

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

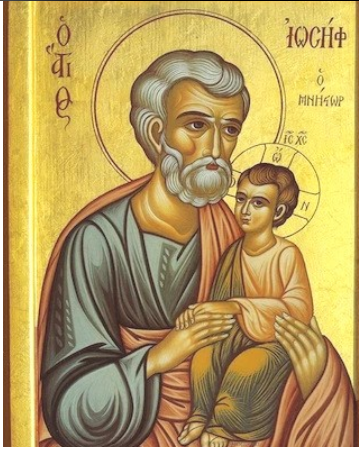
Christ is Born! Glorify Him!



Volume 8 Issue 392

28th Sunday after Pentecost—Sunday after the Nativity of Christ

December 29, 2019



As we continue to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, we should acknowledge that we are probably so familiar with the Christmas story that we often imagine it happened in a world quite different from our own. We tend to make His Nativity a sentimental event that we celebrate yearly with various cultural customs before going back to life as usual. When we do so, howev-

er, we miss the point of how this great Feast challenges us to live faithfully in the very same world in which the Savior was born as a vulnerable Child.

Today we remember a crucial, and often overlooked, figure in the real-life drama of Christmas: Joseph the Betrothed, an elderly relative of the Virgin Mary who reluctantly became her guardian when she had to leave the Temple where she had grown up. One of the verses chanted at vespers last night states that “a strange betrothal fell unto his lot,” and that is surely an understatement.

Betrothal was an arrangement in which a man became the guardian of a woman; it did not imply the intimate relations of marriage. As an 80-year-old widower, Joseph did not want to take on this responsibility for the teen-aged Virgin Mary, but he obeyed

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How often should we take Holy Communion? by Fr. Andreas Agathokleous

Our participation in Holy Communion is a spiritual matter concerning which the opinions expressed have fluctuated over time. From the view that we should commune only infrequently, out of respect for the sacrament and recognition of our own sinfulness, to the attitude that we should take communion every time we attend the Divine Liturgy, since this expresses our capacity as members of the Church.

We realize that there's no answer to extreme

positions, other than that which says that the answer lies not so much in the quantity of our participation in the Chalice of Life, but rather in the quality. Not so much how many times we take communion but simply how we do so.

It's self-evident that no sacrament by itself can affect our transformation and sanctification unless we wish it to. Indeed, instead of being ‘for the remission of sins and life everlasting’ participation in Holy Communion can

become ‘for judgment and condemnation’.

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**** 28th Sunday after Pentecost ****

Righteous Joseph, David, & James

Epistle: Galatians 1:11-19

Gospel: Matthew 2: 13-23

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.

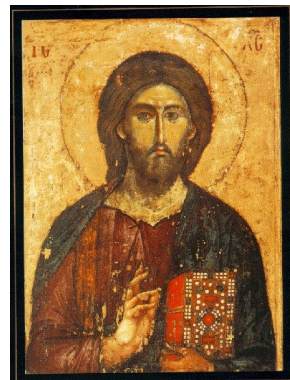
We are dedicated to living out Christ's commandment to, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

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

When God, the Son of God, entered the womb of All-Holy Virgin and took flesh from her, He was born a perfect person and perfect God, without confusion. When has anything more important ever happened for us? We all believe in this Son of God and Son of the ever-virgin Mother of God, Mary, which is why we confidently accept this information about Him and this

event. If we confess Him and repent from the bottom of our heart then the word of devotion [to Him] is born within us like a seed, in exactly the same way as the Word of the Father entered the womb of the Virgin. Marvel at this great and astonishing miracle and accept it in all certainty and faith.

So we conceive this Word, not bodily, as the Virgin and Mother of God did, but spiritually and in truth. And we have Him in our hearts Who is the same Christ born of the Pure Virgin, as Saint Paul says:

‘For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ (II Cor. 4, 6), as if saying: ‘He’s been wholly born within us’.

From St. Symeon the New Theologian



How often should we take Holy Communion, (continued from p. 1)

our capacity as members of the Church.

We realize that there’s no answer to extreme positions, other than that which says that the answer lies not so much in the quantity of our participation in the Chalice of Life, but rather in the quality. Not so much how many times we take communion but simply how we do so.

