

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!



Volume 10 Issue 463

6th Sunday of Pascha— Sunday of the Man Born Blind

May 9, 2021



Today, we're presented with two miracles in the Epistle and Gospel. The Apostles heal a woman with an unclean spirit in Christ's name and Christ God heals a man born blind who suffers for his witness to the truth of Christ.

The jailer in today's Epistle, seeing the miracle at the prison, humbled himself and came to the Apostles. He

fell down before them, trembling, and begging them, "What must I do to be saved?" Through his humility and courage, the jailer gained the sight of faith; he found salvation in Christ, and through him, so did all his family. Ironic isn't it: the jailer was afraid—scared out of his wits—but had the courage and humility to come to the Apostles seeking salvation, seeking to know their God, Jesus Christ.

We can fear like that with regard to our faith: fear rejection, ridicule, judgment. Our fear, our pride, can get in our way of courageously stepping forward in faith to witness to the truth. Today's Gospel gives us yet another example of courage and witness in the face of such fear. Jesus heals a man born blind who then witnesses to all Christ has done. The miracle is even more remarkable than it first seems:

(continued p. 3)

**Sunday of the Man Born Blind *
*** The Holy Prophet Isaiah ****

Epistle: Acts 16: 16-34

Gospel: John 9: 1-39

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, *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 Holy Prophet Isaiah

The Holy Prophet Isaiah lived 700 years before the birth of Christ, and was of royal lineage. Isaiah's father Amos raised his son in the fear of God and in the law of the Lord. Having attained the age of maturity, the Prophet Isaiah entered into marriage with a pious prophetess (Is 8:3) and had a son Jashub (Is 8:18).

St Isaiah was called to prophetic service during the reign of Uzziah, king of Judea, and he prophesied for 60 years during the reign of kings Joat-

ham, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Manasseh.

The start of his service was marked by the following vision: he beheld the Lord God, sitting in a majestic heavenly temple upon a high throne. Six-winged Seraphim encircled Him. With two wings they covered their faces, and with two wings they covered their feet, and with two wings they flew about crying out one to another, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth are filled with His glory!" The pillars of the

heavenly temple shook from their shouts, and in the temple arose the smoke of incense.

The prophet cried out in terror, "Oh, an accursed man am I, granted to behold the Lord Sabaoth, and having impure lips and living amidst an impure people!" Then was sent him one of the Seraphim, having in hand a red-hot coal, which he took with tongs from the altar of the Lord. He touched it to the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah and said, "This has touched

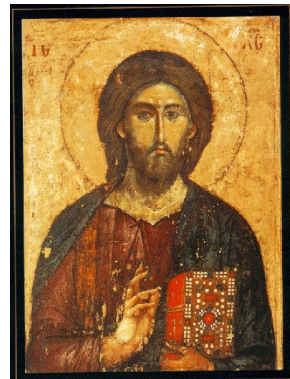
(continued p.2)

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.





Troparion to St. George

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
for our souls
salvation.

News and Notes

We welcome all who are worshiping with us today. Because of COVID-19, our social hour has been canceled until we receive further instructions from the Department of Health.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

Please keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Louise, George, Evan, Ryan, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Laura, Elizabeth Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Pat, Kathleen, Terena, Loretta, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Words from the Holy Fathers

O brethren, how good and comforting is our faith! What a great happiness to be a Christian! Where else is there so much light and life as in the Gospel? Where else is there so much hope and consolation as at the Cross? Where is there a Savior like ours? We Christians alone bear the cross,

we alone celebrate the Resurrection! What is more inevitable on Earth than the former, and more necessary than the latter? Where all earthly wisdom is lost and knows not what to do—to be silent or murmur—I mean over the grave—there the Christian faith especially renders its Divine effect—it illumines, comforts, and gives life. The cross that stands on our graves speaks more about the destiny of man than all the systems of the philosophers.

Let us, brethren, recognize our treasure and learn to cherish it as we ought: Let us not be so unthinking as to be *carried about with every wind of opinions and doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness* (Eph. 4:14). Many can promise salvation, but only One can give it—He Who ascended the Cross and rose from the grave to this end. People who freely ascend a cross don't do so to speak lies; they don't rise again to speak falsehood. Let us be faithful to the Risen One both in deeds and in life, as He was and is faithful to us.

