

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



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Christ is Risen! Christos Voskrese! Al' masir Qam! Christos Anesti!

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5th Sunday of Holy Pascha+ Samaritan Woman

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There is a lot of truth in the saying that familiarity breeds contempt. It is possible for even the best things in life to become so familiar that we become blind to their true importance. We can do that even with our celebration of the Savior's victory over death, as though the Paschal season were simply about singing joyful hymns and enjoy-

ing rich food. It is certainly possible to reduce any dimension of the life of Church to a mere cultural observance that we assume is only for some people, usually those we think are like us in some particular way. Both today's gospel and epistle readings challenge us, however, to consider how the good news of the resurrection impacts the world in a way that is so unfamiliar as to be unsettling, and which challenges our assumptions about who God's people are.

The Samaritan woman certainly took nothing for granted about Jesus Christ. The Jewish nation viewed the Samaritans as heretics who had intermarried with Gentiles, and they had nothing to do with them; as well, men did not strike up conversations with women in public in that time. So when the Lord asked her for a drink of water and
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Miracle, Hope and Love, by Fr. Themistoklis Mourtzanos

Why do people seek miracles in their lives in order to believe? Is it only the effect of our reason that makes us doubt what we all fundamentally know to be true, that is, the presence of God?

Is it the pressure caused by our surroundings, especially people we trust and who influence us; or a feeling that we have to live the experience of proof ourselves and that it's not enough to know the experience of others who have lived the miracle of faith throughout

the centuries, either from being with Christ from the beginning or through His successors?

In the period of the Resurrection, we read excerpts from the book of the Acts of the Apostles. In one of these extracts, Saint Peter raises two people: one from his enforced eight year paralysis, which made his pallet into a kind of grave; and the other a woman who had done many good works among the Christians in Joppa and who had died of a sudden

illness. One resurrection was from an ailment, the other from death.

In both cases, those who witnessed the miracle responded to them and accepted Christ as their Lord. In other words, they believed. It wasn't just the scale of the miracle. It was the fact that the person who performed it did so not through his own power but through his faith in Christ. They didn't believe in Peter, but in Christ, through Peter.
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*** Samaritan Woman ***

St. Theodosius of the Kiev Caves

Epistle: Acts: 11:19-26, 29-30

Gospel: John: 4: 5-42

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.

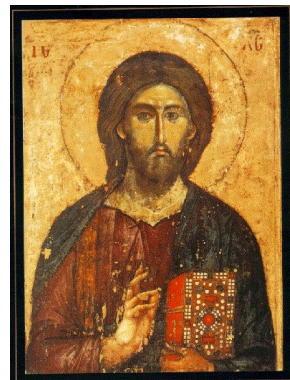
We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

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.*

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 and invite you down to the church hall for our social hour.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Lillian, Meg, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Lorraine, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Bonnalee, Vicky, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

The last Prayer of St. George.

When Saint George was brought at the place of his martyrdom, he asked his executioners to give him a little bit of time and after lifting his eyes to heaven, he exclaimed from the depths of his heart: "My Lord and God, to whom I belong since birth and I have placed all my hopes; You that have given me courage and have prepared me for this struggle.

You who are my sweet hope, the true promise, the unaltered love of the holy souls; You who look attentively at the intentions of our hearts and satisfy our desires, before we even request them in our prayers; You, I say, help me to complete successfully this struggle, which I have undertaken for the confession of Your name, and receive my soul, which after preserving it above the evil spirits, place it with those who have pleased You over the centuries. And forgive, my Master, all this people for what they ignorantly have done to me, and make them worthy to truly recognize You, because You are blessed for now and forever."

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Temptations bring humility. God knows how much each one of us can withstand in terms of temptations. Thus, He allows temptations to the extent of our strength. But at the same time we need to be alert and watchful, so we do not tempt ourselves. We should also remember that after trials and temptations, spiritual joy will follow. The Lord watches over those who endure trials and tribulations for His love.

