

Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

[HTTP://WWW.ORTHODOXHERITAGE.ORG](http://www.OrthodoxHeritage.org)

Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

Vol. 09, Issue 11-12

November-December 2011

Brotherhood of St. Poimen

In This Issue:

- The Nativity Fast (p. 2)
- Archeology & Bible (p. 4)
- The Choice for Life (p. 6)
- The Inevitability of Suffering (p. 10)
- On the Incarnation of the Son of God (p. 21)
- The Rightful Omission of Gnostic Writings (p. 24)
- Was Christ Born on December 25th? (p. 25)
- The Vision of St. Peter of Alexandria (p. 29)



- Χριστὸς Γεννᾶται (σελ. 13)
- Τι εἶναι Ἡ Ἐκκλησία; (σελ. 14)
- Εὐλογημένη ἡ Εἴσοδος τῶν Ἁγίων σου... (σελ. 15)
- Γιάννης ὁ Εὐλογημένος! (σελ. 18)
- Περὶ τῆς Βλασφημίας κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος (σελ. 20)



Publisher: St. POIMEN Greek Orthodox Brotherhood

Editor: George Karras

Story Editors:

Markos Antoniathis & Kostas Matsourakis

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

By St. John Maximovitch (his 1962 Nativity epistle to his flock).

Thou, Who art the God of peace and the Father of compassion, didst send unto us the Angel of Thy great Counsel, granting us peace.

† † †

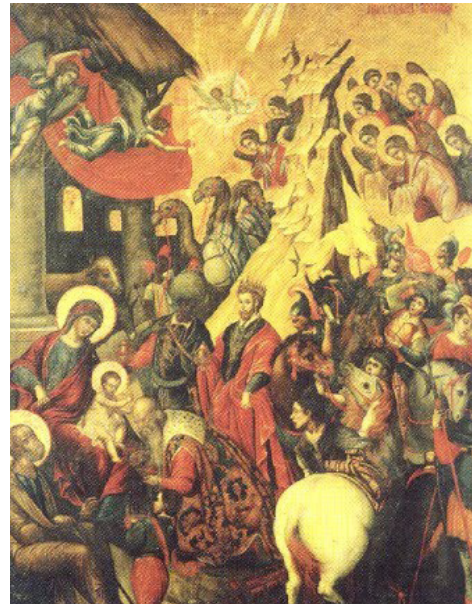
The Angel of the pre-eternal Counsel of the Holy Trinity comes to the earth. This is not an ordinary messenger; it is the Only-begotten Son of God Himself. He brings peace to men. *Peace be unto you*, He said more than once to His disciples. *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you*, He says to the apostles at the Mystical Supper, *not as the world giveth, give I unto you*. And appearing after His Resurrection, again He says: *Peace be unto you*.

For he is our peace, the Holy Apostle Paul says concerning Him: *He came to the earth to reconcile man unto God by the Cross, having slain the enmity thereby. And having come, He preached peace to those afar off and to those near, because through Him we both have access unto the Father.*

The wall that separated heaven and earth is destroyed; the sword that barred the way to the Tree of Life disappears. Unto man that had sinned comes his Creator, calling him into His embrace! By the mouths of the apostles, the Holy Spirit cries out: *In*

Christ, be ye reconciled to God. You that had sinned came not to God, but the Son of God, before Whom you sinned, came to you! He calls everyone to Himself; He gives forgiveness to everyone who merely thirsts for this. For without the desire of man himself, without at least his little effort, God's peace cannot settle in him.

The Lord forces no one to come to Him, but calls everyone: *Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*. Come all ye who are heavy laden with sins, who are exhausted from your labors and who do not find rest! You shall find that inner peace, which you will find nothing on earth more desirable than. The soul will feel unearthly peace and joy.



The Magi who worshipped the Babe experienced that joy; the shepherds, finding Him lying in a manger, also felt it. But neither peace nor joy touched the heart of Herod and those who wanted to destroy the Babe. For evil desire and malice are incompatible with inner peace. And whoever does

not have inner peace, also sows strife and malice about.

The Church now calls us to meet Christ Who comes from heaven. What can we do in order to meet Him like the Magi, and not like Herod? *Ye that desire life, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking guile. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it*. It tends to be hard to do

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN
POIMEN@MAIL.COM

PO Box 38688
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688
USA

[HTTP://WWW.ORTHODOXHERITAGE.ORG](http://www.orthodoxheritage.org)

Orthodox Heritage is published monthly by the "Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen," a laity brotherhood.

All correspondence should be addressed to the Brotherhood at the Phoenix address or the e-mail address above.

Please visit our website for our mission and other useful information.

Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

If you wish to receive this periodical, please write or e-mail us with your address. We suggest to all that share our views and wish to assist us to donate \$24 per annum. This amount will greatly assist us in the costs it takes to bring these articles to you, as well as to aid in our other educational and philanthropic activities.

Please note that the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. POIMEN is a publicly supported organization as described in section 509(a)(2) of the IRS Code and that it is exempt from federal income taxes under section 501(a) of the Code as a 501(c)(3) organization. Our supporters and donors can thus deduct contributions to the extent that they are gifts, in accordance with section 170 of the Code.

Checks should be made out to "Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen." PayPal users may utilize their credit card and address payments to our e-mail address, "poimen@mail.com." Please visit our website for the applicable links.

this; we are weak when it comes to everything good. But the Son of God even came for this: in order to strengthen us. Not for naught was He born in Bethlehem, which signifies "house of bread."

He feeds us with heavenly food, His flesh. "God, the Lord and Creator of all, as a babe in the flesh, is worshipped in a poor manger, crying out: 'Eat My body and through faith be made steadfast.'"

These words of the divine Babe are directed to us. Let us hearken to His call! Let us follow the Magi; let us hasten with the shepherds! Our churches are now that cave of Bethlehem. Not illusory, but in reality does He, Who is now being born in His most pure flesh, rest in them. Let us worship Him; let us offer as a gift our thoughts and desires; let us confess our sins, and let us taste of His immaculate Body and Blood. Whoever did not do this earlier, let him at least accomplish it now, when the star of Bethlehem is already shining! Our minds will be enlightened and the heart will hear:

Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will among men!

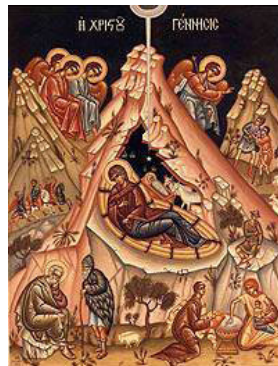


When we are compelled by our conscience to accomplish all the commandments of God, then we shall understand that the law of the Lord is faultless. It is performed through our good actions, but cannot be perfected by men without God's mercy.

St. Mark the Ascetic

WHY THE NATIVITY FAST HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED

From "Orthodox Russia," No. 21, 1999.



The Orthodox Church prepares its faithful to welcome the Nativity of Christ in a worthy manner by means of a 40-day Nativity fast, which lasts from November 15th to December 25th.

Besides generally known reasons, the Nativity fast is also undertaken by Orthodox Christians in order to venerate the suffering and sorrow undergone by the Holy Mother of God at the hands of the scribes and the Pharisees just prior to the sacred event of Christ's Nativity.

Holy Tradition tells us that shortly before the righteous Joseph and the Holy Virgin set off for Bethlehem, they were subjected to the following tribulation. A certain scribe by the name of Ananias, entering their home and seeing the Virgin pregnant, was severely distressed and went to the High Priest and the entire Jewish council, saying: "Joseph the carpenter, who has been regarded as a righteous man, has committed an iniquity. He has secretly violated the Virgin Who was given to him from the temple of God for safekeeping. And now She is with child." Then the High Priest's servants went to Joseph's house, took Mary and Joseph, and brought them to the High Priest, who began to denounce and shame the Most-blessed Virgin Mary.

But the Holy Virgin, crying in deep sorrow, replied: *The Lord God is My witness that I am innocent and have known no man.* Then the High Priest accused the righteous Joseph, but the latter swore on oath that he was not guilty of this sin. Yet the High Priest did not believe them and subjected them to the trial that was customary in those times, (when a woman suspected of violation was given to drink bitter water that had been cursed by the High Priest). However, the trial just served to confirm the innocence of the Holy Virgin and the righteous Joseph. All those present were amazed at this, unable to understand how a Virgin could simultaneously be with child and yet remain inviolate.

After that the High Priest allowed the holy couple to go home in peace. The righteous Joseph took the Virgin Mary and went to his house, joyously glorifying God. But this was not the end of the Holy Theotokos' trials. It is well known that afterwards she shared with Joseph the toil of a three-day journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. And in Bethlehem there was no place for the Holy Virgin either in an inn, or in some home, and since night was already approaching, She was forced to seek shelter in a cave which served as a resting place for cattle. In this humblest of shelters the Most-blessed Virgin remained in prayer and divine contemplation. It is here that She painlessly gave birth to our Lord Jesus Christ, Saviour of the world.

We can see from all of the above that the days immediately preceding the Nativity were not days of rest and comfort for the Holy Mother of God. In those days She suffered various sorrows and trials, but did not leave off her prayers and contemplation. The Holy Church appeals to the faithful to participate, at least to some small degree, in the Holy Theotokos' spiritual labor, constraining one's flesh during the Nativity fast and nourishing one's soul with prayer. However, the Church warns us that external fasting only is not enough. We must also apply ourselves to internal fasting, which consists of shunning malice, deceit, wrath, worldly bustle, and other vices. During this fast, as at all times, we must show works of love and mercy to our fellow beings, doing all we can to help those in need and in sorrow. Only then will our fasting be genuine and not hypocritical, only then will it be God-pleasing, and only then will we know the true joy of the bright feast of Christ's Nativity.



Take as an example the wisdom of Joseph and his submission. Do battle in chastity and service until you make yourself a king.

St. Pachomius (+348)

A THANKSGIVING PRAYER

Author unknown.

Every day we say... thank you Lord! Just this once, Lord, I want to come to you with no problems, but simply to say, Thank You:

For your forgiveness when I fail.

For the sheer joy of sleep when I'm terribly tired.

For silent strength of humility when pride overtakes me.

For the justice of your laws when people are cruel.

For the remedies for sickness when I am ill.

For the simplicity or orderliness when I face confusion.

For the assurance that you have made a place especially for me when I feel inadequate among my peers.

For the joy of helping others when I see people in need.

For the earthly evidence of your will when I'm trying to find out what life is all about.

For the reality of your world, when I stray too far into fantasy.

For the rightness of reasonableness when I panic too quickly.

For the fun that refreshes when everything gets too serious.

For the renewal in moments of silence when I'm overly stressed.

Thank you Lord, for all of these things.

But most of all, thank you for your abiding presence that makes every day I live a day of Thanksgiving!



Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One. What can I, the unworthy and filthy one, say about the grandeur of the innumerable dispensations of the Most High God! I am astonished and unable to look directly at it as I contemplate this mystery.

How did God condescend to be an infant in a cave of irrational beasts? How was He wrapped in swaddling clothes and carried in the holy arms of the holy Virgin, He Who was born by the Father without a mother! *Great art Thou, O Lord, and wondrous are Thy deeds, and no word sufficeth to hymn Thy wonders! Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!* (Rom 11:33).

My soul shall rejoice in the Lord; I shall noetically smother with kisses that most sweet and blessed Infant, so that He may deliver me from my irrational passions.

Elder Ephraim

From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

From "Christian Answers for Our Days," a pamphlet made available by Ms. Sarah M.



***From The Editor:** Television is having an ever increasing role and influence on our beliefs and (worse) knowledge of arts and sciences. There are certain TV channels that are beginning to be viewed more and more as final authorities on history (e.g., the History Channel, Discovery Channel, etc.). These channels often find it necessary to attack the historicity of the Biblical record with "expert opinion." We thus thought that our readers would find the subject article interesting and informative.*

We are aware that many have no desire to be either a Jew or a Christian, especially in a society where these religions have become so politicized. This does not mean, however, that the original authors of the Bible intended their histories, poetry, and letters to be used in the political way that they often are now. It is interesting that when the historicity of the works of ancient Hindu or Buddhist authors comes up, nobody questions their authenticity; meanwhile, the authors of the Bible are constantly attacked by an embittered group of Western "scholars." All of us, also, can respect the writings of Confucius or Lao Tzu as representative of their culture(s) and as reliable witnesses of their surroundings and times. Should not Biblical authors be afforded the same treatment?

To help remedy the trend, the subject article presents some statements from various archaeologists. Of especial note among them is Sir William Ramsay, who set out to prove Luke, author of the gospel that bears his name and the book of Acts, wrong. Instead, he came back with a profound respect for this author.

† † †

Archaeology is the study of material remains of past human life and activities. An archaeologist is the person who conducts the research of those material remains.

Here's what some of the great archaeologists and students of archaeology had to say about how material remains of past human life and activities affected the Bible.

1. Nelson Glueck - "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference."

2. William F. Albright - "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament traditions."

3. F. F. Bruce - "Where Luke has been suspected of inaccuracy, and accuracy has been vindicated by some inscriptional evidence, it may be legitimate to say archaeology has confirmed the New Testament record."

4. Merrill Unger - "Old Testament archaeology has rediscovered whole nations, resurrected important peoples, and

in a most astonishing manner filled in historical gaps, adding immeasurably to the knowledge of biblical backgrounds."

5. Miller Burrows - "Archaeology has in many cases refuted the views of modern critics. It has shown in a number of instances that these views rest on false assumptions and unreal, artificial schemes of historical development ... The excessive skepticism of many liberal theologians stems not from a careful evaluation of the available data, but from an enormous predisposition against the supernatural."

Archaeology and the Old Testament

1. Genesis derives the ancestry of Israel from Mesopotamia. Archaeology confirms it.

2. Genesis 11:1 reads that "The whole earth was of one language and one speech." God confounded the language in Genesis 11:9. Most philologists attest to the likelihood of such an origin for the world's languages.

3. In the genealogy of Esau, there is mention of the Horites (Gen. 36:20). Archaeology confirms the Horites were a prominent group of warriors living in the near East in Patriarchal times.

4. The Bible claims the walls of Jericho fell outwards. Critics scoffed because "walls of cities do not fall outwards, they fall inwards." Archaeology proved in the early 1930s that the walls of Jericho did fall outward, just as the Bible said.

5. One critic said the Biblical record of the laver made of brass mirrors was not an original entry into the Priestly Code. So, he dated the writing of the Law at 500 B.C. However, archaeology has since found evidence of such bronze mirrors in what is known as the Empire Period of Egypt's history (1500-1200 B.C.). That's contemporary with Moses.

6. A century ago such familiar Biblical cities as Jericho, Samaria, Bethel, Shiloh, Bethshan, Gezer, Nineveh, Babylon, Ur and many others were shapeless mounds. Critics scoffed at the Biblical record. Within the last 100 years, all of these cities have been uncovered. The importance of the discoveries is that the excavation has produced material which confirms the Scriptures point after point.

7. Excavations are dated on the basis of levels at which things are found. At Tepe Gawra, a few miles north of Nineveh, a seal was found which depicted a man, a woman and a serpent. Another seal depicted a man and a serpent. Another seal depicted a man and a woman picking fruit from a tree. Behind the woman was a serpent standing erect. The seals were found in the level antedating 3000 B.C. It suggests that the story of the temptation is very old. It was known about long before Abraham and Moses. It was not some Hebrew fairy tale.

These are but a few of hundreds of confirmations of the Old Testament from archaeology.

Archaeology and the New Testament

1. Sir William Ramsay is regarded as one of the greatest archaeologists ever to have lived. He believed that the Book of Acts was a product of the mid-second century A.D. (150 A.D.). He set out to prove it. However, after thorough re-

search, he changed his mind. He became a firm defender for the mid-first century authorship of Acts.

2. For many critics the account of the birth of Jesus was held as ridiculous. They argued that there was no census, that Quirinius was not Governor of Syria at that time and that everyone did not have to return to his ancestral home for a census. Archaeology has proven the critics wrong (again).

- o The Romans had a regular enrollment of taxpayers and held censuses every 14 years. The procedure was begun under Augustus.

- o Quirinius was Governor of Syria about 7 B.C.

- o A papyrus found in Egypt gives directions for the conduct of a census. Families were to return to their own governments to complete family registration of the enrollment and that the tilled lands might retain those belonging to them.

3. Critics said Acts was unreliable because Luke wrote that Lystra and Derbe were in Lycaonia and Iconium was not (Acts 14:6). However, in 1910, Sir William Ramsay found a monument that showed Iconium was a Phrygian city. Later discoveries confirmed that.

4. In his letter to the Romans, Paul mentions the city treasurer, Erastus (Romans 16:23). The letter was written in Corinth. Excavations of Corinth in 1929 found this inscription on a pavement: "Erastus, curator of public buildings, laid this pavement at his own expense." The pavement dates from the 1st century A.D.

5. Many critics have blasted the usage of certain words by Luke.

- o Luke called rulers in Philippi "praetors." Scholars argued that two "duumvirs" would have ruled the town. However, archaeology shows that the title of "praetor" was employed by the magistrates of a Roman colony. Luke was right.

- o Luke called civil authorities in Thessalonica "politarchs." Critics said there was no such person. However, 19 inscriptions have been unearthed which use the title. Luke was right.

- o Luke called Gallio "proconsul." The Delphi inscription was unearthed which reads: "As Lucius Junius Gallio, my friend and the proconsul of Achaia."

Sir William Ramsay wrote of Luke: "Luke is a historian of the first rank ... this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."

The Bible is to be trusted as an authentic Book of antiquity. Archaeology supports and confirms facts as stated in the Bible.

Additional Reading Sources

Read "An Introduction to Bible Archaeology" by Howard F. Vos (1956, Moody Press, Chicago, Ill., 125 pages) for some excellent basics to an understanding of how archaeology confirms the claims of Scripture.

You will enjoy reading the following books if you want to go deeper into the study of Biblical Archaeology.

- o "The Philistines and the Old Testament," Edward Hindson, 1971, Baker Books

- o "Archaeology and Bible History," Joseph Free, 1956, Scripture Press

- o "Archaeology and the Old Testament," Merrill Unger, 1954, Zondervan Publishing

- o "Highlights of Archaeology in Bible Lands," Fred Wight, 1955, Moody Press

- o "Out of the Earth," E.M. Blaiklock, 1957, Eerdmans

- o "Light from the Ancient Past," J. Finegan, 1959, Princeton University Press

- o "Excavations in Palestine," F. Bliss and R.A.S. Macalister, 1902, Palestine Exploration Fund

- o "The Old Testament in Modern Research," H. Hahn, 1966, Fortress Press

- o "Archaeology and the Religion of Israel," W.F. Albright, 1942, Johns Hopkins Press

- o "Archaeology and the Old Testament," J. Thompson, 1957, Eerdmans

- o "Documents from Old Testament Times," D.W. Thomas, 1965, Harper & Row

- o "Archaeology and the Ancient Testament," J. Kelson, 1968, Zondervan

- o "Biblical Archaeology," G.E. Wright, 1960, Westminster

Two other excellent resource books for researching archaeological finds that support the Bible are: "Unger's Bible Handbook" (1967, Moody Press) and "Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible" (1973, Eerdmans).



In the age of the Antichrist, when he will dominate the world, the simple but genuine prayer of a Christian will make him tremble, for Christians have tremendous power.

- Elder, some people say when the Antichrist comes, Christians will not be able to buy food and will starve.

- Well, Christians can live on bread and olives. The ones who will suffer are those who are used to having ten different kinds of cheeses on their table.

After the card, the identification cards and the establishment of the filing system, they will maliciously proceed to the marking by announcing on T.V. that someone stole another person's card and withdrew all his money from his bank account. On the other hand, they will advertise the "perfect system," the marking of the Antichrist's name, 666, on the hand and forehead with laser beams which will not be externally detectable.

Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain

THE CHOICE FOR LIFE

By Sonya Colberg, from "The Oklahoman," October 16th, 2011.

From the Editor: Once in a while we read a mass media story that instills hope in our minds for the future of our society. This is one such story that every mother-to-be must read. The choice for life for a healthy pregnant woman is much easier than the decision made by the protagonist of this story. In the end, cancer took a human life at the time that our Creator allowed; in the process, a baby came to life because of her mother's choice for life. Ms. Crimm traded her earthly life so that her baby can live; she said no to abortion, even when the majority of pro-lifers would have deemed abortion as an acceptable avenue. We are of the prayerful belief that our Lord and Savior and His Most Holy Mother's intercessions have granted Ms. Crimm her rightful place among His angels and saints. May her memory be eternal!

† † †

Stacie Crimm called her brother with astonishing news.

"You're not going to believe this," she said.

She laughed and cried all at once that day in March as she explained that five pregnancy tests showed she would be having a child. It was a joyous surprise at age 41 but even more so because she'd been told she would never be able to get pregnant, said her brother, Ray Phillips.

But even as she shopped for clothes for the child she longed to hold in her arms, she knew something was not right. She sent 159 text messages about her pregnancy to her brother in the months that followed. Many were joyful but then the bone-chilling messages came in during the predawn hours. She said severe headaches and double vision tortured her while tremors wracked her entire body.

