



## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

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✠ **August 16, 2015** ✠

**The Postfeast of the Dormition**

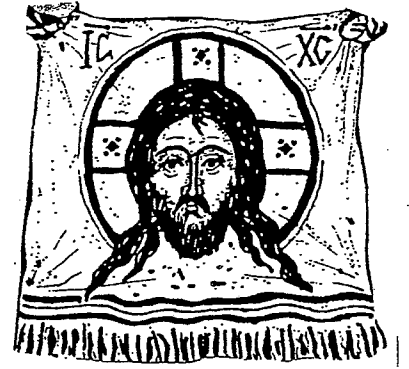
**The Icon of Christ**

**Not-Made-by-Hands**

St. Gerasimus the New, of Kephalaria, Mt. Athos (1579)

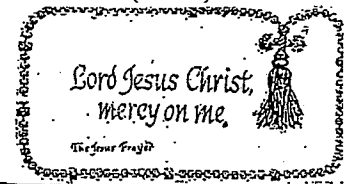
The Romanian Royal New Martyrs Constantine Brancoveanu

and his sons Constantine, Stephen, Radu & Matthew, by the Turks (1714)



✠ **Inquirer's Class Tomorrow - *Final* - 6:30pm**

✠ **Wed. Aug. 19 6:30pm Akathist of the Dormition**



### **St. John of Kronstadt: The Most-Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary**

✠ **It was for our sakes** that the Lord was incarnate, suffered, was crucified, died, and rose from the dead! It was for our sakes also that He adorned His Mother, the Most Pure Virgin Mary, with all virtues, and endued her with all Divine powers, so that she, the most merciful and the most perfect, should be, after Himself, everything to us. And therefore let not God's grace, with which Our Lady is filled, be fruitless for us. Let us all come with boldness and trust to the Virgin's wonderful, ever- helpful, and most pure protection. If sins trouble us, let us pray to her that she may cleanse us with the hyssop of her prayers from every impurity of the flesh and of the spirit.

✠ **Orthodox Christians are like a family, the children of Jesus Christ**, and in a good family the mother is always held in high respect (the Mother of God), likewise the elder brothers enjoy the respect and esteem of the younger ones, and these latter imitate the former. Lutherans and Anglicans! Why is it not so with you? Why is not the Mother of God duly revered and solemnly honored and worshipped by you too? Why do you not solemnly honor and venerate the holy angels and God's Saints? Why do you not wish to imitate them? Or is it that you honor God alone, and worship Him only? But you should remember that the Mother of the Lord, Jesus Christ, the holy angels, and the Saints are pure images of God — friends of God, as Abraham is called the friend of God. How can you, then, not honor the living images of God, the children and friends of God?

✠ **The root and beginning of love for neighbor is love of God.** Whoever truly loves God without fail also loves his neighbor. Without doubt God loves everyone. If then, anyone truly loves the loving God, he also love man, His beloved. Let us, therefore, love one another as God has loved us.

~ St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (1779)

