



## Fire & Light

### St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

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✠ December 9, 2012 ✠

### Conception of the Theotokos

The Prophetess Hannah,

Mother of the Prophet Samuel (1100 B.C.)

New Hieromartyr Priest Sergius Mechev of Moscow (1941)



*"O my beloved Queen, my hope, O Mother of God, protector of orphans and protector of those who are hurt, the savior of those who perish and the consolation of all those who are in distress, you see my misery, you see my sorrow and my loneliness. Help me, I am powerless, give me strength. You know what I suffer, you know my grief - lend me your hand because who else can be my hope but you, my protector and my intercessor before God? I have sinned before you and before all people. Be my Mother, my consoler, my helper. Protect me and save me, chase grief away from me, chase my lowness of heart and my despondency. Help me, O Mother of God!"*

~ Fr. Arseny of the Gulag

#### This Week:

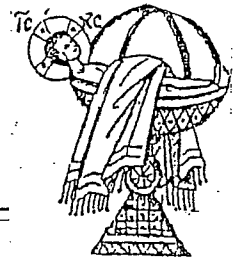
- ✠ Tomorrow Evening, Dec. 10, 6:30pm ~ Inquirer's Class – Worship
- ✠ Wed. Dec. 12, 6:30pm ~ Vespers - St. Herman of Alaska
- ✠ Thurs. Dec. 13 6:00am ~ Divine Liturgy – St. Herman

#### Baptisms the next two Saturdays:

- ✠ Sat. December 15, 3:00pm ~ Child Mary Boyer (taking her middle name)
- ✠ Sat. December 22, 3:00pm - Matthew & Leah Vest & their two boys Jude & Lucas.

#### Nativity Services:

- ⇒ Monday, December 24: 10:00am Royal Hours of Nativity
- 3:00pm Holy Supper
- 6:00pm Christmas Eve Vigil
- ⇒ Tuesday, December 25: 10:00am Nativity Divine Liturgy



⇒ New Parish Council Officers appointed: President - James Gordon!

VP - Innocent Krause; Treasurer – Helen Ritchey; Assistant Treasurer, Nicholas Wells; Secretary – Gregory Gilbert; Building Committee Chairman – Deacon Ephraim Rivers; James Potts – Legal Counsel; Jonathan Boyer – Building Committee and Contractor liaison. *Many Years !*

#### Draw Near!

✠ If you wish to draw the Lord to you, approach Him as disciples to a Master, in all simplicity, openly, honestly, without duplicity, without idle curiosity. He is simple and uncompounded. And He wants the souls that come to Him to be simple and pure. Indeed you will never see simplicity separated from humility.

St. John Climacus

## **St. Spyridon and the Purloined Goat (St. Spyridon is remembered Dec.12)**

St. Spyridon the Wonderworker, bishop of Tremithus in Cyprus (+348) was a shepherd and keeper of livestock before his consecration as bishop, and continued this work even after his elevation of the holy episcopacy.

One day, after our Holy Father had returned from Antioch, a certain government steward came in order to buy some goats from him and to negotiate with the Saint about their price. It was intent to buy 100 goats, but the man put down the price for 99, wishing to deprive the holy one of the price of one goat.

Therefore when the Saint and the meat-monger came into the fold, our clairvoyant father said to the steward, "Come in, my son, and take as many goats as you have paid for." But he, not discerning that which was said to him by our father, and being overcome by his passion of greed, took 100 goats as he had given the price of them.

As he led them from the fold, one of them ran hastily back into the fold again. But that rapacious man returned, wishing to take it as though it were his own. Again, therefore, he carried it away like a captive, leading it to the other 99, not as one seeking out the stray sheep, but wishing to defraud the shepherd. But straightway it returned again. When the goat had done this many times, therefore, the codger grew dispirited and, holding it on his shoulders, he, the erring one, seized the unerring goat. But the goat cried out exceedingly, thereby proclaiming the injustice of the miser, and it struck his head with its horns, so that all they which beheld the clamor of the irrational creature marveled. But the dispassionate and longsuffering and most compassionate father said to the buyer, "Behold, my son, perhaps you did not give his price, and for this reason he cries out and writhes about this way?"

