



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **December 2, 2012** ✠

Holy Prophet Habbakuk (7th B.C.)

Martyr Myrope of Chios (250)

St. Jesse, Bishop of Tsilkani, Georgia (6th C)

St. Stephen Urosh, King of Serbia (1371)

Advent Season

O Nicholas,
the Servant of Christ!
Thou wast shown as truly
victorious to the faithful people
Strong against temptation,
And worthy of thy name!
Called from all places,
Thou art swift to come
to those who turn with love
to thy protection!
Appearing by day and night
to the faithful,
Thou dost save them
from danger and temptation!
~Vespers Stikhera of the Feast

This Week:

✠ Tues. Dec. 4, 6:30pm ~ Inquirer's Class – Church History

✠ Wed. Dec. 5, 6:30pm ~ Vespers - St. Nicholas

✠ Thurs. Dec. 6 10:00am ~ Divine Liturgy – St. Nicholas

🔔 **St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia** 🔔

✠ **Sat. Dec. 15, 3:00pm Holy Baptism ~ Child Elena Boyer**

⇒ **December Services: Dec. 12/13 – St. Herman (6:00am Liturgy); Dec. 19 – Akathist**

🔔 **Nativity Services:**

⇒ **Monday, December 24: 10:00am Royal Hours of Nativity**

3:00pm Holy Supper

6:00pm Christmas Eve Vigil

St. Symeon's
New Cookbooks
are here!

⇒ **Tuesday, December 25: 10:00am Nativity Divine Liturgy**

Charity Towards Him

✠ If we genuinely love God, we cast out the passions by this very love. This is charity towards Him - to prefer Him to the world, the soul to the flesh, while scorning worldly matters to devote oneself to Him continually by means of self-control, charity, prayer and so on.
~ St. Maximos the Confessor (7th C)

A Sermon on the Holy Apostle Andrew

by Our Holy Father, St. John Chrysostom

Strong is the net used by the apostles to fish, wondrous the memory of Andrew, and marvelous the commemoration of the net he employed to catch the nations and to lead them to faith in Christ! The seine of those deathless mortals, the apostles, can never be torn by forgetfulness, nor can time destroy their fishing tackle, made not by art of man but by the grace of God. If the fishermen themselves have departed from us, yet neither their gear nor the sweep-net with which they ensnared the world have fallen into decay.

Wisdom of the Holy Fathers

On the Incarnation

✠ Through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection... For the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word's indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all. You know how it is when some great king enters a large city, and dwells in one of its houses; because of his dwelling in that single house, the whole city is honored, and enemies and robbers cease to molest it. Even so is it with the King of all; He has come into our country and dwelt in one body amidst the many, and in consequence the designs of the enemy against mankind have been foiled, and the corruption of death, which formerly held them in its power, has simply ceased to be. For the human race would have perished utterly had not the Lord and Savior of all, the Son of God, come among us to put an end to death. **St. Athanasios the Great (325)**

Die Every Day

A person who lives as if he were to die every day - given that our life is uncertain by definition - will not sin, for good fear extinguishes most of the disorder of our appetites; whereas he who thinks he has a long life ahead of him will easily let himself be dominated by pleasures.

St. Athanasios the Great

The Time Between

Our Creator already rules, at the beginning and the end of our lives; why not allow Him to rule our entire lives from start to end? He is the Master of birth and death; may He rule over all the time between birth and death.

St. Nikolai of Serbia

Numbered...

Our days are numbered. Every stroke of the clock reminds us to seek Him Who created time and Himself stands above the measure of time. He alone is able to pluck us out from the ravaging torrent of time. Every stroke of the clock tells us: Be watchful! You now have one hour less until you must cross the threshold into life after death which knows neither days nor hours. Do not be seduced by the momentary sweetness of sin which vanishes like a dream, leaving the soul empty, ailing, anguishing; it steals away precious time and ruins it forever. Do not waste time in useless occupations or idleness.