## ON THE FALLING-ASLEEP OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS

The Lord who, on Sinai, gave the Fifth Commandment: "Honor thy father and thy mother", showed by His own example how one must reverence one's parents. Hanging in agony on the Cross, he remembered His mother, and, indicating the Apostle John, said to her: "Woman, behold thy son!", and to John: "Behold thy mother!" And, with this concern for His mother, he breathed His last. John had a home on Zion in Jerusalem, where he settled the Mother of God and left her to pass her remaining days on earth. By her prayers, her kindly advice, her meekness and her patience, she was of immense help to her Son's apostles. She spent virtually the rest of her life in Jerusalem, often going round the places that reminded her of the great events and the great works associated with and performed by her Son. She especially visited Golgotha, Bethlehem and the Mount of Olives. Of her journeys farther afield, her visit to Saint Ignatios the God-bearer is recorded, as are those to Saint Lazaros the Four-days-dead, Bishop of Cyprus, to the Holy Mountain, to which she gave her blessing, and her stay in Ephesus with John during a fierce persecution of Christians in Jerusalem. In old age, she often prayed to her Lord and God on the Mount of Olives, on the spot from which he ascended, to take her from this world. One day, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her and revealed that she would enter into rest in three days' time, and the angel gave her a palm branch to be carried in her funeral procession. She returned home with great joy, with the heartfelt hope that she would see Christ's apostles once more in this life. The Lord fulfilled her desire and all the apostles, brought by angels and clouds, gathered together at John's house on Zion. It was with great joy that she saw the holy apostles, and she encouraged, advised and upheld them, then peacefully gave her soul into God's hands without the slightest physical pain or struggle. The apostles took the coffin containing her body, from which an aromatic fragrance arose, and, accompanied by many Christians, took it to the Garden of Gethsemane, to the grave of Saints Joachim and Anna. By God's providence, they were hidden from the wicked Jews by a cloud. A Jewish priest, Antony, touched the coffin with his hands, intending to overturn it, but at that moment an angel of God cut off both his hands. He cried out with pain, begging the apostles' help, and was healed in confessing his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was left to the Apostle Thomas, who was delayed, again by God's providence, to reveal a new and glorious mystery about the holy Mother of God. He arrived on the third day, and desired to embrace the body of the holy and most pure. When the apostles opened her grave, he found only the winding-sheet—the body was not in the grave. That evening, she appeared to the apostles, surrounded by a multitude of angels, and said to them: "Rejoice; I will be with you always!" It is not known exactly how old the Mother of God was at the time of her falling-asleep, but the prevailing belief is that she had reached the age of sixty.

## On the Holy Dormition - St. John of Damascus (8<sup>th</sup> C)

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Today the treasure of life, the abyss of Grace - how can I express myself with bold and shameless lips? - enters the shadow of a life-bearing death. Without fear she who gave birth to the One Who destroyed death approaches death, if it is even permissible to call death her departure so full of holiness and life.

How could she, who was for all the fountain of true life, fall under the power of death? But she was obedient to the law which her own Son established. As a daughter of the old Adam, she paid back the ancestral debt, since her very Son, Who is Life in Person, did not deny it. But as the Mother of the living God, it is meet and right that she be borne upwards before Him. For if God has said: "For fear that man" the first-created, "does not stretch forth his hand, and gather of the fruit of life, not tasting of it and living for but a season..." Would she not also live forever as she has received Life itself, without origin, and without termination, freed from the limits of the beginning and of the end?

Now as the other members of this mortal race have gorged themselves with the wine of disobedience and dulled the vision of their heart with the drunkenness of transgression, the Lord God struck such ones who had weighed down the eyes of their spirit by the intemperance of sin and had fallen asleep in a sleep of death. He exiled them, casting them out of the Paradise of Eden. But behold, she has cast aside every passionate movement and has brought forth the blade of obedience unto God the Father.

How could Paradise not receive her who began life for our entire race? How could the Heavens not open their gates to her with joy? Yea, we have no doubt. Now, Eve inclined her ear to the serpent's message and listened to the suggestion of the enemy. Her senses tasted the charm of the deceitful and false pleasure which brought a sentence of sadness and affliction. Thus, she was subjected to the sorrows of childbirth; with Adam she was condemned to death and thus cast into the depths of Hades. But she who is the All-Blessed in truth and full of the strength of the Spirit meekly inclined her head before the Word of God, and with the assurance of the Archangel received in her womb the One Who fills all. Through the benevolence of the Father, she conceived, without sensual pleasure and without human union, the Person of the Word of God and gave birth without natural sorrows. How could death swallow up one whose entire being was united to God? How could Hades close its mouth around her? How could corruption dare to take the body which had contained Life? All such things are absolutely repugnant and foreign to the soul and body which had carried God.

