

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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16th Sunday after Pentecost— The Calling of the Disciples

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We see before us today another miracle of Jesus Christ that bears particularly and personally on your faith, on my faith, and on our church. Christ once again reveals Himself as God incarnate.

The Gospel is opened for us today to reveal the calling of Christ's foremost disciples: Peter, James, and John.

Christ doesn't call these fishermen in the Synagogue but on the water, in their boats, while fishing! In other words, He calls them where they're at, where you'd expect to find a pious fisherman—on the sea, fishing!

And what does He call them to? He calls them to follow Him, that is, to grasp hold of Life and He calls them to share that Life with others, saying, "Do not be afraid, from now on you will be fishers of men" (Luke 5: 10). Having just seen the miracle of the great catch of fish by Him who called those fish into being where there weren't any before, they're ready to leave all else behind to follow Christ.

All of us as baptized Orthodox Christians are certainly likewise beckoned to follow Christ, to become inheritors of true and everlasting Life, that is life in Christ. The reality is

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+ 16th Sunday after Pentecost +
+ Birth of the Holy Theotokos +

Epistle: 2 Cor 6: 1-10

Gospel: Luke 5: 1-11

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 Feast of the Birth of the Theotokos, by Deacon Rafael Misiaoulis

The feast of the Birth of the Mother of God is a cause of universal rejoicing, thanks to the all-pure and blessed person of Our Lady. The feast is a harbinger of joy, because from the Virgin rose the Sun of Righteousness, Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the World.

The parents of the Mother of God were Joachim and Ann. Both of them belonged to the root and lineage of David and were devout and righteous people. They'd grown old, however, without having had any

children, and this saddened them. They implored God for many years to grant them a child and promised that, should he do so, the child would be dedicated to him.

It should be mentioned that, at that time, being childless was a curse and stigma for a married couple, who were derided by the whole of society. The priests didn't even accept the gifts such couples brought to the temple of God, because of the lack of offspring. In this instance, God rewarded the

prayers and deep piety of Joachim and Ann.

Through the Archangel Michael, he announced that the barren and sterile Ann would give birth to a holy child. They thus proved to be true benefactors of the human race, since they also contributed to the salvation of the world. The Birth of the Mother of God was a gift from God to them, commensurate with their virtue.

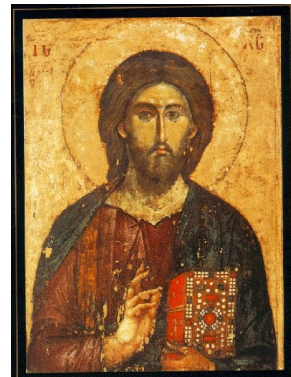
We celebrate a two-fold miracle today. The first is that the barren gates of
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our pas-

tor, 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

"And by His stripes [wounds] we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

We are healed by the wounds of Christ. Thus, the prophet of God prophesies and we now know that his prophecy is true. By the suffering of Christ, we have been saved from eternal suffering; by His All-pure blood, we are cleansed of the leprosy

of sin and are enlivened. Our blood and body became impure from sinful passions; but our spirit, the nest and source of bodily impurity, first became impure. Can the unclean be cleansed by the unclean?

Only that which is clean can wash that which is unclean. One drop of the blood of the All-pure Christ can cleanse mankind more than all of the idolatrous sacrifices from the beginning of the world. Why? Because the blood of Christ is pure and all else is impure. Physicians take one drop of a strong remedy and diluting it, vaccinate many people with it in order to protect them from disease.

We even dilute the blood of Christ in the Chalice with water and then we take it and drink it, for it is said that when they pierced the body of the Lord with a spear "there came out blood and water" (St. John 19:34). Such is the power from one drop of His blood that, the world could be burned by it. That is the sinless blood, the only sinless blood; the blood most-pure, the only pure blood in the world. "By thy Precious Blood, thou has released us from the curse of the law."

The Birth of the Theotokos, continued from p.1

elderly Ann are opened and the Incorrupt Virgin is born. The second is that the closed gate of Eden is opened, the gate which was sealed because of the disobedience of our first ancestors, Adam and Eve. It opens because God wished to show that he was well-pleased with the couple, Joachim and Ann, and that he wasn't simply giving them the fruit of the womb they so desired and had prayed for, but was also giving them the maiden who would open the path to God for us, as well.

