

The Arena

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The Newsletter of
Saint Katherine the Great Martyr Mission
Orthodox Church of America

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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

Delegate Report from 2010 Diocesan Assmebly

by Emily Lorelli

Let me begin my report by saying thank you for allowing me to represent St. Katherine Mission at the 2010 Diocesan Assembly. As you can imagine, it was wonderfully inspiring and beautiful to be there with all the clergy and other lay people from the Diocese of the West. It was particularly special for me to be able to attend the Assembly at St. John of Damascus, where I grew up, and to be there with my entire family for my father's ordination to the diaconate.

I've outlined the highlights of the Assembly proceedings below. Particularly important is the section regarding the Strategic Plan. The Bishop and the Diocesan Council would like our constructive feedback as to how to make the Strategic Plan more specific and measureable. Please forward all suggestions to Father John who will pass them along to the appropriate people. If you have any questions regarding the Assembly proceedings, please feel free to ask me or Father John.

I. Address of His Grace Bishop BENJAMIN

- A. While there is no question about the OCA's Synod of Bishops handing back autocephaly to Russia, it realizes the importance and necessity of resolving the multi-jurisdictional Orthodox presence in North America and around the world.
- B. There has been much progress in resolving the disagreements between Russia and ROCOR and between ROCOR and the OCA.
- C. There will be an assembly in Alaska next August to nominate a new bishop.

- D. Next All American Council will be in Bellevue, WA.
 - 1. He would like to demonstrate what makes Orthodoxy in the west unique.
 - 2. A pilgrimage to Sitka is planned at the conclusion of the event.

II. Presentation of Archpriest John Erickson regarding the preparation for a Holy Synod of all Orthodox Churches planned for 2013.

- A. Resolve "canonical irregularities" in the situations of local Orthodox Churches in "the diaspora."
 - 1. Define "autocephaly" and "autonomous"
- B. Episcopal Assemblies of all local, canonical hierarchs have been established to coordinate these efforts.
 - 1. The North American Episcopal Assembly, including members of the OCA Holy Synod, met in May of this year to begin their discussions.
 - 2. The OCA is the only autocephalous Church in North America, a place where other Orthodox jurisdictions have also established a presence.
 - a) If the goal is to create a single, universally recognized autocephalous Church in North America, all jurisdictions will have to agree on how to resolve this anomaly.
 - b) As suggested by Fr. Erickson, the best case scenario is that all parent churches grant their churches in diaspora in North America autocephaly so that these autocephalous churches can reconcile and all come under one North American Church.
 - c) Some issues of difficulty in governing the parallel and united church:
 - (1) Theological and pastoral inconsistencies.
 - (2) Reception of converts.
 - (3) Marriage.
 - (4) Discipline of clergy.
 - (5) Church government and accounting – transparency, accountability, due process, impartial judgment, etc.
 - (6) Selection of bishops.
- C. To guide our Church on this issue, the Holy Synod has adopted the following statement:
 - 1. "The Holy Synod of Bishops celebrates and affirms the autocephaly of the OCA, given by the Russian Orthodox Church 40 years ago. By the grace of God, this great gift resulted from the long process of reconciliation between the Metropolia and the Moscow Patriarchate, whose relations had tragically gone astray, and still stand at the heart of our ecclesial life and serves as the basis for understanding ourselves.

"The recent convocation of the Episcopal Assembly has challenged us to enter more fully into the pan-Orthodox process in North America. As such we have reflected on how we understand our life and work and how they can become a means for greater and deeper interrelationship with other Orthodox Churches as we move toward an authentic unity through the process of the Episcopal Assemblies.

"At this point in the process of our reflection, we can state these following principles:

- a) We understand ourselves to be an indigenous, multi-ethnic, missionary Church, laboring to bring Orthodoxy to all Americans.
- b) We affirm that we historically derive from the Russian Orthodox Church as a historical reality. We have humbly received and faithfully maintain the inheritance of the Russian Mission of 1794, the Diocese of Sitka 1843; the Diocese of San Francisco 1870, and its relocation to New York in 1907, and the Autocephaly of 1970.
- c) As directed by the Tomos, we live as other self-governing Churches do: electing our own bishops and Primate, without confirmation by any other Synod, maintaining inter-Church relationships with all other Churches; and consecrating our own chrism.
- d) As envisioned in the Tomos, we believe that the autocephaly given to us will be fully realized when the promise of Orthodox unity in North America is fulfilled, and the OCA together with all the Orthodox faithful in North America become a united Autocephalous Church of America, recognized by all other Orthodox Churches. We commit ourselves to work within the Episcopal Assembly in order to realize the goal of unity."

