

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

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Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!



Volume 8 Issue 388

24th Sunday after Pentecost—Christ and the Young Lawyer

December 1, 2019



Many of us keep lists of activities and tasks that we need to accomplish. These lists serve as reminders for us. For daily chores and errands, this approach to life serves its purpose. The rich young ruler who asked Jesus Christ what he had to do in order to find eternal life also apparently thought in terms of lists. So when the Lord told him to keep the commandments of the Old Testament, the man

said that he had checked them all off, that he had kept them his entire life.

This is where the story gets really interesting, for the Lord then gives him a commandment that had never been on the man's list and that he couldn't imagine following: Sell all that you have, give to the poor, and come follow me. This fellow was rich and powerful and loved his possessions, so he became very sad and apparently walked away. The Lord knew how hard it was for people who have it all in this life to enter the kingdom of heaven, for they are tempted strongly to love their possessions and status more than God and neighbor. Still, as the Lord said His stunned disciples, "the things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

What did Christ mean by speaking in this way? He certainly wasn't simply
(continued p. 3)

**** 24th Sunday after Pentecost ****

*** The Holy Prophet Nahum ***

Epistle: Ephesians 2: 14-22

Gospel: Luke 18: 18-27

St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and teachings of the Church.

We worship God in Trinity -
Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

We are dedicated to living out Christ's commandment to, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

The Icon of the Entry of the Theotokos, by Hierodeacon Philaret

When we look at the icon of the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple, we're conscious of the silence of the Holy Scriptures and listen instead to the augmentation of the Gospels by the sacred Tradition of the Church. This presents us with the preparation of the earthly vessel of the Son and Word, the precious bridal-chamber, the heavenly tabernacle, as she's described in the kontakion of the feast.

Saint John of Damascus declares that she 'was

planted' in the house of God, that her spirit blossomed like a 'laden olive-tree', that she became 'the refuge of all the virtues', that she preserved her body and soul until she was able to receive Christ.

As the dismissal hymn for the feast tells us, she is the prelude of God's favor towards us, the announcement of our salvation, the proclamation of Christ and the realization of the plan of divine dispensation. We find a description of the entry in

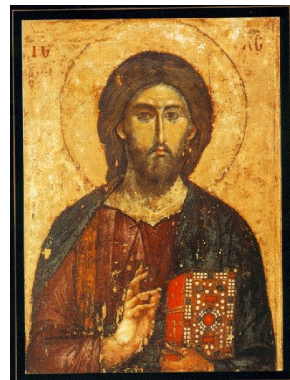
the Proto-Evangelion of Saint James, on which the hymns for the feast are based. The holy hymnographers proceed further than a description of the event itself and attempt to catch its mystical meaning, as this is set out in the dismissal hymn, as we've said: its relationship to the salvation of humankind.

According to the Proto-Evangelion of Saint James, then, the ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna, were still childless
(continued p.2)

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

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our pastor, please call Fr. Matthew at 607-280-1586

Glory be to Jesus Christ.
Glory be Forever.





Troparion to St. George

As the deliverer
of captives
and defender
of the poor,
healer of the infirm
and champion of kings,
victorious great
martyr George
intercede with Christ
our God
for our souls
salvation.

News and Notes

We welcome all who are worshipping with us today and invite you down to the church hall for our social hour.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Lillian, Meg, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Lorraine, Peg, Christopher, Jackie, Karoline, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Andrea, Samuel, Anatoly, Linda, Alexey, Chuck, Eric, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Sally Lou, Bob, Catherine, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, and those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Words of wisdom from the Elders

Our response to the closing down of churches must be an effort to maintain constant remembrance of God. This spiritual struggle would not only serve to get the churches reopened, but it is a way of building the temple that cannot be destroyed. (The author writes at a time when many churches in the former Soviet Union were being closed. At times, one would

have to travel several hundred miles to find a functioning church).

A childhood recollection helps me to understand "keeping the memory of God in one's heart." In the monastery I visited as a small boy, there was a chapel built over a well. On the inside of the roof, there was an icon of Christ the All Mighty. If I looked into the water, I could see in its dark glassy surface a reflection of the icon. Thus I believe that we can see the image of our Lord's blessing in the deep well of our hearts.

It is also said that the kingdom of heaven is within our heart. We have to take our heart into our hand-a warm and firm hand-and then our prayer will take root. All good works become a habit, but prayer always remains a unique experience for us.

(From *Light in the Darkness*, by Sergei Fudel, p. 57-58)



The Entry of the Theotokos, (continued from p. 1)

after twenty years of married life and entreated Him to grant them a child. An angel of the Lord announced to them that they would, indeed, have a child and that they had to promise to dedicate it to God.

