

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

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Christ is Risen! Al Maseeh Qam! Christos Voskrese!

Volume 8 Issues 18

2nd Sunday of Pascha-St. Thomas Sunday

May 5, 2019



As we continue to celebrate the glorious good news of this season of Pascha, we recall how Christ called doubting Thomas to faith in His great victory. “He said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.’ Thomas answered Him, ‘My Lord and

my God!’” Still bearing His wounds even in His glorified body as the God-Man, the Risen Christ brought Thomas to faith through the witness of His own deified flesh.

We have probably heard the story so many times that we have become deaf to its importance. Nonetheless, it remains the case that the Savior’s resurrection is not an escape from the body or the physical world, but instead their healing and sanctification. Likewise, St. John referred in his epistle to that “which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it...” The Apostles saw the Lord after His resurrection with their eyes, touched Him with their hands, heard His voice with their ears, felt His breath on their skin, and

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The Blast of a Trumpet by Fr. Lawrence Farley

From the prophecies of Isaiah: “It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the Lord in the holy mountain at Jerusalem” (Isaiah 27:13).

The prophet here surveys the world around him, and sees how the people of God were languishing in exile, scattered to the four winds and perishing helplessly

in the lands of the mighty superpowers of the day, Assyria and Egypt. Israel was tiny, powerless, unable to lift a finger to help; the superpowers sat invincible on their haughty thrones, intent upon keeping their prey within their grip.

But help would arrive, and it would come about that in the day God arose to shake the towers and counsels of the great, He would save His people. A great trumpet would be blown, the signal of deliverance and freedom,

a summons for the exiles to arise and be free and come home.

Why a trumpet? Why not (for example) a signal fire, or the waving of a standard? Why a trumpet blast, and what did the blast of a trumpet mean to Israel? For one thing, it meant the Year of Jubilee. In the Law, every seventh year was a year of release, a year when all the slaves were to be set free (Exodus 21:1), and after every forty-nine years, i.e.

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** 2nd Sunday of Holy Pascha **

**** Sunday of St. Thomas ****

Epistle: Acts 5: 15– 20

Gospel: John: 20: 19-31

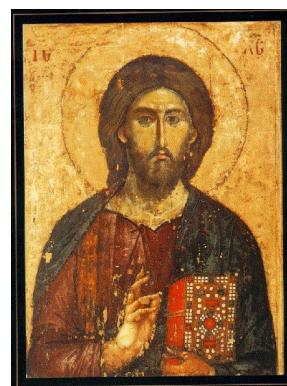
St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and the teachings of the Church.

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 worshiping with us today and invite you down to the church hall for our social hour.

Pray without ceasing (I 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, Peg, Christopher, Jackie, Karoline, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Andrea, Samuel, Anatoly, Linda, Alexy, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, and those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Commentary on the Our Father

Our Father who art in Heaven.

Unusually in the history of religion, the fundamental Christian prayer begins in the plural. One possible explanation is that the text that we have is actually a liturgical text. Such a liturgical text would necessarily be in the plural because it would be part of the practice of group worship. That this might be so is witnessed by the liturgical doxology which follows the prayer. And indeed the Our Father is prayed cor-

porately in the Divine Liturgy.

However, there is no tradition in the Orthodox Church that the Our Father is merely a liturgical prayer; rather the Fathers consider the prayer the fundamental prayer of Christians, a prayer taught by God. And, it seems to us that the Our Father contains the Gospel in a nutshell. Hence, we must take the plural as conveying something deeper than merely an original liturgical setting of the Our Father.

The basic message we take from the plural is that we are not saved as isolated individuals but as members of the Church. The Church is so fundamental a concept in Christianity that it behoves us to pray for all members of the Church even when we are praying just for ourselves.

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Behind Closed Doors, cont'd from p.1)

seven times seven years—freedom would come to all in the land: “You shall consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you.” (Leviticus 25:10). No matter what had happened by way of poverty or misfortune, whatever the disaster which had forced the poor man to sell his land to pay his debts, once every lifetime, once every fifty years, everyone had a second chance to start over.

Everyone could go free, everyone could go home. The downtrodden waited to hear the blast of that jubilee trumpet—and indeed the very word “jubilee” comes from the Hebrew word for “ram’s horn” or “trumpet”. When the Septuagint writers encountered the Hebrew word, they rendered it “signal of release.”

That is why the signal for the gathering of the exiles was a trumpet, for God was announcing a worldwide jubilee for His people. Their Assyrian and Egyptian oppressors and debtors might rage all they liked, but His peo-

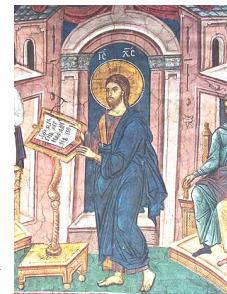
ple had been set free and were going home. Every debt was remitted, and every shackle was shattered, every bond, broken.