"I'm worried about this baby," she texted.

"I hope I live long enough to have this baby," said another message. "Bubba, if anything happens to me, you take this child."

Initially, she and her brother used the Internet to try to diagnose her illness. The single mother-to-be had been exposed to mold while she was remodeling her home and her symptoms seemed to match up to mold exposure. At her family's encouragement, she visited a number of doctors. In July, a CT scan revealed that she had head and neck cancer.

Now she had to choose between her life and her baby's life. Phillips said she agonized only for a while before deciding against taking potentially life-saving chemotherapy

in hopes that she would soon hold a healthy baby in her arms.

The Turning Point

Crimm collapsed at her home in Ryan and was rushed to OU Medical Center in Oklahoma City on August 16th. Doctors said that the invasive tumor had begun wrapping around the brain stem, slowly squeezing the life out of Crimm. But on a beautiful sunny morning two days later, Crimm felt good enough to sit on the edge of her hospital bed to visit with her brother. He returned to his medical equipment business in Edmond with a lighter heart.

At noon, the baby's heart rate plummeted. Then Crimm's heart stopped 90 minutes later. With "code blue" issued, doctors and nurses rushed to resuscitate her and decided it was best to take the 2-pound, 1-ounce baby, Dottie Mae, by C-section.

Phillips raced back to the hospital, where the baby was in neonatal intensive care and the mother was in intensive care in a separate building.

"Sister was dying right there. She was gasping," he said. "The human body fights death."

A Mother's Will

Crimm's will was so strong she got off the ventilator and was no longer under sedation after several days.

"There was still a lot of hope at that point," said Jennifer Phillips, Ray Phillips' wife.

Doctors told the family that a treatment plan developed for Crimm could offer a small chance of surviving the aggressive cancer.

"The cancer was such that it had crossed one of her eyes and it had destroyed the muscle behind her eye. It paralyzed her throat. When she did talk, she was hard to understand. As far as her mind, she was there," Ray Phillips said.

But Crimm's improvement was short-lived. She often fell unconscious and hadn't been able to sign Dottie's birth certificate. Phillips gained guardianship because she frequently told him that if she didn't survive, she wanted him and his wife to raise the baby with the four children they already had at home.

"I think she's a miracle. I just want to do right by her and do what Stacie asked," Jennifer Phillips said.

A Nurse's Determination

On Sept. 8th, Crimm stopped breathing and once again was resuscitated. Hospital doctors and nurses warned the family that she likely was dying.



Ms. Stacie Crimm



Newborn Dottie Crimm

“Her heart had stopped. She quit breathing. She was technically dead, and then they brought her back,” said Ray Phillips.

But she had not yet held the baby whose life she had chosen above her own. She’d never touched the golden fluff of fuzz framing her baby Dottie’s angelic face. Never counted those fingers as tiny and perfect as a doll’s. Never looked into those dark blue eyes. But a quiet yet determined nurse and mother, Agi Beo, couldn’t bear to think of Crimm’s emotional pain.

“She was in the last stage with the brain tumor. And she never got to see the baby,” Beo said.

“This baby was everything she had in this world.”

With Crimm’s death imminent, Beo worked with nurse Jetsy Jacob to step up their questioning of the family, healthcare professionals and disease experts about Crimm’s condition, including her staph infection. They talked to Neoflight, the medical center’s neonatal transport team, about using a capsule-like ICU to safely move Dottie.

When his sister regained consciousness later that day, Phillips asked what she thought about possibly seeing Dottie. Crimm’s eyes popped open and she raised her hands as if to ask where was her child. Nurses wheeled Dottie down the hallway to her mother moments later. Phillips said doctors, nurses and others clad in protective gear gathered as nurses carefully lifted the baby from the incubator under her mother’s watchful eye.

They placed the baby on her mother’s chest. Mother and child gazed into each other’s eyes for several minutes. She smiled at the baby who at last lay in her arms.

No one said a word. No one had a dry eye.

Stacie Crimm died three days later.

Last week, Ray Phillips fulfilled his last promise to his sister. Healthy, 5-pound Dottie went home to live with Ray and Jennifer Phillips and her four new siblings.



Christ the Lord came, as the strongest expression of God’s unchanging love for mankind, to rekindle the extinct fire of love in the hearts of God’s children, and to make natural once more that which had, at one time, been completely normal to man, as to the angels, and had in time become unnatural. Were a mother not to love her child, could that child love its mother? Were God not to love man, could man love God? But God, from the beginning - and from before the beginning - loves man, and it is therefore natural for man to love God.

St. Nikolai Velimirovich (+1956)

ST. ANTHONY IN AN AMERICAN PRISON

From “Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry.”



This icon of Saint Anthony is the work of an American monastic named Anthony. The unique situation of Anthony is that he does not live in a monastery, but in a maximum security prison in Colorado.

Anthony has never entered an Orthodox church, nor has he attended “live” a liturgy or any other service; he has only seen a liturgy that was video recorded.

The same situation exists for the other Orthodox Christians held in maximum security, such as the monk Matthew, and the majority of lay people like Loukas and George. This is because they became Orthodox after a personal search and while in prison.

The Orthodox faithful in the penitentiary do not recognize each other, since in this prison the detainees go into the courtyard individually and do not meet each other — they are completely isolated. But they can mail letters to the “outside world,” in compliance to certain conditions of course, such as the contents of the letters being checked. Our brothers understand Orthodoxy much more than one would expect. Another detainee, David, makes beautiful woolen prayer ropes, and has sent them to many Christians in various parts of the world.

The Orthodox of this Maximum Security Prison are the fruit of the grace of God through the missionary activity of a remarkable priest, Fr. Stephan Powley, who for years served there (he is now Chaplain of the prison).

Fr. Stephan, a former Evangelical Protestant, was ordained in the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese in the USA (under the Patriarchate of Antioch). He has been a prison Chaplain since January 1985 and has served in every security level from minimum to maximum. He is a priest in the Antiochian Archdiocese and serves the Orthodox Churches of Southern Colorado as needed.



No one should plead inability to do what is asked of us in the gospels, since there are souls who have accomplished far more than is commanded.

St. John Climacus

MIRACLES OF AN ASCETIC: ST. DANIEL THE STYLITE (+493)

From the Life of Daniel the Stylite (St. Daniel is commemorated on December 11th).



A certain man traveling to Constantinople from the East fell among robbers who stole from him everything that he had with him, mutilated his body, cut the sinews of his knees and leaving him half dead, went their ways.

By the providence of God, however, they had not inflicted any mortal wound on him. Some wayfarers who came to that place picked him up and carried him to the city of An-cyra, for it was close to that city that this had befallen him. There they took him to the bishop who ordered him to be conveyed to the hospital and cared for there. But while his wounds were tended he was not able to walk. He therefore made this request of the bishop:

- I was traveling to Constantinople in fulfillment of a vow making my way to our lord Daniel, who stands on the column, when I met with this accident; and now that, thanks to you, I have been healed it behooves me to fulfill my vow. I pray you, therefore, servant of God, to send me safely to Constantinople to the holy man.

The bishop, since he thought that this was a pious request; gave him money for his expenses, also a beast and two men to conduct him to the holy man Daniel.

So the men took him and brought him to the holy man's enclosure and then carried him and laid him in front of the column. The man cried aloud and told the holy man the reason for which he had come and related what had happened to him and how he had been saved by the help of God and the bishop.

The holy man sent thanks to the bishop for the kindness he had shown to the man and after furnishing those who had brought him with supplies for their journey he dismissed them in peace with presents for the bishop. He handed over the man to some of the servants with orders to carry him and bring him to the enclosure daily at the hour of prayer, and to anoint him with the oil of the saints; the man's legs hung down as if they did not belong to him.

After a few days, one Friday when the Saint had said the prayers as usual and all had said *Amen*, the man suddenly leapt from the litter, and stood on his feet and said with a loud voice:

- Bless me, oh servant of God.

And he quickly ran up the steps and embraced the column giving thanks the while to God.

A certain woman had a son of twelve years, Damianus by name, dumb from birth; him she brought to the holy man's enclosure and signing to him not to go away, she left him and departed.

When the brethren saw the boy staying there and saying nothing to anybody, they brought him to the holy man. He, beholding him, ordered that he should remain in the monastery, saying:

- The boy shall be God's minister.

The brethren said:

- He is dumb, master!

He said to them:

- Moisten his tongue with the oil of the saints.

But the brethren suspected that from stress of poverty the mother had suggested to him to feign dumbness; so very often when the boy was asleep they woke him suddenly by making a noise; and at other times they would prick him in the body with needles or pens to see whether he would speak. But he said nothing, as he was held by the power of dumbness.

One Sunday, after some considerable time had passed, when the holy Gospel was going to be read aloud, and the deacon had announced the lesson from the holy Gospel of St. Matthew, the boy shouted out ahead of the others:

- Glory be to thee, oh Lord!

And after uttering this first cry he surpassed all the brethren in his singing of the psalms. A certain chamberlain, Calopodius by name, had built an oratory to the holy Archangel Michael and came to the holy man asking him to give him some brethren for this oratory in Parthenopolis. And together with the brethren the holy man gave him this boy to sing the psalms and he became God's minister, as the servant of God had foretold about him.

So great are the achievements of grace, so great the gifts of our Master to His sincere servants; he came not speaking and became a good speaker, he came voiceless and gained a beautiful voice, he was deserted by his mother as dumb and he proved to be the wonderful herald of the church.



Hold fast humility, practice obedience, exercise hospitality, keep the fasts, observe the vigils, love poverty, and above all maintain charity, which is the first and great commandment; keep closely bound to all that regards piety, avoid the tares of the heretics. Separate never from the Church your Mother; if you do these things your righteousness shall be perfect.

St. Daniel the Stylite

THE TEMPLE GUARDIAN AND SAINT GREGORY

By St. Gregory of Nyssa, from "The Life of St. Gregory Thaumaturgos (the Wonderworker)," (commemorated 17 November).

After leaving his solitude, [St. Gregory the Wonderworker] at once hastened to the city where he felt obliged to establish a church for God. He knew that the whole region was under the grip of demons and that the temple of the true God was not yet constructed; the entire city and surrounding area was filled with pagan altars, sacred places and all the people were devoted to images. They adorned the temples and sacred places with images and the madness of idolatry with processions. Their defilement gave substance to rites and ceremonies.

Just as a noble commander routs the enemy in combat by the strength of his battle order, so does that great man's valor set an example against the demons. How does he accomplish this?

Upon arriving in the city at evening from the countryside, a violent rainstorm forced [St. Gregory] into the temple. This place was renowned because one of the demons revered there was accustomed to manifest himself to the temple's custodians, and a certain prophet was empowered to utter oracles. Once [St. Gregory] entered the temple with several companions, one of the demons was petrified at the invocation of Christ's name. The saint, having purified the defiled air with the figure of the Cross, he spent the entire night in prayer and singing hymns according to his usual custom. In this way, St. Gregory transformed the place into a temple of prayer which had been profaned by unclean sacrifices and images [cf. Is 56:7, Mk 11:17]. After completing night prayer, he resumed at daybreak, but when the temple's custodian began to perform his rites to the demons at sunrise, he claimed that he could not approach the temple because St. Gregory blocked the way.

The custodian then attempted to invite demons into the temple using sacrifices of purification and sacred rituals. However, his endeavors were ineffectual because the demons were not accustomed to respond to this enticement. Overcome with a furious rage, the custodian seized that great man and threatened him with various intimidations and to bring him to the leaders. He wanted to lay hands upon St. Gregory and reveal his audacity to the king because a Christian who was hostile to the gods had the effrontery to enter the temple.

The saint's admission to the temple for performing services was refused, and he was prohibited from visiting places where oracles were made to demons. The custodian's harsh anger was aroused by [St. Gregory's] splendid resolve, and he hurled all kinds of threats against the blessing offered to

the true God. The saint kept alleging to have more fortitude than his opponent and the ability to enter those places anytime he wished as well as being able to prove this.

The temple keeper was so struck with admiration at St. Gregory's ability to perform wonders that he again invoked the demons to enter the temple. Having learned about this, the great man suddenly snatched a piece of the book and gave it to the temple keeper while angrily commanding the demons. The words of this epitaph read as follows: **Gregory to Satan: Enter.**

When the temple keeper received this little book to place on the altar according to custom, he offered burnt sacrifices and various types of unclean rites and again beheld what he had seen before the demons were ejected from the temple which contained the idols. Having accomplished this, he realized that Gregory was endowed with divine power which made him stronger than the demons. Before leaving the city, he promptly grasped Gregory in order to learn about his secret and about God who had vanquished the demons.

When the great man gave a brief account about the mystery of piety, a certain temple guardian approached him who was in all likelihood uninitiated into divine matters. He was inclined to believe that it was too inconsequential for God to appear to men in the flesh. But when Gregory said that these miracles are possible not by reason but by faith, the temple keeper begged to see a miracle which would strengthen him in the faith. Right then and there it was said to everyone's surprise that Gregory performed a great miracle.

After the temple guardian found a huge stone which in his eyes seemed unmovable by human means but only through the power of faith, Gregory ordered it transferred to another place. That great man at once charged the large stone which seemed endowed with life to move to that place designated by the temple's keeper. Once this was accomplished, the man immediately believed and forsook his entire family, household, wife, children, friends, the priesthood and possessions. In their place he requested to participate in [St. Gregory's] greatness, accomplishments, divine philosophy and teaching.

Thus that great man [St. Gregory] prevailed against the demons' strength and paraded the temple guardian as a victory trophy, a sight which filled the people with awe. With faith and courage he triumphantly entered the city not with chariots, horses, asses and boasting in the number of supporters but attended by the full array of virtues. The town's entire populace gathered to learn about this the novel wonder, and everyone desired to see that man called Gregory. They considered him a god who exercised authority and did whatever he wished against the demons in order to subject them. Having vanquished their patron to his authority and despising the honor which was formerly theirs, he changed their way of life and everything which pertained to it.

THE INEVITABILITY OF SUFFERING

By New Martyr Archbishop John of Riga.



A Latvian by birth, Archbishop John began his pastoral work in Russia where he inspired such love and devotion in his flock, that when the Communist revolution struck and trouble began, volunteers from among the workers organized a guard to watch over him day and night. Seeing in him a bold accuser of the new regime, the Bolsheviks never left

the Archbishop in peace; he was constantly followed and several attempts were made on his life.

In 1921, at the persistent entreaty of the Latvian Orthodox Patriarch Tikhon, blessed Archbishop John returned to his native Latvia. Under his guidance life was restored to the much suffering Latvian Orthodox Church. Here too he continued to speak fearlessly, his voice sounding forth like an alarm bell; the image of Golgotha often appeared in his sermons. He never forgot the persecuted Orthodox in Russia and conducted a ceaseless open battle against the Soviet atheist regime. In turn, his political enemies did not forget him.

During the night of October 11th, 1934, Archbishop John ascended his own Golgotha. He was tortured and burned alive in the attic of the cathedral. Over 100,000 people accompanied the coffin to the cemetery, a living glorification of this beloved archpastor and chief confessor of the Latvian Orthodox Church.

† † †

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. [Mt 16:21.23]

† † †

Like a thunderclap from a clear sky, so was the impression made upon the disciples by this revelation of the Lord concerning the sufferings which awaited him. Earlier He had told them that His path was also their path. *You will be hated for My name's sake. The servant is not greater than his master. He who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.* And in the lives of Christ's true disciples there is a time of suffering the Passion, when each must enter his own Jerusalem, ascend his Golgotha, and the fateful Cross, and rake up the fateful cup, even unto death

Even the sons of this world have their Golgotha. Unforeseen and uninvited, suffering enters the house. You must suffer whether you like it or not. The bitter "must"...

This "must" is bitter even for the faithful disciple of Christ. And the cross of suffering frightens even him. in his soul

is heard the voice of Peter: *Be merciful to yourself; do not let this happen; defend yourself.* And this is not surprising, for after all, the great Sufferer Himself prayed: *If it be possible, take this cup from Me.* This is an altogether necessary "must", and we are powerless to stand against it.

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things. If the way of the Lord led to Jerusalem, if His fate was to be decided by the scribes, the Pharisees, the elders, then it was natural that He had to suffer and be killed.

This Jerusalem towards which Christ directed His steps was not the heavenly Jerusalem, but an earthly city, full of the spirit of this world which had fallen away from its God, not recognizing, not comprehending the visitation of the Lord. This is the same Jerusalem which at the altar of the Lord, killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent to it...

And the world, my brothers, even unto this day, stands on that same foundation. Perhaps it does not have the same outward appearance. Nowadays they do not crucify people on crosses, as they did Jesus Christ; they do not beat people with staves as they did Peter and John; nor are people stoned like Stephen. People have become too indifferent towards faith to suffer for its sake. Our path is less rocky, and whoever murmurs at the harshness and the evil of this world should know that he is far from suffering unto blood.

Nevertheless, now as never before, the words of the Lord contain a sacred truth: *If you were of the world, the world would love you, but because you are not of this world but I took you from the world, the world despises you.* It cannot do otherwise. The natural desire of man's heart is to live at peace with everyone. Youthful hearts often make decision for an unconcerned faith within themselves: "I want to get along with everyone, I mustn't antagonize anyone." But even the most well-intentioned man soon realizes that this is impossible. Even the meekest lamb is sure to meet on his way the ferocious wolf who says: "You are a thorn in my side."

He who believes must confess his faith. He who desires to serve God in the world must act according to his faith, but every confession inevitably arouses antagonism, and every action is sure to meet with hostility. To see that his honest persuasion and strivings are not recognized by the world, that his good deeds are everywhere met with opposition, that there where he sows only love he must reap evil—this is obviously very grievous to the follower of Christ. And he is often ready to ask together with his Master: "What evil has been done you?" or "How have I offended you?"

The truth which you proclaim and which you confess and which the world cannot gainsay; or the righteousness manifest in your life which silently reproaches the world; or the peace of the Lord written on your face which the world cannot forgive; or the heavenly other-worldliness of

your behavior which shames and accuses their earthly way of life. This is how you have offended the world. And the world would sooner pardon you of ten vices and crimes... which set you on a level with otters, than forgive one good deed which elevates you above the rest.

Why did Cain murder Abel? Because Cain's actions were evil and the actions of Abel were good and righteous. Why did the scribes and Pharisees condemn the Saviour? Because He was light, and darkness cannot abide the light.

Do not be surprised, then, my dear brothers, if the world hates you. This is nothing unusual. Do not let the evil mockings and vicious hatred of evildoers lead you astray. Go along the straight road with the name of the Lord through the world which lies in evil and think to yourself: I must follow the straight road and the world cannot do otherwise.

It would not be the world if it did not prefer the lies of its errors to truth, egoism to love, its laziness to zeal for God, worldly vanity to righteousness. I am not a disciple of Christ, not His soldier, if I do what is pleasing to everyone, if I go along the broad path together with the crowd instead of keeping to the narrow path where there are few travelers. And so, let us step forward in the name of the Lord with the full realization that "I must".

There is another aspect of this "I must." When the Son of Man told His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and there suffer much and die, He was aware that this was necessary for Himself. Because *He was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross, God raised Him up and gave Him a name which is above every name.* If the Heavenly Father so willed that even His Only-begotten Son would drink from the cup of suffering, is it for us sinners who are so imperfect to shun this cup of suffering, this school of suffering, when we are such a long way from perfection and still have so much to learn in order to become worthy disciples of the great Sufferer?

Some think: "How much more fervently and more willingly I would serve my Lord if only my life's path were easier, if it weren't so thickly strewn with sharp rocks." In saying this, you yourself obviously do not know who and what you are, what is beneficial for you and what is harmful, what you need and what you don't need.

It is true when they say that a man tolerates least of all his own well-being. Days of happiness, days of success, when everything goes according to one's wishes—how many times have such days woven a fatal net which captures man's soul? What dissoluteness grows in man's heart, like rust on the blade of a battle sword when it lies unused, or like a garden

which becomes overgrown if not tended by the gardener's shears.

Tell me, O Christian, what preserves you from the haughtiness which so easily penetrates even the strongest hearts, even the hearts of Christ's disciples? Is it not the cross and suffering? What humbles the passionate inclinations of the flesh which so quickly and easily spread in times of well-being and prosperity, like insects in a swamp on a sunny day? What teaches you to shun this uncleanness? Is it not the rod of misfortunes and sorrows? What arouses you from the sleep of self-assurance in which we are so easily lulled to sleep by times of earthly happiness? Or what is more conducive to lazy vegetation than cloudless, carefree days of prosperity? At such times, isn't a storm to be welcomed? What will draw you out of the dangerous state of insensibility? Will not sorrows? Will not illness? What tears us away from our worldly attachments, the love for the world and all that is

in it? Is it not necessity and misfortunes? Do not trials teach us to take life more seriously? Do not sorrows teach us to be prepared for death?

