

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

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*Glory be to Jesus Christ!*

*Glory be Forever!*



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14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-Parable of the Wedding Garment

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There are times when we want to make sure that we are dressed appropriately for what we are doing. Some have to wear uniforms to work or school each day and will be disciplined if their clothing does not meet the standard. Most people develop a sense of what to wear for everything from athletic events to weddings and funerals. How we dress says some-

thing about our attitude toward what is going on and toward others, especially our host, our employer, or those we are gathering to honor or support.

If that is true for us today, it was all the more so for guests at a wedding in the first century, especially the wedding of the son of a king. It was the custom in those days for the host to supply each guest with a wedding garment, clothing suitable for the occasion. Consequently, no one in attendance could have a good excuse for not being dressed in a way that honored the host, the bride and groom, and marriage itself as a sign of God's blessings from generation to generation.

It is understandable, then, that the king in the parable threw out the guest who was not wearing a wedding garment. For by neglecting to put on the  
*(continued p.3)*

+ 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost +

++Birth of the Holy Theotokos++

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 1:21- 2:4

Gospel: Matthew 22: 1-14

St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and teachings of the Church.

We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

We are dedicated to living out Christ's commandment to, *Lorve the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

## ***The Nativity of the Theotokos by Metropolitan Sotirios of Pisidia***

*"Your birth, Oh Theotokos, brought joy to the whole world, for from you dawned the sun of righteousness, Christ our God. Freeing us from the curse, He gave us His blessings. Abolishing death, He granted us eternal life."* (the Dismissal hymn) of the Nativity of the Theotokos

The birth of the ever virgin and Mother of God, Mary, which is celebrated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, is the source of much spiritual joy. The woman born, who will give birth "in flesh" to

the pre-eternal God-the-Word, the Creator and Savior of the world, who abolished death so that we may have eternal life. This joyous feast is not only shared with humanity, but the entire universe, which includes the invisible realm of angels.

If the whole world was jubilant at the birth of the "most gracious" Mary, then we can imagine how her mother, Anna, must have felt, especially with her physical infertility overcome. Additionally, there is her father, Joa-

chim, who saw the fulfillment of his fervent prayers to God by becoming a father, even at an old age. All of this was certainly a miracle! As we know from the Old Testament, God has also blessed other women in this way.

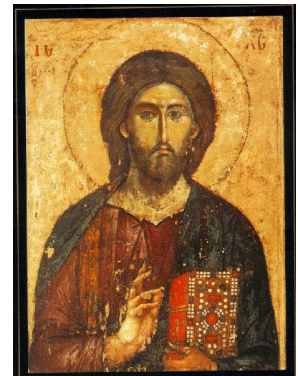
We can remember Sara, the wife of the patriarch Abraham; Rebecca, the wife of Isaac; Anna, the mother of the Prophet Samuel. However, the case of Anna and Joachim is different in one key respect. While the above mentioned mothers  
*(continued on p.2)*

We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our

pastor, please call Fr. Matthew at 607-280-1586

Glory be to Jesus Christ.  
Glory be Forever.





As the deliverer  
of captives  
and defender  
of the poor,  
healer of the infirm  
and champion of kings,  
victorious great  
martyr George  
intercede with Christ  
our God that our souls  
may be saved.

**News and Notes**

We welcome all who are with us today and invite you to join us at our coffee social following the Divine Liturgy.

**Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)**

Please keep the following in your prayers: Mother Onufria, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, Stan, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Matthew, Michael, Tom, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

**From St. John Kronstadt**

If you allow yourself to pray carelessly, and not from your heart, you will not fall asleep (if you pray at night) until you have wiped out by tears your sin before God. This is not so with everybody, however, but only with the more perfect. Take care, then, not to put your flesh before God, and disdain, for His sake, bodily repose.

