

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



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Christ is in Midst!

He is and ever Shall be!



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Sunday after Theophany—Jesus begins His Earthly Ministry

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In this season we celebrate the great feast of Theophany, of Christ's baptism when the voice of the Father identified Him as the Son of God and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove. Theophany reveals that the Savior Who appears from the waters of the Jordan to illumine our world of darkness is the God-Man, a Person of the Holy Trinity. He is baptized to restore us, and

the creation itself, to the ancient glory for which we were created. He comes to make all who wandered in the blindness of sin and death radiant with the brilliant light of holiness.

In baptism, Jesus Christ clothes us with a garment of light, restoring us to our original vocation to become like God in holiness. He delivers us from the nakedness and vulnerability of slavery to our own passions and to the fear of the grave. Through His and our baptism, He makes us participants in His restoration and fulfillment of the human person. He is baptized in order to save Adam and Eve, all their descendants, and the entire creation, fulfilling the glorious purposes for which He breathed life into us in the first place.

Our lives after baptism are not, however, without pain, disease, death and
(continued p.3)

++ Sunday after Theophany ++

+++Martyr Tatiana of Rome +++

Epistle: Ephesians 4: 7-13

Gospel: Matthew 4:12-17

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 Stages of the Spiritual Life, by Monk Theologos

The oldest collection of books in the Old Testament is called the Pentateuch. This term comes from the Greek which means "five volumes" and refers to the so-called books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The main narrative in the Pentateuch is the movement of the Israelites from their native land to Egypt, where after some time they became the slaves of Pharaoh, until God decided to get them out of slavery in Egypt, and under the

leadership of Moses bring them back through the Arabian Desert to the Promised Land.

Some of you will wonder: Why is this narrative so important? What is its great significance both in the Old Testament and in Church history? One of the reasons is that God's help is clearly visible in this narrative. But there is also another reason, less obvious, that the story of the Exodus of the chosen people from Egypt, their wandering through the desert and entering of the Promised Land reflect the

stages of the ascetic's spiritual life on his path to Paradise.

A similar phenomenon in modern society

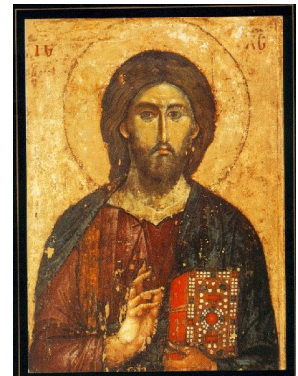
Pharaoh burdened the Israelites with work and did not give them time to worship God. A similar phenomenon is seen today: we have tyrannical rulers, who don't know God and make their subjects work all the time so that they don't have time to think about themselves, others and God. Scads of "needs" are generated that are not real.

(continued 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 our social hour following the 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, Abraham, George, Rochelle, Theresa, Joanne, Tamam, Loretta, Frankie, Brittany, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

On God's Judgment and Mercy Live this day so that you do not need to flee as your actions are judged by your Father in Heaven. In the goings and comings of your day, seek to live out each action, each personal decision, warmed by the presence of God's love surrounding you and seeing clearly Christ Jesus, the Son of God, in the face of everyone around you.

How fortunate we are, then, that we are being judged by the mercy of the all-good God in Love. God judges the creatures he molded with his own hands in his own im-

age with lovingkindness. And God's love is always surrounding you and supporting you. Just think, then, how God's love is approaching you in loving Judgement in the cool of the day. Therefore, be ready with the kindnesses of the day which you can amass—and humility about the negligent and selfish actions you may have committed—to be found worthy in God's eyes as the shadows lengthen.

As we see the Vesper light, and we sing God's praises, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are gifted with a tantalizing glimpse of our own eternity coming home to God. And eternity is always with us, when we gaze at the Beauty of the Lord in the Divine Liturgy, and in every twinge of repentance that jolts us in mind of our own mortality and our own personal End of Days. Eternity is always near us, every time we see Jesus. And remember that this Parable was not preached by Jesus to the wider world of skeptics, to bring in new believers, but to the inner circle of Jesus followers, to clarify the Beauty of their faith.

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The prince of this world, through his instruments, offers us numerous temptations and passions to keep us captive so that we can't strive for our loving God. Egypt in the Old Testament was a symbol of the material world, the world that we live in today.

