



St. Herman of Alaska

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **December 8, 2013** ✠

The Advent Season

St. Patapius of Thebes (7th C)

**Apostles of the 70: Sosthenes, Apollos, Cephas, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, Caesar, & Onesiphorus Martyr
Anthusa of Rome (5th C) St. Sophronios of Cyprus (8th C) St. Kyrill, Abbot of Chelmogorsk (1367)**



✠ **Thurs. December 12 6:30pm ~ St. Herman of Alaska – Vespers with Litiya**

✠ **Saturday Baptisms: December 14, 3:00pm ~ Susanna Knarr, and the Spence's –
Columba, Brigid, Genevieve, Raphael, and Peter ! Godparents include the Condras,
Boyers and Mulders** ⇒ **IOCC Sunday Collection - \$1250 sent !**

HOMILY ~ On the Creator of the New Man

... for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace (Ephesians 2:15).

When He came to earth, the Lord, the Lover of Mankind, came to all men, not just to some. The Jews awaited a messiah; He came as the Messiah. The pagans awaited a redeemer; He came as the Redeemer. He came with equal love for both the Jews and the pagans. There was no other group on earth-only the Jews and the pagans. The Jews were the only ones in the world who believed in one God, whereas the pagans worshiped idols. But the Jews had obscured their faith by their transgressions and, therefore, knew nothing. Thus, both the Jews and the pagans had become equal in their ignorance and equal in the curse of sin with which Adam had burdened the benighted earth.

As of old Adam did not belong to the Jews exclusively, but also to the pagans, for they both descended from him, so Christ, the new Adam, did not belong to one or the other, but to both, for He saved both. The Lord Jesus could not side with the Jewish kingdom of empty legal formalism, or the Hellenic kingdom (including paganism in general) of naturalistic fables and demonic divinations and sorcery. Rather, He healed them both. He took both of these sick ones and he created the new man. And this is the Church of God. Thus, the Lord annulled and cast out both Judaism and Hellenism, and created His Holy Church.

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In this Season of Holy Birth - Tomorrow (December 9) is the Feast of the Conception of the Most-Holy Theotokos:

The Fathers of the Orthodox Church on Abortion

The following represent the teaching of the Orthodox Church from the [early] second century through the fifth century.... Note that penalties, when they are given, are neither civil nor criminal, but ecclesiastical and pastoral (excommunication for the purpose of inducing repentance). Also note that these quotes deal with both surgical and chemically induced abortion, both pre- and post-quickening.

From the Letter to Diognetus (1st C):

(speaking of what distinguishes Christians from pagans) "They marry, as do all others; they beget children but they do not destroy their offspring" (literally, "cast away fetuses").

From the Didache (1st C):

"You shall not slay the child by abortions."

From the Letter of Barnabus(1st C):

"You shall not destroy your conceptions before they are brought forth; nor kill them after they are born."

From St. Clement (2nd C):

"Those who use abortifacients commit homicide."

From Tertullian(2nd C):

"The mold in the womb may not be destroyed."

From St. Basil the Great (4th C):

"The woman who purposely destroys her unborn child is guilty of murder. The hair-splitting difference between formed and unformed makes no difference to us."

From St. Augustine(5th C):

"Sometimes their sadistic licentiousness goes so far that they procure poison to produce infertility, and when this is of no avail, they find one means or another to destroy the unborn and flush it from the mother's womb. For they desire to see their offspring perish before it is alive or, if it has already been granted life, they seek to kill it within the mother's body before it is born."

From St. John Chrysostom(4th C):

"Why do you sow where the field is eager to destroy the fruit? Where there are medicines of sterility? Where there is murder before birth? You do not even let a harlot remain only a harlot, but you make her a murderess as well. Indeed, it is something worse than murder and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation. What then? Do you condemn the gifts of God, and fight with His laws? What is a curse you seek as though it were a blessing. Do you make the anteroom of slaughter? Do you teach the women who are given to you for a procreation of offspring to perpetuate killing?"

Two Canons from the Ecumenical Councils:

Canon XCI:

As for women who furnish drugs for the purpose of procuring abortions, and those who take fetus-killing poisons, they are made subject to penalty for murderers.