It’s self-evident that no sacrament by itself can affect our transformation and sanctification unless we wish it to. Indeed, instead of being ‘for the remission of sins and life everlasting’ participation in Holy Communion can become ‘for judgment and condemnation’.

Within its bosom, the Church doesn’t have perfect and sinless people, but those who repent. Christ came to ‘call sinners to repentance’. The notion that, in order to take communion we should be perfectly ‘cleansed from the stain of sin’ is not only absent from the teaching of the Church, but is also unrealistic. We know that we’re all in a fallen state

and that ‘only Christ is without sin’. This recognition will prevent any Pharisaical temptation to consider ourselves better than others because we don’t commit any of the great sins and are therefore ‘not like other people’.

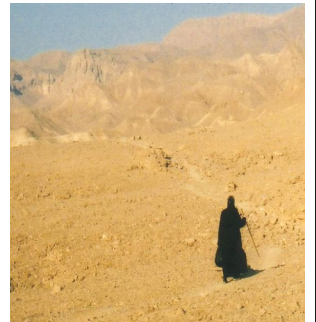
The criterion for participation in Holy Communion are, of course, first that we’ve been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity and that we believe what the Orthodox Church does. The second is that we repent and wish to be united to Christ ‘for the remission of sins and life everlasting’. These basic criteria will bring us to the point where we extend forgiveness to those who have wronged us and ask forgiveness from those we’ve wronged, to prayer and care, so that we go to Holy Communion in the expectation of Christ’s entry into our heart. A heart full of passions, full of bad thoughts, a life disordered and in disarray.

Then, when we receive Him in Communion, He comes and transforms the darkness within us into

light, His light, the turmoil within us into serenity where everything’s under control, in order and takes the form of what suits us best.

In the face of this blessing, there’s no room for the question: ‘When should I take communion?’ Because the need of the heart doesn’t ask such questions. If it so desires, it proceeds as quickly as it can for as long as it can, towards Holy Communion, in order to be united with its Beloved and find its equilibrium, its center, its position so that it can experience the joy and peace it seeks.

On the evening of the Last Supper, Christ gave the Church the sacrament of the Divine Eucharist so that He could be united with us and confirm His love for us. When we take Holy Communion we respond to His love.



God's command nonetheless. That is how he came to play a key role in the salvation of our world of corruption.

The story of Joseph connects with so much of the heritage of the Old Testament. An evil ruler wanted to murder the young Savior because He viewed Him as a threat. Pharaoh had ordered the deaths of Hebrew male infants long ago in Egypt, and now a wicked king like him reigned in Israel. Herod slaughtered the young boys in and around Bethlehem when he realized that the wise men had tricked him.

In the Exodus, the Hebrews had fled Egypt on the night of the Passover. Now the young Messiah flees Israel to go to Egypt at night. Once the danger had passed, Joseph brought the family back to the Promised Land, just as the Hebrews eventually returned after wandering in the desert for forty years. Recall also the story in Genesis of another Joseph. He went to Egypt unwillingly, as a slave, but eventually saved his whole family from a famine by bringing them there.

Matthew's gospel describes Joseph's role in the Lord's early life with obvious Old Testament symbolism. The point is not simply to glorify Joseph, of course, but to show how Christ fulfills God's promise of a Savior to the Hebrews and to all people. Joseph's story is a clear reminder that God calls people to cooperate with His gracious plans to bring salvation, blessing, and healing to the entire world. No, that world is not one of imaginary sentimental perfection, but the very same one inhabited today by those who suffer from persecution, abuse, and war. There are still many "Herods" among us.

The necessity of our free response to God's calling in such a world should be obvious at Christmas. The Theotokos freely chose to say "yes" when the Archangel Gabriel visited her with the good news that she was chosen to be the Virgin Mother of the Son of God. Despite his reluctance to become her guardian in the first place, old Joseph accepted the responsibility. And then after being horrified to discover her pregnancy, he had the faith to believe the message of the angel that the Child was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Despite his advanced age, Joseph successfully guided his family to Egypt as they fled the murderous Herod. He had not anticipated

involvement in such a dangerous set of circumstances in his latter years, but he did what had to be done for the safety of his family, as so many parents struggle to do today in life-threatening circumstances around the world.

