

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



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Christ is Born! Glorify Him!



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The Birth of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Sunday, December 27, 2020



On this glorious day where heaven and earth meet, we celebrate God's Incarnation in-the-flesh. In so doing, we do more than commemorate the anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. Through our worship, we call into the present all those glorious and life-saving events surrounding Christ's miraculous birth. This is the day on

which God has fashioned all things new and given hope to all mankind to be renewed in the image and likeness of our Creator.

This is the day on which the whole universe is filled with light and all creation with joy. Through the Divine Services of the Feast we have become witnesses of the communion between those in heaven and those on earth, the angels and shepherds who glorify Him in heaven and on earth join together with one voice, celebrating the greatest of God's gifts: the gift of Himself, His humble condescension to us sinners, God with us! In His great love and mercy, the Creator of all, the Giver of Life, becomes one of His own creation to enter into our human nature and make it new!

Dwell for a moment on this awesome mystery revealed: As we hear in the
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*** The Nativity of Christ ***

** St. Stephen the first Martyr **

Epistle: Galatians 4:4-7

Gospel: Matthew 2: 1-12

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.*

Christ's Birth and the Human Race, by Prof. Karavidopoulos

The Gospel reading for the Sunday before Christmas, taken from the beginning of the Gospel of Saint Matthew, contains Christ's genealogy 'after the flesh', and, thereafter, God's dispensation regarding the birth of Jesus from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. Let us turn our attention to the significance of this for each one of us.

Every year, in an atmosphere of joy and delight, the Church celebrates the Birth of Christ,

and sings wonderful hymns to God Who became incarnate and reformed our degenerate human nature.

Orthodox hymnography and theology emphasize the great anthropological significance of the divine incarnation: we have been saved from hopeless degradation and from the chaos of destructive hatred by the love of God, which took on flesh and bone within history through the person of Jesus Christ. This love doesn't simply re-

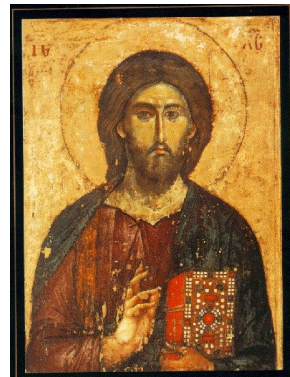
deem us from certain destruction, but also restores our 'ancient beauty'; it deifies us, to use the familiar Patristic terminology.

What we as people could never have achieved because of our subjugation to the demonic power of corruption and to sin is offered to us by Him Who was born from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. It's precisely the Savior's descendancy from the Holy Spirit that reveals
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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 worshiping with us today. Because of COVID-19, our social hour has been canceled until we receive further instructions from the Department of Health.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Evan, Ryan, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Paula, Andrea, Matthew, Corella, Mike, Ron, Renee, Daniel, Frankie, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

St Stephen-Protomartyr

Archdeacon Stephen was the eldest of the seven deacons, appointed by the Apostles themselves, and therefore he is called "archdeacon." He was the first Christian martyr, and he suffered for Christ when he was about thirty.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Saint Stephen

preached Christianity and defeated Jewish teachers of the Law in debate. They maligned Saint Stephen, saying that he had uttered blasphemy against God and against Moses. Saint Stephen came before the Sanhedrin and the High Priest to answer these charges. He gave a fiery speech, in which he recounted the history of the Jewish nation, and denounced them for persecuting the prophets, and also for executing the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Acts, 7).

During his speech, Saint Stephen suddenly saw the heavens opened and Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God. The Jews shouted and covered their ears, and rushed at him. They dragged him out of the city and stoned him, but the holy martyr prayed for his murderers. Far off on the heights stood the Mother of God with the holy Apostle John the Theologian, and She prayed fervently for the martyr.

Before his death Saint Stephen said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. O Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Then he joyfully gave up his pure soul to Christ.

Christ's Birth and Humanity, cont'd from p. 1)

in an eloquent manner that our salvation could not come about from the wrack and ruin of a humanity inevitably consigned to death, but only from heaven, from God's Spirit, from the source of life.