Canon II:

"A woman who aborts deliberately is liable to trial as a murderess. This is not a precise assertion of some figurative and inexpressible conception that passes current among us. For here there is involved the question of providing for the infants to be born, but also for the woman who has plotted against her own self. For in most cases the women die in the course of such operations, But besides this there is to be noted the fact that the destruction of the embryo constitutes another murder.... It behooves us, however, not to extend their confessions to the extreme limit of death, but to admit them at the end of the moderate period of ten years, without specifying a definite time, but adjusting the cure to the manner of penitence."



A St. Nicholas Story...

A TRUE STORY...

Translated from "Raiskie Tsveti Russi Zmli," initially printed by the Russian Orthodox Youth Committee, Baldwin Place, N.Y., 1984.

Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. [Pss 100:6]

† † †

During his stay in Moscow in the spring of 1707, Tsar Peter Alexeevich commissioned Prince Feodor Yurevich Romodanovsky to organize the penitentiary system. And so, Romodanovsky set out on an inspection of the Moscow prisons. In the convict prison, accompanied by an inspector and a guard, he walked along all the corridors, looking into each cell and inquiring about the prisoners.

Suddenly, one of the convicts addressed him: "Esteemed Prince! We know that you are a pious and God-fearing man, that you venerate the memory of the saints, especially that of our hierarch St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. For his sake, the merciful one, show thy generous mercy and let me go home for a visit, just for two days."

"What?!" Exclaimed the astonished Romodanovsky. "Are you crazy to think of asking such a thing?"

"I am fully aware and of sound mind," replied the convict. "I shall add that in my part of the country the feast of St. Nicholas is particularly honored. There in the village church is an altar dedicated to him. And besides, I long to see my young wife and my little children. I want to embrace and to kiss them. Let me go..."

"What kind of a man is this?" Asked the prince.

"He murdered one of the tsar's soldiers," answered the guard.

"What kind of soldier?"

"One of the Preobrazhensk regiment. True," added the guard, "it was committed in a fit of anger."

The prisoner continued: "Merciful prince! It's true, I'm a great criminal. I repent of my deed before God and man. Nevertheless, I'd like to go home for a visit. I'm asking for two days only, and be assured that on the third day I shall return here on my own."

The convict's frankness impressed the prince, and he asked him, "Who will act as surety for you?"

"St. Nicholas the Wonderworker," answered the prisoner.

"He will secure me against any temptation."

Here Romodanovsky looked the prisoner straight in the eyes, and something warmly compassionate moved in his soul.

"Unfetter him and release him for two days," he ordered, pointing to the prisoner.

"Your honor," said the inspector, "I dare say he will deceive you. He has only to make it out of the prison and there'll be no trace of him. Nothing in the world is sacred for these criminals. They are masters of fine speech."

Romodanovsky pondered these words...

"It's true," he thought. "Once he leaves the prison where would one look for him? Maybe he isn't even interested in going home but just wants to be released and do what he pleases... Obviously, I wasn't thinking when I gave the order. But once said, there's no turning back; a Romodanovsky doesn't take back his words."

The prince looked once again into the open face of the convict and repeated: "Release him from prison for two days! I have faith that he will return at the appointed time. His holy surety will guarantee it."

The prisoner threw himself at the feet of the kind prince, while the inspector, sullen and pessimistic, ordered the guard to unfetter him.

† † †

Twenty *versts* from Moscow (a *verst* is Russian unit of length of approximately one kilometer, *Ed.*), in the village of Nikolsk, the feast for St. Nicholas the Wonderworker was in full swing. At the end of the Liturgy the people spilled out from the church onto the market square. There a colorful picture of a fair presented itself. The temporarily released prisoner mingled happily in the midst of the crowd. In his arms he held a beautiful child who clung tightly with his pudgy arms around the neck of his father. Beside them walked a slender young woman, holding by the hand a lively boy.

"My poor, unfortunate husband," said the woman, "don't leave us orphaned. See how agreeable life is in freedom. But there—prison, fetters. True, you killed one of the tsar's soldiers. But you did so without evil motive, unintentionally, by accident. Why must you torment yourself in eternal imprisonment and ruin your unhappy family!"

"I can't, my dear," answered the prisoner. "I promised..."

"As a prisoner, I'm sure you promised many things," continued his wife. "If you don't return, no one will be able to do anything. Let's hurry away from here, let's go to the Don. There we can live a free life. Our sons will grow up to be brave Cossacks and will serve our Tsar-batiushka for you."

