

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 10 Issue 475

12th Sunday after Pentecost-Feast of the Holy Dormition

August 15, 2021



Today is the “Feast” of the falling asleep or Dormition of Mary the Theotokos, the Birth-Giver of God. Mary is acclaimed by the Church as “more honorable than the cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim.” And yet, this vessel of God, chosen to carry in her womb the uncontainable God in the holy mystery

of the Incarnation, and who is also accorded the greatest honor and veneration also needed her Son and God as her Savior. He saves her in this extraordinary way and in a manner fitting for the one who is, in the hymnody of the Church also acclaimed as, “higher than the heavens” for she bore her and our Creator.

In Psalm 115 (LXX), the Prophet David reminds us that „precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His Saints.” Likewise, Solomon writes in Proverbs that “the memory of the just is praised” (Prov. 10:7). God has created us “a little lower than the angels,” writes St. David in Psalm 8:5, but calls him to glory and the adoption of sonship through the regeneration of new birth by “water and the spirit.” So, if this is the value God has bestowed on His human creation, the same God

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+ 12th Sunday after Pentecost +
+++ Feast of the Domition +++

Epistle: Philippians 2:5-11

Gospel: Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28

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 Jesus Prayer-Matthew 9: 27-35, by Metropolitan Joel of Edessa

‘Have mercy upon us, Son of David.’

Many miracles have been performed through the invocation of the name of Christ. The Lord himself, on his way to the Passion, said: ‘Whatsoever you ask in my name, I will do’ (Jn. 14, 13). And when he was being taken up into the heavens and giving his final instructions to his disciples, he again stressed: ‘In my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues. (Mk 16)

In the name of Jesus, the Apostles were to

work wonders. And they did. The lame man who sat outside the Temple was healed by the Apostles Peter and John through the invocation of the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 3, 6). Let’s look, in simple terms, at the name of our Lord.

The name of the Lord Jesus. In the Gospel for the 7th Sunday of Matthew, we hear of two blind men who call out the name of the Lord, asking him to have mercy on them (Matt. 9, 27). Saint John Chrysostom says that they didn’t

merely go to meet him, but called his name very loudly, asking nothing else of him but that he have mercy on them. The sweet name of Jesus isn’t human, but divine and heavenly. It wasn’t given to him by people but by his heavenly Father (Matt. 1, 21).

It is the sweet study of the mind, the tongue and the heart of us humans. St. Nikodemus mentions a certain Christian who died on the Lord’s tomb, crying: ‘Jesus Christ, sweet love’.

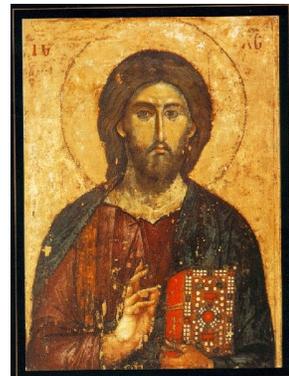
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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 worshipping with us today. We are also happy to announce that coffee social has resumed out on the church lawn following the Divine Liturgy.

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, Joan, Terena, Loretta, Bill, Mike, Carol, Pam, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Divine Potential

What is our Godly potential? Each of us were created in the image and likeness of God. Reflect on this for a moment! Being created in the image and likeness of God is what distinguishes humans from the rest of the animal world. Every single person was created in the image of God – He’s given us creativity, intel-

lect, reason, passion, desire, and the freedom to use it how we choose. The Fathers of the Church distinguished between image and likeness by highlighting that being created in the likeness of God is the divine potential we each possess. Each one of us, without exception, have the potential to be united with God and so filled with His Spirit that we can become Christ-like. We have the potential to become saints, holy ones who are so enlightened and filled with God’s grace that we become one with Him. Our potential as human beings is lifted up from any earthly, limited, finite boundary into an eternal, unending, and infinite journey in the Divine Love of God!

