



ΛΥΧΝΟΣ

A GREEK ORTHODOX PERIODICAL FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

«Λύχνος τοῖς ποσὶ
μου ὁ νόμος σου
καὶ φῶς ταῖς
τρίβοις μου»

Ψαλμ 118, 105

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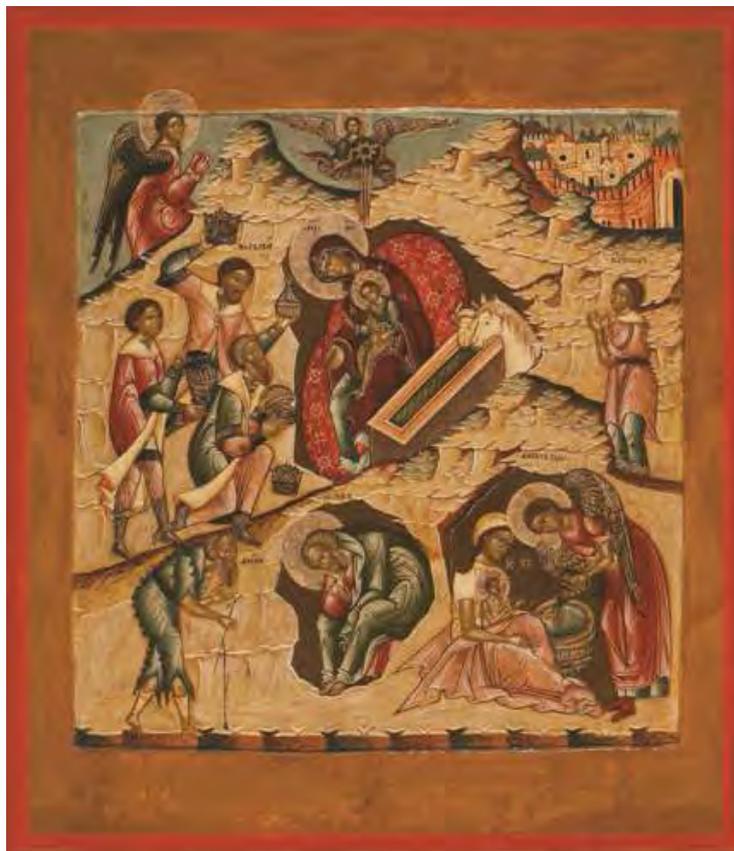
DECEMBER 2015 – JANUARY 2016

THE NATIVITY AND THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD

*'We worship Thy
Nativity, O Christ; show
us also your divine
Theophany'
(From the Service of the
Great Hours, 24th
December)*

Throughout the ages, there have been many people who have desired to see God. Moses, a faithful servant of God pleaded with his Maker to see His face, but was granted only a momentary glimpse of His Presence. As he stood behind the cleft of a rock, it was not the face of God that Moses saw, but His back (Exodus 33:22-23). This was a preview of the Nativity and Theophany, two events from the life of Jesus that had been celebrated as one feast in the early Church because they both revealed God's Son to humankind and were an integral part of God's redemptive plan for our salvation.

God sent His Son to live in the world so that He could lead all people back to the Father. There was no other way, because all other avenues had been exhausted. The Prophets and the Law of the Old Testament were meant to protect and lead the Israelites on the road to redemption, but the Law only cut them off from God because they could not keep its precepts. The Gentiles did not know God, and so they were strangers and far away from His Truth. In his Homilies on the Epistle of St Paul to the Ephesians, St John Chrysostom tells us that God did not send Angels and Archangels on this mission



to redeem humankind from ignorance and sin, but He sent His Son because 'there was no other who could repair so much mischief'. People had moved far from God's ways and were incapable of knowing Him, and so they could not see God or worship Him purely. Only the Son knew the Father, and therefore, the Son had to come on earth and live amongst us, so He could show us the way to find God and to see Him.

Our Lord Jesus Christ's earthly life began as an infant needing nourishment and protection from His holy mother. As He grew up and matured into a young

man, He became a minister, teaching and spreading the good news of God's plan of salvation to all people living in Judea and beyond. He showed His followers how to live through His own life's example as we read in the Gospels of the New Testament and in the Acts of the Apostles. He preached 'Peace' to all people, and His sacrifice on the Cross conclusively destroyed all the enmity that separated humankind from God and one another (Ephesians 2:14-21). Both Jew and Gentile, St John Chrysostom says, were made new. Both were given the chance to become heirs, true children, exalted to the same dignity. Christ had reconciled all people with God, and gave them the gift to be able to live in peace and to become fellow citizens with the Saints. So in light of this gift, let us not belittle the effort God made to redeem us through Christ's birth and the Theophany. ❖

Η ΕΝΑΝΘΡΩΠΗΣΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ

Η Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία γιορτάζει και πανηγυρίζει το μέγα μυστήριο της Ενανθρωπήσεως του Θεού-Λόγου. Στο σύμβολο της πίστεως συνοπτικά λέμε: **«δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν κατελθόντα ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν καὶ σαρκωθέντα ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς Παρθένου καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα»**. Πρόκειται για **«μυστηρίου χρόνους αἰώνιους σεσιγημένου, φανερωθέντος δὲ νῦν»** (Ρωμ. ΙΔ' 24-25).

Δηλ. η ενανθρώπιση του Θεού Λόγου αποτελεί ένα μυστήριο που για αιώνες παρέμενε κρυφό και που έγινε φανερό σε όλους μας με τη Γέννηση του Κυρίου μας. Ο Απόστολος Παύλος στις επιστολές του υπογραμμίζει την αιδιότητα του μυστηρίου, που σημαίνει πως πρόκειται για το μυστήριο της αιώνιας βουλής του Θεού.