We are mystically linked to the Nativity-Christ's birth- in a direct, vital, dynamic and existential way. We have to accept that this personal dereliction on the part of each of us is due to the tragic contradiction between the fact that, although Christ was born in order to save us from the corruption of sin and death, we as people become defiled on a daily basis.

We bring down ourselves and others. The angels sing the glad tidings that a Savior has been born and peace has come upon the earth (Luke 2, 11;14) but at the same time the news media bring us terrible instances of war and catastrophe.

The Birth of Christ acquires meaning as an existential fact for each of us in our own personal concern and in our anxiety and fear about our elimination and our hope for life. If

the 'sun of righteousness' doesn't rise in the soul of each of us, we're wasting our time expecting the enlightenment of humankind in general. If sal-



vation doesn't become a personal event for each of us, there's no point in wondering and complaining about the general prevalence of hatred, crime and warfare.

And if the Birth of Christ is no more than an important, but distant historical event or an emotionally moving feast of the Church, rather than a real-

ity within each of us, it's meaningless to seek any obvious consequences deriving from it.

The God of love and peace became incarnate in history and, like a glowing landmark, made a clear distinction between pre-Christian darkness and Christian light, between pre-Christian hatred and Christian love, between the despair of death and the Christian hope of the resurrection. If life today is characterized by the pre-Christian features just mentioned, the fault for that lies within ourselves.

The Birth of Christ is the starting-point for a dialogue, an opportunity for us to change in such a way that, if we listen to and take to heart the divine message, we'll be radically transformed. We'll stop seeing other people as enemies against whom we have to defend ourselves constantly, often attacking them, in fact, in order to preserve our identity, and instead we'll see them as brothers and sisters, for whom the Son of God was born, crucified and resurrected, just as much He was as for us.

(Homily on the Nativity of Christ, cont'd from p.1)

on this awesome mystery revealed: As we hear in the Royal Hours of the Feast, "Today, He who holds the whole creation in His hand is born of the Virgin." God, whom the universe cannot contain, has become a tiny babe to inaugurate the new race of Adam. On this day, we sing with the angels in heaven, who rejoice with the shepherds, who, in turn, worship with the magi. On this day, those in heaven and those on earth are joined in one chorus. In Vigil we sang, "today, heaven and earth are united." "Today, God has come to earth and man ascends to heaven" (Litya of the Feast).

God has destined us for glory, for communion with Him for all eternity. We're co-heirs with Christ, the Father's adopted children through the new birth of baptism and Christ in the center of our lives. As St. Athanasius (4th century) declares, "God became man, that we may become divine." This is God's loving desire for us—no matter who you are or what your past. Christ's Incarnation fills all of humanity with this potential: to find healing from sin-sickness through repentance, to conquer sin and death through His victory over sin and death, to be made anew, in the likeness of Christ, the new Adam, for, "as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive," (I Cor. 15:22).

Christ's Nativity is then an invitation to new life, to renewal of life. Christ has become incarnate to give us new identity and self-worth as adopted children, His peace which surpasses all comprehension—the fruit of communion with God the Father in Christ by the Holy Spirit's indwelling. This is the good news announced to the shepherds and, indeed, today, for a world suffering under so much sin, disobedience, and violence.

St. Gregory Palamas says of the Mystery revealed: "He who defines all things and is limited by none is contained in a small, makeshift manger. He who holds the universe and grasps it in the hollow of His hand, is wrapped in narrow, swaddling bands and fastened into ordinary clothes" (St. Gregory Palamas, Homily Fifty-Eight, "On the Saving Nativity of Christ").

He who is the King of Kings is worshiped by the Persian kings and receives their gifts. The Only-Begotten One has become incarnate for our sake and reversed and renewed that human nature fallen into sin, despair, and death. "The Word has become flesh without leaving His Father," as we sing in the Vespers of the Feast. The one who anoints is now the anointed. The one who offers is now the one who is offered.