The prisoner considered the tempting words of his wife. To go away to the Don, to live in freedom... But will it be like that? Will it really be good there? And the conscience? That holy sponsor, who is more powerful than any prison or earthly exile... What shall I do if I deceive his sacred memory? Everything will be lost: there will be neither success, nor joy, nor happiness. I shall pine away worse than a captive slave. It was not in vain that the prince said the Saint would not permit deception.

Under the persuasive arguments of his beloved wife, however, the unfortunate man again began to waver, and he was close to giving in to the decision to run away with his family. But there in the depths of his soul something powerful stopped him, turning his mind towards what was just and true. The prisoner listened to this and thought, "No, Saint

Nicholas won't allow it! I must act according to my conscience."

Taking leave of his family the next day, he said to them: "Although it is difficult for me to part with you, I nevertheless feel that my conscience is at peace. And I trust that he who is my surety will save me from further troubles and misfortunes."

† † †

In two days time he was already in Moscow and arrived at the prison an hour before Rodomanovsky drove up. "I was passing by," said the prince to the inspector who met him, "and I remembered about the convict who called upon Saint Nicholas to act as his surety. His term of release is up. Has he returned?"

"Yes, your honor," replied the inspector. "An altogether extraordinary case. He returned within the allotted time and is back in prison."

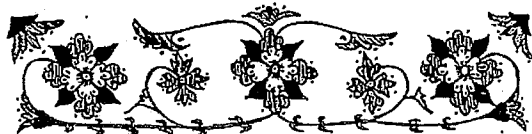
"Most commendable!" Exclaimed the prince. "Today I'm to see the Tsar and I shall tell him about this rare case."

The next day the convict prison was buzzing with the news that in the morning a messenger had come from the Tsar and had taken the prisoner to the palace. When the prisoner returned everyone impatiently asked him what the Tsar-batishka had said to him.

"Our majesty," replied the prisoner, "wished to know about the crime for which I was sentenced. Then, having mercifully heard my admission, he said that he is reducing my term."

Here the prisoner crossed himself and added with emotion: "Glory to St. Nicholas the Wonderworker who, in a critical moment, helped me to vanquish my temptation."

And within a short time the prisoner was set at liberty...



WE ARE GOD'S FELLOW WORKERS... YOU ARE GOD'S BUILDING

His assertion that they are one, refers to their inability to do anything without 'God who gives the increase' ...Since this had a tendency to make men more indolent - I mean all being esteemed as one - whether they had labored much or little, observe how he sets this right. He says, 'But each will receive his own reward according to his own labor' ...Do you see how to them he has also assigned no small task, having before laid down that the whole is of God? ...For the field is not called the husbandman's, but the householder's ...Again, the building is not the workman's but the master's ...Upon this then let us build, and as a foundation let us cleave to it as a branch to a vine; and let there be no interval between us and Christ. For the branch by its adherence draws in the sustenance, and the building stands because it is cemented together ...Let us then not merely keep hold of Christ, but let us be cemented to Him (Cf.Ps.73:27)...Let us cleave to Him ...by our works ...He is 'the Head,' we are 'the body'...He is 'a foundation,' we are 'a building'; He 'a vine,' we 'branches'; He 'the Bridegroom' we 'the bride'; He 'the Shepherd,' we 'the sheep,' He is 'the Way,' we 'they who walk therein.' Again, we are 'a temple,' He 'the indweller,' He the 'firstbegotten,' we 'the brethren': He 'the Heir,' we 'the heirs together with Him' ...He 'the Resurrection,' we 'those who rise again'; He 'the light,' we 'the enlightened.' All these indicate unity, and they allow no void interval, not even the slightest. For he who removes but to a little distance will go on till he has become very far distant.

St. John Chrysostom. *Homily VIII on I Corinthians III, 6, 7.*

LONG HAIR ON MEN

From the "Life of Elder Paisios the Athonite"



One time a young man with long hair in a ponytail came to see the elder. The elder asked him,

"Hey, young man, what work do you do?"

"I'm a student," he answered.

"Do you have any classes left to pass?" Asked the elder.

"I have eight."

"If you want to pass them, come over here so I can give you a haircut," he told him smiling.

He went into his cell, brought his scissors and cut his hair. The young man considered it a blessing, and he told others about it, and they went to receive a similar blessing. "I've tonsured many people," he would say laughing.