Coming to himself, and perceiving that his bad intent was made known, he prostrated himself before the wonderworking Father and asked forgiveness from him for this scheme and sin, and gave him the price for the hundredth goat. Thus, when the goat, with all haste and quiet, joined itself to the 99, the buyer marveled and glorified God, Who accepts the correction of our evil desires.

*Through the prayers of our Holy Father Spyridon the Wonderworker, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us!*

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✠ According to the Holy Fathers, our salvation would be an impossibility were it not for the Church's Holy Sacraments, which embody us in Christ, and render us of the same Body and of the same Blood as Christ.

**Elder George of Gregoriou Monastery**

✠ One must act in such a way that the soul does not turn to God only when one is standing in prayer, but should do so as far as possible throughout the day. It should be an unceasing offering of oneself to Him.

**St. Theophan the Recluse**

✠ When I speak of having God in our mind, it does not mean that we see God, but that God sees us. This is the right attitude: we act in the presence of God, knowing that He is looking at us.

**Elder Sophrony (+1996)**

✠ People mostly pray as if there were no God in them, or as if He did not heed their prayers. Let us ascribe to the Lord at least the same amount of attention that good parents show to the requests of their children, at least that provident and attentive love which good parents have for their children.

**St. John of Kronstadt**

✠ A place does not save you. There is no place where you can flee from yourself.

**St. Nikon of Optina (1931)**

## **Early Church Fathers:**

### **On Opposing the use of Musical Instruments in Church**

It would be tedious, beloved, were I to recount every single detail that the history of the Psalms contains, especially now that it is time that we must also present something from the New Testament in confirmation of the Old, lest one think that the office of psalmody is to be curtailed, inasmuch as many of the Old Law usage(are now abolished. For what is carnal has been rejected, for example, circumcision, the Sabbath, sacrifices, discrimination among foods, trumpets, harps, cymbals and timbrels,. all of which are understood to reside now in the bodily members of man and there better to sound. Daily ablution, observance of the new moons, that fastidious inspection of leprosy, have altogether ceased and gone their way along with whatever else of the sort was necessary at the time because of their immaturity. The other things which are spiritual — faith, piety, prayer, fasting, patience, chastity, praise — have been increased, not diminished.

**St. Nicetas of Remesiana, On the Use of Hymns, 9**

If the Holy One tolerated blood and sacrifice because of the childishness of men at that time, why do you wonder that the music of harp and psaltery was used?

**St. Isidore of Pelusium, Epistle II, 176**

Some also take the meaning of these instruments allegorically and say that the timbrel calls for the death of the flesh and that the psaltery looks to heaven. And indeed this instrument is moved from above, not from below like the harp. But I would say this: That in ancient times, they were thus led by these instruments due to the slowness of their understanding, and were gradually drawn away from idolatry. Accordingly, just as He allowed sacrifices, so too did He permit instruments, making concession to their weakness.

**St. John Chrysostom, On Psalm 149, 2**

*Elsewhere, St. John says that our worship matches what is offered in sacrifice. Hence, in the Old Testament, "inarticulate instruments" were used because inarticulate animals were offered in sacrifice. But in the New Covenant, the "articulate instrument," the human voice, is employed because our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, the "rational Sacrifice," is the One Who is being offered for the sins of the world.*

'Praise Him with psaltery and harp. Praise Him with timbrel and dance. Praise Him with strings and flute. Praise Him with tuneful cymbals, praise Him with cymbals of jubilation' (Ps. 150: 3-5). The Levites employed these instruments long ago as they hymned God in his holy Temple, not because God enjoyed their sound but because he accepted the intention of those involved. That the Deity does not take pleasure in singing and playing we hear Him saying to the Jews: "Take away from me the sound of your songs; to the voice of your instruments I will not listen" (Amos 5:23). He allowed these things to happen because he wished to free them from the error of idols. For since they were fond of play and laughter, and all these things took place in the temples of the idols, he permitted them and thereby enticed them, thus avoiding the greater evil by allowing the lesser, and teaching perfect things through the imperfect.

