

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor



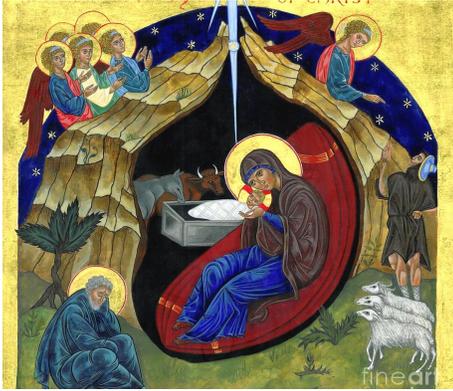
*Glory be to Jesus Christ!*

*Glory be Forever!*

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29<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-The Nativity of Christ

December 24, 2023



On this glorious day where heaven and earth meet, we celebrate God's Incarnation in-the-flesh. In so doing, we do more than commemorate the anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. Through our worship, we call into the present all those glorious and life-saving events surrounding Christ's miraculous birth. This is the day on which God has fashioned all things new and given hope to all mankind to

be renewed in the image and likeness of our Creator.

This is the day on which the whole universe is filled with light and all creation with joy. Through the Divine Services of the Feast we have become witnesses of the communion between those in heaven and those on earth, the angels and shepherds who glorify Him in heaven and on earth join together with one voice, celebrating the greatest of God's gifts: the gift of Himself, His humble condescension to us sinners, God with us! In His great love and mercy, the Creator of all, the Giver of Life, becomes one of His own creation to enter into our human nature and make it new!

Dwell for a moment on this awesome mystery revealed: As we hear in the Royal Hours of the Feast, "Today, He who holds the whole creation in  
*(continued p.3)*

+ The Nativity of Jesus Christ +

+ Commemoration of the Magi +

Epistle: Galatians 4:4-7

Gospel: Matthew 2: 1-12

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.*

## ***On the Birth of Christ by St. John of Kronstadt***

The Word became flesh; that is, the Son of God, co-eternal with God the Father and with the Holy Spirit, became human – having become incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. O, wondrous, awesome and salvific mystery! The One Who had no beginning took on a beginning according to humanity; the One without flesh assumed flesh. God became man – without ceasing to be God.

The Unapproachable One became approachable to all, in the aspect of

an humble servant. Why, and for what reason, was there such condescension [shown] on the part of the Creator toward His transgressing creatures – toward humanity which, through an act of its own will had fallen away from God, its Creator?

It was by reason of a supreme, inexpressible mercy toward His creation on the part of the Master, Who could not bear to see the entire human race – which, He, in creating, had endowed with wondrous gifts – enslaved by the devil and

thus destined for eternal suffering and torment.

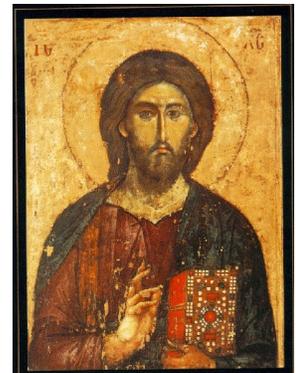
And the Word became flesh to make us earthly beings into heavenly ones, to make sinners into saints; in order to raise us up from corruption into incorruption, from earth to heaven; from enslavement to sin and the devil – into the glorious freedom of children of God; from death – into immortality, in order to make us sons of God and to seat us together with Him upon the Throne as His royal children.

*(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, Mike, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Michael, Abraham, George, Rochelle, Brianna, Tamam, Catherine, Liz, Chuck, Theresa, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

**From St. John Kronstadt**

You hear in church oftener than anything the voices of the priests, deacons, readers, and singers praying God to have mercy upon us. What does this signify? It signifies that all of us who are in God's Temple are deserving, by our sins, of God's punishment, and that before everything--on our coming into the church--we must remember that we are sinners, and have come to the Lord of Heaven and Earth, to

our Creator and Benefactor, Whom we have daily and hourly angered by our iniquities, to ask for mercy, each one for himself, and also, in accordance with Christian love, for others.

The prayers asking for mercy are called in Church "great," "small," and "redoubled." As there is not a single superfluous word in the church service, it is especially necessary at the time of the singing of the redoubled litany to pray to God most fervently, from the very depths of a most contrite heart, as we are reminded at the very beginning of the litany by the words: "Let us say with our whole souls and with our whole understanding." At this time we must lay aside even the slightest coldness, the slightest inattention of heart, and, burning with the spirit of humility, becoming all attention, offer up to the Creator our most fervent prayers to have mercy upon us sinners. But what do we see at the time of the exclamations of the priest and the singing by the singers of the great and redoubled litany? For the greater part, the usual inattention and indifference on the part of those praying.

**On the Nativity of Christ, cont'd from p.1**

O, boundless compassion of God! O, inexpressible wisdom of God! O, great wonder, astounding not only the human mind, but the angelic [mind] as well!