St. Peter teaches us that to fulfill our divine potential we must nurture “*our faith with goodness, knowledge, endurance, godliness, and love.*” Divine grace is a gift that God gives us, helping us fulfill our potential, but we are co-workers with the Almighty and we must consciously cultivate the virtues that will increase our faith. By nourishing our faith we will participate in God’s nature.

The Jesus Prayer, continued from p.1

It’s true that the energies of Christ are made manifest in names, such as ‘wisdom, peace, joy, Lord, King, God’ and so on. Our faith isn’t abstract, but is directed towards a specific person who has a name, is a living individual, can love and wishes to establish communication with people.

This person is Jesus Christ. He came into contact with us, loved us and became a human person just like us. His name is linked to our salvation, as the Apostles told the leaders of Israel. The name of Jesus has inexhaustible potential and is ontologically bound to him. It’s a channel through which grace comes to us and fills the whole of our being with the presence of God. It gives us life and strength.

The Jesus Prayer

The exclamation of the two blind men, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David’, is a variant of the well-known prayer, ‘Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us’, usually called the ‘Jesus Prayer’. This prayer wasn’t invented by monks, but, as we saw above, was

recommended by Christ and used by the Apostles. It’s the bane of the demons: ‘In the name of Jesus, scourge the demons’, writes Saint John of the Ladder.

The prayer contains within it the mystery of the Holy Trinity: Jesus is the Son of the Father and his mercy and grace come to us through the Holy Spirit. To those who say it frequently, the prayer of the name of Jesus gives, strength, watchfulness, purity of mind, life-giving tears, love for our brothers and sisters and desire for our salvation. In general, it links us to God.

How to use the prayer

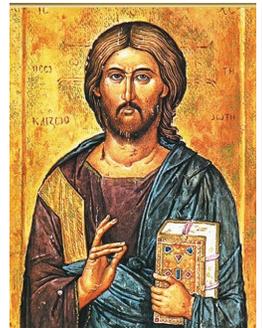
If the Jesus prayer is to bear fruit, we have to humble ourselves and we have to love Christ. There was an Athonite who used to say that, when we say the Jesus Prayer, we should emphasize the verb, that is ‘have mercy’, as did the blind men in the Gospel. We must humble ourselves, weep over our sins, recognize God as the priority in our life so that we bear fruit. If we say the words with a spir-

itual dryness, without love for him whom we’re addressing then we can’t bear spiritual fruit. Prayer without attention leaves a void within us.

My brothers and sisters, the words spoken by the blind men can be taken as a fervent ‘Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us’. Through them the men found a boundless ocean of salvation. Let us also say the prayer with fervor, so that God may have mercy on us.

* * *

You’re attending the Divine Liturgy and even though the priest is striving for your salvation, you’re indifferent. At the moment when all the heavenly powers, as well as the priest, entreat God on your behalf, at the moment when the fire of the Holy Spirit descends from heaven then you will feel chastened by your conscience. Be watchful and prepare for the King of Glory enters now.



(Homily on Feast of the Dormition, cont'd from p.1)

who created man for loving communion with Him, who became incarnate to enter into our human nature and renew it, who wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus, who willingly offered Himself up for the life of the world and our salvation by defeating sin and death on the cross by virtue of His own vivifying resurrection, then how much more precious is the death of His dear Mother who carried Him, the God of the universe made flesh in her womb?

Yes, Mary, like all of the race of Adam, was created “a little lower than the angels” and yet, through her miraculous virginal birth-giving and holy Dormition and subsequent ascension, is raised to a place higher and more honorable than the cherubim and so much more glorious than the seraphim. These angels who specifically are charged to worship at the throne of God, now behold her as the Mother of the Church and Queen of Heaven.

As the Mother of the „New Adam,” another name for Christ—the one who renewed and restored the fallen race of Adam with His new and perfect life, which He freely gives to all who put Him on in holy baptism, as St. Paul puts it in Gal. 3:27, “as many of you as are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ,” we’re assured in the hymnody of the Feast of her falling asleep that Adam and Eve rejoiced to see this day when a new Eve of their own lineage would be raised to heaven where together they glorify the One who undid the ancient curse caused by their first sin.

