

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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Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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True Christianity is a mystical religion filled with miraculous events. Think of the great mystery of the invisible God taking on flesh and walking among us, think of the appearance of the Holy Trinity at the Baptism of Christ, the divine light that shone from Christ at His Transfiguration, His glorious Ascension into heaven, and the

descent of the Holy Spirit as tongues of fire upon the Apostles.

All of these events, so fundamental to our salvation, defy space and time and all the laws of nature. And remember that Our Savior also said. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to my Father." (John 14:12-14)

Dear brothers and sisters, the miraculous events of the Gospel are certainly not the end of salvation history. The history of Christ's Holy Church is a history of miracles, of God acting in the world, acting in our lives, healing incurable illnesses and resolving impossible problems. If we limit the activity of God to only what we can prove or understand then we are limiting God's omnipotent power and

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+ 26th Sunday after Pentecost +
+ St. Proclus of Constantinople +

Epistle: Hebrews 9:1-7

Gospel: Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28

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.*

Born to Eternal Life by George Mantzarides

God is love (1 Jn. 4, 16). And we people are created 'in the image and likeness' of the God of love. But the God of love is also fair-minded. He respects our freedom and doesn't set before us his power but his even-handedness. In this way, we remain free to accept or reject communion with him. He did this from the beginning and continues to do so after the fall, with his plan for our salvation.

This is why he became human and was crucified for us. His power was

manifested after death, through his resurrection. Saint Gregory Palamas says that this indicated the perfect order God adheres to in the execution of his works. We are also called upon to follow this order in the completion of our tasks on earth, so that we may observe it eternally, when we receive the power at the time of our immortality.

We weren't created to die, but to live eternally. This fleeting life is a precursor of eternity. And the way we act in this transitory life prepares

our state in eternity. God doesn't impose himself on us by force. The kingdom of God isn't one of oppressive authority but of all-powerful love and freedom. But if people turn their face from God, they short-circuit and punish themselves. In this way, from as early as this short life, they enter eternal despair.

In his book, *On the Life in Christ*, Saint Nikolaos Kavalas writes that the life in Christ begins in this life and is completed in the next, but neither

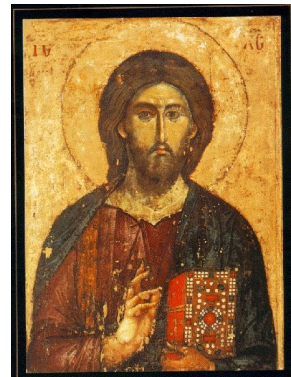
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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

News and Notes

We welcome all who are worshipping with us today. We are also happy to announce that coffee social has resumed 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, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Doug, Heidi, Laura, Elizabeth, Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Pat, Bill, Carol, Pam, Gladys, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Prayers to the Theotokos

November can be rightly called "the month of the Theotokos." It is interspersed with holidays of the revered icons of the Mother of God, such as the "Kazan" icon, "Joy of All Who Sorrow" and "Quick to Hearken". Many prayers to the Most Holy Theotokos are sung during the services on these days. Generally

speaking, prayers to the Mother of God play a special part in Orthodox services..

The prayer "Running for refuge under thine, O Sovereign-Lady, shelter" is probably the most ancient known hymn to the Mother of God. It was discovered for the first time in a 3rd century papyrus and is therefore used in both the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. The no less ancient hymn "O Theotokos, Virgin, rejoice" refers to the Angel's greeting to the Theotokos on the Annunciation day and the exclamation of the righteous Elizabeth during her meeting with the Holy Virgin (see Luke 1). The first evidence of this hymn being used in divine services is also found in the papyri discovered in the Egyptian city of Luxor. This chant is also widely spread in both Orthodox and Western worship.



Born to Eternal Life continued from p.1

this life nor the next can perfect our souls unless we make a start here.

Just as we have the bodily senses of sight, smell and so on, there are also spiritual senses. The present life is the workshop where we hone these spiritual senses. People who don't acquire spiritual senses here will remain 'dead and wretched' in eternity. God will appear to all as light, but such people will remain in darkness, like the foolish virgins, because it'll no longer be possible for them to make eyes.

