



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **January 31, 2016** ✠

Holy New Martyrs and Confessor of Russia

Sts. Cyrus & John, Unmercenary Healers (311)

St. Arsenios of Paros (1877)



✠ **Tomorrow, February 1, 6:30pm Vespers – Presentation of Christ**

✠ **Tuesday, February 2, 6:00am Divine Liturgy**

✠ **Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple** ✠

✠ **Next Weekend: Archpastoral Visit by His Beatitude,
Metropolitan Tikhon, Archbishop of Washington,
Metropolitan of All America and Canada**

➤ **Saturday & Sunday, February 6 and 7**



Diocesan Clergy Pastoral Conference – February 9-11

**Daily Vespers and Matins / Divine Liturgy with His Beatitude, Tuesday,
February 9, 7:30am (See schedule on back)**

February 12-13 – Fr. John Behr, Dean of St. Vladimir's Seminary, will give three talks at
Samford University, titled "What Protestants Need to Know about Orthodoxy."

Tickets are \$10 in advance, \$20 at the door. Visit the Theopolis Institute website.

✠ "Take care; do not forget, Christian; never lose hearty faith in Him Who is your invisible Life, your Peace, your Light, your Strength, your Breath; that is, in Jesus Christ."

✠ "When you look at the candles and lamps burning in church, rise in thought from the material fire to the immaterial fire of the Holy Spirit, for our God is a consuming fire. When you see and smell the fragrant incense, rise in thought to the spiritual fragrance of the Holy Spirit, for we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ. Also, in contrast think of the spiritual stench, which is sin and endeavor to be filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit."

✠ "The voice of the readings in church, the hymns, prayers and supplications, is the voice of our own souls, pouring forth from the acknowledgment and feeling of our spiritual needs and requirements; it is the voice of all mankind acknowledging and feeling its poverty, its accursedness, its sinfulness, the necessity of a Savior, the necessity of gratitude and praise, for the innumerable benefits and the infinite perfections of God. Wonderfully beautiful are these prayers and hymns; they are the breathing of the Holy Spirit." – St. John of Kronstadt

The Week of February 8-11, St. Symeon's will host the clergy of the Diocese of the South for the annual Diocesan Pastoral Conference (and Diocesan Council Meeting on Monday)

Volunteers are needed to help out with hospitality during the Conference days. All meals will be catered. If you're working you are welcome to eat with the clergy.

Pastoral Conference Schedule – Note liturgical service times in bold – The Conference gives us an opportunity for additional worship services outside the usual schedule and to get to meet our Diocesan clergy. Metropolitan Tikhon may attend to lead at the Tuesday Liturgy for the Leavetaking of the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

Monday, February 8

11:00am Diocesan Council Meeting at St. Symeon Church
1:00pm - Lunch
2:00pm - Diocesan Council Meeting
5:30pm - Vespers
6:30pm – Dean's Meeting / Dinner out

Tuesday, February 9

7:30am - Divine Liturgy – Leavetaking of the Presentation of Christ ~ His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon presiding
9:30am – Breakfast
10:30am - First Session with Dr. Stephen Muse
1:00pm - Lunch at St. Symeon's
2:30pm - Second Session
5:00pm - Vespers
6:00pm - Dinner at St. Symeon's
7:30pm – Administrator and Clergy Gathering

Wednesday, February 10

8:00am - Matins
9:30am - Breakfast
10:30am – Third Session with Dr. Stephen Muse
12Noon - Lunch at St. Symeon's
1:30pm – Fourth Session
5:00pm - Vespers
6:00pm - Dinner at St. Symeon's

