

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!

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Sunday after the Nativity of Christ

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Christ is born! The Nativity of Christ has never been a one day celebration for the Orthodox faithful. Since the day of God's Incarnation-in-the-flesh began to be celebrated by the Church in the mid-300's A.D, it's been recognized as a season of worship, celebration, and great joy because the Word is made flesh and has dwelt among us.

The light of the world has shown in

the darkness and the world is forever changed and re-oriented toward God. So, on this Sunday, we celebrate the Divine Liturgy remembering that this is a special day liturgically because it's the Sunday After Nativity, a day to which the Church assigns special readings and reminds us again that we are in the midst of our celebration of Christ's holy Nativity.

The Christmas story is full of light, joy, and renewal: the shepherds receive the message of angels "with great joy." The pagan magi who worshiped the stars come, bearing their gifts and follow the star to worship Him who made the stars and who is the Light of Light and the King of Kings, as we sing in the troparion of the Feast.

At the same time, the story of Christ's Nativity is also a story of the
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+ Sunday after the Nativity +

+Righteous Joseph & King David+

Epistle: Galatians 1:11-19

Gospel: Matthew 2: 13-23

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.*

A Conversation with your Soul, by Fr. Ioannichie Balan

Father Ioannichie Balan (1930-2007) devoted his entire life, serving Christ at every moment of his life on earth, with every action, word, and movement of his soul. Fr. Ioannichie kept a spiritual diary, and looking into it, we can see how that was possible.

I call to you now, my soul, come to speak with me! I call to you, come and awaken from sleep! Come, my soul, so that we can talk, rejoice together and cry! Return from the scattered paths and roads and come so

that we can examine our conscience, reject sins and make a good beginning in the service of the Lord Jesus.

Thus, seeing that I am so sinful and negligent, I advise you, by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, from now on to move forward with a new spirit and new morale; to try most of all to practice spiritual virtues, so that by them we can be vouchsafed the mercy of the Good God in our hour of death.

Love. My soul, I have put Divine love first,

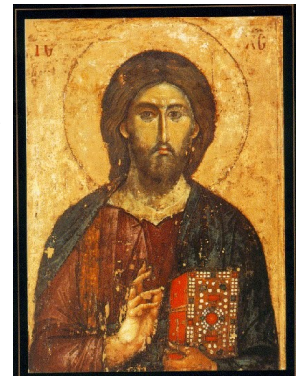
without which you will die unless you strive to acquire it. Love God as He loves you. Love Him, trusting entirely in His will. Love Him with unceasing prayer, humble obedience, profound humility and penitent crying. Love Him, loving your neighbor; love Him with sacred stillness, love Him with self-denial and self-humiliation.

Remember, my soul, how much the Good God loves you! How much He has done for you, my dear. In addition to His
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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, 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

A terrible truth. Impenitent sinners after their death lose every possibility of changing for good, and therefore remain unalterably given up to everlasting torments (for sin cannot but torment). How is this proved? It is plainly proved by the actual state of some sinners and by the nature of sin itself--to keep the man its prisoner and to close every outlet to him. Who does not know how difficult it is, without God's

special grace, for a sinner to turn from the way of sin that is so dear to him into the path of virtue?

How deeply sin takes root in the heart of the sinner, and in all his being! how it gives the sinner its own way of looking at things, by means of which he sees them quite differently to what they are in reality, and shows him everything in a kind of alluring light! It is for this reason that we see that sinners very often do not even think of their conversion, and do not consider themselves to be great sinners, because their eyes are blinded by their self-love and pride. And if they do consider themselves sinners, then they give themselves up to the most terrible despair, which overwhelms their mind with thick darkness and greatly hardens their heart. But for the grace of God, what sinner would have returned to God? For it is the nature of sin to darken our souls, to bind us hand and foot. But the time and place for the action of grace is here alone: after death there remain only the prayers of the Church, and these prayers can be efficacious for penitent sinners alone--

A Conversation with your Soul, cont'd from p.1

Cross, death, and Resurrection, the Lord raised you from death, enlightened you by Holy Baptism, nurtured you with the milk of the right faith and strengthened you in everything with the dew of the Holy Spirit... What has the Lord not done for you? What has He not given you of what you have asked of Him?

What has He ignored when you needed something? Who kept you alive for twenty-six years? Who comforted you in sorrows? Who strengthened your hope for Paradise? Who visited you when you were sick? Who wiped away your tears? Whose hand has covered you all your life?