Από τη στιγμή της πτώσης του προπάτορα Αδάμ, που σήμανε και την πτώση όλου του ανθρωπίνου γένους, ο Θεός Δημιουργός μέσα από την άπλετη αγάπη Του, έχει ήδη καταστρώσει το σχέδιο της σωτηρίας μας.

Περιμένει ο Θεός, γενεές και γενεές. Οι άνθρωποι μακριά από το Θεό έχουν τελείως αποξενωθεί. Τα χαρίσματα του **«κατ' εἰκόνα»** έχουν κι αυτά αλλοιωθεί, σε καταστρεπτικές δυνάμεις: εγωισμό, φιλαυτία, αλλοζονία, ανυπακοή, ηθική ακαταστασία. Μα ο Θεός δεν αλλάζει βουλή. Μακροθυμεί και περιμένει. Στέλνει το Νόμο, και παιδαγωγεί τους ανθρώπους να αισθανθούν την ανάγκη του Λυτρωτή. Στέλνει προφήτες να ξυπνήσουν τους ανθρώπους που καθεύδουν και τελικά έρχεται **«τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου»** (Γαλ. Δ' 4).

Δηλ. όταν συμπληρώθηκε ο χρόνος που είχε οριστεί στο θείο σχέδιο, τότε ο Θεός ζητά και βρίσκει την Παρθένο Μαρία.

Η Παναγία είναι ο καρπός των κτισμάτων όλης της δημιουργίας. Με τη προσωπική της αγιότητα, καθαρότητα και ταπείνωση, προσφέρει τον εαυτό της για τον ερχομό του Κυρίου. Γίνεται το **«πανάγιον ὄχημα»**, η **«ἐπουράνια κλίμακα»**, η **«πύλη τῆς σωτηρίας»**. Στο πρόσωπο της



Υπεραγίας Θεοτόκου βρίσκεται η ύψιστη συνεργία του Θεού με τον άνθρωπο. Από το γεγονός αυτό και μετά, τα πάντα αλλάζουν για τον άνθρωπο. Διότι **«Αὐτὸς (Χριστὸς) ἐνηνθρώπησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν»** (Μ. Αθανάσιος).

Τώρα πιά, οι άνθρωποι δεν θα πεθαίνουν. Θα κοιμούνται μέσα στο χώμα απ' όπου βγήκαν, μα θ' αναστηθούν μιά μέρα και θα χαρούν τη χαρά της αθανασίας.

Επομένως, ο Χριστός έγινε άνθρωπος όχι απλά για να μας διδάξει κάποιες ξεχασμένες αλήθειες μήτε για να μας ευεργετήσει, ούτε και για να γίνουμε καλύτεροι και ηθικότεροι. Γεννήθηκε για να μας ενώσει με το Θεό.

Και μας καλεί με την Εκκλησία Του να ζήσουμε την αγάπη του Θεού και να αισθανθούμε ότι είμαστε παιδιά του Θεού-Πατρός **«ἵνα τὴν υιοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν»** (Γαλ. Δ' 5). Δηλ. να πάρουμε όλοι, την υιοθεσία που μας είχε υποσχεθεί ο Θεός.

Στο χώρο της Εκκλησίας, με την ενέργεια του Αγίου Πνεύματος, γινόμαστε **«θείας φύσεως κοινωνοί»** (Β Πέτρ. Α' 4) και οδηγούμεθα με ασφάλεια στην ένωση με το Θεό Πατέρα που σημαίνει γεύση αιώνιας ζωής από τούτη τη ζωή.

Ευχόμαστε σ' όλους μας να αισθανθούμε τη Γέννηση του Χριστού μέσα στη Μυστηριακή ζωή της Ορθοδόξου Εκκλησίας μας και να ζούμε παντοτινά **«αἰώνια μέσα μας Χριστούγεννα»** (Γ. Βερίτης).



Current Issues

The Meaning of 60 Years of Mission Work

By Professor Michael Anthony, lay preacher and founding president, Greek Orthodox Christian Society

The year 2015 has seen many Communal events and festivities, showing the work of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society in our city, and to a lesser extent in other parts of the Country. These events were generally impressive, and succeeded in showing to our Community the amount of Christian work taking place in Sydney.

However, this was not the purpose of organising so many activities, which to say the least, were time consuming, simply for the reason to show our organising prowess. Our aim was much more serious and important. Whether this aim was achieved, is something which we must look at and analyse, because after all, this is the central core of our existence and the reason for so much effort and sacrifice in the field of Christian mission.

The assessment is best summarised by listing the problems that face our Orthodox brethren and the impact of our work on them.

1. 1. The problem of Ignorance/Indifference: We hope that the sale of Christian books, particularly of the Holy Bible, the operation of Sunday Schools, the Sermons by the members so appointed, the publication of "Lychnos", and the personal example of our own life, has had some effect on instilling the deeper values of our Faith into our congregations. This is probably true, though more solid evidence is needed for one to come to a realistic positive conclusion.
2. 2. The problem of Repentance (Metanoia): This work, about which our Society speaks to its members frequently and forcefully, was pioneered by Fr Stefanos as a dedicated confessor, and gradually spread to some of the Parishes, forming groups of people with real insight into their Christian calling. We glorify God for this blessing.
3. 3. The problem of Spiritual Transformation: This appears to proceed slowly, at every level of group meetings (Society, Ladies Friendly Kyklo, Youth



Omathes). It is a topic very difficult to assess with any degree of accuracy, as it is mostly a personal matter of the individual and his spiritual father. However, judging by external actions of people, one can assume with some degree of reservation, that there are instances of people with impressive improvement in this sphere.

