

## Fire & Light

### St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 854-4235

Visit [stsymeon.com](http://stsymeon.com) &

[birminghamorthodox.com](http://birminghamorthodox.com)

✠ November 20, 2011 ✠

23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Forefeast of the Entrance

of the Theotokos into the Temple

St. Gregory of Decapolis (816)

St. Proclus, Archbishop of Constantinople (447)

Martyr Edmund, King of England (869) St. Diodorus of Solovki (1633)

"The infant, who runs with yearning to the embrace of its mother to breast-feed and is filled with her sweet love and affection, is smarter than us adults when we avoid union with God through prayer --- which we often consider drudgery."

~ Elder Paisios



- ✠ Tomorrow, Nov. 21 10:00am Liturgy ~ Feast of the Presentation of the Theotokos
- ✠ Inquirer's Class – Tuesday, November 22 ~ 6:30pm
- ➔ Saturday – 7:00am to 12 Noon - Pepper Place Booth

~ *Happy Thanksgiving!*



**Aluminum Recycling** is a new fundraising project. Bring items to the church hall. A bucket will be set up outside the church hall.

**To Keep Off** : Cell Phones in church and lipstick on Icons. *Thanks!*

### St. Gregory Palamas ~ On the Theotokos, at Her Presentation

The highest summit of all the Saints, the Mother of God, passes, in the words of the Psalm, "Into the place of the wonderful tabernacle", entering the Holy of Holies "with the voice of joy and praise" (Ps. 42:4 Lxx), the inspired sound of those escorting her then, and us keeping the festival now. She is more exalted than the Saints in Heaven, and not only would it be impossible for anyone on his own to come anywhere near to honoring her as she deserves, but neither could all those together who have been saved by her Son, even if all were to be united as one voice. The whole Creation would fall short of offering her the glory that befits her, for she has become the Mother of the Creator of all. How could any words of ours adequately express the great things done for her by her Son, even taking all of us together? Would our words not be as the tiniest drop of water compared with the inexpressible abyss of her glory? Thus is this undertaking beyond my powers, and so far am I from supposing that I can devise words of praise commensurate with the superhuman virtue of the Mother of God, she who is truly blessed and superior in every way to the entire Creation.

But how else can I fulfill my longing, settle my debt, or express my thanks for her countless gracious gifts to me, except by extolling her as best I can? For love persuades me and obligation, both our common indebtedness and my own personal duty, compels me. The grace which I have already received promises forgiveness hereafter for what follows, and the unfailing love for mankind of the Ever-virgin Bride is a continual presence among all those who hear, encompassing all things and holding them in being. For she is near and ever standing by those who call upon her, through her tireless and most effective intercession to God her Son, which accomplishes all things for our good, as we ourselves know, having learnt from the benefits we have received, and having had our faith strengthened as a result. Calling upon her with this faith, I hope to have her as my support to the end as I plunge now into the ocean of her wonders.

✠ ✠ ✠

## Pearls of the Holy Fathers 3:3

He who is within the walls of a monastery is not necessarily a monk. No, it is still necessary to build within oneself also the spirit of monastic life. This is where you should put your zeal.

St. Theophan the Recluse

This age is not rest and repose, but a battle, warfare, a marketplace, trading, a school, a sea voyage. For these reasons you must labor in asceticism, not become despondent, not be idle, but exercise yourself in the works of God. Look carefully: here they sell crowns; acquire them, lest you return empty without a purchase. Strive not to deprive yourself of God's grace. Otherwise you will be a stranger to reward, and, more than that, you will be evilly judged and will perish.

Elder Nazarius of Valaam

When you are in church, and are going to partake of the divine Mysteries of Christ, do not go out until you have attained complete peace. Stand in one place, and do not leave it until the dismissal. Think that you are standing in Heaven, and that in the company of the holy angels you are meeting God and receiving Him in your heart. Prepare yourself with great awe and trembling, lest you mingle with the holy powers unworthily.

Abba Philemon

Someone asked an old man, "How is it that some say, 'We see visions of angels'?" — and he replied, "Happy is he who always sees his sins."