St. John of Kronstadt

Patience in Temptations

"To say, *'Prove me, O Lord, and try me'*, is a mark of a man engaged in spiritual struggle, who seeks to be tested through a temptation inflicted by God's permission; in order to determine whether he will preserve patience amid the affliction caused by temptation. For the patience that a man shows amid temptations, as we have said, is the proof of his character, and also confers other goods on him. Herein, in truth, consists both benefit and progress, for the will of a struggler does not cooperate with temptation; but is, rather, opposed to it. And, for this reason, such a man strives not to be overcome by temptation." The verse *'lead us not into temptation,'* means, *'Do not allow us to be tempted by our own will and desires'*; for such a temptation engenders death, and about this the Savior says, *'Pray that ye enter not into temptation.'* **St. Barsanouphios the Great**

They cast and pull in their net invisibly, but the net is clearly seen to be full. They do not make use of a rod that time decays, nor do they let down into the water flaxen cord, which rots with time. No hook that rusts away have they fashioned; no bait have they prepared for a hook with which to catch fish. They do not sit upon a rock washed by waters, nor in a ship that may be sunk by a tempest do they sail. Indeed, it is not fish, by nature irrational, that they catch. Astonishing are the methods of which they make use; new and previously unseen their gear. With them, preaching replaces the rod; their recollections of Christ, the fishing-line; the might of grace, the hook; miracles, bait; and the heavens, from which they cast their line, the rock at the water's edge. Their ship is the holy altar; instead of fish, their catch is kings. They do not spread a net but the Gospel. Their work is guided by divine grace, not by the rules of the fishing trade. They are not helmsmen of ships on the sea but men's guides in life, and the seine, the sweep-net they always employ, is the Cross.

Who has ever seen fishermen from the dead catch living men like fish? O, great is the power of the Crucified One! Wondrous is the beauty of the divine! Mighty are the deeds of the apostles! Nothing in this life is as great and lofty as the grace given to them! The history of mankind has seen much that is marvelous and surpasses understanding; it has seen spilt blood cry, murder call out as though with a tongue, nature divided and turned against itself in jealousy, brother slay a brother born of the same womb, and the door of death opened by rancor. It has seen Noah's ark remain afloat while the whole world was submerged by the flood and the human race destroyed. It has seen an old man, because of his faith, arm himself against his own son, the offspring of his loins, and take him to sacrifice, although the son was not put to death. It has seen a blessing stolen and God the Creator wrestle with His servant. It has seen envy arise between brethren and slavery lead to dominion over a kingdom. A throne it has seen prepared by a dream and those who betrayed their brother compelled by famine to return to him. It has seen a rod work miracles and a bush covered with flames as if with dew. It has seen Moses the lawgiver give commands to nature. It has seen water made hard as a rock, the bottom of the sea laid bare, a path suddenly opened, and a pillar of cloud by day and one of fire by night serve as guides for a host of people. It has beheld a rod blossom, although the rod was not planted in the earth, and seen manna given as bread from heaven. It has seen the sun halted in its course by a man's prayers and a prophet conceived through the supplications of a barren woman. It has seen a handful of meal made greater than the contents of a granary and a cruse of oil stream forth more abundantly than a spring. It has seen a chariot ascend through the air,

carrying away a prophet, and the bones of the dead become a life-giving potion. The history of mankind has seen many great and marvelous things, but all of them pass away and are extinguished like a lamp put out at the rising of the sun. Never has there been anything or anyone like the apostles.

As servants of God the Word, they touched the Incarnate One, Who as God has no form. They followed after Him Who is everywhere present and reclined with Him Who cannot be contained in any place. They heard the voice of Him Who created the world by a word, and caught the world with their tongues; as if with nets. Their travels took them to the ends of the earth. Error they rooted up like thistles, and they leveled heathen places of sacrifice like thorns cut down to the ground. They utterly destroyed idols as if they were wild beasts, and drove off demons as though they were wolves. They assembled their flock, the Church, and gathered in the Orthodox like a crop of wheat. But heresies they cast away like tares, while they caused Judaism to wither up like grass and destroyed paganism as if by fire, reducing it to ashes. The Cross was the plow with which they cultivated human nature, and they sowed on that ground the seed of the word of God. Their deeds shone like the stars; therefore, the Lord said of them, *Ye are the light of the world*. The eastern horizon is for the Christian man the Lord, born of a Virgin; morning, Him Who gave an example to all by being baptized. The light of the sun is the grace of Christ crucified; its rays, the wondrous tongues of fire that appeared at Pentecost. Morning is the age to come; midday, the time when the Lord hung on the Cross. The western horizon is the grave; evening, death, which quickly passes away at the rising of the sun, the resurrection of the dead. *Ye are*, it is said, *the light of the world*. Let us gaze upon these stars and marvel at their brilliance!