"Elder, what do you do with their hair?"

Smiling, he would answer, "I keep it and give it to the bald."

Another time he mentioned humbly, "If there's a chance that I'll be saved, it will be through the prayers of mothers. Do you know how many letters I receive in which, being moved, they thank me, since I convinced their children to cut their hair and take out their earrings?"

He didn't want men to have long hair, because he considered it effeminate, and quoted the passage by the Apostle Paul, *if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him.* (I Cor II:14)

When he would see young men with long hair he would ask them, "The dedicated (monastics) and the absent-minded [i] let their hair grow out. Which of the two are you?"

† † †

[i] This is another clever witticism of the elder's. The words that he chose, "αφιερωμένοι" (those dedicated) and "αφηρημένοι" (the absent-minded), are phonetically similar - Ed.



With regard to self-control in eating, we must never feel loathing for any kind of food, for to do so is abominable and utterly demonic. It is emphatically not because any kind of food is bad in itself that we refrain from it. But by not eating too much or too richly we can to some extent keep in check the excitable parts of our body. In addition we can give to the poor what remains over, for this is the mark of sincere love.

St. Diadochos of Photiki (5th century ascetic)

“Most Holy Theotokos, save us!”

~ Fr. Stephen Freeman, *Glory to God for All Things*

At these words, heard frequently in an Orthodox service, Protestant visitors often have fear and trembling in their limbs. “How can this not be idolatry?” they wonder. “How can a mere human being save me? They are worshipping Mary!”

The language of Mary’s role in the life of salvation is certainly scandalous. But the reaction reveals not the error and idolatry of the Orthodox, but the great gulf that separates contemporary Christianity from the classical Christianity of the ancient world. *For the language is not idolatrous – but rather a careful theological expression of the Christian doctrine of salvation.*

No one is saved alone.

I didn’t get into this mess by myself. I mean to say that the whole mess of my sin and the brokenness of my existence is not entirely my fault. Each of us bears responsibility – but none of us got here by ourselves. We are the children and offspring of sinners. We enter a broken world. Even the ugly mess of contemporary Christian disunity is not of our making. Regardless of how innocent I may enter the world (Orthodoxy holds that we are, by nature, good), I did not enter an innocent world. Born into pain and pleasure, the passions quickly become my companion, even in childhood. We are nurtured and raised by broken men and women, even at their best. Thus, my sins will not be original with me, but will often represent the collective legacy of a broken humanity.

My salvation, like my sin, is never mine alone.

God’s work for our salvation did not avoid the collective quality of our existence. He did not descend among us at a distance nor come to us in a world apart. He took flesh of the Virgin Mary and was made man. The flesh of the God/Man, Jesus Christ, is thus always Mary-flesh. There is no incarnate Son of God who is not also the incarnate Son of Mary.

This has always been the way of things – it is the “Biblical” point-of-view. The people of God are called by name – by a *man’s* name – “Israel.” Spiritually, we are Israel’s collective offspring. The naming of Israel reveals how God Himself sees us and calls us. He sees not only me, but Israel as well – from the dusty old desert conniver and wrestler Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, to every mother’s son who called on God in faith. *We are Israel.*

And in Christ, *we* become Mary-flesh. “Whosoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, abides in me and I in Him.” Christ’s flesh becomes our flesh, his blood becomes our blood. Bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh, we share in the cup of the marriage banquet.

The collective nature of traditional Christian prayers, Orthodox prayers, illustrates quality of salvation as communion. The Church is not scandalized when it prays “Most Holy Theotokos save us!” Just as the people of Canaan were not scandalized when they appealed to Mary for help in a wedding banquet gone awry. The only word spoken to Christ at that banquet was from His mother, “They have no wine.” His answer (often badly translated) is very intimate, “Woman, what is this between you and me? My time isn’t here yet.” But at her direction, “Do whatever he tells you,” the wedding feast arrives.

At such an occasion it was right to say, “Most Holy Theotokos, save us!” The words “save us,” have become, in contemporary Christian speech, synonymous with the whole plan of salvation accomplished in the death and resurrection of Christ. But modern Christians did not invent Christian speech – they have only altered it. The language of Orthodoxy is the ancient language of the Church.

The cry: "Most Holy Theotokos, save us!" has always meant, "Help us!" and nothing more. And help us, she has, and does.