Apophthegmata Patrum

It is truly a great deed: the tonsuring into the holy angelic order. It is a great and mysterious power that is embodied in this sacred act, an act which is directed to the angelic order so that the man will become an angel in the image of his inward life; for angels are bodiless, and the material order cannot become like them.

Abbess Taisia

— My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him.— Reflect, dearly beloved, how great a dignity this is: to have the Lord come and abide in our heart. Should some rich and powerful friend enter your home you would make haste to clean the whole house, lest there be anything to displease the eye of the one who is coming. Let you then cleanse the stains of evil doing from the house of your soul, in preparation for the coming of God.

St. Gregory, On Pentecost

Remember the time which is past and the years of your life which were lost in the vanity of this world. Can you return of them even a single day or night? And likewise, if the end of your life comes, can you add or beg back a day for repentance, or even a single hour? We shall wish to seek out the time we have poorly spent of our life, and we shall not find it.

St. Paisius Velichkovsky

No man has been entrusted with great things without having first been tried in small ones.

St. Isaac the Syrian

Think good thoughts about what is good by nature, and think well of every man.

St. Thalassius of Libya

God demands only one thing from us — that our heart be purified by means of attention.

St. Symeon the New Theologian



## Entry into the Temple of our Most Holy Lady Mother of God and Ever Virgin Mary

Celebrated on the 21<sup>st</sup> Day of the Month November

The Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Mother of God happened, according to the preserved accounts of Holy Tradition, in the following manner. The parents of the Virgin Mary, Righteous Joakim and Anna, in praying for a solution to their childlessness, gave a vow that if a child were born to them, they would dedicate it to the service of God.

When the Most Holy Virgin reached three years of age, the holy parents decided to fulfill their vow. Having gathered together their kinsfolk and acquaintances, and having dressed the All-Pure Mary in Her finest clothes, and with the singing of sacred songs and with lighted candles in their hands they carried Her to the Jerusalem Temple. There the high-priest with a throng of priests met the maiden of God. In the Temple, the stairway led up fifteen high steps. The Child Mary, so it seemed, could not Herself make it up this stairway. But just as they placed Her on the first step, strengthened by the power of God, She quickly made it up over the remaining steps and ascended to the highest. Then the high-priest, through an inspiration from above, led the Most Holy Virgin into the Holy of Holies, and herein of all people it was only the high-priest that entered one time a year with a purifying sacrifice of blood. Therefore all those present in the Temple were astonished at this most unusual occurrence.

Righteous Joakim and Anna, having entrusted their Child to the will of the Heavenly Father, returned home. The Most Blessed Mary remained in the domicile for girls, situated near the Temple. Round about the Temple, through the testimony of Holy Scripture (Exodus 38; 1 Kings 1: 28; Lk. 2: 37), and also the historian Josephus Flavius, there were many living quarters, in which dwelt those dedicated to the service of God.



The earthly life of the Most Holy Mother of God from the time of Her infancy to the time of Her ascent to Heaven is shrouded in deep mystery. Her life at the Jerusalem Temple was also a secret. "If anyone were to ask me, — said Blessed Jerome, — how the Most Holy Virgin spent the time of Her youth, — I would answer: that is known to God Himself and the Archangel Gabriel, Her constant guardian".

But in the Church tradition there were preserved accounts, that during the time of the stay of the All-Pure Virgin at the Jerusalem Temple, She grew up in a community of pious virgins, read diligently the Holy Scripture, occupied Herself with handcrafts, prayed constantly and grew in love for God. In remembrance of the Entry of the Most Holy Mother of God into the Jerusalem Temple, Holy Church from ancient times established a solemn feastday. The decretals for the making of the feast in the first centuries of Christianity are found in the traditions of the Palestinian Christians, where mention is

made that the holy Empress Helen built a church in honor of the Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Mother of God.

In the IV Century there is mention of this feast by Sainted Gregory of Nyssa. In the VIII Century Saints Germanos and Tarasios, Constantinople Patriarchs, delivered sermons on the feastday of the Entry.

The feast of the Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Mother of God — foretells the blessing of God for the human race, the preaching of salvation, the promise of the coming of Christ.

