

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

*Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!*



Volume 8 Issue 391

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost—Sunday before the Nativity of Christ

December 22, 2019



During the season of Christmas, many of us will see family members whom we may not visit often. I hope that most of us truly enjoy our family celebrations, but unfortunately they can be difficult for many people because of strained relationships, old resentments, and the fact that no one is perfect, including those to whom we are related by birth or marriage. In the world as we know it, family can be a

struggle.

Our gospel reading today does not shy away from such difficulties, even in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, Who had the right heritage to be the Messiah, the anointed One in Whom all God's promises to Abraham are fulfilled for the entire world. What family would not be strained by remembrance of scandalous stories involving figures such as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, Gentile women who were disreputable in one way or another, precisely the sort of women Jewish men were told time and again not to bring into the family.

For example, Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and bore twins by her father-in-law. Rahab actually was a prostitute. King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband. Ruth was King

*(continued p. 3)*

## **The Signs of a Correct Spiritual Life, Archimandrite Andreas**

Someone once asked me, "How do I know that I'm leading a proper life in the Church? Some often go to church, pray, participate in the services, partake of the Sacraments, but I do not see any noticeable changes in their lives, or rather, I see the same kind of people in the world; I was expecting more from them.

What are the signs of a proper church life?" I cannot say that there are a certain number of signs. God does the

"calculations", because the changes are internal, secret, hidden from us externally.

On the one hand, only you and God know about what is happening in the recesses of your soul, and on the other, some things are determined by your behavior with your spouse, children, with others. Some older people say, "I have been going to church since I was a child." So what? What is the result? What have you achieved over the years? I mean, you can't

say that you've been going to a gym, say, for five years and five months, and that you had a weight of eighty kilos, but now you weigh 110 kilos.

Or that you've been learning English for many years, but when you get to the airport you're not capable of coherently putting together two or three words. When you say that you are near Christ, there will be fruit, there is no other way. Your

*(continued p.2)*

**\*\* 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost \*\***

**\* Sunday before the Nativity \***

Epistle: Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40

Gospel: Matthew 1: 1-25

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.

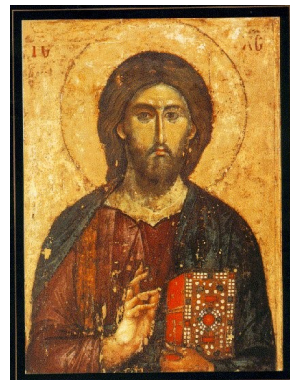
We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

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.*

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, 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**

This Nativity night bestowed peace on the whole world; So let no one threaten;

This is the night of the Most Gentle One – Let no one be cruel;

This is the night of the Humble One – Let no one be proud.

Now is the day of joy – Let us not revenge;

Now is the day of Good Will – Let us

not be mean.

In this Day of Peace – Let us not be conquered by anger.

Today the Bountiful impoverished Himself for our sake;

So, rich one, invite the poor to your table.

Today we receive a Gift for which we did not ask;

So let us give alms to those who implore and beg us.

This present Day cast open the heavenly doors to our prayers;

Let us open our door to those who ask our forgiveness.

Today the Divine Being took upon Himself the seal of our humanity, in order for humanity to be decorated by the Seal of Divinity



*(From The Homily on the Nativity of Our Lord, St. Isaac of Syria*

### **The Signs of a Correct Spiritual Life, (continued from p. 1)**

Your inner life will somehow be made manifest on the outside. When you approach Christ, you obtain happiness not from the outside, but inside yourself; that is, you do not grieve over certain events, you do not get disappointed over trifling matters. Someone says something and you are offended; the weather is bad out on the street and you fall into melancholy; whereas one who succeeds in the spiritual life feels peace and tranquility in the depth of his heart, and this is made manifest in all his actions.

I remember the following words of Mother Gabriela: “There is not a man yet born who could hurt my soul, who could take away my joy.” Why is that so? Of course, there were people who annoyed her, offended her, disturbed her, slandered her. But how *you* behave with others is your own problem. How you answer them depends on your life stance, and your life stance is a matter of personal choice. What you want is what you answer them.