At the mere sight of her, death is seized with fear. Instructed by its defeat when it attacked her Son, experience has made it more prudent. No, she has not known the somber descent into Hell, but rather the straight and direct way to Heaven, this journey had been so prepared for her. If Christ Who is Life and Truth has said: "Where I am, there will my servant be also," of all his servants how could His Mother not dwell with Him? As her childbearing was free of sorrows, so her departure from this life would be free from them as well. "The death of sinners is grievous," for they have been killed. But what shall we say of her, if not that her death was an entrance into an immortal and better life? Precious in truth, is the death of the Saints of the Lord God of Hosts. Even more precious still is the Heavenward flight of the Mother of God.

Now the Heavens rejoice and the angels clap their hands! Now the earth exults and men leap for joy. Now the air rings with chants of gladness, and dark night rejects its sinister cloak of darkness and of mourning and shines with the brightness of day as with the fire of lightning. And so the living City of the Lord God of Hosts is lifted into the heights and the King brings the gift of great price: the Temple of the Lord, "far-famed Zion," the Jerusalem on High which is free and which is their Mother. And the Apostles whom Christ has established as chiefs over all the earth escort the Ever-Virgin Mother of God. † † †

# **The Most-Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary**

The death of the Theotokos was also life-bearing, translating her into a celestial and immortal life ... Its commemoration not merely renews the memory of the wondrous deeds of the Mother of God, but also adds thereto the strange gathering at her all-sacred burial of all the sacred Apostles conveyed from every nation ...

**St. Gregory Palamas (14<sup>th</sup> C)**

Mary properly bore the name of Virgin, and possessed to the full all the attributes of purity. She was a virgin in both body and soul, and kept all the powers of her soul and her bodily senses far above any defilement. This she did authoritatively, steadfastly, decisively and altogether inviolably at all times, as a closed gate preserves the treasure within, and a sealed book keeps hidden from sight what is written inside. The Scriptures say of her, 'This is the sealed book' (cf. Rev. 5:1-6:1; Dan. 12:4) and 'this gate shall be shut, and no man shall enter by it' (Ezek. 44:2).

**St. Gregory Palamas**

"I have hid the words of His mouth in my breast' (Job 23:12). For we 'hide the words of His mouth in the bosom of our heart' when we hear His commandments not in a passing way, but to fulfil them in practice. So it is that of the Virgin Mother herself it is written, 'But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart' (Lk. 2:19).

**St. Gregory the Great (6<sup>th</sup> C)**

But that God's word may be made clearer, listen to this. If any one loves Jesus, and attends to Him in earnest, and not in a casual way, but in love abides by Him, God is already devising to make some return to that soul for its love, although the man does not know what he is to receive or what portion God is about to give to the soul.

**St. Macarios the Great (4<sup>th</sup> C)**

The censer, with coal and incense, is a strong weapon in my hands. It is a symbol of blessing, strength and power, given to me by God to further my prayer for all the people of the world, especially for the members of the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church. It is a symbol of the ardent, fragrant grace of the Holy Spirit, breathing on all believers ... it also stands for an image of the Holy Mother carrying in her womb the live coal of Divinity.

**St. John of Kronstadt (1908)**

God rests in holy places; that is, in the Theotokos and all the Saints. These are they who have become likenesses of God as far as it is possible, since they have chosen to cooperate with divine election. Therefore, God dwells in them.

**St. John of Damascus (7<sup>th</sup> C)**

Thou art She who, as it is written, appears in beauty, and thy virginal body is all holy, all chaste, entirely the dwelling place of God, so that it is henceforth completely exempt from dissolution into dust. Though still human, it is changed into the heavenly life of incorruptibility, truly living and glorious, undamaged and sharing in perfect life.

**St. Germanus of Constantinople**

It was fitting that she, who had kept her virginity intact in childbirth, should keep her own body free from all corruption even after death. It was fitting that she, who had carried the Creator as a child at her breast, should dwell in the divine tabernacles. It was fitting that the spouse, whom the Father had taken to himself, should live in the divine mansions. It was fitting that she, who had seen her Son upon the cross and who had thereby received into her heart the sword of sorrow which she had escaped when giving birth to him, should look upon him as he sits with the Father. It was fitting that God's Mother should possess what belongs to her Son, and that she should be honored by every creature as the Mother and as the handmaid of God.