Thursday, February 11

8:00am – Matins
9:30am – Breakfast



THE MEETING [PRESENTATION] OF OUR LORD IN THE TEMPLE

Many years before the coming of Christ there lived a very pious and saintly man called Simeon. Simeon plays an important role in the Feast of Our Lord's Presentation in the Temple which we celebrate today (Feb. 2). Holy Tradition relates that he was one of the most intelligent Jewish scholars of his day. He was called upon during the reign of Ptolemy II of Alexandria to serve as one of seventy Hebrew scholars responsible for preparing a translation of the Old Testament for Greek-speaking Jews who no longer understood Hebrew. This translation was known as the Septuagint, meaning "seventy", and is the foundation of our Orthodox Bible to this day. While translating, Simeon came across Isaiah 7:14 which says: **"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."** This verse amazed Simeon and, thinking it to be a mistake, he intended to strike out the word "virgin" and replace it with "maiden" saying, "I cannot believe that this will ever happen." Suddenly an angel of the Lord spoke to him saying that the verse was rightly expressed and that Simeon would behold Christ and hold Him in his arms. The angel departed saying "You will not die till this has come to pass." Simeon was filled with great joy and fervently prayed each day that the Messiah would soon come to the world. Holy Tradition tells us that Simeon waited for many years. Some Holy Fathers inform us that Simeon was over 150 years old when the Promise of God was fulfilled.

On the fortieth day after His birth, the most holy Virgin Mary brought her divine Son to the Temple in Jerusalem, to consecrate Him to the Lord and to purify herself according to the Law. (Exodus 12:2, Leviticus 12:2-7). And though neither the one nor the other was necessary, nevertheless the Lawgiver would not in any way transgress the Law which He had given through His servant and Prophet Moses. Just as He did at His circumcision, Jesus had to do all things according to God's law so that in Him the Law might be literally fulfilled. (The tradition of presenting children at the Temple is still practiced in the Orthodox Church. 40 days after birth a child is "churched" and prayers are offered for the baby and its mother.)

At that time Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was serving his turn as high priest in the Temple. He stood the Virgin Mary in the place for maidens, not that for married women. On this occasion the ancient Simeon was present as well as Anna, the daughter of Phanuel. Simeon, drawn by the Holy Spirit to the Messiah, took the infant child into his trembling hands and recited the following beautiful prayer which is recited in the Orthodox Church every evening during the Vesper services:

"Lord, lettest now Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." (Luke 2: 29-32).

Simeon also spoke the following words of the Christ Child: **"Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against."** (Luke 2:34).

Then Anna, who had from her youth served God in the Temple in fasting and prayer, and who herself recognized the Messiah, praised the Lord and made known to the inhabitants of Jerusalem the coming of the awaited One. But the Pharisees, present in the Temple and seeing and hearing all that had taken place, and being angry with Zacharias for having stood Mary in the place for maidens, made this known to King Herod. Believing this to be the new king of whom the star-following Magi of the East had spoken, Herod quickly sent to have Jesus killed. (Matthew 2:16-18). (The resultant slaughter of 14,000 Innocents is commemorated by the Church on December 29). But in the meantime the holy family had already escaped from the city and set out for Egypt, under the direction of an angel of God. (Matthew 2:13).

Thus the promise made to Simeon so many years before was fulfilled. The next day Simeon died in peace, thankful to Almighty God that he was honored to see the coming of Christ. All this took place on February 2nd, 40 days after the birth of Christ.

The Feast day of the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple is also known in Orthodox Tradition as the "Meeting of the Lord" for on that 40th day Christ meets His chosen people in the persons of Simeon the Elder and Anna the Prophetess. The Old and New Covenants meet. The promise made to Abraham is fulfilled. As one Orthodox writer says, "Israel's glory has dawned in the person of Christ who is now encountered in the world as "a light of revelation to the Gentiles." In Him the whole world is illuminated and saved." Simeon and Anna who meet Jesus in the Temple and recognize him for who He is symbolize in their oldness the passing away of the ancient laws and customs which were "but a shadow of the good things to come..." (Heb. 10:1). With the Leavetaking of the Feast of the Presentation (Feb. 9) the Christmas-Epiphany season of celebration in the Orthodox Church comes to an end. The feast of The Presentation of the Lord has been celebrated from the very earliest times, but its solemn celebration dates from 544, in the time of the Emperor Justinian.

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, full of grace!
From you shone the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God!
Enlightening those who sat in darkness.
Rejoice, and be glad, O righteous Elder,
You accepted in your arms the Redeemer of our souls,
Who grants us the Resurrection!