III. Strategic Plan (An overview is provided here; the full 20 page Draft can be found on the DOW website)

- A. Why is the Church doing this? The SIC (Special Investigating Committee) recommended that the OCA develop a Strategic Plan ...
 - 1. to address the organizational problems it identified
 - 2. to help the Church heal and focus on its future
- B. The Holy Synod and the Metropolitan Council established a Strategic Planning Committee to draft a plan with input from The Holy Synod, the Metropolitan Council and the Dioceses, Parishes and Institutions of the Church
- C. How are they doing the planning?
 - 1. Define who we are and where we are going;
 - 2. Design goals, strategies, and actions to get there;
 - 3. Create the underlying culture and leadership;
 - 4. Build structure and processes
- D. What's in the Draft Strategic Plan?
 - 1. Analysis:
 - a) *We are facing significant challenges:*
 - (1) we are surrounded by a culture of "nominal religiousness;
 - (2) our membership is declining;
 - (3) trust lost through recent "troubles/scandals";
 - (4) we have lost the zeal and sense of direction which followed autocephaly in 1970.
 - b) We have significant opportunities.
 - (1) A new Metropolitan and several new hierarchs;
 - (2) a pent-up desire for visionary leadership in fulfilling our calling to Christ;
 - (3) historic steps toward Orthodox unity in North America;
 - (4) a society around us that is very much looking for spiritual answers to life's difficult challenges.

2. Core Elements:
 - a) Who we are:
 - (1) The OCA is a territorial manifestation of the One, Holy Catholic, and Apostolic Church established by Jesus Christ and transmitted through Holy Tradition;
 - (a) committed to bringing the Good News to all the people of North America since 1794;
 - (b) doing so in a conciliar Church that includes bishops, priests, deacons, and laity working together in love.
 - b) Where we are going:
 - (1) Our focus is on:
 - (a) internal spiritual renewal and growth,
 - (b) reaching out in love to the needy around us,
 - (c) actively cooperating in the formation of a fully united, autocephalous Orthodox Church in North America.
3. Goals and Strategies
 - a) Goal: Witnessing to the Kingdom
 - (1) In the local community,
 - (a) Strategies
 - (i) Rededicate ourselves to the Gospel Vision
 - (ii) Revitalize our parish sacramental, liturgical, and devotional life
 - (iii) Reenergize the bond between hierarchy, clergy, and laity
 - (iv) Care for and invest in our young people
 - (b) Possible Actions
 - (i) Personally rededicate ourselves to Christ and the Church by the study of Scripture, by prayer and fasting, and by attendance at services
 - (ii) Re-energize the clergy through frequent clergy meeting and retreats and through continuing education programs
 - (iii) Develop parish and deanery-based Adult Education Programs in Scripture study and Christian ethics
 - (iv) Reach out to the marginalized of society
 - (2) In the Church,
 - (a) Strategies:
 - (i) Organize effective parish, diocesan, and territorial institutions
 - (ii) Establish personal working relationships with other Orthodox Churches
 - (iii) Participate in creating a united, autocephalous Church in North America
 - (b) Possible Actions
 - (i) Determine which ministries are critical to achieving our goals
 - (ii) Determine which are best conducted locally and which nationally

- (iii) Develop clear list of activities, funding, staffing, and outcomes for each ministry
 - (iv) Link ministries and their activities to Diocesan Council and Metropolitan Committee and activities
 - (3) In the world
 - (a) Strategies:
 - (i) Encounter and challenge contemporary culture and morals
 - (ii) Foster evangelization, outreach, and ministry at all Church levels
 - (iii) Develop and enrich appropriate alliances
 - (b) Possible Actions:
 - (i) Convene conferences of the best Orthodox and non-Orthodox thinkers on key contemporary issues
 - (ii) Develop appropriate educational tools: bibliography of Orthodox writings on the issue, seminary courses, media-based courses
 - (iii) Position papers by the Holy Synod, including pastoral ways to deal with these issues
- E. How can we participate in the development of the Strategic Plan?
1. The committee has reviewed and incorporated feedback from
 - a) the Holy Synod,
 - b) the Metropolitan Council,
 - c) the OCA Chancery and Departments,
 - d) individuals contacting the OCA website and public websites
 2. Now it's your turn!
 - a) We need your ...
 - (1) feedback on the Draft Strategic Plan;
 - (2) additional concerns, goals, and ideas;
 - (3) ideas for a Pilot Program:
 - (a) an activity the Diocese will plan, fund, staff, carry out, and monitor, which will be of value to the Diocese, to other Dioceses, and/or to the Territorial Church, such as:
 - (i) a Diocesan "Bank" to fund mission and parish capital improvements
 - (ii) a new priest mentoring program
 - (iii) an outreach program to homeless children
 - (iv) a pan-Orthodox retreat cycle
 - (v) an on-going Bible study course for the laity
- F. What happens next?
1. The Committee Will:
 - a) compile and integrate Diocesan input;
 - b) solicit and integrate input from Parishes and from individual parishioners:
 - (1) Diocesan delegates discuss with their parishes,
 - (2) all Plan materials will be on the OCA website,
 - (3) a special issue of TOC will be dedicated to the Draft Plan,
 - (4) printed materials & DVDs will be distributed to Parishes

- c) present a revised Plan to the Holy Synod and the Metropolitan Council for their review and input;
- d) distribute the Plan and study materials prior to the November 2011, 16th All American Council;
- e) present the Plan at the 16th AAC