The fragrance of the Holy Spirit will fill all things but they won't be able to acquire smell if they don't already have it. Those who haven't developed their spiritual senses before they depart this life won't have anyone in common in the next life, whereas those who do have their spiritual senses will share in eternal bliss with Christ.

Pure spiritual senses, a clean heart, make us blessed and able to see God. With Christ's resurrection, which is the quintessence of the divine revela-

tion, 'everything is filled with light'. This isn't something which simply needs to be believed but is something which can and should be lived. Christ wasn't the prophet of the resurrection and the kingdom of God, but the



agent who brought them to pass. He didn't foretell things that would happen in the future, but brought these things right into the present and made them, to a certain extent, attainable by all, depending on their purity and receptivity.

The resurrection canon urges us:

'Let us cleanse our senses and we shall see the inapproachable light of the resurrection'. The light of the resurrection is the light of the kingdom of God; it's the light of the future age which exists and is revealed to the saints, in a preliminary manner, even in this present life.

* * *

When we are baptized, we reside in a mansion that belongs to our heavenly Father. The Lord spoke of this when He said "In my Father's house there are many rooms." Through our baptism, we cast off the old and dying man and we are renewed by the new Adam, who is Christ. We are protected from the spiritual elements and embraced by the loving protection of God our Father. Finally, through our baptism we are seated at the feet of Christ attentively and in our right minds. The Word of God rescues our lives from insanity. He grants us sanity; He makes our lives whole. These are just some aspects of the good news that we have in Our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Homily on the Feast of the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple, cont'd from p.1)

Holy Scriptures and the tradition of the Church. To reduce our faith to what can only be proven historically and physically would be to alter it so fundamentally that it would no longer bear any resemblance to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the experience of the Church.

The word miracle is defined in a secular way by the dictionary thus: "A surprising and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency." So often, modern man is tempted to disassemble true Christianity and to create something that is more palatable for those with weak faith: something so bland that it can be easily adapted to any life style, so undemanding that personal morality becomes irrelevant, and so unchallenging that no one is made to feel uncomfortable.

But today, we gather here to celebrate one of these extraordinary events, one of these great miracles that clearly defies the Jewish Law and goes against history: the Great Feast of the Entry of the Holy Theotokos into The Temple. Today we commemorate the day that the Holy Virgin Mary as a three-year-old child was brought to the Temple to the Holy of Holies, to be reared far away from the noise and distractions of the world. There in the House of God she was nourished by the sacred presence of God in His holy Sanctuary.

In the Old Testament, God was hidden from His people behind the veils of the Holy of Holies. No one was ever allowed to see Him or to enter His presence; only the High Priest, and then only once a year. With the Entry of the young Virgin Mary into the Temple all of this begins to change radically. God is changing the Jewish Law and becoming visible and approachable. The Holy Theotokos was raised in the Holy of Holies, and after nine years when she departed the Temple God dwelt with her.

And in only a few years after her departure from the Temple she would become herself the living Temple of God, the Gate through which Christ Himself would enter this world. She would bring forth the Eternal Word, Je-

sus Christ Himself. The invisible and unapproachable God hidden in the Holy of Holies would not only become visible to His people and to all creation but become a man and walk among us. Through the Theotokos, God enters this world and dwells among us. He is no longer hidden from us.

When the Holy Virgin enters the Holy of Holies, it is the beginning of a new covenant between God and man, the end of the many centuries of man's alienation from God, and the end of our bondage to sin. We also, you might say, like the Theotokos, have been brought here to this holy temple to be protected from the noise and distractions of the world. Here in this quiet, remote holler of West Virginia we have been placed by God, so that we too, like the Theotokos, can grow spiritually.

She dwelt in the Holy of Holies in the presence of

God. She grew up in His presence and remained in His presence for the rest of her life even after leaving the Temple. In celebrating this feast, this particular feast which is the patronal feast of our holler, we too are called to dwell always in His presence. But how sad that we who are called to dwell in His presence here in this holy temple so often choose to ignore God.