**St. John of Damascus**

## **August 16 - THE ICON OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, "NOT MADE WITH HANDS"**

At the time when our Lord preached the Good News and healed every illness and infirmity of men, there lived in the city of Edessa on the shore of the Euphrates Prince Abgar who was completely infected with leprosy. He heard of Christ, the Healer of every pain and disease and sent an artist, Ananias, to Palestine with a letter to Christ in which he begged the Lord to come to Edessa and to cure him of leprosy. In the event that the Lord was unable to come, the prince ordered Ananias to portray His likeness and to bring it to him, believing that this likeness would be able to restore his health. The Lord answered that He was unable to come, for the time of His Passion was approaching. He took a towel, wiped His face and, on the towel, His All-pure face was perfectly pictured. The Lord gave this towel to Ananias with the message that the prince will be healed by it, but not entirely, and later on, He would send him a messenger who would erase the remainder of his disease. Receiving the towel, Prince Abgar kissed it and the leprosy completely fell from his body, but a little of it remained on his face.

Later, the Apostle Thaddaeus, preaching the Gospel, came to Abgar and secretly healed and baptized him. The prince then destroyed the idols which stood before the gates of the city and above the gates he placed the towel with the likeness of Christ attached to wood, framed in a gold frame and adorned with pearls. Also, the prince wrote beneath the icon on the gates: "O Christ God, no one will be ashamed who hopes in You." Later, one of Abgar's great grandsons restored idolatry and the bishop of Edessa came by night and walled up that icon over the gates. Centuries have passed since then. During the reign of Emperor Justinian, the Persian King Chozroes attacked Edessa and the city was in great hardship. It happened that Eulabius, the Bishop of Edessa, had a vision of the All-Holy Theotokos who revealed to him the mystery of the sealed wall and the forgotten icon. The icon was discovered and, by its power, the Persian army was defeated.

### **REFLECTION**

The Orthodox Church surpasses all other Christian groups in the richness of her Tradition. The Protestants want only to adhere to Holy Scripture. But, not even Holy Scripture can be interpreted without Tradition. The Apostle Paul himself commands: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word or our epistle" (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

The tradition of Prince Abgar, without doubt, is of Apostolic Tradition even though the Apostles do not mention him in their writings. The Apostle Thaddaeus, did not write anything at all and, according to Protestant thinking, did not say anything and neither did he teach the faithful. According to what then was he an Apostle of Christ? St. John Damascene mentions the tradition of Prince Abgar in his defense of the veneration of icons.

How wonderful and touching is the letter of Abgar to Christ. And since he previously wrote that he heard of His miraculous power, that He cures the sick and since he implored Him to come and to heal him, Abgar further writes: "I also hear that the Jews hate You and that they are preparing some evil against You. I have a city, not large, but beautiful and bountiful in every good: come to me and live with me in my city, which is sufficient for the both of us for every need." Thus wrote a heathen prince while the princes of Jerusalem were preparing death for the Lord, the Lover of Mankind.

### **ON PRAYING WHEN TIRED . . .**

It happened that many times after an exhaustive day of hearing confessions the Elder Epiphanius Theodoropoulos (+1989) would ascend the stairs to his room with great difficulty, holding the railings of the stairs. So, he related to us, "the wicked one would whisper in my ear: 'Now you are tired. Why should you do the Compline (Evening Prayers)? You won't understand anything. You will do it mechanically!' And I would respond: 'If I don't do it at all, the victory will be yours. If, however, I do it even mechanically, half the victory will be mine.' And I would do it."

## ***This and That***

**Protestantism came along claiming to “reform” the Church but revolutionized it, de-sacramentalized it, and thus paved the way to de-sacralize culture and human life.** Yes, I would not argue that the original Reformers had it in mind to de-sacralize religion, but this is going to be the outcome when they take all the beauty and fun out of it. Smashing altars and statues, burning books and paintings, holding barren services in barren buildings, becoming a mere puppet of the King-gee, and we wonder why religion has bit the dust?