What Good Samaritan showed you compassion when you were lying, beaten by robbers, on the path of your life? Who put you on His horse? Who brought you to this guesthouse? Who anointed you with oil and bandaged your wounds? Who gave you health, sight, hearing, speech, and mind? Who has been maintaining your life? Only the Good God!

God alone has given you everything

and has done everything for you. He kept you in the world for twenty years, preparing something better for you. He took you out of your father's house, out of the wicked life of this world and brought you to this holy assembly, where you can be saved easily and heal your wounds...

The Good God alone has done everything for you out of love. Therefore, I advise you and solemnly urge you to love the Lord Jesus, God, more. Love Him from the bottom of your soul, love Him with all the strength and zeal of your heart, love Him with all the strength of your mind and thought.

Do whatever you do to be for the glory of God with zeal, and what is not for His glory, don't do. I advise you to love Him especially with frequent prayer, deep humility and sincere obedience. Do everything for Him alone, try not to upset Him with anything and serve Him with love until you die. And do everything that brings peace to your soul, everything that comforts you in sorrows and eve-

rything that strengthens you in life, with joy and hope. When you grieve His holiness, fall down with many tears, fall down in profound humility in prayer, and He will forgive you.

Also, my soul, love your neighbor. Love all people without distinction. Love everyone in Christ and Christ in all humans. Don't discriminate. Don't upset anyone with your actions. Don't offend anyone with your words, and especially in your monastic life, treat your abbot and all the fathers and brethren with love. Love everyone as yourself, serve everyone with love as your parents, and seek peace for everyone!



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Homily on the Sunday after the Nativity, (cont'd from p.1)

disparate, of being separate—alone but not lonely. Where God is, there is always fullness. All that would otherwise appear as empty or lacking from a temporal perspective, is filled to overflowing with the eternal. Joseph and Mary find no room in the inn, but they are welcomed by the animals in the cave that becomes Christ's manger, and which foreshadows His burial in the tomb at which time He harrows hades and raises the souls (and some of the bodies) of the faithful to eternal life.

Soon after Christ is born, as we read in today's Gospel, Joseph receives word from an angel that he must flee with the Holy Child to Egypt. Imagine! From their harrowing journey to Bethlehem with Mary in travail and unable to find a place to rest and give birth, now, they must also flee. Jealous Herod has all the infant boys under two slain in his prideful fear and ignorance concerning the nature of Christ's Kingdom. Then, after several years, after their return to Israel, Joseph and his adopted family flee again: this time to Nazareth. You could say that Christ's early years were spent "on the run." What courage and faith Mary and Joseph demonstrate to us.

Christ God Himself tells us, that if any man would come after Him, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Him. From His birth, to His early childhood, to His ministry, the cross, the grave, Christ goes before us in His example. He changes us from within to equip us for life with Him, eternal life.

There's one aspect of our struggle to live out our faith in Christ that I hear more than any other in this regard: People tell me how hard it is to be a Christian these days; many often feel like they're going it alone. So many around them: family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, fellow students are all living largely secular, even godless lives.

Even as many still consider themselves more or less 'Christian,' the research shows us that this number is in decline in our culture; what Christianity remains is often on their terms and superficial, and, therefore, of minimal impact on how they live their lives, how they stand out as witnesses in the hedonistic culture at large. This leaves those who truly strive to live out the life in Christ,

to deny themselves, to take up that cross, in a seeming lonely place—in their families or among their neighbors or classmates—in possessing the fear and love for God that others scoff at, in submitting themselves to the Gospel and the Orthodox Faith, which is, in so many ways, so counter-cultural and politically incorrect.

What God teaches us in His call to deny ourselves and take up our cross, in the countless examples we have in the martyrs, is that this world is not, cannot be, our true home, if we are to become inheritors of eternal life. Just as there was no room for Christ in the inn, so too, this world makes no room for Him in their hearts. So too, they will reject you who have Christ.

But the Good News is that those whose identity is grounded in Christ and His Church, who have put on

Christ through baptism and become His adopted sons and daughters, who have rejected the hold of the world, are never alone. The Good News brought by the Archangel reminds us of this truth: "You shall bear a Son and His name shall be called, 'Emmanuel' (God with us). "God with us" is manifested in and through our life in the Church.