Wild brambles in the heart cannot be uprooted without the pruning shears of the heavenly Gardener, and the good fruit of truth and righteousness will not grow without the rain of tears and sorrows. True obedience cannot be experienced other than by the drinking of the bitter cup of grief, when one can only say: *Not my will, but Thine be done, Father...* And

submission to the will of God is never seen so clearly as in days and hours of storm, when in the midst of threatening and frightful waves the Christian gives himself totally into the hands of Him Whose very hands hold these tempests and waves.

When can the steadfastness, courage and strength of a soldier of Christ be better demonstrated than when trials and obstacles must be turned into Christian deeds, than in the war against evil or in times of danger? All the noble strength of the Christian soul, of the Christian character, shines forth most brightly in times of distress, misfortune, and suffering. All the miracles of God's grace are most evident in times when the waters of grief and misfortune flood our souls and we are forced to recognize our helplessness, our weakness, and thus in turn we surrender all our strength and understanding to Almighty God.

And are you going to ask, what for? And why? When God Himself chastises and calls you to account? Or, when the Lord sends you to the school of the Cross, will you say: "I have no need of its teachings?" Rather, you must say: "I need this; I must go to this school of the Cross; I must suffer with Christ in order to be raised with Him. When the Lord



chastens me, I must think and feel like a child chastised by the loving right hand of the Lord, like a grape vine under the gardener's pruning shears; like iron beneath the smith's hammer, like gold in the purifying furnace, like a cluster of grapes beneath the burning rays of the sun. This 'I must' is of God, and I must not shrink from it."

Even the ancient Greeks and other peoples bowed before the divine will, before sacred duty, before the immutable destiny and man's dependence upon the divine. The submission of one's will before this divine "I must," the exact fulfillment of the decrees of the divine will, in the wise this was called 'wisdom', in heroes it was 'courage', in the righteous it was 'sanctity'. How much more willingly must we Christians fulfill our duty when we know that we are not being led by a blind faith, but by the good will of the Father which led even Christ to Golgotha and the Cross, but through Golgotha and the Cross to the glorious Resurrection. And so we must put our trust in Him even when we cannot comprehend the meaning of this guidance. Mankind would have been deprived of so much goodness, such glory and blessedness, if the Saviour had hearkened to the voice of Peter: "Defend yourself."

Let each soul bow before the divine "I must," for the will of God is good, perfect, guiding all to salvation. And you, O son of dust and corruption, bend your neck under His almighty hand before which your strength is as nothing; trust to Divine wisdom, before which your light is but a dark shadow; give yourself over to the fatherly guidance of Him Who desires, not enmity and sorrows, but peace and blessedness for all men and all mankind. When you submit your thoughts and your will to this thought and will, then no cup will be for you too bitter, and no cup too heavy; you will be able to bear it; no path too narrow you will be able to follow it; no trial will tempt you beyond measure; you will be able to withstand it. Such is the will of God.

If you are surrounded by your wife, your children, friends, and everyone you love, and if they try to persuade you to have pity on yourself, not to destroy yourself—pay no attention to their tears and their pleadings; point to the heavens and say: "Do not burden my heart; so it is pleasing to God and I must; you are reasoning according to man's wisdom and not the wisdom of God." And if from your own heart cries out the voice of flesh and blood and begins to persuade you: "this cannot happen to you, defend yourself," turn away from this counsel of your own heart and follow after that which glorifies God.

We can more easily bear our afflictions if we keep in mind the example of our Saviour. See with what peaceful and holy determination He goes to meet His passion. And then follow Him along the path of the Cross until, with His last breath, you hear from His lips the Divine words: *It is finished*. And then ask yourself: aren't you drawn by this example? Doesn't

this make clear the commandment, *He who wishes to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me?* Doesn't this lead you to the conviction of that disciple who said, *I cannot wear a crown of roses when my Saviour is wearing a crown of thorns?*

At the cross of Christ, even the most suffering soul among us can find consolation: I have endured and even now endure much, but my Divine Saviour endured still more. If you find this example too lofty, read what the holy Apostle St. Paul says: *Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.* (2 Cor 11:25-27). See what he endured for Christ's sake; how many times he was beaten, stoned, imprisoned... and then understand how far we are from him.

Everywhere the Cross is the sign of Christianity. A Christian can simply not be without his cross.

Amen.



Death itself, which once was man's chiefest terror, has been overthrown, and now that which was once the object of hate and loathing is preferred to life. These are the achievements of Christ's presence; these are the tokens of His power. For it was not one people that He saved, as when through Moses He divided the sea and delivered Israel out of Egypt and the bondage of Pharaoh (cf. Ex. 14:16); nay, rather He rescued all mankind from the corruption of death and the bitter tyranny of sin; not leading them by force to virtue, not overwhelming them with earth or burning them with fire, or ordering the sinners to be stoned, but persuading men by gentleness and long-suffering to choose virtue and vie with one another and find pleasure in the struggle to attain it.

St. John of Damascus



We wish to remind our readers to not neglect sending us their annual contribution to help us cover the costs associated with our humble publication. In addition, we kindly request of those who have the financial ability, that they consider sending us an amount over the requested annual contribution of \$24 to assist us with our educational and philanthropic activities.

Χριστός Γεννᾶται, Δοξάσατε!

Αγίου Γρηγορίου Θεολόγου.

**Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε·
Χριστὸς ἐξ οὐρανῶν, ἀπαντήσατε·
Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς, ὑψώθητε.
Ἄσατε τῷ Κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ
καὶ ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ, ἀνυμνήσατε λαοί,
ὅτι δεδόξασται.**

† † †

Καὶ ἐγὼ θὰ φωνάξω τὴν δύναμη (σημασία) τῆς ἡμέρας: Ὁ ἄσαρκος σαρκώνεται. Ὁ Λόγος γίνεται ὑλικός. Ὁ ἀόρατος ὁράται. Ὁ ἀναφῆς ψηλαφιέται. Ὁ ἄχρονος ἀρχίζει, Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς χθὲς καὶ σήμερα ὁ ἴδιος καὶ στοὺς αἰῶνες.

Ἐνα (πρόσωπο) ἀπὸ δυὸ ἀντίθετα (φύσεις), σάρκα (ἀνθρώπινη φύση) καὶ Πνεῦμα (Θεῖα φύση), ἀπὸ τίς ὁποῖες ἡ μιὰ (ἡ Θεῖα) ἐθέωσε, καὶ ἡ ἄλλη (ἡ ἀνθρώπινη) ἐθεώθηκε. Ὡ τῆς καινούριας μίξεως! Ὡ τῆς παραδόξου συνθέσεως! Ὁ Ὡν δημιουργεῖται καὶ ὁ ἄκτιστος κτίζεται καὶ ὁ ἀχώρητος χωρεῖται διὰ μέσου νοερῆς ψυχῆς ποὺ μεσιτεύει στὴν Θεότητα καὶ (διὰ μέσου) τῆς ὑλικότητος τῆς σάρκα. Καὶ ὁ πλουτίζων πτωχεύει. Ἐπειδὴ πτωχεύει (λαμβάνοντας) τὴν δική μου σάρκα, γιὰ νὰ πλουτήσω ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὴν δική Του Θεότητα. Καὶ ὁ Πλήρης ἀδειάζει, ἐπειδὴ ἀδειάζει ἀπὸ τὴν δόξα Του γιὰ λίγο, γιὰ νὰ μεταλάβω ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὴν πληρότητά του.

Ποῖος ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀγαθότητος; Τί εἶναι αὐτὸ τὸ μυστήριον (ποὺ ἔγινε) γιὰ μένα; Μετάλαβα τὴν εἰκόνα (του) καὶ δὲν τὴν ἐφύλαξα. Μεταλαμβάνει τὴν δική μου σάρκα, καὶ γιὰ νὰ σώσει τὴν εἰκόνα καὶ γιὰ νὰ ἀθανατήσει τὴν σάρκα. Δεύτερη πραγματοποιεῖ κοινωνία, πολὺ παραδοξότερη τῆς πρώτης (τῆς δημιουργίας). Τότε μετέδωσε τὸ καλύτερο (τὴν εἰκόνα του), ἐνῶ τώρα μεταλαμβάνει τὸ χειρότερο (τὴν σάρκα μου). Αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀπὸ τὸ προηγούμενον θεοπρεπέστερον. Αὐτὸ εἶναι σὲ ὅσους ἔχουν νοῦ ὑψηλότερον.

Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε, Χριστὸς ἐξ οὐρανῶν, ἀπαντήσατε, Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς, ὑψώθηκε. Ἄσατε τῷ Κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ... Μ' ἕνα λόγο: Ἄς εὐφραίνονται οἱ οὐρανοὶ καὶ ἄς ἀγάλλεται ἡ γῆ γιὰ τὸν Ἐπουράνιον, ποὺ κατόπιν ἔγινε Ἐπίγειος. Ὁ Χριστὸς παρουσιάζεται

μὲ ἀνθρώπινο σῶμα, ἀγαλλιᾶσθε μὲ τρόμον καὶ χαρὰ. Μὲ τρόμον γιὰ τὴν ἐνοχὴ τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ μὲ χαρὰ γιὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς σωτηρίας...

Πάλι διαλύεται τὸ σκοτάδι, πάλι ὑπάρχει τὸ φῶς. Πάλι τιμωρεῖται μὲ σκοτάδι ἡ Αἴγυπτος καὶ πάλι ὁ ἰσραηλιτικὸς λαὸς φωτίζεται μὲ τὸν πύρινον στύλο. Ὁ λαὸς ποὺ καθόταν στὸ σκοτάδι τῆς ἀγνοίας, ἄς δῆ τὸ μεγάλο φῶς τῆς θεογνωσίας.

Τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρήλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονε τὰ πάντα καινά. (Κορ. Β' 5:17). Τὸ νεκρὸ γράμμα ὑποχωρεῖ. Τὸ πνεῦμα ἐπικρατεῖ. Οἱ σκιεὶς τοῦ νόμου περνοῦν. Ἡ ἀλήθεια θριαμβεύει. Ὁ Μελχισεδέκ, ποὺ ἦταν ἕνας τύπος, τώρα δείχνει ποιὸν προεσήμαινε, δηλαδὴ τὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό. Αὐτός, ποὺ ὡς Θεὸς δὲν ἔχει μητέρα, γεννιέται χωρὶς πατέρα. Γιατί στὸν Δημιουργὸ τῆς φύσεως δὲν ἰσχύουν οἱ φυσικοὶ νόμοι. Ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη χειροκροτήσατε, γιατί παιδίον ἐγεννήθη ἡμῖν υἱὸς καὶ ἐδόθη ἡμῖν οὗ ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐγενήθη ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄμου αὐτοῦ καὶ καλεῖται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ μεγάλης βουλής ἄγγελος, θαυμαστὸς σύμβουλος, Θεὸς

ἰσχυρὸς, ἐξουσιαστής, ἄρχων εἰρήνης, πατὴρ τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος ἐγὼ γὰρ ἄξω εἰρήνην ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄρχοντας εἰρήνην, καὶ ὑγίειαν αὐτῷ (Ἠσ. 9:6). Ἄς φωνάξῃ δυνατὰ ὁ Ἰωάννης Βαπτιστής: Ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν Κυρίου. Καὶ ἐγὼ θὰ φωνάξω τὴν δύναμη καὶ τὴ σημασία τῆς μεγάλης αὐτῆς τῆς ἀγίας ἡμέρας (τῶν Χριστουγέννων).

Αὐτὸς ποὺ εἶναι Ἄναρχος καὶ Αἰώνιος, τώρα λαμβάνει ἀρχή. Αὐτὸς ποὺ

εἶναι Αὐθύπαρκτος, δημιουργεῖται. Αὐτὸς ποὺ εἶναι Ἄπειρος, χωρεῖται στὴν περιορισμένη ἀνθρώπινη φύση. Αὐτὸς ποὺ πλουτίζει μὲ τὰ ἀγαθὰ Του τὸν κόσμον, γίνεται Φτωχὸς, παίρνοντας ἀνθρώπινο σῶμα, γιὰ νὰ πλουτίσω ἐγὼ μὲ τὴν θεότητά Του. Ποῖος μπορεῖ νὰ παραστήσει πόσος εἶναι ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀγαθότητός Του;

Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ σὺ μαζί μὲ τὸν Ἄστερα τρέξε καὶ μαζί μὲ τοὺς Μάγους φέρε Του γιὰ δῶρα, χρυσὸ καὶ λιβάνι καὶ σμύρνα. Τίμησέ Τον ὡς Βασιλέα καὶ Θεὸ καὶ ὡς Λυτρωτὴ, ποὺ νεκρώθηκε γιὰ σένα. Μαζί μὲ τοὺς ποιμένες δόξασέ Τον, μὲ τοὺς ἀγγέλους ὕμνησέ Τον, μὲ τοὺς ἀρχαγγέλους σκίρτησε ἀπὸ χαρὰ. Ἄς εἶναι κοινὴ ἡ πανηγυρὶς τῶν οὐρανίων καὶ τῶν ἐπιγείων δυνάμεων...



**Ἡ ἀκριβὴς θέσις τῆς γεννήσεως τοῦ
Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
(Ναὸς τῆς Γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ—Ιερουσαλήμ)**

Τι Είναι Η Εκκλησία;

Του Μοναχού Μωυσέως Αγιορείτου, από την έφημερίδα «Μακεδονία», 9 Ιανουαρίου, 2011.

Η Ορθόδοξη εκκλησία δεν είναι ανθρώπινο κατασκεύασμα, αλλά θεοϊδρυτη οικοδομή. Η εκκλησία δε σώζεται, αλλά σώζει όσους θέλουν. Δεν κάνει επίδειξη ισχύος και δυνάμεως. Ανέχεται, υπομένει. Τη διώκουν, αλλά δεν διώκει. Είναι φιλεύσπλαχνη μητέρα και γνωρίζει μόνο να αγαπά. Ο κόσμος δεν γνωρίζει την αξία της γι' αυτό αδιαφορεί ή και την κτυπά. Η αγκάλη της εκκλησίας έχει αίγλη, θέρημη και εύρος. Μέσα της χωρά και αναπαύει όλους τους μετανοημένους.

Μπορεί ο κόσμος να ξέφυγε, όμως η δίψα και η πείνα για τόν Θεό υπάρχει βαθιά στην καρδιά του σύγχρονου ανθρώπου. Υπάρχουν και στους δύσκολους καιρούς άνθρωποι γνήσια πιστοί, που δεν παρασύρθηκαν από την εύκολία και την κακία. Η πνευματική ζωή δεν θέλει μεγάφωνα και προβολείς, δημοσιότητα, διαφήμιση και επικρότηση. Αγαπά πολύ την άφωτη μυστικότητα και την ίερη σιγή. Ορθόδοξοι Χριστιανοί όσοι δεν φανατίζονται υπέρμετρα, δεν θυμώνουν με τους κακούς, δεν κυνηγούν τους αμαρτωλούς, αλλά την αμαρτία, δεν διαπομπεύουν και δεν γελοιοποιούν κανένα, δεν ευκολασκανδαλίζονται.

Η αποστολή των Χριστιανών στον κόσμο σήμερα δεν είναι καταγγελτική, ανατρεπτική και εισαγγελική. Οί πιστοί αισθάνονται συνυπεύθυνοι για τὸ ὑπάρχον κακὸ στον κόσμο. Είναι ανεκτικοί, συμπαθείς και επιεικείς με τους άλλους. Κύριο έργο τους δεν είναι να καταλογίζουν ευθύνες, να παρατηρούν τους άλλους συνεχῶς αὐστηρά, να μεμψιμοιρούν και να μελαγχολούν για τὸ πολὺ κακὸ των καιρῶν μας.

Η Εκκλησία του Χριστού δεν φοβάται, δεν αισθάνεται ανασφαλής, δεν παίρνει επιθετική ή άμυντική στάση. Υπάρχει σὲ κάποιους μιὰ φοβία και μιὰ καχυποψία ὅτι ὅλοι μᾶς ἐχθρεύονται και πολὺ μᾶς πολемоῦν. Η υπερβολική καχυποψία είναι νοσηρή, ἐγωπαθής και φανερώνει ἄνθρωπο, που δεν ἔχει ἐμπιστοσύνη στο Θεὸ ἀλλὰ στον ἑαυτό του. Και θέλει κανείς συνεχῶς να παρατηρεῖ τους άλλους, να τους κάνει ὅπως θέλει και φαντάζεται. Ἄνθρωπος που δεν ἀγαπᾶ είναι δυστυχημένος. Η χριστιανική ἀγάπη είναι πάντοτε διφυής, πρὸς Θεὸ και ἄνθρωπο. Η ἀγάπη αὐτή είναι ἀνιδιοτελής, οὐσιαστική και πασίχαρη.

Η εκκλησία ξέρει μόνο να αγαπά. Δεν δυσκολεύεται καθόλου να ὑποδεχθεῖ τὸ ἀπομακρυσμένο τέκνο της, ἂν θελήσει να τὴ πλησιάσει. Δεν τὸ μαλώνει, δεν τὸ ἐπιτιμᾷ, δεν τοῦ φωνάζει, δεν τὸ κάνει να περμιένει, τὸ ἀγκαλιάζει ἀμέσως, τὸ καταφιλά. Τέτοια εκκλησία ἔχουμε, μάνα φιλόστοργη, καταδεκτική. Η εκκλησία

κινεῖται στον κόσμο, ἀλλὰ δεν είναι ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου. Κάθε φορὰ που ἐπιχειρήθηκε να δοθεῖ στην Ἐκκλησία κοσμική δύναμη, εἴχαμε ἐκτροπή ἀπὸ τὴν ἀποστολή της και ἀποτυχία ἀπὸ τὸν προορισμὸ της. Η Ἐκκλησία, θὰ μπορούσαμε να ποῦμε, είναι ἕνα πνευματικὸ φαρμακεῖο, θεραπευτήριο και ἡσυχαστήριο. Θεωροῦν ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία είναι ὑπερβολική, δύσκολη, ἀπαιτητική, ἀπηρχειωμένη, ὄλο ἀπαγορεύσεις, δικαιολογεῖ μόνο τους ἄλλους.

Φέρνουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι γνωστὲς ἐνστάσεις. Ἐχουμε και ἐμεῖς καρδιά και δικαιώματα, ὄλο ἐμεῖς θὰ ὑποχωροῦμε, θὰ ταπεινωνόμαστε, θὰ πηγαίνουμε με τὸ σταυρὸ στο χέρι; Οἱ ἄλλοι θὰ μᾶς φᾶνε λάχανο, θὰ μᾶς πατήσουν, θὰ μᾶς βγάλουν τὸ λάδι, θὰ μᾶς περιθωριοποιήσουν και θὰ μᾶς ἐκμεταλλετοῦν. Ἐχουμε και ἐμεῖς, βρὲ ἀδελφέ, τὰ ὄριά μας. Τὰ βάζουμε κάποτε και με τὸν Θεὸ, που δεν μᾶς καταλαβαίνει, δεν μᾶς ἀκούει, δεν ἐπεμβαίνει, σιωπᾶ ἐνοχλητικά, δεν μᾶς ὑπολογίζει.

Ὁ Θεὸς είναι πάντοτε με ἀνοιχτὴ θύρα, καλεῖ ὄλους τους πεφορτισμένους και κεκοπιακότες να τους ἀναπαύσει ἀληθινά. Δεν ἔχει ὤρες που δέχεται και ἄλλες ὄχι, δεν χρειάζονται μεσάζοντες, να κλείσεις συνάντηση ἀπὸ τὰ πρὶν, να ἔχεις τίτλους, να εἶσαι κάτι, να ἔχεις ιδιαίτερες γνώσεις. Είναι ἕνας Θεὸς ὑπέροχος, που ποτὲ δεν κρατᾶ κρατούμενα και δεν ξεσυνερίζεται. Ἀπεχθάνεται τρομερὰ τὴν ὑποκρισία και τὴ ψευδοαγιότητα. Τοῦ ἀρέσουν τὰ ντόμπρα, τὰ γνήσια, τ' ἀληθινά, ἐλεύθερα και ἐγκάρδια πράγματα.

Η Ἐκκλησία δεν χάνει, ἐμεῖς χάνουμε. Δεν ζητᾶ ὁπαδούς ἀλαλάζοντες και καταχειροκροτοῦντες. Είναι κατὰ των ὁπαδῶν. Ζητᾶ και ἔχει παιδιά ἀγαπητά. Η εκκλησία τηρεῖ τις ὑποσχέσεις της. Δεν ξεγέλασε ποτὲ κανένα. Τὰ εἶπε ὄλα ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχὴ καθαρὰ και ξάστερα. Η Ἐκκλησία θεραπεύει, συγχωρεῖ, μεταμορφώνει τὸν λύκο σὲ ἀρνί, ἀνασταίνει, χαριτώνει, παραμυθεῖ, ἀγιάζει, σώζει και λυτρώνει. Η Ἐκκλησία εὐλογεῖ και ἐμπνέει παντοῦ και πάντοτε. Η Ἐκκλησία ὑπάρχει για ὄλους. Δεν ἐκβιάζει κανένα, δεν τοῦ τραβᾷ τὸ αὐτί.