G. Assembly Reaction

- 1. People were very disappointed with the Draft Strategic Plan's lack of specific, measureable goals
- 2. Specifically, people were dissatisfied that the Draft Strategic Plan did not address the original charter given to the committee
 - a) which was to create a Strategic Plan to address the shortcomings identified in the SIC report and fix them
 - b) The current Draft Strategic Plan speaks to parish life and local outreach, which (though good, but something we should be doing anyway as it is basically "doing the Gospel") doesn't answer the SIC charter.
- 3. Resolution unanimously approved by the Assembly:
 - a) "With all due respect to the SPC and its considerable efforts, we wish to state that we feel that the current plan very much misses the original intent and commission from the SIC. To this end, His Grace Bishop Benjamin will form an ad hoc committee to discuss the matter and it will consult with the Diocesan Council. The Diocese of the West will then submit its thoughts and recommendations to the SPC."

IV. Treasurer's Report

- A. Monthly DOW financial report (summary and detailed) on the DOW website
- B. Parish financial reports are due January 31, 2011
 - 1. Each parish will be provided with an income summary sheet to accompany the complete 2010 report
 - a) Mary is asking for more information just to collect data to look at how parish contributions would be different if we switch to a tithe model.
 - 2. Help for Parish treasurers:
 - a) Mary Caetta will come to parish
 - b) FAQ sheet on DOW webpage under "Help for Treasurers"
 - c) Possible workshop at the Mission Deanery Retreat
- C. Parish Tithe to fund Fair Share and Diocesan % Assessment
 - 1. Biblically based,
 - 2. Based on actual parish income rather than on headcount
 - a) DOW tithing model would include building funds, but not charity.

1 Parish and Local News, Notes, and Events

Catechetical Challenges (Our Catechumens can answer them. Can you?)

- 1) What are the four orders of the Divine Liturgy (and the saint associated with each) used in the Orthodox Church?
- 2) What is unique about the timing of the Divine Liturgy in relation to the daily order of services (Vespers, Compline, Matins, the Hours)?
- 3) What vision led Saint Katherine to seek cleansing of sin through holy baptism?

Calendar Highlights:

November 11: Orthodox Studies @ 7pm

November 13: Church School @ 5pm

November 18: Catechesis @ 7pm

November 20: Festal Vigil @ 6pm

November 21: Entry of the Theotokos – Baptism @ 8:30; Divine Liturgy @ 9:30am

November 23: Parish Council @ 4:30pm; Festal Vigil @ 7pm

November 24: Feast of Greatmartyr Katherine – Divine Liturgy @ 9am

November 25: Moleben of Thanksgiving @ 10am

November 27: Church School @5pm; Great Vespers @ 6pm

December 2: Catechesis @ 7pm

Dear parishioners,

We have embarked on a serious effort to acquire property for use as a holy place of worship for our parish, perhaps permanently and certainly for many years. We, as members of the parish, can contribute to this task in no better way than to fervently pray to our Lord Jesus Christ that He bestow his favor and guidance upon us, and to ask the Lady Theotokos and all the Saints to intercede for us that we may succeed in doing the will of God.

Fr. Mancantelli of Billings, Montana was kind enough to recommend this prayer rule. If possible, please add it to your daily rule of prayer and bring it to the attention of others who might be willing to support us in this manner. Regardless of the outcome of the property search, this prayer will help us all fulfill our primary mission of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in love to the world, beginning here on the East Side.

Glenn Rebne (Property Search Committee)

Prayer for Repentance and Church Growth

Please offer this prayer each morning at 10 AM (or as close to that hour as you can):

Lord Jesus Christ our God, Thou didst promise that when two or three are gathered together in Thy name, Thou Thyself wouldst be in their midst. We call out to Thee with one voice, one mind and one heart, asking for the communion of Thy Most Holy Spirit, a converted heart which burns with love for God and our neighbor, and the growth of our parish.

Give us the grace to help our parish grow to establish Thy peace and righteousness upon the earth. Show us when and how to speak to, to pray, and to love Thy lost sheep, and bring them into the safety of Thy fold. We ask this through the prayers of our Most Pure Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and the Holy Great-martyr Katherine, patroness and protector of our holy parish.

For Thou, O Christ our God, art worthy to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and blessing; and we praise Thee, together with Thy Father, Who is from everlasting, and Thy Most Holy, Good, and Life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Readings and Ramblings: Where we, the parishioners of St. Katherine Orthodox Church, “ramble” about what we’re reading, doing, and thinking about. **Please email submissions to Emily Lorelli – ekstorelli@gmail.com**.

A book review by Nancy Desmond

Defeating Sin: Overcoming Our Passions and Changing Forever by Fr. Joseph Huneycutt (Regina Orthodox Press, 2007).