The Reformation will never end until the Roman Church returns to Holy Orthodoxy, because the Pope was the first Protestant, putting his own, individual, position above the collegial leadership of the entire church.

– Internet comment

We have such a long history of bad theology in our culture – it has individualized the believer, and isolated Christ’s saving action as a discreet, private, Divine action, in no way subject to communion or participation.

– Fr. Stephen Freeman

We are all human, we are all sinners. We are all equal before the Lord and His judgment even if we are different in the world. The only hierarchy that ultimately matters is closer union with Christ. Identifying ideologically as this, that or the other is a mechanism that keeps us from that union because Christ calls us to be who He knows us to be. Nothing less, nothing else. – Michael Baumann

### ***Denial of Reality:***

**Theory:** In advanced societies, the average amount of reality people can bear has declined across the past few decades.

This, I believe, has something to do with the ever-increasing availability of screen-based entertainment (movies, TV, the internet), something to do with the decline of religion, something to do with the revolution in manners that we call “political correctness...” There are surely connections there; but which is cause, which is effect, and which mere symptom, I don’t know. That’s why the theory is half-baked.

**Illustrations:** As we have seen these past few days, the whole zone of “identity” is shot through with barefaced, unblushing denial of reality.

All but a very tiny proportion of human beings are biologically male (an X and a Y chromosome in the genome) or female (two X chromosomes). A person who is biologically of one sex but believes himself to be of the other is in the grip of a delusion. That is what everybody would have said 50 years ago.

Some of those who said it would have followed up with an expression of disgust; some with unkind mockery; some with sympathy and suggestions for psychiatric counseling. Well-nigh *nobody* would have said: “Well, if he thinks he’s a gal, then he is a gal.” Yet that is the majority view nowadays. It is a flagrant denial of reality; but if you scoff at it, you place yourself out beyond the borders of acceptable opinion.

– John Derbyshire, *Nothing is Real*

“The destruction of the family is the single most destructive force in the past 40 years.”

### **On Fatherhood:**

The father sets down the law. When he is not there, a sense of anxiety takes root and that leads to outwardly directed hostility. Soon you are looking to the outside world to show you what the limits are. You’re ‘acting out’ and hoping society will control you. The desire for paternal law becomes pathologized.

Historian Arnold Toynbee said it well: “Civilizations die from suicide, not by murder.”

## St. Raphael Helps a Pregnant Woman

I wanted to write to you of a miracle that St. Raphael worked for me. My name is Eleni X. from Alexandria, Hematheias. In November 2011, I learned from my gynecologist that I was pregnant with my second child. My doctor told me to return the next month, in other words, December to listen to the baby's heartbeat.

The time passed, and the day came that we were to do the ultrasound to hear the baby's heartbeat. We went to the doctor, and he put the ultrasound on, and looked here and there, and nothing. The sac was larger than last time, but it was empty. Nothing was there. My husband and I froze. We heard the doctor tell us that he couldn't hear the baby's heartbeat, and he couldn't see any embryo. He called us into his office, and told us that we had to proceed with induction, so that there would not remain any products of conception, because there was a danger of causing sepsis and death. It was Tuesday when all of this took place. We set up the appointment for Friday (three days later). Those days, we were very saddened. I therefore called one of the fathers of the Brotherhood of St. Raphael, Ano Souli, Marathon, whom I met over the telephone, and who supported me with his good words, and with his blessings and prayers. Full of pain, I related to him everything that took place, and I entreated him to pray for me and for my child. He gave me courage and strength. He said that I shouldn't lose hope, but that I should have faith in God and His Saints. He said that he would pray for me, but that I must pray as well, and entreat St. Raphael to take up the situation, and that I should say to St. Raphael: "O Saint Raphael, go ahead in front of me, and I will follow you!" This I did. Friday came, and we went to the doctor to do the procedure. We reached the doctor's office. The doctor was in the operating room, because he had a delivery. As soon as he finished, I would go have the procedure. I waited a short time together with my husband and a friend of ours.