If you start to get nervous and shout, then I perceive, according to **St. Porphyrios**, that you are as one who is wounded, struck, and bleeding. If I see you in a state like this, then my behavior should be appropriate. We have to become more dis-



cerning, understanding both our own soul and our brother's.

Once, a long time ago, I got angry at someone and started talking to him rudely, but he kept looking at me calmly. A long time afterwards I

asked him, “How did you endure all that I said to you?” “I understood that you had some kind of problem. I didn't want to upset you any more, I didn't want to hurt you,” he said. Calmly listen to your neighbor, but do not get involved in his problem. This doesn't mean you're dismissive of him. Try to understand him.

One day Fr. Paisios was traveling on a ship from Daphne to Ouranoupolis. He was offered a separate room for monks in order to avoid any worldly people. Father Paisios replied, “What for? Why should I sit alone, other than if I were hiding something? We're all the same.” This is something very important. We have to realize that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ and are moving towards the same goal. The more you grow spiritually, the more you connect with your neighbor.

When you come to understand the words of Christ about what it means to be a servant to your brother, you begin to understand what it means to wash the feet of another.



David's great-grandmother and a Moabite woman. The Old Testament is full of warnings to Jewish men against marrying Gentile women like Ruth. Just think for a moment how amazing it is that St. Matthew began his gospel by reminding us of these embarrassing stories. Their presence in the genealogy is a sign that God worked through generations of families not unlike our own to bring salvation to the world.

They are a reminder that His blessings are not only for the proper and upstanding with perfect reputations, but for everyone with faith in the Lord, no matter their memorable failings or roles in embarrassing situations that we would rather forget. Through this shockingly honest family tree, St. Matthew prepares us for the unique Messiah we encounter in Jesus Christ Who came to save sinners, to heal the sick, to exalt the humble, and make those who are dead last in the eyes of the world the very first in the Kingdom of God.

This family tree does not stop with unlikely characters from the Old Testament, for it culminates in the shocking and unconventional event of the Most Holy Theotokos's conception of Christ. That is the kind of news that would shake up any family even today. When we remember that this is the story of the union in Jesus Christ of God and humanity for the salvation of the world, the story becomes even more shocking. For we like to think that God's ways are like our ways, that He favors those who are living the dream, who appear healthy, wealthy, and wise by our culture's standards.

But when we do so, we simply make God in our own image and ultimately let ourselves off the hook as though holiness were not really for us because our lives are not perfect in every way. We forget, however, that many of the Saints we know best were once outrageous sinners, and that even those who were not faced difficult struggles that were embarrassing, unconventional, or inconvenient. Just think of the suspicions people had about the Theotokos and St. Joseph the Betrothed.

Think for a moment of all the sufferings and struggles of the righteous people of the Hebrews. As our epistle reading states, "And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." As astounding as it sounds, the promises to them awaited their fulfillment

until the coming of Christ in Whom we may all become part of this family tree.

For Jews and Gentiles, for the upright and the scandalous alike, He is the vine and we are the branches. Like those who prepared for the coming of Christ and have served Him since, we are also sinners whose lives in many ways fall short and wide of the mark. Perhaps that is why the Son of God chose a human heritage full of imperfect people who often stumbled themselves; perhaps that is why He was born in circumstances that at least outwardly commanded the respect of no one.

Yes, the good news that we will celebrate at Christmas is that there is hope for us all in Him. And if we want to have hope in Christ for ourselves, then we must also not give up hope for other people. Whether family members, friends, coworkers, or whoever, our Savior calls everyone to become part of the current generation of this blessed family tree. Perhaps there are those we think are just too broken, who have made such messes of their lives that they appear as better candidates for condemnation than for salvation.

When we start thinking that way about particular people, we should immediately turn our thoughts to the humble repentance of the Jesus Prayer, for not one of us deserves a place in the Kingdom on the basis of our accomplishments. The Lord's human ancestors include notorious sinners; tax-collectors and prostitutes were among His first followers; St. Peter denied Him three times; and St. Paul had been a persecutor of Christians. If His healing mercy extended even to them and if we want that same grace for ourselves, we simply cannot write anyone off as a hopeless case.