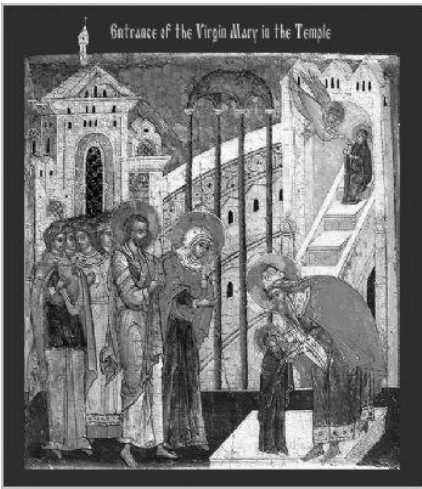
One of the many reviews in the opening pages of *Defeating Sin* states my own feelings about this book pretty succinctly: “*Defeating Sin*, like its author Fr. Joseph Huneycutt, is a fantastic combination of Holy Orthodoxy and wit in 21st century clothing. I recommend it highly for those who seek a primer on how to deepen their own repentance.” You may know Fr. Joseph. He writes the “Orthodoxie” blog, serves at a Houston Antiochian Orthodox church, and wrote two other books you may have seen or read: *One Flew Over the Onion Dome -- American Orthodox Converts, Retreads & Reverts* and *We Came, We Saw, We Converted*. He is a pretty witty and readable guy.

I wasn't looking for a book on spiritual warfare or confession when I spotted this in a King County library. Picked it up on a whim – just surprised at finding another Orthodox book in their hugely Protestant religion collection. I expected the author to take me to task for not being a better person, and to suggest various prayers and/or exercises to put me to shame and raise up some guilt - or use some other formula to remind me of my sinfulness (!!). (I confess a suspicious attitude toward authors who sincerely want to help me repent.) I've bought books by Bishop Kallistos and Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) on repentance and confession, and have looked at articles and books on the subject by other Orthodox authors as well. Most of what I've read has been somewhat useful but dry, dry, dry - if not obscure. However, this book was different.

Fr. Joseph wrote this for a wider Christian audience (including Catholics and Anglicans), to educate them in spiritual warfare using teachings of the Church fathers and contemporary theologians. Reading it helped me think and prepare more deeply for my last confession than I normally do. But it is more than a how-to-confess guide. Fr. Joseph uses a variety of quotes from the writings of early and later Church fathers to explore the whole realm of sin, passion, and how it happens, going back to the Garden of Eden. The approach he takes and the questions he raises were, to me at least, a bit unexpected. And some of the insights he provides from saints like John of Damascus, Ephraim the Syrian and Symeon the New Theologian are conveyed in such a meaningful and useful fashion that I wanted to run right out and find their books. (I managed to curb that passion though, and bought a copy of this book instead.)

Fr. Joseph originally developed this material in preparation for a Lenten retreat, and he has used it at a number of retreats and workshops since. He even includes some retreat exercises in appendices at the back of the book. I didn't derive much help from these, but they are a minor aspect of the book. The big plus is his thoughtful and extended discussion of the various sins. He examines and analyzes each type in a clear and understandable manner, yet uses traditional theological vocabulary. He does not secularize or psychologize at all. For example, while exploring anger and remembrance of wrongs, he cites St. John of Kronstadt on the devil – and makes it very alive and relevant. His explorations of pride and vainglory were really enlightening to me. In fact, I found his whole approach refreshing.

I've read excerpts from the writings of several Orthodox saints from previous centuries who had deep and holy wisdom to impart, but I've often had to struggle to comprehend their meaning and retain my focus. This book brings many such insights forward almost effortlessly. It reminds me that Orthodox spiritual wisdom truly *is* timeless, and sometimes all that's required to appreciate and participate in it is a fresh and intelligent presentation.



The Lives of the Saints -

November 21

The Entry of the Most Holy Mother of God into the Temple

According to Holy Tradition, the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple took place in the following manner. The parents of the Virgin Mary, Sts Joachim and Anna, praying for an end to their childlessness, vowed that if a child were born to them, they would dedicate it to the service of God.

When the Most Holy Virgin reached the age of three, the holy parents decided to fulfill their vow. They gathered together

their relatives and acquaintances, and dressed the All-Pure Virgin in Her finest clothes. Singing sacred songs and with lighted candles in their hands, virgins escorted Her to the Temple (Ps. 44/45:14-15). There the High Priest and several priests met the handmaiden of God. In the Temple, fifteen high steps led to the sanctuary, which only the priests and High Priest could enter. (Because they recited a Psalm on each step, Psalms 119/120-133/134 are called "Psalms of Ascent.") The child Mary, so it seemed, could not make it up this stairway. But just as they placed Her on the first step, strengthened by the power of God, She quickly went up the remaining steps and ascended to the highest one. Then the High Priest, through inspiration from above, led the Most Holy Virgin into the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest entered once a year to offer a purifying sacrifice of blood. Therefore, all those present in the Temple were astonished at this most unusual occurrence.

After entrusting their child to the Heavenly Father, Joachim and Anna returned home. The All-Holy Virgin remained in the quarters for virgins near the Temple. According to the testimony of Holy Scripture (Exodus 38; 1 Kings 1: 28; Luke 2: 37), and also the historian Josephus Flavius, there were many living quarters around the Temple, in which those who were dedicated to the service of God dwelt.