Η Ἐκκλησία ὑπάρχει και θὰ ὑπάρχει. Πολλοὶ τὴ φθόνησαν, τὴ χτύπησαν, τὴ μίσησαν. Διατηρεῖται ὅμως ἀκέραια, νικηφόρα παρὰ τὴν τόση πολεμική, ἀκόμη και κάποτε και αὐτῶν των ἰδίων των ἐκπροσώπων της. Ὁ κόσμος ἀγνόησε τὸν βαθὺ πνευματικὸ πλοῦτο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας και ἀσχολήθηκε με τὰ κτήματά της. Δεν ἤθελε πολὺ να μπερδεύεται καθημερινὰ στο πόδια του. Να τὴν ἔχει για Χριστούγεννα και Πάσχα και για πολὺ ἔκτακτες ἀνάγκες. Τὴν Ἐκκλησία μερικοὶ σήμερα τὴ θέλουν μόνο για τὸ κοινωνικὸ της ἔργο, κάτι σὰν παράρτημα τοῦ ὑπουργείου κοινωνικῆς προνοίας.

Η Ορθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία ὅμως δεν πεισιμώνει, δεν κακιώνει, δεν ἐκδικεῖται. Συνεχίζει ἕναν θαυμαστὸ

τρόπο τὸ σωτήριο ἔργο της, ποὺ κανεὶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀντικαταστήσει. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν θυμώνει ποὺ δὲν τῆς ἀναγνωρίζουν τὴν ἀξία της, ἀλλὰ λυπᾶται. Μπορεῖ νὰ τῆς πῆραν τὴν περιουσία της, νὰ τῆς πάρουν καὶ τὴν ὑπόλοιπη, νὰ εἶναι δίχως κανένα περιουσιακὸ στοιχείο, σὰν τὸν γυμνὸ Χριστὸ στὴ φάτνη καὶ ὅμως νὰ παραμένει ἀμύθητα πλούσια. Μπορεῖ κάποιοι ἐλάχιστοι ἐκπρόσωποί της νὰ λαθεύουν, ὅμως δὲν παύει νὰ δίνει ὀρθὸ νόημα βίου, ὑψηλοὺς στόχους, νὰ γεννᾷ Ἁγίους.



Περὶ τοῦ «Καζαντζάκη»

Τὸν Ἰούλιο τοῦ 2009, πολλὲς ἐφημερίδες ἐδημοσίευσαν ρεπορτάζ ἐκ τῆς Κρήτης, συμφώνως μὲ τὸ ὁποῖον ἐνεγκαινιάσθη τὸ μουσεῖον «Νικ. Καζαντζάκη» εἰς τὴν Μυρτιανὴν Ἡρακλείου μὲ τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ ὑπουργοῦ Ἐθνικῆς Ἀμύνης κ. Βενιζέλου, τῆς πρώην ὑπουργοῦ κ. Ντόρας Μπακογιάννη καὶ ἄλλων ἐπισήμων. Κατὰ τὴν διάρκειαν τῶν ἐγκαινίων ὅλοι ὠμίλησαν μὲ θαυμασμὸν διὰ τὸν ἅθειον Καζαντζάκη.

Σήμερον οὐδεὶς τὸν ἀμφισβητεῖ. Ἀκόμη καὶ θεολόγοι ὑποκλίνονται εἰς τὴν μνήμην καὶ εἰς τὸ ἔργον του. Τὰ παλαιότερα ἔτη τὰ πράγματα ἦσαν διαφορετικά, ἀφοῦ σύγχρονοι μορφαὶ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας τὸν ἀμφισβητοῦσαν. Μεταξὺ αὐτῶν ὁ π. Ἐπιφάνιος Θεοδωρόπουλος καὶ ὁ Γέρων Θεόκλητος Διονυσάτης. Ἴδου τί ἀπῆντων, ὅταν τοὺς ἔθετον ἐρωτήματα σχετικῶς μὲ τὰς πνευματικὰς ἀνησυχίας καὶ τὰς ἀναζητήσεις τοῦ θρησκευόντος Καζαντζάκη.

Ὁ πατήρ Ἐπιφάνιος εἶχεν ἀπαντήσῃ:

— Καὶ τί μ' αὐτό; Ποῦ κατέληξε; Ξέρετε τί ζήτησε ὁ ἴδιος νὰ γραφῇ στὸν τάφο του; «Δὲν ἐλπίζω τίποτα, δὲ φοβοῦμαι τίποτα, εἶμαι ἐλεύθερος». Καὶ ἐγράφη βεβαίως. Πηγαίνετε στὰ κοιμητήρια νὰ διαβάσετε ἐπιγραφὰς πάνω στοὺς τάφους πιστῶν ἀνθρώπων. «Προσδοκῶ ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν» ἢ «Ἀναστήσονται οἱ νεκροὶ καὶ ἐγερθήσονται οἱ ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις» ἢ «Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται ἐκ νεκρῶν, ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων» καὶ ἄλλα.

Ἡ τελευταία λέξις τοῦ Καζαντζάκη, ὀλίγον πρὶν ἀναχωρήσῃ ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς ζωῆς, ἦτο «Διψῶ». Ὁ πατήρ Θεόκλητος Διονυσάτης, ὅταν τοῦ ἐτέθη τὸ θέμα, ἔγραψεν ἄρθρον εἰς τὸ ὁποῖον ἐτόνιζε:

— Ἄραγε πρὶν ἀκόμη βγῆ ἡ ψυχὴ του νὰ προγευόταν τὴν βασιανιστικὴ φλόγα τῆς καμίνου τοῦ πυρὸς τοῦ ἐξώτερου σὰν τὸν πλούσιο, ποῦ ὠδυνᾶτο ἐν τῇ φλογὶ ἐκεῖνη καὶ ἤθελε κάποιον νὰ τοῦ ἀναψύξει τὴν γλῶσσα;

Εὐλογημένη ἢ Εἴσοδος τῶν Ἁγίων σου, Πάντοτε...

Ἰωάννου Φουντούλη, Καθηγητοῦ Πανεπιστημίου.

Τί σημαίνει ἡ φράση *Εὐλογημένη ἢ εἴσοδος τῶν ἁγίων σου, πάντοτε...*, ποῦ λέγεται ἀπὸ τὸν ἱερέα κατὰ τὴν Μικρὰ Εἴσοδο; Ἡ ἐρμηνεία τῆς φράσεως αὐτῆς, τῆς κατὰ τὰ ἄλλα τόσο σύντομης καὶ ἀπλῆς, παρουσιάζει πάρα πολλὰ δυσχέρειες, γιατί δὲν εἶναι σαφὲς ποῦ ἀναφέρονται καὶ τὰ δυὸ σκέλη της: ποῖα εἶναι «ἢ εἴσοδος», ποῦ εὐλογεῖται, καὶ ποιοὶ εἶναι οἱ ἅγιοι ἢ τὰ ἅγια, γιὰ τοὺς ὁποίους ἢ γιὰ τὰ ὁποῖα ὁ λόγος στὸ δευτέρω μέρος της;

Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν κρατοῦσα μορφή ποῦ σημειώνεται στὴν ἐρώτηση, στὰ χειρόγραφα ἀπαντοῦν διάφορες παραλλαγές, ποῦ ἴσως μποροῦν νὰ διευκολύνουν τὴν ἀναζήτησή μας: *Εὐλογημένη ἢ εἴσοδος τῶν ἁγίων σου, Κύριε...*, ἢ συνηθέστερη παραλλαγή, ἢ ἡ σπανιώτερη *Εὐλογημένη ἢ ἅγια εἴσοδος τῆς θείας λειτουργίας τῶν ἁγίων σου, Κύριε, πάντοτε...*

Στὴ δευτέρα αὐτῆ μορφή προφανῶς ἐπιδιώκεται ἡ διαφοροποίηση ἀπὸ τὴν εὐλογία τῆς εἰσόδου κατὰ τὸν ἔσπερινὸ ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ τὴν παρόμοια εὐλογία ποῦ ἀπαντᾶ σὲ κώδικα τοῦ 14^{ου} ἢ 15^{ου} αἰῶνος, στὴν ἀκολουθία τοῦ μικροῦ ἁγιασμοῦ: *Εὐλογημένη ἢ εἴσοδος διὰ τῆς τεκούσης σὲ Θεοτόκου, Χριστὲ ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, πάντοτε...* Στὴν ἐνδιάμεση μορφή (*Εὐλογημένη ἢ εἴσοδος τῶν ἁγίων σου, Κύριε...*) τὴν συναντοῦμε καὶ στὴν ἀκολουθία τῆς ἀσματικῆς τριθέκτης, ἐνῶ σὲ μία ἄλλη παραλλαγή ἀπαντᾶ στὴν ἑναρξη τῶν λιτανειῶν ἢ στὴν λιτανευτικὴ μετάβαση ἀπὸ τὸν κυρίως ναὸ «ἐν τῇ πλαγίᾳ» γιὰ τὴν τέλεση τοῦ λυχνικοῦ κατὰ τὴν μαρτυρία τοῦ ἁγίου Συμεῶν Θεσσαλονίκης: *Εὐλογημένη ἢ δόξα Κυρίου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου αὐτοῦ, πάντοτε...*

Σὲ ὅλες τὶς περιπτώσεις ἡ φράση συνοδεύεται μὲ εὐλογία διὰ τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ ἱερέως, εἰσάγεται δὲ μὲ τὴν διακονικὴ παρακέλευση *Εὐλόγησαν, δέσποτα, τὴν ἁγίαν εἴσοδον*. Μόνο σὲ λίγους κώδικες διαφοροποιεῖται ἡ διακονικὴ προτροπὴ στὴν θεία λειτουργία: *Εὐλόγησον, δέσποτα, τὴν μικρὰν εἴσοδον*. Τέλος, χρῆσιμο εἶναι νὰ σημειωθεῖ ὅτι ἡ εὐλογία αὐτῆ τῆς εἰσόδου καὶ ἡ φράση ποῦ τὴν συνοδεύει δὲν ἀνήκει στὸ ἀρχικὸ κείμενο τῆς θείας λειτουργίας. Πρέπει νὰ ἔχει εἰσαχθεῖ κατὰ τὸ τέλος τοῦ 12^{ου} αἰῶνος, γιατί δὲν μαρτυρεῖται ἀπὸ τὶς παλαιότερες πηγές καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ ἀρχαία χειρόγραφα.

Σ' ὅλες τὶς περιπτώσεις (μικρὰ εἴσοδος τῆς θείας λειτουργίας, ἔσπερινος καὶ τριθέκτη) ὁ ἱερεὺς βρῖσκεται ἐπὶ κεφαλῆς μίας λιτανευτικῆς πομπῆς ποῦ κατευθύνεται πρὸς τὸ ἅγιο βῆμα, στέκεται δὲ στὸ μέσο του ναοῦ, «ἐν τῷ μεσονάφῳ» ἢ «ἐν τῷ συνήθει

τόπω», ἀτενίζοντας πρὸς ἀνατολάς. Ὁ δὲ διάκονος, λέγοντας τὸ *Εὐλόγησον, δέσποτα, τὴν ἁγίαν εἴσοδον*, «δείκνυσιν ἅμα καὶ πρὸς ἀνατολάς μετὰ τοῦ ὄραριου οὕτως, ὡς κρατεῖ αὐτό», καὶ ὁ ἱερεὺς τότε εὐλογεῖ «ποιῶν σταυρὸν κατὰ ἀνατολάς».

Ὁ ἱερεὺς καλεῖται νὰ εὐλογήσῃ «τὴν ἁγίαν εἴσοδον» καὶ εὐλογεῖ «τὴν εἴσοδον». Ἡ λέξις ἔχει δυὸ δυνατότητες ἐρμηνείας. «Εἴσοδος» μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι καὶ ἡ πύλη τοῦ ἁγίου βήματος, ποῦ βρίσκεται ἀκριβῶς ἐμπρὸς ἀπὸ τὸν ἱερέα, πρὸς τὴν ὁποία δείχνει ὁ διάκονος μὲ τὸ ὄραριο καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ὁποία ἐντὸς ὀλίγου θὰ εἰσέλθουν διάκονος, ἱερεὺς καὶ οἱ τυχὸν συλλειτουργοὶ στὸ ἅγιο βῆμα. Αὐτὴ σωστὰ χαρακτηρίζεται ἀπὸ τὸν διάκονο ὡς «ἁγία»—ἁγία εἴσοδος τοῦ ἱεροῦ βήματος. Προφανῶς ἡ εὐλογία τῆς εἰσόδου στηρίζεται σὲ μία πανάρχηια πράξις ἀναλόγου συμπεριφορᾶς, τῆς ὁποίας ἀπόηχο βρίσκουμε στὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη, στίς ὑποθήκες τοῦ Κυρίου πρὸς τοὺς ἀποστόλους του: *εἰς ἣν δ' ἂν οἰκίαν εἰσέρχησθε, πρῶτον λέγετε*

Εἰρήνη τῷ οἴκῳ τούτῳ (Λουκ. 10:5), ἡ ἀκόμη καὶ σὲ λειτουργικὰ κείμενα, ὅπως στὴν τελευταία εὐχὴ τοῦ γάμου *Ὁ Θεὸς ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν ... εὐλόγησαν αὐτῶν εἰσόδους καὶ ἐξόδους*.

Στὸ παράλληλο τῆς εὐλογίας τῆς εἰσόδου στὴν ἀκολουθία τοῦ ἁγιασμοῦ, ποῦ μνημονεύσαμε ἀνωτέρω, πρόκειται γιὰ εὐλογία εἰσόδου Θεομητορικοῦ ναοῦ, ἴσως τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς Παναγίας τῶν Βλαχερνῶν, ἀπὸ ὅπου πιθανότατα ἔλκει τὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς ἡ ἀκολουθία αὐτὴ (...*διὰ τῆς τεκούσης σὲ Θεοτόκου...*). Στὴν περίπτωση ὅμως τῆς εὐλογίας τῆς εἰσόδου τοῦ ἐσπερινοῦ, τῆς θείας λειτουργίας ἢ τῆς τριθέκτης εἶναι ἐξ ἴσου, ὄχι ὅμως περισσότερο, πιθανό, ὅτι δὲν ἐννοεῖται ἡ πύλη—ἡ ὠραία πύλη τοῦ ἱεροῦ—ἀλλὰ ἡ ἴδια ἡ πράξις τοῦ εἰσοδεῦν, ἢ εἰσοδεύουσα στὸ ἅγιο βῆμα πομπή.

Ποιὸ νόημα ὅμως θὰ δώσουμε στὴν συνέχεια τῆς φράσεως, τὸ «τῶν ἁγίων σου»; Κι ἐδῶ ὑπάρχει ἡ δυνατότητα διπλῆς ἐρμηνείας. Μπορεῖ νὰ νοηθεῖ ὡς οὐδέτερο («ἅγια τοῦ Θεοῦ»), δηλαδή ὁ ἅγιος ναὸς Του, τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων τοῦ ναοῦ Του, τὸ ἱερό, τὸ ἐπίγειο κατοικητήριο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Μ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἔννοια, «τὰ ἅγια» ἀπαντοῦν πάρα πολλές φορὲς στὴν Παλαιὰ ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη, καὶ ἰδιαίτερος στὸ Ἐβρ. 10:19-20: *Ἔχοντες οὖν, ἀδελφοί, παρηρσίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ, ἣν ἐνεκαίνισεν ἡμῖν ὁδὸν πρόσφατον καὶ ζῶσαν διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος,*

τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἱερέα μέγαν ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποῦ κατὰ λέξιν ἀπαντᾷ ὡς παράθεμα στὴν εὐχὴ τοῦ καταπετάσματος τῆς λειτουργίας τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰακώβου. Ἀπὸ τὸ χωρίο αὐτὸ εἶναι προφανές ὅτι εἶναι ἐμπνευσμένη ἢ εὐλογητικὴ φράσις («Εὐλογημένη» ἢ εἴσοδος τῶν ἁγίων (σου)).

Ἄν ὅμως, κατὰ τὴν ἄλλη δυνατότητα ἐρμηνείας, ἡ γενικὴ «τῶν ἁγίων» ἐκληφθεῖ ὡς γένους ἀρσενικοῦ, «ἅγιοι» τῶρα πρέπει νὰ ἐννοοῦνται οἱ εἰσοδεύοντες κληρικοὶ ἢ οἱ συνεισοδεύοντες ἄγγελοι, κατὰ τοὺς λόγους τῆς εὐχῆς τῆς εἰσόδου τῆς λειτουργίας ποῦ πρὸ ὀλίγου ἔχει ἀναγνωσθεῖ. Παλαιότερα μάλιστα, ποῦ ἡ εὐχὴ αὐτὴ τῆς εἰσόδου ἐλέγετο ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν βασιλικὴ πύλη τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ κληρὸς καὶ λαὸς εἰσερχόταν μετὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὴν στὸν κυρίως ναὸ γιὰ τὴν τέλεση τῆς θείας λειτουργίας (ὅπως γίνεται σήμερα κατὰ τὴν ἀκολουθία τῶν ἐγκαινίων), τὸ «τῶν ἁγίων» θὰ μπορούσε νὰ κυριολεκτεῖται στὸν ἅγιο λαὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὴν ἁγίαν

Ἐκκλησία Του.

Παρόμοια καὶ παράλληλη μὲ τὴν παρούσα ἐρμηνευτικὴ δυσχέρεια παρουσιάζει ἡ εὐχὴ τοῦ τρισάγιου *Ὁ Θεὸς ὁ Ἅγιος ὁ ἐν Ἀγίοις ἀναπανόμενος...* καὶ ἡ ἐκφώνησις *Ὅτι Ἅγιος εἶ ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν καὶ ἐν Ἀγίοις ἐπαναπαύει*. Καὶ ἐδῶ ἡ δυνατότητα ἐρμηνείας εἶναι διπλή: Τὰ «ἅγια», στὰ ὁποία κατοικεῖ καὶ ἐπαναπαύεται ὁ Θεὸς μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι ὁ



ναὸς Του ἢ ὁ οὐρανός. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ ἅγιος λαὸς Του, οἱ «ἅγιοι», ἐρμηνεῖα πρὸς τὴν ὁποία συνηγορεῖ ἡ ἐκφώνηση τῆς εὐχῆς τῶν ἐγκαινίων τοῦ ναοῦ «Ὁ Θεὸς ὁ ἄναρχος καὶ ἀίδιος...», ποῦ ταυτίζει τοὺς ἁγίους μὲ τοὺς τίμιους μάρτυρας. Ἔτσι ὁ χειροποίητος ναὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, μετατρέπεται σὲ σύμβολο καὶ τύπο τῆς ἀχειροποίητου σκηνῆς καὶ τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ, τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῶν ὁσίων του κατὰ τὸ Ψαλμικὸ ἢ *αἶνεσις αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ ὁσίων* (Ψάlm. 149:1) καὶ τὸ ἀποστολικὸ *Ἔμεῖς γὰρ ναὸς Θεοῦ ἐστε ζῶντος, καθὼς εἶπεν ὁ Θεός*. (Β' Κορ. 6:16).

Καὶ γιὰ νὰ ἐπιστρέψουμε στὸ ἀρχικὸ ἐρώτημα. Ἀπὸ τίς δυὸ δυνατότες ἐρμηνείας τῆς φράσεως *Εὐλογημένη ἢ εἴσοδος τῶν ἁγίων σου*: «Εὐλογημένη ἢ πύλη τοῦ ἱεροῦ ναοῦ σου» ἢ «Εὐλογημένη ἢ εἴσοδος—ἢ εἰσοδεύση—τῶν ἁγίων ἱερέων σου ἢ τοῦ ἁγίου λαοῦ σου», πιθανότερη ἐρμηνεῖα εἶναι ἡ ἀπλούστερη καὶ λιγότερο θεολογικὴ. Πρόκειται δηλαδή γιὰ εὐλογία τῆς πύλης τοῦ ἱεροῦ, τῆς ὠραίας λεγομένης πύλης, ἀπὸ τὴν ὁποία θὰ εἰσοδεύσουν στὸ ἅγιο βῆμα οἱ λειτουργοί.

Ἡ Ἀξία τῆς Ἐξομολόγησεως

Αρχιμανδρίτη Δαμιανού Ζαφείρη.



Ἡ ἐξομολόγησις ἔχει μεγάλη σημασία γιὰ τὴ ζωὴ τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ, διότι:

(1) Εἶναι μέσον λυτρώσεως καὶ τὸν ὁδηγεῖ στὴ σωτηρία διὰ τῆς μετανοίας του. Ὁ Θεὸς *Μὴ θελήσει τὸν θάνατον τοῦ ἀνόμου, λέγει Κύριος, ὡς τὸ ἀποστρέψαι αὐτὸν ἐκ τῆς ὁδοῦ τῆς πονηρᾶς καὶ ζῆν αὐτόν.* (Ἰεζ. 18:23). Αὕτη ἡ ἐπιστροφή στὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ἐπικοινωνία μαζί Του καὶ πνευματικὴ ἀναγέννησις τοῦ ὅλου ἀνθρώπου.