4. 4. The matter of Sunday Schools: The operation of 67 Sunday Schools in Sydney is certainly a matter of success, and it is further a matter of Christian pride that their operation is so flawless. This is both due to the organisation as well as the obedience of the teachers to serve wherever they are told to do so. However, we need language improvement and more passionate interest in the concept of Sunday School and the children, by the Sunday School teachers.
5. 5. The problem of Witnessing/Confession: ***Because if you confess the Lord Jesus with your mouth and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom 10:9).*** This is a problem we must all pay attention to. It is certainly one of our weak points, and it appears not to have improved much over the years. It affects the younger members more, because it is age related and is partly enhanced by natural reservation. However, older members should pay great/serious attention - refer to the above verse by Paul the Apostle - the unbelievable rewards and its negative implications! The courage needed for confessing Jesus, we should pass to all our members and those that support us!





Gospel Reading December 25th (Matthew 2:1-12)

This passage from the Gospel of Matthew recounts the visit paid by the wise men from the East when Christ was born. The wise men or “Magi”, who were scholars of their time, arrived in Jerusalem, most likely from Persia, and approached king Herod saying, “Where is He who has been born a King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship him”.

When King Herod heard why the Magi had come to Jerusalem, he was troubled because he felt the new-born King would threaten his reign. He contrived an evil plan, asking the Magi to notify him when they found the child, so that he too could worship Him.

The Magi then left the king’s court and continued to follow the star, which took them to Christ. Upon entering the house and seeing Christ, “they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy”, “fell down and worshipped Him” and presented Him with their treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Then they departed, but being divinely warned that they should not return to Herod, they left for their own country by another way.

The gifts of the Magi are of particular spiritual and theological significance. The gift of gold is taken as the sign that Jesus is the King of Israel, of the entire Universe, and of the Kingdom of God to come. This is a crucial part of the Christmas story in the Gospels. It led Herod to kill all the "male children in Bethlehem and in all the region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men" (Mt 2:16).

The gift of frankincense is taken to signify the fact that Jesus is God, since incense is for worship, and only God may be worshipped.

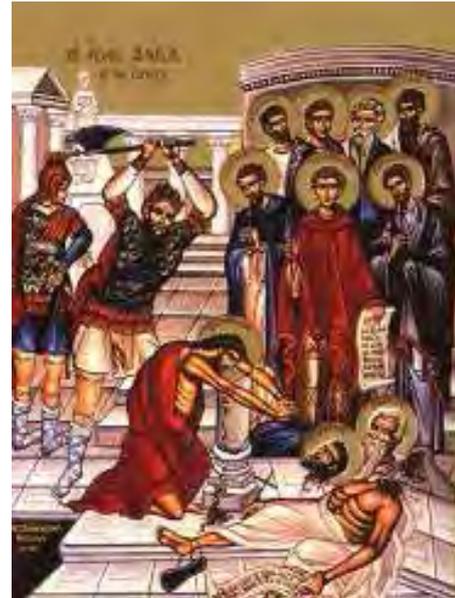
And the gift of myrrh is for the Lord Jesus who has come to die as the perfect sacrifice for the people. For the dead were anointed with myrrh, as Jesus Himself was anointed, according to the Scriptures, at the time of His death (Jn19:39-40).

In the gifts of the Magi therefore, are contained all the mysteries of Christ's coming. They point to the purpose of His appearance on earth - He is the royal King, the Son of David, whose Kingdom will have no end.

As we approach Christmas, we should be compelled to think about what this mystical event means for our spiritual life and, like the Magi, consider what gifts of gratitude we can offer to the Lord to show our philotimo.



The Ten Holy Martyrs of Crete Celebrated on 23rd December



In the third century under the oppressive reign of Roman emperor Decius, ten men fought the good fight.

Decius ruled from 249 to 251, and fiercely persecuted followers of Christ. Saints Theodulus, Saturninus, Europus, Gelasius, Eunician, Zoticus, Pompeius, Agathopous, Basilides and Evaristus came from all over Crete, including Gortyna, Knossos and Heraklion. They were united before the emperor because of their belief in Christ. For thirty days they were dragged to pagan sanctuaries all over Crete, forced to make idolatrous sacrifices. Passers-by mocked them, hit them, threw stones at them and spat in their faces. They were even dragged through dung.

Despite these sufferings, they persevered in their faith and refused to concede to the demands of their society. Displays of such heroic endurance gave encouragement to other Christians in Crete. Decius therefore ordered even more cruel tortures, before their limbs were finally broken and they were each beheaded.

These ten men were unified in their love for Christ and won the crown of eternal glory. Their adversaries wished to break their spirit, yet God brought these men together in order to strengthen their spirit. Around one hundred years later, St Paul of Constantinople (November 6) visited Crete and took the relics of The Ten Holy Martyrs of Crete back to Constantinople to serve as a protection for the city.



Questions & Answers

A clergyman of our Archdiocese answers ...

What Does it Mean to be Saved?

Why do we follow Christ? A common answer is “to be saved”. But what does this mean? Is it simply Jesus plucking us out of hell and putting us in heaven?

Protestant groups called Evangelicals believe that a person is saved when they accept Christ as their personal saviour. They may describe the event of this acceptance as being “born again”. They base their teachings on passages such as Galatians 2:16, which says, “a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ”.

