Faith Radio]

THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS – September 25

Saint Sergius of Radonezh was born in the village of Varnitsa, near Rostov, on May 3, 1314. His parents were the pious and illustrious nobles Cyril and Maria (September 28). The Lord chose him while still in his mother's womb. In the Life of St Sergius it is reported that even before the birth of her son, St Maria and those praying heard the thrice-repeated cry of the infant at the Divine Liturgy: before the reading of the Holy Gospel, during the Cherubic hymn, and when the priest pronounced: "Holy Things are for the Holy."

God gave Cyril and Maria a son whom they named Bartholomew. From his very first days of life the infant amazed everyone by his fasting. On Wednesdays and Fridays he would not accept milk from his mother, and on other days, if Maria used oil in the food, the infant also refused the milk of his mother. Noticing this, Maria refrained altogether from food with oil.



At the age of seven, Bartholomew was sent to study together with his two brothers: his older brother Stephen, and his younger brother Peter. His brothers learned successfully, but Bartholomew fell behind in his studies, even though the teacher gave him much special attention. The parents scolded the child, the teacher chastised him, and his classmates made fun of his lack of comprehension. Finally, Bartholomew besought the Lord with tears to grant him the ability to read.

Once, his father sent Bartholomew out after the horses in the field. Along the way he met an angel sent by God under the appearance of a monk. The Elder stood at prayer beneath an oak in a field. Bartholomew approached him, and bowing, waited for the Elder to finish praying. The monk blessed him, gave him a kiss and asked what he wanted.

Bartholomew answered, "With all my soul I want to learn reading and writing. Holy Father, pray for me to God, that He may help me to become literate." The monk fulfilled Bartholomew's request, offering up his prayer to God. In blessing the child he said to him: "Henceforth, my child, God gives you to understand reading and writing, and in this you will surpass your brothers and peers" (See the famous M. Nesterov painting "Vision of Bartholomew").

Then the Elder took a vessel and gave Bartholomew a piece of prosphora. "Take, child, and eat," said he. "This is given to you as a sign of the grace of God, and for the understanding of Holy Scripture." The Elder wanted to leave, but Bartholomew asked him to visit at the home of his parents. His parents received their guest with joy and offered him their hospitality.

The Elder replied that it was proper to partake of spiritual nourishment first, and he bade their son to read the Psalter. Bartholomew began to read, and his parents were amazed at the change that had occurred with their son. In parting, the Elder prophetically said of St Sergius, "Your son shall be great before God and the people. He shall become a chosen habitation of the Holy Spirit."

After this the holy child read without difficulty and understood the contents of books. He became immersed in prayer with a special fervor, not missing a single

church service. Already in childhood he imposed upon himself a strict fast. He ate nothing on Wednesdays and Fridays, and on the other days he sustained himself on bread and water.

About the year 1328, the parents of St Sergius moved from Rostov to Radonezh. When their older sons married, Cyril and Maria received the monastic schema shortly before their death at the Khot'kov monastery of the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos, not far from Radonezh.

Later on, the older brother Stephen was widowed and became a monk at this monastery. Having buried his parents, Bartholomew and his brother Stephen withdrew into the forest (12 versts from Radonezh) to live in the wilderness. At first they made cells, and then a small church, and with the blessing of Metropolitan Theognostus, it was consecrated in the name of the Most Holy Trinity. But soon, unable to bear the difficulties of life in the wilderness, Stephen left his brother and went on to the Moscow Theophany monastery, where he became close to St Alexis, afterwards Metropolitan of Moscow. (February 12).

On October 7, 1337 Bartholomew was tonsured by Igumen Metrophanes, taking the name of the holy Martyr Sergius (October 7), and he started to build a new habitation to the glory of the Life-Creating Trinity. Suffering temptations and demonic apparitions, St Sergius advanced from strength to strength. Gradually he became known to other monks seeking his guidance. St Sergius accepted all with love, and soon a brotherhood of twelve monks were gathered in the small monastery.

Their experienced spiritual guide distinguished himself by an extraordinary love for work. With his own hands he built several cells, he carried water, he chopped wood, baked bread, sewed clothing, prepared food for the brethren and humbly took on other tasks. St Sergius combined the heavy work with prayer, vigil and fasting.

The brethren were amazed that with such severe exertion the health of their guide did not deteriorate, but rather became all the more hearty. It was not without difficulty that they implored St Sergius to accept the position of igumen of the monastery.

