

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 12 Issue 578

9th Sunday after Pentecost-The Transfiguration of Our Lord

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Seeing is believing. It is one thing to hear an interesting story or to entertain a bright idea. It is far different, however, to encounter an event or to participate in a situation such that we know its truth and are changed as a result. That is precisely what the apostles Peter, James, and John experienced on Mount Tabor when they were enabled to behold the divine glo-

ry of Jesus Christ, Who shone brightly with light as the voice of the Father identified Him as His beloved Son.

St. Peter writes in today's epistle reading that he did not proclaim "cleverly devised myths" about Christ, for those who beheld the Transfiguration "were eyewitnesses of His majesty." The gospels make clear that the disciples were not looking for a Messiah Who was truly divine, but for a righteous national leader like King David. Peter famously rejected the Lord's prediction of His crucifixion and denied Him three times.

He was restored as the chief apostle and went to his death as a martyr, not because he had made up stories about a crucified and risen Lord, but because the Savior had revealed Himself to Peter as truly the Son of God. And he did not understand the full meaning of
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+ 9th Sunday after Pentecost +

Feast of the Holy Transfiguration

Epistle: 2 Peter 1:10-19

Gospel: Matthew 17: 1-9

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.*

On the Feast of the Transfiguration by St. Athanasius the Sinaite

Upon Mount Tabor, Jesus revealed to his disciples a heavenly mystery. While living among them he had spoken of the kingdom and of his second coming in glory, but to banish from their hearts any possible doubt concerning the kingdom and to confirm their faith in what lay in the future by its prefiguration in the present, he gave them on Mount Tabor a wonderful vision of his glory, a foreshadowing of the kingdom of heaven.

It was as if he said to them: "As time goes by

you may be in danger of losing your faith. To save you from this I tell you now that some standing here listening to me will not taste death until they have seen the Son of Man coming in the glory of his Father. "Moreover, in order to assure us that Christ could command such power when he wished, the evangelist continues:

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, and led them up a high mountain where they were alone. There, before their eyes,

he was transfigured. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light. Then the disciples saw Moses and Elijah appear, and they were talking to Jesus.

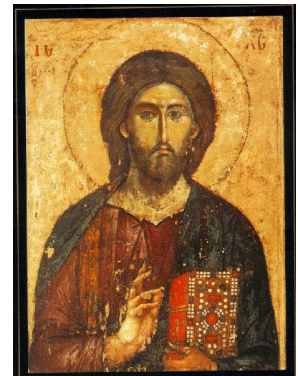
Let us listen, then, to the sacred voice of God so compellingly calling us from on high, from the summit of the mountain, These are the divine wonders we celebrate today; this is the saving revelation given us upon the mountain; this is the festival of Christ that has drawn us here, so that
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We 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.





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 the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

From St. John Kronstadt

Having Christ in your heart, fear that you may lose Him, and with Him the peace of your heart; it is hard to begin again; efforts to attach oneself afresh to Him after falling away will be very grievous, and will cost bitter tears to many. Cling to Christ with all your might, gain Him, and do not lose boldness in approaching Him.

You gaze upon the icon of the Savior and see that He looks at you from it with

brightest eyes; this look is the image of how He actually looks upon you with His eyes, that are brighter than the sun, and sees all your thoughts, hears all your heartfelt distress and sighs. The image represents in lines and signs that which cannot be delineated, cannot be given in signs, and can be comprehended by faith alone. Believe, then, that the Savior always protects you and sees each one of you--with all your thoughts, sorrows and sighing, in all your circumstances, as upon the palm of the hand.

"Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me," says the Lord God. How much consolation and life are contained in these gracious words of the Almighty and Provident God! Therefore pray before the icon of the Savior as before Himself. He is present in it by His grace, and with the eyes depicted in it really looks at you: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place," while with His ears as represented on the icon, He hears you. But remember that His eyes are the eyes of God, and His ears are the ears of the omnipresent God.

On the Transfiguration by St. Athanasius, cont'd from p.1

with the Lord's chosen disciples we may penetrate the deep meaning of these holy mysteries, so far beyond our capacity to express.

Jesus goes before us to show us the way, both up the mountain and into heaven, and – I speak boldly – it is for us now to follow him with all speed, yearning for the heavenly vision that will give us a share in his radiance, renew our spiritual nature and transform us into his own likeness, making us forever sharers in his Godhead and raising us to heights as yet undreamed of.

Let us run with confidence and joy to enter into the cloud like Moses and Elijah, or like James and John. Let us be caught up like Peter to behold the divine vision and to be transfigured by that glorious transfiguration. Let us retire from the world, stand aloof from the earth, rise above the body, detach ourselves from creatures and turn to the creator, to whom Peter in ecstasy exclaimed: Lord, it is good for us to

be here.

It is indeed good to be here, as you have said, Peter. It is good to be with Jesus and to remain here for ever.



What greater happiness or higher honor could we have than to be with God, to be made like him and to live in his light?