The Orthodox Church sees it somewhat differently. Without minimising the importance of faith, it emphasises that faith and works work together¹. Jesus’ teachings (e.g. the Sermon on the Mount) were filled with teachings and exhortations expecting his followers to abide by a particular way of life. Salvation is a synergistic act: God offers salvation, and we either accept it or reject it. Accepting it means that our life needs to be compatible with His - by striving to deny our will, and taking up our Cross daily and following Him (Lk 9:23).

Thus, the gift of salvation is not a one-time event, but a life-time process. We have been saved (past tense) through Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross. We are being saved (present tense) through the life in Christ. We hope to be saved (future tense) through God’s righteous judgement at the second coming.

So, what is the process of being saved? It requires belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God as the promised Messiah; as articulated in the Nicene Creed. It requires proof of this faith by growing in God’s image and likeness. It requires tapping into God’s divine energies through participation in the Holy Sacraments of the Church. It requires anticipation of the final judgement.

Salvation is the attainment of the Kingdom of Heaven. Both Jesus and St John the Baptist, from the onset of their ministries, emphasised that “the Kingdom of heaven



is at hand” (e.g. Mat 3:2, 4:17). The Kingdom of Heaven is not an arbitrary promise, but an intimate reality; we begin experiencing the Kingdom on this earth. The lives of the saints are living examples of this.

The Orthodox understanding of salvation is summed up in the doctrine of theosis. As St Athanasios the Great notes, **God became human, so that we might become god**. This resonates with the words of the apostle Peter:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness... by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become **partakers of the divine nature**. (2 Pet 1:3-4).

To be partakers of the divine nature is to fulfil the role of humanity as God intended when He created us. Being created in His image and likeness means that we are complete and perfected when in total communion with God. The Saints inspire us as to how this is possible. Thus, our salvation is simply our reunion with our Creator.

† Fr G. L. ✠

¹ Stylianopoulos, Theodore. *How are we saved?*
<http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/how-are-we-saved>.

E-mail your questions to:
editor@lychnos.org



The Miraculous Holy Cloud

The following is an account from a young man who went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem this year.

Every year, on the Old Calendar Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord (August 19), a light-bearing cloud descends upon Mount Tabor in a miraculous fashion, which I was blessed to see for myself in August this year.



Mount Tabor is situated on a 500m hill in the region of Galilee. According to sacred tradition, it was upon this hill that Jesus Christ took his three beloved disciples up, 40 days prior to his Crucifixion, and transfigured before them, “showing His glory as much as they could bear”.

According to the monks of Galilee, everybody sees the miraculous phenomenon differently, as was justified by accounts from the tour group I was a part of.

On a warm, cloudless and calm night, we ascended Mount Tabor, anticipating the all-night vigil for the Transfiguration. We had all heard of this miraculous “cloud” but had never in fact seen photos describing the miraculous event.

To everyone’s surprise, as soon as the hymns of Katavasies began, a fog-like smoke started rising from the valley below us. Out of nowhere, a massive rushing of wind began, bringing this mysterious incense-like fog with it. Slowly, the fog turned into an endless cloud carried by the wind, flying over us with an intense speed which I had never seen before.

Not long after, “Blessed is the Kingdom...” was said. The enormous brass bells tolled as the clouds descended onto the whole congregation. Every single person embraced the miraculous cloud with arms held high, chanting the troparion of the Transfiguration and giving glory to God!

Some people stated that they even saw flashes of lightning, while other claimed that the cloud had an intense reddish colour, and others smelled a sweet fragrance.

Overjoyed, the whole congregation, filled with thousands of pilgrims from all over the world, continued their hymns to God until daybreak.

Having descended the Holy Mountain, the cloud was visible encircling only the Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration and not any other of the heterodox churches on the mountain. We, the faithful, departed with great joy on being witnesses of this great annual miracle! ❖



St Nikitas in the slums of Medan

In December 2014, with the blessings of His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos the Greek Orthodox Christian Society travelled to Medan, Indonesia, on their Orthodox priest of Indonesian background.

Fr Chrysostomos established the primary school of St Nikitas for children and performed medical, dental and physiotherapy clinics.

Close to the centre of Medan, our minivan left a busy road and entered a narrow alleyway for the minivan to negotiate the lanes. The ram-shackled dwellings and the air on a windless day, we were blanketed by the pollution of the city. Sporadic greenery was visible. To our eyes, it was a portrait of despair.

When we arrived at St Nikitas, there was no hint of despair. The children were surrounded by faces full of hope and joy!



Dr John Psarommatis examines a child while Fr Chrysostomos translates from Bahasa Indonesian to Greek.



Dentists are busy extracting teeth from childrens mouths, rotten due to the amount of candy consumed. Candy in the slums is cheap compared to proper food. Nurses from the Theotokos lend a hand as well.



and His Eminence Metropolitan Konstantinos of Singapore, nine men from
second missionary visit there at the request of Fr Chrysostomos Manalu, an

out 10 years ago. We visited the school, spent time with the
cs in the classrooms.

ered the narrow lanes of the slum. There was hardly enough room
were scattered amongst open sewers and canals. It was hot. On a
dically, people were lighting fires to burn the household rubbish.

children and parents greeted us with excitement and enthusiasm. We

The three doctors set up examination couches and treatment areas
n one classroom. In another, the dentists and our physiotherapist
set up work stations on school desks and chairs. The children and
parents waited outside. We saw person after person, more than 150
people. Many of the children had impetigo, or school sores, a type
of highly contagious skin infection. Other common conditions were
asthma, upper respiratory tract infections and malnutrition. We
were all struck by the poverty and lack of material possessions.
People were able to deal with difficulties with dignity and showed
great resilience. They did not have their hearts set on the things of
this world.