Through her yes to God in being willing to carry and then bear her Creator and Savior, the Theotokos has become the first fruit of the resurrection of her Son and our God, hence the term, “Mother of the Church,” who now, by virtue of His own resurrection and His power over sin and death, raises His own dear Mother from the grave, that is, from death, the rotten fruit of Adam and Eve’s first disobedience. This is the joy God gives us in this Feast: the spiritual exclamation mark on His already life-changing resurrection is once more brought to the fore as His own dear Mother is redeemed: her body along with her soul are set in heaven beside His holy throne.

For this reason, the Dormition is sometimes referred to in the Church’s ancient and Holy Tradition as „the summer Pascha.” Certainly, the fruit of Christ’s salvific death and resurrection, a foretaste of the final eschaton (end and new beginning) are seen here: Christ God’s Mother, the Church’s Mother, experiences even now the promise of the Second Coming of her Son, when our own bodies will be raised to stand before His dread Judgment Seat. If God saw fit to translate some of His own righteous directly to heaven—Elijah and Enoch come readily to mind, is it not fitting that He would bring His human Mother to be in His near presence as well?

The falling asleep of the Mother of God is recorded in

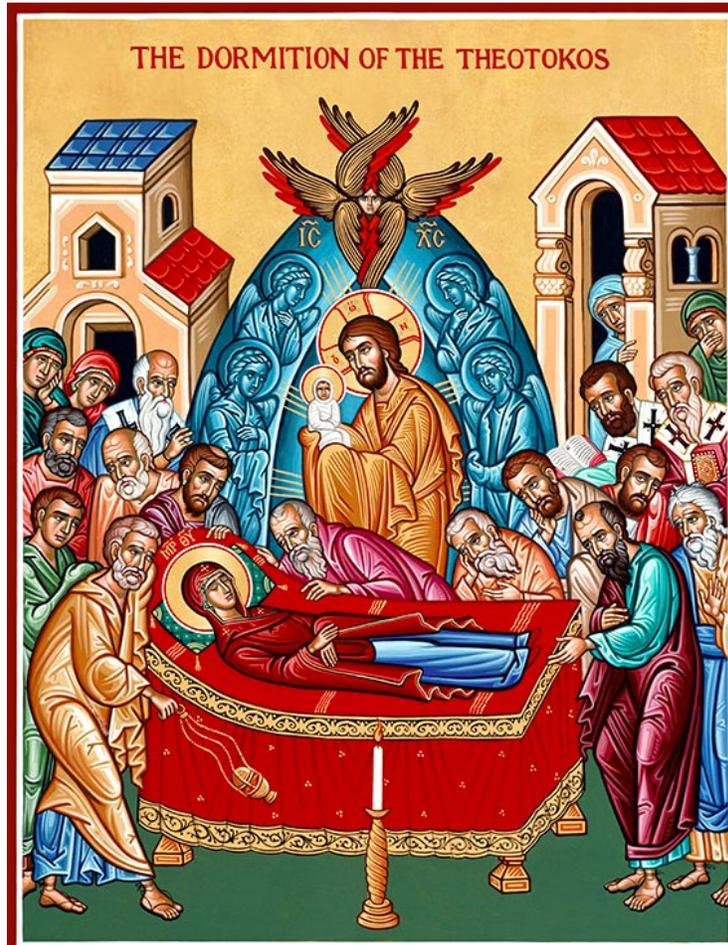
Apostolic times from the beginning. Already in the first century, the Bishop-Martyr Dionysius the Areopagite, the disciple of St. Paul (Acts 17:34), wrote about Her “Falling-Asleep.” In the 2nd century, the account of the bodily ascent of the Most Holy Virgin Mary to Heaven is found in the works of Meliton, Bishop of Sardis. In the fourth century, Saint Epiphanius of Cyprus refers to the “Falling Asleep” of the Mother of God.” We know that at the time of her falling asleep, Mary was again in Jerusalem, praying before the holy sepulcher, the place of Christ’s resurrection.