In 1354 Bishop Athanasius of Volyn ordained the saint a hieromonk and elevated him to the rank of igumen. Just as before, monastic obediences were strictly fulfilled at the monastery. With the expansion of the monastery, its needs also grew. Often the monks had only scant food, but through the prayers of St Sergius unknown people provided the necessities.

Reports of the exploits of St Sergius became known even at Constantinople, and Patriarch Philotheus sent to the monk a cross, a "paraman" (monastic clothing, a four-cornered cloth tied with cords to the chest and worn beneath other garb, and adorned with symbols of the Lord's Passion) and schema-robe in blessing for new deeds, and a grammota of blessing, in which the Patriarch counselled the chosen of God to organize a cenobitic monastery. The monk set off with the patriarchal missive to St Alexis, and received from him the counsel to introduce a strict manner of cenobitic life. The monks began to grumble at the strictness of the monastic Rule, and St Sergius was compelled to forsake the monastery. At the River Kirzhach he founded a monastery in honor of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos. Matters at the former monastery went quickly into disarray, and

the remaining monks recoured to St Alexis that he should get the saint to return.

St Sergius unquestioningly obeyed the holy hierarch, and left in place of himself at the Kirzhachsk monastery his disciple, St Roman.

Already during his lifetime St Sergius had been vouchsafed the gift of wonderworking. He raised a lad, at a point when the despairing father had given up on his only son as lost. Reports about the miracles worked by St Sergius began quickly to spread about, and the sick began to come to him, both from the surrounding villages and also from remote places. And no one left from St without receiving healing of infirmities and edifying counsel. Everyone gave glory for St Sergius, and revered him on an equal with the ancient holy Fathers. But human glory did not hold allure for the great ascetic, and as before he remained the example of monastic humility.

One time St Stephen, Bishop of Perm (April 27), who deeply revered St Sergius, was on journey from his diocese to Moscow. The roadway passed eight versts distant from the Sergiev monastery. Intending to visit the monastery on his return trip, the saint stopped, and having recited a prayer, he bowed to St Sergius with the words: "Peace be to thee, spiritual brother." At this instant St Sergius was sitting in the trapeza for a meal with the brethren. In reply to the blessing of the holy hierarch, St Sergius rose up, recited a prayer, and made a return blessing to St Stephen. Certain of the disciples, astonished at the extraordinary action of St Sergius, hastened off to the indicated place, and became convinced of the veracity of the vision.

Gradually the monks began to witness also other similar actions. Once, during Liturgy, an angel of the Lord served with the saint, but St Sergius in his humility forbade anyone to tell about this until after his death.

St Sergius was connected with St Alexis by close bonds of spiritual friendship and brotherly love. St Alexis in his declining years summoned St Sergius to him and besought him to accept to be Russian Metropolitan, but St Sergius humbly declined to be primate.

The Russian Land at this time suffered under the Mongol-Tatar Yoke. Having gathered an army, Great-prince Demetrius Ioannovich of the Don went to monastery of St Sergius to ask blessing in the pending struggle. St Sergius gave blessing to two monks of his monastery to render help to the great-prince: the Schemamonk Andrei [Oslyaba] and the Schemamonk Alexander [Peresvet], and he predicted the victory for prince Demetrius. The prophecy of St Sergius was fulfilled: on September 8, 1380, on the feastday of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos, Russian soldiers gained a total victory over the Tatar hordes at Kulikovo Pole (Kulikovo Field), and set in place the beginning of the liberation of the Russian Land from the Mongol Yoke. During the fighting St Sergius and the brethren stood at prayer and besought God to grant victory to the Russian forces.

For his angelic manner of life St Sergius was granted an heavenly vision by God. One time by night Abba Sergius was reading the rule of prayer beneath an icon of the Most Holy Theotokos. Having completed the reading of the canon to the Mother of God, he sat down to rest, but suddenly he said to his disciple, St Mikhei (May 6), that there awaited them a wondrous visitation. After a moment the Mother of God appeared accompanied by the holy Apostles Peter and John the Theologian. Due to the extraordinary bright light St Sergius fell down, but the Most

Holy Theotokos touched Her hands to him, and in blessing him promised always to be Protectress of his holy monastery.

Having reached old age, and foreseeing his own end six months beforehand, St Sergius summoned the brethren to him and designated his disciple St Nikon (November 17), who was experienced in the spiritual life and obedience, to be igumen. In tranquil solitude St Sergius fell asleep in the Lord on September 25, 1392. On the night before, the great saint of God summoned the brethren a final time to give them his final instruction: "Brethren, be attentive to yourselves. Have first the fear of God, purity of soul and unhyphocritical love...."