Let us glorify God! With the coming of the Son of God in the flesh upon the earth, with His offering Himself up as a sacrifice for the sinful human race, there is given to those who believe the blessing of the Heavenly Father, replacing that curse which had been uttered by God in the beginning; they are adopted and receive the promise of an eternal inheritance of life. To a humanity orphaned by reason of sin, the Heavenly Father returns anew through the mystery of rebirth, that is, through baptism and repentance. People are freed of the tormenting, death-bearing authority of the devil, of the afflictions of sin and of various passions.

Human nature is deified for the sake of the boundless compassion of the Son of God; and its sins are purified; the defiled are sanctified. The ailing are healed. Upon those in dishonor

are boundless honor and glory. Those in darkness are enlightened by the Divine light of grace and reason.

The human mind is given the rational power of God – we have the mind of Christ (Cor. 2, 16), says the Holy apostle Paul. To the human heart, the heart of Christ is given. The perishable is made immortal. Those naked and wounded by sin and by passions are adorned in Divine glory. Those who hunger and thirst are sated and assuaged by the nourishing and soul-strengthening Word of God and by the most pure Body and Divine Blood of Christ. The inconsolable are consoled. Those ravaged by the devil have been – and continue to be – delivered.

What, then, O, brethren, is required of us in order that we might avail ourselves of all the grace brought unto us from on high by the coming to earth of the Son of God? What is necessary, first of all, is faith in the Son of God, in the Gospel as the salvation-bestowing heavenly teaching; a true repentance of sins and the correction

of life and of heart; communion in prayer and in the mysteries [sacraments]; the knowledge and fulfillment of Christ's commandments. Also necessary are the virtues: Christian humility, alms-giving, continence, purity and chastity, simplicity and goodness of heart.

Let us, then, O brothers and sisters, bring these virtues as a gift to the One Who was born for the sake of our salvation – let us bring them in place of the gold, frankincense and myrrh which the Magi brought Him, as to One Who is King, God, and Man, come to die for us. This, from us, shall be the most-pleasing form of sacrifice to God and to the Infant Jesus Christ.



## Homily on the Nativity of Christ, (cont'd from p.1)

His hand is born of the Virgin.” God, whom the universe cannot contain, has become a tiny babe to inaugurate the new race of Adam. On this day, we sing with the angels in heaven, who rejoice with the shepherds, who, in turn, worship with the magi. On this day, those in heaven and those on earth are joined in one chorus. In Vigil we sang, “today, heaven and earth are united.” “Today, God has come to earth and man ascends to heaven” (Litya of the Feast).

God has destined us for glory, for communion with Him for all eternity. We’re co-heirs with Christ, the Father’s adopted children through the new birth of baptism and Christ in the center of our lives. As St. Athanasius declares, “God became man, that we may become divine.” This is God’s loving desire for us—no matter who you are or what your past. Christ’s Incarnation fills all of humanity with this potential: to find healing from sin-sickness through repentance, to conquer sin and death through His victory over sin and death, to be made anew, in the likeness of Christ, the new Adam, for, “as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive,” (I Cor. 15:22).

Christ’s Nativity is then an invitation to new life, to renewal of life. Christ has become incarnate to give us new identity and self-worth as adopted children, His peace which surpasses all comprehension—the fruit of communion with God the Father in Christ by the Holy Spirit’s indwelling. This is the good news, announced to the shepherds and, indeed, today, for a world suffering under so much sin, disobedience, and violence.

St. Gregory Palamas says of the Mystery revealed: “He who defines all things and is limited by none is contained in a small, makeshift manger. He who holds the universe and grasps it in the hollow of His hand, is wrapped in narrow, swaddling bands and fastened into ordinary clothes.” He who is the King of Kings is worshiped by the Persian kings and receives their gifts. The Only-Begotten One has become incarnate for our sake and reversed and renewed that human nature fallen into sin, despair, and death. “The Word has become flesh without leaving His Father,” as we sing in the Vespers of the Feast. The one who anoints is now the anointed. The one who offers is now the one who is offered.

Gold, a fitting gift for a king, is given to the King of Kings. Frankincense, the gift befitting God, is given to

Christ who is God Incarnate. Myrrh is prophetically offered by the Magi in preparation for His life-saving death, when He will defeat sin and death for all. The One who could, by His own words, call down a thousand angels to destroy the wicked, instead submits Himself in His love and humility to the vulnerability of a new-born babe to call the those who do evil, all of us, to new life, to holiness. The One who loved us into being, now accepts love from his Virgin Mother and adopted father. “He who rained manna on His people in the wilderness is fed on milk from His Mother’s breast” (Royal Hours).