If you have made a rule to read so many prayers (whether they be long or short,

fulfil the reading of all of them well), read the prayers with all conscientiousness, and do not do God's work with your heart divided in two, so that only one half belongs to Him and the remaining half to your own flesh. For every insincere prayer removes your heart from God and sets it in opposition to you yourself, whilst every earnest prayer draws your heart nearer to God and makes it perpetually godly

Thus, be assured, if you hurry over your prayers, to give rest to your body, you will lose both spiritual and bodily rest. Oh! by what labor, sweat, and tears is the approach of our heart to God gained! Is it possible that we should again make our very prayers (when careless) the means of our estrangement from God, and that God should not be jealous of this?

For He pities us and our former labors, and He desires that we should again un-faithfully turn to Him with our whole hearts. He wishes that we should always belong to Him for it is a duty you owe to God. Having put your hand to the plough, do not look back

**The Nativity of the Holy Theotokos, cont'd from p.1**

gave birth to children who were virtuous and holy, Anna and Joachim's child was to become the holy Mother of God!

Our Holy Mother, as we heard, was born after the persistent and heartfelt prayers of the righteous Ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna. However, in order for this blessing to come, they had to have an unshakable faith and perseverance beyond measure. They cultivated a hope that did not disappoint, as they prayed with confidence that God would answer their prayers. We also need to consider that this childlessness was not for a short time, but as the Tradition teaches it was after fifty years of sterility that Anna gave birth to the Theotokos. The way of the holy Ancestors must become an example for us. Couples unable to bear children should not give up their hope in God, since *"the things which are impossible with men are possible with God"* (Luke 18:27).

Miracles of this kind, which we see happening even in our own days, are

not a rarity. But what is needed in the face of such struggles, is to look to the Theotokos' parents for inspiration. As human beings with weaknesses, we become tired and grumble



during our own struggle. We complain that our prayers are not heard, and become impatient. In sorrow, our zeal fades, and with it the desire to continue the fight leaves us.

Let us not forget the holy Ancestors, Joachim and Anna! Did they stop calling upon God because He did not immediately respond to their prayers? Did they cease asking, knocking

and hoping? Truly, theirs was an unwavering patience and resolve over many years!

In the end, their faith was rewarded. In times of suffering, what is needed is faith in God's promises and His will, to come to Him with absolute obedience and hope, so that our prayer will not diminish (see Luke 18:1). God knows when and how it is beneficial for us to receive His priceless and indescribable gift; His divine Grace!

Let us also act as the righteous Joachim and Anna did, and be serene in the face of temptations or hardship, which God allows for our own spiritual benefit and progress. May the Lord, through the intercessions of the Most Holy Theotokos, heal our troubled hearts, which lack faith, hope, patience, trust and spiritual fruit. May He also replenish our souls with His divine and all-powerful Grace, which heals all that is sick and provides what may be lacking, so that humanity is renewed. Amen.

## Homily on the Wedding Garment, (cont'd from p.1)

garment he had been given, he was refusing to show respect for the celebration, much less to take part in it in a worthy manner. Though we often overlook them, there are many times in the Bible when putting on particular kinds of clothing manifests our relationship with the Lord. Adam and Eve stripped themselves naked of the divine glory by turning away from God.

As we chant in preparation for Theophany, Christ appeared in the waters of the Jordan in order to clothe the naked Adam with "the first robe," to restore fallen humanity and the entire creation as participants in His divine glory. Remember what St. Paul said of baptism, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27) In the Orthodox baptismal service, the priest puts a white garment on the newly baptized person immediately after he or she comes out of the water with the words "the servant of God is clothed with righteousness." Then the chanter sings "Grant to me the robe of light, O Most Merciful Christ our God, Who clothes Yourself with light as with a garment."