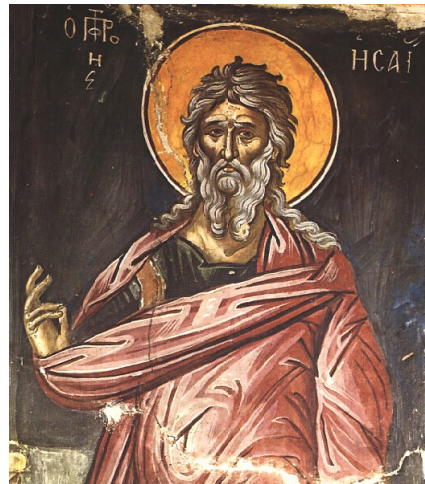
The Holy Prophet Isaiah, continued from p.1

thy lips, and will take away with thine iniquities, and will cleanse thy sins." After this Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord, directed towards him, "Whom shall I send, and who will go to this people?" Isaiah answered, "Here am I, send me" (Is 6:1 ff). And the Lord sent him to the Jews to exhort them to turn from the ways of impiety and idol worship, and to offer repentance.

To those that repent and turn to the true God, the Lord promised mercy and forgiveness, but punishment and the judgment of God are appointed for the unrepentant. Then Isaiah asked the Lord, how long would the falling away of the Jewish nation from God continue. The Lord answered, "Until the cities be deserted, by reason of there being no people, and the land shall be made desolate. Just as when a tree be felled and from the stump come forth new shoots, so also from the destruction of the nation a holy remnant will remain, from which will emerge a new tribe."

Isaiah left behind him a book of

prophecy in which he denounces the Jews for their unfaithfulness to the God of their Fathers. He predicted the captivity of the Jews and their return from captivity during the time of the



emperor Cyrus, the destruction and renewal of Jerusalem and of the Temple. Together with this he predicts the historical fate also of the other nations bordering the Jews. But what is most important of all for us, the Prophet Isaiah with particular clarity and detail prophesies about the com-

ing of the Messiah, Christ the Savior. The prophet names the Messiah as God and Man, teacher of all the nations, founder of the Kingdom of peace and love.

The prophet foretells the birth of the Messiah from a Virgin, and with particular clarity he describes the Suffering of the Messiah for the sins of the world. He foresees His Resurrection and the universal spreading of His Church. By his clear foretelling of Christ the Savior, the Prophet Isaiah deserves to be called an Old Testament Evangelist. To him belong the words, "He beareth our sins and is smitten for us.... He was wounded for our sins and tortured for our transgressions. The chastisement of our world was upon Him, and by His wounds we were healed...." (Is 53:4-5).

The holy Prophet Isaiah had also a gift of wonderworking. And so, when during the time of a siege of Jerusalem by enemies the besieged had become exhausted with thirst, he by his

(continued p.4, column 2)

(Homily on Sunday of the Man Born Blind, cont'd from p.1)

Not only has no one ever opened the eyes of one born blind before, BUT, as the Holy Fathers tell us, this man was born WITHOUT EYES. Not only did Christ God, the Word of God through Whom all things were made, open the blind man's eyes, He MADE eyes for the blind man, which He then opened. Just as our first parent, Adam, was taken from the clay and made alive, so Jesus takes clay and makes eyes for the blind man.

There is a clear parallel here to the first creation of man, but here there is even more: Christ God not only gives the blind man physical eyes, not only does He then open those eyes so the blind man can see, but even more importantly, He gives him the sight within—He awakens and illumines the blind man's immortal soul, giving Him a living encounter with God, revealing Himself to him,

and bringing him to the knowledge and love of Him, that is, He brings him salvation. The blind man comes to faith in the living God; he receives spiritual sight and worships God, his Creator, the only Lover of mankind.

The Pharisees, for their part, witness the healing of this man, a man known to all and seen regularly begging—but in their pridefulness and lack of faith, they do won't believe, they choose not to believe. Jesus heals the blind man on the Sabbath and reveals Himself as the long-awaited Messiah, but they cannot 'see' the miracle; they're blinded by their pride, blinded by their lack of faith in God's love and power to fulfill the Law, let alone, to heal as the God He is.

The Pharisees question the blind man, searching for a 'reasonable' explanation for the miracle, a reason not to believe. They don't want their eyes opened; they want to remain unchanged. The blind man doesn't stop with his own encounter with God, his own salvation. No, he testifies boldly to the truth of Christ and His life-giving power, not fearing their wrath.

In the end, the uneducated blind man must teach the learned Pharisees, what faith really means. He says, "Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. 'If this

man were not from God, He could do nothing.'" For this true and courageous statement, the Pharisees cast him out of the Synagogue.

As the world rejected the blind man, casting him out, so too the world often rejects us as we proclaim our faith in the living God, as we live out and testify to the miracle of the life of faith, of doing real battle with our passions, of bringing our struggles and sin-sickness before the Lord in confession in our desire for healing from them, of professing our belief in miracles and the Doer of those wonders, in vocally giving God the glory, the credit, for our blessings. Jesus says, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18).