Therefore, since each of us possess-

es God in his heart and is being transformed into his divine image, we also should cry out with joy: It is good for us to be here – here where all things shine with divine radiance, where there is joy and gladness and exultation; where there is nothing in our hearts but peace, serenity and stillness; where God is seen.

For here, in our hearts, Christ takes up his abode together with the Father, saying as he enters: Today salvation has come to this house. With Christ, our hearts receive all the wealth of his eternal blessings, and there where they are stored up for us in him, we see reflected as in a mirror both the first fruits and the whole of the world to come.

Troparion of the Feast:

You were transfigured on the mountain, O Christ God, revealing Your glory to Your Disciples as far as they could bear it. Let Your everlasting Light also shine upon us sinners, through the prayers of the Theotokos! O Giver of Light, glory to You!

(Homily on The Transfiguration of Christ, (cont'd from p.1)

the Transfiguration when it occurred, as it was not until after the resurrection that Christ “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” (Lk 24:27) Indeed, the Lord said to Peter, James, and John, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is risen from the dead.” It was only from the perspective of the resurrection, which no one anticipated, that the disciples could understand what it meant for Christ to be the Son of God.

The truth revealed at the Transfiguration may not be conveyed simply in words or ideas. It had to be seen, heard, and experienced in a way that made Peter, James, and John participants as whole persons in the divine glory. The Lord graciously opened the eyes of their souls, filling them with the divine energies such that they could catch a glimpse of His holy majesty. He enabled them to hear the voice of the Father, and like Moses before the Burning Bush, they fell on their faces “and were filled with awe.” As is shown by the disappearance of Moses and Elijah, He enabled them to see His superiority to the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament. They did not simply have thoughts or feelings about Christ; no, they truly experienced Him from the depths of their souls as the Son of God.

The change that occurred was not in the Lord Himself, Who is eternally radiant with the divine glory in a way beyond our comprehension. The change was in the disciples, for Christ opened the eyes of their souls to behold His infinite holiness, to the extent that they were able as human beings. If we observe this feast simply by observing Christ’s divinity or the great mystical experience of the apostles, we will have excluded ourselves from the full meaning of this event.

For as in all feasts of the Church, the point is not simply to look back at what happened long ago. It is, instead, to enter into the eternal truth that is revealed. And on this great day of the Transfiguration, the only appropriate way to celebrate is to cooperate with the gracious divine energies of our Lord so that we also will behold His divine glory. That means that we too must become transfigured through personal union with the Son of God such that His eternal majesty permeates our existence.

As with Peter, who rejected the Lord’s prediction of His death and then denied Him three times, we might well prefer another kind of religion with expectations not quite so high. Shining with the uncreated light may

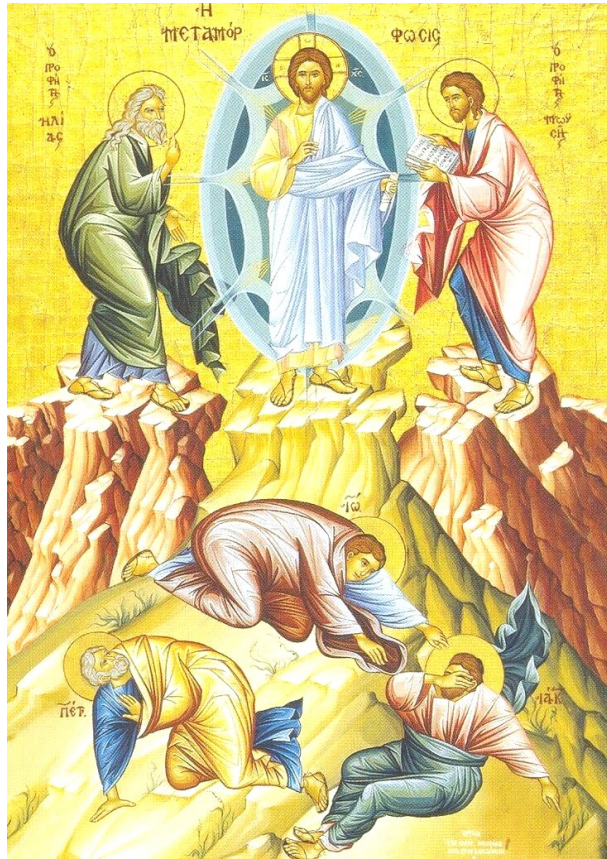
be more than we want to pursue. It may be more appealing to follow an imaginary King David in waging war against those we consider our enemies and to set up a social order that rewards those we think are righteous like ourselves. Maybe we would prefer someone pretending to be Moses or Elijah who would provide instructions that we think good people like us can easily follow on how to live differently from those we like to condemn. Such sentiments are terrible misinterpretations, of course.

The only fitting way to celebrate the Transfiguration is by embracing the opportunities that we have to grow in holiness as we open the eyes of our souls to participate in the glory of God by grace. If the thought ever occurs to you, “Gosh, I’m becoming really holy now,” pay it no attention at all and instead say the Jesus Prayer or at least focus your mind on something other than your own deluded thoughts until it goes away. The more transfigured we are in holiness, the more aware we will be of our sinfulness and the infinite distance between our current spiritual state and the perfection to which our Lord calls us.