*Translation by Fr. Stephen Janos from the Moscow Patriarchate texts, the "Reference Book for Clergy-Servers"*

## HOW DOES THE DEVIL CONFIRM SINNERS IN THEIR SLAVERY TO SIN?

*From Unseen Warfare*

When the devil keeps a man in slavery to sin, he takes special care to darken him more and more by spiritual blindness, banishing from him every good thought, which could bring him to realize the perniciousness of his life. Not only does he banish thoughts, which could lead to repentance and turn the man to the path of virtue, but instead of them he implants evil and depraved thoughts, at the same time presenting opportunities for committing the sin, which is most habitual to him, and enticing him to fall into it or into other more grievous sins as often as possible. Thus the poor sinner becomes more and more blind and darkened. This blindness strengthens in him the habit and constant impulse



to go on every sinning and sinning. Led from sinful action to greater blindness, and from blindness to greater sins, the unhappy man whirls in this vortex and will do so right up to death itself, unless special Divine grace is sent to save him.

If a man find himself in this perilous state and wishes to be freed from it, then, as soon as a good thought, or

rather, a suggestion comes to him, calling him from darkness to light and from sin to virtue, he should immediately and without delay accept it with his whole attention and desire, and put it at once into practice with all diligence, calling from the bottom of his heart to the generous Giver of all blessings: "Help me, O Lord God, help me quickly, and let me no more linger in this sinful darkness." Let him never weary in appealing to God in these or similar

similar words. At the same time let him also seek help on earth, by turning to those who know for advice and guidance as to how better to free himself from the bonds of sinful slavery that hold him. If he cannot do it immediately, he should do so as soon as the chance presents itself, at the same time never ceasing to appeal to the Lord Jesus, crucified for us, and to His Holy Mother, the Immaculate Virgin, imploring them to have mercy on him and not to deprive him of their speedy help. He should know that victory and triumph over the enemy lie in not delaying and in quick readiness to follow a right prompting.

## CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS

The **shamrock** was used by St. Patrick of Ireland to teach the Holy Trinity. The leaves are one, yet three, and distinct, equal, and of the same substance.



The **seven lamps** represent the seven branch candlestick before the Throne of God which symbolize the gifts of the Holy Spirit. (Is 11:2-3; Rev. 5:12)

The **candle** symbolizes the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is "the Light of the World" (John 8:12).



The **censor** is symbolic of prayer, for as the smoke of incense soars upward, so too does prayer ascend to God (Rev. 8:4).



## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S ADVENT IN THE FLESH?

*Saint Symeon Metaphrastic*

It is the restoration of human nature in Him, for He restored to human nature the dignity of Adam, and, in addition, bestowed on it the unutterable grace of the heavenly inheritance of the Holy Spirit. Leading it out of the prison of darkness, He showed it the way and the door to life. By going this way and knocking on this door, we can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. As He said, "Ask and it will be given to you... knock and it will be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7). By passing through this door, it is possible for everyone to attain the freedom of his soul, to cut off his evil thoughts, and to become Christ's bride and consort through the communion of the Holy Spirit. Such is the inexpressible love of the Lord towards man, whom He created in His own image.

# LESSONS FROM THE FATHERS - Giving Thanks to God

(On the holiday of Thanksgiving)

*Below we present excerpts from the brochure *Glory to God for All Things*, published by Bishop Alexander of South America.*

There is a story about a protestant pastor who, in the course of visiting the sick, entered a mental hospital. There, apparently in a moment of lucidity, one of the patients approached the pastor and asked him, "Have you in any way given thanks to God for your reason?" The pastor was stunned by this unexpected question. No, it had never occurred to him to thank God for such an obvious gift. It was only here, standing in the midst of so many unfortunate and mentally ill persons in the mental hospital, that he understood that his intellect was a great gift from God! The pastor immediately promised the patient and himself that he would thank God daily for his healthy mental faculties.

This vignette from the life of the pastor illustrates a general characteristic of mankind's attitude toward the good things of life, through which people have become accustomed to taking everything as their self-evident right. There are few people who thank their Creator, Who constantly cares for them and sends them countless material and spiritual good things.