The Archangel Gabriel came to tell her that the time of her departure to heaven was fast approaching and gave her a palm branch as a pledge. Mary prayed that the Apostle John, to whom

Christ had entrusted His dear Mother on the cross, would be brought to her. The Holy Spirit not only miraculously transported John, but all the Apostles, St. Paul and his disciple, Dionysios, Timothy, and others of the Seventy. Too many to count, St. John of Damascus likens them to clouds and eagles. Holy Tradition relates that she called each by name and wished them eternal bliss.

At the Ninth Hour, the same time Christ was crucified, as those gathered by the Holy Spirit sang songs glorifying God, a bright light shown in their midst. “Descending from Heaven was Christ, the King of Glory, being

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(Homily on the Holy Dormition, cont'd from p.3)

surrounded by hosts of Angels and Archangels and other Heavenly Powers, together with the souls of the Forefathers and the Prophets, who had prophesied in ages past concerning the Most Holy Virgin Mary” in relation to His own Incarnation.

Seeing Her Son, the Mother of God exclaimed: “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God My Savior, for He hath regarded the low estate of His Handmaiden” (Luke 1:46-48), and, rising from Her bed to meet the Lord, She bowed down to Him, and the Lord bid Her enter into Life Eternal. Without any bodily suffering, as though in a happy sleep, the Most Holy Virgin Mary gave Her soul into the hands of Her Son and God.”

Then began a joyous angelic song. The heavenly voices joined the earthly voices as all praised God for the life of Mary the Theotokos. All the faithful kept vigil for three days after she was buried, singing, praying, and glorifying God. St. Thomas arrived only then. In tears he beseeched the other Apostles to allow him to gaze once more on the Most Holy Theotokos. It was then, in compassion for St. Thomas, that they brought her body back out from the grave that the miracle was made known: The grave was empty: Christ God has taken His Mother bodily to heaven.

St. Gregory Palamas says of this holy mystery revealed, “Earth, the grave and death could not ultimately detain her life-giving body, which has held God and been a more beloved habitation for Him than heaven...” King and Prophet David, her forebear, prophesied concerning her, “Upon the right hand did stand the Queen (Ps. 44:9). She is one closest to God. Her Son is always ready to hear her entreaties as He was when He walked the earth.

For her part, the Theotokos is always eager to enjoin our prayers for growth in faith and union with Christ. She is the exception where we can honestly say that she is like her Son and not the other way around. And, like her Son, in whose image she was also made and whose likeness she attained, she, like her Son, loves the world and is always willing to enjoin our prayers to her Son.

This day, of all days, think of one thing you need from Christ God to advance in faith and love and life with Him—the gift of one virtue, one discipline, the healing of one vice or unhealthy habit. Know this: Our holy Mother, Mary, the Theotokos, stands ready to intercede for us this day, and Christ is always quick to hear His holy Mother.

The Epistle to Diognetes (part 3)

I do not think that you require to learn anything from me. For, to accept some of those things which have been formed by God for the use of men as properly formed, and to reject others as useless and redundant — how can this be lawful? And to speak falsely of God, as if He forbade us to do what is good on the Sabbath-days — how is not this impious? And to glory in the circumcision of the flesh as a proof of election, and as if, on account of it, they were specially beloved by God — how is it not a subject of ridicule? And as to their observing months and days, Galatians 4:10 as if waiting upon the stars and the moon, and their distributing, according to their own tendencies, the appointments of God, and the vicissitudes

of the seasons, some for festivities, and others for mourning — who would deem this a part of divine worship, and not much rather a manifestation of folly? I suppose, then, you are sufficiently convinced that the Christians properly abstain from the vanity and error common [to both Jews and Gentiles], and from the busybody spirit and vain boasting of the Jews; but you must not hope to learn the mystery of their peculiar mode of worshipping God from any mortal.

Chapter 5. The manners of the Christians

For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they fol-

low has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh but they do not desire the flesh.

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