**Theodore of Cyrus, Interpretation of Psalm 150**

When formerly the people of the circumcision worshipped through symbols and types, it was not unreasonable that they raised hymns to God on psalteries and harps, and that they did this on the days of the Sabbath, thus clearly violating the required rest and transgressing the law of the Sabbath. We, however, maintain the Jewish law inwardly, according to the saying of the Apostle: 'For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is real circumcision something external and physical, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal' (Rom. 2: 28-9); and it is upon a living psaltery and an animate harp and in spiritual songs that we render the hymn. And so more sweetly pleasing to God than any musical instrument would be the symphony of the people of God, by which, in every church of God, with kindred spirit and single disposition, with one mind and unanimity of faith and piety, we raise melody in unison in our psalmody. **Eusebius of Caesarea, On Psalm 91**

St. Clement of Rome warns against the use of "lifeless instruments" in sacred assemblies. (Protrepticus)

~ From the *Orthodox Christian Witness*, Vol. 29, No. 16, 1980's

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## On the Four Types of Communion with God in the Orthodox Church by Elder Cleopa of Romania (+1997)

Our union and communion with God in general terms come about in two ways: through the mystical communion of the Body and Blood of the Lord and through spiritual communion.

The first and most important communion with Christ takes place through the partaking of His Body and Blood at the Divine Liturgy.

The second way of communion and union with Christ is in the Prayer of Jesus, during which the intellect is plunged into the heart and there says unceasingly, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner."

The third way of communion with God our Creator takes place through the keeping of His commandments and the acquisition of the virtues.

And the fourth way of communion with Christ takes place through the reading and hearing of the word of God in the Holy Scriptures.

The Orthodox Church is the 'special, most holy place in which is realized our many-sided communion with Christ. Therein, all of our faithful, approaching the divine services with piety and faith, dwell in a mystical atmosphere and communion by the intellect, heart, prayer and participation in the divine communion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

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✘ **Silence is beneficial for the soul. When we talk it is difficult to refrain from idle talking and judging others. But there is also a bad silence, when someone is angry and for this reason is silent.** **St. Nikon of Optina (+1931)**

# Our Venerable Father, St. Herman Elder and Wonderworker of America

## Our Venerable Father Herman of Alaska

Little is known of the early life of the Monk Herman. He was born in Serpukhov in the Moscow Diocese about 1756 and at the age of 16, he began his monastic life at the Trinity-St. Sergius Hermitage near St. Petersburg. While at the Hermitage, Herman developed a severe infection on the right side of his throat which brought him to the point of death. After fervent prayer before an Icon of the Most-Holy Theotokos he fell into a deep sleep, and during this sleep, Herman dreamed that he was healed by the Virgin. Upon waking, he found that he had completely recovered. Remaining at the Trinity-Sergius Hermitage for five more years, he then moved to the Valaam Monastery on Lake Ladoga.

During his stay at the Valaam Monastery, Father Herman developed a strong spiritual attachment to the Elder Nazarius, Abbot and Renewer of the spiritual life of Valaam. He found in Nazarius a gentle, yet effective spiritual guide, whom he would remember for the rest of his life. During his stay in Valaam, the monastery was visited by Gregory Shelikov, head of the Golikov-Shelikov Trading Company, who requested Monks to work in the new mission field in Alaska. Thus, in 1793, Father Herman, with several other Monks was sent by the Holy Synod of Russia to the Alaskan missionary field.

After a journey of nearly a year, the little band of eight Monks arrived on Kodiak Island on September 24, 1794. From Kodiak, the Monks began their effort to convert and educate the natives. Several thousand Alaskans were converted to Orthodoxy, but the Mission did not have the success that had been expected. Archimandrite Joasaph, the head of the Mission, was consecrated a Bishop, but died with two others when the ship on which he was returning to Alaska sank, and Fr. Herman, who, from the beginning had distinguished himself with his humility, compassion for the natives and his administrative skills, became the acting head of the Mission. Eventually only he remained from the original Mission.