WISDOM OF THE FATHERS

Sermon on the Nativity of the Virgin Mary

Saint Andrew, Archbishop of Crete

The present Feast is for us the beginning of feasts. Serving as boundary to the law and to prototypes, at the same time it serves as a doorway to grace and truth. "For Christ is the end of the law" (*Rom 10:4*), Who, having freed us from the letter (of the law), raises us to spirit.

Here is the end (to the law): in that the Lawgiver, having made everything, has changed the letter in spirit and gathers everything in Himself (*Eph 1:10*), enlivening the law with grace: grace has taken the law under its dominion, and the law has become subjected to grace, so that the properties of the law not suffer reciprocal commingling, but only so that by Divine power, the servile and subservient (in the law) are transformed into the light and free (in grace), so that we are not "in bondage to the elements of the world" (*Gal 4:3*) and not in a condition under the slavish yoke of the letter of the law.

Here is the summit of Christ's beneficence towards us! Here are the mysteries of revelation! Here is the theosis [divinization] assumed upon humankind, the fruition worked out by the God-Man.

The radiant and bright descent of God for people ought to have a joyous basis, opening to us the great gift of salvation. Such also is the present feastday, having as its basis the Nativity of the Theotokos, and as its purpose and end, the uniting of the Word with flesh, this most glorious of all miracles, unceasingly proclaimed, immeasurable and incomprehensible.

The less comprehensible it is, the more it is revealed; and the more it is revealed, the less comprehensible it is. Therefore the present God-graced day, the first of our feastdays, showing forth the light of virginity and the crown woven from the unfading blossoms of the spiritual garden of Scripture, offers creatures a common joy.

Be of good cheer, it says, behold, this is the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin and of the renewal of the human race! The Virgin is born, She grows and is raised up and prepares Herself to be the Mother of the All-Sovereign God of the ages. All this, with the assistance of David, makes it for us an object of spiritual contemplation. The Theotokos manifests to us Her God-bestown Birth, and David points to the blessedness of the human race and wondrous kinship of God with mankind.

And so, truly one ought to celebrate the mystery today and to offer to the Mother of God a word by way of gift: since nothing is so pleasing to Her as a word and praise by word. It is from here also that we receive a twofold benefit: first, we enter into the region of truth, and second, we emerge from the captivity and slavery of the written law. How so? Obviously, when darkness vanishes, then light appears; so also here: after the law follows the freedom of grace.

The present day solemnity is a line of demarcation, separating the truth from its prefigurative symbol, and ushering in the new in place of the old. Paul, that Divine Trumpet of the Spirit, exclaims about this: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things pass away and behold, all things have become new (2 Cor 5:17); for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by which we draw near to God" (Heb 7:19). The truth of grace has shown forth brightly.

Let there now be one common festal celebration in both heaven and on earth. Let everything now celebrate, that which is in the world and that beyond the world. Now is made the created temple for the Creator of all; and creation is readied into a new Divine habitation for the Creator. Now our nature having been banished from the land of blessedness receives the principle of theosis and strives to rise up to the highest glory.

Now Adam offers from us and for us elements unto God, the most worthy fruit of mankind: Mary, in Whom the new Adam is rendered Bread for the restoration of the human race. Now is opened the great bosom of virginity, and the Church, in the matrimonial manner, places upon it a pure, truly spotless pearl.

Now human worthiness accepts the gift of the first creation and returns to its former condition; the majesty darkened by formless sin, through the conjoining by His Mother by birth "of Him Beauteous by Goodness," man receives beauty in a most excellent and God-seemly visage. And this creating is done truly by the creation, and recreation by theosis, and theosis by a return to the original perfection!

Now a barren one has become a mother beyond expectation, and the Theotokos has given birth without knowing man, and She sanctifies natural birth. Now the majestic color of the Divine purple is readied and impoverished human nature is clothed in royal worthiness. Now, according to prophecy, sprouts forth the Offshoot of David, Who, having eternally become the green-sprouting Staff of Aaron, has blossomed forth for us with the Staff of Power: Christ.

Now from Judah and David is descended a Virgin Maiden, rendering of Herself the royal and priestly worthiness of Him Who has taken on the priesthood of Aaron according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb 7:15). Now the renewal of our nature is begun, and the world responding, assuming a God-seemly form, receives the principle of a second Divine creation.