FOR CONSIDERATION

St. Anthony teaches: "As a man comes forth naked from his mother's womb, so the soul goes forth naked from the body. And one soul is pure and light, a second soiled by sin and a third blackened by many sins. If a body coming forth from an unhealthy womb cannot live, so also a soul, if it has not come to the knowledge of God through good conduct, cannot be saved or be in communion with God. The organ of bodily vision is the eye; the organ of spiritual vision is the mind. As the body is blind without the eyes, so is the soul blind without a right mind and a right life."

The Mystery of Repentance (Confession)

Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, *from Orthodox Dogmatic Theology (excerpt)*

The Mystery of Repentance is a grace-giving sacred rite in which, after the faithful offer repentance of their sins, the remission of sins is bestowed by the mercy of God through the intermediary of a pastor of the Church, in accordance with the Savior's promise.

In the Mystery of Repentance the spiritual afflictions of a man are treated, impurities of soul are removed, and a Christian, having received forgiveness of sins, again becomes innocent and sanctified, just as he came out of the waters of Baptism. Therefore, the Mystery of Repentance is called a "spiritual medicine" One's sins, which draw a man downward, which dull his mind, heart and conscience, which blind his spiritual gaze; which make powerless his Christian will—are annihilated, and one's living bond with the Church and with the Lord God is restored. Being relieved of the burden of sins, a man again comes to life spiritually and becomes able to strengthen himself and become perfected in the good Christian path.

The Mystery of Repentance consists of two basic actions: 1) the confession of his sins before a pastor of the Church by the person coming to the Mystery; and 2) the prayer of forgiving and remitting them, pronounced by the priest.

This Mystery is also called the Mystery of Confession (even though the confession of sins comprises only the first, preliminary part of it), and this indicates the importance of the sincere revelation of one's soul and the manifestation of one's sins.

Confession - that is, pronouncing aloud - is the expression of inward Repentance, its result, its indicator. And what is repentance? Repentance is not only awareness of one's sinfulness or a simple acknowledgment of one's unworthiness; it is not even contrition or regret (although all these aspects should enter into repentance), Rather, it is an act of one's Will for correction, a desire and firm intention, a resolve, to battle against evil inclinations; and this condition of soul is united with a petition for God's help in the battle against one's evil inclinations. Such a heartfelt and sincere repentance is necessary so that the effect of this Mystery might extend not only to the removal of sins, but so that there might also enter the opened soul a grace-giving healing which does not allow the soul again to become immersed in the filth of sin..

The very uttering aloud of one spiritual afflictions and falls before a spiritual father -the confession of sins-has the significance that by means of it there are overcome

a) pride, the chief source of sins, and
b) the despondency or hopelessness in one's correction and salvation. The manifestation of the sin brings one already near to casting it away from oneself.

Those who approach the Mystery of Repentance prepare themselves for it by an effort of prayer, fasting, and entering deeply within themselves, with the aim of uncovering and acknowledging their sinfulness.

The mercy of God goes out to meet the repenting Christian, testifying, through the lips of the spiritual father, that the Heavenly Father does not reject one who comes to Him, just as He did not reject the prodigal son and the repentant publican, This testimony consists in the words of the special prayer and the special words of remission which are pronounced by the priest.

The Institution of the Mystery

The Lord instituted the Mystery of Repentance after His Resurrection, when, having appeared to His disciples who, except for Thomas, were gathered together, He said to them solemnly:

Peace be unto you...And when He had said this, He breathed on them and saith unto them: Receive ye the Holy Spirit. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained. (John 20:21-23)

Moreover, even before this, Christ the Savior twice uttered a promise about this Mystery. The first time He said to the Apostle Peter, when Peter, on behalf of all the Apostles, had confessed Him to be the Son of God:

I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven, (Matt. 16:19)

Priests are only the visible instruments at the performance of the Mystery, which is performed invisibly through them by God Himself.

St. John Chrysostom, having in mind the Divine institution of the authority of the pastors of the Church to loose and bind, says: "The priests decree below, God confirms above, and the Master agrees with the opinion of His slaves. The priest is here the instrument of God's mercy and remits sins not on his own authority, but in the name of the Holy Trinity."