We stand here in His presence, in this Holy of Holies just like Mary did, but we choose to daydream and imagine that we are somewhere else. Here in this holy temple during the sacred and Divine Liturgy, when heaven and earth meet, when Christ Himself comes down upon our altar to dwell within us, we choose to look away. We

so often freely choose the trivial over the sublime.

When we look at the holy face of the Mother of God in the icons, we see a woman, a human being just like us, but one who is filled with peace, because she chose not to look away but to keep her gaze always fixed on Him. No matter what happened in her life, she did not look away from Him. This is the source of her deep inner peace that is undisturbed by the turmoil of this world. On this holy and miraculous day, may we have the faith to enter with her into the presence of God and remain there forever. Amen.



On Happiness

Nothing is greater than a clean heart, because such a heart becomes the throne of God. And what's more glorious than the throne of God? Nothing, of course. Regarding those who have a clean heart, God says: 'I will live with them and walk among them; and I will be God to them and they will be a people to me' (2 Cor. 6, 16). So who can be happier than these people? What good thing can they possibly lack? Don't they find all the good things and gifts of the Holy Spirit within their blessed souls. What more do they need? Nothing. In truth, nothing. Because they have the greatest good in their heart: God himself.

How deceived those people are who seek happiness outside themselves, in foreign countries and travels, in riches and fame, in great possessions and enjoyments, in pleasures and all the luxuries and vanities which, in the end, leave a bitter taste. If you construct a tower of happiness outside your heart, you're building on ground that's shaken by continuous earthquakes. Such a structure will quickly collapse.

My brothers and sisters, happiness lies within our own self and blessed are they who realize this. Examine your heart and look at its spiritual state. Have you lost the boldness to address God? Is your conscience troubled because you haven't kept his commandments? Perhaps it condemns you for being critical, telling lies or neglecting your duties to God and your neighbor? Look and see if wickedness and passions haven't filled your heart. Perhaps it's slipped onto a tortuous and rocky path.

Unfortunately, those who've neglected their heart have been deprived of all good things and have fallen into a multitude of evils. They've expelled joy and have been filled with bitterness, sorrow and worry. They've expelled peace and acquired anxiety, turmoil and fear. They've expelled love and welcomed hate. Finally, they've expelled all the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit which they received at baptism and have adopted all those evils which make people miserable and thoroughly wretched.

My brothers and sisters, our most merciful God wants us all to be happy, both in this life and the next. This is why he founded his holy Church: to cleanse us from sin, to sanctify us, to reconcile us with him and to grant us the

blessings of heaven. The Church has opened its arms to us in welcome. If our conscience is burdened, let us hasten to the Church. If we do so, it's prepared to lift our heavy burden, to give us the boldness to address God and to fill our heart with happiness and bliss.

On Baptism

'Those who have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ' (Gal. 3, 27). What a great truth Saint Paul points out to us with these words. Baptized Christians don't wear the old person, with its passions and sinful desires, but are clad in a new person; they've been clothed by Christ himself, who now dwells within their hearts. And the word 'clad' doesn't refer to some ordinary, external garment, but to something more profound, something of the essence, something inalienable.

With our faith in Christ and with our baptism, we're clothed in Christ himself and become children of God, dwelling-places of the All-Holy Spirit, temples of God, holy and perfect, gods by grace. We've cast off perishability and have been robed in imperishability. We've put aside the person of sin and put on the person of righteousness and grace. We've rid ourselves of death and clothed ourselves in immortality.

We've also pondered the great obligations towards God which we've undertaken with our baptism. We now realize that we have a duty to act as children of God and brothers and sisters to our Lord; that we

have an obligation to align our will with that of God; that, as his children we must remain free of sin; that we should love him with all our strength, from the depths of our soul and heart; that we ought to worship him and long to be united to him for ever. Have we really considered that our heart should be inundated with love so that this love overflows onto our neighbor? Do we have a sense that we ought to become holy and perfect and images of God, children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven?

For all these reasons, we must strive not to be unworthy of the calling from God, lest we be rebuked. Indeed, my brothers and sisters, let us struggle with zeal and self-denial in order to triumph. Let none of us lose courage, let us not neglect our duties, let us not be craven, let us not quake before the pitfalls of the spiritual life. Because we have God as our aid and he will fortify us on the difficult path of virtue.

