

We would like to welcome all parish visitors and invite you to join us after the Liturgy for Coffee hour.

Orthodox Church of the Mother of God OCA – Diocese of New York-New Jersey

V. Rev. Dr. Matthew Searfoorce, Rector

Sub-Deacon Edward Dawson Sub-Deacon Vlashi

Parish Council President: Trudy Ellmore Parish Council Vice President: Holly Dawson



Sunday, December 20, 2015

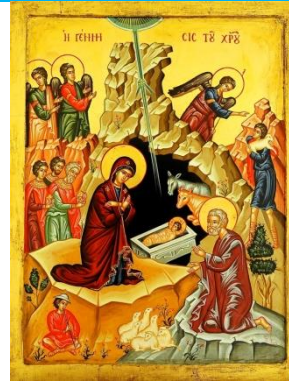
Tone 4

Gospel: Matthew 1:1-25

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

29th Sunday after Pentecost (13th of Luke); Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ and Sunday before the Nativity.

**Glory to
Jesus Christ!**



*Forefeast of the Nativity
of Christ*

**Glory
Forever!**

Prepare, O Bethlehem, for Eden has been opened to all! Adorn yourself, O Ephratha, for the tree of life blossoms forth from the Virgin in the cave! Her womb is a spiritual paradise planted with the Divine Fruit: If we eat of it, we shall live forever and not die like Adam. Christ comes to restore the image which He made in the beginning

Today's Commemorated Feasts and Saints

29th Sunday After Pentecost — Tone 4. Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ; Sunday before the Nativity. Repose of St. John of Kronstadt (1908), Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-bearer, Bishop of Antioch (107). Ven. Ignatii (Ignatius), Archimandrite of the Kiev Caves (Far Caves—1435). St. Philogonius, Bishop of Antioch (323).

Prayer Requests

For Health of:

Maribeth Romanofsky, on her birthday, offered by her family.

Sandra, on her birthday, offered by Linda & Richard

Archpriest Jonathan Ivanoff, presently fighting prostate cancer, offered by NY/NJ Diocese.

For Memory of:

Evelyn Coll, mother of Susan Coll-Guedes.

Vyacheslav Markevich, offered by his daughter Tatsiana and her family.

Liturgical Schedule:

Sunday, December 20th

9:30 am: Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

Thursday, December 24th

7:00 pm: Christmas Liturgy

Saturday, December 26th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, December 27th

9:30 am: Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

Saturday, January 2nd

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, January 3rd

9:30 am: No Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
9:45 am: General Confession
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

Saturday, January 9th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, January 10th

9:30 am: No Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

Bulletin Sponsors:

***Romanofsky Family
Susan Coll-Guedes
Linda & Richard Dantinne
Tatsiana Markevich DaGrosa***

Readings:

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

BRETHREN, by faith Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundation, whose builder and maker is God. And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets - who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated - of whom the world was not worthy - wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. 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.

Gospel: Matthew 1:1-25

The book of the Genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa, and Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father

of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. So all Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.



Bulletin Sponsors/Prayer Requests: Use the sign-up sheet at the candle stand for the health of, eternal memory of or a Pannikhida for a loved one or friend, for a donation of \$10. Bulletin Sponsors/Prayer Requests will be remembered during Divine Liturgy for the day/week that you signed up for.

Memorial Candles: Candles be purchased at the candle stand, suggested donation of \$10 for a large one and \$2 for a small one.

Private Confessions: Can be heard a half hour before any service. See Father Matthew for other times and **General Confession:** Will be at 9:45 am on the first Sunday of the month.

Pannikhida Service: The third Sunday of each month there will be a Pannikhida after Divine Liturgy. If you would like your loved ones to be remembered please give a list of names to Father Matthew before that Sunday for those to be remembered in the month.

Special Announcements for the bulletin can be submitted by E-Mail:
ChurchMotherOfGod@outlook.com

The Living Clean Group of Narcotics Anonymous meets every Friday from 8-9:15 pm downstairs in the community room.

The Grey Book Step Meeting Group of Narcotics Anonymous meets every Tuesday from 7-8:00 pm downstairs in the community room.



Orthodox Church of the Mother of God: Parish News

There will be a parish council meeting today December 20th immediately following coffee hour.

Christmas Liturgy will be held at 7:00pm on the 24th of December (Christmas Eve).