St. John of Kronstadt writes, "No matter where I look with the eyes of my heart, whether within myself or without, everywhere I see good reasons to thank and glorify the Lord!"

Truly, our entire life is an unbroken chain of God's blessings! He created the body, something better and more perfect than any machine or computer. He instilled in us this immortal, God-like soul to animate our mortal body, the soul which is precious and treasured above all else. He gave us reason, raising us above the animals; free will, through which we might physically and spiritually improve ourselves and direct our life to good; and the senses, with which we might enjoy God's gifts and find happiness and joy in life...

Many become despondent and complain in times of trial. However, one must understand that the Lord sometimes permits us to experience troubles and sorrows not because He has forgotten us, or because He wishes to punish us. No! He allows them to occur, as a bitter but necessary medicine, a medicine to heal us of pride, absent-mindedness, excessive self-reliance, egotism, and other such failings. Recognizing this, St. John Chrysostom said at the twilight of his life, "Glory to God for all things, and especially for sorrows!"

We Orthodox people should thank God even more for making us worthy to be children of His true Church, which through the power of the Holy Spirit maintains the pure teaching of the Gospel, which enlightens and strengthens us with its grace-filled Mysteries. It is that Church to which belonged the prophets, apostles, martyrs, and all of the saints who both reside in the heavenly abode and together with us, their younger brothers, comprise the one, great, Family of God. It is that Church in which we are made worthy to commune of the life-giving Body and Blood of our Savior, which grants us immortality.

Thus, contemplating the paths of God's providence in our lives, we see that it is not so much duty or obligation, but rather our entire being, our present and future life, that demands that we not remain insensitive to God's blessings. One must add that it is not God, but we ourselves, who need our thanksgiving. In thanking God, we are reminded of His love for us, His constant care for us, and the sea of material and spiritual good things which He daily pours out upon us. This reminder enlightens our intellect, gives us the opportunity to understand more precisely the

purpose of our life, and helps us to separate from what is of primary importance that which is of secondary importance.

Moreover, giving thanks to God causes our despondency to dissipate, removes our sorrow from us, returns to us courage and joy in being alive. Giving thanks to God may be compared to the warm rays of the sun penetrating into the dark cellar of the soul. The touch of the Spiritual Sun warms the soul, causing man to become kinder and better disposed to love.

Let us strive daily, and especially on Sundays, to offer thanks to our Creator and Savior. This will serve as excellent medicine for our souls!

A Prayer of Thanksgiving

Lord Jesus Christ our God, O God of every merciful kindness and compassion, Whose mercy is without measure, and Whose love for mankind is an unfathomable deep: Falling down before Thy greatness, with fear and trembling as unworthy servants, and now humbly rendering thanksgiving unto Thy loving-kindness for Thy benefits bestowed upon us, we glorify, praise, hymn and magnify Thee as Lord, Master, and Benefactor; and falling down again we offer thanks. We implore Thy boundless and ineffable merciful kindness, humbly praying, in that Thou hast now graciously vouchsafed to accept and to fulfill the supplications of Thy servants, so also grant that henceforth we might increase in true love of Thee, and of our neighbors, and in all of the virtues. And enable us to always thank and praise Thee, together with Thine unoriginate Father and Thy most holy and good and consubstantial Spirit. Amen.

---

## Kassiana: Lessons in Divine and Christian Love

(Instructions to a nun from her spiritual father)

✦ "Listen, daughter, to those words of unspoken bravery, which are characteristic only of love. Out of love, the Son of God humiliated Himself, served, taught, healed, fed, strengthened, straightened, gladdened, suffered, was in distress, forgave, and died. *'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life as a ransom for many'* (Mt.20:28). When serving, He served with rejoicing; when sacrificing Himself, He sacrificed voluntarily, not worrying about Himself, but looking constantly with an everlasting, ardent love towards the heavens, at those two other Persons of the Trinity. That is the simple existence of love in the Son. That is also the natural way of men who have love.

Because of this, St. Nilus of Sinai says: *'With pain you have acquired divine love: that all will become easy to do and maintain. But where there is no love, there is no repose.'* And all becomes difficult and impossible."