This prophecy of restoration, like all such prophecies, finds its fulfillment in Christ. He is our Jubilee, the Jubilee of all the world, and His Resurrection is the trumpet which announces it. With the rolling away of the stone from the door of the tomb, a trumpet began sounding which has never ceased to sound. It calls all the exiles home, announcing the forgiveness of every debt, liberation from every bond of sin and death.

And not just the Jewish exiles, for Christ died not only for the Jewish nation, “but He that might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad”, Gentiles as well as Jews (John 11:52). As many in the world whom God taught and who heard the voice of the Shepherd, just as many God would gather into one, “and they shall become one flock with one Shepherd” (John 10:16). It did not matter whether or

not one was a great sinner, or bound by shackles of addiction and despair. It did not matter whether or not one lived in the land of Assyria or the land of Egypt—Christ came to forgive and liberate all, and gather the exile safe and sound in His holy flock.

What then is our responsibility? Pascha calls us to live like men and women who have heard the blast of a trumpet, who have arisen like those alive from the dead, living in joy. Nietzsche famously said that he would believe in the Redeemer when the Christians looked a little more redeemed. Fair enough: let us live in such a way that all may know that we have been redeemed—the faces of those who have heard the blast of the Jubilee trumpet. Let that trumpet sound in the ears of the weary world, loud enough to wake the dead: Christ is risen!



even saw Him eat food. (Luke 24: 36-43)

The good news that “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” comes from a resurrection in glory of a complete Person with a human body marked by the wounds of torture and crucifixion. His resurrection is not an escape from the body, but its fulfillment. The Eternal Word Who created us by breathing into the dust of the earth now breathes physically on His Disciples as He empowers them to carry out His ministry of bringing salvation to the world, even to the point of forgiving sins in His name. Here are powerful signs of what it means for human beings to be in the likeness of God and partakers of the divine nature by grace.

These are not merely details of ancient history, but reminders that we participate in Christ’s Passover from death to life by how we live as whole, embodied persons. We were baptized physically with water into Christ’s death in order to put Him on like a garment, in order to rise with Him into a new life of holiness. To be blunt, the Christian life is not simply about our emotions, ideas, or opinions; it is not reduced to what we say we believe. For those who are truly in Christ will live in ways that manifest the brilliant life of the resurrection, that radiate the holy light of the Savior’s great victory over sin and death. As St. John put it, “If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

We participate in the new life of our Risen Lord by walking into His light, by embracing as fully as we can the blessed healing of the human being that He has brought to the world. Christ’s Passion was not a matter simply of His feelings, words, or ideas, but of His complete Self-offering through crucifixion, burial, descent to Hades, and resurrection from the dead. He rises in glory with His wounds, and we cannot begin to make sense of His salvation without speaking of the most bodily of realities, such as torture, execution, death, and burial in a tomb that was later found to be empty.

We are probably all tempted at times to think how much easier it would be to serve God if we did not have

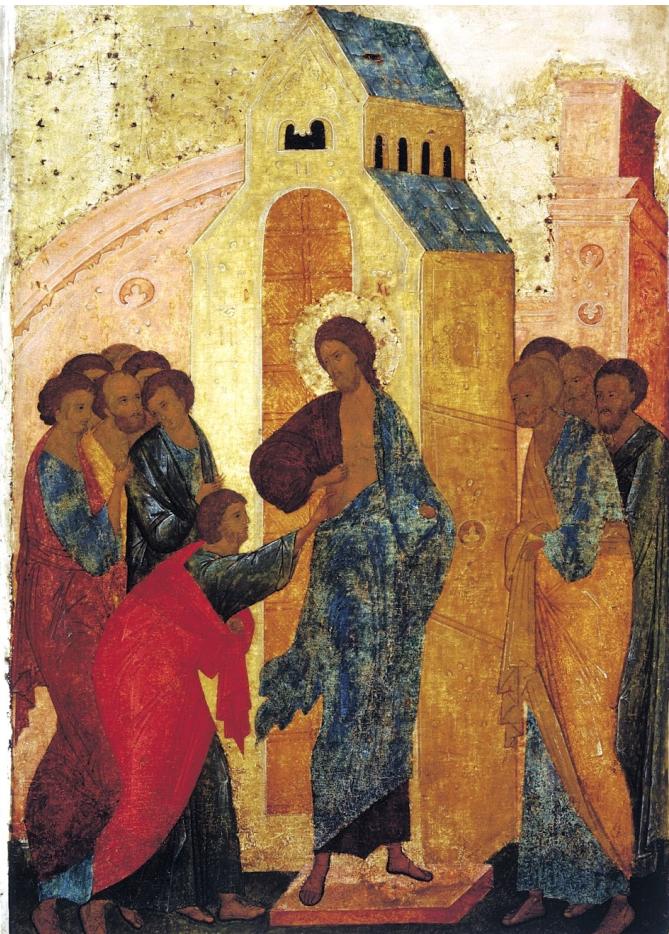
our particular set of bodily limitations and problems. Some are challenged by physical or mental illness, while others wrestle with passions for the pleasures of food, sex, alcohol, technology, shopping, or other behaviors. And whether it is greed, sloth, anger, or refusal to help the needy with our time, attention, and resources, there is no sin that does not show itself physically in some way in the lives of those who struggle with it.