When Andrew, whom we commemorate today, found the Lord of all, he cried to his brother Peter, *We have found the Messiah!* O brotherly love that surpasses measure! O good reversal of nature's order! Andrew was born after Peter, but it was he who led Peter to the Gospel, catching him by the words, *We have found the Messiah!* Joyfully did he exclaim these words: 'We have found a treasure!' he cried. 'Flee, O Peter, the poverty of circumcision; strip yourself of the ragged cloak of the Law, and cast off the yoke of its written ordinances.

"Count all things temporal as of little importance. Regard your present life as a dream, and flee Bethsaida, the wretched dwelling of outcasts. Forsake your nets, the gear of impoverished men; your boat, refuge from deluge; fishing, an occupation fit for times of flood; fish, gluttony's merchandise; the people of the Jews, a nation ever in revolt against God; and

Caiaphas, the father of a rebellious nation. *We have found the Messiah!* Whom the prophets foretold and Whose coming the Law heralded like a trumpet. We have found the treasure hidden in the Law. Flee, O Peter, the famine of the written statutes! *We have found the Messiah*, foreshadowed in ancient wonders, Whom Micah beheld sitting upon a throne of glory, Whom Isaiah saw surrounded by Seraphim, Whom Ezekiel saw amid the Cherubim, Whom Daniel beheld seated upon clouds, Whom Nebuchadnezzar saw in the furnace, Whom Abraham received in his tent, Whom Jacob would not release until he had received His blessing, Whose back parts Moses beheld as he stood upon a rock. We have found Him Who was begotten before time and appeared in the last times. Great is this treasure, which can never be exhausted! The riches thereof are not subject to the laws of nature; they exist eternally although they are newly revealed. *We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.* Many were they whom God anointed, but all were subject to death. Abraham He anointed, but he molds in the grave; Isaac He also anointed, but his bones lie in a sepulcher. Jacob He anointed, but he was mortal, and Moses as well, whose body lies in a place known to no one. David was also anointed, but like the others he was death's prey All alike were captives of death. Only Christ is by nature God. Yet in His compassion He became man, leaving sealed the virginal womb from which He appeared and making of fishermen springs of healing; for His are dominion and the Kingdom, and unto Him, together with His blameless and consubstantial Father and the Holy Spirit, are due glory and worship, now and ever and unto ages of ages! Amen.

■ from the *November Menaion*

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We should look upon all the faithful as one person and consider that Christ is in each one of them. We should have such love for them that we are ready to sacrifice our very lives for them. For it is incumbent upon us neither to say, nor to think of any person as evil, but we must look upon everyone as good. If you see a brother afflicted with a passion, do not hate him. Hate the passion that makes war upon him. And if you see him being terrorized by the habits and desires of previous sins, have compassion upon him. Maybe you too will be afflicted by temptation, since you also are made from matter that easily turns from good to evil. Love towards your brother prepares you to love God even more. The secret, therefore, of love towards God is love towards your brother. *For if you don't love your brother who you see, how is it possible to love God who you do not see? (1 John 4:20)*

Blessed Elder Porphyrios (+1991)

HOMILY~ On the Faithful as One Body and One Spirit

...There is one body and one spirit (Ephesians 4:4).

The Holy Apostle counsels the faithful to strive to be one body and one spirit. By one body is understood "one Faith," without divisions, without heresies and without self-will: the whole Church is one body of which Christ is the Head. By one spirit is understood "love," the ardent love of all the faithful for Christ, from which proceeds mutual love. The many become as one; many men become as one man. This is the miracle of the Christian Faith and Christian love. There is no power in the world which can be a stronger bond among men: not the same blood, or the same language, or the same hearth, or the same parents, or any type of common material interests. None of these is even nearly as powerful a bond as Christian faith and love. By this powerful, irresistible bond, all the members of the Church are bound to each other. The Church of God stands as one man, in time and in eternity-one body and one spirit. There is nothing more contradictory to this wondrous unity than the pride of individual men. Pride distorts faith, cools love, creates heresies, divides the Church, and sacrifices the good of the whole for individual satisfaction. Pride, in essence, is the absence of both faith and love.

Brethren, may God save us from pride, the primal infirmity of the human race, that we may always be one body and one spirit in our Lord Jesus Christ!

To Thee, O Lord Jesus; to Thee, the Head of the Church, be glory and praise forever! Amen.