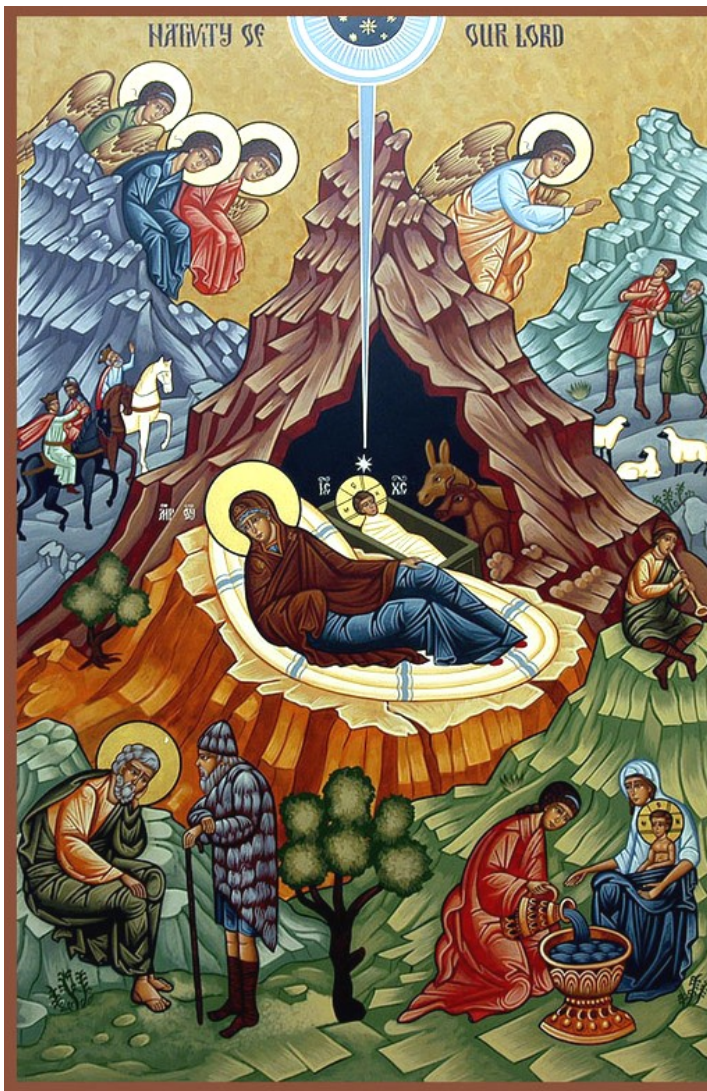
Gold, a fitting gift for a king, is given to the King of Kings. Frankincense, the gift befitting God, is given to Christ who is God Incarnate. Myrrh is prophetically offered by the Magi in preparation for His life-saving death, when He will defeat sin and death for all. The One who could, by His own words, call down a thousand angels to destroy the wicked, instead submits Himself in His love and humility to the vulnerability of a new-born babe to call the those who do evil, all of us, to new life, to holiness.

The One who loved us into being, now accepts love from his Virgin Mother and adopted father. "He who rained manna on His people in the wilderness is fed on milk from His Mother's breast" (Royal Hours).

The uncircumscribable God has become circumscribed in His humanity while simultaneously remaining God. And so, for us, humility now has a face; humility and love are *known*. The Wisdom and Word of God, *Logos*, who originally brought all things into being, has enlightened the whole universe by virtue of His incarnation. Humility becomes the means of our renew-

al, in imitation of our Savior born this day in a manger, in a cave, among dumb beasts.