Of course, there are broken and severely strained relationships that we do not have the power to heal. But to the extent that it depends on us, we are to be at peace with everyone. That may mean keeping our mouths shut when we would like to remind someone of their failings or otherwise to criticize them or to slander them behind their back. It may mean small gestures to let others know that, despite a painful history, we do not judge or abandon them. It may mean simply praying in silence for God's mercy on those who have lost their way and for strength to treat others as we would like to be treated. Christ was born to save sinners, not to condemn them.





## *St. Matrona of Moscow (pt. 2)*

With the ascent of the Communists, Matrona's life was in danger. In 1925 at the age of 40 she was forced to flee to a friend's home in the relative anonymity of Moscow. Two of her brothers, Mikhail and Ivan had become staunch Communists and were irritated by the constant stream of the sick and the suffering coming to see their sister in the family home. The brothers also knew the danger they and their family faced from the Communist authorities since their village home had become a place of religious pilgrimage.

Here in Moscow Matrona continued her ministry of prayer intercession for the sick but was forced to continuously move from apartment to apartment, one step ahead of the Communist authorities who sought to put an end to her popularity. She lived as a homeless wanderer without her own home, possessions or even food, being completely dependent on what was given to her.

Once a Communist official came to arrest Matrona who did not leave her residence but calmly waited for his arrival. She greeted him with a warning: "Go, go quickly, there is trouble for you at home! A blind woman has no place to hide. I'll sit here on the bed, I won't go anywhere." Fearful, the policeman ran home to find that his wife had been badly burned by the stove. He managed to get her to the hospital and saved her life. When he returned to his office the next day, his chief asked him: "Well, did you get the blind woman?" He replied: "I'm not taking her anywhere. If that blind woman hadn't told me, I would have lost my wife, but I was able to get her to the hospital in time."

She predicted the day of her death, giving everyone instructions concerning her funeral and burial. Until the end she frequently received Holy Confession and Holy Communion. She remained very humble and like ordinary people she admitted that she was afraid of her approaching death.

Before her death on May 2, 1952 she instructed those around her: "Everyone, everyone who will come to me: tell me, as if I were alive, of your sorrows, and I will see you, and hear you, and help you. After my death few

people will visit my grave, only close friends, and when they die my grave will be abandoned. But after many years people will hear about me and come in crowds for help in their sorrows and with requests for prayer for them to the Lord God, and I will help everyone and listen to everyone."

Blessed Matrona was glorified as a saint of the Orthodox Church on May 2, 1999. Her relics are enshrined in the Protection Monastery in Moscow where every day hundreds of people stand in long lines to bring her their problems, illnesses, and needs as they ask for her prayers before the throne of the Lord.

### *Her Significance*

The life of St. Matrona reminds us that all of us are called to a life of holiness and that this is possible for all of us. She was not a nun, never attended a seminary, in fact was an illiterate, peasant woman yet was so filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit that she was able to see people's needs and sins, predict the future, and perform countless miracles even after her death. The Bible teaches that when a person is cleansed of their sinful passions and is filled with the Holy Spirit the presence of the Spirit produces certain "gifts" or "fruit". These include the ability to read the hearts of people, perform miracles, predict future events... (see 1 Corinthians 12:4-11) as well as characteristics of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness... (see Galatians 5:22)

Why is it that we do not have people like her among us in America today? Where are these people who can predict

the future and perform miracles? St. Matrona was immersed, she was "marinated" in the divine services of the Church, spending countless hours in her village church along with hours daily of her own private prayer.

What are we in America immersed or marinated in? To what do we devote our time? Television, internet, Facebook, movies, magazines, shopping.... The Bible also describes the "fruit" of this type of immersion: adultery, fornication, hatred, jealousy, selfish ambition, dissension... (see Galatians 5:19) Which do you prefer in your life, the fruit which St. Matrona had or the fruit of this world?