After difficult relations with and persecution by the Russian-American Trading Company, which controlled the Alaska Colony, between 1808 and 1818 Fr. Herman left Kodiak and went to Spruce Island, which he called *New Valaam*. He spent the rest of his life on this island, where he cared for orphans, ran a school and continued his missionary

work. He built a small chapel, school and guest house, while food for himself and the orphans was produced from his own experimental garden.

Caring little for himself, Fr. Herman wore the oldest and simplest clothes under his cassock and ate very little. His free time was devoted to prayer and singing the services he could do as a simple Monk, since, in humility, he had refused to be ordained. Thus, his life on the island was that of an ascetic and was in many ways similar to the lives of the early Monks of the Egyptian desert. When asked if he was ever lonesome, Fr. Herman answered, "No, I am not alone there! God is there, as God is everywhere. The Most-Holy Angels are there. With whom is it better to talk, with people or with Angels? Most certainly with Angels."

Father Herman continued to grow in his love for the natives while he lived on Spruce Island, for he saw them as newly-born children in the faith, who had to be guided and taught. He had a special love for the children and they were very fond of him. One of his greatest pleasures was being with children, teaching them and giving them the delicacies he made. During this time a ship from the United States brought an epidemic to the Alaskans and hundreds of them died. But they were not alone, for Fr. Herman remained with them constantly, going from person to person, comforting the dying and praying with and for them. After the epidemic ended, Fr. Herman brought the orphans back to New Valaam with him and cared for them. On Sundays and Holy Days, Fr. Herman would gather the people for prayer and singing, and he would give sermons that captivated the hearts of all those present. As a clairvoyant Elder, he could see into the hearts of his spiritual children and help them.

The natives recognized the holiness of the Venerable One and turned to him for help, seeing in him an intercessor before God. Once there was a great tidal wave threatening the island and the people came to Fr. Herman for help. He took an Icon of the Theotokos, placed it on the beach and said, "Have no fear. The water will not go any higher than the place where this holy icon stands"; and it did not. On another occasion there was a fire on the island and the people again turned to the righteous Elder, who interceded successfully on their behalf.

Prior to his death, Fr. Herman revealed what



would happen to him. He told the people that when he died there would be no Priest in the area and the people would have to bury him by themselves. He also said that he would be forgotten for thirty years and then would be remembered. Father Herman died on December 13, 1837, in the manner in which he had described to his flock. They continued to revere his memory, but the outside world seemed to

forget him until the first investigation of his life in 1867, by Bishop Peter of Alaska. Finally, on August 9, 1970, the Holy Monk was glorified by the Orthodox Church in America, in impressive ceremonies at Kodiak, Alaska, and the Blessed Father Herman of Alaska entered the ranks of Saints who are interceding on behalf of American Orthodoxy.

## Liberty, Equality and Social Justice

***Liberal American church denominations have for some time now been preoccupied with the concept of "social justice," making the Gospel primarily a vehicle for correcting perceived social injustices, as they define them. Here's some common sense and data on the subject from secular sources.*** -----

Judging by what they say and the policies they pursue, modern liberals are not all that concerned about liberty. What they really care about, and what they assign a higher value to, is *economic equality* (as reflected in the now famous phrase, "spread the wealth around"). Yet here is what the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote in 1976 about this very issue in connection with the redistributionist ideology then common at the United Nations:

"And equality ... what is the record? Those nations which have put liberty ahead of equality have ended up doing better by equality than those with the reverse priority.... This is our case."

...After surveying the numbers, the economist Walter Williams of George Mason University asks an excellent question: "What standard of fairness dictates that the top ten percent of income earners pay 71 percent of the federal income tax burden while 47 percent of Americans pay absolutely nothing?" To which an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* replies: "There is nothing fair about confiscatory tax policy that reduces growth, denies opportunity, and keeps more people in poverty."