By the end of the day, everyone was exhausted by the heat,
pollution and noise. The people were grateful for the smallest help
and kindness shown to them. They challenged our notion of
poverty and despair. ✠



Children of St Nikitas Orthodox School posing for a photo in
their playground in the slums of Medan. Schooling for the stu-
dents is free.



Let Us Attend: A Journey Through the Orthodox Divine Liturgy

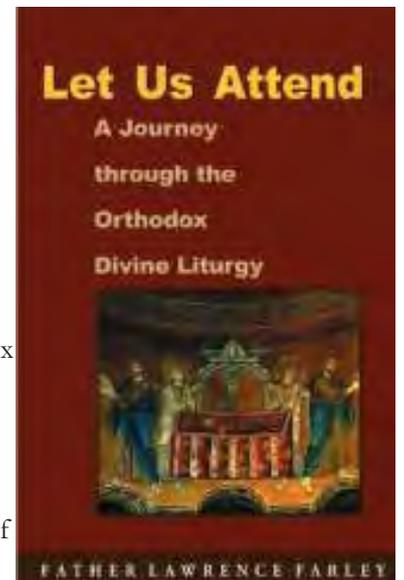
By Fr Lawrence Farley, Conciliar Press, 2007

The Orthodox
Divine Liturgy is
the heart of Orthodox
spiritual practice. While
many books have been
written on the Liturgy,
this book is unique. In
98 pages, Fr Farley
analyses the structure,
content and historical
context of the Orthodox
Liturgy, all the while
developing the spiritual
mystery of the Liturgy.

Each chapter deals step
by step with a section of
the Divine Liturgy,
beginning with “Blessed
is the Kingdom” and ending with the Final Rites. The
role of the priest, worshipers and chanters are explained
for each section of the Liturgy. Where relevant, Fr Farley
explains how different practices entered the Liturgy at
different points in history, such as the Small Entrance
echoing the ancient practice of the priest bringing the
Holy Bible from his home and placing it on the Holy
Altar.

The book is full of practical information. There are
footnotes explaining terms such as antiphon, epiclesis and
typika. A particularly interesting aspect of the book is the
appendix, which compares the form of the Liturgy at
different historical time points. It is fascinating to read
that around AD 400, Holy Communion was received in
the hand. The current practice of receiving Holy
Communion with a spoon, as well as the priest reading
the prayers of the Anaphora silently, developed around
AD 1300.

This book is brief and easy to read. It appeals to all ages:
to those at the beginning of their spiritual journey and
those well advanced. The reader will gain insights that will
fundamentally help them in the journey to the Kingdom
of God. ✠



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Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ Ο ΠΡΟΔΡΟΜΟΣ

στη Ζωή και Λατρεία της Εκκλησίας μας



Αγαπητοί μας φίλοι, είχαμε γράψει και πέρσι τέτοια εποχή εάν ενθυμήστε σχετικά με την Βάπτισμα του Κυρίου μας, και το πρόσωπο του Ιωάννη του Προδρόμου. Εφέτος όπως διαβάσατε και στην επικεφαλίδα του άρθρου, θα αναφερθούμε πολύ σύντομα και επιγραμματικά πάνω σε αυτό το σπουδαίο θέμα.

Μέσα στη Θεία Λειτουργία, γράφουν οι Πατέρες της Εκκλησίας μας, το πρόσωπο του Τιμίου Προδρόμου και μνημονεύεται και εικονίζεται. Το κερύ, που προηγείται του Ευαγγελίου στη Μικρή Είσοδο, συμβολίζει τον

Τίμιον Πρόδρομο που είναι ο «λύχνος ό καιόμενος και φαίνων» (Ιωαν Ε' 35). Καθώς ο Χριστός έρχεται στον κόσμο μας, ο Βαπτιστής τον παρουσιάζει: «ΐδε ό άμνός του Θεού» (Ιωαν Α' 29). Το ίδιο και ο ιερέας, σαν τον Πρόδρομο, δείχνει το Ευαγγέλιο και αναφωνεί «Σοφία, όρθοί». Ο ιερέας, μέσα στη Θεία Ευχαριστία, προτρέπει το λαό σε μετάνοια για άφεση αμαρτιών, όπως και ο Πρόδρομος φώναζε «μετανοείτε· ήγγικε γάρ ή Βασιλεία τών Ουρανών» (Ματθ. Γ' 2). Με τη μετάνοια, πλησιάζουμε το μυστήριο της ζωής. Στη θεία Λειτουργία, που είναι η τράπεζα του Αρνίου (Αποκ. Ιθ' 9), ο Βαπτιστής του Χριστού είναι «δειπνοκλήτωρ και νυμφαγωγός». Είναι δηλαδή αυτός ο οποίος μας καλεί στο δείπνο Του και εκείνος που μας οδηγεί στο Χριστό για να γινούμε μέτοχοι της Βασιλείας Του.