The earthly life of the Most Holy Theotokos from Her infancy until She was taken up to Heaven is shrouded in deep mystery. Her life at the Jerusalem Temple was also a secret. "If anyone were to ask me," said St Jerome, "how the Most Holy Virgin spent the time of Her youth, I would answer that that is known to God Himself and the Archangel Gabriel, Her constant guardian."

But there are accounts in Church Tradition, that during the All-Pure Virgin's stay at the Temple, She grew up in a community of pious virgins, diligently read the Holy Scripture, occupied Herself with handicrafts, prayed constantly, and grew in love for God. From ancient times, the Church has celebrated the Feast of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple. Indications that the Feast was observed in the first centuries of Christianity are found in the traditions of Palestinian Christians, which say that the holy Empress Helen (May 21) built a church in honor of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple.

St Gregory of Nyssa, in the fourth century, also mentions this Feast. In the eighth century Sts Germanus and Tarasius, Patriarchs of Constantinople, delivered sermons on the Feast of the Entry.

The Feast of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple foretells God's blessing for the human race, the preaching of salvation, the promise of the coming of Christ.



Wisdom of the Fathers

Discourse on the Feast of the Entry of our Most Pure Lady Theotokos into the Holy of Holies

by Saint Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica

If a tree is known by its fruit, and a good tree bears good fruit (Mt. 7:17; Luke 6:44), then is not the Mother of Goodness Itself, She who bore the Eternal Beauty, incomparably more excellent than every good, whether in this world or the world above? Therefore, the coeternal and identical Image of goodness, Preeternal, transcending all being, He Who is the preexisting and good Word of the Father, moved by His unutterable love for mankind and compassion for us, put on our image, that He might reclaim for Himself our nature which had been dragged down to uttermost Hades, so as to renew this corrupted nature and raise it to the heights of Heaven. For this purpose, He had to assume a flesh that was both new and ours, that He might refashion us from out of ourselves. Now He finds a Handmaiden perfectly suited to these needs, the supplier of Her own unsullied nature, the Ever-Virgin now hymned by us, and Whose miraculous Entrance into the Temple, into the Holy of Holies, we now celebrate. God predestined Her before the ages for the salvation and reclaiming of our kind. She was chosen, not just from the crowd, but from the ranks of the chosen of all ages, renowned for piety and understanding, and for their God-pleasing words and deeds.

In the beginning, there was one who rose up against us: the author of evil, the serpent, who dragged us into the abyss. Many reasons impelled him to rise up against us, and there are many ways by which he enslaved our nature: envy, rivalry, hatred, injustice, treachery, slyness, etc. In addition to all this, he also has within him the power of bringing death, which he himself engendered, being the first to fall away from true life.

The author of evil was jealous of Adam, when he saw him being led from earth to Heaven, from which he was justly cast down. Filled with envy, he pounced upon Adam with a terrible ferocity, and even wished to clothe him with the garb of death. Envy is not only the begetter of hatred, but also of murder, which this truly man-hating serpent brought about in us. For he wanted to be master over the earth-born for the ruin of that which was created in the image and likeness of God. Since he was not bold enough to make a face to face attack, he resorted to cunning and deceit. This truly terrible and malicious plotter pretended to be a friend and useful adviser by assuming the physical form of a serpent, and stealthily took their position. By his God-opposing advice, he instills in man his own death-bearing power, like a venomous poison.

If Adam had been sufficiently strong to keep the divine commandment, then he would have shown himself the vanquisher of his enemy, and withstood his deathly attack. But since he voluntarily gave in to sin, he was defeated and was made a

sinner. Since he is the root of our race, he has produced us as death-bearing shoots. So, it was necessary for us, if he were to fight back against his defeat and to claim victory, to rid himself of the death-bearing venomous poison in his soul and body, and to absorb life, eternal and indestructible life.

It was necessary for us to have a new root for our race, a new Adam, not just one Who would be sinless and invincible, but one Who also would be able to forgive sins and set free from punishment those subject to it. And not only would He have life in Himself, but also the capacity to restore to life, so that He could grant to those who cleave to Him and are related to Him by race both life and the forgiveness of their sins, restoring to life not only those who came after Him, but also those who already had died before Him. Therefore, St Paul, that great trumpet of the Holy Spirit, exclaims, "the first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45).

Except for God, there is no one who is without sin, or life-creating, or able to remit sin. Therefore, the new Adam must be not only Man, but also God. He is at the same time life, wisdom, truth, love, and mercy, and every other good thing, so that He might renew the old Adam and restore him to life through mercy, wisdom and righteousness. These are the opposites of the things which the author of evil used to bring about our aging and death.

As the slayer of mankind raised himself against us with envy and hatred, so the Source of life was lifted up [on the Cross] because of His immeasurable goodness and love for mankind. He intensely desired the salvation of His creature, i.e., that His creature would be restored by Himself. In contrast to this, the author of evil wanted to bring God's creature to ruin, and thereby put mankind under his own power, and tyrannically to afflict us. And just as he achieved the conquest and the fall of mankind by means of injustice and cunning, by deceit and his trickery, so has the Liberator brought about the defeat of the author of evil, and the restoration of His own creature with truth, justice and wisdom.