The invisible effects of grace in the Mystery of Repentance, in their breadth and power, extend to all the lawless deeds of men, and there is no sin that could not be forgiven men if only they sincerely repent of it and confess it with lively faith in the Lord Jesus and hope in His mercy. I am come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Matt. 9:13), said the Savior, and as great as was the sin of the Apostle Peter, He forgave him when he sincerely repented. It is known that the holy Apostle Peter called to repentance even the Jews who crucified the true Messiah (Acts 2:38), and later he called Simon the sorcerer, the ancestor of all heretics (Acts 8:22); the Apostle Paul gave remission to the incestuous man who repented, subjecting him first to a temporary excommunication (II Cor. 2:7).

On the other hand, it is essential to remember that the remission of sins in the Mystery is an act of mercy, but not an irrational pity. It is given for a man's spiritual profit, for edification, and not for destruction (II Cor. 10:8). This lays a great responsibility upon the one who performs the Mystery. Holy Scripture speaks of cases of conditions when sins are not forgiven. Finally, the Apostle Paul instructs that: *It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.* (Heb. 6:4-6)

In all these cases, the reason why the forgiveness of sins is not possible is to be found in the sinners themselves, and not in the will of God; more precisely, it lies in the lack of repentance of the sinners. How can a sin be forgiven by the grace of the Holy Spirit, when blasphemy is spewed forth against this very grace? But one must believe that, even in these sins, the sinners, if they offer sincere repentance and weep over their sins, will be forgiven. "For," says St. John Chrysostom about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, "even this guilt will be remitted to those who repent. Many of those who have spewed forth blasphemies against the Spirit have subsequently come to believe, and everything was remitted to them" (Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew). Further, the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council speak of the possibility of forgiveness for deadly sins: "The sin unto death is when certain ones, after sinning, do not correct themselves, ...In such ones the Lord Jesus does not abide, unless they humble themselves and recover from their fall into sin. It is fitting for them once more to approach God and with contrite heart to ask for the remission of this sin and forgiveness, and not to become vainglorious over an unrighteous deed. For the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart (Ps. 33:18).

The permission and even the direct demand to repeat the Mystery of Repentance is clear from the words of the Gospel: *Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.* (Luke 15:7) ✠ ✠ ✠

What Is A Christian Temple?

1 Cor 3:16 *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*

What is a temple for Christians? Why do we call our Churches temples? A temple is a place of encounter with a god. The central feature of a pagan temple was usually an image of a god, and it usually had an altar, a place for offering sacrifice to the god.

In the scriptures there is an ambiguity about temples. The building of the Tabernacle and later the Temple is commanded by God, and every detail of its construction and furnishing are prescribed in scripture. It is called the House of God. Yet the people of God knew, as St. Stephen later put it, that *God that made the world and all things therein... dwelleth not in temples made with hands* (Acts 17:24). King Solomon says at the dedication of the temple he built: *Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?* (1 Kings 8:27)

Notice the irony that in the Jewish Temple, in the center, the Holy of Holies, where one would expect the image of the god to be, the "Mercy Seat" atop the Ark, where God was said to "dwell" flanked by the huge images of the Cherubim (Dan. 3:55 LXX) was really an empty space. God was there, yet He was not.

The first temple in the wilderness is called the tent ("tabernacle") of meeting. This is an important concept; God "tents," or camps, among us. It is the same word, *eskeenosen*, used in St. John 1:14 (usually translated *dwelt* among us). It expresses the mystery or paradox that God is present in the created world but not part of it.

Furthermore, for the Jews eventually there was only one Temple and one Altar, because there is only one God.

But of the enormous magnificent Temple in Jerusalem our Lord says: *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up...* St. John says *he spake of the temple of his body* (John 2:19-21). Our Lord Himself is the true Temple, the true meeting place of God and Man. He is the one perfect acceptable sacrifice, the fulfillment of all sacrifices (Heb. 10).