Today, joy has come to the human race. We hear this in the Dismissal Hymn for the feast. But what is this joy which the Church celebrates? Certainly not joy which we as people normally understand it. For us, today's joy isn't an emotion we feel, it isn't enjoyment. It's a gift from heaven, the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Joy is related to grace. Grace is the gifts God bestows on us and which save us, bring us into heaven. Joy, then, is a gift of God to us.

On the occasion of today's feast,

Saint John the Damascus writes: 'today the gates of sterility are opened and a divine, virginal portal is presented, from whom God will pass and enter the world "bodily". God who is beyond all beings, according to Saint Paul, who heard the



"inexpressible mysteries".

The Virgin Mary is our most precious offering to God, made so that he could effect and instigate our salvation. She is the guarantee of salvation and of our perfection in Christ. Through her birth, Our Most Holy Lady opened the way for the incarnation of the Son and Word of God and,

by extension, started the work of the salvation of the human race. Through her birth, Our Lady loosed the bonds of sterility, both for her parents and also for the whole of the human race. As an affectionate mother, she tends people's problems and pain and is constantly working wonders through her protection. As a faithful people, we have no other hope but Our Most Holy Lady.

Our Lady is Broader than the Heavens; she is the Intercessor at the frontier between the created and the uncreated. She receives our prayers and takes them to the throne of her Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Virgin Mary is the offering of the race of mortals to the Triune God. She's already a citizen of the kingdom of heaven and sits alongside the throne of God, interceding for our salvation.

Our Most Holy Lady, the Mother of God, is living dogma, that is a living, firm principle which is beyond all doubt, because of the informed theology concerning her which is accepted by the Universal Church.

(Homily on the Calling of the Disciples, cont'd from p.1)

that this journey of salvation, what we call deification or theosis in the Church, our increasing participation in the Life of the Holy Trinity, is never just about ourselves. Part of that growth in participation in the life of the Holy Trinity is achieved only by coming outside ourselves to love and to serve Christ by witnessing to His truth in this world around us.

Listen to what St. Paul says, "Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation... Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." (II Cor. 5:17,20). By virtue of our putting on Christ in baptism, becoming a new creation in Him, we're made His ambassadors to the world around us.

Our living out of our faith is our response to that calling as ambassadors. So, it's incumbent on us to examine how we live our lives, how we speak, how we think, what we do, how we love, how we prioritize our worship and our time with God and with each other, but also how we perceive our fellow man and woman. Are we perhaps indifferent toward their plight? Do we fear witnessing or being more open about our faith for fear of rejection?

What gift from God compels us to model our faith before others? The verse we hear in every Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom gives us the answer: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, may have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16).

Having put on Christ in baptism, having been made a new creation, having become Christ's ambassadors, called by Christ to be His light and salt in this world, we grow in the love that God Himself is the Author of, the love that God Himself models for us and pours out on us through His Son Who entered into human nature as man so that He could redeem that nature as God.

We who are in Christ are called to grow in that same love, to share that same love and hope of new life. This love is a love for the truth of God, for the fullness of life with God, because Christ proclaims and demonstrates Himself to be that Truth. If we are in Christ, the same desire to save the lost, to witness and speak the truth of God that Christ did, that the holy Apostles possessed, that we see in evidence in all the Saints, is also in us.

Following Christ, the Saints overcome their prideful fear of rejection, and dared to love God to such an extent that they can follow Him and become great "fishers of men." So, if we find ourselves indifferent or our love growing cold, then we repent and begin to pray that Christ will give us His love, to help us to learn to love with His love.

While we may understand the "why" of witnessing the Gospel and Orthodox Faith, it doesn't take away from the fact that to many, coming outside ourselves to witness to the truth of our faith is daunting if not frightening. It demands humility, overcoming over-sensitivity and fear of rejection. Remember Christ's four words when He tells the disciples that they will now be "Fishers of men: "Do not be afraid" (Luke 5: 10).

It's true: sometimes our witness to the truth that Christ is will be rejected. We may be greeted with indifference or even scorned. St. Paul puts it this way: "We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness" (I Cor. 1:23). There's no doubt that it's easier just to remain silent, to get along, but this is not love. Instead, Christ God calls us to love sacrificially by witnessing to the truth that He is in a world trapped in darkness.