It was a deed of perfect justice that our nature, which was voluntarily enslaved and struck down, should again enter the struggle for victory and cast off its voluntary enslavement. Therefore, God deigned to receive our nature from us, hypostatically uniting with it in a marvelous way. But it was impossible to unite that Most High Nature, Whose purity is incomprehensible for human reason, to a sinful nature before it had been purified. Therefore, for the conception and birth of the Bestower of purity, a perfectly spotless and Most Pure Virgin was required.

Today we celebrate the memory of those things that contributed, if only once, to the Incarnation. He Who is God by nature, the Co-unoriginate and Coeternal Word and Son of the Transcendent Father, becomes the Son of Man, the Son of the Ever-Virgin. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8), immutable in His divinity and blameless in His humanity, He alone, as the Prophet Isaiah prophesied, "practiced no iniquity, nor deceit with His lips" (Is. 53: 9). He alone was not brought forth in iniquity, nor was He conceived in sin, in contrast to what the Prophet David says concerning himself and every other man (Ps. 50/51: 5). Even in what He assumes, He is perfectly pure and has no need to be cleansed Himself. But for our sake, He accepted purification, suffering, death and resurrection, that He might transmit them to us.

God is born of the spotless and Holy Virgin, or better to say, of the Most Pure and All-Holy Virgin. She is above every fleshly defilement, and even above every impure thought. Her conceiving resulted not from fleshly lust, but by the overshadowing of the Most Holy Spirit. Such desire being utterly alien to Her, it is through prayer and spiritual readiness that She declared to the angel: "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord; be it unto Me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38), and that She conceived and gave birth. So, in order to render the Virgin worthy of this sublime purpose, God marked this ever-virgin Daughter now praised by us, from before the ages, and from eternity, choosing Her from out of His elect.

Turn your attention then, to where this choice began. From the sons of Adam God chose the wondrous Seth, who showed himself a living heaven through his becoming behavior, and through the beauty of his virtues. That is why he was chosen, and from whom the Virgin would blossom as the divinely fitting chariot of God. She was needed to give birth and to summon the earth-born to heavenly sonship. For this reason also all the lineage of Seth were called "sons of God," because from this lineage a son of man would be born the Son of God. The name Seth signifies a rising or resurrection, or more specifically, it signifies the Lord, Who promises and gives immortal life to all who believe in Him.

And how precisely exact is this parallel! Seth was born of Eve, as she herself said, in place of Abel, whom Cain killed through jealousy (Gen. 4:25); and Christ, the Son of the Virgin, was born for us in place of Adam, whom the author of evil also killed through jealousy. But Seth did not resurrect Abel, since he was only a type of the resurrection. But our Lord Jesus Christ resurrected Adam, since He is the very Life and the Resurrection of the earth-born, for whose sake the descendents of Seth are granted divine adoption through hope, and are called the children of God. It was because of this hope that they were called sons of God, as is evident from the one who was first called so, the successor in the choice. This was Enos, the son of Seth, who as Moses wrote, first hoped to call on the Name of the Lord (Gen. 4:26).

In this manner, the choice of the future Mother of God, beginning with the very sons of Adam and proceeding through all the generations of time, through the Providence of God, passes to the Prophet-king David and the successors of his kingdom and lineage. When the chosen time had come, then from the house and posterity of David, Joachim and Anna are chosen by God. Though they were childless, they were by their virtuous life and good disposition the finest of all those descended from the line of David. And when in prayer they besought God to deliver them from their childlessness, and promised to dedicate their child to God from its infancy. By God Himself, the Mother of God was proclaimed and given to them as a child, so that from such virtuous parents the all-virtuous child would be raised. So in this manner, chastity joined with prayer came to fruition by producing the Mother of virginity, giving birth in the flesh to Him Who was born of God the Father before the ages.

Now, when Righteous Joachim and Anna saw that they had been granted their wish, and that the divine promise to them was realized in fact, then they on their part, as true lovers of God, hastened to fulfill their vow given to God as soon as the child had been weaned from milk. They have now led this truly sanctified child of God, now the Mother of God, this Virgin into the Temple of God. And She, being filled with Divine gifts even at such a tender age, ... She, rather than others, determined what was being done over Her. In Her manner She showed that She was not so much presented into the Temple, but that She Herself entered into the

service of God of her own accord, as if she had wings, striving towards this sacred and divine love. She considered it desirable and fitting that she should enter into the Temple and dwell in the Holy of Holies.

Therefore, the High Priest, seeing that this child, more than anyone else, had divine grace within Her, wished to set Her within the Holy of Holies. He convinced everyone present to welcome this, since God had advanced it and approved it. Through His angel, God assisted the Virgin and sent Her mystical food, with which She was strengthened in nature, while in body She was brought to maturity and was made purer and more exalted than the angels, having the Heavenly spirits as servants. She was led into the Holy of Holies not just once, but was accepted by God to dwell there with Him during Her youth, so that through Her, the Heavenly Abodes might be opened and given for an eternal habitation to those who believe in Her miraculous birthgiving.