(2) Εἶναι μέσον ψυχολογικῆς θεραπείας τῶν ψυχικῶν τραυμάτων καὶ βοηθᾷ στὴν ψυχικὴ ἰσορροπία τοῦ ἀτόμου. Θλίψεις, καθημερινὲς ἀγωνίες, προβλήματα προσωπικά, κοινωνικά, οἰκογενειακά, ὠθοῦν τὰ ἄτομα σὲ πλῆθος ἐσωτερικῶν ψυχικῶν συγκρούσεων. Σ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ὁ ἱκανὸς ἐξομολόγος πρέπει νὰ βοηθήσει τὸ ἄτομο νὰ ξεφύγει ἀπὸ τὰ προσωπικά ἀδιέξοδα. Στόχος του εἶναι ἡ ψυχικὴ ὑγεία καὶ ἡ ὁλοκλήρωσις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

(3) Εἶναι μέσον ἠθικῆς καὶ πνευματικῆς προόδου τοῦ πιστοῦ, διότι τὸν βοηθᾷ νὰ ἐπιλέγει τρόπους ζωῆς κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Γίνεται ὁ ἐξομολόγος σύμβουλος στὴ ζωὴ του, στίς διάφορες ἐπιλογές τῆς ζωῆς του. Τοῦ ἐξασφαλίζει τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ εἰρήνη τῆς ψυχῆς του. Τοῦ διδάσκει νὰ διακρίνει τὸ δίκαιο ἀπὸ τὸ ἄδικο. Τοῦ παρέχει ψυχικὴ ἀσφάλεια κοντὰ στὸ Θεό. Τὸν ἐνθαρρύνει στὴν προσωπικὴ ζωὴ του ἀπὸ τὰ διάφορα προβλήματα ποὺ τοῦ παρουσιάζονται καθημερινῶς. Τὸν προλαβαίνει νὰ μὴν κάνει οὐσιαστικὰ λάθη στίς διάφορες κινήσεις τῆς ζωῆς του. Τὸν κατευθύνει στὴν ὀρθὴ πνευματικὴ ζωὴ μὲ τὴν ἀποφυγὴ τῶν παθῶν καὶ τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ καρποφορία τῶν θείων ἀρετῶν.

(4) Εἶναι μέσον ἀγιαστικὸ καὶ ἀναγεννητικὸ, διότι τοῦ προσφέρει, μετὰ ἀπὸ μία εἰλικρινῆ ἐξομολόγησις, ἡ θεία χάρις, ἡ ὁποία τὸν ἀναγεννᾷ πνευματικῶς μὲ τὴν ἐξάλειψις τῶν δηλωθέντων ἁμαρτημάτων του. Τὸν κάνει νὰ ἀπολαμβάνει τὴν εἰρήνη καὶ τὴν Ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ. Τὸν ἐνισχύει δὲ στὸν συνεχῆ πνευματικὸ ἀγῶνα του.

(5) Εἶναι μέσον ἀποκτήσεως γαλήνης τῆς συνειδήσεως, διότι ἡ συναίσθησις τῆς ἐνοχῆς ὁδηγεῖ τὸ ἄτομο στὴ μετάνοια, στὴν εἰλικρινῆ ἐξομολόγησις καὶ στὴ συγχώρησις διὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ αὐτοῦ μυστηρίου. Ἡ ἀπόφασις τῆς διορθώσεως εἶναι καθοριστικὸς παράγοντας τῆς ἀπαλλαγῆς ἀπὸ τὶς ἐνοχές. Ἡ ἐξομολόγησις παίρνει χαρακτῆρα μυσταγωγικὸ καὶ ἱερό, ποὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος

ἀναζητᾷ τὴ θεία εὐσπλαχνία καὶ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη συμβουλή γιὰ τὴν διορθώσις τῆς ζωῆς του.

(6) Εἶναι μέσον αὐτογνωσίας τοῦ ἀτόμου. Τὸ ἱερό Μυστήριον τῆς ἐξομολόγησεως μᾶς βοηθᾷ νὰ ἐπιστρέψουμε στὸν ἑαυτὸ μας μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ ἀπαλλαγούμε ἀπὸ τὸν ἐγωισμό μας καὶ τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ δυσαρμονία ποὺ προξενοῦν οἱ ἐνοχές καὶ τὰ πάθη. Αὕτη ἡ εἰλικρινῆς στροφή πρὸς τὴν ἀπελευθέρωσις ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη, τὸ δρόμο τῆς ἀσκήσεως τῶν ἀρετῶν, μᾶς βοηθᾷ νὰ ἐπανεύρουμε τὴν πνευματικὴ καθαρότητα μας μὲ τὴν ἄφεσις τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν.

Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Νύσσης γράφει γιὰ τὴν ἀξία τῆς ἐξομολόγησεως: «Ἡ Γραφή συνηθίζει νὰ δίνει στὴν ἐξομολόγησις διπλὴ σημασία, ἡ ὁποία ἄλλοτε εἶναι ἡ ἐξαγόρευσις τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ ἄλλοτε πάλι ἡ εὐχαριστία. Ἐδῶ, καὶ μὲ τὶς δυὸ ἔννοιες ὁδηγοῦμαστε στὴν ἐνάρετη ζωὴ. Διότι ἡ ἐξαγόρευσις μὲν πραγματοποιεῖ χωρισμὸ καὶ ἀλλοτριώσις ἀπὸ τὰ κακά, ἡ προθυμία δὲ γιὰ εὐχαριστία αὐξάνει τὴ χάρις ἀπὸ τὸν εὐεργέτη γιὰ ὅποιους δέχονται μὲ εὐγνωμοσύνη τὶς εὐεργεσίες. Ὁ ψαλμὸς μετανοίας λοιπὸν σημαίνει αὐτό: ἂν σὲ κρυφοκαίει ἡ μνήμη κάποιας ἁμαρτίας, σὲ συμβουλεύει στὸν καθαρισμὸ μὲ τὴ μετάνοια. Ἄν ὅμως ἡ ζωὴ σου προχωρεῖ ἐπιτυχῶς πρὸς τὸ καλύτερο, σοῦ κάνει βεβαιότερη τὴ βελτιωμένη προαίρεσις, μὲ τὴν εὐχαριστία πρὸς τὸν Θεό.

Ὁ ἔχων ὅτα ἀκούειν ἀκούετω. (Ματθ. 13:9)



Ὁ ποῖος ἀγαπάει ἀληθινὰ τὸ Θεό, αὐτὸς ὅπωςδήποτε καὶ προσεύχεται ἀπερίσπαστα. Καὶ ὅποιος προσεύχεται ἀπερίσπαστα, αὐτὸς ἀγαπάει ἀληθινὰ τὸ Θεό. Ἀπερίσπαστα ὅμως δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ προσευχηθεῖ ἐκεῖνος ποῦ ἔχει τὸ νοῦ του προσηλωμένο σὲ κάτι ἀπὸ τὰ ἐπίγεια.

Ἁγίου Μαξίμου

Ἐκεῖνος ποῦ προσεύχεται μόνο σωματικά, χωρὶς νὰ ἔχει ἀκόμα γνώση πνευματικὴ, εἶναι τυφλὸς ποῦ φωνάζει: *Υἱέ Δαβὶδ, ἐλέησόν με.* (Μάρκ. 10:48).

Ὁ ἄλλοτε τυφλός, ὅταν θεραπεύθηκε ἡ τύφλωσή του καὶ εἶδε τὸν Κύριο, δὲν τὸν ἀποκάλεσε πιά «Υἱὸν Δαβὶδ», ἀλλὰ Τὸν ὁμολόγησε *Υἱὸν Θεοῦ* καὶ Τὸν προσκύνησε. (Ἰω. 9:38).

Ἀββᾶ Μάρκου

Πὼς πρέπει νὰ προσευχόμεστε; Δὲν εἶναι ἀνάγκη νὰ φλυαροῦμε, ἀλλὰ ν' ἀπλώνουμε τὰ χέρια μας καὶ νὰ λέμε: «Κύριε, ὅπως θέλεις καὶ ὅπως ξέρεις, ἐλέησέ με!». Κι ἂν βρισκόμαστε μπροστὰ σὲ πόλεμο (μὲ τὰ πάθη μας), νὰ λέμε: «Κύριε, βοήθησέ με!». Κι Ἐκεῖνος ξέρει τί μᾶς συμφέρει, καὶ αὐτὸ κάνει.

Ἀββᾶ Μακαρίου

Γιάννης ὁ Εὐλογημένος!

Ένα πρωτοχρονιάτικο διήγημα τοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου.



Ὁ Ἅγιος Βασίλης, σὰν περᾶσανε τὰ Χριστούγεννα, πήρε τὸ ραβδί του καὶ γύρισε σ' ὅλα τὰ χωριά, νὰ δεῖ ποιὸς θὰ τότε γιορτάσει μὲ καθαρὴ καρδιά. Πέρασε ἀπὸ λογιῶν-λογιῶν πολιτεῖες κι ἀπὸ κεφαλοχώρια, μὰ σ' ὅποια πόρτα κι ἂν χτύπησε δὲν τ' ἀνοίξανε, ἐπειδὴ τὸν πήρανε γιὰ διακονιάρη. Κ' ἔφευγε πικραμένος, γιατί ὁ ἴδιος δὲν εἶχε ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, μὰ ἔνοιωθε τὸ πόσο θὰ πονοῦσε ἡ καρδιά κανενὸς φτωχοῦ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀπονιὰ πού τοῦ δείξανε κείνοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι.

Μιὰ μέρα ἔφευγε ἀπὸ ἓνα τέτοιο ἄσπλαχνο χωριό, καὶ πέρασε ἀπ' τὸ νεκροταφεῖο, κ' εἶδε τὰ κιβούρια πὼς ἦτανε ρημαγμένα, οἱ ταφόπετρες σπασμένες κι ἀναποδογυρισμένες, καὶ τὰ νιόσκαφτα μνήματα ἦτανε σκαλισμένα ἀπὸ τὰ τσακάλια. Σὰν ἅγιος πού ἦτανε ἄκουσε πὼς μιλούσανε οἱ πεθαμένοι καὶ λέγανε: «Τὸν καιρὸ πού εἴμαστε στὸν ἀπάνω κόσμο, δουλέψαμε, βασανιστήκαμε, κι ἀφήσαμε πίσω μας παιδιὰ κι' ἐγγόνια νὰ μᾶς ἀνάβουνε κανένα κερὶ, νὰ μᾶς καίγουνε λίγο λιβάνι μὰ δὲν βλέπουμε τίποτα, μήτε παπᾶ στὸ κεφάλι μας νὰ μᾶς διαβάσει παραστάσιμο, μήτε κόλλυβα, παρὰ σὰν νὰ μὴν ἀφήσαμε πίσω μας κανέναν».

Κι ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης πάλι στενοχωρήθηκε κ' εἶπε: «Τοῦτοι οἱ χωριάτες οὔτε σὲ ζωντανὸ δὲ δίνουνε βοήθεια, οὔτε σὲ πεθαμένον», καὶ βγήκε ἀπὸ τὸ νεκροταφεῖο, καὶ περπατοῦσε ὀλομόναχος μέσα στὰ παγωμένα χιόνια.

† † †

Παραμονὴ τῆς πρωτοχρονιάς ἔφατξε σὲ κάτι χωριὰ πού ἦτανε τὰ πιὸ φτωχὰ ἀνάμεσα στὰ φτωχοχώρια, στὰ μέρη τῆς Ἑλλάδας. Ὁ παγωμένος ἀγέρας βογκοῦσε ἀνάμεσα στὰ χαμόδεντρα καὶ στὰ βράχια, ψυχὴ ζωντανὴ δὲν φαινότανε, νύχτα πίσσα! Εἶδε μπροστά του μιὰ ραχοῦλα, κι ἀπὸ κάτω τῆς ἦτανε μιὰ στρούγκα τρυπωμένη. Ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης μπήκε στὴ στάνη καὶ χτύπησε μὲ τὸ ραβδί του τὴν πόρτα τῆς καλύβας καὶ φώναξε: «Ἐλεῆστε με, τὸν φτωχό, γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τῶν ἀποθαμένων σας κι ὁ Χριστὸς μᾶς διακόνεψε σὲ τοῦτον τὸν κόσμο!».

Τὰ σκυλιὰ ξυπνήσανε καὶ χυθῆκανε ἀπάνω του, μὰ σὰν πήγανε κοντά του καὶ τὸν μυριστήκανε, πιάσανε

καὶ κουνούσανε τὶς οὐρὲς τους καὶ πλαγιάζανε στὰ ποδάρια του καὶ γρούζανε παρακαλεστικὰ καὶ χαρούμενα. Ἀπάνω σ' αὐτά, ἀνοίξε ἡ πόρτα καὶ βγήκε ἓνας τσομπάνης, ὡς εἰκοσιπέντε χρονῶν παλληκάρι, μὲ μαῦρα στριφτὰ γένεια, ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Μπαρμπάκος, ἄνθρωπος ἄθῳς κι ἀπελέκητος, προβατάνθρωπος, καὶ πρὶν νὰ καλοῖδεῖ ποιὸς χτύπησε, εἶπε: «Ἐλα, ἔλα μέσα. Καλὴ μέρα, καλὴ χρονιά!».

Μέσα στὸ καλύβι ἔφεγγε ἓνα λυχνάρι, κρεμασμένο ἀπὸ πάνω ἀπὸ μιὰ κούνια, πού ἦτανε δεμένη σὲ δυὸ παλούκια. Δίπλα στὸ τζάκι ἦτανε τὰ στρωσίδια τους καὶ κοιμότανε ἡ γυναίκα τοῦ Γιάννη. Αὐτὸς, σὰν ἐμπήκε μέσα ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης, κ' εἶδε πὼς ἦτανε γέρος σεβάσιμος, πήρε τὸ χέρι του καὶ τ' ἀνεσπᾶσθηκε κ' εἶπε: «Νὰ ἔχω τὴν εὐχή σου, γέροντα», καὶ τό ἔλεγε σὰν νὰ τὸν γνώριζε κι ἀπὸ πρωτύτερα, σὰ νὰ ἔτανε πατέρας του. Καὶ κείνος τοῦ εἶπε: «Βλογημένος νὰ ἴσαι, ἐσὺ κι ὄλο τὸ σπιτικό σου, καὶ τὰ πρόβατά σου ἢ εἰρήνη τοῦ Θεοῦ νὰ ἴναι ἀπάνω σας!».

Σηκώθηκε κ' ἡ γυναίκα καὶ πήγε καὶ προσκύνησε καὶ κείνη τὸν γέροντα καὶ φίλησε τὸ χέρι του καὶ τὴ βλόγησε. Κι ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης ἦτανε σὰν καλόγερος ζητιάνος, μὲ μιὰ σκούφια παλιὰ στὸ κεφάλι του, καὶ τὰ ράσα του ἦτανε τριμμένα καὶ μπαλωμένα καὶ τὰ τσαρούχια του τρύπια, κ' εἶχε κ' ἓνα παλιοτάγαρο ἀδειανό.

Ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος ἔβαλε ξύλα στὸ τζάκι. Καὶ παρευθύς, φεγγοβόλησε τὸ καλύβι καὶ φάνηκε σὰν παλάτι. Καὶ φανήκανε τὰ δοκάρια, σὰ νὰ ἔτανε μαλαμοκαπνισμένα, κ' οἱ πητιές πού ἦτανε κρεμασμένες φανήκανε σὰν καντήλια, κ' οἱ καρδάρες καὶ τὰ τυροβόλια καὶ τ' ἄλλα τὰ σύνεργα πού τυροκομοῦσε ὁ Γιάννης, γινήκανε σὰν ἀσημένια, καὶ σὰν πλουμισμένα μὲ διαμαντόπετρες φανήκανε, καὶ τ' ἄλλα, τὰ φτωχὰ τὰ πράγματα πού ἔχε μέσα στὸ καλύβι τοῦ ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος.

Τὰ ξύλα πού καιγότανε στὸ τζάκι τρίζανε καὶ λαλούσανε σὰν τὰ πουλιὰ πού λαλοῦνε στὸν παράδεισο, καὶ βγάζανε κάποια εὐωδιὰ πάντερπνη. Τὸν ἅγιο Βασίλη τὸν βάλανε κ' ἔκατσε κοντὰ στὴ φωτιὰ κ' ἡ γυναίκα τοῦ ἔθεσε μαξιλάρια νὰ ἀκουμπήσει. Κι ὁ γέροντας ξεπέρασε τὸ ταγάρι τοῦ ἀπὸ τὸ λαιμό του καὶ τό ἔβαλε κοντά του, κ' ἔβγαλε καὶ τὸ παλιόρασό του κι ἀπόμεινε μὲ τὸ ζωστικό του.

Ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος πήγε κι ἄρμεξε τὰ πρόβατα μαζί μὲ τὸν παραγιό του, κ' ἔβαλε μέσα στὴν κοφινέδα τὰ νιογέννητα τ' ἄρνια, κι ὕστερα χώρισε τὶς ἐτοιμόγεννες προβατίνες καὶ τὶς κράτησε



στο μαντρί, κι ὁ παραγιὸς τὰ βγαλε τ' ἄλλα στὴ βοσκή. Λιγοστὰ ἦτανε τὰ ζωντανά του, φτωχὸς ἦτανε ὁ Γιάννης, μὰ ἦτανε Βλογημένος. Κ' εἶχε μία χαρὰ μεγάλη, σὲ κάθε ὥρα, μέρα καὶ νύχτα, γιατί ἦτανε καλὸς ἄνθρωπος κ' εἶχε καὶ καλὴ γυναίκα, κι ὅποιος λάχαινε νὰ περάσει ἀπὸ τὴν καλύβα τους, σὰν νὰ ἔτανε ἀδελφός τους, τὸν περιποιόντανε. Γιὰ τοῦτο κι ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης κόνεψε στὸ σπίτι τους, καὶ κάθησε μέσα, σὰ νὰ ἔτανε δικό του σπίτι, καὶ βλογηθήκανε τὰ θεμέλιά του. Κεῖνη τὴ νύχτα τὸν περιμένανε ὅλες οἱ πολιτεῖες καὶ τὰ χωριά τῆς Οἰκουμένης, οἱ ἀρχόντοι, οἱ δεσποτάδες κ' οἱ ἐπίσημοι ἄνθρωποι μὰ ἐκεῖνος δὲν πῆγε σὲ κανέναν, παρὰ πῆγε καὶ κόνεψε στὸ καλύβι τοῦ Γιάννη τοῦ Βλογημένου.

† † †

Τὸ λοιπόν, σὰν σκαρίσανε τὰ πρόβατα, μπῆκε μέσα ὁ Γιάννης καὶ λέγει στὸν ἅγιο:

—Γέροντα, ἔχω χαρὰ μεγάλη. Θέλω νὰ μᾶς διαβάσεις τὰ γράμματα τ' Ἄη-Βασίλη. Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἄνθρωπος ἀγράμματος, μὰ ἀγαπῶ τὰ γράμματα τῆς θρησκείας μας. Ἐχω καὶ μία φυλλάδα ἀπὸ ἕναν γούμενο ἁγιονορίτη, κι ὅποτε τύχει νὰ περάσει κανένας γραμματιζούμενος, τὸν βάζω καὶ μοῦ διαβάξει ἀπὸ μέσα τὴν φυλλάδα, γιατί δὲν ἔχουμε κοντά μας ἐκκλησία.

Ἐπιασε καὶ θαμπόφεγγε κατὰ τὸ μέρος τῆς ἀνατολῆς. Ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης σηκώθηκε καὶ στάθηκε κατὰ τὴν ἀνατολὴ κ' ἔκανε τὸ σταυρό του, ὕστερα ἔσκυψε καὶ πῆρε μία φυλλάδα ἀπὸ τὸ ταγάρι του, κ' εἶπε:

—*Εὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν πάντοτε, νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.*

Κι ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος πῆγε καὶ στάθηκε ἀπὸ πίσω του, κ' ἡ γυναίκα βύζαξε τὸ μωρὸ καὶ πῆγε καὶ κείνη καὶ στάθηκε κοντά του, μὲ σταυρωμένα χέρια. Κι ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης εἶπε τὸ Θεὸς Κύριος καὶ τ' ἀπολυτίκιο τῆς Περιτομῆς *Μορφήν ἀναλλοιώτως ἀνθρωπίνην προσέλαβες*, δίχως νὰ πει καὶ τὸ δικό του τὸ ἀπολυτίκιο ποὺ λέγει *Εἰς πάσαν τὴν γῆν ἐξήλθεν ὁ φθόγγος σου.*

Ἡ φωνὴ του ἦτανε γλυκεῖα καὶ ταπεινὴ, κι ὁ Γιάννης κ' ἡ γυναίκα του νοιώθανε μεγάλη κατάνυξη, κι ἄς μὴν καταλαβαίνανε τὰ γράμματα. Κ' εἶπε ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης ὄλον τὸν Ὅρθρο καὶ τὸν Κανόνα τῆς Ἑορτῆς: *Δεῦτε λαοὶ ἄσωμεν ἄσμα Χριστῷ τῷ Θεῷ*, χωρὶς νὰ πει τὸ δικό του τὸν Κανόνα, ποὺ λέγει *Σοῦ τὴν φωνὴν ἔδει παρεῖναι, Βασίλειε.* Κ' ὕστερα εἶπε ὅλη τὴ λειτουργία κ' ἔκανε ἀπόλυση καὶ τοὺς βλόγησε.

