

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!



Volume 12 Issue 561

6th Sunday of Great Lent—Palm Sunday—Christ's Entry into Jerusalem

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No doubt, there are many obvious differences between the time and place of our Lord's entry into Jerusalem on a donkey and our own circumstances. It would be hard to confuse first-century Palestine with twenty-first century America. Nonetheless, the charged setting of the days leading to the Savior's Passion resonates with the challenges people face in every period of human history, including our own.

His friend Lazarus had died and He

wept at the tomb, as we all do for those we love. Today's wars, natural disasters, and diseases make it hard to ignore the inevitability of death and mourning. Lazarus' sisters were overcome with grief and wondered why the Lord had not healed their brother. In a time well before modern medicine and mortuary practices, people had no illusions about the grim realities of decay and stench for a body that had been that long in the grave.

Despite Martha's warning about opening the tomb, Christ commanded Lazarus to rise and come out, which he did in his grave clothes. The Lord foretold His own resurrection and foreshadowed ours by rescuing His friend from the inevitable corruption of those made of dust in our fallen world. The raising of Lazarus shows that Christ is "the resurrection and the

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++ 6th Sunday of Great Lent ++
+ Christ's entry into Jerusalem +

Epistle: Philippians 4:4-9

Gospel: John: 12: 1-18

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.*

Lazarus Saturday-the Start of Holy Week

We always begin Holy Week with this commemoration because we are reminded that, at the end of all things, Christ Jesus will do for us what he does for His friend, Lazarus. He will call us forth from the tomb; our souls and our bodies will be reunited, and we will be resurrected.

That should bring us comfort and peace and hope and joy. But even though resurrection is something that isn't going to happen to us until history has run its course, we can experience a fore-

taste of that glorious blessing right now, because, on this day, Christ Jesus is already calling out to us. He is calling us to come forth from the tomb.

Many of us are buried in tombs of hatred and resentment. There are people towards whom we are so bitter, we can't even think about them without grinding our teeth and clenching our fists.

We re-live old arguments; we rehearse what we are going to say to them if we ever get the chance; we fantasize

about horrible things happening to them. But today, Christ Jesus is calling us to come out of that darkness; He is giving us the power to forgive.

Many of us are entombed in a bad habit. It may be an addiction to alcohol or certain kinds of food or pornography or drugs. We may tell lots and lots of lies. It could be that we spend way too much money or we invest way too much time in video games or sports or social media.

But today, our Lord and

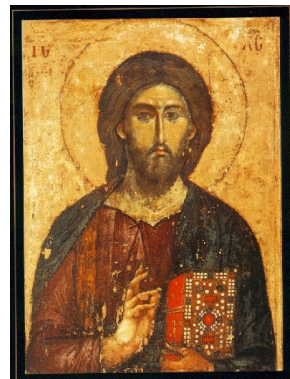
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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, Fr. Michael, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, Skip, Colleen, Stan, David, Carol, Lee, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Repentance

Repentance is a change of mind, a new way of thinking, a dynamic transition 'from the unnatural to the natural, and the return from the devil to God through asceticism and labors'. This definition makes it clear that repentance isn't compliance with the Law, but a heart-rending encounter with Christ.

'Draw near to God and he will draw near to you' (James 4, 8). If we take one step towards God, he takes ten towards us.

Hell isn't for sinners, but for the unrepentant. For those who don't feel their unworthiness, who don't understand the magnificence of forgiveness, who have no concept of the paradise of God's love, who don't live in the hope that faith brings.

The Church can say to each of us 'Fear nothing and don't be sad. Provided you repent, God will forgive you everything. In this world, there isn't and can't be any crime so great that God won't forgive those who truly repent. Nor can we commit any sin so great that it will exhaust God's measureless love'.

We can't hope in ourselves, but can have trust in God alone. What saves us, in the end, is God's infinite love, which seals the mystery of God's existence and our own eternal existence. No one has ever fallen out of God's love. Because even in our sinfulness, even at the lowest ebb of our decency, we still remain God's children. Besides, who can say for certain that people are what they do, that they're free to act as they wish, or that they enjoy what they do?