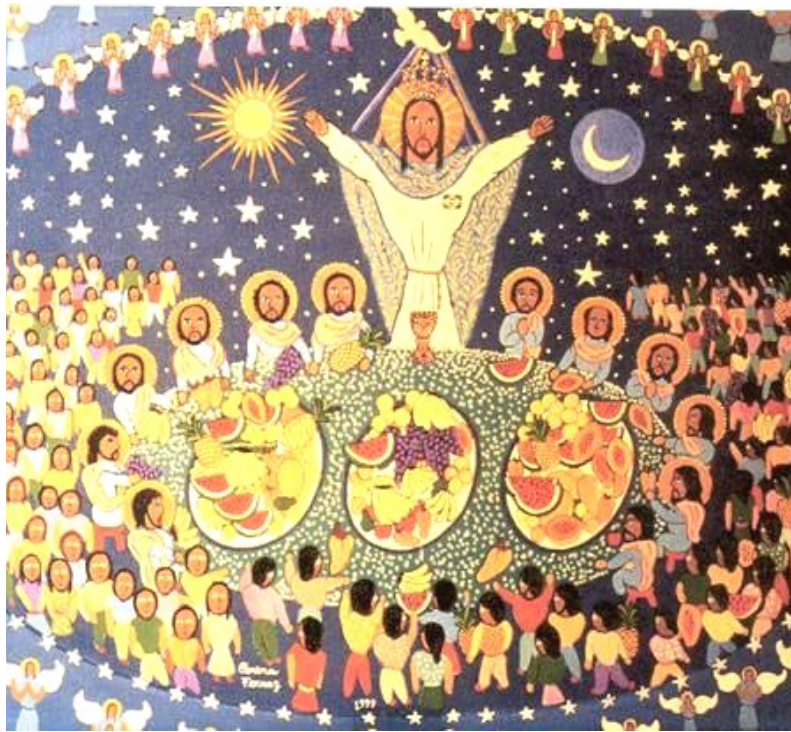
The connection to today's parable is clear. The wedding garment is our baptismal garment, our putting on Christ, our participation in the healing and blessing of humanity that He has brought to the world. The Savior so often used a wedding feast as a sign of the Kingdom of God. The Book of Revelation presents the marriage banquet of the Lamb as the fulfillment of all things. Christ is the Groom and the Church is His Bride. In every Divine Liturgy, we enter mystically into that heavenly celebration, that eternal wedding banquet that is the salvation of the world.

The question for each of us, then, is whether we are living in a way that is appropriate to our exalted identity as participants in this great banquet. Do we act, think, speak, and believe in ways that fit with the beautiful garments Christ has given us? Of course, He Himself is our garment for we have put Him on in baptism. Through the God-Man, we become true participants in the divine nature, nourished by His own Body and Blood.

We are not only guests at the wedding, but the ones being united to the Lord in a deep, binding covenant that changes our very identity. As always, God's salvation is personal and organic, fulfilling His gracious intentions

ever since He made us male and female in His image and likeness.

The man in the parable had much less responsibility than we do. He had simply been part of the crowd, the good and bad, invited to a wedding on a given day. He would have worn the wedding garment for a short period of time, and doing so would have given him no obligations once the celebration was over. In contrast, our baptismal garment gives us a profound responsibility throughout our lives to live in a way that shines with the divine glory, that radiates the light of Christ to a world so filled with darkness, death, and despair. By putting on Christ, we accept a calling to do and say only those things that reflect His holiness, that flow from His righteousness and love. It is not enough simply to be baptized, for we must embrace the new life the Lord has given us and do all that we can to grow up spiritually into "the full stature of Christ." (Eph. 4:13)



There are many kinds of uniforms that demand something of those who wear them. For example, soldiers and officers of public safety do not represent only themselves, especially when they wear their uniforms. They must follow codes of behavior that give them legal duties that the rest of us do not have to the point laying down their lives. When others run away from danger, they must run right into the thick of it.

Athletes and musicians often wear uniforms, which identify them as people who accept a certain discipline and take on a new identity. Those who do not respect what their uniform stands for do not respect what their organization is about. In any demanding group endeavor worth its salt, people like that must eventually get with the program or find something else to do with their time and energy.