The phone rang, and it was the doctor, who asked his assistant if I had arrived yet, and told him that he was ready for the procedure. Then, the doctor said to wait because he wanted to see me first, because he wanted there to be no doubt [of no heartbeat] before the procedure. The doctor came down, and again put on the ultrasound.

My husband was sure that there was no baby, and so he was waiting outside. The doctor put on the machine, and what did he see!

My God, the little heart of the embryo was beating normally, and even I could see it!! The doctor lost it. He looked again 2-3 times. He went out perplexed to go look at his computer to see my history. (How could he know that St. Raphael's had his hand in the matter).

After a short time, he entered again to the ultrasound, and called my husband and told us that the procedure couldn't take place, because there was a little baby, and its little heart was beating normally. My joy was so great that it couldn't be described with words. We were so happy. We left the doctor and our first thought was to go with our friend to light a candle to St. Raphael.

We thanked St. Raphael from within our hearts for the miracle that he worked. He is my Patron Saint, along with the Archangel Michael and our Panagia.

He helps us daily with his presence. I will thank him my whole life! I thank you for everything, my Saint Raphael!

Note: St. Raphael, other than being a protector of many sick people, is also a protector of pregnant women, as many women had experienced this, and he frequently appears himself in a dream, telling them to call upon him to protect them and those children that they are bearing, that they might be helped to have a good delivery.

## Hymns of the Feast of Dormition – from Matins

Cry out, O David: What is this present feast?

Christ, he said, has translated to the heavenly mansions the one who bore Him without seed;

She of whom I sang in the book of Psalms calling her daughter, child of God and Virgin!

Therefore, mothers and daughters and brides of Christ, celebrate and cry://  
Rejoice, for thou art translated into the heavenly kingdom!

Thou gavest birth to God, the King of heaven.

Now, O Pure One, thou art translated as a Queen, to the Kingdom of heaven.

Thou didst win the honor of victory over nature by bearing God, O pure Virgin;  
Yet like thy Son and Creator,  
in a manner beyond nature  
Thou submitted to its laws.

Therefore, dying, thou didst rise to live eternally with thy Son.

Thy death, O pure Virgin,  
Was a crossing over to a better and eternal life.

It translated thee, O undefiled one,  
from this mortal life to an unending and truly divine one, and so thou dost look with joy upon thy Son and God!

The gates of heaven were opened wide,  
and the angels sang as Christ received the virgin treasure of His own Mother.  
Cherubim withdrew before thee in your exaltation,  
while seraphim glorified thee in joy!

The inspired tongues of the Apostles  
Rang out louder than trumpets as they sang in the Spirit the burial hymn to the Theotokos: Rejoice, O incorruptible source of God's Life-giving Incarnation that brings salvation to all!

Let the Apostolic trumpets ring out today,  
and let the voices of mankind sound praises in many tongues.

Let the air re-echo, shining with infinite light, and let the angels honor the Dormition of the Virgin with hymns!

The Lord and God of all  
Gave thee the things above nature as thy portion.

For just as He kept thee virgin in thy childbearing,  
So He preserved thy body incorrupt in the tomb; and He glorified thee by a divine translation, showing thee the honor of a Son to His Mother!

O Virgin, thy Son has truly made thee dwell  
as a bright candlestick in the Holy of Holies,  
flaming with immaterial fire;  
As a golden censer burning with divine coal,  
As the vessel of manna,  
The rod of Aaron, and the tables written by God;  
As a holy ark and table of the Bread of life.

Let us, believers, clap our hands in gladness, fulfilling the most precious feast of the Mother of God.

By knowing God through the Theotokos,  
let us glorify God Who was born of her!

Life arose from thee without destroying the seals of thy virginity!  
How then could the spotless tabernacle of thy body, the source of Life,  
become a partaker of death?

In his anger, Moses shattered the tables made by God and written by the Holy Spirit.

But Moses' Master kept His own Mother unharmed in her childbearing and now has made her dwell in the Heavenly mansions. Dancing with her in her joy, we cry aloud to Christ:

Blessed art Thou, O most Glorious God,  
Our God and the God of our fathers!