Καὶ σὰν καθήσανε στὸ τραπέζι καὶ φάγανε κι ἀποφάγανε, ἔφερε ἡ γυναίκα τὴ βασιλόπητα καὶ τὴν ἔβαλε ἀπάνω στὸ σοφρᾶ. Κι ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης πῆρε τὸ

μαχαίρι καὶ σταύρωσε τὴ βασιλόπητα, κ' εἶπε:

— *Εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος*, κ' ἔκοψε τὸ πρῶτο τὸ κομμάτι κ' εἶπε «τοῦ Χριστοῦ» κ' ὕστερα εἶπε «τῆς Παναγίας», κ' ὕστερα εἶπε «τοῦ νοικοκύρη Γιάννη τοῦ Βλογημένου».

Τοῦ λέγει ὁ Γιάννης:

—Γέροντα, ξέχασες τὸν ἅη- Βασίλη!

Τοῦ λέγει ὁ ἅγιος:

—Ναί, καλά!

Κ' ὕστερα λέγει:

—Τοῦ δούλου τοῦ Θεοῦ Βασιλείου...

Κ' ὕστερα λέγει πάλι:

—Τοῦ νοικοκύρη,... τῆς νοικοκυρᾶς,... τοῦ παιδιοῦ,... τοῦ παραγιουῦ,... τῶν ζωντανῶν,... τῶν φτωχῶν.

Τότε λέγει στὸν ἅγιο ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος:

— Γέροντα, γιατί δὲν ἔκοψες γιὰ τὴν ἀγιωσύνη σου;

Τοῦ λέγει ὁ ἅγιος:

—Ἐκοψα, Βλογημένε!

Μὰ, ὁ Γιάννης δὲν κατάλαβε τίποτα, ὁ μακάριος. Κ' ὕστερα, σηκώθηκε ὄρθιος ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλειος κ' εἶπε τὴν εὐχή του:

—*Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς μου, οἶδα ὅτι οὐκ εἰμὶ ἄξιος, οὐδὲ ἱκανός, ἵνα ὑπὸ τὴν στέγην εἰσέλθης τοῦ οἴκου τῆς ψυχῆς μου.*

Κ' εἶπε ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος:

—Πές μου, γέροντα, ποῦ ξέρεις τὰ γράμματα, σὲ ποῖα παλάτια ἄραγες πῆγε σὰν ἀπόψε ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης; Οἱ ἀρχόντοι κ' οἱ βασιληάδες τί ἁμαρτίες νὰ ἔχουνε;

Ἐμεῖς οἱ φτωχοὶ εἶμαστε ἁμαρτωλοὶ, ἐπειδὴς ἡ φτώχεια μᾶς κάνει νὰ κολαζόμαστε.

Κι ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης δάκρυσε κ' εἶπε πάλι τὴν εὐχή, ἀλλοιώτικα:

—*Κύριε, ὁ Θεὸς μου, οἶδα ὅτι ὁ δούλος σου Ἰωάννης ὁ ἀπλοῦς ἐστὶν ἄξιος καὶ ἱκανὸς ἵνα ὑπὸ τὴν στέγην του εἰσέλθης. Ὅτι νῆπιος ὑπάρχει καὶ τὰ μυστήριά σου τοῖς νηπίοις ἀποκαλύπτεται.*

Καὶ πάλι δὲν κατάλαβε τίποτα ὁ Γιάννης ὁ μακάριος, ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος...



Ὅταν ἁμαρτάνεις, νὰ μὴν ἀπελπίζεσαι. Μὲ θάρρος καὶ ἐλπίδα στὸ Θεὸ νὰ μετανοεῖς καὶ νὰ πηγαίνεις στὸν Πνευματικὸ πού σου ἔχω ὑποδείξει, ἂν δὲν μπορῶ ἐγώ, καὶ νὰ τὰ ἐξομολογεῖσαι. Ἐτσι μόνο θὰ σωθεῖς.

Γέροντας Πορφύριος

Περὶ τῆς Βλασφημίας κατὰ Τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος

Ἁγίου Νικολάου Βελμίροβιτς, «Δρόμος Δίχως Θεοῦ δὲν Ἀντέχεται...», 130 Ἱεραποστολικές Ἐπιστολές, Ἐκδ. «Ἐν Πλῶ», σ. 108-110.

Στὸν Πέτρο Σ. ποῦ ρωτᾷ: Τί εἶναι ἡ βλασφημία κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος;

Διάβασες στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο τοὺς λόγους τοῦ Χριστοῦ: *Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν πᾶσα ἁμαρτία καὶ βλασφημία ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἢ δὲ τοῦ Πνεύματος βλασφημία οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται. Καὶ ὅς ἐὰν εἴπῃ λόγον κατὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ ὅς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ κατὰ τοῦ Πνεύματος τοῦ Ἁγίου, οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ οὔτε ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι οὔτε ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι.* (Ματθ.12:31-32). Καὶ ρωτᾷς τί σημαίνει βλασφημία κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος;

Εἶναι ἡ βλασφημία κατὰ τῆς ἀλήθειας καὶ τῆς ζωῆς, ποὺ προέρχονται ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὁ ἄπιστος ποὺ μισεῖ καὶ διώκει τὴν ἀλήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ, βλασφημεῖ κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Ὁ αὐτόχειρας ποὺ μισεῖ καὶ ἀφαιρεῖ τὴ ζωὴ του, βλασφημεῖ κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἐφόσον τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα ἀποκαλεῖται καὶ Πνεῦμα τῆς Ἀληθείας καὶ τῆς ζωῆς.

Στὸ εὐαγγέλιο τοῦ Ἰωάννη γράφεται ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς τρεῖς φορὲς ἐπικαλέσθηκε τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα μετὰ τὴν σημασία τοῦ Πνεύματος τῆς Ἀληθείας:

Ὁ δὲ παράκλητος τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον, ὃ πέμψει ὁ πατήρ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι μου ἐκεῖνος ὑμᾶς διδάξει πάντα καὶ ὑπομνήσει ὑμᾶς πάντα ἃ εἶπον ὑμῖν ἐγώ. (Ἰωάν. 14:26).

Ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὁ παράκλητος ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω ὑμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς, τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας ὃ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται, ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ. (Ἰωάν. 15:26)

Ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὀδηγήσει ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν ἀλήθειαν πᾶσαν· οὐ γὰρ λαλήσει ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ, ἀλλ' ὅσα ἀκούει λαλήσει καὶ τὰ ἐρχόμενα ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν. (Ἰωάν. 16:13).

Ἐκεῖνος, λοιπόν, ποὺ ἀρνεῖται καὶ χλευάζει τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα, ἀρνεῖται καὶ χλευάζει τὸν Θεὸν ποὺ εἶναι τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς Ἀληθείας.

Ρωτᾷς γιατί αὐτὸ τὸ ἁμάρτημα δὲν συγχωρεῖται ἐνῶ κάθε ἄλλο ἁμάρτημα συγχωρεῖται. Κοίταξε, στὸν Ζαχαῖο συγχωρέθηκε τὸ ἁμάρτημα τῆς φιλαργυρίας, σὲ ἁμαρτωλὲς γυναῖκες τὰ σαρκικὰ ἁμαρτήματα, τοῦ ληστή στὸ σταυρὸ οἱ ληστεῖες, καὶ σὲ πολλοὺς ἄλλους πολλὰ ἄλλα ἁμαρτήματα. Γιατί λοιπόν νὰ μὴν συγχωρεῖται καὶ ἡ ἄρνηση, ἡ ἀπιστία, ὁ χλευασμὸς κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος; Ἐπειδὴ στὰ μὲν πρῶτα ὑπάρχει ντροπὴ καὶ μετάνοια ἐνῶ στὸ δεύτερο δὲν

ὑπάρχει. Στὰ μὲν πρῶτα, λοιπόν, ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἂν καὶ ἁμαρτάνει διαθέτει ντροπὴ καὶ φόβον τοῦ συνδέει μετὰ τὸν Θεόν, ἐνῶ στὸ δεύτερο ἡ σχέση μετὰ τὸν Θεὸν διακόπτεται καὶ ὁ ἀσεβὴς ἄνθρωπος ἀνεπίστρεπτα καὶ ἐντελῶς ἀπομακρύνεται ἀπὸ τὸν Θεόν. Στὰ μὲν ὑπάρχει ἀδυναμία στὸ δὲ ἐμμονή. Στὰ μὲν ἡ ψυχὴ ταξιδεύει στὸ σκοτάδι καὶ ἀποκαλεῖ τὸ σκοτάδι φῶς. Στὸ δὲ συμβαίνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ μὴν ἔχει τὴν παραμικρὴ διάθεση νὰ σωθεῖ καὶ εἶναι γνωστὸ ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς δὲν σώζει μετὰ τὴν βία.

Μιὰ ἄλλη βλασφημία πρὸς τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα εἶναι ἡ ἔχθρα πρὸς τὴ ζωὴ καὶ ἡ ἀφαίρεση τῆς ζωῆς ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου. Τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα ἀποκαλεῖται καὶ χορηγὸς τῆς ζωῆς, δωρητὴς τῆς ζωῆς. Ἔτσι, ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος λαμβάνει ζωὴ ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα ἀλλὰ ἀγνοεῖ ἀπὸ ποῦ ἔλαβε τοῦτο τὸ δῶρο μὴ εὐχαριστώντας τὸν Θεόν, μπορεῖ νὰ τοῦ συγχωρεθεῖ. Ἀκόμα καὶ κάποιος ποὺ γνωρίζει ἀπὸ ποῦ ἔλαβε τὸ πολύτιμο αὐτὸ δῶρο καὶ παρόλα αὐτὰ δὲν εὐχαριστεῖ τὸν Θεόν, μπορεῖ νὰ τοῦ συγχωρεθεῖ. Ἀλλὰ ὅταν κάποιος λαμβάνει ζωὴ ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα καὶ μὲ περιφρόνηση τὴν πετάει, αὐτὸς δὲν πρόκειται νὰ συγχωρεθεῖ. Γιὰ νὰ τὸ καταλάβουμε αὐτὸ πρέπει πρὶν ἀπ' ὅλα νὰ καταλάβουμε τί σημαίνει συγχώρεση. Συγχώρεση τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ σημαίνει νὰ τοῦ ἐπιστραφεῖ πλήρως ἡ ζωὴ. Ἀλλὰ ὅταν κάποιος δὲν θέλει τὴ ζωὴ πολὺ δὲ περισσότερο τὴ μισεῖ καὶ τὴν ἀρνεῖται, ὁ Θεὸς δὲν ἔχει τί ἄλλο νὰ τοῦ δώσει. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τὸν διαγράφει ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς.

Προσευχήσου στὸν Θεὸ νὰ φυλᾷ ἐσένα καὶ τοὺς οἰκείους σου ἀπὸ ἀσυγχώρητα ἁμαρτήματα καὶ νὰ σταματᾷ τὸν ἀνόητο ξεσηκωμὸ τοῦ δημιουργήματος ἐναντίον τοῦ Δημιουργοῦ του.

Ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ ὑγεία καὶ ἔλεος,
+Νικόλαος



Κάποτε ρώτησε ὁ Ἀββᾶς Μωϋσῆς τὸ νεαρὸ ὑποτακτικό του Ζαχαρία:

- Τί νὰ κάνω, παιδί μου, γιὰ νὰ σωθῶ;
- Ἐμένα τὸν ἀνίδεο ρωτᾷς, Ἀββᾶ μου; Τοῦ εἶπε ἐκεῖνος συνεσταλμένος.

- Πίστεψέ με ἀδελφέ, εἶδα τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον νὰ σ' ἐπισκιάξῃ κι αὐτὸ μ' ἀναγκάζει νὰ σὲ συμβουλευτῶ, ἀποκρίθηκε ὁ Γέροντας.

Ὁ νεαρὸς Ζαχαρίας τότε ἔβγαλε ἀπὸ τὸ κεφάλι τοῦ τὸν καλογερικὸ σκοῦφο του, τὸν πέταξε κατὰ γῆς κι ἄρχισε νὰ τὸν ποδοπατᾷ λέγοντας:

- Ἄν ὁ καλόγερος δὲν ποδοπατηθῇ κατ' αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο, Ἀββᾶ μου, δὲν βρῖσκει σωτηρία...

Ἀπὸ τὸ Γεροντικὸν

ON THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD

By Bishop Theophilos of Campania (+1795).

*Christ is born; glorify Him!
Christ comes from Heaven; go to meet Him!
Christ is on earth; be exalted!
Sing to the Lord, all the earth!
And praise Him in gladness, O people;
for He has been glorified!*

† † †



1. The Mystery of the Incarnation. God who is All-Powerful could have liberated the human race from the hands of the Devil by a single command. Had He done that, however, we would have known only His All-Powerfulness, which we already knew. We would not have known His Compassion and Love in spite of the fact that we are hostile to him.

The Incarnation (literally *Ensarkosis* = “En-flesh-ment”) of the Son of God is called such because of His extreme condescension and because it was out of love that He who is not separated from the Father came down to the lowest point, i.e., to the “flesh,” although when we speak about “flesh” here we understand the whole man who is denoted by the partial element of the “flesh.”

The Incarnation of the Son of God is the supreme dogma of the Christian Faith, because it was by these means that we were saved *by grace*. The whole Son of God became Man, personally (literally *hypostatically* = existentially). In other words, He was perfect God and perfect man, with two natures, Godhead and manhood, and one person (*hypostasis*), the divine.

This mystery, says St. Dionysios (the Areopagite) remains ineffable, although we denote it with words. It is also unknowable, although we put it in our mind. God Himself said to Moses: *Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish* (Exod 19:21), i.e., those who try to investigate God’s nature and mysteries fall into perplexity. This is why Gregory the Theologian says: *Before you grasp Him run away, and before you put Him in your mind escape*. Indeed he goes on to call those who try to investigate the mysteries babblers, imprudent, uncontrollable and chatterers.

2. Why Did the Incarnation Take Place at That Time? No one should examine why the Incarnation took place then, and not earlier or later, because only He knows it. He was incarnated *from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary* because there

was never before, nor will there appear again, such a Virgin in the human race as immaculate as the Virgin Mary, sanctified in the flesh and worthy to be united with the Godhead of the Son of God, the Son of God who assumed the entire man from her pure and immaculate blood.

As she conceived without a sperm, so Christ was born without corruption. In other words, the Holy Mary and Theotokos, who was a Virgin before the birth, remained a Virgin even after the birth. Thus Christ came out of her womb in an ineffable manner just as He entered into her in a manner, which involved no passion and cannot be explained.

This is exactly what Ezekiel’s prophecy stresses: *Son of Man, this gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut*. (Ezek 44:2).

3. This Mystery of the Incarnation is inconceivable according to the prophet Jeremiah who says: *And he is a man, and who shall know Him?* (Jer 17:9). The great Paul also declares the same: *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory*. (1 Tim 3:16).

Through communion with the Godhead the entire man was deified *in Christ*. The humanity of Christ enjoyed all the charismas and benefits of the Godhead, since Christ is perfect God and perfect man after the union. This is similar to the initial light, which God created and which fell on the sun’s disk and the entire disk became full of dazzling light.

This Mystery of the Incarnation is inconceivable both to Angels and human beings. God Himself revealed it to Moses, when He showed him through the burning bush, namely His Incarnation. He did not show him His person, i.e., His Godhead, which no man can ever see, not even an angel. At the Incarnation, then, God did not change what He was, since He is unchangeable; rather He assumed what He was not, because He is a Lover of man.

One may ask, how did the humanity receive the Godhead without being burnt out? But is this not also the case with the burning bush, which was not burnt out? Where God is at work whatever is impossible becomes possible. The burning iron receives the entire nature of fire, and yet the iron remains iron and the fire, fire. It burns like fire, and like iron it undergoes changes, which an iron undergoes and has a cutting edge when it is used.

4. The Godhead Deified the Human Nature, which is now deified together with its soul, which is endowed with mind, reason, will and energy. As a man, Christ was exposed to the so-called natural but blameless passions. In others words, He felt pain, thirst, weariness, even faintheartedness in a natural way. He did not display, however, any blameworthy passions, i.e., those deriving from evil choice. This was the case because

He was united with God, who was the leader of His rational soul and preserved Christ sinless.

Some of the Fathers say that the babe was perfect already inside the belly of His mother. Others, however, say that He grew gradually like all babes. This is a matter of opinion and not a heresy that has an effect on the Mystery. The point is that just as Adam was made from the soil, so Christ was made from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit gave birth to the soul of Christ while His flesh was made from the blood of the Virgin.

5. The Manner of the Incarnation. Saint Maximus says that the Angels knew the impending Incarnation of the Son of God for the salvation of human beings. What, however, escaped their perception were the unthinkable Holy Conception and the manner of the Incarnation. How He could be entirely in the Father and entirely inside all things which He fulfilled, and also entirely inside the belly of the Virgin!

Nevertheless, Christ's becoming man differs from that of all other human beings. He is substantially a perfect man, yet He differs because He is seedless, and because He falls under a different law from that which pertains to the nature of composite beings. The Word of God was conjoined with the flesh by means of assuming it in an ineffable manner.

Thus, only when Christ was born was the message heard, *Peace on earth and good will among men.* (Lk 2:14). God had granted His peace many times and had called many human beings His sons. There was only one Person, however, in whom He *was well-pleased* and only one Peace that was perfect and saving for all human beings along with His perfect good-pleasure.

6. The Name "Jesus" and the Greek Alphabet. The Name Jesus, which is *the Name above every other name* (Phil 2:9), means Savior for the Jews and healer (*iomenos*) for the Greeks. And indeed, Christ is the Healer of our souls and of the bodies of those who believe in him. The curious point here, however, is that this great and divine Name was indicated beforehand, through the Greek Alphabet, which consists of 24 letters!

As is known, the first eight letters of this Alphabet from **A** to **Θ** specify 8 monads. The following eight letters from **I** to **Π** specify 8 decades, and the following eight letters from **P** to **Ω** specify 8 hundreds. If we add them all up we form the number 888. The same applies, however, if we add the numbers which are specified by the letters of the name **ΙΗΣΟΥΣ** (JESUS): **I**(=10)+**H**(=8)+**Σ**(=200)+**O**(=70)+**Υ**(=400)+**Σ**(=200)=888. This is exactly what the following verse stresses: *For if eight monads are to be added to eight decades and these to eight hun-*

dreds they will denote to the human unbelievers the Name of their Savior. (Oracula Sibyllina).

7. Witnesses of the Gentiles about the God-Man. Witnesses to Christ being God and Man are also found among many Gentiles:

A) Josephus: The Jewish historian Josephus says this about Christ: "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and other

wonderful mysteries concerning him; and the tribe of the Christians, so named from him are not extinct at this day." (Antiquitates Judaicae, Book 18, 64.2). In other words, Josephus wonders whether Jesus was only a man, since he did so many incredible things and taught in such a way that he made many Jews and Greeks believe in him. Also, when the leaders of the Jews delivered him to Pilate to be crucified, his disciples did not reject him, for he was resurrected on the third day and appeared to them according to the predictions of the prophets who had spoken about this and many more mysteries concerning his person. Indeed his followers took his name and came to be called Christians and their race has not ceased to exist to this day.

B) The Roman Emperor Augustus: Eusebius of Pamphilos (Metropolitan of Caesarea in Palestine) reports that the Roman Caesar Augustus went to the Oracle of Delphi and offered sacrifice there as a Greek in order to ask Pythia who gave the oracles to tell him who would reign after him. Pythia gave him the following oracle: "A Hebrew child, who will reign over the blessed gods, orders me to leave this altar and return to Hades again. Depart, therefore, silent from my altars." (Oracula, or Suda, Lexicon alpha). When Caesar Augustus heard these things, he returned to Rome and erected an altar on which he inscribed: "An Altar to the firstborn God" (Johannes Malalas, Chronographia or Suda, Lexicon, alpha). It is truly amazing to think that the demon was forced by the divine power to witness to the Gentiles the divine birth of Christ the God-man!