The first creation of mankind occurred from the pure and unsullied earth; but their nature darkened its innate worthiness, they were deprived of grace through the sin of disobedience; for this we were cast out of the land of life and, in place of the delights of Paradise, we received temporal life as our inheritance by birth, and with it the death and corruption of our race.

All started to prefer earth to heaven, so that there remained no hope for salvation, beyond the utmost help. Neither the natural nor the written law, nor the fiery reconciliative sayings of the prophets had power to heal the sickness. No one knew how to rectify human nature and by what means it would be most suitable to raise it up to its former worthiness, so long as God the Author of all did not deign to reveal to us another arranged and newly-constituted world, where the pervasive form of the old poison of sin is annihilated, and granting us a wondrous, free and perfectly dispassionate life, through our re-creation in the baptism of Divine birth.

But how would this great and most glorious blessing be imparted to us, so in accord with the Divine commands, if God were not to be manifest to us in the flesh, not subject to the laws of nature, nor deign to dwell with us in a manner known to Him? And how could all this be accomplished, if first there did not serve the mystery a Pure and Inviolable Virgin, Who contained the Uncontainable, in accord with the law, yet beyond the laws of nature? And could some other virgin have done this besides She alone, Who was chosen before all others by the Creator of nature?

This Virgin is the Theotokos, Mary, the Most Glorious of God, from Whose womb the Most Divine came forth in the flesh, and by Whom He Himself arranged a wondrous temple for Himself. She conceived without seed and gave birth without corruption, since Her Son was God, though also He was born in the flesh, without mingling and without travail.

This Mother, truly, avoided that which is innate to mothers but miraculously fed Her Son, begotten without a man, with milk. The Virgin, having given birth to the One seedlessly conceived, remained a pure Virgin, having preserved incorrupt the marks of virginity. And so in truth She is named the Mother of God; Her virginity is esteemed and Her birth-giving is glorified. God, having joined with mankind and become manifest in the flesh, has granted Her a unique glory. Woman's nature suddenly is freed from the first curse, and just as the first brought in sin, so also does the first initiate salvation also.

But our discourse has attained its chief end, and I, celebrating now and with rejoicing sharing in this sacred feast, I greet you in the common joy. The Redeemer of the human race, as I said, willed to arrange a new birth and re-creation of mankind: just as the first creation, taking dust from the virginal and pure earth, where He formed the first Adam, so also now, having arranged His Incarnation upon the earth, and so to speak, in place of dust He chooses out of all the creation this Pure and Immaculate Virgin and, having re-created mankind in His Chosen One from among mankind, the Creator of Adam is made the New Adam, in order to save the old.

Who indeed was This Virgin and from what sort of parents did She come? Mary, the glory of all, was born of the tribe of David, and from the seed of Joachim. She was descended from Eve, and was the child of Anna. Joachim was a gentle man, pious, raised in God's law. Living prudently and walking before God he grew old without child: the years of his prime provided no continuation of his lineage. Anna was likewise God-loving, prudent, but barren; she lived in harmony with her husband, but was childless. As much concerned about this, as about the observance of the law of the Lord, she indeed was daily stung by the grief of

childlessness and suffered that which is the usual lot of the childless -- she grieved, she sorrowed, she was distressed, and impatient at being childless.

Thus, Joachim and his spouse lamented that they had no successor to continue their line; yet the spark of hope was not extinguished in them completely: both intensified their prayer about the granting to them of a child to continue their line. In imitation of the prayer heard of Hannah (*1 Kings 1: 10*), both without leaving the temple fervently beseeched God that He would undo her sterility and make fruitful her childlessness. And they did not give up on their efforts, until their wish be fulfilled. The Bestower of gifts did not contemn the gift of their hope. The unceasing power came quickly in help to those praying and beseeching God, and it made capable both the one and the other to produce and bear a child. In such manner, from sterile and barren parents, as it were from irrigated trees, was borne for us a most glorious fruition -- the all-pure Virgin.

The constraints of infertility were destroyed -- prayer, upright manner of life, these rendered them fruitful; the childless begat a Child, and the childless woman was made an happy mother. Thus the immaculate Fruition issuing forth from the womb occurred from an infertile mother, and then the parents, in the first blossoming of Her growth brought Her to the temple and dedicated Her to God. The priest, then making the order of services, beheld the face of the girl and of those in front of and behind, and he became gladdened and joyful, seeing as it were the actual fulfillment of the Divine promise.