Sisterhood of the Protector of the Mother of God: Announcements

"The Sisterhood raffling of a Nativity gift basket was held Sunday, December 13th and the winner of the basket was Nicholas Zimmerman.

NY/NJ Diocese News



Mays Landing NJ: Visitors Welcomed on Neighborhood Walking Tour - 12/13/15

Orthodox Church of the Mother of God

On Saturday, 12 December 2015, the **Orthodox Church of the Mother of God in Mays Landing NJ** participated in the community's *"Annual Christmas Walking Tour."* Sponsored by the Mays Landing Merchants Association, community members open their decorated homes to ticket-holding visitors. Of the 46 visitors, almost all had

never been in an Orthodox Church, so there was ample opportunity to share the Faith of The Church with them, as well as invitations extended to attend Vespers or Liturgy. Whispers of *"How beautiful!"* were made as people stepped over the threshold into the church. As one person put it, *"What a priceless gem there is in Mays Landing."*



With the pathway lit by luminaries, visitors were greeted at the church doors by Sub-deacon Vlashi (Charles) Gallagher and Council President, Trudy Ellmore. Each person was invited to take a hand-dipped candle from Shen Vlash Monastery (Albania) to light, or take home, and was given a brochure telling about the parish and Orthodox beliefs. Sub-Deacon Vlashi, who has gone on mission trips to the Shen Vlash Monastery with an OCMC mission team the past two years, donated the candles to the church. Council Vice-President, Holly Dawson (a second generation founding member) answered many questions about the parish's history and historical iconography.



Orthodox Church in America (OCA) News

Nativity of our Lord 2015

Archpastoral Message of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

To the Honorable Clergy, Venerable Monastics, and Pious Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,

My Beloved Brethren and Blessed Children in the Lord,

It is my joy and privilege to greet all of you on the radiant feast of the Nativity of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. In some 700 communities large and small sprinkled across the North American continent, from Canada, to the United States and Mexico, we gather together to celebrate the wonder of God’s entry into human history. For many in our society this message is still as foolish as it was in the first century. But we continue to stand with the saints beside the manger, the Cross and the empty tomb to proclaim God’s sacrificial love for us and for His Creation. As we sing on Christmas Day:

*I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord, with my whole heart;
I will make all Thy wonders known
In the company of the upright, in the congregation.
Great are the works of the Lord!
They are studied by all who have pleasure in them!
His work is glory and beauty, and His righteousness endures forever.
—Christmas Day, 1st Antiphon (Psalm 111:1-3)*

Truly, “Great are the works of the Lord!”

He sees a world filled with suffering and He Himself voluntarily suffers to make a path to healing.

He sees a world dying and He Himself dies to bring resurrection and unending life.

He sees a world in darkness and He Himself enters that darkness to bring a divine light that can never be extinguished.

He sees a world in bondage to the forces of evil and He submits Himself to that evil in order to destroy it forever.

The God Who is “ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible and eternally the same” empties Himself of power and divine privilege. He becomes a weak, fragile human being in order to share fully in our broken existence and in so doing offers the possibility of a life in communion with Him, with each other, and with all creation.

May our Lord bless each of you, your communities, and your families as you celebrate His Nativity and serve Him.

With love in the New-Born Christ,

+ **Tikhon**
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada



Teach Youth Basic Orthodoxy in Guatemala This Summer

In Guatemala there are hundreds of children and young adults hungry to learn more about their Orthodox Christian Faith. A short-term OCMC mission team has been invited to offer a summer Church school program for two communities outside Nuevo Conception in southwest Guatemala to teach basic Orthodoxy. If you have a heart for youth or teaching, please prayerfully consider joining this team which will serve from June 15th to the 28th, 2016. To learn more or apply, visit http://www.ocmc.org/about/view_team.aspx?TeamId=170, e-mail teams@ocmc.org, or call 1-877-463-6784/FREE ext. 141.



Forefeast of the Nativity of our Lord

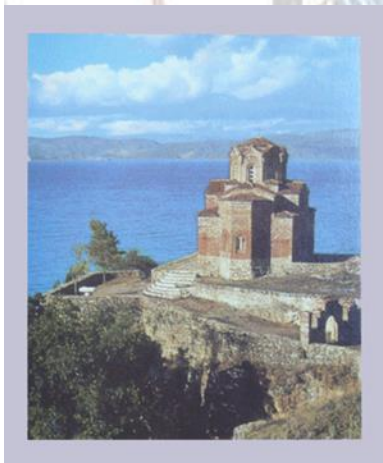
The Forefeast of the Nativity of the Lord begins on December 20. From now on, most of the liturgical hymns will be concerned with the birth of the Savior. Many of the Church's hymns of this period are slightly modified versions of the hymns of Holy Week.