C) Porphyry: The opponent of the Christians, Porphyry, says the following: "But now [the Gentiles] marvel how the disease has befallen the city for so many years and there has been no intervention either from Asclepius (the god of health) or from any other gods. Because the honor offered to Jesus



did not leave room for any common help from the gods.” (Porphyrius, *Contra Christianos* 80.3).

Their oracles ceased and their divinations from their false gods, the demons. What else did the thoughtless and blind gentiles wish to see in order to understand that the mighty power of the Lord and God Jesus Christ? But the sages of the Greeks had proclaimed Christ even before his incarnation.

D) Orpheus. Orpheus says: “Voice, I attest you, of the Father, which he uttered first. When he established the world on his own will” (Justin Martyr, *Cohortatio ad Gentiles*, 16). And the next verse says: “And when you look at the divine word, attach yourself to him.” (Ibid. *De Monarchia*, and Clement Alexandrinus *Protrepticus* and *Stromata*).

Just as the birth of Christ was seedless, so also the divine generation was without birth pangs. It is a mistake to speak of the birth pangs of the holy Virgin, i.e., that the feast on the day after Christmas is connected with greeting the mother that recovers from the birth pangs.

8. God Became Man in order to Conquer the Devil as Man. He was born in an indescribable and unutterable manner and received the homage of the Magi (and that unusual star appeared in the sky). Yet He was fed with human milk, and grew up, and went to the desert and fasted for forty days; as such, the Devil thought that He was only a man and could fall if tempted with hunger and so he started tempting Him hard. But Christ rebutted the enemy, putting forth the light of Scripture, not using the power and authority of His Godhead, but following the natural sequence of humanity. It was as a man, then, and not as God that Christ conquered the Devil, because the Devil had conquered the first man at the beginning not as God but as man. It was necessary, then, that the Devil should be conquered by man. This is why the divine Dionysius the Areopagite and Gregory the Theologian say, that *Christ conquered the Devil not by power but by right judgment and righteousness.* (Dionysius, *De ecclesiasticae Hierarchy*). Luke the Evangelist says that Christ sustained all temptations, because He scored victories over the three capital ones, gluttony, vainglory and avarice, which give birth to all others. Thus He put the Devil to shame.

9. The Public Ministry of the God-Man and its Conclusion in the Resurrection. When Christ came down from the desert and gathered together His disciples, He preached to the world for three years and produced many miracles, having first completed the thirtieth year of His age. After all these things His disciple Judas sold him by treachery, and Christ accepted it, because He wanted to redeem us human beings, who had been sold to the Devil through sin. He deliberately handed Himself over to those who pursued him, because He wanted to complete the divine economy and redeem the human race. He was crucified, died and buried, and the Third Day He rose and appeared to His disciples and to the women. Then, forty days later He blessed His disciples, and having

taught them about peace, He ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of the Father having fulfilled all things and having deified man.

Before the Resurrection of Christ took place, three human beings appear in the Old Testament to have been risen from the dead. The first one is the son of the widow from Zarephath or Sarepta (cf. Luke 4:26) who was raised by Elijah. The second was the son of the Somanite woman who was raised by Elisha (cf. 4 Kings 4:32ff). And the third is the case of the soldier who was buried near the tomb of Elisha and was raised from the dead (4 Kings 13:21). In the New Testament there are four cases of human beings who were raised from the dead by Christ: the daughter of the leader of the synagogue (Luke 8:49ff), the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11ff), Lazarus who had been buried for four days (John 11:43f) and those who arose at the resurrection of Christ (cf. Matt. 27:52f). All of these died again. Christ, however, who is the eighth case of a man that rose from the dead, is the only one who does not die again because death has no dominion over him. We too will rise again, on that Eighth Day, which has no end, without dying again.

10. Epilogue From the Words of Dionysius the Areopagite. We shall let Dionysius the Areopagite to close this chapter. And first of all we shall recall what he says about the darkness, which occurred when Christ was crucified. There is, he says, the witness of the Greek astronomer Phlegon who said: “In the second year of the 202nd Olympiad, a major eclipse of the Sun occurred, the like of which had not been seen earlier, so that the stars appeared in the sky” (Johannes Malalas, *Chronographia*). This is one additional witness of the Greeks, which is connected with the Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is in this way, then, that we should believe in and worship Jesus Christ, as God who became man, because the Son and Word of God remains inseparable from His humanity. As God He is other than the Flesh, but also as Flesh He is other than the Word. Since, however, the Word of the Father, who is from God, Himself became man as well, this is not the case of “an other and an other” because of the indescribable union and summit. Thus, the Son is called: *One and Only*, both before the summit of the Incarnation and after His union with the Flesh. It is exactly for this reason that He said to the man who had been previously blind and was healed by Him: *Do you believe in the Son of man?* (Jn 9:35). And he answered, *And who is he Lord, that I might believe in Him* (Jn 9:36). And then, Christ said to Him, “And you have seen Him and He who is speaking with you, He is the one” (Jn 9:38). He speaks as man, He appears as man, and He is believed to be a God-Man, God’s Son Himself!

Truly, how incomprehensible and lofty is this Mystery of the Incarnation of Christ! Yet it is an absolute confirmation and revelation of God’s infinite love for us human beings.

THE RIGHTFUL OMISSION OF Gnostic WRITINGS

By Fr. Barnabas Powell, St. Michael's Orthodox Church.

From the Editor: As we had observed during past pre-Christmas periods, the mass media will once again stand ready to release (in whatever form they consider most effective) "new historically-based" stories or television specials that are based on so-called "ancient Christian manuscripts" that have "finally gained the exposure they deserve." They will tell us that their aim is to make the Bible text more understandable for all humans and to provide that "missing insight" into Jesus. It is our personal contention that their true aim is simply another form of attack on the truth of our Faith. The subject article correctly exposes one such "manuscript" and places it into the perspective that it deserves.

We appeal to all Orthodox Christians that they treat these "ancient Christian manuscripts" with the disrespect that they deserve; they are truly nothing more than religious trash-talk that is being utilized by the Dark Forces of our days. Their aim continues to be the instilling of doubt in the hearts and souls of our brethren towards the great mystery of His Incarnation and the salvific power of our Faith.

† † †

Perusing the religious sections of major bookstores over the years, I've noticed a growing fascination with material that fell to the cutting-room floor as the Church produced a biblical canon. In 100 back-cover endorsements, pop-scholars pose the provocative question "What doesn't the Church want you to know?"

Given our post-modern disillusionment with authority and penchant for conspiracy theories, obsession over "lost" books of the Bible is not surprising. Before we remove such works from the trash, however, it may be worthwhile considering why they were tossed in the first place.

As the apostles' successors continued their work of spreading the Gospel, they were shadowed by a group of revisionists who claimed to possess an arcane knowledge of God that the Church at large wasn't privy to. They were called Gnostics ("gnosis" is Greek for "knowledge"). They rejected the physical world and its Jewish Creator God, denied the incarnation of God in Christ, and promoted a puritanical spirituality that rejected the body and its redemption.

To promote their teachings, they attributed them to Christ by authoring "gospels" under apostolic pseudonyms. No Gnostic work has better captured popular imaginations than the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. Purporting to fill in the years of Jesus' Egyptian childhood, this work titillates us with the prospect of information not included in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We expect something cute, if not inspiring.

Yet there's nothing endearing about this Gnostic Jesus. An all-powerful brat with a vindictive streak, he strikes a playmate dead for bullying him. When the boy's parents complain to Joseph and Mary, they're struck blind for their trouble. When a rabbi tries teaching Jesus the alphabet, the boy declares his omniscience and mocks his pedagogue. The rabbi raises a hand to rebuke the arrogant cur, and winds up dead. When Jesus channels five mud puddles into a single pool, a Pharisee stamps out his project because it constitutes work on the Sabbath. You guessed it. He, too, ends up dead.

Like the child demigods of Greek mythology and Far Eastern demonology, this Jesus is no innocent babe, but a malevolent and capricious trickster. Why would the Gnostics depict him thus? Their goal was to cast his humanity as mere illusion, a thin cloak barely concealing the divine being within. He only seems to be as we are, only seems subject to human limitations.

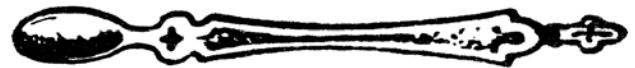
The canonical Gospels depict a God who empties himself to the point of suffering and death. The Gnostic deity would never stoop to such depths. Even his childhood is a facade.

Modernist scholars urge us to include such works in our understanding of the "historical Jesus." They accuse the early Church of deliberately covering them up in a prejudiced desire for orthodoxy over diversity. As a member of that same Church, I plead guilty. I'm glad such twisted icons were rejected, because Jesus is, after all, not simply an object of worship. He's the perfect man we seek to become. Imagine if the Gnostic Jesus were part of that model. What kind of Christians would that produce? What kind of Church? Vengeance would be next to godliness; a martyr not so much one who dies for his faith as one who kills for it.

Although secularists exploit isolated, historic aberrations to accuse Christianity of fitting that bill, let's get real. There are other faiths in which such a paradigm is no aberration at all. Their claim to secret knowledge continues to inspire Gnosticism's spiritual successors, who focus today on the secret sex life of Jesus, or whatever the latest cultural psychosis dictates.

Gnosticism may inspire Hollywood blockbusters and New York Times best-sellers, but has never inspired love of neighbor. It produced no saints. Gnostic writings are an interesting read, but there's a reason they didn't make the biblical cut. Christ didn't leave a text. He left a Church, which compiled a text.

Perhaps we can all be convinced now that the Mother Church truly knew what She was doing...



What does it mean to sincerely confess? To hide nothing, speak plainly and not beat around the bush.

St. Ambrose of Optina

WAS CHRIST BORN ON DEC. 25TH?

By John Eidsmoe and Ben DuPré, from *WorldNetDaily*, 12/24/2009.

The secularizers commonly defend the de-Christianization of Christmas by noting that America is a much more diverse nation than we used to be, that we shouldn't offend others, that saying "Merry Christmas" might be bad for business and that public Christmas observances might even violate the First Amendment. Then they deliver their crowning blow: "Besides, everybody knows Jesus wasn't born in December."

But saying "everybody knows" begs the question, as saying "all scholars agree" defines anyone who doesn't agree as a non-scholar. At the risk of flying in the face of this collective modern wisdom, we suggest that there is substantial, though not conclusive, evidence that Jesus was born in December.

The Biblical Evidence

What does the Bible say about the date of Jesus' birth? Luke 2:6 tells us that *the days were accomplished that she should be delivered*, so we assume Jesus was a full-term baby, born nine months after His conception. Luke 1:26 says the angel Gabriel announced the conception of Jesus to Mary in the sixth month of her cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. So Jesus was conceived about six months after John the Baptist was conceived.

So when was John the Baptist conceived? That's more difficult, but the Scriptures suggest some answers. John's father was Zacharias, a Levite priest *of the course of Abia [Abijah]* (Lk 1:5). According to I Chronicles 24:7-19, King David had divided the priests into 24 orders, and these orders took turns serving in the temple for a period of eight days twice a year, separated from their wives and children. During their time Zacharias and the other priests of the course of Abia served during the 10th and 24th weeks of the Jewish year.

The angel of the Lord spoke to Zacharias *while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course* (Lk 1:8), that is, while he was performing his service in the temple. After his course was finished he left the temple, returned to his wife, Elizabeth, and John was conceived (Lk 1:23-24). If this was after the second course, that is, the 24th week of the year, John would have been conceived around September or October and born around June or July. Jesus' conception six months later would have occurred around March or April and His birth around December or January.

There is no certainty to this theory, especially given that the Jewish calendar (of only 360 days) may have been different from King David's time to Jesus' time. But based on the scriptural account of Zacharias's service in the temple, it is well within the realm of possibility that Jesus was born in December.

The Extrabiblical Evidence

St. John Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.), argued strongly for a Dec. 25th birthdate because of the course of Zacharias' priestly service. But he also based his conclusion on the findings of Pope Julius. Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem (348-386 A.D.) had asked Pope Julius to ascertain the date of Christ's birth *from the census documents brought by Titus to Rome* after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Julius then determined the date of Christ's birth to be Dec. 25th.

Julius, Cyril and Chrysostom were not alone in their reliance upon the census documents. St. Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.), in a detailed statement of the Christian faith addressed to Emperor Marcus Aurelius, stated that Jesus was born in Bethlehem *as you can ascertain also from the registers of the taxing*. (Apology, I, 34). Likewise, Tertullian (160-250 A.D.) wrote of *the census of Augustus—that most faithful witness of the Lord's nativity, kept in the archives of Rome* Contra Marcion, Bk 4, 7).

Unfortunately, we do not have access to these census records today. But perhaps the better part of wisdom bids us to assume that these church fathers had access to information that we do not possess, and that they knew what they were talking about.

Some have said that Jesus couldn't have been born in December because shepherds did not keep their sheep in the fields past late autumn. But Alfred Edersheim, in his classic work *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1883), cites ancient Jewish sources to the effect that flocks of sheep "remain in the open alike in the hottest days and in the rainy season, i.e., all the year round" (Book 2, p. 186). There was also a special class of Levitical shepherds who kept sacrificial lambs in the field all year round because they were used for sacrifice every month of the year.

Winters can be cold in Palestine, but they vary greatly, and some Decembers are rather mild. A recent study of stalagmites and stalactites in caves near Jerusalem strongly suggests that the average annual rainfall dropped nearly 50 percent from about 3 feet in 100 A.D. to about 1.6 feet in 700 A.D. Average winter temperatures may have varied as well. If Mary could have given birth to a baby in a Bethlehem stable, then hardy shepherds could have watched their flocks in the fields at the same time.

Edersheim concludes, "There is no adequate reason for questioning the historical accuracy of this date (Dec. 25th). The objections generally made rest on grounds, which seem to me historically untenable."

In the end, no one's Christian faith should depend upon whether Dec. 25th is the date of Jesus' birth, nor do such questions give us any reason to take Christ out of Christmas. We'd welcome responses from anyone who can prove or disprove this thesis. But sometimes it is comforting, and even fun, to learn that ancient scholars and ancient traditions may have been right all along.

And Merry Christmas, one and all—on Dec. 25th!

HOLY PROPHET DANIEL [COMMEMORATED ON DECEMBER 17TH]

From "Orthodox America," vol. VI, No. 5, December, 1985.

Among those who foretold the Birth of the promised Messiah was the holy Prophet Daniel. He was of royal lineage from the tribe of Judah. As a youth he was taken captive by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (607-562 BC). As he was handsome and of a good family, he was chosen together with several others to be trained for service in the palace. They were taught the Chaldean language as well as various sciences. The king ensured that they were well provided for and given food from his own table.

Among the chosen youths Daniel had three friends: Ananias, Azarias and Misail. All four steadfastly preserved their faith in the one true God and together refused to eat the king's food for fear breaking one of Moses' laws. They asked their overseer to give them only bread and vegetables, but the overseer was afraid that they would become thin and he would be made to suffer the king's wrath. Daniel persuaded him to make a test and allow them to observe this regimen for ten days. At the end of this period all could see that not only had Daniel and his friends not lost weight—they had grown still healthier and more handsome than before. And so they were permitted to eat as they pleased. The Lord God rewarded them for their faithfulness, granting them various talents and success in their studies. And to Daniel was given the special gift of interpreting dreams and visions.

Now in the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar saw an unusual dream which troubled his spirit; when he awoke, however, he couldn't recall the content of the dream. He summoned together all the wise men, astrologers, magicians and soothsayers of the land, and demanded an explanation of his dream. But they were astonished at such a task. Who, they asked, could begin to interpret a dream which the king himself could not remember! Nebuchadnezzar grew angry and ordered all these sages to be put to death.

Daniel heard of their dilemma and requested some time to think it over. That night he prayed fervently to God, and in his sleep the Lord revealed to him the king's dream and its significance. All this Daniel explained to the king—how he had been thinking of the future and beheld in a dream a terrible statue whose head was of fine gold, *his breast and his arms were of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs*

of iron and part of clay. Then from a mountain a stone was cut out without hands and struck the image, breaking it to pieces; and the stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. [1]

In explaining this dream Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that as a king of kings to whom God had given a kingdom, power, strength and glory, he was this head of gold, and after him would arise another kingdom, less powerful, and then a third; and finally these would all be consumed by an everlasting, kingdom of the God of heaven, which kingdom would spread over the entire earth unto the ages of ages.

Nebuchadnezzar arose and, bowing down before Daniel, said: *Truly, your God is the God of gods and King of kings!* In reward for his interpretation Daniel was given authority over all the wise men of Babylon, and his three friends—Ananias, Azarius and Misail—were made rulers of the land. [2]

Nebuchadnezzar, however, did not remain steadfast in confessing the God of Daniel to be God of gods and King of kings. In the 18th year of the Babylonian captivity, Nebuchadnezzar had an enormous golden idol erected in a field. All the wise men and the learned members of Babylon gathered to witness its unveiling. It was announced that at the sound of the trumpets and the musical instruments everyone was to bow down before the idol. Anyone who failed to observe the king's decree would be thrown into the furnace.

At the given moment, all bowed down—with the exception of Ananias, Azarias and Misail. Hearing of their refusal, the king flew into a rage and com-

manded that the flames be increased seven-fold and that the three obstinate young Israelites be bound and thrown into the furnace. It was made so hot that the soldiers who threw the victims into the fire themselves fell dead, and even those Chaldeans standing nearby were scorched. The three godly youths, however, remained unharmed. The Lord had sent His angel to guard them from the flames, and they stood in the midst of the furnace singing praises to God.

Nebuchadnezzar, who was seated on a high throne facing the furnace, turned to his counselors: *Were there not three youths bound and thrown into the furnace? How is it that I see four, freely walking, unharmed, amidst the flames; and the fourth has the appearance of the Son of God.* Approaching the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar called the youths out. When they came forth it could be seen that the flames had not touched them: neither their clothing nor their hair was even singed. Seeing this Nebuchadnezzar said: *Blessed is your God Who sent His angel and preserved his servants who trusted in Him.*



And he forbade his subjects, on penalty of death, to mock the God of the Israelites.

After Nebuchadnezzar's death, the throne passed through his son and his son-in-law to his grandson Belshezzar. And all these years Daniel continued to interpret dreams and himself to have dreams which were significant in foreshadowing future events. He foretold to Belshezzar that because he had forgotten the example of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar and had scorned the true God, he would be killed and his kingdom would be divided. That very night the prophecy was fulfilled and the Babylonian empire was taken over by the Medes and Persians.

The Median king Darius looked with favor upon Daniel and raised him up to be one of the three kings under his sovereignty. Daniel's popularity roused the envy of the Chaldean wise men who plotted to have him killed. They knew that three times a day Daniel prayed before a window opened towards Jerusalem. They proposed the king make a decree that for 30 days no one petition any god or man, save the king, for any reason whatsoever. Breaking this decree would cause the offender to be thrown to the lions. King Darius agreed.

The holy prophet Daniel continued as before to pray to God and ask His mercy. When his enemies denounced Daniel, the king realized it was all a ruse, but he could not annul his decree and was forced to have Daniel thrown into the lions' den.

Early the next morning, Darius hurried to the den, *Daniel, servant of the living God, he shouted, has your God been able to save you from the lions? ... King, answered Daniel, my God sent His angel to close the jaws of the lions, for I have been found pure in His sight, and before you, O king, I have not transgressed.*

The king was overjoyed and ordered Daniel released from the lions' den and his accusers to take his place. These men had scarcely entered the den when they were attacked by the lions and torn to pieces.

Then Darius wrote the following to be spread abroad: *I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God... and His dominion shall be even unto the end.*

And so the Prophet Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian. Among his prophecies, he foretold the year of Christ's Birth, and that the Messiah would be given over to death; this would be followed by the destruction of the temple and all Jerusalem, and the Old Testament sacrifices would cease. And so it came to pass.

† † †

[1] According to the Holy Fathers, the stone uncut by human hands, which broke away from the mountain and crushed the image—signifies Christ, born of a Pure Virgin

without the participation of a man. Overruling all temporal kingdoms, He raised up a kingdom which is never to be destroyed, a spiritual kingdom. Because this prophecy foretells the Saviour's Birth, it is read during Vespers on the eve of the Feast of Nativity.

[2] Daniel's prophecy was fulfilled precisely. The Babylonian kingdom was succeeded by three more great empires: the Persian Medean, the Greek-Macedonian, and the Roman; each of these ruled over the Jewish people. During the Roman Empire the Lord Jesus Christ appeared on earth, the Saviour of the world, and established His everlasting and universal kingdom—His holy Church.



BAPTISM AND EMERGENCY BAPTISM

“Regular” Baptism

The Absolute Requirements.

- Always performed by a priest/bishop
- Water, Oil of gladness, Chrism
- Person ALWAYS present. Godparent must be present.
- Full immersion, ALWAYS three times. “Baptism” is from the Greek Word “baptizo” which means to immerse.
- *The servant of God ____ is baptized in the name of Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit* – immerse fully at the mention of each person. Never “I baptize ...”