Lazarus Saturday, cont'd from p.1

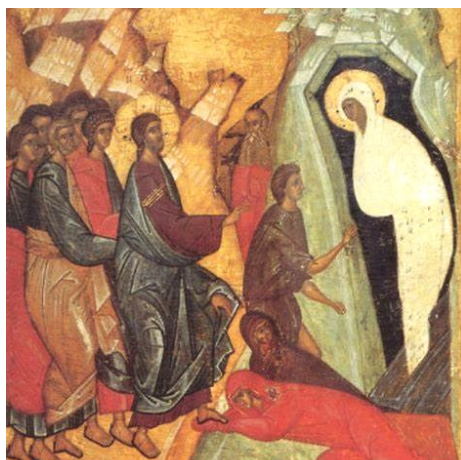
and Master is calling out to us. He's giving us the power to walk away from all that.

And, of course, all of us know what it's like to be buried under trauma and anxiety—especially right now. We are wondering if our job or our business is going to survive all the shut-downs. We're wondering if the people that we love are going to get sick. We're wondering if we are going to be the same on the other side of all this isolation. But today, Christ Jesus is calling us out of all that. Our Lord and Master is extending His healing power to us.

Every one of us have a bright and glorious future because each and every one of us will be resurrected by Christ Jesus. He's calling us by name; He's calling us from death to life. So as we offer this service together on the first day of Holy Week, let's do in response to Christ Jesus, as with one mouth and one heart, we praise and glorify the honorable and majestic Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

(Some additional thoughts)

The Saturday of Lazarus, along with Palm Sunday, occupies a special position between Lent and Holy and Great Week. Following the forty days of penitence which have just ended and immediately before the days of



darkness and mourning which are to follow in the weeks of the Passion, there come two days of joy and Triumph on which the Church keeps festival.

This miracle is performed by Christ

as reassurance to His disciples before the coming passion: they are to understand that, though He suffers and dies, yet He is Lord and Victor over death. The resurrection of Lazarus is a prophecy in the form of an action. It foreshadows Christ's own Resurrection eight days later, and at the same time it anticipates The Resurrection of all the righteous on the last day: Lazarus is 'the saving first fruits of the regeneration of the world.'

As the liturgical texts emphasize, the miracle reveals the two natures of Christ the God-man. Christ asks where Lazarus is laid and weeps for him, and so He shows the fullness of His Humanity, involving human ignorance and genuine grief for a beloved friend. Then, disclosing the fullness of His Divine Power, Christ raises Lazarus from the dead, even though his corpse has already begun to decompose. This double fullness of the Lord's divinity and His humanity is to be kept in view throughout Holy and Great Week, and above all on Holy and Great Friday.

life” even for a world where death, with all its graphic horror and tragic sorrow, so often appears to reign supreme.

When He raised the dead man after four days in the tomb, the Lord demonstrated that He is “the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” Even before Lazarus’ resurrection, Martha said, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

Ironically, it is this magnificent sign that led the chief priests and Pharisees to decide that Christ must die, for “If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.” The actions of the crowd when the Lord entered Jerusalem on a donkey were very unsettling to those corrupt religious leaders, for people welcomed Him as a conquering hero precisely because He had raised Lazarus from the dead. They “took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, crying, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord, the King of Israel!’”

They longed for a new King David to liberate their nation from the Romans, but would yell “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” five days later when it had become clear that He was not the kind of Messiah Who brings death upon a nation’s enemies. No, He is One Who enters into death through the Cross in order to conquer it.

The One prophetically anointed for burial by Lazarus’ sister Mary will be lifted up upon the Cross in judgment of the idolatrous schemes of politicized religious leaders for power and the resentful desires of the masses for vengeance against their Roman oppressors. A week after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the true Passover Lamb will rise in victory over them all and liberate us from slavery to the fear of the death, which is at the root of the horribly ironic response of the chief priests to Pontius Pilate, “We have no king but Caesar!” (Jn. 19:5)

To this very day, some present themselves as being very religious while rejecting Christ and His Cross rather than risk losing their chance to gratify their passion for power. Of course, that is never the way to true peace, whether in one’s own soul or in relation to others. There is nothing but constant worry and fear in

store for those who ground their hopes in the passing power arrangements and other circumstances of the world as we know it.