He consecrated Her to God, as a reverential gift and propitious sacrifice -- and, as a great treasury unto salvation, he led Her within the very innermost parts of the temple. Here the Maiden walked in the upright ways of the Lord, as in bridal chambers, partaking of heavenly food until the time of betrothal, which was preordained before all the ages by Him Who, by His unscrutable mercy, was born from Her, and by Him Who before all creation and time and expanse Divinely begat Him, and together with His consubstantial and co-reigning and co-worshipped Spirit -- this being One Godhead, having One Essence and Kingdom, inseparable and immutable and in which is nothing diverse, except the personal qualities. Wherefore, in solemnity and in song I do offer the Mother of the Word the festal gift; since that He born of Her hath taught me to believe in the Trinity: the Son and Word Without-Beginning hath made in Her His Incarnation; the Father begetting Him hath blessed this; the Holy Spirit hath signed and sanctified the womb which incomprehensibly hath conceived.

Now is the time to question David: in what did the God of all forswear him? Speak, O Psalmist and Prophet! He hath sworn from the fruit of my loin to sit upon my throne (*Ps 131/132:11*). Here in this He is forsworn and will not break His oath, He hath forsworn and His Word is sealed with a deed! "Once -- said he -- I forswear by My Holiness, that I lie not to David; his seed wilt prevail forever, and his throne, like the sun before Me and like the moon coursing the ages: a faithful witness also in heaven" (*Ps 88/89:35-38*). God hath fulfilled this oath, since it is not possible for God to lie (*Heb 6:18*). Consider this: Christ in the flesh is named my Son (*Mt. 22: 42*), and all nations will worship my Lord and Son (*Ps 71/72:11*), seeing him sit upon a virginal throne! Here also is the Virgin, from Whose womb the Pre-eternal One issued forth, incarnated at the end of the ages and renewing the ages, likewise sprung forth from my loins! All this is so!

People of God, holy nation, sacred gathering! Let us revere our paternal memory; let us extol the power of the mystery! Each of us, in the measure given by grace, let us offer a worthy gift for the present feast. Fathers -- a prosperous lineage; mothers -- fine children; the unbearing -- the not-bearing of sin; virgins -- a twofold prudence, of soul and of body; betrothed -- praiseworthy abstinence. If anyone of you be a father, let him imitate the father of the Virgin; and if anyone be without child -- let them make harvest of fruitful prayer, cultivating a life pleasing to God. The mother, feeding her children, let her rejoice together with Anna, raising her Child, given to her in infertility through prayer.

She that is barren, not having given birth, lacking the blessing of a child, let her come with faith to the God-given Offshoot of Anna and offer there her barrenness. The virgin, living blamelessly, let her be a mother by discourse, adorning by word the elegance of soul. For a betrothed -- let her offer mental sacrifice from the fruits of prayer. All together rich and poor, lads and maidens, old and young (*Ps 48:2, 148:12*), priests and levites -- let all together keep the feast in honor of the Maiden, the Theotokos and the Prophetess: from Her has issued forth the Prophet, foretold by Moses, Christ God and Truth (*Dt 18:15*). Amen.

THE ORTHODOX FAITH

An excerpt from Fr. Hopko's *The Orthodox Faith: Doctrine, Volume II*
The Symbol of Faith: Jesus Christ

... and In One Lord Jesus Christ ...

The fundamental confession of Christians about their Master is this: Jesus Christ is Lord. It begins in the gospel when Jesus himself asks his disciples who they think that He is:

But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matt 16:16).

Jesus is the Christ. This is the first act of faith which men must make about Him. At His birth, the child of Mary is given the name Jesus, which means literally Saviour (in Hebrew Joshua, the name also of Moses' successor who crossed the Jordan River and led the chosen people into the promised land). "You will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (*Matt 1:21; Luke 1:31*). It is this Jesus who is the **Christ**, which means the **Anointed**, the **Messiah** of Israel. Jesus is the Messiah, the one promised to the world through Abraham and his children.

But who is the Messiah? This is the second question, one also asked by Christ in the gospels--this time not to his disciples, but to those who were taunting him and trying to catch him in his words. "Who is the Messiah?" he asked them, not because they could answer or really wished to know, but in order to silence them and to begin the inauguration of "the hour" for which he had come: the hour of the world's salvation.

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question saying, "What do you think of the Christ (i.e., the Messiah)? Whose Son is he?"

They said to him, "The Son of David."

He said to them, "How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him

Lord, saying "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand till I put thy enemies under thy feet" (Ps 110). If David thus calls him Lord, how is he his son?"