The path to shining with light begins with a humble, honest acceptance of the darkness in our lives. The path also continues along that route. That is precisely why we need to be transfigured so that we, who are filled with darkness, will become radiant with the brilliant light of the Lord. But we must be prepared: the more you step into His light, the more obvious the

spots of darkness will be. The better focused the eyes of our souls are, the more we will be aware of our need for His healing and strength.

If we want to enter into the joy of this great feast, we must persistently walk into the light by opening the eyes of our souls to the blinding glory of our Savior. We will often not like what we see in ourselves as a result, but by stumbling forward as best we can, constantly calling out for His mercy, the Lord will change, strengthen, and purify us. He will make us “a lamp shining in a dark place” that gives light and hope to a world that so desperately needs to be healed by union with His gracious divine energies. The message of this feast is not to lose heart, but to press on in faithfulness. For the darkness is simply the absence of light and a sign that we have yet more room to embrace the blessed life of Christ.



The Life of the Nun Ambrosia of Russia-Service to God and Humanity

“I was born on April 4, 1870,”—this is the beginning of the book with a long title, *The Story of an Old Woman, Whom the Lord Did not Abandon and Who Always Considered Herself a Happy Person, Even Amid the Most Severe Suffering*. The book is based on autobiographical notes and the diary of Nun Ambrosia of Shamordino Convent, who lived a long and dramatic life. She saw two world wars, the Revolution, the persecution of the Church, the terrible suffering of people of her generation and experienced them herself: havoc, famine, epidemics and repression.

Many troubles and sorrows fell to the lot of this amazing woman: the deaths of her loved ones, serious illnesses, trials and tribulations after the closure of the convent, arrest, prison, exile, terrible poverty and backbreaking work. But Nun Ambrosia always humbly and completely trusted in God, leaving her heart open for love and goodness. A person of a pure soul and integrity, a doctor by profession, she treated not only bodies, but also human souls. She was a chosen vessel of God.

The Nun Ambrosia (secular name: Alexandra Dmitrievna Oberucheva) was born in Sochi to the family of a military man. The Obruchev family was noted for their piety and purity of life. There was an atmosphere of love for God and for each other in the house, and Alexandra and her only brother Mikhail had a happy childhood. Sashenka [a diminutive form of the name Alexandra.—Trans.] was very attached to her mother, about whom she wrote in her memoirs: “She spoke gently and little, but her every word was an immutable law for us. And our father would tell us, ‘We all must obey Mama.’ There was special purity in her, which was manifested in her words and behavior. In her presence everyone was shy of saying inappropriate words or judging anyone.”

The mother instilled in her children steadfastness in trials and faithfulness to the instructions they received in childhood. When the Nun Ambrosia learned to read and write at the age of seven, her favorite activity was copying prayers into a notebook. She studied first at the Smolensk Gymnasium (classical school), then at the Moscow Alexandrov Institute for women (1884–1889), from which she graduated with a silver medal.

At that time the young lady was strongly impressed by the little book, *The Life of the Missionary Father Da-*

mien de Veuster, which described the selflessness of a young monk; having contracted leprosy, he felt closer to God and considered himself to be the happiest of missionaries. She was also astounded by F. M. Dostoevsky’s novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Because she loved her mother who was often sick, Alexandra longed to see her healthy, and therefore she had the desire to devote herself to medicine. In 1897, she wrote a letter to Emperor St. Nicholas II with a request to allow her to attend lectures privately at the Medical Department of Moscow University. In response she received a message that she had been admitted to the newly opened St. Petersburg Women’s Medical Institute—the only institution in Russia that provided women with higher medical education. Alexandra began her studies with great joy—she felt as if she were crossing the threshold of a holy church rather than an institute. She summarized lectures of venerable professors diligently and spent much time in the anatomical room.

“I recall the feelings I had when we were examining the structure of a living cell and body tissue under a microscope. A special realm was opening up before me, I was astounded by this wonderful structure and involuntarily felt reverence for the Creator of all this,” she wrote in her diary. Alexandra likewise never missed lectures on theology, which other students rarely attended. The society of that time was in a state of deep internal crisis. The very idea of a restructuring of the State, of a revolution, excited the minds of young people. The revolutionary penetrated the walls of the Medical Institute as well, and it became the center of a student revolutionary movement.

Revolutionaries dragged their fellow students into their groups. Although she attended their meetings, Alexandra did not share their views and felt like a stranger in this environment. At meetings she always openly voted against strikes. She must have had the great courage to oppose the whole team on her own. One day, fearing that the institute might be closed due to yet another strike, she came to classes despite threats of physical violence. In the institute the doorman exclaimed: “Why have you come? You may be shot—there are revolvers around the corner!” Alexandra was not afraid, but found a professor and almost forced him to give a lecture. As a result, the strike was disrupted, and the institute was saved.

(continued next issue)