From the 20th to the 23rd we sing the Troparion (Tone 4) "Prepare, O Bethlehem, for Eden has been opened to all. Adorn yourself, O Ephratha, for the Tree of Life blossoms forth from the Virgin in the cave. Her womb is a spiritual paradise planted with the fruit divine; if we eat of it we shall live forever and not

die like Adam. Christ is coming to restore the image which He made in the beginning."

We also sing the Kontakion (Tone 3) "Today the Virgin comes to the cave where she will give birth past understanding to the Word from all eternity. Rejoice, O universe, when the tidings are proclaimed. Glorify, with the angels and shepherds, the one Who chose to be manifest as a newborn Child, while remaining the eternal God."

At Vespers on this first day of the pre-feast we sing, "Let us celebrate, O people, the prefeast of Christ's Nativity; let us raise our minds on high, in spirit going up to Bethlehem...."



Prayers by the Lake, St. Nikolai Velimirovich, XXXVI:

Martyrs of good hope, pray to God for us.

You who have buried all hopes, so that you might be wealthy in a single hope;

Who have awaited the end of many human aspirations, and seen the ashes;

Who have seen many tear-stained eyes returning from the graveyard of their hopes;

Who have heard many confessions concerning the evil stench of every worldly hope from the other realm;

And who have permitted yourselves to be crucified¹ for one special hope, which does not end in ashes, nor in a graveyard, nor in an evil stench.

To you we bow down and pray: "Pray to God for us."

I saw a child chasing after a bird with dappled feathers and a golden beak for a long time, and when he caught it, the bird pecked him and the child began to cry.

I said: "Such are you with your hopes, human children, and such is your end."

Again I saw a child running after a swarm of spring butterflies for a long time, and when one butterfly was near him, he left it and ran off after the others, which seemed to him to be more beautiful.

I said: "Such are the sons of men, and such is their running through the whole of life after many desires."

Truly, your race is tiring and futile. If the hour of death comes upon you, you will not be able to say what it is that you have been pursuing. And you will enter into the other world with empty hands and a perplexed heart.

The race of the sons of heaven is also tiring, but is not futile. And when the hour of death comes upon them, they will be able to say what it is that they have been pursuing. And in the other world they will have full hands and a restful heart.

An eagle beneath the clouds sees a lamb in the field and descends toward it, and asks the sparrows perched on the back of the lamb: "Do you not see the lamb?" And they answer him: "No, we do not see it." So it is with martyrs of good hope. At a great distance they spot their nourishment, while those next to the nourishment are walking over it without seeing it.

The race for good hope is a long one. But a champion sets his mind on the race, and casts all illusory hopes beneath his feet and tramples over them like dry leaves. There are many, very many hurdles between him and his hope;--and death is one of the hurdles. But he leaps over them all; he even leaps over death, and pursues his hope.

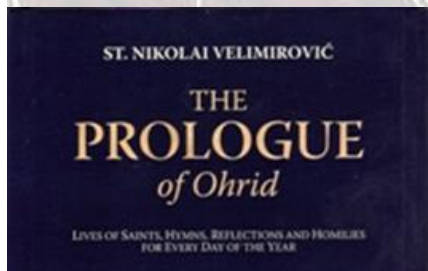
Martyrs of good hope, who flutter around the Light of Heaven like a flock of white doves, pray to God for us.

Sayings of the Ascetics of the Orthodox Church, XXXV:

Unbelief

Each of us can discuss God inasmuch as he has known the grace of the Holy Spirit; for how can we think of or discuss what we haven't seen, or haven't heard of, or don't know? The saints say that they have seen God, but there are people who say that there is no God. Clearly, they say this because they haven't known God, but this does not at all mean that He is not. The saints speak of that which they have truly seen and know.