And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions (*Matt 22:41-46*).

After Jesus' resurrection, inspired by the same Holy Spirit who inspired David, the apostles and all members of the Church understood the meaning of his words. Jesus is the Christ. And the Christ is the Lord. This is the mystery of Jesus Christ the Messiah, namely that He is the One and Only Lord, identified with the God Yahweh of the Old Testament.

We saw already how Yahweh was always called Adonai, the Lord, by the people of Israel. In the Greek Bible the very word Yahweh was not even written. Instead, where the word Yahweh was written in Hebrew, and where the Jews said Adonai, the Lord, the Greek Bible simply wrote **Kyrios--the Lord**. Thus, the Son of David, which was another way of saying the Messiah, is called **Kyrios**, the Lord.

For the Jews, and indeed for the first Christians, the term **Lord** was proper to God alone: "God is the Lord and has revealed Himself unto us" (*Ps 11:8*). This Lord and God is Yahweh; and it is Jesus the Messiah as well. For although Jesus claims that "the Father is greater than I" (*Jn 14:28*), he claims as well: "I and the Father are one" (*Jn 10:30*).

Believing in "One Lord Jesus Christ" is the prime confession of faith for which the first Christians were willing to die. For it is the confession which claims the identity of Jesus with the Most High God.

HYMNOGRAPHY: SEPTEMBER

September 6: Miracle of the Archangel Michael at Colossae

Troparion - Tone 4

Michael, commander of the heavenly hosts,
we who are unworthy beseech you,
by your prayers encompass us beneath the wings of your immaterial glory,
and faithfully preserve us who fall down and cry out to you:
"Deliver us from all harm, for you are the commander of the powers on high!"

Kontakion - Tone 2

Michael, commander of God's armies
and minister of the divine glory,
prince of the bodiless angels
and guide of mankind,
ask for what is good for us, and for great mercy,
as supreme commander of the Bodiless Hosts.

September 8: Nativity of the Theotokos

Troparion - Tone 4

Your Nativity, O Virgin,
Has proclaimed joy to the whole universe!
The Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God,
Has shone from You, O Theotokos!
By annulling the curse,

He bestowed a blessing.
By destroying death, He has granted us eternal Life.

Kontakion - Tone 4

By Your Nativity, O Most Pure Virgin,
Joachim and Anna are freed from barrenness;
Adam and Eve, from the corruption of death.
And we, your people, freed from the guilt of sin, celebrate and sing to you:
The barren woman gives birth to the Theotokos, the nourisher of our life!

September 13: Forefeast of the Elevation of the Cross

Troparion - Tone 4

We offer in supplication
the life-creating Cross of Your goodness, O Lord,
which You have granted to us
although we are unworthy.
Through the Theotokos, save all Orthodox Christians, O only Lover of mankind.

Kontakion - Tone 4

Podoben: "Today You have shown forth..."
Your precious Cross rises like the sun
and mystically makes all things holy and pure.
Let us prepare to welcome it with faith

September 14: The Elevation of the Cross

Troparion - Tone 1

O Lord, save Your people,
And bless Your inheritance.
Grant victories to the Orthodox Christians
Over their adversaries.
And by virtue of Your Cross,
Preserve Your habitation.

Kontakion - Tone 4

As You were voluntarily raised upon the cross for our sake,
Grant mercy to those who are called by Your Name, O Christ God;
Make all Orthodox Christians glad by Your power,
Granting them victories over their adversaries,
By bestowing on them the Invincible trophy, Your weapon of Peace.

September 27: Apostle Mark of the Seventy

No Troparion or Kontakion available.

PARISHIONERS' NAME DAYS – SEPTEMBER

September 5: The Righteous Elizabeth (Elizabeth Lorelli)

September 17: Holy Martyr Saint Sophia (Sophia Collins)

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 include the following people, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox, in whatever prayers you can offer. Each of them is in special need this month for our common intercessions before God.

Living

Patricia

Flore

Allan Simeon

Deborah Maria

James Demetrius

Robert Gregory

Bistra

Sarah

Allan

Antonio

Departed

ND Very Rev. Joseph Hirsch

Catechetical Challenge Answers:

- 1) 1970
- 2) Saint Tikhon Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania (established in 1905)
- 3) B ("And being found . . .") is not in I Corinthians, but the Epistle to the Philippians (2:8). The other quotes are: I Cor. 1:23 (A); I Cor. 10:17 (C); and I Cor. 13:13 (D)