

# 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 9 Issue 397

33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost—Meeting of the Lord in the Temple

February 2, 2020



Today's Feast has no fewer than four different names. Each name recalls a different aspect of this Feast. What are they?

First of all, today's Feast is called the Presentation of Christ. This is because it commemorates the Presentation of Christ by His Mother in the Temple at Jerusalem exactly forty days after His Birth. As we can see from the icon of

the Feast, Christ was brought to the Temple by His mother and accompanied by His guardian Joseph, who holds the customary sacrifice of two turtle doves.

In the Temple Christ was carried in the arms of the Righteous Simeon and watched over by the Prophetess Anna. This Feast is yet more proof that the Son of God truly became man. Today an infant, not a spirit or an angel, is brought to the Temple.

This meeting between the Righteous Simeon and Anna and the Savior is why this Feast has another, very common name: 'The Meeting of the Lord'. According to age-old tradition, Simeon was one of those Seventy translators who in the third century before Christ had translated the Scriptures of the Old Testament into Greek. Coming to the words in the seventh chapter of  
*(continued p. 3)*

**\*\* 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost \*\***

**Meeting of the Lord in the Temple**

Epistle: Hebrews 7:7-17

Gospel: Luke 2: 22-40

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 Heart of God, by St. Theophan the Recluse**

God is everywhere. And when He finds a heart that isn't opposed to Him, a humble heart, He enters it and fills it with joy. The joy of the heart which has God within it is so great that it attaches itself to Him and never wants to separate from Him. The Lord doesn't approach a heart puffed up with egotism. Such a heart is deeply sad, shrivels and slowly dissolves. It wallows in ignorance, sorrow and darkness.

No matter how sinful

we are, as soon as we turn to the Lord in repentance and desire, the door of the heart opens to Him. Our inner uncleanness drains out and makes way for purity, virtue, the Savior Himself, the great Visitor of the soul, the Bringer of joy, light and mercy.

This blessed state is a gift of God, not something we ourselves have achieved. And since it's a gift, we ought, in humility, to thank the giver. Humility! The basis of all the virtues and the

fundamental requirement for spiritual fruition. Do you have humility? You have God, You have everything! You don't have humility? You lose everything!

So retain the feeling of humility in your heart. Our natural and normal relationship with God requires a heart which is impassioned, contrite and entirely devoted to Him, a heart which cries mystically at every moment: 'Lord, You know all things;

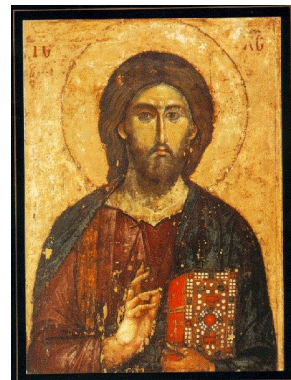
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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.





*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, Peg, Christopher, Jackie, Karoline, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Andrea, Samuel, Anatoly, Linda, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Sally Lou, Bob, Catherine, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, and those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

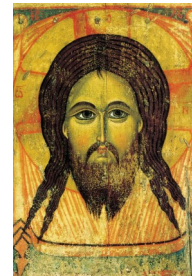
### ***Words of wisdom from the Elders***

When the Lord entered the house of Zacchaeus, salvation came to his family: 'Today salvation has come to this house'. From avaricious, the Lord had made him charitable, from an enemy of God into a lover of God, from an inhospitable person into a welcoming one, and from a sinner He made him into a repentant image of God. Zacchaeus recognized the Lord, he

confessed his sin, confirmed his repentance and altered his way of life.

Unfortunately, some of those who were present on the occasion of the Lord's entry into the house of Zacchaeus were shocked and protested. They were shocked that Jesus should stay in the house of a sinner. They couldn't understand how Jesus would go to the house of this sinner. But the judgments of people are a long way from those of God. The Lord sees our hearts and realized that Zacchaeus wasn't satisfied with the life he was living and was seeking an opportunity to repent.

Christ's entry into his house seemed to him like a hand outstretched to someone in need of help. The Lord looked into the depths of Zacchaeus' soul, which is why He didn't condemn him for the transgressions he'd committed thus far. He gave him the opportunity to put things right. Through repentance he was deemed worthy to be enlisted into the choir of the Saints.