Miracle, Hope and Love, (cont'd from p. 1)

They felt the experience- the miracle that had occurred to their neighbors- touch them and theirs. But they realized that the truth was not confined to the experience but included the person who was revealed by it: Jesus Christ as God. Both miracles increased the number of people who became part of the Church community. The miracles weren't the actions of a someone performing marvels for the sake of his or her personal glory. They were those of a man with direct experience of God, who transmitted it through his words and through his miracles.

In essence, then, there are three miracles recorded: health, life and communion. Our health is precious to us. If it's badly affected, this is a great trial. Health and also sickness do have within them some hope, however, which is that of sustainability or of change. That health will be maintained or restored, either through medical science, the body's own resources or a miracle. People who are ill retain within themselves the hope

that they may become well again.

Death, though, involves the loss of any kind of hope. Both the deceased and their families are entirely powerless in the face of death and cease to have any hope, since death is an event from which there's no return. In the two miracles Peter performed in the name of Christ, he restored hope as a gift from God. He brought Aeneas back to health, fulfilling the man's dreams, even though this seemed not to be feasible. He told him to get up and sort out his pallet. In essence, to pull himself together, because he now had hope that God exists and hadn't forgotten him.

And not just at that moment. At every trial in his life thereafter, he would feel God present. Peter gave life to Tabitha and to those who loved her the joy and hope that she would regain her place in their lives. Because the raising of Tabitha is a sign that, in the end, death doesn't have dominion over our lives. Faith defeats it, either through the resurrection of a miracle or through the resurrection of the

dead.

The third miracle is communion among people, which is experienced in the Church. Both Aeneas and Tabitha were members of the local Church and the miracles were experienced by all the other members thereof. The Church is the body of Christ, it's the community of those who hope and also of those who believe. They believe in Christ as the victor over death, Who will give us what's missing in this present life, in our daily routine, whether this be health, progress, or the strength to withstand our trials.



We believe that Christ and those who follow Him have the last word, even as regards the final enemy of our
(continued p.4, column 2)

engaged her in an extended theological discussion, she was completely surprised. He knew the details of her broken personal history and obviously related to her very differently than had the men in her community.

This encounter made such an impression that “she left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?’” She did something quite shocking herself in that moment, proclaiming to her fellow Samaritans that this Jewish rabbi was the Messiah. “Many Samaritans from that city believed in Him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He said to me all that I ever did.’”

So when the Samaritans came to Him, they asked Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His words. They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.’”

A Samaritan woman with an immoral lifestyle became the Great Martyr Photini, an unlikely evangelist whose testimony led many in her village to belief in Christ. Her transformation occurred because she received by faith the living water of which the Savior spoke, “a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” Here is a foreshadowing of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, for she is empowered from the depths of her soul to participate in the healing of the human person that our Risen Lord has brought to the world. As we chanted at Great Vespers about Photini after her encounter with Christ, “that chaste woman hastened at once to the city and said to the crowds: Come and see Christ the Lord, the Savior of our souls.” Yes, she was truly restored to the dignity of a beloved child of God in the divine image and likeness.

Remember that in the chapter of John’s gospel right before the Lord’s conversation with Photini, He spoke with the Pharisee Nicodemus, an expert in the Jewish law. At that point, Nicodemus could not understand even the most basic points of the Lord’s teaching. How shocking, then, that a Samaritan woman with a notorious past came to faith so quickly and even preached to others. Through her witness, the Lord Himself spent two

days in a Samaritan village, which must have been the last thing that anyone expected the Jewish Messiah to do. His salvation does not operate according to the conventional categories of this world, but transcends and subverts them. How odd: Great religious teachers miss the point, while disgraced women from despised communities become glorious saints.

Our reading from Acts describes the foundation of the first Gentile church in Antioch, where the disciples were first called Christians. It took a good bit of debate and discernment for the Church to determine how to respond to Gentiles who wanted to become Christians, for the

origins of the faith are so clearly in Judaism. At the council held by the apostles in Acts 15: 8-9, St. Peter said of the Gentile Christians, “God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us.”

He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.” That, of course, is a very good description of what the Lord had done with St. Photini. The letter to the Gentile Christians from that council did not require them to become circumcised or convert to Judaism, but “to abstain from food sacrificed to idols...and from sexual immorality.” (Acts 15:20) It is not surprising that the Jewish Christian leaders of the Church made a point of reminding Gentile converts to distance themselves from forms of spiritual and moral corruption so common in their culture.