St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, VIII.9



1. The Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-Bearer

This holy man is called "the God-bearer" because he constantly bore the name of the Living God in his heart and on his lips. According to tradition, he was thus named because he was held in the arms of God Incarnate, Jesus Christ. On a day when the Lord was teaching His disciples humility, He took a child and placed him among them, saying: *Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven* (Matthew 18:4). This child was Ignatius. Later, Ignatius was a disciple of St. John the Theologian, together with Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna. As Bishop of Antioch, Ignatius governed the Church of God as a good shepherd and was the first to introduce antiphonal chanting in the Church, in which two choirs alternate the chanting. This manner of chanting was revealed to St. Ignatius by the angels in heaven. When Emperor Trajan was passing through

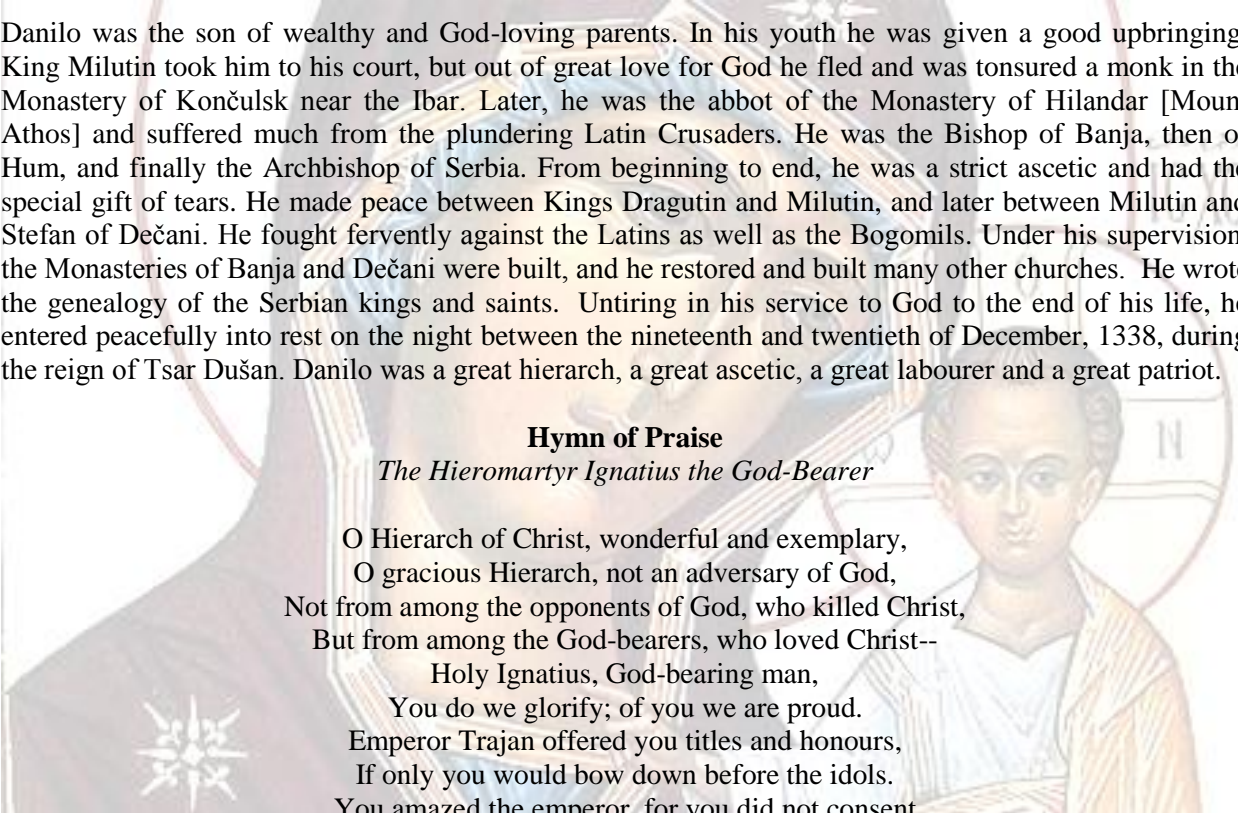
Antioch on his way to do battle with the Persians, he heard of Ignatius, summoned him and counseled him to offer sacrifice to the idols. If Ignatius would do so, Trajan would bestow upon him the rank of senator. As the counsels and threats of the emperor were in vain, St. Ignatius was shackled in irons and sent to Rome in the company of ten merciless soldiers, to be thrown to the wild beasts. Ignatius rejoiced in suffering for his Lord, only praying to God that the wild beasts would become the tomb for his body and that no one would prevent him from this death. After a long and difficult journey from Asia through Thrace, Macedonia and Epirus, Ignatius arrived in Rome, where he was thrown to the lions in the circus. The lions tore him to pieces and devoured him, leaving only several of the larger bones and his heart. This glorious lover of the Lord Christ suffered in the year 106 in Rome at the time of the Christ-hating Emperor Trajan. Ignatius has appeared many times from the other world and worked miracles, even to this day helping all who call upon him for help.