Ο Τίμιος Πρόδρομος δεν έφυγε στην έρημο γιατί δεν αγαπούσε τον κόσμο, αλλά για να ετοιμασθεί, ώστε να ανταποκριθεί στο έργο που του ανέθεσε ο Θεός. Το ίδιο και οι μοναχοί που τον έχουν προστάτη τους. Δεν φεύγουν από τον κόσμο γιατί αποστρέφονται τους ανθρώπους, αλλά γιατί θέλουν να νεκρώσουν τα πάθη και το κοσμικό φρόνιμα, και έτσι να φθάσουν στο



τέρμα, που είναι η καταξίωση της ζωής και η υπέρβαση του θανάτου. Φτώχεια και ταπείνωση συναντώνται επίσης στο πρόσωπο του Προδρόμου. Το ταπεινό φρόνιμα του Ιωάννη φαίνεται από την άρνηση να δεχθεί πως είναι Μεσσίας ή ο προφήτης Ηλίας, και αποποιήθηκε τους τίτλους τιμής. Ο Ιωάννης είναι έλεγχος για πολλούς από μας που έχουμε την τάση της προβολής και την επιθυμία απόκτησης αξιωμάτων και το πάθος της φιλοπρωτίας, που μας εμποδίζουν να κάνουμε το θέλημα του Θεου και να αγωνισθούμε όπως ο

Πρόδρομος. Αγαπητοί αδελφοί, ας ευχαριστήσουμε τον Θεό διότι μας αποκάλυψε, όπως λέει και ο υμνωδός της Εκκλησίας μας, ένα «ένσαρκο Άγγελος» ο οποίος στο βάπτισμα του Χριστού μας παρουσίασε το κάλος Του και την αγιοσύνη Του. Το ίδιο κάνει και η Εκκλησία: φανερώνει το Χριστό στους ανθρώπους. Σ' αυτούς που αναζητούν τον Κύριο, ή έχουν εγκάρδιο πόθο να τον συναντήσουν, η Εκκλησία σαν τον Πρόδρομο τους τον δείχνει.

Ο Χριστός βρίσκεται μέσα στα μυστήρια, στην προσευχή, στην Αγία Γραφή, στο Θείο λόγο, στη μυστική ευλογία της Ευχαριστίας, στην εφαρμογή των εντολών, στο πρόσωπο του αδελφού μας.

Κλείνοντας αυτές τις λίγες σκέψεις, θα πρέπει ακόμα να πούμε με πολύ ταπείνωση ότι ο Κύριος καταδέχθηκε να βαπτισθεί όπως και οι άνθρωποι, που είναι δούλοι του Θεού, για να μας αποκαλύψει το πρόσωπό Του. Έτσι και η Εκκλησία, και μόνον αυτή, με ασφάλεια μας δείχνει ποιός είναι ο Χριστός και πως μπορούμε να συνδεθούμε μαζί του. Ας τον συναντήσουμε προσωπικά μέσα από την κοινωνία μας με την Εκκλησία για να σωθούμε. Αμήν.





Psalm 103 (Greek 102), Verse 8

“The Lord is compassionate and merciful, long-suffering and rich in mercy”

«οἰκτίρμων καὶ ἐλεήμων ὁ Κύριος, μακρόθυμος καὶ πολυέλεος»

With these four adjectives David expresses both the experience of God in his own life and in the life of Israel.

Elder Aimilianos says that God's “compassion” is exercised on behalf of human beings who are made of earth and are forever in danger of lapsing into non-existence¹. If something is very delicate and fragile, you'll handle it with care and compassion. Human nature demands that God act toward it with sensitivity and compassion.

God is also “merciful” to us because we forget that we are created from earth; we forget that we are nothing and act as if we were gods. To such a person, one can only be patient and show mercy.

God is “long-suffering”. He exercises patience with us, because we are ignorant and rebellious; because we stubbornly resist Him. We are not interested in God because our attention is occupied with a life of fantasy and ego, our self-will.

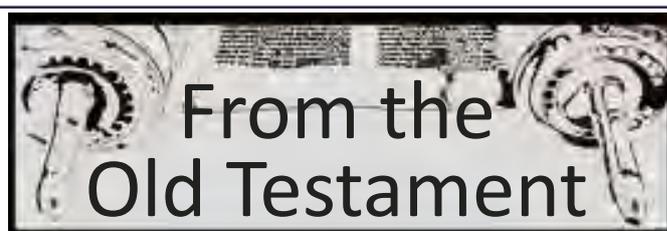
God is “rich in mercy” because human sinfulness is as deep as the ocean. Mercy is God's response to sin and the soul. In the words of the Hymn of Kassiani: “Who can count the multitude of my sins or fathom the abyss of Your judgments?” St Gregory Palamas writes, “Him alone, therefore, the Master and Creator of all, you



should glorify as God and through love you should cleave to Him; before Him you should repent day and night for your deliberate and unintentional lapses. For He is compassionate and merciful, long-suffering and rich in mercy.”



¹ Psalms and the Life of Faith, Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra, Indiktos, pp 280-281.



Isaiah the Prophet

There are well over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament that relate to details about the coming of the Messiah. A great proportion of these are found in the writings of the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah was born 700 years before the time of Jesus. He was married to a pious prophetess and they had two sons.

Following a vision from God, he set out to call the Jewish people to repentance from their idol-



worshipping ways. In the book of Isaiah are collected all his prophecies, of which a third concern the coming of Christ. From describing of the nature of Christ's birth to a virgin (Isaiah 7:14) through to Jesus' betrayal and suffering for our sins (Isaiah 53), he foretells in great detail with unprecedented clarity what was to come. His prophecies are read in the daily readings of our Church throughout the Easter Lent and on the eve of the Nativity. One of the most beautiful of the prophecies read on Christmas Eve is Isaiah 9:6-7:

*For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end...*

This passage reminds us that of all the gifts received at this time, the greatest gift of all was given to us by God: ‘a Son is given’. Jesus was, and is, the most precious gift given to us humans so that we would be reunited once more with God, being saved by Him and through Him receiving the everlasting peace, of which ‘there will be no end’.





What we Hear in Church



FROM THE HOLY FATHERS...

