

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



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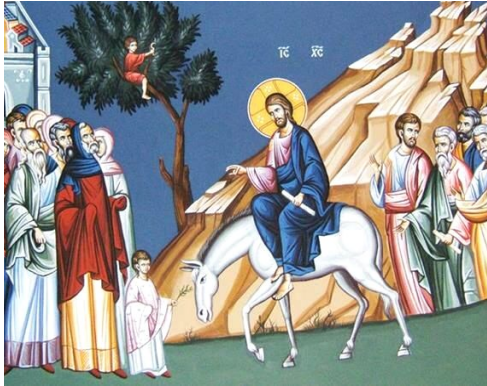
Glory be to Jesus Christ!

Glory be Forever!

Volume 13 Issue 611

6th Sunday of Great Lent-Palm Sunday

March 24, 2024



Human beings are blessed with the ability to focus on what is most important. So much of what we do at work or school, for example, requires that we tune out distractions and give our minds to the task before us.

St. Paul reminds us that we especially need to do so in the Christian life by giving our minds to what is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, virtuous, and praise worthy. Palm Sunday is a time

that we all need this reminder as we enter into the mystery of our salvation as Jesus Christ journeys to His cross, descent into Hades, and glorious resurrection.

Nothing about this week comes naturally or easily to us. We understand wanting our enemies to suffer, but not freely suffering for their sake. We understand religious people judging others with self-righteousness, but not loving sinners to the point of dying on their behalf. We understand wanting our side to win, but not that true victory comes by laying aside all that looks like power in this world. We think that we understand a remote God in the heavens who does not understand how hard life is down here, not One who hangs on a cross, occupies a tomb, and descends to Hades.

There are times when what has been
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++ 6th Sunday of Great Lent ++

+ Forefeast of the Annunciation +

Epistle: Philippians: 4: 4-9

Gospel: John 12:1-18

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 Christ's commandment, *Love 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 Feast of the Annunciation (March 25)

The Feast of the Annunciation is one of the earliest Christian feasts, and was already being celebrated in the fourth century. There is a painting of the Annunciation in the catacomb of Priscilla in Rome dating from the second century. The Council of Toledo in 656 mentions the Feast, and the Council in Trullo in 692 says that the Annunciation was celebrated during Great Lent.

The Greek and Slavonic names for the Feast may be translated as "good tidings." This, of course,

refers to the Incarnation of the Son of God and the salvation He brings. The background of the Annunciation is found in the Gospel of Saint Luke (1:26-38). The troparion describes this as the "beginning of our salvation, and the revelation of the eternal mystery," for on this day the Son of God became the Son of Man.

There are two main components to the Annunciation: the message itself, and the response of the Virgin. The message fulfills God's promise to

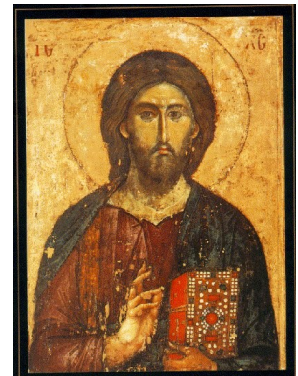
send a Redeemer (Gen. 3:15): "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; he shall crush your head, and you shall lie in wait for his heel."

The Fathers of the Church understand "her seed" to refer to Christ. The prophets hinted at His coming, which they saw dimly, but the Archangel Gabriel now proclaims that the promise is about to be fulfilled. We see this echoed in the Liturgy of Saint Basil, as
(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, Larissa, Jack, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Michael, Abraham, Katrina, George, Rochelle, Brianna, Tamam, Catherine, Chuck, Theresa, Sally Lou the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Holy Week Services

Although we are in the midst of our renovation project, we will continue to celebrate Holy Week Services in the church basement until we can safely use the church.

Holy & Great Wednesday, March 27

Holy Unction Service (6:00 pm)

Holy & Great Thursday, March 28

Reading of the 12 Holy Gospels (6:00 pm)

Great & Holy Good Friday, March 29

Burial and Lamentation Service (6:00 pm)

Holy & Great Saturday, March 30

Vesperal Divine Liturgy (9:00 am)

Sunday, March 31—PASCHA-Easter-

the Holy Resurrection of Our Lord-

Matins & Divine Liturgy (9:00 am)

Blessing of Easter Baskets & Food

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From St. Gregory the Wonderworker on the Feast of the Annunciation:

Today are strains of praise sung joyfully by the choir of angels, and the light of the advent of Christ shines brightly upon the faithful. Today is the glad spring-time to us, and Christ the Sun of righteousness has beamed with clear light around us, and has illumined the minds of the faithful. Today is the whole circle of the earth filled with joy, since the sojourn of the Holy Spirit has been realized to men. Today the grace of God and the hope of the unseen shine through all wonders transcending imagination, and make the mystery that was kept hidden from eternity plainly discernible to us. Today is fulfilled the word of David, Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad.