Nine months later, a daughter, Mary, was born to them and they brought her up until the age of three when they delivered her to the priest in the temple, which she entered accompanied by an escort of candle-bearing virgins. While the Virgin Mary remained in the temple, she spent her time in studying the Scriptures, in needlework and in prayer. She was also fed by the hand of an angel. At the age of twelve, as the result of a sign, she was given to Joseph, who was to be her guardian, not her husband.

As regards the time of the establishment of the feast, it's not possible to determine it, though it's connected to the 'New Church', the basilica of 'Saint Mary the New', built by Justinian in honor of the Mother of God. The church was erected on Mount

Moriah in Jerusalem, to the south of the Temple of Solomon and was inaugurated in 543. The feast was firmly established some time between the middle and end of the 7th century and was introduced into Constantinople at the beginning of the 8th.



The oldest iconographical depiction is a 5th century relief from Tarascon in Provence. The oldest depiction in the East is a miniature in the Menologion of Basil II (r. 976-1025), in which the Mother of God is portrayed

as praying in the temple. In the 11th century, the composition was fixed as in the Monastery of Dafni [near Athens] with some variations, while in the 14th century the depiction changed to that in the Monastery of Hora, which showed the procession from home to the temple.

The usual depiction is as follows: the main person in the icon is Our Lady at three years of age. She is being received into the temple by the priest, Zechariah, who was later to become the father of John the Baptist. Zechariah led her into the Holy of Holies, even though this was a privilege reserved for the High Priest, and then only once a year. A clear sign that she was chosen by God. In the icon, her God-fearing parents hand her to Zechariah, though sometimes it is both of them who do so, sometimes Joachim and sometimes Anna. Behind them an undefined number of virgins follow, 'the spotless daughters of the Hebrews' holding lighted candles.

(continued next issue)

adding another law to a list of requirements to be checked off. Instead, he challenged this man to stop thinking about his relationship with God as a matter of law, a set of behaviors, which he could master. Someone who responds to the Old Testament laws by saying, "Oh, I've always followed them since I was a child" has a very shallow understanding of what God requires of us. That would be like someone saying, "Oh, I've always been a perfectly faithful Christian since childhood."

If we have any spiritual insight at all, we will see that none of us has mastered God's requirements, none of us may stand before the Lord bragging that we have it all down. The truth is that we have all fallen short and need God's mercy and healing in our lives.

Christ jolted this man out of his delusion, of his false self-confidence, by giving him a commandment that He knew he could not keep:

giving away all his beloved money, possessions, and power. Perhaps for the first time, this fellow was challenged to see that eternal life is not a matter of checking off a list, not something that we can accomplish by our own ability. If we can't give up that which we love most in this life for God, then we obviously have not fulfilled all that the Lord expects of us.

And since Christ came to unite our fallen humanity with divinity and to conquer sin and death, it's pretty clear that even the most law-abiding person still needs the mercy, grace, and love of our Lord in order to inherit eternal

life. By our own power, it's not possible to share in the life of heaven, but with Jesus Christ, all things are possible.

As we continue to prepare for the coming of Christ, we do well to remember that this great feast is not about the birth of a mere teacher, law-giver, or example. Were our Lord simply another prophet with a strict teaching, we would not rejoice at His coming. Instead, we would—like the rich young ruler—become sad and dejected, for the last thing we need is another law to fail to obey and make us feel guilty.

The eternal Son of God was not born at Christmas to add to the burden of the law or to give us the impression that all will be well if we obey a new set of teachings. To the contrary, He became a human being to do what a mere law never could, to bring us into His holiness, to make

us partakers of the divine nature, to heal and fulfill our fallen, corrupt humanity, to make it possible for us mortals to put on immortality.

The Lord's shocking statement about giving everything away challenged the rich young ruler to stop thinking of his life before God in legalistic terms. Likewise, we should use the prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and other spiritual disciplines of Advent, to be shocked out of our conventional and shallow assumptions about what it means to share in the eternal life of the Holy Trinity. For Christ was not born to bring us self-indulgence, popularity, or whatever else the world calls success. Neither did He come to make us strict legalists who think that holiness can be reduced to a list of "do's" and "don'ts." And He certainly did not put on flesh in order to make His followers the self-righteous judges of others.

The eternal Son of God became one of us for completely different reasons. Out of unfathomable love, He wanted to make possible for us what is impossible by our own power. We may take pride in what we accomplish, but which of us can claim credit for our Lord's birth? There is no earthly prestige in a Virgin Mother giving birth in a cave to a baby whose cradle was a manger, a feeding trough for animals. The rich young rulers of the world cannot understand a Messiah whose human life begins in such lowly circumstances and ended on a cross. Jesus Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension



are not simple human accomplishments or rewards, but truly miraculous manifestations of God's eternal life in our world of sin, death, and corruption.