2. Saint Danilo, Archbishop of Serbia

Danilo was the son of wealthy and God-loving parents. In his youth he was given a good upbringing. King Milutin took him to his court, but out of great love for God he fled and was tonsured a monk in the Monastery of Končulsk near the Ibar. Later, he was the abbot of the Monastery of Hilandar [Mount Athos] and suffered much from the plundering Latin Crusaders. He was the Bishop of Banja, then of Hum, and finally the Archbishop of Serbia. From beginning to end, he was a strict ascetic and had the special gift of tears. He made peace between Kings Dragutin and Milutin, and later between Milutin and Stefan of Dečani. He fought fervently against the Latins as well as the Bogomils. Under his supervision, the Monasteries of Banja and Dečani were built, and he restored and built many other churches. He wrote the genealogy of the Serbian kings and saints. Untiring in his service to God to the end of his life, he entered peacefully into rest on the night between the nineteenth and twentieth of December, 1338, during the reign of Tsar Dušan. Danilo was a great hierarch, a great ascetic, a great labourer and a great patriot.

Hymn of Praise

The Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-Bearer



O Hierarch of Christ, wonderful and exemplary,
O gracious Hierarch, not an adversary of God,
Not from among the opponents of God, who killed Christ,
But from among the God-bearers, who loved Christ--
Holy Ignatius, God-bearing man,
You do we glorify; of you we are proud.
Emperor Trajan offered you titles and honours,
If only you would bow down before the idols.
You amazed the emperor, for you did not consent
To betray the Lord, not for the entire kingdom.
Instead, you went joyfully to death, O God-bearing Father;
For that we glorify you; of you we are proud.
Thrown before wild beasts, quietly you wait.
Rome seeks amusement; they toy with you!
"I am God's wheat!" you exclaimed there.
"The beasts shall grind me, to become good bread!"
And now, where is Trajan? But you are an inhabitant of heaven.
You are a hymn to the angels, and to us a teacher.
Holy Ignatius, you who bore God,
Entreat God to grant us the Bread of Life!

Reflection

The holy martyrs, seized with the love of Christ, were like unquenchable flames. This love eased their sufferings and made their deaths sweet. St. Chrysostom says of St. Ignatius: "He put off his body with as much ease as one takes off his clothes." Traveling to Rome to his death, Ignatius feared only one thing: that Christians would somehow prevent his martyrdom for Christ, by their prayers to God or in some outward manner. Therefore he continually implored them, in writing and in speech, not to do this. "Forgive me," he said. "I know what is for my benefit. I but begin to be a disciple of Christ when I desire nothing, either visible or invisible, save to attain Christ. May every diabolical torture come upon me: fire, crucifixion, wild beasts, the sword, tearing asunder, the crushing of my bones, and the dismemberment of my whole body--only that I may receive Jesus Christ. It is better for me to die for Christ than to reign to the ends of the earth.... My love is nailed to the Cross, and there is no fire of love in me for any earthly thing." When he was brought to the circus, he turned to the people with these words: "Citizens of Rome, know that I am not being punished for any crime, neither have I been condemned to death for any transgression, but rather for the sake of my God, by Whose love I am overcome and Whom I insatiably desire. I am His wheat, and the teeth of the wild beasts will grind me to be His pure bread." When he had been devoured by the wild beasts, by God's providence his heart remained among the bones. When the unbelievers cut open the saint's heart, they saw inside, inscribed in golden letters, the name Jesus Christ.

Contemplation

Contemplate the courage of Joshua the son of Nun:

1. How Joshua held unswervingly to all the Lord's commandments;
2. How, with faith in God's help, he courageously entered into every battle against the enemies of his people;
3. How he was victorious everywhere and ascribed all his victories to God.