The confusion between prayer and worship is itself worth noting. The word "pray" is by no means a "worship" word. It has become so only because of evolution within the English language. The older English phrase, "I pray thee, sir..." never meant more than a polite way of saying, "Please..." The word to pray means to ask – nothing more and nothing less. We pray to God, because we ask God. But I ask you for a drink of water, I am praying as well. And regardless of how good your water might be, I have no intention of offering you worship in exchange for it.

We are not saved alone. We still feast on Mary-flesh and partake of a banquet provided by her Son at her request. And we still do well to obey her simple command, "Do whatever He tells you."

Of course, it is possible for Christians to pray without making mention of Mary. It was always possible for Israel to bear another name and to speak to God by something other than "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." But we have not been taught in such a manner. The radical individualism of modern Christianity distorts the account of our salvation. It flees from Mary when it should run to her.

In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Christ offers a very different picture. Heaven itself, Paradise, is described as "Abraham's bosom," and is pictured as nothing less than feasting, laying on the breast of Abraham (much like St. John did on the breast of Christ at the Last Supper – it is the most intimate position at a feast). And though the topic of conversation from the Rich Man (who has been cast into Hades and is tormented) is everlasting life and relief from the torment of his position, his "prayer" is directed to Abraham. Nowhere in the story does Christ suggest that such a scene is marred by the content or object of the Rich Man's prayer. He offers the story in a manner that can only suggest that His hearers are not in the least confused. Jewish sensibilities seemed quite accustomed to such an image.

It is contemporary Christianity that has lost this sensibility. Orthodoxy did not add something that was not already present. Its prayers, quite ancient, are a living representative of the ancient sense of salvation. The oldest known record of a hymn to Mary, is a papyrus fragment that dates to around 250AD. Its existence has to be taken as evidence not of its being written in 250 a.d., but written and circulated widely enough to have offered even the chance of such a scrap being found. Its words are still a popular hymn within the Orthodox and Catholic Churches.

*Beneath your compassion,
We take refuge, O Theotokos:
do not despise our petitions in time of trouble:
but rescue us from dangers,
only pure, only blessed one.*

Why should the Orthodox apologize for praying in the words of the fathers?

An Internet Reader Comment: A helpful comparison for me in coming to terms with Mary was the Ark of the Covenant. Look at the honor and veneration given to it by the people of Israel in the OT (a reverence commanded by God). The people were forbidden to even touch it. It contained the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, a jar of manna and Aaron's blossomed staff. Mary carried the eternal Word and Son of God! The Ark of the Covenant carried the shadow, Mary carried the Reality. How much more is she due veneration.

This and That

I suspect that on the Day of Judgment, there will be a certain contingent that says, "Lord, Lord, you're not accounting for the complexities of the issue!" S.M. Hutchens

Two obvious and simple points: first, any government-run universal healthcare program, no matter how implemented, is socialist; and, second, that the Christian teachings of Scripture and Tradition do not mandate socialism. This leaves only one final question, whether or not socialist policies of wealth redistribution, whether disguised as tax credits or insurance plans, are compatible with the Christian understanding of society....Any form of (government) coercion is incompatible with the charity to be practiced by morally free Christians. Thomas Fleming

There is no liberty without virtue.

Civil and religious liberty were the reasons why the Early Americans sacrificed to the measure that they did. These virtues and thus these freedoms, cannot be comprehended apart from God because it is only by God that man perceives he is created to be free.

To the people who have forgotten God, the understanding that freedom and virtue work hand in hand exists only as an irrelevant echo. It's a moral blindness of the first order and, over the span of a generation or two, the echo will grow silent and all that remains is the belief that man is no more than animal or machine.

History is memory, and memory tells us where we have been so that we might know where we should go. The history of America is forged in Christian anthropology and teleology -- God created man to be free, and that freedom imposes the obligation to encourage each other in the virtues by which liberty is nurtured and protected. Fr. Johannes Jacobse

Thank you, Holy Mother!

As salvation was taught to me when still a young Protestant, it's a legal matter settled in God's court of law. By virtue of the judge's release, I could be blessed to enter the kingdom when it comes in glory. In this way of thinking it makes sense to consider any signature but Christ's, who is our ransom, inadequate -- an affront to justice. After all, "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

But salvation is not such a one-time legal transaction paid for by Christ, it is everything that pertains to all of God's creatures. It is for all of us together, both now and ever. There is no lifeline, no help or friend that is not already a gift of God for our good and salvation, regardless how humble. All we have and may ever have is given by Christ, through Him and is found in Him.