Doing so makes it impossible to obey St. Paul’s instruction to the Philippians to “Have no anxiety about anything.” He wrote these words while under arrest for his Christian ministry in a pagan empire and would ultimately die as a martyr. He had no illusions about the sufferings and trials he would face. The foundation of the peace he describes was not in hopes of a nation defeating its opponents or in any other worldly course of events, but simply in the confession that “The Lord is at hand.” Because Christ is coming, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your petitions be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”



Today we celebrate that the Lord is at hand, coming into Jerusalem as the Messiah, hailed by the crowds as their Savior. He enters Jerusalem on a humble beast of burden, carrying no weapons and having no army, political machine, or media campaign to flatter the powerful and play on the fears, resentments, and hopes of the masses. For this was not a warrior who would make a nation great by conventional standards, but the Lamb of God Who will take away the sins of the world through the shedding of His own blood. He will reign by being lifted up on the Cross, dying as a victim of brutal capital punishment, descend-

ing to Hades, and miraculously rising in glory from the tomb on the third day. In doing so, He will reveal the pathetic weakness of the corrupt powers of this world and even work the death of death itself.

In one week, we will celebrate His great victory on the third day, but what an unsettling victory it is for us who have become too comfortable with our place in a world enslaved to the fear of death. The Savior Who rides into Jerusalem on a humble donkey has shown power beyond what this world knows. He took upon Himself the very worst that the forces of evil can do and then rose triumphantly over them. When we know from the depths of our souls that the joy of Christ’s empty tomb comes through the terror of His Cross, we will gain the peace that enables us never to embrace despair.

The Feast of Our Lord's Entry into Jerusalem

The end of Lent and the beginning of Holy Week is heralded by Palm Sunday, which remembers the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey (Matthew 21:1-11). This is a key event in Christ's ministry, and so as well as being celebrated since antiquity. To the left is the Mount of Olives and to the right is the city of Jerusalem, often depicted with the domed Temple (in later icons it may also anachronistically be topped by a Cross, like a church). In the center, heading towards Jerusalem, is Jesus Christ sat upon either a donkey or a colt.

The common understanding is that it was the donkey upon which Christ rode into Jerusalem, even though He commanded both a colt and a donkey to be brought to Him. Nevertheless, both

animals would have been shocking to the Jews in Jerusalem: the donkey because it is an animal of peace and the Jews expected a conquering, war-like, Messiah; the colt because it was an animal associated with the Gentiles, while the Jewish Elders expected the Messiah to be only for them.

The Twelve Apostles are often shown deep in conversation; good iconographers will depict them with expressions mixing wonder with apprehension. This is not surprising, as they had already shown consternation at Jesus' insistence in returning to Judea due to the Jews' threats (John 11:7-10). Now, not only is Jesus in Judea, but returning to Jerusalem itself, the seat of the Jewish religious authorities so determined to kill Him. They are also perplexed at Christ's choice of transport.

"These things His disciples understood not at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him" (John 12:16). For this reason, in some Icons, Christ is shown turning back to the Apostles, as if exhorting them to continue.

Out of Jerusalem's gates come the Hebrews who had gathered to celebrate the Passover. They are crying out: Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9). Children are breaking off branch-

es from the palms and laying them before Christ's donkey, whilst others are laying their clothes before Him. In Russian icons, the palms sometimes look more like the local trees found there than the foliage of Jerusalem. In northern Eurasia, readily available willow branches are often used in place of the non-existent palms during services for the feast; the icons reflect this familiar local custom so as to more readily "connect" worshipers with the event they are celebrating.

That children are laying down their garments and cutting down palm branches is a detail found in almost all Icons of the Entry into Jerusalem, despite not being explicitly stated in Scriptures. However, the Icons are in perfect harmony with the hymns of the Church, which

do specifically mention children: Mounted on the throne in heaven, Christ God, and on the foal on earth, you accepted the praise of the Angels and the hymn of the children who cried to you: Blessed are you who come to call back Adam (Kontakion for Palm Sunday).

The didactic function of the images reflects the ancient homilies of the Church Fathers, which link the event with the celebration, and the rituals of the celebration with our own lives. From St Andrew of Crete's homily for Palm Sunday: "Let us go together to meet Christ on the Mount of Olives. Today he returns from Bethany and proceeds of his own free will toward his holy and blessed passion, to consummate the mystery of our salvation.

... Let us run to accompany him as he hastens toward his

passion, and imitate those who met him then, not by covering his path with garments, olive branches or palms, but by doing all we can to prostrate ourselves before him by being humble and by trying to live as he would wish. Then we shall be able to receive the Word at his coming, and God, whom no limits can contain, will be within us."

Hymn from the Divine Liturgy

God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us! Celebrate the feast and come with gladness! Let us magnify Christ with palms and branches, singing: "Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord."