The Feast of the Annunciation, cont'd from p.1

well: “When man disobeyed Thee, the only true God who had created him, Thou, O God, in Thy righteous judgment, didst send him forth from Paradise into this world, yet providing for him the salvation of regeneration in Thy Christ Himself.”

The Archangel Gabriel was sent by God and spoke to the Virgin who was betrothed to Saint Joseph: “Hail, thou who art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

In contrast to Eve, who was readily deceived by the serpent, the Virgin did not immediately accept the Angel’s message. In her humility, she did not think she was deserving of such words, but was actually troubled

by them. She did not disbelieve the words of the angel, but could not understand how they would be fulfilled, for they spoke of something which was beyond nature.

Then said Mary unto the angel,



“How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” (Luke 1:34). “And the angel answered and said unto her, ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: therefore also that which shall be born of thee shall be

called the Son of God. For with God nothing shall be impossible.’ And Mary said, ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.’ And the angel departed from her.” (Luke 1: 35-38)

The icon of the Feast shows the Archangel with a staff in his left hand, indicating his role as a messenger. Sometimes one wing is upraised, as if to show his swift descent from heaven. His right hand is stretched toward the holy Virgin as he delivers his message.

The Virgin is depicted either standing or sitting, usually holding yarn in her left hand. Sometimes she is shown holding a scroll. Her right hand may be raised to indicate her surprise at the message she is hearing. Her head is bowed, showing her consent and obedience. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon her is depicted by a ray of light issuing from a small sphere at the top of the icon, which symbolizes heaven. In a famous icon from Sinai, a white dove is shown in the ray of light.

Homily on Christ's Entry into Jerusalem, (cont'd from p.1)

cloudy and confused becomes bright and clear, when what has been hidden is made manifest for all to see. Today is one of those times. For Jesus Christ, who revealed that He is the resurrection and the life by raising His friend Lazarus from the dead, now enters Jerusalem as the long-awaited Messiah to the welcoming cheers of the crowd.

But even before He gets to Jerusalem, the forces of darkness had decided to kill Christ because they could tell that someone who could raise the dead was a threat to their power; for He was neither a conquering general nor a Pharisee-like interpreter of the Law; and those nationalistic religious leaders had no use for a Messiah who did not serve their schemes of domination.

On Palm Sunday, it becomes clear that the Savior Who enters Jerusalem today is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is the Passover Lamb whose death and resurrection will conquer death itself. Mary, Lazarus' sister, performed a prophetic act when she anointed Christ with the same kind of costly ointment that was used to anoint the bodies of the dead.

This Messiah, this One who is truly anointed to save His people and the whole world, will be rejected by the leaders of the Jews and crucified under the authority of the Romans. And when He is lifted up upon the Cross, He will draw all who believe in Him—Jew, Gentile, male, female, rich, poor, all nations, classes, and races—to the life of a Kingdom that transcends this world and our petty divisions.

Jesus Christ will not reign as a soldier, a politician, or a rich man, but as a Suffering Servant, a slaughtered lamb, a despised victim of torture and capital punishment. The crowds are right on Palm Sunday to welcome Him as a conquering King in Whom God's promises will be fulfilled. But they misunderstand what kind of King He is and how He will conquer. For He rules from a cross and an empty tomb; instead of killing Roman soldiers, He kills death by allowing Himself to be killed; in the place of a magnificent stallion fit for a king, He rides a humble donkey that would impress no one.

The crowd is right, "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel." They shout

"Hosanna," which is a plea for God's salvation to come upon the earth. And it does through the Lord's death and glorious resurrection. But that's not what the crowds expected; it's apparently not what the disciples or anyone else anticipated. For it goes against all our preconceived notions of what it means to be successful, to be powerful, to rule upon the earth, and to be respectable and religious.

And it's still a very hard lesson for us to accept, for there is too much of the world in all of us and the demons never work harder than when we are trying to grow closer to Christ. That's why we need to follow St. Paul's advice to focus on what is truly holy this week, to

rejoice always, and to "let your gentleness be known to all men." As St. Paul wrote, "The Lord is at hand" which is never more true than on this feast as He enters Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowds.