Then too there is the assumption, blithely accepted by the party of economic equality, that the gap between rich and poor - or even between the rich and the middle class - self-evidently amounts to a violation of social justice. **Yet far from being self-evident, this assumption stems from a highly questionable concept of social justice - one that rules out or minimizes the role played by talent, character, ambition, initiative, daring, work, and spirit in producing unequal outcomes in 'the pursuit of happiness.'**"

Furthermore, both the assumption and its correlative concept of social justice run counter to the American grain. As study after study has shown, and as the petering out of the *Occupy Wall Street* movement has recently confirmed, what Tocqueville observed on this point in the 1830s remains: Americans, unlike Europeans, he wrote, "do not hate the higher classes of society" even if "they are not favorably inclined toward them, which is to say, that most Americans are not prone to the envy of the rich that eats away at their self-appointed spokesmen on the Left.

Nor are most Americans subject to the accompanying passion for economic egalitarianism that made for the spread of socialism in other countries. What explains the absence of that leveling passion is that it has been starved by the opportunities America has afforded millions upon millions to better their lot and the advantage they have been free to take of those opportunities - which in turn explains how unprecedented and unmatched levels of prosperity have been created here and how they have come to be shared more widely here than anywhere else.

Tocqueville also put his finger on a second and related reason for the persistence of this particular feature of American exceptionalism: "The word poor is used here in a relative, not an absolute sense. Poor men in America would often appear rich in comparison with the poor of Europe."

**A story I was once told by a Soviet dissident provides an amusing illustration. It seems that the Soviet authorities used to encourage the repeated screening of *The Grapes of Wrath*, a movie about the Great Depression-era migration of starving farmers from the Dust Bowl to California in their broken-down pickups. But contrary to expectation, what Soviet audiences got from this film was not an impression of how wretched was the plight of the poor in America. Instead they came away marveling that in America, "even the peasants own trucks."**

Tocqueville further observed that in America, "the poor, instead of forming the immense majority of the nation, as is always the case in aristocratic communities, are comparatively few in number, and the laws do not bind them together by the ties of irremediable and hereditary penury."

## Hurrying by...

An ethics professor at Princeton Seminary asked for volunteers for an extra assignment. About half the class met him at the library to receive their assignments. The professor divided the students into three groups of five each.

He gave the first group envelopes telling them to proceed immediately across campus to Stewart Hall. He told them that they had 15 minutes and if they didn't arrive on time, it would affect their grade.

A minute or two later, he handed out envelopes to five others. They were also to go over to Stewart Hall, but they had 45 minutes.

The third group had three hours to get to Stewart Hall.

The students weren't aware of it, but the professor had arranged for three drama students to meet them along the way. Close to the beginning of their walk, one of the drama students had his hands on his head and was moaning aloud as if in great pain.

About half way to Stewart Hall, on the steps of the chapel, the seminary students passed a man who was lying face down as if unconscious. Finally, on the steps of Stewart Hall, the third drama student was acting out a seizure.

In the first group of students, those who had only 15 minutes to get across campus, no one stopped to help. In the second group, two students stopped to help. In the last group, the one that had three hours for their assignment, all of the students stopped to help at least one person. The professor had clearly shown these seminarians that hurry hinders our heart...

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## Signs of Pride

✠ "A brother once asked one of the Fathers about the thought of blasphemy, saying: 'Abba, my soul is troubled by the demon of blasphemy. Have pity on me and tell me how this happened to me, and what I should do about it.' The Elder answered: 'This kind of thought occurs to us because we malign, disparage, and condemn other people; or, otherwise, it comes: from pride, from following one's own will, from neglecting prayer, and from irritation and anger --- all of which are signs of pride. For pride leads us to the aforementioned passions, from which the thought of blasphemy is engendered. If this thought lingers in one's soul, the demon of blasphemy hands one over to the demon of fornication.'"

**From the 'Gerontikon'**

## Out of Envy

✠ "When the mind begins to make progress in the love of God, then the demon of blasphemy starts to tempt it. He suggests such thoughts to it as no man - but only their father, the Devil - could devise. He does this out of envy for the God-loving man, in order that - coming into despair at having conceived such thoughts - he might no longer dare to soar up to God in his customary prayer. The pernicious demon receives no aid from this trickery in attaining his purpose, but - in fact - renders us more steadfast; for, in being attacked and fighting back, we become more proven and more genuine in our love for God. 'Let their sword enter into their own hearts, and let their bows be broken' [Psalm 36(37):15]."

**St. Maximos the Confessor**