As important as the healing of the blind man is and the regaining of his physical sight, even more vital than this is his finding Christ and His witness to his faith in Him as the Messiah and his willingness to pay the price for such witness to the truth.

You and I have the opportunity to courageously embrace the faith of the blind man this day. We ask Christ to continue to open our spiritual eyes, to make us more faithful witnesses to His truth—the truth of a changed life, of freedom from enslavement to this world—which our friends, our relatives, our co-workers and neighbors, who are all in such great need of a life-changing encounter with Christ as well. We live out our faith, we do battle with our passions, so that cooperating more and more

with the work of the Holy Spirit in us, we too may see Christ, the Light of the world, the Savior of our souls. And we overcome our pride, our fear, with love, which compels us to bear witness of Him and His truth to this world.

With gratitude, we thank God for the spiritual eyes to see and discern good from evil we gain from life in the Church, and for the opportunities He gives us to be a martyr, a witness (literally), testifying to the reality of life in Him, to the hope of eternal life. With the blind man, we worship Him and receive Him this day and testify to the changeless Truth that He is. May God give us such courage and humility!



On Repentance by St. Gregory Palamas (part 5)

A fundamental view in the theology of mourning is that it is not only the soul that participates but also the body. And the “consolation” which the Lord said would be a blessing for those who mourn is a fruit which not only the soul, but as Saint Gregory says “the body also receives in a variety of ways” (On the Hesychasts (1, 3, 33). The clearest proof of this reality, he says, is “the sad tears with which they mourn their sins” (Ibid).

Another fruit of Godly remorse is that people become steadfast in virtue, since, as the Apostle Paul says: “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret” (II Cor. 7, 10). Because, according to

Palamas, people can become poor in a Godly manner and be humbled, but unless they also acquire remorse, their disposition alters easily- they may well return to the inappropriate and sinful actions they have abandoned and, once more, transgress against God’s commandments, given that a desire and appetite for a sinful life will again arise within them. But if they remain in the poverty that the Lord declared blessed, and cultivate spiritual mourning within themselves, then they become steadfast and secure in the spiritual life, thus expelling the danger of returning to the point where they began. (To Xenii).

So this Godly mourning does not merely draw down consolation and God’s forgiveness, offering the pledge of eternal rejoicing, but, at the same time, guards the virtues the soul has, since, according to Saint Gregory, the soul that has learned to mourn is much less likely to be moved to evil (To Xenii).

Finally, the Athonite hesychast and Archbishop of Thessaloniki, in his essay on the passions and the virtues, which, to a great extent, is dedicated to mourning, uses a most expressive example to demonstrate the path people follow towards remorse. He compares the beginning of mourning with the return of the Prodigal Son, which is why the remorseful person is cheerless and is brought to repeating the words: “Father, I have sinned against heav-

en and in your sight”.

And then again, he pictures its end with the imperative and wide-open embrace of God the Father “in which by the richness of the incomparable poverty he had suffered, and having acquired great joy and frankness through it, kissed and was kissed and, on entering, sat down to eat with the Father, both enjoying heavenly bliss”. (To Xenii). This is why the term “bright sorrow” which is commonly used by ascetics to describe the experience of eschatological transcendence of pain, is perhaps the most expressive symbol of the whole of their ascetic life, a life mostly of tears and mourning .



In this brief and, one might say, rough presentation of the positions of Palamas on repentance, we see that Saint Gregory, as the outstanding person of the inner life, was interested not only in us correcting our external shortcomings, but in our inner repentance, with mourning and tears. Saint Gregory was himself a man of repentance and also a true preacher of it.

* * *

The Holy Prophet Isaiah

(continued from p.2)
prayer drew out from beneath Mount Sion a spring of water, which was called Siloam, i.e. “sent from God.” It was to this spring afterwards that the Savior sent the man blind from birth to wash, and He restored his sight. By the prayer of the Prophet Isaiah, the Lord prolonged the life of Hezekiah for 15 years.

The Prophet Isaiah died a martyr’s death. By order of the Jewish king Manasseh he was sawn through by a wood-saw. The prophet was

buried not far from the Pool of Siloam. The relics of the holy Prophet Isaiah were afterwards transferred by the emperor Theodosius the Younger to Constantinople and installed in the church of Saint Laurence at Blachernae. At the present time part of the head of the Prophet Isaiah is preserved at Mount Athos in the Hilandar monastery. For the times and the events which occurred during the life of the Prophet Isaiah, see the 4th Book of Kings [alt. 2 Kings] (Ch 16, 17, 19, 20, 23, etc.), and likewise 2 Chr:26 -32.