When you and I avail ourselves of the Church, we're assured that in our striving and struggling to follow Christ faithfully, we too will be victors over this world for, as Christ reassures us, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against her" (Matt.

16:18). The holy icons remind us of this truth that Emmanuel is with us, even now; Christ is reflected in the faces of the Saints, and, as He is seen and experienced in the Holy Gifts of His precious Body and Blood, the abiding Gift of Himself to His Bride, the Church.

This is why, brothers and sisters, that it's so important that we make time to worship together; that we make Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings, as well as the feast days of the Church, sacred time, set aside time, to worship the Holy Trinity together, as the Body of Christ, as this church family. To be victors over the world and find our identity in our new life in Christ, our "second birth," we need more of Holy Church and not church on the periphery, or on our own terms. Otherwise, we may find "we have gained the whole world, but forfeited our souls."

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Every time you walk through our church's doors and light a candle, I want you to remember, that you are not alone in your struggle to live out your faith in a culture or family or work or school environment of disbelief, skepticism, confusion. Emmanuel is here! Christ God was born in a lonely cave for our salvation. Joseph and Mary had no one else.

But God provided a family to share in their joy: the shepherds in the field who received the news from the angels and the magi who came in their own due time to worship the new-born babe, Jesus, Emanuel. This is where the Feast of the Nativity leads us: not you or me, but we, Christ and the Church which He's entrusted to us, which communes us with Him, Emmanuel, so that we may always find the strength and courage to bear witness to the light and truth in a world .

One of the most common questions that comes up when someone comes to the Orthodox Church, especially those who come from Protestant backgrounds is "Why do you call the priest 'Father'?" This is actually a very good question. We should ask questions about our faith and try to dig in and learn as much as we possibly can in life, especially our life in Christ. When we ask the right questions, we have the possibility of gaining knowledge and insight that can inform and sometimes transform our reality. That being said, we are encouraged to ask but also to listen closely to the answers provided through the gospels, through the Scriptures, and through the holy tradition of the Church as it has existed for 2000 years.

This question about why we call the priest "Father" is even more important in light of the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 23:9 where He says "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven." So the question then is, "why do Orthodox and Roman Catholic believers still call their priests "Father"? As far as I can tell, the answer is multi-faceted. It involves depth not careless and simple interpretation.

Fr. Richard Ballew in his short article "Call No Man Father?" writes that "[Christ] was telling them not to use their positions as fathers and teachers as an opportunity to build disciples around their own private opinions. For to do so would only serve to "shut up the kingdom of heaven against men". He goes on saying "While Father Abraham by his faith-

fulness deserved the title, as did others of Israel's greats in history, these men (the Pharisees and Sadducees) had forfeited their role as fathers. They were to cease and desist in their use of the term and, in turn, bow to God Himself as the fountainhead of all fatherhood."

St. Jerome writes, "No one should be called teacher or father except God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the Father, because all things are from him. He alone is the teacher, because through him are made all things and through him all things are reconciled to God.

But one might ask, "Is it against this precept when the apostle calls himself the teacher of the Gentiles? Or when, as in colloquial speech widely found in the monasteries of Egypt and Palestine, they call each other Father?" ...

One is rightly called a teacher only from his association with the true Teacher. I repeat: The fact that we have one God and one Son of God through nature does not prevent others from being understood as sons of God by adoption. Similarly this does not make the terms father and teacher useless or prevent others from being called father." Commentary on Matthew 4.23.10. St. John Chrysostom had this to say, "not that they should not call, but they may know whom they ought to call Father, in the highest sense. For like as the master is not a master principally; so neither is the father. For

He (God) is cause of all, both of the masters, and of the fathers." Commentary on Matthew, Homily LXXII

In an epistle we hear these words from the great Apostle St. Paul who writes "For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel." (1 Cor 4:15) I remind you that this St. Paul encountered the living Lord Jesus Christ and learned from Him directly. He was the chosen apostle to preach and teach the gentiles. He possibly understood the faith with more depth than anyone who had come before or after him. Yet here he clearly calls himself "father" to those Christians at Corinth. It wasn't that He was ignorant of the teaching of Christ. It was that He understood it much better than we do. It was meant to mold and guide our understanding of reality in Christ. Life in the Church, just as in the home, functions best when a good father is present. The father is there to challenge, to encourage, to correct, to protect, and to provide for his family, meaning our worldly needs and most importantly, this refers to caring for our spiritual needs.