1st Ode Katavasia of Christmas

«Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε. Χριστὸς ἐξ οὐρανῶν ἀπαντήσατε. Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς, ὑψώθητε, ἄσατε τῷ Κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ, καὶ ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ, ἀνυμνήσατε λαοί, ὅτι δεδόξασται.»

‘Christ is born, give glory! Christ comes from heaven, go to meet him! Christ is upon earth, be exalted! Sing to the Lord all the earth; and all you peoples raise the hymn with joy, for he has been glorified.’

This hymn is chanted in every Matins (Ὁρθρος) service from the 21st November until Christmas Day. It is the 1st Ode of the Katavasias of Christmas, written by St Kosmas, Bishop of Maiouma. Most of the hymn is an exact duplication of the opening of the 38th Oration of St Gregory the Theologian on the Feast of Theophany, from the thrice-fold repetition of the exclamatory phrases beginning with ‘Christ’, up to the phrase which St Gregory himself borrows from Psalm 91:1, “Sing to the Lord all the earth”. These words were also sung by the Israelites after God had miraculously delivered them over the Red Sea (Ex 15:1-21), forming the first Biblical Song or Ode, the latter derived from the Greek word for Song - Ὠδή - hence why this hymn is linked with the 1st Ode.

This hymn affirms the joy that our Church feels on the Incarnation of God. There could be no joy, no salvation, no hope, if God did not become man. St Athanasius is very clear on this: “For the human race would have perished utterly had not the Lord and Saviour of all, the Son of God, come among us to put an end to death.”¹ In another sermon, St Gregory states that “God must come down to us, as I know He did of old to Moses; and on the other that we must go up to Him, and that so there should come to pass a Communion of God with men, by a coalescing of the dignity. For as long as either remains on its own footing, the One in His Glory the other in his lowliness, the Goodness of God cannot mingle with us, and His loving kindness is incommunicable, and there is a great gulf between, which cannot be crossed; and which separates not only the Rich Man from Lazarus and Abraham's Bosom which he longs for, but also the created and changing natures from that which is eternal and immutable.”²

The Feast of Christmas is another opportunity for us to respond freely and without coercion to God's Love, indeed, to become “alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:11).



1. St. Athanasius the Great, “On the Incarnation”, SVSP, NY, 1998, p 35.

2. St Gregory the Theologian, “Oration 41:12”, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 7.

St Gregory the Theologian On the Nativity of our Lord

Like many of the celebrated hymns of the Church, the much-loved Katavasias of Christmas were inspired by the writings of the Fathers of the Church, and in this case, one of the giants of Orthodox Theology in Saint Gregory the Theologian. His 38th Oration on the Nativity of Christ is full of the joy and poetic eloquence we find amongst so much of St Gregory's work.

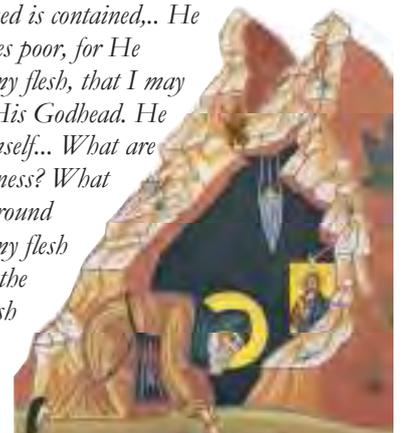


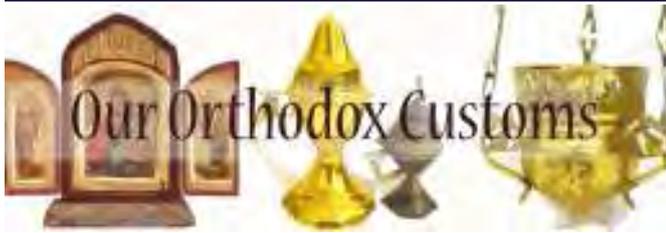
Christ is born, glorify Him. Christ from heaven, go out to meet Him. Christ on earth; be exalted. Sing unto the Lord all the whole earth; and that I may join both in one word, Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad, for Him Who is of heaven and then of earth (Oration 38:1).

St Gregory invites all to celebrate this joyous occasion, but not with the elaborate dances, clothing music, and drunkenness of secular celebrations popular of the time, but with a cleansing of the mind, ears and thoughts so that one can truly reflect on the Divine, and enjoy real delights which will not fade away (Oration 38:5-7).

In reflecting on the event, St Gregory explores the lead up to the event being celebrated: God in His unimaginable love, creates all unseen and seen creation, culminating in the creation of the human being, who is a unique mingling of both realities (Oration 38:7-1). However after the fall, humankind found itself mortal, banished from paradise and distanced from God: a gap that could not be bridged without God's intervention. So God Himself took on flesh for the sake of our flesh, and mingled Himself with an intelligent soul in order to save our soul. In the words of St Gregory:

O new commingling; O strange conjunction; the Self-Existent comes into being, the Uncreated is created. That which cannot be contained is contained,.. He Who gives riches becomes poor, for He assumes the poverty of my flesh, that I may assume the richness of His Godhead. He that is full empties Himself... What are the riches of His Goodness? What is this mystery that is around me? ...He partakes of my flesh that He may both save the image and make the flesh immortal (Oration 38:13).





Vasilopita

On January 1st we observe a tradition, both in our churches and in our homes, which has been handed down from the 4th century. It is the baking and cutting of the sweet bread (or cake) known as the Vasilopita (Βασιλόπιτα), aptly named after St Basil the Great.



St Basil came from a Christian family, and is considered one of the most wise and compassionate clergymen in the entire history of the Church! He was made Bishop of Cappadocia in Caesarea, and was the first to establish orphanages, hospitals and age-care homes.