I prefer the ancient Christian language of salvation. It doesn't cut corners. It doesn't even try to make some theological point. It simply and naively expresses the fullness of the salvation given us in Christ. And just as a child may say "Abba Father" we may also say "Mary help us!" Doing less only shows how closed our eyes are to all the many witnesses, friends, family and Saints surrounding us in the Kingdom; spirits who love and pray for us.

If someone ever prayed to me for help, what help might I have to give? In this way we are no more in competition with Christ than Mary or any angel or Saint. We all stand completely indebted to Him for everything, now and ever and unto ages of ages. We should simply respond by giving as He did, completely, unto death. This is what Mary did, offering her heart, soul, spirit and flesh for our salvation. Thank you holy Mother! Please help me, save me, pray for me. ~ Michael Baumann

INCARNATION THOUGHTS

"Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendant One." What can I, the unworthy and filthy one, say about the grandeur of the innumerable dispensations of the Most High God! I am astonished and unable to look directly at it as I contemplate this mystery.

How did God condescend to be an infant in a cave of irrational beasts? How was He wrapped in swaddling clothes and carried in the holy arms of the holy Virgin, He Who was born by the Father without a mother! "Great art Thou, O Lord, and wondrous are Thy deeds, and no word sufficeth to hymn Thy wonders!" "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom.11:33).

My soul shall rejoice in the Lord; I shall noetically smother with kisses that most sweet and blessed Infant, so that He may deliver me from my irrational passions. **Elder Ephraim**

"The Word appropriates to Himself the attributes of humanity: for all that pertains to His holy flesh is His: and He imparts to the flesh His own attributes by way of communication in virtue of the interpenetration of the parts one with another, and the oneness according to subsistence, and inasmuch as He Who lived and acted both as God and as man, taking to Himself either form and holding intercourse with the other form, was one and the same. Hence it is that the Lord of Glory is said to have been crucified (cf. I Cor. 2:8), although His divine nature never endured the Cross, and that the Son of Man is allowed to have been in heaven before the Passion, as the Lord Himself said (cf. Jn. 3:13)."

St. John of Damascus

"The law of grace directly teaches those who are led by it to imitate God Himself. For... despite the fact that because of sin we were His enemies, God loved us so much more than Himself that, although He is beyond every being, He entered without changing into our being, supra-essentially took on human nature, became man and, wishing to reveal Himself as a man among men, did not refuse to make His own the penalty we pay. And as in His providence He became man, so He deified us by grace, in this way teaching us not only to cleave to one another naturally and to love others spiritually as ourselves, but also, like God, to be more concerned for others than for ourselves, and as proof of our love for each other readily to choose, as virtue enjoins, to die for others. For, as Scripture tells us, there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for a friend (cf. Jn. 15:13)."

St. Maximos the Confessor, The Philokalia Vol. 2

Man has failed to recognize his own Father, the Most High God, Who brought him into being out of nothingness. Oh! How harmful this failure to recognize Him has been! This is the cause of all human suffering, the first transgression of Adam and Eve. And their sin of disobedience and lack of repentance brought upon their children--upon us--all the evil results, and we harvest the thorns and thistles of various tribulations.

"You shall surely die." (Gen.2:17). Death is corruption of our former incorruption, with all of its attributes: illness, affliction, misery, pain. However, the good God did not overlook His own creation, but gave grace through the death of His Son on the Cross--"by grace you have been saved." (Eph. 2:5) Just as the evil one used the crafty serpent as a tool, in a like manner did our Lord Jesus Christ put on human nature to deceive the devil.

O Lord Jesus Christ, the light of my darkened soul, the goal of my life, how great has our guilt become with the passing of time! One disobedience resulted in bringing God down to earth -- and where did it lead Him? To be crucified at Golgotha! And the small taste of the forbidden fruit was paid by the awesome drama of the God-man. Oh, how much God loves man! So let us be confident in our repentance, my fellow sinners. "Though your sins are like scarlet, I shall make them white as snow; though they are red like crimson, I shall make them white as wool." (Is.1:18). So, my child, let us cleave with love to such a merciful God. Amen. **Elder Ephraim**