So it is, and this is why She, from the beginning of time, was chosen from among the chosen. She Who is manifest as the Holy of Holies, Who has a body even purer than the spirits purified by virtue, is capable of receiving ... the Hypostatic Word of the Unoriginate Father. Today the Ever-Virgin Mary, like a Treasure of God, is stored in the Holy of Holies, so that in due time, (as it later came to pass) She would serve for the enrichment of, and an ornament for, all the world. Therefore, Christ God also glorifies His Mother, both before, and also after His birth.

We who understand the salvation begun for our sake through the Most Holy Virgin, give Her thanks and praise according to our ability. And truly, if the grateful woman (of whom the Gospel tells us), after hearing the saving words of the Lord, blessed and thanked His Mother, raising her voice above the din of the crowd and saying to Christ, "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the paps Thou hast sucked" (Luke 11:27), then we who have the words of eternal life written out for us, and not only the words, but also the miracles and the Passion, and the raising of our nature from death, and its ascent from earth to Heaven, and the promise of immortal life and unfailing salvation, then how shall we not unceasingly hymn and bless the Mother of the Author of our Salvation and the Giver of Life, celebrating Her conception and birth, and now Her Entry into the Holy of Holies?

Now, brethren, let us remove ourselves from earthly to celestial things. Let us change our path from the flesh to the spirit. Let us change our desire from temporal things to those that endure. Let us scorn fleshly delights, which serve as allurements for the soul and soon pass away. Let us desire spiritual gifts, which remain undiminished. Let us turn our reason and our attention from earthly concerns and raise them to the inaccessible places of Heaven, to the Holy of Holies, where the Mother of God now resides.

Therefore, in such manner our songs and prayers to Her will gain entry, and thus through her mediation, we shall be heirs of the everlasting blessings to come, through the grace and love for mankind of Him Who was born of Her for our sake, our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory, honor and worship, together with His Unoriginate Father and His Coeternal and Life-Creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.



The Orthodox Faith

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

The Symbol of Faith: Eternal Life

I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world [ages] to come.

The Orthodox Church does not believe merely in the immortality of the soul, and in the goodness and ultimate salvation of only spiritual reality. Following the Scriptures, Orthodox Christians believe in the goodness of the human body and of all material and physical creation. Thus, in its faith in resurrection and eternal life, the Orthodox Church looks not to some "other world" for salvation, but to this very world so loved by God, resurrected and glorified by Him, filled with His own divine presence.

At the end of the ages God will reveal His presence and will fill all creation with Himself. For those who love Him it will be paradise. For those who hate Him it will be hell. And all physical creation, together with the righteous, will rejoice and be glad in His coming.

The wilderness and the solitary places will be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom in abundance (Is 35:1).

For behold I create new heavens and a new earth says the Lord, and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create, for behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing and her people a joy (Is 65:17-18).

The visions of the prophets and those of the Christian apostles about things to come are one and the same:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God himself will be with them; He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:1-5).

When the Kingdom of God fills all creation, all things will be made new. This world will again be that paradise for which it was originally created. This is the Orthodox doctrine of the final fate of man and his universe.

It is sometimes argued, however, that this world will be totally destroyed and that God will create everything new "out of nothing" by the act of a second creation. Those who hold this opinion appeal to such texts as that found in the second letter of Saint Peter:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away ... and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up (2 Pet 3:10).

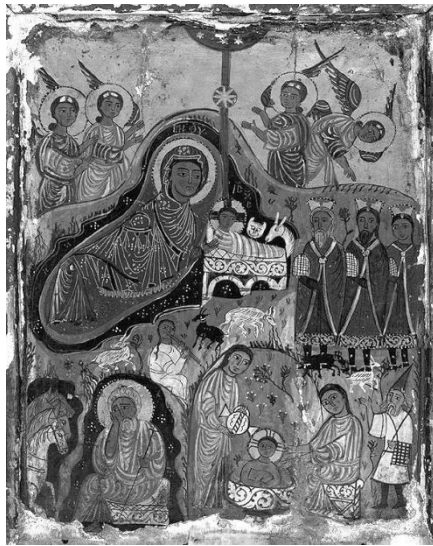
Because the Bible never speaks about a "second creation" and because it continually and consistently witnesses that God loves the world which He has made and does everything that He can to save it, the Orthodox Tradition never interprets such scriptural texts as teaching the actual annihilation of creation by

God. It understands such texts as speaking metaphorically of the great catastrophe which creation must endure, including even the righteous, in order for it to be cleansed, purified, made perfect, and saved. It teaches as well that there is an "eternal fire" for the ungodly, an eternal condition of their being destroyed. But in any case the "trial by fire" which "destroys the ungodly" is in no way understood by the Orthodox in the sense that creation is doomed to total destruction, despised by the loving Lord who created it and called it "very good" (Gen 1:31; also 1 Cor 3:13-15; Heb 12:25-29; Is 66; Rev 20-22).