Homily: on David

*And David said to Nathan: I have sinned against the Lord (II Samuel 12:13).
My tears have been my food day and night (Psalm 42:3).*

King David sinned against God and repented, and God forgave him. The king's sin was great, but greater still was his repentance. He was guilty before God of two grave sins: adultery and murder. But when Nathan the prophet of God denounced him, he cried out in anguish: *I have sinned against the Lord!* Thus he confessed his sin and repented bitterly, most bitterly. Grief-stricken, he prayed to God, weeping, fasting, lying on the ground, and enduring meekly the terrible blows that God sent upon him, his house and his people because of his sins. In his penitential Psalms he says: *I am a worm and not a man* (Psalm 22:6); *Because of the sound of my groaning, my bones cling to my flesh* (Psalm 102:5); *I lie awake ... for I have eaten ashes like bread and mingled my drink with weeping* (Psalm 102:7, 9); *My knees are grown weak through fasting* (Psalm 109:24). Here is true repentance; here is a true penitent! He did not become hardened in sin nor did he fall into despair, but, hoping in the mercy of God, he repented unceasingly. And God, Who loves the penitent, showed mercy upon this model of penitence. God forgave him and glorified him above all the kings of Israel; He gave him the great grace to compose the most beautiful penitential prayers and to prophesy the coming into the world of the Holy Savior, Who would be of his seed. Brethren, do you see how wonderful is God's mercy toward penitents? So much mercy did God have on this repentant David that He was not ashamed to take upon Himself flesh from David's seed. Blessed are they who do not become hardened in sin and who do not fall into despair because of sin. Repentance saves both the one and the other from evil.

O Merciful Lord, soften our hearts with tears of repentance.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.



The Morning Offering – Daily Inspiration with Abbott Tryphon

Our Need for Christ

Without Christ the world is devoid of hope

Without Christ our world is devoid of hope, and for others to know this Christ, they must be able to see Him in us. The light of this very Christ must shine forth through the love of His Church and be made manifest in the works of His people. Without this love there is only darkness upon the face of our world, and the world will remain without hope.

Others cannot know they need Christ if they do not see Him in us. They do not know this Christ fills hearts and transforms lives if they do not see transformation in us. If we are fearful, angry, judgmental, arrogant or aloof, the world will see nothing in our Christian faith worthy seeking.

If others do not see in you a forgiving heart, how will they know there is forgiveness in Christ? If others do not see in you a heart filled with joy, how will they know they need the very Christ whom you proclaim as your Lord and Savior? If others see in you a judgmental, narrow minded, unhappy person, why would they be drawn to the Orthodoxy you claim is the true faith?

With love in Christ,
Abbot Tryphon



Coffee with Sister Vassa – Daily Reflection

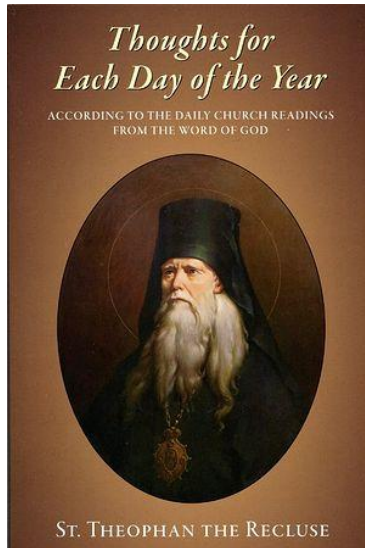
He Comes to Restore

“Prepare, O Bethlehem, for Eden has been opened to all! / Adorn yourself, O Ephratha, for the tree of life blossoms forth from the Virgin in the cave! / Her womb is a spiritual paradise planted with the Divine Fruit: / If we eat of it, we shall live forever and not die like Adam. / Christ comes to restore the image which He made in the beginning!”
(Byzantine Troparion-hymn of the Forefeast of the Nativity)

Christ comes, indeed, to “restore,” to “make right” what goes “wrong” in our paradise. In our paradise, we tend to seek out “food” that isn’t good for us; to nurture ourselves in unhealthy ways. Today our unhealthy “nourishment” is commonly useless information that we might choose to imbibe on a daily basis, through various news outlets and social media. This kind of information, if we immerse ourselves in it outside God’s word and grace, commonly brings us painful self-awareness, either through fear (of calamities in the world, like terrorist attacks), or delusional comparison with other people’s lives and fortunes, like the lives and fortunes of celebrities.

In reading up on the news I may have a good intention, because I want to better myself by knowing things. But if I constantly choose to seek this betterment outside God, with disregard for His word, I obscure His image in me, “the image He made in the beginning.” I am left in burdensome communion with the self, with the merely human, as Eve did when she trusted the serpent’s promise, that “*your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*” (Gen 3: 5)

Christ brings me new vision and a new communion, with Himself, the Divine Fruit. He liberates me from the bondage of the merely-human through His light, that “blossoms forth from the Virgin in the cave.” Today as I continue my journey to that cave in Bethlehem, let me take some time to sit in His light, in a bit of prayer and reading of His word. Let Him restore in me what I tend to lose when left to my own devices. “Christ comes to restore the image which He made in the beginning.”