There is a parallel truth in the Christian life. We are members of the Body of Christ and must all work together for our collective health and well-being. A wedding celebration is a social event, and so is the Divine Liturgy. We do not commune with the Lord as isolated individuals, but as living members of Him and one another. We show our faithfulness not simply by what we do for a couple of hours on Sunday morning, but most profoundly by whether we live as those who have put

*(continued p.4, column 2)*

What a mercy of God on us! What a mercy of God is extended to us! In order for every day of ours to be blessed by God and our every minute to be blessed by God, the Lord gave His Son. He gave Him so that He would live this life and whiten our lives; so that He would walk this path, and our path would be made straight by Him for the good.

The Lord took all our sins to cleanse us so that what David asked for would happen: *Sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow. Cleansing, whitening... The bones that be humbled will rejoice .*

*Make me to hear joy and gladness*—so that the bones would rejoice. The bones that get old, and sometimes joints hurt, and sometimes there is no strength to rise—but they still rejoice in the Lord! Because they will eventually receive eternal youth and forgiveness when the Lord raises us all from the dead, grants us the enjoyment of eternal life and reign with Him in His Glory, where His might, His power and His strength lie.

And thus, brothers and sisters, entering this new day, this week, we will take a brush and paint the day in bright colors and adorn it. What color will we paint it? Will it be the color of prayer so that the day should begin with prayer and go on with the thread a prayer, with prayer passing through the whole day? Or will there be laziness, apathy, depression and despondency? Or bad and impious words and thoughts?

Or we will take up the color of humility and patience before the Lord and paint with it: “O Lord, I endure in Thy holy Name! In Thy holy joy, O Lord, do I want to walk! I don’t want to despair—I put My trust in Thee.” Let’s take the color of trust and hope in God, and let this color be bright!

Let our day, our grains of sand—twenty-four hours a day— all be painted in virtue, in the joy of God, in patience, in love, in mercy, in meekness. Let’s not refuse to do good deeds and hasten to do good. Let virtue restrain our tongues from judging and from untruth. When asked: “How should I live?”, St. Ambrose of Optina used to say: “Don’t grieve!” That is, what color should I take? Joy! “Don’t condemn anyone. Don’t annoy anyone.” We know how sometimes we can say, “You’ll get exactly the same you’ve done to me!” Tit

for a tat. We can do something like this, we can bite or sting in response.

But we must avoid judging. That is the gate to sorrow. St. Ambrose would conclude, “And respect everyone!” It is necessary to be at peace with everyone. The Apostle Paul exhorted us, *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men* (Rom. 12:18), and you will feel good. And why do we need enemies? You are compelled to fight with your enemies! And if you start fighting—where is peace? Where is happiness? O Lord, give us this opportunity: to not grieve, to not condemn

anyone, to not annoy anyone, and to respect everyone! To paint our every day in the colors of Christian virtues—beautiful and bright. May all our days be cheerful, joyful, spiritual, godly, and filled with every virtue and truth. May the Lord strengthen and bless you, instructing you in every good deed, in every truth, love and mercy!

*(Homily cont’d from p.3)*

on Christ every day of the week, when we are not at Church and are wearing other uniforms or performing other tasks not usually associated with religion. No matter where we are, how we are dressed, or what we are doing, we still wear the robe of light given us by our Savior. We are never off-duty or out of season as followers of Jesus Christ, and we must live accordingly. If we do not intentionally struggle to do so, we disgrace our high calling and

risk excluding ourselves from the Kingdom.

At the end of the day, we must extend the holy joy of the Divine Liturgy into everyday life. That means making our time at work, school, home, and elsewhere an extension of the heavenly banquet, an offering of ourselves and world to the One Who is the source of life itself and all our other blessings. It means that we must clothe not only one small sliver of ourselves with Christ, but every aspect of our life in the world.

We must not go around half naked spiritually or pretend that holiness concerns only one day of the week. The Second Adam has come to restore the entire creation, turning the water of our most mundane tasks into the wine of His glory. He wants us to celebrate and participate in the heavenly banquet every day of our lives. We will be able to do so only if we act as those who worthily wear a robe of light, whose true uniform is the baptismal gown, the wedding garment of heaven.