### ***The Heart of God, (cont'd from p. 1)***

save me!' If we surrender ourselves into His hands, He'll do with and for us whatever's best for our salvation, according to His wise and holy will. The task of unceasing prayer is not only for hesychasts, but also for all Christians, whom the Lord enjoins, through His holy apostle, to 'Pray without ceasing'. There are various stages of prayer before it becomes unceasing. They're all the work of God, Who watches over the hearts of all of us to the same degree, be we monastics or lay people. And whenever a heart, whoever's it may be, turns to Him, He approaches it with love and unites with it.

How fear of God is retained in the heart. The fear of God is begotten from faith and is a requirement for spiritual progress. When it settles in the heart, then, like a good householder, it puts everything to rights. Do we have fear of God? If so, let us thank the Lord Who gave it to us and let us guard it as we would a valuable treasure. And if we don't have it, let us do whatever we can to acquire it,

in the knowledge that the reason for our lack is our own inattention and negligence.

From fear of God are begotten repentance, contrition, and lamentation over our sins. May this feeling, the precursor of salvation, never be absent from our heart. If we're to retain the fear of God within us, we must keep in mind the whole time the remembrance of death and of the judgment, along with a sense of the presence of the Lord: God is always with us and in us, seeing, listening and knowing everything, even our most hidden thoughts.

When this triad- fear of God, remembrance of death and a sense of the divine presence- settles within us, then prayer surges from the heart spontaneously- then the hope of salvation becomes firm. It's not so much the fear of God that preserves it; more the memory of the dread judgment. This remembrance, however, mustn't produce dejection, but should rather inspire combativeness and repentance.

Let us try to remain unsullied by the filth of sin. And if, on occasion, we do sin, let us purify ourselves through confession. Trusting in God's mercy in this way, we won't lose heart. In any case, our Judge is merciful and loves us. He won't be looking for something to condemn us for. On the contrary, he'll try to find even the slightest reason to exonerate us. God and the conscience.

If you decide, with all your heart, to always submit to the Lord and to please Him alone through the whole of your way of life, and if, in every predicament and need you turn to Him alone, in faith and devotion, then you can be sure that everything in your life, things spiritual and secular, will turn out successfully. It's a great thing to realize that, without God, there's nothing you can do about anything and, having come to understand this, to then have recourse to His assistance in full confidence.



Isaiah the Prophet, he had been awestruck by the affirmation that a Virgin would give birth. He had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would live until he saw these words fulfilled. At today's Feast which is the fulfillment of these words, the aged Simeon utters the words: 'Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy words, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel'.

Soon after uttering these words, he reposed, as did the Righteous Anna, who had also been waiting to see the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit that she too would see the Messiah in great old age. The Prayer of St Simeon is read at every Vespers service in the Church Year, but at Vespers yesterday, and again tonight, before tomorrow's Feast of St Simeon and St Anna, it is sung.

According to the Old Testament, the Jewish people were commanded to present their male children at the Temple in Jerusalem forty days after their Birth. This was to give thanks to God and pray for the purification of the mother and health of the child, for it was considered that after the vital forty-day period it was almost certain that all mortal danger was passed. This is why this

Feast has yet another name: 'The Purification of the Virgin'. The Christ-Child is only forty days old, the salvation of the world is dependent on His Mother. This is why although this Feast is a Feast in honor of Our Lord, the Church is yet in blue, for we also give great honor today to the Mother of God. Indeed, this Feast is the Feast of all mothers.

In our New Testament times, we have the custom of 'churching', which is similar to this rite of purification of the mother, which was carried out in the Old Testament, but there are also important differences. First of all, since the Coming of Christ, all children, not only boys, are to be presented in church at the age of forty days. However today, they are to be presented for baptism and chrismation and so made ready for holy communion.

Secondly, the Church also appoints prayer to be said over the mother at this critical time. These prayers are firstly in thanksgiving for the physical safety of the mother, but also they are said for the spiritual safety of the mother, in order to ward off what is now called 'post-natal depression'.

The Presentation, the Meeting and the Purification are then all names given to today's Feast, but there is yet a fourth name - Candlemas. This name was given to this Feast in memory of the Roman custom of lighting candles at it, which recalls the lights in the Temple at Jerusalem. The custom spread from Rome even to western parts of Russia and in the Russian service-books there is a prayer for the blessing of candles on this day. In this country, Candlemas is connected with many popular sayings concerning weatherlore, witnessing to the popularity of Candlemas in olden times.