We have an inherent interest in following Christ's call to become "Fishers of men." This is a "spiritual hospital" for all of us who are sin-sick and looking for growth in Christ. We trust that God will provide and we bless the hands through which He provides. We are participants in

this work and in its fruit: those who grow in their faith in Christ, those who return to their faith in Christ, those who come to the fullness of faith and life in Christ through His Church. All because those before us were not afraid or ashamed to be "fishers of men," to heed Christ's call in obedience just as the disciples Peter, James, and John did in today's Gospel.

We serve as Christ's ambassadors: we give of our time, talents, and our treasures, so that we can build a church, another spiritual 'hospital,' for all those who will come to embrace the life in Christ with us through this church. This too is an act of love and sacrifice that you and I are called to continue growing in. And so, we remember Christ's words, "Do not be afraid, from now on you will be fishers of men" (Luke 5: 10).



Chapter 12. The importance of knowledge to true spiritual life

When you have read and carefully listened to these things, you shall know what God bestows on such as rightly love Him, being made [as you are] a paradise of delight, presenting in yourselves a tree bearing all kinds of produce and flourishing well, being adorned with various fruits. For in this place the tree of knowledge and the tree of life have been planted; but it is not the tree of knowledge that destroys — it is disobedience that proves destructive.

Nor truly are those words without significance which are written, how God from the beginning planted the tree of life in the midst of paradise, revealing through knowledge the way to life, and when those who were first formed did not use this [knowledge] properly, they were, through the fraud of the Serpent, stripped naked. For neither can life exist without knowledge, nor is knowledge secure without life. Wherefore both were planted close together. The Apostle, perceiving the force [of this conjunction], and blaming that knowledge that knowledge which, without true doctrine, is admitted to influence life, declares.

Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. For he who thinks he knows anything without true knowledge, and such as is witnessed to by life, knows nothing, but is deceived by the Serpent, as not loving life. But he who combines knowledge with fear, and seeks after life, plants in hope, looking for fruit.

Let your heart be your wisdom; and let your life be true knowledge inwardly received. Bearing this tree and displaying its fruit, you shall always gather in those things which are desired by God, which the Serpent cannot reach, and to which deception does not approach; nor is Eve then corrupted, but is trusted as a virgin; and salvation is manifested, and the Apostles are filled with understanding, and the Passover of the Lord advances, and the choirs are gathered together, and are arranged in proper order, and the Word rejoices in teaching the saints — by whom the Father is glorified: to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Forgiveness is a Key to the Kingdom of Heaven

We are reminded by the Lord Jesus that forgiveness is not a matter of opinion or feelings. It's not really about what we want to do. It is about what we need to do for our own health and well being, as well as the well being of others. Forgiveness is a life or death conscious decision. Of course we are speaking about spiritual life or spiritual death.

Forgiveness is a foundational aspect of the life of a Christian. It was forgiveness that the Lord demonstrated when He hung on the cross for us. It was forgiveness that was given to us as a gift at the time of our baptism into Christ. It is forgiveness that is offered to us daily when we repent and pray to God and when we come and receive the sacrament of confession. We have received so much by the grace of God. No matter what others have done to

you in your life, they have not done anything compared to what we have done against God. Not even close. According to St. John Chrysostom, this is precisely why the debt owed to the king is much greater than the debt owed to the servant. People may sin against us but it is rather infrequent, yet according to St. John, we openly sin against God who is watching all the time and knows all things!

My brothers and sisters, if we search our hearts we might find that we are angry with others, hurt by them. We can see that our society is more angry as a whole. It is also the case that this wretched pandemic has further divided people. God is giving us plenty of opportunities to learn this blessed work of forgiveness. Perhaps it is because people do not forgive one another that they are so angry. Perhaps it is because we don't forgive one another and we don't reflect the reali-



ty of God's radical forgiveness. But how can we reflect this reality unless we first embrace it and accept that God has indeed forgiven us? We have to acknowledge the work of God in our lives. How He has wiped away our sins and refashioned us in the image of His Son. It is very hard to live a perfect life, to live without offending or being offended by others. Yet through forgiveness, every door to godliness is open to us. Instead of being enclosed in a prison of resentment, let us open our hearts to receive and give mercy and forgiveness.