The uncircumscribable God has become circumscribed in His humanity while simultaneously remaining God. And so, for us, humility now has a *face*; humility and love are *known*. The Wisdom and Word of God, *Logos*, who originally brought all things into being, has enlightened the whole universe by virtue of His incarnation. Humility becomes the means of our renewal, in imitation of our Savior born this day in a manger, in a cave, among dumb beasts.

He whose throne the six-winged Seraphim surround in worship, Whose face they cannot bear to see, now appears to us in human flesh and the angels themselves are filled with awe. Because of this life-saving day, every eye may now gaze on that face even as we see Him now through the holy icons, faithfully and timelessly proclaiming the truth of His life-saving incarnation in-the-flesh and His calling to each of us to embrace the new life in Him.

This is our God! See His unsurpassed love and mercy for us. Rejoice with the angels! Be stirred by it, take it to heart for

your renewal and salvation. At Vespers for the Feast we sing, “*The angels offer Thee a hymn; the heavens, a star; the Magi, gifts; the shepherds, their wonder; the earth, its cave; the wilderness, a manger; and we offer Thee a Virgin Mother.*”

Now we who celebrate the Feast ask the question of ourselves: *What do I offer Christ this day?* Let us offer Christ clean minds and a pure heart through repentance. “Let us offer Him a life of virtue instead of Myrrh.” Like the angels, shepherds, and magi, we share this good news with all whom we meet because the world cannot contain our joy in this life-changing event. Thou, O Christ, has this day filled all things with joy!



Behold a new and wondrous mystery. My ears re-sound to the Shepherd's song, piping no soft melody, but chanting full forth a heavenly hymn. The Angels sing. The Archangels blend their voice in harmony. The Cherubim hymn their joyful praise. The Seraphim exalt His glory. All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead here on earth, and man in heaven. He Who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below; and he that was lowly is by divine mercy raised.

Bethlehem this day resembles heaven; hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices; and in place of the sun, enfolds within itself on every side, the Sun of justice. And ask not how: for where God wills, the order of nature yields. For He willed; He had the power; He descended; He redeemed;

all things yielded in obedience to God. This day He Who is, is Born; and He Who is, becomes what He was not. For when He was God, He became man; yet not departing from the Godhead that is His. Nor yet by any loss of divinity became He man, nor through increase became He God from man; but being the Word He became flesh, His nature, because of impassability, remaining unchanged.

And so the kings have come, and they have seen the heavenly King that has come upon the earth, not bringing with Him Angels, nor Archangels, nor

Thrones, nor Dominations, nor Powers, nor Principalities, but, treading a new and solitary path, He has come forth from a spotless womb.

Since this heavenly birth cannot be described, neither does His coming amongst us in these days permit of too curious scrutiny. Though I know that a Virgin this day gave birth, and I believe that God was begotten before all time, yet the manner of this generation I have learned to venerate in silence and I accept that this is not to be probed too curiously with wordy speech. For with God we look not for the order of nature, but rest our faith in the power of Him who works.

What shall I say to you; what shall I tell you? I behold a Mother who has brought forth; I see a Child come to this light by birth. The manner of His conception I cannot comprehend.

Nature here rested, while the Will of God labored. O ineffable grace! The Only Begotten, Who is before all ages, Who cannot be touched or be perceived, Who is

simple, without body, has now put on my body, that is visible and liable to corruption. For what reason? That coming amongst us he may teach us, and teaching, lead us by the hand to the things that men cannot see. For since men believe that the eyes are more trustworthy than the ears, they doubt of that which they do not see, and so He has deigned to show Himself in bodily presence, that He may remove all doubt.

Christ, finding the holy body and soul of the Virgin, builds for Himself a living temple, and as He had willed, formed there a man from the Virgin; and, putting Him on, this day came forth; unashamed of the lowliness of our nature. For it was to Him no lowering to put on what He Himself had made. Let that handi-

work be forever glorified, which became the cloak of its own Creator. For as in the first creation of flesh, man could not be made before the clay had come into His hand, so neither could this corruptible body be glorified, until it had first become the garment of its Maker.

What shall I say! And how shall I describe this Birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of days has become an infant. He Who sits upon the sublime and heavenly Throne, now lies in a manger. And He Who cannot be touched, Who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men. He Who has broken the bonds of

sinners, is now bound by an infants bands. But He has decreed that ignominy shall become honor, infamy be clothed with glory, and total humiliation the measure of His Goodness.

For this He assumed my body, that I may become capable of His Word; taking my flesh, He gives me His spirit; and so He bestowing and I receiving, He prepares for me the treasure of Life. He takes my flesh, to sanctify me; He gives me His Spirit that He may save me. Come, then, let us observe the Feast. Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the Nativity. For this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of kindness diffused, and spreads on every side, a heavenly way of life has been planted on the earth, angels communicate with men without fear, and men now hold speech with angels.