The inclusion of Samaritans like Photini and Gentiles like the original Antiochian believers provides a powerful sign that the resurrection of Christ is not about business as usual in a world where people divide up according to all kinds of human characteristics. When we do that, we define ourselves over against enemies, real and imagined, and tend to think that all the evil and wickedness are on the side of those we oppose. Among the many dangers of such ways of thinking is that we easily become the self-righteous judges of others and inflame our own passions to the point that we see neither ourselves nor our neighbors clearly. A Jewish person of the first century would typically have viewed Photini as a terrible sinner who did the wretched kinds of things expected of Samaritans.

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Homily on the Samaritan Woman (con't from p.3)

The apostles could have easily put up almost insurmountable roadblocks to keep the Gentiles at arm's length. That the Church developed very differently is an indication that it is not simply another human institution of a world enslaved to the fear of death, but truly the Body of our Risen Lord in Whom "strangers and foreigners" become "fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God" by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 2:19) As St. Paul taught, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28) He offers living water to all people who come to Him in humble faith as did St. Photini, the Samaritan woman.

Like her, we all encounter Christ as people with a history of personal brokenness in thought, word, and deed. We may doubt, however, whether the Savior's victory over death, the wages of sin, may truly become active in us. The Church highlights the example of so many notorious sinners who have become great saints by receiving the Lord's mercy through repentance. Perhaps we have heard their stories so many times that we take them for granted and assume that, after their conversion, they were no longer troubled by temptations, doubts, and sorrow for their failings. That would be an unrealistic assumption, of course. If we are genuinely embracing the new life our Risen Lord, we will face battles in our own souls as we turn away from the darkness of the tomb and toward the brilliant light of His kingdom.

As the eyes of our souls gain the focus to behold His radiant glory more fully, the darkness within us will become all the more apparent. We will then be like Photini when the Savior mentioned her history with men. Instead of shutting down in shame or making excuses, she simply said, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet" as she continued to open herself to the healing mercy of the Lord through faith. If we truly believe that Christ has conquered death, the wages of sin, then we must become as courageous as she was in offering even the most painfully broken dimensions of lives to the Savior for healing. Like her, let us do so with the confident hope of those who know that something worth living and dying for has come into the world, for Christ is Risen!

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Miracle, Hope and Love (cont'd from p.2)

existence, death.

The Church isn't a body of theorists. It's a body that hopes, believes and communes. All three miracles have to do with Christ. People who don't experience these signs don't understand the grace we receive in our hearts as members of the body of Christ. This body creates a different way of viewing human relationships. It's not life, routine, or the goals and dreams of this world that bring us close together. It's the presence of Christ in our hearts.

Unless they have the faith which becomes a relationship with Christ, those who talk about the sacraments or the way in which the Church acts can't understand why we wish to be in good spiritual health first and foremost, because we hope in Christ, because we commune with one another and with Christ. Our faith invites us to 'Come and see', especially during this time of the year. And the experience brings us rest and comfort when our ego stops being demanding, and instead becomes accepting, surrendering to the miracle that is Christ. When Christ is our hope. When we're determined to pull ourselves together. When we feel that we're missing Christ and we seek him with might and main.

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"To love a man means seeing him as God intended him to be." Compassion is the most important and, perhaps, the only law of existence for all mankind. Freedom is not about not restraining oneself. It is about having self-control. There is a line in all things that is dangerous to cross; for it is impossible to turn back once you have crossed it.

Happiness is not a matter of being happy; rather, it is the process of achieving it. It is necessary to love life more than to seek its meaning. Life suffocates without purpose. If you stop reading books, it means that you stop thinking. There is no happiness in comfort; happiness is born of misery. Beauty shall save the world. If you are on your way to the goal and stop to throw stones at any dog that barks at you, you will never reach that goal. Truth without love is a lie. Seek love and accumulate love in your hearts. Love is so powerful that it makes us born again. If you truly love, either jealousy will kill your love, or your love will kill jealousy.