The first period of spiritual life

The first period of spiritual life is the struggle with passions, a period when grace should be as obvious as possible, when you need to see how your spiritual mentor performs many miracles by the grace of God. These miracles can be real—that is, overcoming by the grace of God the laws of nature established by God Himself—or they can be an attitude that is miraculous only for a neophyte. Such a neophyte vision is also from grace, and it is of great importance, because the neophyte needs to have reverence for his spiritual mentor just as he needs the air to breathe, because otherwise he will not be able to continue on his path to Paradise.

Grace helps the disciple very much

by giving him zeal, prayer and willingness to obey. Here he needs self-denial and attention to obedience, prayer and his daily routine.

The obstacle created by self-love

If a young man shows selfishness, demands logical explanations for his mentor's orders and grumbles, then



he stops on his journey even before leaving Egypt. And if he does not stop there, he will stop on the shores of the Red Sea—that is, where a horde of memories and worldly pleasures will rush in pursuit of him,

and a huge miracle from God through his spiritual mentor will be required to shield him from temptations and memories of the world, which the love of God will plunge into the depths of the Red Sea.

The second stage of spiritual life. Entering the Promised Land

After crossing the Red Sea, wandering in the Arabian Desert begins, because our faith is not strong enough to be able to enter the Promised Land directly. Remember that God led the Israelites directly to the Promised Land; but since the scouts—except for two—disobeyed Moses, the man of God, and put logic first, God led them through the Arabian Desert for forty years until the entire generation who had had experience of tasting the worldly pleasures in Egypt died out. For this reason the second period of spiritual life is called enlightenment, because a person, as a result of gradual liberation from passions, begins to see the light of God's love in his heart.

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Christ's Earthly Ministry (cont'd from p.1)

Other sorrows. The more we are illumined by His light, the more clearly we will see the darkness that remains within us. In contrast with the divine glory of the appearance of our Lord, the darkness of sin becomes all the more apparent.

Today's gospel reading refers to the Forerunner's arrest by Herod Antipas for prophetically denouncing the king's immorality. After the one who baptized Him was arrested, the Lord went to "Galilee of the Gentiles" to begin His public ministry in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that "the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." (Matt. 4:15-16)

The Jewish who suffered under the oppression of the Romans and their client kings knew all too well about darkness, death, and crushed hopes. Their homeland was controlled by foreigners who worshiped other gods and exploited the people. Understandably, the dominant expectation among the Jewish people was for a Messiah like King David to defeat their enemies and establish a reign of national righteousness.

Jesus Christ, however, rejected the temptation to become an earthly king throughout His ministry, from His testing by Satan in the desert to His crucifixion. He repudiated the idolatrous attempt to identify the heavenly reign with any version of politics or religion as usual in our world of corruption, for they can not help us attain the purity of heart necessary to see God. Our true hope is in Him, not in any of the false gods that tempt us today to seek first something other than His kingdom.

We are baptized into Christ's death in order to rise up with Him into a life of holiness. In every aspect of our lives, we must become radiant with the divine glory shared with us by the New Adam. In order to do so, we must find healing for the passions that have darkened our hearts and distorted our relationships even with those we love most in this life. It does not matter whether we are at home, work, school, we must reject the temptation to be become blinded by pride, lust, hatred, anger, resentment, or the desire to dominate others.

If we have put on Christ in baptism, we must become living icons of His salvation and peace in every thought,

word, and deed. For that to happen, we must be on guard for all the ways in which we have become accustomed to "the region and shadow of death." That requires struggling mindfully each day to obey the Lord's command: "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Because the Savior has hallowed the water and the entire creation through His baptism, we must remember that nothing in our life and world is intrinsically evil or profane. Theophany reveals that we are always on holy ground and must speak, act, and think as those who wear a garment of light. Though we fall short of fulfilling that goal each day, we must constantly strive to turn away from corruption and embrace our high calling "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

If we are to discern how to fulfill our vocation to bear witness to our Lord, we must focus on opening even the darkest corners of our own souls to the brilliant healing light of Christ. Doing so requires resisting the temptation to pretend that we know the hearts of others and are in a position to judge them, for that is simply a distraction from doing "the one thing needful" of hearing and obeying the Word of God from the depths of our hearts. Doing so requires constant vigilance against allowing self-centered desire to corrupt our souls and distort our vision of ourselves, our neighbors, and our world.

Doing so requires turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, and treating others as we would have them treat us, especially when we think we are justified in responding in kind to those we consider our enemies. Doing so requires turning away from whatever fuels our passions so that we may build peaceable relationships even with those we find it hardest to love.