♪ Hymnography: November

The Nativity Canon of St. Cosmas

By Megan Martha



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 sing in gladness, O people,
for Christ has been glorified.

Among the many icons in the choir corner is one of Cosmas the Hymnographer. He holds a scroll reading "Christ is born, glorify Him!" The fact that the iconographer chose this quotation has always amused me. It is appropriate in a way - "Christ is born, glorify Him!" is the first line of the Nativity Canon, and Cosmas *did* compose that canon. However, he did *not* compose that particular line. Cosmas was very well-read, and a special fan of Gregory the Theologian. The first four lines of the Nativity Canon are, not coincidentally, also the first four lines of Gregory's Nativity Homily, given in A. D. 380.

Cosmas was the adopted brother of John of Damascus, another famous hymnographer. As I explained to one of the altos a few weeks ago, "John wrote half of the festal canons, Cosmas wrote the other half." This is a slight exaggeration, but it gets the point across. They were both highly educated monastics, prolific composers, and their contributions to the Festal Menaion are still very much in use today. John's most famous composition is the Paschal Canon. Cosmas, well, here are a few more quotations that the iconographer could have used:

"Though I have transgressed more than the harlot, O good one,..." from Holy Wednesday Matins.

"Come, and let us all sing the praises of Him Who was crucified for us..." from Holy Friday Matins.

"More honorable than the cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim..." - also from Holy Friday Matins originally, but now sung at almost every service.

"Do not lament me, O Mother..." from the Canon of Holy Saturday.

Cosmas also wrote canons for the feasts of Theophany, the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple, Palm Sunday, Pentecost, and the Elevation of the Cross.

November Troparia and Kontakia

November 7: Thirty-three Martyrs of Melitene

Troparion - Tone 4

Your thirty-three holy martyrs, O Lord,
through their sufferings have received incorruptible crowns from You, our God.
For having Your strength, they laid low their adversaries,
and shattered the powerless boldness of demons.
Through their intercessions, save our souls!

Kontakion - Tone 2

The radiant choir of martyrs, the light-bearing company,
spiritually descends to us, enlightening the Church with brilliant rays.
Therefore as we celebrate their honored memory,
we ask You, our Savior:
through their prayers deliver us from misfortunes
so that we may sing to You: "Alleluia."

November 14: Holy, All-praised Apostle Philip

Troparion - Tone 3

Holy Apostle Philip,
entreat the merciful God
to grant our souls forgiveness of transgressions.

Kontakion - Tone 8

Your disciple, friend and imitator of Your passion,
the God-preaching Philip, proclaimed You to the universe!
By his prayers deliver Your Church from her enemies;
through the Theotokos protect every city, most merciful Christ!

November 21: The Entry of the Most Holy Mother of God into the Temple

Troparion - Tone 4

Today with the most revered of all cities
we fittingly celebrate your honored translation to heaven,
Father of Fathers, wise Proclus.

Kontakion - Tone 4

The most pure Temple of the Savior;
the precious Chamber and Virgin;
the sacred Treasure of the glory of God,
is presented today to the house of the Lord.
She brings with her the grace of the Spirit,
therefore, the angels of God praise her:
"Truly this woman is the abode of heaven."

November 28: Monk-martyr and Confessor Stephen the New

Troparion - Tone 4

Trained in asceticism on the mountain,
with the weapon of the Cross you destroyed the spiritual assaults of the hostile
powers, all-blessed one;
Again you bravely prepared for combat
and slew Copronymus with the sword of faith;
for both struggles you have been crowned by God, monk-martyr Stephen of
eternal memory.

Kontakion - Tone 8

Lovers of the feasts, from the heart with hymns let us praise in faith godlike Stephen
the lover of the Trinity,
for he honored the fair icon icon of the Master and of His Mother.
Now let us rejoice together and cry out to him with love:
"Rejoice, ever glorious Father."

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
Allan Simeon
Deborah Maria
James Demetrius
Patty Joanna
Juliana
Nina
Emily and CTBB
Miruna and CTBB
Anne
Bistra
Sarah
Allan
Antonio
Aida
Isaac
Amy

Departed

Catechetical Challenge Answers:

- 1) They are the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom (served most Sundays and feast days during the year), Saint Basil the Great (served on Sundays of Lent, with Vespers on fasting days, and on the feast of Basil), Saint Gregory of Rome (known as the Presanctified Liturgy and served on weekdays of Lent), and Saint James (served in some parishes on the feast of James, but rarely otherwise). To this list could be added a fifth order, known as the "western rite" (and associated with Saint Tikhon of Moscow) which a small number of parishes within the Antiochian Archdiocese of America use.
- 2) Each of the daily services has a set time when it is served: Vespers at sunset; Matins prior to the sunrise; Third Hour at 9:00 am; etc. The Divine Liturgy manifests the eternal kingdom of heaven and is in one sense "beyond time." Therefore it is not anchored in one established time of the day. In fact, it is served at a variety of hours depending upon the season and feast in question.
- 3) One in which Christ, held in the arms of his most-pure mother, could not bear to look upon the physically beautiful Katherine because of her spiritual ugliness and turned his face away.