Emergency Baptism

Some Basic Rules and Guidance

- By whom can it be performed? Any Baptized Orthodox Christian. Principle: you cannot give what you do not have.
- When is it “allowed”? When it is believed a person that has not been baptized is in danger of imminent death and there is no time for usual baptism.
- How is it performed?
 - As many prayers as possible. Trisagion, Creed.
 - Water – make the sign of the cross over it
 - Immerse if possible, or pour, with the proper formula: *The servant of God ____ is baptized in the name of Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit*
- Contact a priest as soon as possible to complete the baptism.

“Completing” the Emergency Baptism

- In the case that the newly baptized survives.
- Never any “re-baptism”.
- Priest performs the baptism service, omitting the blessing of the water and immersion.
- All other parts are said.
- Always chrismation is performed.
- Godparent must be present, as possible.

GRACE ILLUMINING THE SOUL

By Fr. Valery Lukianov, St. Alexander Nevsky Church, Lakewood, New Jersey.

In every man there are two aspects—the outward man and his inward content; or, on the contrary, these two aspects are bound together in complete harmony.

What is the outward man? It is the facade or “image” with which I appear before the world and society. Here, of course, if we show ourselves to others, it is with our most attractive side. Even without inward harmony, the outward man can seem very well brought up, orderly, correct, and polite. But this is only outward “self-control.” Just take away the “world” before which one finds it necessary to show off, and there is revealed the inward content of a man’s heart, which does not at all correspond to his attractive outward image.

This can be seen best of all at home with one’s family, where a man feels himself no longer obliged to restrain his passions. And how sad it is for a spiritual father to find out that in outwardly happy and model families there are often fighting, irritability, crudity, and the storm of passions!...

But what do we see in a man whose outward image is in harmony with his hidden spiritual life? Here we see the beginning of the positive action of God’s grace on a man’s soul, the beginning of a reflection of the light of Tabor about which St. Gregory Palamas teaches. He explains that just as once the Divine light appeared visibly to the Prophet Moses on Mt. Sinai, and just as this light appeared on Mt. Tabor when our Lord Jesus Christ was transfigured, so also this reflection of the light of Tabor can appear even outwardly in a man, but under the unflinching condition that his life is sanctified by the grace of prayer, fasting, and other labors of self-renunciation.

The clearest example of such grace-given illumination of the soul was manifested by the wondrous St. Seraphim of Sarov who was truly “a heavenly man and an earthly angel.” This flaming wonderworker of the Russian Church, who devoted his whole life to acquiring the Holy Spirit, was granted even here on earth the special gift of shining with the light of Tabor—to such an extent that, as Motovilov testifies, it was impossible to look at his face, for it shone and burned like the sun. The same reflection of inward peace and spiritual beauty was shown by the last Tsar-Martyr, Nicholas II, who, as is well known, had especially radiant eyes that won over not only his well-wishers, but even people who, out of spiritual faint-heartedness, were disposed against him.

If one looks attentively at the world around us, we see that God’s Providence has placed an image of spiritual transfiguration even in inanimate nature. Let us remember nature as it is in winter—could anyone imagine that the naked branches of trees, when spring comes, would suddenly awake from a death-like sleep, become covered with new green

leaves, and that on them splendid fruits would come forth to rejoice and feed men? And who has not experienced a special feeling of grace in those wondrous moments of dawn when a man observes how the night ends and a new day begins? What a wondrous, blessed stillness! What a remarkable peace! What joy settles then in the heart of a man when he sees the darkness transformed unnoticeably into light. And, if a sensitive person can take so close to his heart such purely outward manifestations of nature, then how deeply and brightly must a Christian experience those hidden secrets of spiritual existence which open up when there are planted in the heart the grace-given gifts of prayer, repentance, and forgiveness, accompanied by fasting and good deeds.

With our bodily eyes we follow the natural course of life; everything passes away: every happiness, family and social well-being, glory and honor, one’s voice and hearing, memory and intelligence. With the setting of the sun, spring passes over into dead winter! But with our spiritual gaze we follow our earthly pilgrimage—life is not fading away, but on the contrary, an ascent from strength to strength, the acquisition of the spiritual gifts bountifully distributed by the Lord to those who seek Him, given through the Church of Christ.

How sweet is the awareness that still here on earth we have the promise of the victory of good over evil, the pledge of a joyful resurrection. How splendid and consoling is our existence in the Church where a man receives the wondrous opportunity to renew his soul, to tear sin out of his heart with tears, and to be in communion with the spiritual world, in union with Christ.

Let us, then, treasure our joyful communion with the Church, for perhaps the day is not far distant when the Lord will call His faithful children to be confessors. And let us hope that if in this life, because of our unworthiness, the Lord does not illumine our gaze with the clear light of His mercy, then at least He does so during our death. In that frightful hour when the soul is to be separated from the fragile remains of its earthly vessel, and when all sorrows and every vain thing remain behind, our soul might then be illumined by the wondrous light of Tabor so as eternally to be washed in the rays of God’s grace and eternally to send up praise to its Creator together with the angels. Amen.



The priest’s cassock is the flag of the Church of our Christ: for this reason we must try hard to honor it, we who wear it, with a holy life, so that those who don’t wear it will honor and respect it.

Blessed Elder Amphilochios of Patmos

THE VISION OF SAINT PETER, BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA

[FEAST DAY - NOVEMBER 24TH]

From the "Mystagogy" webpages, by J. Sanidopoulos.

Saint Peter illustriously occupied the throne of Alexandria for twelve years, and, as Eusebius says, *was a divine example of a bishop on account of the excellence of his life and his study of the Sacred Scriptures*. He excommunicated Arius for his sympathy with the Meletian schism. Melitius, Bishop of Lycopolos, rejected the idea that the lapsed could return to the Church and thus created a schismatic group.

When Arius learned that Saint Peter had been imprisoned, he sent many priests and deacons to him, asking that he receive him back into the communion of the Church before his martyrdom (he did this in the hope of becoming Bishop of Alexandria). When the ambassadors of Arius, among whom were Achilles and Alexander the presbyters—who had not, like Saint Peter, perceived the ruin he would engender—were astonished at the assertiveness and intensity with which Saint Peter refused to receive Arius again, he revealed to them a dread vision he had seen.

In the vision the Master Christ had appeared to him as an adolescent of 12 years of age wearing a white garment torn from head to foot which He held with His hands to His breast to cover His nakedness. When Saint Peter asked the Lord who rent His garment, the Lord answered that it was Arius, and that he must not be received back into communion because he rent and tore asunder His people in the Church. The Lord also told Peter to bless Achilles as his successor and Alexander as Achilles' successor so as to prevent Arius from coming to the episcopal throne of Alexandria. Eventually, the motif of the torn garment became a metaphor for schisms and for the Arian misinterpretation of the Trinity (see the Vespers for the Feast of the Fathers of Nicaea in the Pentekostarion).

The holy hieromartyr Peter was beheaded during the reign of Maximinus in the year 312; he is called the *Seal of the Martyrs* because he was the last Bishop of Alexandria to suffer martyrdom under the pagan Emperors. His successors to the throne of Alexandria, Saints Alexander and Athanasius the Great, brought to final victory the battle against Arius' heresy and Meletius' schism, battles which Saint Peter had begun.

Liturgical Connotation of the Vision

The earliest surviving depiction of the vision of St. Peter of Alexandria is in the famed Menologion of Basil II (c. 1000) accompanying the commemoration of St. Peter of Alexandria on the 24th of November.

But in the 11th century, the account took on a liturgical connotation, at a time when there was an increase in the number and expansion of liturgical thematic scenes in general.

An image of the Vision appears in an 11th century liturgical roll (Jerusalem, Stavrou 109) where it forms the initial letter of the priestly prayer recited just before the "Our Father" which refers to receiving the Eucharist in a proper manner (i.e., unlike Arius, but like Bishop Peter, faithful even unto death).

Peter is presented as a liturgical bishop and the young Christ appears on an altar as the real presence of the Eucharist. Both allude to the theme of Sacrifice and Offering—the purifying sacrifice of martyrdom and the sacrifice of Christ—themes echoed in the Cherubic Hymn (of offering and being offered). The image of the young Christ at this time parallels similar contemporary depictions of the young Christ in the scenes of the Melismos that were often placed in sanctuaries from this point onward. The fracturing (melismos) of the Eucharist at the time of receiving was also likened to the fractured garment of Christ in the image.



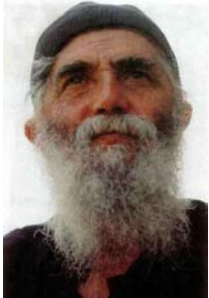
**St. Peter of Alexandria
(Feast Day - November 24)
[fresco from Dionysiou Monastery
on Holy Mountain]**

A Few Fresco Examples of the Vision

1. Church of the Savior, Nereditsa, Novgorod (end of 12th cent.), on north wall of prothesis.
2. Church of St. Clement of Ochrid (1295), in the prothesis.
3. Church of the Virgin Olympiotissa, Thessaly (1295/96), in the diakonikon. The image in Holy Cross Chapel at Holy Cross School of Theology is modelled on this image and also placed in the diakonikon.
4. Church of the Virgin, Gračanica, Serbia (1321), in the diakonikon.
5. Chilandari, Mount Athos (14th cent.), in the diakonikon.
6. Church of St. Nicholas of Tzotza, Kastoria (14th cent.), north wall of prothesis area.
7. Church of the Holy Cross, Cyprus (15th cent.), north wall of prothesis.
8. Holy Trinity, Manasija, Serbia (15th cent.), in the prothesis.
9. Great Lavra, Mount Athos (1535), north wall of prothesis.
10. Dionysiou, Mount Athos (16th cent.), on north wall of prothesis.

WESTERN RATIONALISM AND EASTERN ORTHODOXY

By Elder Paisios the Athonite, from "With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man."



Unfortunately, western rationalism has had its influence on certain Eastern Orthodox leaders, who are members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, but only in body. In spirit, they really belong to the West, which they consider to "reign" over the secular world. But if they were to view the West spiritually, to see it in the light of the East, in the light of Christ, then, they would be able to

discern its spiritual twilight. For the light of the intelligible Sun, the light of Christ Himself is disappearing from the West and a deep darkness is slowly setting in.

All these gatherings and conferences are the work of the evil one; the leaders are engaging in endless discussions on issues that need no discussion, issues that even the Holy Fathers never addressed in the past. All these are meant to confuse and scandalize the faithful and drive some of them to heresies and others to schisms, so that he can gain more ground. Ah! The misery and confusion they bring to people!

When holy Martyrs did not know how to explain the doctrines of the Church, they would often say, *What I believe is what the Holy Fathers have taught.* That was enough to lead them to martyrdom. You see, they could not defend their faith with arguments and persuade those that persecuted them, but they trusted the Holy Fathers. A martyr would reason to himself, *How can I not trust the Holy Fathers? They were far more experienced and virtuous and holy than we are. How can I accept this nonsense and not protest when people insult the Holy Fathers?*

We must trust Holy Tradition. The problem today is that so many embrace European courtesy and try to appear nice. They want to be viewed as open-minded and tolerant and end up bowing to the two-horned devil. "We don't need many religions," they say, "one, universal religion will do." This way they want to level everything.

Some of my visitors actually think this way. "Those of us who believe in Christ should form one religion," they once told me. "What you are suggesting," I replied, "is that we take eighteen carat gold that has been purified and separated from copper and mix it with copper again. Does this make any sense? Ask a jeweler, 'Does it make sense to mix base metals with gold?' So many have struggled to keep our Orthodox dogma pure and make it shine."

The Holy Fathers were right to forbid relations with heretics. But today people don't see that, "We should pray together with the heretic, the Buddhist, the fire-worship-

per, even the demon-worshipper," they say. "The Orthodox should participate in joint conferences and prayer sessions. It's important that we are present." What kind of presence are they talking about? They try to approach everything with logic and end up justifying the unjustifiable. If we follow the European spirit, we'll end up putting spiritual matters under a Common Market...

A few among the Orthodox, who are rather superficial individuals, seeking self-promotion in a "self-appointed mission," organize conferences with the heterodox to create a stir. They are supposedly promoting Orthodoxy, but all they do is bring in the heterodox and make a "mixed salad." This gets the super-zealots angry and they go to the other extreme; they blaspheme against the Mysteries of the New Calendar Orthodox, and so on and thoroughly scandalize souls who are full of devotion and Orthodox sensitivity. The heterodox on the other hand, come to these conferences, behave as if we all have to learn from them, and then take whatever good spiritual material they find in Orthodoxy, process it in their lab, add their own color and label and present it as an original idea. And there are all kinds of strange people who are moved by such ventures, and end up spiritually damaged.

The time will come, however, when the Lord will bring forth great figures like Saint Mark the Evgenikos and Saint Gregory Palamas. They will gather together all our scandalized brothers and sisters, to confess the Orthodox faith and secure the Orthodox Tradition, bringing great joy to the Mother Church.



The truly rich are not those who keep their riches to themselves but those who give to others. Happiness comes not from possessing wealth but from giving it away. Whatever is generously given away becomes a fruit of the soul. It therefore becomes the soul's wealth.

Saint Clement of Alexandria



We ask those of our readers who wish to receive our publication via e-mail (in the form of a pdf file, of approximately 1.5-2.5 Mb size) to let us know.

It allows us to make available printed issues of "Orthodox Heritage" to more of our fellow Orthodox who are unable to financially support our effort.



Please be advised that, in the event of a move, it is necessary to provide us with your new address at your earliest convenience. The Post Office does not forward our bulk mail nor do they send it back to us. Our issues are simply lost!

RELIGIOUS HOMILIES & BOOKS OFFERED BY THE ST. POIMEN BROTHERHOOD						
#	Type & Format	Author / Publisher / Homilist	Description	Price (US\$)	Order #	Sub-Total
In ENGLISH						
C101A	CD-mp3	C. Zalalas	1 CDs, The Life of Tobit (Fr. Athanasios Mitilinaios – 20 homilies)	FREE		---
D102A	DVD-mp3	C. Zalalas	1 DVD, The Book of Revelation (Fr. Athanasios Mitilinaios – the first 48 of his 102 homilies on the vision of St. John the Theologian)	FREE		---
C201A	CD-mp3	Fr. Demetrios Carellas	A series of homilies on (1)The Mystery of Marriage, (2)The Long-Suffering Job, (3) Our Panagia, and (4) Our Holy Orthodoxy	FREE		---
B101 A-D	Book	St. Poimen Bro.	Annual volumes of “Orthodox Heritage,” spiral-bound, 2003 to 2010. Please SPECIFY year(s): _____	19ea		
B102	Book	K. Yiannitsiotis	With Elder Porfyrios (415 pages)	25		
B103	Book	K. Ioannidis	Elder Porfyrios (367 pages)	18		
B104	Book	Fr. Agapios	The Divine Flame of Elder Porfyrios	10		
B202	Book	Panaghia Mon.	Elder Anthimos Vayianos (+1960) -- (190 pages)	10		
B203	Book	Monk Moses	Blessed Elder George Karslides (+1959) -- (150 pages)	10		
B204	Book	Orth. Kypseli	“St. Parthenios of Chios” 105 pgs -- small booklet format	6		
B205	Book	Orth. Kypseli	Life - Miracles - Prophecies of St. Seraphim of Viritsa (150 pages)	10		
B206	Book	Orth. Kypseli	Counsels for Life by Fr. Epiphanius (222 pages)	15		
B207	Book	Orth. Kypseli	Fr. Philotheos Zervakos: Autobiography, Homilies & Miracles (236 pages)	15		
B208	Book	Orth. Kypseli	Papa-Dimitri Gagastathis, the Man of God (132 pages)	10		
In GREEK						
010A-G	DVD-mp3	Πρ. Ἀθανάσιος Μυτιληναῖος	7 DVDs, 1.650 ὁμιλίες (ὅλη ἢ σειρὰ ὁμιλιῶν τοῦ πατρὸς Ἀθανασίου τοῦ Μυτιληναίου, ἐπὶ πολλῶν καὶ διαφόρων θεμάτων) -- ἡ σειρὰ αὐτὴ εἶναι ἕνας πνευματικὸς θησαυρὸς γιὰ κάθε Ἑλληνορθόδοξο Χριστιανό			---
020A-C	DVD-mp3	Παναγόπουλος	3 DVDs, 617 ὁμιλίες, Πολλὰ καὶ Διάφορα Θέματα	FREE		---
030A	CD-mp3	Διάφοροι	Διάφορες ὁμιλίες ἀπὸ τὸ διορθόδοξο θεολογικὸ συνέδριο μὲ θέμα «ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΙΣΜΟΣ: Γένεση, Προσδοκίες, Διαψεύσεις»	FREE		---
031A-B	CD-mp3	Διάφοροι	Διάφορες ὁμιλίες ἀπὸ τὰ δύο Διορθόδοξα Συνέδρια: «Γέροντας Ἰωσήφ ὁ Ἠσυχαστής, Ἅγιον Ὅρος – Φιλοκαλικὴ ἐμπειρία», 2004 & 2005	FREE		---
040A-C	DVD-mp3	Μητρ. Λεμεσοῦ Ἀθανάσιος	3 DVDs, 685 ὁμιλίες Μητρ. Λεμεσοῦ Ἀθανασίου, Διάφορα Θέματα	FREE		---
B-001	Book	Γιαννιτσιώτης	Κοντὰ στὸν Γέροντα Πορφύριο (495 σελίδες)	25		
B-002	Book	Ἰωαννίδης	Ὁ Γέρον Πορφύριος (310 σελίδες)	18		
B-003	Book	Πρ. Ἀγάπιος	Ἡ Θεϊκὴ Φλόγα (Ποῦ Ἄναψε ὁ Γέροντας Πορφύριος, 110 σελ.)	10		
GRAND TOTAL===>						

-- The above prices include all applicable S&H costs to the US only --

† † †
To all who order our FREE CDs / DVDs

If you are able to financially support our humble efforts in spreading the Word of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whatever sum you deem appropriate, we assure you that your contributions will be dedicated exclusively for this purpose by our non-profit organization. †

† † †

Εὰν δύνασθε νὰ συνδράμετε στὶς ταπεινὲς μας προσπάθειες γιὰ τὴν ἐπέκταση τοῦ Λόγου τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἰς ὅποιοδήποτε ποσόν, σὰς κοινοποιούμε ὅ,τι οἱ προσφορὲς σας ἀφιερώνονται ἀποκλειστικῶς καὶ ἀφιλοκερδῶς πρὸς αὐτὸν τὸν σκοπό.

Credit Card holders may order through the Internet, using PayPal -- please see our website (<http://www.OrthodoxHeritage.org>) for details.

Name:		<i>[Office Use Only]</i>	
Street Address:		Amnt / chk #:	
City, State, Zip Code:		Date Rec'd:	
Country:		Date Shipped:	

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN
PO Box 38688
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688



A 501(C)(3) ORGANIZATION
[HTTP://WWW.ORTHODOXHERITAGE.ORG](http://www.OrthodoxHeritage.org)
POIMEN@MAIL.COM

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
US POSTAGE
PAID
PHOENIX, AZ
PERMIT NO 100

ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΓΕΝΝΑΤΑΙ, ΔΟΞΑΖΑΤΕ!

CHRIST IS BORN, GLORIFY HIM!

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN

THE POST-NATIVITY VIRGINITY OF THE THEOTOKOS

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

The Holy Mother conceived the Lord Jesus on a Friday, just as His passion was on a Friday, and she gave birth to Him on the first day of the week. On the first day of the week God said, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3); on the first day of the week, manna fell from heaven; on this day the Lord and Savior was born; and on this day He was baptized in the Jordan.

At that time, there lived in Bethlehem the aged Salome, a kinswoman of Joseph and Mary. She was unable to receive her kinfolk at her house but visited them in the shepherd's cave. When the Most-holy Virgin immaculately gave birth to the Lord and Savior, Salome came to visit her. She was amazed that such a young girl could give birth without the aid of a midwife, swaddle the Child herself, and beside all of that still be on her feet.

When it was explained to Salome that this birth was of God and not man, that it was immaculate and without pain, and that the Virgin Mother remained a Virgin after birth as she was

before birth, Salome did not believe it, but rather she stretched out her hand to the body of the Most-holy Virgin to examine it, after the custom of a midwife, and to find out if this was indeed so. And because of her unbelief and insolence, a punishment befell her: her hand was seized and withered.

The aged woman was greatly frightened by the miracle and lamented over her withered hand. However, when she touched the Divine Child later, her hand was restored to health like it was before. Thus, Salome believed in the virginity of the Most-pure Virgin Mary and in the Divinity of Christ.



Thus after forty days, when according to custom the Most-pure Virgin came with the young Child to the Temple in Jerusalem, Zacharias the high priest placed her in the area reserved for virgins. The Pharisees and priests were disturbed by this and wanted to remove her to the place reserved for married women, but the discerning Zacharias did not allow this, claiming, that she was a virgin even though she had given birth. Because of this, the Jewish elders hated Zacharias and sought from Herod that he be killed. Immediately after she left the Temple, the Theotokos and Joseph left from Jerusalem to Nazareth and then to Egypt.