No matter what someone’s particular struggles, weaknesses, or failings are, we must respond with compassion, for we too are among the sick who need the Physician. Nonetheless, no physical condition can ever make us sin or do evil. The problem is not that we have bodies, but that we choose to remain in the tomb, that we would rather walk in the darkness than in the light.

For it is no sin to be ill or to be tempted in any way. The Lord Himself suffered terribly on the cross and was tempted. It is a sin, however, to let any of our wounds become excuses for not walking in the light as best we can. It is a sin to let anything fill our lives with such darkness that we refuse to open our eyes—and our lives—to the good news of the resurrection. It is a sin when we think that God must remove this or that problem in order to earn our faithfulness, in order to be worthy of our devotion. As we celebrate Christ’s great victory over sin and death, we must not be afraid to expose our wounded

selves to Him with humility as we say with St. Thomas “My Lord and my God!”? Even our darkest inclinations ultimately do not stand a chance against His glory, if we will only expose them to Him, if we will only offer them to Him for healing.

The good news is that Christ does not ask us to conquer sin and death by our own power, for He has already done that. But He does ask us truly to have faith, which requires a faithful life, even as we constantly ask for His mercy and strength to participate as fully as possible in the joy of His resurrection. So let us celebrate Pascha by walking in the light as best we can with all our wounds, for that is how we will open ourselves to the light that has made even the tomb radiant with the divine glory. If He can do that to a grave, just imagine what He can do with us.



The Miracle of the Holy Fire

The ceremony, which awes the souls of Christians, takes place in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. The date for Pascha is determined anew for every year. It must be a first Sunday after the spring equinox and Jewish Passover. Therefore, most of the time it differs from the date of Catholic and Protestant Easter, which is determined using different criteria. The Holy Fire is the most renowned miracle in the world of Eastern Orthodoxy. It has taken place at the same time, in the same manner, in the same place every single year for centuries. No other miracle is known to occur so regularly and so steadily over time. It happens in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, the holiest place on earth, where Christ was crucified, entombed, and where He finally rose from the dead.

The Sepulcher is located in the small chapel called Holy Ciborium, which is inside the Church of the Resurrection. Beginning at around 11:00 in the morning the Christian Arabs chant traditional hymns in a loud voice. These chants date back to the Turkish occupation of Jerusalem in the 13th century, a period in which the Christians were not allowed to chant anywhere but in the churches. "We are the Christians, we have been Christians for centuries, and we shall be forever and ever.

Amen!"

- They chant at the top of their voices accompanied by the sound of drums. The drummers sit on the shoulders of others who dance vigorously around the Holy Ciborium. But at 1:00 pm the chants fade out, and then there is a silence. A tense silence, charged from the anticipation of the great demonstration of God's power for all to witness.

Shortly thereafter, a delegation from the local authorities elbows its way through the crowd. At the time of the Turkish occupation of Palestine they were Muslim Turks; today they are Israelis. Their function is to represent the Romans at the time of Jesus. The Gospels speak of the Romans that went to seal the tomb of Jesus, so that his disciples would not steal his body and claim he had risen.



In the same way the Israeli authorities on this Holy Saturday come and seal the tomb with wax. Before they seal the door, they follow a custom to enter the tomb, and to check for any hidden source of fire, which would make a fraud of the miracle.

The Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem enters the tomb and kneels in holy fear in front of the place where Christ lay after His death and where He rose again from the dead. He finds his way through the darkness towards the inner chamber in which he falls on his knees. He then

says certain prayers that have been handed down through the centuries and, having said them, he waits. Sometimes he may wait a few minutes, but normally the miracle happens immediately after saying the prayers. From the core of the very stone on which Jesus lay an indefinable light pours forth. It usually has a blue tint, but the color may change and take many different hues. It cannot be described in human terms. The light rises out of the stone as mist may rise out of a lake — it almost looks as if the stone is covered by a moist cloud, but it is light. This light each year behaves differently. Sometimes it covers just the stone, while other times it gives light to the whole sepulcher, so that people who stand outside the tomb and look into it will see it filled with light. The light does not burn. The light is

of a different consistency than normal fire that burns in an oil lamp... At a certain point the light rises and forms a column in which the fire is of a different nature, so that he is able to light candles from it. When he has received the flame on the candles, he goes out and gives the fire first to the Armenian Patriarch and then to the Coptic. He then gives the flame to all people present in the Church." While the patriarch is inside the chapel kneeling in front of the stone, there is darkness but far from silence outside. One hears a rather loud mumbling, and the atmosphere is very tense. When the Patriarch comes out with the two candles lit and shining brightly in the darkness, a roar of jubilee resounds in the Church.

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