In Holy Week, what had been cloudy becomes clear; the truth is out in the open and we cannot ignore it any longer. Jesus Christ is the Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. He is our Champion, our Savior, our King, yet in His humility and love, the incarnate Son of God suffers on the cross as the lowest of the low in order to bring us to the heights of heaven and the joy of life eternal through His empty tomb.

It's time to embrace the great mystery of our salvation, of our Savior's infinite love and mercy, and thus share already in the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven. Holy Week is the time

to enter into the Light that shines brightly even from the terror of the cross and the darkness of the tomb. Yes, our Savior has endured all these evils for us purely out of love; and He will soon rise over them triumphantly.

On Palm Sunday, it is clear who Jesus Christ is: The Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. How will we respond to Him as He goes to the cross for us? Hopefully, with the fear of God and faith and love, we will draw near and not abandon or disregard Him. Yes, that will take intentional focus and the discipline to turn away from temptations, distractions, and unholy thoughts that become obstacles along our path. Nonetheless, we must follow St. Paul's guidance to "Be anxious for nothing" and allow "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding...[to] guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."



Palm Sunday-Christ's Holy Entry into Jerusalem

Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9) The icon for Palm Sunday is known as "Christ's Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem" and recounts an event found in all four gospels (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44 and John 12:12-19). This icon is intended to depict the exultant welcome the Son of God received as He entered into His city and His kingdom.

The arrival of the Messiah on the back of a colt (or donkey) would have been bewildering to the Jews because 1) they expected a military Messiah to free them from Roman occupation and 2) they expected the Messiah to come only for them and not the gentiles. The donkey symbolizes an animal of peace and a colt is representative of the gentiles – so either animal would have been confusing to the Jews of Jerusalem. A king entering a city on a horse meant war; a king arriving on a donkey meant peace.

The underlying geometry of this icon creates movement that subconsciously directs our attention to the focal point – heavenly Jerusalem. The mountain and city walls serve as a geometric funnel directly to the city of Jerusalem. Even the palm in background is angled in the direction of the city as is the lowered head of the colt/donkey. Every line points to heavenly Jerusalem.

In iconography, buildings often represent the Church. In this 15th century icon painted by the Novgorod school, the city of Jerusalem anachronistically depicts a temple with a cross on top, making this reference to the founding of the Church very clear. The scroll in Jesus' left hand indicates He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. A scroll in the hand tells the viewer that this person has authority and wisdom. It is also a reference to Revelation 5:5 as "the one who is worthy to open the scroll."

If you look closely, Christ's halo contains a cross,

which denotes His glorification. No halos of saints or angels contain the Cross of Salvation. Only three arms of the cross are visible, making up a Holy Trinity. These Greek letters are written in the three arms of the cross: ω O N (omega, omicron, nu) mean "the being" or more precisely "He who is." This reference to Christ's divinity is found in the Old Testament when God in the burning bush revealed himself to Moses as "He who is" or "I am." (Ex. 3:14 – in the Septuagint text this is $\epsilon\gamma\omega$ $\epsilon\iota\mu\acute{\iota}$ $\acute{\omicron}$ $\acute{\omega}\nu$: "I am He Who is" or "I am").

Above Christ's head are the letters "IC" and "XC", the four-letter abbreviation of the Greek words for Jesus (IHCOYC) Christ (XPICTOC). Jesus is the bridge between the disciples and the heavenly Jerusalem. In some icons, he looks back at his disciples and followers as though to encourage them to persevere through this difficult phase. In other icons, He looks forward toward His glory as he leads his Apostles.

Typically, the two most visible disciples behind Christ are Peter and John who are the pillars of the church. Behind them, the Apostles may sometimes look a little confused and fearful because they don't understand why Christ is returning to a place of danger where Jewish authorities were planning his murder.

Child's play conveys a visual reminder of Christ's words, "Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of heaven like a little child will never inherit it." Children are shown climbing the palm tree, and sometimes laying branches down or their outer tunics before the Messiah. Laying garments beneath someone's feet is a symbol of total surrender. By removing their outer garments, the children expose their white tunics, which like baptismal gowns, represent purity and innocence. Sometimes a child is shown pulling a thorn from the foot of another child who acquired it by climbing a palm tree, demonstrating that *spiritual ascent can be painful or difficult*.