One such saying for example is: 'If Candlemas be fair and bright, winter shall have another flight'. This means that if today's weather is good, we shall have more cold and wintry weather before the Spring.

But what does this Feast mean for us today? Since it is exactly forty days since Christmas, it is time for us to think about the last forty days and ask ourselves some questions: What today can we present to the Temple of

Christ, the Church? In what condition do we present our souls to Christ? What sacrifices have we made in the last forty days? Have we begun cultivating a new virtue? Have we attempted to give up an old vice?

Have we been to confession? Have we taken communion? Have we kept the Wednesday and Friday fasts? Have we read our prayers? Have we set a Christian example to our neighbors? Have we thanked God for all that we have received? What has changed in our way of life since the Birth of Christ forty days ago? What progress has been made?

Whatever our answers to these questions, on this, the Feast of the Meeting of Christ, one thing is certain: If we are not spiritually prepared to meet Christ, then we shall never meet Him.



The same tactics are also employed frequently by the social sciences, particularly sociology, despite the fact that they focus on people and their social life. These tactics, which became prevalent in the scientific world after the triumph of the natural sciences, impair the social sciences and distance them from their real purpose. Moreover, they are an affront to the primacy of the person, which is the principle and completeness of being. If the person is marginalized, the living truth is made moribund.

The characteristic feature of the culture of our age, as of the scientific research which is being conducted within its framework is the marginalization of the person and our subjection to the impersonal whole or even to irrational nature. This neglect, which is initially presented as methodology, in the end proves to be of the essence. Modern civilization is not merely not centered on the spirit, as would be appropriate to people who stand out in the world for their spirit, but it is not even technocratic, as is often claimed. Naturally, there are always technocratic elements, just as there are other features which testify to the spiritual factor within us. But these are not merely atrophied; they are ineffective, as well.

Our culture has become machine-dominated. And this domination does not lie in any increase in the power of machines, nor in the conveniences they provide us with, but in the pervasiveness of the frigid spirit they produce. It lies in the prevalence of the mechanistic logic they promote and cement.

And our age is machine-centered because it shapes people 'in the image and likeness' of machines. It makes the heart arid, makes a machine of the mind and bulldozes our personality. All people and all their activities are reduced to numbers, described in numbers and trapped in numbers.

Yet people remain people. As long as they exist, they develop as persons. The principle of the person is the fundamental principle of the Orthodox Christian view of the human person, as, indeed, of its theology. When the person is nullified, then people no longer exist as such, nor is God worshipped as the living God. Besides, the essential

feature of our creation 'in the image of God' is our sovereign authority. We are not subject to anything or anyone; we simply exist as a given, even for God Himself. This is why our relationship with God depends on the principle of freedom. Anything and everything which imposes on or reduces our value as persons assumes a negative value.

In this context, it is natural that we should address, as a matter of urgency, certain problems concerning the purpose and extent of the application of scientific research. But first of all, we need to pose the question asked by Socrates of the philosophers of his day who were attempting

to study nature: 'So, have these people learned what they should about human things and are now able to busy themselves with other ones, or have they abandoned human things in order to inquire into other ones, imagining that they're doing their duty?'

Our first duty as people is to investigate and know ourselves. And our greatest error lies in the fact that we are usually entirely indifferent to the examination and recognition of ourselves and are concerned solely with inquiry into the world. Not only do we simply fail to take sufficient interest in ourselves, to our detriment, but we often go so far as to be exclusively unilateral, totally abandoning ourselves in the name of investigating the world.

The next question which arises has to do with the limits of research and its applications: is it permissible for us to do us much as we might be able to? Ought there not to be some bounds to research and

its applications. If so, how can these choices and limitations be determined? What criteria should apply? What rules do there need to be? These questions have assumed enormous importance, especially in our own day and age, where scientific research is booming and covering a huge range of subjects, to the extent that it now involves experimentation on and processing of human personality itself. This is particularly obvious in the field of bio-technology, where research is being conducted into the artificial alteration of genetic material with the aim of the creation of organisms with new properties and abilities.

*(continued next issue)*