The example of Joseph reminds us that God uses our cooperation to accomplish His gracious purposes in the world. That was certainly the case in the Old Testament: Abraham, Moses, David, and countless others responded to God's initiative, and He worked through them, despite their many failings. The same is certainly true of the Theotokos, for through the free response of a teenaged Palestinian Jewish girl came the Messiah in

Whom the ancient promises to the descendants of Abraham are fulfilled and extended to the entire world.

The details of our Lord's conception, birth, and infancy show that God does not force people to obey Him. It is entirely possible to disregard God and refuse to live as those created in the divine image and likeness. Herod provides a shockingly clear example of where the choice to turn away from truth and goodness leads. Doing so does not simply weaken us as particular people, but also frustrates the accomplishment of God's blessing and healing of the world. Just look at the pain and brokenness that violence, hatred, and lust for power still bring to people today. Unfortunately, Herod remains an all too familiar figure when-

ever the lives of the weak and innocent become inconvenient and expendable before the dominant forces of the world as we know it.

Let us celebrate Christmas by growing in our cooperation with God's good purposes for us in the broken world we inhabit. That means rejecting the lie that we are isolated individuals who will find fulfillment in getting what we want on our own terms in any area of life. It means learning to see and serve Christ in neighbors, family members, and coworkers, in the lonely, sick, and suffering, and especially in anyone we are inclined to view as an enemy. It means turning off non-stop media and disregarding intrusive thoughts as we open our hearts to God in the stillness of the Jesus Prayer. It means undergoing a change of mind such that fulfilling our role in the salvation of the world becomes what is most important to us, even when that is difficult and we would rather be doing something else.



Christmas Joy and Thanks

Each year I am amazed by the kindness, generosity, and prayerful spirit of the parishioners at St. George. You demonstrate true faith by living the life of the Gospel, and by your works, show others how one can achieve a Life in Christ. Your faithful attendance at the Divine Liturgy and other services testifies to your commitment to “commend ourselves and our whole life, to Christ our God.”

First, I wish to thank Gibran and Mary for their tireless efforts to keep the church in good working order. From cutting the grass and shoveling snow to cleaning the gutters and repainting the outdoor cross, they make time to put Christ into their lives.

Secondly, I want to thank our readers-Leaf, Paula, and Judy-who offer their voices as a gift when they chant the epistle and other verses during the liturgy. We are inspired by their dedication and commitment.

Next, I thank the altar servers, Leum and Quinn, who assist me at the altar during the liturgy. Their help allows me to concentrate on the prayers and stand before the “Living God” with awe. And when they are not available, I rely on Gibran and Marion, our veteran altar servers, for their willingness to stand in and be a presence at the altar.

I would be remiss if I did not mention those who sing the responses so beautifully every Sunday-Joe, Karen, Linda, Mary, Marthanne, Catherine, Lorraine, Meggie, Noelle, Gus, and Paula. Your voices inspire and lift all of our souls allowing us to be present with God and “lay aside all earthly cares.”

Finally, I want to thank Katrina for her tireless efforts to lead us in song at every liturgy and service. No matter how difficult the music may be, she sings like an angel guiding us over the melodies and keeping us in tune. She shares her gifted voice with us, and in so doing, makes our liturgy and worship extra special.

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A special thanks for those who donated and assisted with decorating the Church for the Christmas Holiday. Here is a list of those who sponsored poinsettias:

Catherine and Lorraine Abraham-in memory of the departed members of the Abraham family.

Gibran and Mary Baida-in memory of Elia & Mary Baida; Ed and Mary Jane Mikula.

Marion and Linda George-in memory of Abraham & Helenie George, Abraham George, Jr. Mary George, Nicholas George, Casper George, Alfred George, Bonnie Baldwin, Gerald Bouton, Herb & Ruth Moravia, Ivan and Gladys Bouton; for the health of the George Family.

Gus Isaac-in memory of the departed members of the Isaac family and for the health of the Isaac family.

Marthanne Moses-for the health of Catherine and Lorraine Abraham.

Joe and Karen Philip-in memory of Joe & Betty Philip and Abbott and Aggie Philip.

Paula Tucker-in memory of Stephen Melnick, Patricia Tucker, and Gerald Tucker; for the health of John Tucker Jenny Tucker, Pia Tucker, and Katie Tucker.

May God bless all in the New Year with peace, good health and prosperity. Happy New Year.