✦ "Christ, out of love, sought us - but not ours. But men, because of their meager love, seek His good things rather than Him. They expect from Him bread, rain, fertility, health, and earthly goods in general. And He gives all with sadness that it is not He, Himself that they seek. They have forgotten that when they have received Him, they have received *all* along with Him. The Apostle said: *'I do count them all as dung that I may win Christ'* (Phil 3:8). Elsewhere he writes to the faithful: *'I seek not yours but you'* (2Cor. 12:14)."

✦ "St. Anthony the Great said: *'The beginning of sin was lust; the beginning of salvation and the Kingdom of Heaven was love.'* Love and lust are opposites. Whoever calls lust by the name of love, sins against love. For love is spiritual, pure and holy, but lust is carnal, impure and profane. Love is inseparable from truth, and lust is inseparable from delusion and lies. It is natural for real love to grow continuously in ardor without consideration of human age; lust quickly passes, transforming itself into loathing, and frequently leading to despondence."

✦ ✦ ✦

## This and That

"The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming . . . and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."  
~ Theodore Roosevelt

### On being offended:

Are our egos all so fragile that we can't experience another person's different opinions or beliefs without being somehow damaged by the experience? I just don't get it. Elias Davis

### On "the visceral antipathy of the Western elite class toward Russia:"

"That disdain is based on the accurate recognition that Russia is the last bastion of faith and identity, which those people (Russia's critics) have done their best to destroy in their own countries."  
Serge Trikovic

Thanks to the irresponsibility of both parties, of the Bush as well as Obama administrations, we are facing unavoidable and painful choices.  
Patrick Buchanan

Vetoing a welfare bill to assist drought-stricken Texas farmers, Democratic President Grover Cleveland, in 1887, expressed the philosophy of the American people when he declared, "Though the people support the government, the government should not support the people."

When and why did the critical shift occur in American mentality that caused "scholars" and journalists to stop reporting facts, events, and conditions observable in the world around us and concentrate on reporting their feelings about an imaginary world?  
Clyde Wilson

Was Solzhenitsyn right when he said that an evil regime's pervasive distortions of the truth are even worse than its *physical* oppression?  
Clyde Wilson

When a country works reasonably well—when the schools teach algebra and not governmentally mandated Appropriate Values, when the police are scarce and courteous, when government is remote and minds its business and works more for the benefit of the country than for looters and special interests, then pledging to it a degree of allegiance isn't foolish. Decades back America was such a country, imperfect as all countries are, but good enough to cherish. Fred Reed

In the deepening twilight, home-schooling becomes almost a responsibility, a parallel to medieval monks copying Greek manuscripts.  
Fred Reed

Does television corrupt American morals or do American morals corrupt television? ~ Clyde Wilson

Some people hear the truth and accept it; others hear it and complain that it offends them — then try to shame those who speak the truth into hiding it a little, in the false hope that by not calling it "sodomy" we might manage to convince some of sodomy's public advocates to admit their error.

We must not allow such people to define the terms of debate. We must speak plainly in public and not be cowed into trying to treat the whole wicked world as we would a repentant sinner. The world will only hold our cowardice in contempt.  
Dn. Brian Mitchell

One might ask oneself, "What do I really need, and what things really matter to me? How much money do I really need, and how much am I willing to pay to get it?" Remember, you pay more for money than for anything else.  
Fred Reed

# GENERAL THANKSGIVING

By the PRESIDENT of the United States Of America

## A PROCLAMATION

---

WHEREAS it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favour; and Whereas both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me "to recommend to the people of the United States a DAY OF PUBLICK THANKSGIVING and PRAYER, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness:"

NOW THEREFORE, I do recommend and assign THURSDAY, the TWENTY-SIXTH DAY of NOVEMBER next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies and the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquillity, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed; – for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been able to establish Constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted; – for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; – and, in general, for all the great and various favours which He has been pleased to confer upon us.

And also, that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions; – to enable us all, whether in publick or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually; to render our National Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed; to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shewn kindness unto us); and to bless them with good governments, peace, and concord; to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us; and, generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best.

GIVEN under my hand, at the city of New-York, the third day of October, in the year of our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine.

(signed) G. Washington