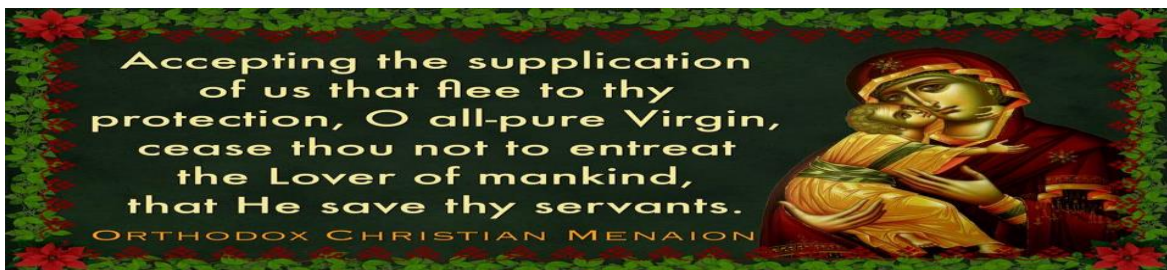
Twenty Ninth Sunday After Pentecost. [Col. 3:4-11; Luke 17:12-19]

Ten lepers were healed, but only one came to thank the Lord. Isn't there generally a similar proportion of people who are grateful after receiving benefactions from the Lord? Who has not received good things; or, rather, what do we have in us, or whatever happens to us that is not good for us? Even so, is everyone grateful to God, and does everyone give thanks for everything? There are even those who permit themselves to ask, “Why did God give us existence? It would be better for us not to exist.” God gave you existence so that you would be in eternal bliss; He gave you existence as a gift, as a gift He has furnished you with every means for attaining eternal bliss. The job depends on you: you need only to labour a bit for this. You say, “But I have only sorrows, poverty, diseases, misfortunes.” Well, these are also some of the ways to attain eternal bliss. Be patient. Your entire life is less than a moment compared with eternity. Even if you had to suffer unceasingly your entire life, against eternity it is nothing; and you still have moments of consolation. Do not look at the present, but at what is prepared for you in the future, and concern yourself with making yourself worthy of that; then you will not notice the sorrows. They will all be swallowed up by unquestioning hope in eternal consolations, and your lips will never cease to utter thanks.

The Philokalia: Daily Readings

As has been said many times, in everything we do God examines our motive, to see whether we are doing it for His sake or for some other purpose. Thus when we desire to do something good, we should not do it for the sake of popularity; we should have God as our goal, so that, with our gaze always fixed on Him, we may do everything for His sake. Otherwise we shall undergo all the trouble of performing the act and yet lose the reward.

- St Maximos the Confessor, 400 Chapters on Love



December – 2015

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
29 9:30 Sunday School 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy / Social	30	1 7:00-8:00pm – The Grey Book Step Mtg. NA Grp	2	3	4 8:00-9:15pm – Living Clean NA Group Mtg.	5 6:30 Vespers
6 9:40 Hours 9:45 Gen'l Confession 10:00 Divine Liturgy / Social After Liturgy: Annual St. Nicholas Day Festivities	7	8 7:00-8:00pm – The Grey Book Step Mtg. NA Grp	9	10	11 8:00-9:15pm – Living Clean NA Group Mtg.	12 No Vespers Mays Ldg. Open House 5:30 – 8:30pm
13 9:30 Sunday School 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy / Social After Liturgy: Nativity Gift Basket Raffle	14	15 7:00-8:00pm – The Grey Book Step Mtg. NA Grp	16	17	18 8:00-9:15pm – Living Clean NA Group Mtg.	19 6:30 Vespers
20 9:30 Sunday School 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy / Social 12:15 Council Mtg.	21	22 7:00-8:00pm – The Grey Book Step Mtg. NA Grp	23	24 7:00pm–Divine Liturgy/Christmas	25 8:00-9:15pm – Living Clean NA Group Mtg.	26 6:30 Vespers
27 9:30 Sunday School 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy / Social	28	29 7:00-8:00pm – The Grey Book Step Mtg. NA Grp	30	31		