We are told that during a time of terrible famine, the emperor put an excessive tax on the people of Caesarea. To avoid prison, the people had to hand over whatever they had: coins and jewellery. St Basil, on learning of this injustice, came to his people's defence. With fervent prayer and by God's grace, the emperor repented of his deed and instructed the tax collectors to hand over all the wealth to St Basil.

Faced with the dilemma of not knowing who contributed what, St Basil returned each person their valuables by having them baked into a huge 'pita'. After the Divine Liturgy, he blessed the pita, and each person's slice miraculously contained the money or jewels they had contributed!

In remembrance of this miracle, Orthodox Christians bake the Vasilopita on St Basil's feast day, January 1st, the date on which he reposed.

A coin is baked into the sweet Vasilopita and the person who is lucky to find it is considered to be blessed for the whole year. Traditionally the Vasilopita is cut by the most senior member of the family. It is good to do the sign of the cross three times over the Vasilopita, saying: "in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit".

The first portion cut is for our Lord, the second for Panagia, the third for St Basil, the fourth for the poor and then members of the family starting from the eldest to the youngest. Pieces can be cut for the Church, the household, and visitors.

This custom reminds us of St Basil's great charity and love, and that we too should always be mindful of our suffering brothers and sisters. Only then will the coming new year be truly blessed from God.



How to Actualize the Image of God in You

By Anthony M Coniaris.

We are all made in God's image. But to be in His likeness is only granted to those who deny their own will to follow God's will.

In this book, Anthony Coniaris guides us Christians on our way towards theosis: towards union with God. We are described as iconographers of our lives. We are iconographers, and each and every one of us has a grand icon to construct.

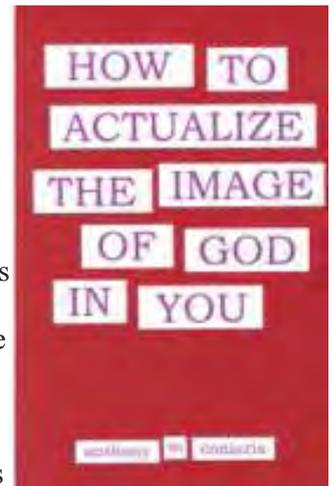
The image of God in us is the God-given capacity of love. Archbishop Demetrius quotes: "We should distinguish ourselves from the rest of Christ's kingdom not simply because we bear the name 'orthodox.' We should be distinguished above all by the Christ-like manner of our life... by the abundance of love as well as by our conscientious devotion to truth".

To actualise the image of God in us we need to be like icon-restorers who do not hack away at the damaged part of the icon, but instead very gently clean away all the spots and disfigurement with small, delicate brushes until the original image is restored. We need to require the same ascetic effort to restore the damaged image of God in us.

Something that prevents us in achieving our mission is Iconoclasm: where we desecrate and abolish the living icons inside us. Some examples of this are:

- When we ignore and neglect the poor, the sick, the abandoned in our midst, then we are allowing the icons to be marginalised.
- When we refuse to speak to or forgive our brother, we are defaming the image of God in us.

The book ends: *Help me Lord by Your grace, to keep actualising Your image through faith, love and obedience as I go through life, so that I may have You living in me as I live in You. Amen.*



NEWS and VIEWS

60 Years Sunday Schools!

On Sunday 22nd November, the Sunday Schools of Sydney held a major concert at Sydney Town Hall to celebrate the remarkable achievement of 60 years of continuous operation of Sunday Schools in Sydney! This landmark event in the history of our Church was marked by the presence of His Grace Bishop Seraphim and all the Clergy, the Greek Consul General of Sydney Dr Stavros Kyrimis, as well as numerous other dignitaries. The theme of the concert was "Together with Christ", with the Sunday School children performing various sketches on the virtues of Christian life including Humility, Repentance, Forgiveness and Patience. By all accounts, the concert was a spectacular success, with deserving congratulations due to all who organised the event, as well as the Sunday School children themselves and their teachers. We pray that our Lord continues to bless the work of Sunday Schools for many more years to come, so that generations of children continue to benefit from its soul-saving education.



The combined classes of all Sunday Schools sing on stage at the 60 Years Concert.

Blessing Service (Αγιασμός) for the Orthodox Mission Bookstore

On Saturday 28th November, a Blessing Service officiated by His Grace, Bishop Seraphim, was held to officially inaugurate the new Orthodox Mission Bookstore located at the Orthodox Mission Centre, 217 Bexley Rd, Kingsgrove. The Bookstore will operate on weekdays and Saturday mornings, selling a large range of Orthodox Christian books in both English and Greek. For many years it operated from its former location at King St, Newtown, but has now moved to the new premises of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society.



His Grace Bishop Seraphim with Fr Stephanos Pantanassiotis congratulating the children after the concert. Also seen are Fr Eusebius, Abbot of Pantanassa Monastery, Professor Michael Anthony (left of His Grace), founding president of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society, which has organised Sunday Schools for the past 60 years, and Dr John Psarommatas (at right), current president of the Society.



His Grace performing the Blessing of the Orthodox Mission Bookstore.

The interior of the new Orthodox Mission Bookstore.



Ακούτε το ραδιοφωνικό πρόγραμμα
«Η ΦΩΝΗ ΤΗΣ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΙΑΣ»

κάθε Κυριακή:

10:45 π.μ. στο 2MM-AM 1665

11:00 π.μ. στο 2ERA-FM 151.675 (scanner)

5:30 μ.μ. στο Galaxia FM 151.850 (scanner)

κάθε Πέμπτη:

3:30 μ.μ. στο Radio Club AM 1683

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