As we proceed in the life of Christ, let us focus mindfully on living each day as those who have died to sin and risen up into a new life holiness through the Lord Who has baptized by John in the Jordan for our salvation. Anything else is a distraction from embracing the full meaning and purpose of our baptism as those who now wear a garment of light and are called to become living epiphanies of the salvation of the world each day of our lives in every thought, word, and deed.



The Holy Martyr Tatiana of Rome (January 12)

The Holy Virgin Martyr Tatiana was born into an illustrious Roman family, and her father was elected consul three times. He was secretly a Christian and raised his daughter to be devoted to God and the Church. When she reached the age of maturity, Tatiana decided to remain a virgin, betrothing herself to Christ. Disdaining earthly riches, she sought instead the imperishable wealth of Heaven. She was made a deaconess in one of the Roman churches and served God in fasting and prayer, tending the sick and helping the needy.

When Rome was ruled by the sixteen-year-old Alexander Severus (222-235), all power was concentrated in the hands of the regent Ulpian, an evil enemy and persecutor of Christians. Christian blood flowed like water. Tatiana was also arrested, and they brought her into the temple of Apollo to force her to offer sacrifice to the idol. The saint began praying, and suddenly there was an earthquake. The idol was smashed into pieces, and part of the temple collapsed and fell down on the pagan priests and many pagans. The demon inhabiting the idol fled screeching from that place. Those present saw its shadow flying through the air.

Then they tore holy virgin's eyes out with hooks, but she bravely endured everything, praying for her tormentors that the Lord would open their spiritual eyes. And the Lord heard the prayer of His servant. The executioners saw four angels encircle the saint and beat her tormentors. A voice was heard from the heavens speaking to the holy virgin. Eight men believed in Christ and fell on their knees before Saint Tatiana, begging them to forgive them their sin against her. For confessing themselves Christians they were tortured and executed, receiving Baptism by blood.

The next day Saint Tatiana was brought before the wicked judge. Seeing her completely healed of all her wounds, they stripped her and beat her, and slashed her body with razors. A wondrous fragrance then filled the air. Then she was stretched out on the ground and beaten for so long that the servants had to be replaced several times. The torturers became exhausted and said that an invisible power was beating them with iron rods. Indeed, the angels warded off the blows directed at her and turned them upon the tormentors, causing nine of them to fall dead. They then threw the saint in prison,

where she prayed all night and sang praises to the Lord with the angels.

A new morning began, and they took Saint Tatiana to the tribunal once more. The torturers beheld with astonishment that after such terrible torments she appeared completely healthy and even more radiant and beautiful than before. They began to urge her to offer sacrifice to the goddess Diana. The saint seemed agreeable, and they took her to the heathen temple. Saint Tatiana made the Sign of the Cross and began to pray. Suddenly, there was a crash of deafening thunder, and lightning struck the idol, the sacrificial offerings and the pagan priests.

Once again, the martyr was fiercely tortured. She was hung up and scraped with iron claws, and her breasts were cut off. That night, angels appeared to her in prison and healed her wounds as before. On the following day, they took Saint Tatiana to the circus and loosed a hungry lion on her. The beast did not harm the saint, but meekly licked her feet.

As they were taking the lion back to its cage, it killed one of the torturers. They threw Tatiana into a fire, but the fire did not harm the martyr. The pagans, thinking that she was a sorceress, cut her hair to take away her magical powers, then locked her up in the temple of Zeus. On the third day, pagan priests came to the temple intending to offer sacrifice to Zeus. They beheld the idol on the floor, shattered to pieces, and the holy martyr Tatiana joyously praising the Lord Jesus Christ. The judge then condemned the valiant sufferer to be beheaded with a sword. Her father was also executed with her, because he had raised her to love Christ.

The Relics of Saint Tatiana

The honorable head of the Holy Martyr Tatiana was first brought to Romania in 1204, placed it in a church in Tarnovo (Bulgaria) and then in Bucovat Monastery (near Craiova). Later, however, in 1393, the head of the Saint was taken to a church in the town of Nicaea and then to Constantinople, and placed in the Church of the Holy Apostles.

In 1453, after the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks, the faithful transported the relic of the holy Martyr Tatiana to this country, Later, the honorable skull of Saint Tatiana was brought to the Cathedral of Râmnicu Vâlcea in 1955. Finally, the honored relics were permanently enshrined in the Cathedral of Craiova.