We prepare to receive Christ at Christmas by opening our hearts and souls to His salvation—not by mastering laws—but by true repentance. We repent by honestly confessing our sins and asking for the Lord's mercy, even as we resolve to make a new beginning in the Christian life. Yes, we must cooperate with our Lord's mercy and grace by doing what we can to live faithfully. But even the best life does not somehow earn heaven. In fact, the more we grow in holiness, the more we will begin to see clearly the gravity of our sins and how far we are from the full stature of Christ. The closer we grow to Him, the less we will think of salvation as a reward for good behavior according to a check list.

The Saints of North America (part 21)

“St. Olga gestured for me to follow her. We walked a long way until there weren’t many trees. We came to a little hill that had a door cut into the side. After a little while some smoke came out of the top of the hill. St. Olga came out with some herbal tea. We both sat in silence drinking our tea and feeling the warmth of the sun on our faces. I began to get a pain in my belly and she led me inside. The door was so low I had to duck like bowing in prayer.

“Inside the hill was dry and warm and very quiet. The light was very soft coming from a shallow bowl and from the open hole on the top of the hill. Everything around me felt gentle, especially Mother Olga. Mother Olga helped me up on a kind of plat-form bed like a box filled with moss and grasses. It was soft and smelled like the earth and the sea. I was exhausted and lay back. St. Olga went over to the lamp and warmed up something which she rubbed on my belly. I looked five months pregnant (I was not really pregnant at that time). I started to labor. I was a little scared. Mother Olga climbed up beside me and gently holding me by the arm, she pretended to labor with me, showing me what to do and how to breathe. She still hadn’t said anything. She helped me push out some stuff like afterbirth which kind of soaked into dried moss on the box bed, I was very tired and crying a little from relief when it was over.

“Up until this she hadn’t spoken, but her eyes spoke with great tenderness and understanding. We both got up and had some tea. As we were drinking it, Holy Mother Olga gradually became the light in the room. Her face looked like the sun shining under her skin. But I think the whole of her glowed. I was just so connected to her loving gaze that I didn’t pay much attention to anything else. It was like the kind of loving gaze from a mother to an infant that connects and welcomes a baby to life. She seemed to pour tenderness into me through her eyes. I know now that some very deep wounds were being healed at that time. She gave me back my own life which had been stolen, a life that is now defined by the beauty and love of God for me, the restored work of His Hands.

“After some time I felt like I was filled with wellness and a sense of quiet entered my soul, as if my soul had been crying like a grief-stricken abandoned infant and now had finally been comforted. Even now as I write . . . the miracle of the peacefulness and also the zest for life

which wellness has brought, causes me to cry with joy and awe.

“Only after this did Holy Mother Olga speak. She spoke about God and people who choose to do evil things. She said the people who hurt me thought they could make me carry their evil inside of me by rape. She was very firm when she said: “That’s a lie. Only God can carry evil away. The only thing they could put inside you was the seed of life which is a creation of God and cannot pollute anyone.” I was never polluted. It just felt that way because of the evil intentions of the people near me. What I had held inside me was the pain, terror, shame and helplessness I felt. We had labored together and that was all out of me now. She burned some grass over the little flame and the smoke went straight up to God, who is both “the judge and the forgiver. I understood by the incense that it wasn’t my job to carry the sins of people against me either. It was God’s, and what an ever-unfolding richness this taste of salvation is.

“At the end of this healing time we went outside together. It was not dark in the visioning prayer. There were so many stars stretching to infinity. The sky was all shimmer with a moving veil of light. Either Matushka Olga said or we both heard in our hearts -I can’t remember which -that the moving curtain of light was to be for us a promise that God can create great beauty from complete desolation and nothingness.

For me it was like proof of the healing -great beauty where there had been nothing before but despair hidden by shame and great effort.”

What is one to make of these accounts? If nothing else, for now, one can acknowledge the special place that Matushka Olga has had in the lives of certain native people and a growing number of contemporary women. But it is in the slow and gradually expending process of knowledge which moves from local veneration to broader awareness that God reveals how He can be “wonderful in His Saints.” Matushka Olga herself was a midwife and may also have known from personal experience the traumas of being abused earlier in life. Perhaps it is in this role as an advocate for those who have been abused, particularly sexually, that God will continue to use Matushka Olga in drawing “straight with crooked lines,” His work of “creating beauty from complete desolation and nothingness.” If God wills, may it also one day be possible to exclaim: “O Blessed Mother Olga, pray to God for us!”