REFLECTION ~ God's Judgments

Submit yourself to the will of God and do not pry too closely into God's judgments, for you can lose your mind. The judgments of God are innumerable and unfathomable.

A monk in the wilderness, imagining that he had attained perfection, prayed to God that He would reveal to him His various judgments in the lives of men. God put the thought in his mind to go to a distant place to inquire of a spiritual elder concerning this. However, while the monk was on his way, an angel of God in the form of an ordinary man joined him, saying that he too wanted to go to that elder. Thus traveling together, they came upon the house of a God-fearing man, who treated them well, giving them to eat from a silver platter.

When they had eaten, the angel took the platter and threw it into the sea. The monk found this both amazing and unjust, but he remained silent. The second day they came upon the house of another hospitable man who cordially received and treated them as kinsmen. Before leaving, that man brought out his only son for the travelers to bless. The angel of God then took the child by the throat and strangled him. The monk was greatly angered and asked the angel who he was, and why he had committed such misdeeds. The angel meekly replied to him: "The first man was pleasing to God in all things and had nothing in his house that was attained by injustice except that silver platter. By God's judgment, I threw that stolen platter away, so that the man would be righteous before God in all things. The other man was pleasing to God and had nothing in his house that would bring down the wrath of God except his son, who-had he matured-would have become a great criminal and a demonic vessel. Therefore, by God's judgment, I strangled that child in time to save his soul, for the sake of his father's goodness, and to save the father from many miseries.

Behold, such are the mysteries and the unfathomable judgments of God. And you, elder, should return to your cell and not strive vainly by inquiring into that which is in the authority of the One God."

✠ Spiritual life is very simple and easy; we make it difficult by not struggling properly. With a little effort, a great deal of humility, and trust in God, one can achieve great progress in the spiritual life. For the devil cannot find a foothold where there is humility; and where there is no devil, it follows that there will be no temptations.

+Elder Paisios of Mt. Athos

St. Nicholas the Wonderworker of Myra



The true story of Santa Claus begins with Saint Nicholas, who was born during the third century in the village of Patara. At the time the area was Greek and Christian and is now on the southern coast of Turkey. His wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young. Obeying Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor," Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors and ships.

Under the Roman Emperor Diocletian, who ruthlessly persecuted Christians, Bishop Nicholas suffered for his faith, was exiled and imprisoned. The prisons were so full of bishops, priests, and deacons, there was no room for the real criminals—murderers, thieves and robbers. After his release, St. Nicholas attended the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. He died December 6, AD 343 in Myra and was buried in his cathedral church, where myrrh poured from his relics. This myrrh, said to have healing powers, fostered the growth of devotion to St. Nicholas. The anniversary of his death became a day of celebration, St. Nicholas Day, December 6th (December 19 on the Julian Calendar).

Through the centuries many stories and legends have been told of St. Nicholas' life and deeds. These accounts help us understand his extraordinary character and why he is so beloved and revered as protector and helper of those in need.

One story tells of a poor man with three daughters. In those days a young woman's father had to offer prospective husbands something of value—a dowry. The larger the dowry, the better the chance that a young woman would find a good husband. Without a dowry, a woman was unlikely to marry. This poor man's daughters, without dowries, were therefore destined to be sold into slavery. Mysteriously, on three different occasions, a bag of gold appeared in their home—providing the needed dowries. The bags of gold, tossed through an open window, are said to have landed in stockings or shoes left before the fire to dry. This led to the custom of children hanging stockings or putting out shoes, eagerly awaiting gifts from Saint Nicholas. Sometimes the story is told with gold balls instead of bags of gold. That is why three gold balls, sometimes represented as oranges, are one of the symbols for St. Nicholas. And so St. Nicholas is a gift-giver.

One of the oldest stories showing St. Nicholas as a protector of children takes place long after his death. The townspeople of Myra were celebrating the good Saint on the eve of his feast day when a band of Arab pirates from Crete came into the district. They stole treasures from the Church of Saint Nicholas to take away as booty. As they were leaving town, they snatched a young boy, Basilios, to make into a slave. The emir, or ruler, selected Basilios to be his personal cupbearer, as not knowing the language, Basilios would not understand what the king said to those around him. So, for the next year Basilios waited on the king, bringing his wine in a beautiful golden cup. For Basilios' parents, devastated at the loss of their only child, the year passed slowly, filled with grief. As the next St. Nicholas' feast day approached, Basilios' mother would not join in the festivity, as it was now a day of tragedy. However, she was persuaded to have a simple observance at home—with quiet prayers for Basilios' safekeeping. Meanwhile, as Basilios was fulfilling his tasks serving the emir, he was suddenly whisked up and away. St. Nicholas appeared to the terrified boy, blessed him, and set him down at his home back in Myra. Imagine the joy and wonderment when Basilios amazingly appeared before his parents, still holding the king's golden cup. This is the first story told of St. Nicholas protecting children—which became his primary role in the West.