He whose throne the six-winged Seraphim surround in worship, Whose face they cannot bear to see, now appears to us in human flesh and the angels themselves are filled with awe. Because of this life-saving day, every eye may now gaze on that face even as we see Him now through the holy icons, faithfully and timelessly proclaiming the truth of His life-saving incarnation in-the-flesh and His calling to each of us to embrace the new life in Him. This is our God! See His unsurpassed love
(continued on p.4, column 1)



Homily on the Nativity of Christ (cont'd p.3)

love and mercy for us. Rejoice with the angels! Be stirred by it, take it to heart for your renewal and salvation. At Vespers for the Feast we sing, *"The angels offer Thee a hymn; the heavens, a star; the Magi, gifts; the shepherds, their wonder; the earth, its cave; the wilderness, a manger; and we offer Thee a Virgin Mother."*

Now we who celebrate the Feast ask the question of ourselves: *What do I offer Christ this day?* The service of the Royal Hours suggests this: Let us offer Christ clean minds and a pure heart through repentance. "Let us offer Him a life of virtue instead of Myrrh."

Let us also consider offering our faith and love as we celebrate with joy His holy Nativity. Let us receive Him inside ourselves in the Eucharist as the cave did of old, preparing Him room. As Christ God did not reject the humble cave for His birth, neither will He reject the room of a humble soul. In His love and humility, Christ comes to us too, He receives us, indwells and heals us, unites us with Him and all the faithful who have come before us or who will come after us. *Emmanuel* is here (God with us). Like the angels, shepherds, and magi, we share this good news with all whom we meet because the world cannot contain our joy in this life-changing event. Thou, O Christ, has this day filled all things with joy! Together, joining our voices with the angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven, we proclaim this day: Christ is Born. Glorify Him!

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Sing, O Jerusalem! Make merrry, all who love Zion! Today Adam's ancient bonds are broken. Paradise is opened to us. The serpent is cast down.

Long ago our first mother was deceived by him. Now he sees a woman become mother of the Creator. Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

Through Eve, woman became the tool of sin, bringing death to all flesh, but through Mary, she becomes the first-fruits of salvation for all the world, for God, the All-perfect, is born of her.

By His birth He seals her virginity. He is bound in swaddling clothes to loose the bonds of sin. Through His birth, the pains of Eve are healed. Let all creation sing and dance for joy, for Christ has come to restore it and to save our souls! (*Vespers of the Nativity*).

The Divine Child by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

The eternal God was born as a little child.. It is the words "child" and "God" which give us the most striking revelation about the Christmas mystery. Yes, Christmas is a feast for children, not just because of the tree that we decorate and light, but in the much deeper sense that children alone are unsurprised that when God comes to us on earth, he comes as a child. This image of God as child continues to shine on us through icons and through innumerable works of art, revealing that what is most essential and joyful in Christianity is found precisely here, in this eternal childhood of God.

Christ said "become like children" (Mt 18:3). What does this mean? What are adults missing, or better, what has been choked, drowned or deafened by a thick layer of adulthood? Above all, is it not that capacity, so characteristic of children, to wonder, to rejoice and, most importantly, to be whole both in joy and sorrow? Adulthood chokes as well the ability to trust, to let go and give one's self completely to love and to believe with all one's being. And finally, children take seriously what adults are no longer capable of accepting: dreams, that which breaks through our everyday experience and our cynical mistrust, that deep mystery of the world and everything within it revealed to saints, children, and poets.

Thus, only when we break through to the child living hidden within us, can we inherit as our own the joyful mystery of God coming to us as a child. The child has neither authority nor power, yet the very absence of authority reveals him to be a king; his defenselessness and vulnerability are precisely the

source of his profound power. The child in that distant Bethlehem cave has no desire that we fear him; He enters our hearts not by frightening us, by proving his power and authority, but by love alone. He is given to us as a child, and only as children can we in turn love him and give ourselves to him.

The world is ruled by authority and power, by fear and domination. The child God liberates us from that. All He desires from us is our love, freely given and joyful; all He desires is that we give him our heart. And we give it to a defenseless, endlessly trusting child. Through the feast of Christmas, the Church reveals to us a joyful mystery: the mystery of freely given love imposing itself on no one. A love capable of seeing, recognizing and loving God in the Divine Child, and becoming the gift of a new life.