His is an eternal sacrifice; though offered once in time it is forever a present reality; St. John sees in the midst of the Throne of God in heaven *a Lamb as it had been slain* (Rev. 5:6); this is Jesus Christ, *Who ever liveth to make intercession* for us (Heb. 7:25).

Moreover, unworthy though we be, we are given the privilege of joining ourselves to His one perfect sacrifice and being accepted in Him at the altar of God. As St. Paul puts it: *... by the mercies of God ... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service* (Rom 12:1). That's what the Divine Liturgy is about; we place on the altar bread and wine,



the substance of our bodies, our lives. We ask God to send down His Holy Spirit upon us and upon the gifts of bread and wine. By the Holy Spirit we and these gifts become the Body of Christ.

St. Paul calls the Church members the Temple: *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are* (1 Cor 3:16).

St. Peter says the same: *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.* 1 Peter 2:5

No, God does not dwell in temples ... but he "tents" in them. He dwells in His Body, His people, which is us.

We call this building a Temple because it is for us the meeting place of God and man. It is an icon of the one true Temple, the Body of Christ, the one true perfect acceptable sacrifice. We come here to offer ourselves in Him to the Father. We come to the Altar which sanctifies what is placed on it. (Matthew 23:19) And we ourselves become the Temple, because we are united to Christ who is the true Temple, and we become His dwelling place. This is personified in the icon of the Lord's Mother above the Altar Table: *Thy womb He made more spacious than the heavens, for it contained Him Whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain.*

– the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

“Will You Also Go Away?” {John 6:67}

In the face of today's assaults on our holy beliefs, we must seek with all our strength to confront our doubts, to seek the truth, and to increase our faith. What can we do to become bold when confronted by a non-Orthodox world view? How can we overcome our doubts? How can we strengthen our resistance to today's challenges to our faith?

The words of St. Peter hold very true in our own time: “Scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming?” (1 Pet.3:4) The sacred words of Jesus Christ seem to fall as if into a void and the history of His endless goodness is met with unbelief. The contemporary mind often does not want to accept His teaching, or else finds it rather hard to do so. What seem to be new doctrines—astrology, divination, witchcraft, non-Christian religions or secular humanism—continue to poison souls and blind them to the real teaching of Christ, as they have done throughout Christian history. Even for some Orthodox Christians it is no longer convenient to live faithfully by the commandments of God, by His Scripture, or by the rules of the Church. Others seek escape in the dark alleys of alcoholism, drugs and even suicide.

What are we looking for? This is an essential question for each of us to answer, and it must be looked at clearly and honestly. Perhaps we find that we just want a quick and comfortable solution to all our needs. Sometimes we do not even know that there is Truth, nor are we sure we even want it. If we can recognize the existence of Truth and commit to seeking it, we can then hear the answer Jesus gives: “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). God has revealed Himself to us! All who hear the Sunday Gospels year after year can attest to the reality of this. What the Orthodox Church teaches is not a fable. It is teaching the correct belief in God.

We know only too well that the Apostles had doubts—Peter, foremost among them, could have walked on the water had he not doubted. Even John the Baptist, the greatest born of woman, sent his disciples to ask Jesus: “Are you He Who is to come or shall we look for another?” (Luke. 7:19) The answer Jesus sent him is this: “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offence at Me” (vs.22-3). We are given these examples from the Gospel not merely to identify with the doubts, but also to hear Christ's answers.

When we are confronted with beliefs that threaten to undermine our faith, it would be fruitful to hear and take to heart the crucial dialogue between Jesus and His twelve disciples that is written in John 6. Jesus had just told them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (Jn. 6:53). At this point, “Many of His disciples drew back and no longer went about with Him. Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Will you also go away?’” (vs.66-7) Peter, having a strong faith because he had followed Christ and experienced His saving words, was wise. He knew enough now to answer, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that You are the Holy One of God” (vs.68-9).

It is not easy to be a good Orthodox Christian but the struggle is worthwhile. Here is what St. Paul writes to Timothy: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will reward to me on that day and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7)—so also do crowns await all those who love His coming and are not ashamed of Him.