Another story tells of three theological students, traveling on their way to study in Athens. A wicked innkeeper robbed and murdered them, hiding their remains in a large pickling tub. It so happened that Bishop Nicholas, traveling along the same route, stopped at this very inn. In the night he dreamed of the crime, got up, and summoned the innkeeper. As Nicholas prayed earnestly to God the three boys were restored to life and wholeness. In France the story is told of three small children, wandering in their play until lost, lured, and captured by an evil butcher. St. Nicholas appears and appeals to God to return them to life and to their families. And so St. Nicholas is the Patron and protector of children. Several stories tell of St. Nicholas and the sea. When he was young, St. Nicholas sought the holy by making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. There as he walked where Jesus walked, he sought to more deeply experience Jesus' life, Passion, and Resurrection. Returning by sea, a mighty storm threatened to wreck the ship. St. Nicholas calmly prayed. The terrified sailors were amazed when the wind and waves suddenly calmed, sparing them all. And so St. Nicholas is the Patron of sailors and voyagers.

Other stories tell of Nicholas saving his people from famine, sparing the lives of those innocently accused, and much more. He did many kind and generous deeds in secret, expecting nothing in return. Within a century of his death he was celebrated as a Saint. Today he is venerated in the East and West as a wonderworker and as a Patron of a great variety of persons - children, sailors, bankers, pawn-brokers, scholars, orphans, laborers, travelers, merchants, judges, paupers, marriageable maidens, students, victims of judicial mistakes, captives, perfumers, even thieves and murderers! He is known as the friend and protector of all in trouble or need.

Sailors, claiming St. Nicholas as Patron, carried stories of his favor and protection far and wide. St. Nicholas chapels were built in many seaports. As his popularity spread during the Middle Ages, he became the Patron Saint of Apulia (Italy), Sicily, Greece, and Lorraine (France), and many cities in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Russia, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Following his Baptism, Grand Prince Vladimir brought stories of and devotion to St. Nicholas to his homeland where St. Nicholas became the most beloved Saint of Holy Russia. St. Nicholas was so widely revered that thousands of churches were named for him.

St. Nicholas' tomb in Myra became a popular place of pilgrimage. Because of the many wars and attacks in the region, some Christians were concerned that access to the tomb might become difficult. For both the religious and commercial advantages of a major pilgrimage site, the Italian cities of Venice and Bari vied to get St. Nicholas' relics. In the spring of 1087, sailors from Bari succeeded in spirited away the bones, bringing them to Bari, a seaport on the southeast coast of Italy. An impressive church was built over St. Nicholas' crypt and many faithful journeyed to honor the Saint who had rescued children, prisoners, sailors, famine victims, and many others through his compassion, generosity, and the countless miracles attributed to his intercession. The St. Nicholas shrine in Bari was one of medieval Europe's great pilgrimage centers. To this day pilgrims and tourists visit Bari's great Basilica di San Nicola.

Through the centuries St. Nicholas has continued to be venerated by Orthodox and Catholics and honored as well by Protestants. By his example of generosity to those in need, especially children, St. Nicholas continues to be a model for the compassionate life.

Widely celebrated in Europe, St. Nicholas' Feastday, December 6th, kept alive the stories of his goodness and generosity. In Germany and Poland, boys dressed as bishops begged alms for the poor—and sometimes for themselves! In the Netherlands and Belgium, St. Nicholas arrived on a steamship from Spain to ride a white horse on his gift-giving rounds. December 6th is still the main day for gift-giving and merrymaking in much of Europe. For example, in the Netherlands St. Nicholas is celebrated on the 5th, the eve of the day, by sharing candies (thrown in the door), chocolate initial letters, small gifts, and riddles. Dutch children leave carrots and hay in their shoes for the Saint's horse, hoping St. Nicholas will exchange them for small gifts.