



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **December 15, 2013** ✠

The Holy Forefathers

Hieromartyr Eleutherius of Illyria (138) Martyr Susanna the Deaconess of Palestine (4th C) St. Tryphon of Pechenga, Finland (1583) New Russian Hieromartyr Hilarion (Troitsky) of Verey (1929)

✠ *Many Years! Newly Illumined* ~

Susanna Knarr, Columba, Brigid, Genevieve, Raphael, and Peter Spence!

✠ **This Week: Wed. Dec. 18 6:30pm Akathist to the Theotokos and Choir Rehearsal**

Nativity Service Schedule:

✠ **Tuesday, December 24 6:30pm Nativity Eve Vigil – Compline/Matins**

✠ **Wednesday, December 25 10:00am ~ Divine Liturgy**

☪ **Feast of the Nativity According to the Flesh of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ** ☪

⇒ **Friday, December 27 Parish Christmas Party @ Nick and Ashley Wells'**

⇒ **Sunday, December 29 Children's Christmas Program**

HOMILY ~ On the Foundation and the Cornerstone

And are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone (Ephesians 2:20).

Brethren, the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets is their life and work: the Old and the New Testaments. Who unites the Apostles and the Prophets? Christ the Lord. Without Him, the Prophets would not understand the Apostles, nor would the Apostles understand the Prophets. Therefore, He is the fulfillment of the Prophets and witness of the Apostles. Thus, He is the Cornerstone that ties the Prophets and the Apostles together, as a cornerstone holds the walls together. The Old and New Testaments are united in Him, have their meaning in Him, revolve around Him, were inspired by Him and are upheld by Him, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Where would the pagans and Jews meet, and where would they understand one another, if not in Jesus Christ the Lord? Nowhere, except in Him. In Him and through Him they are united in one new man, in one immortal body, in One, Holy and Catholic Church. Only through the Lord Jesus Christ are the body and the soul united in a loftier and holier friendship. The bonds between the soul and body were at enmity until His coming in the flesh, and that enmity led to the destruction of the soul. He reconciled and sanctified them both. Thus, He became the Cornerstone of every immortal and God-pleasing edifice - be that edifice an individual man or family or nation or the entire race of man - either in the present, in the past, or in the future; of the Old Covenant or the New Covenant. He is the Chief Cornerstone in every building, as He is the Head of the Body, God's Church.

~ **St. Nikolai of Serbia**

From His Most-incorrupt Mother, the Lord borrowed most-pure flesh, and to her, He granted Divinity in place of the flesh which she had given Him. O Lord, such a most marvelous and most miraculous exchange!

St. Symeon
the New Theologian

The Holy Forefathers

✘ "Now we have said that the Synagogue could be denoted by the tabernacle which Moses and the children of Israel built in the desert, but the Church of the Gentiles by the temple which Solomon and the children of Israel erected with the help of the proselytes and Gentiles. The worship and religion of the tabernacle lasted four hundred and eighty years and then work began on the building of the temple because the writing of the Old Testament overflows with such perfection that, if one understands it properly, it contains in itself all the mysteries of the New Testament. Besides, a great many of the Patriarchs of the Old Testament attained such a peak of perfection by the way they lived that they are not in any way to be considered inferior to the Apostles or apostolic men."

The Venerable Bede

✘ "The all-wise Moses initiated us into true spiritual knowledge and the holy prophets, apostles and evangelists who came after him did not deviate from his teaching. The same single theological approach may be seen in all of them and one will not find them at odds with each other in any matter whatsoever. Truly inspired by God, they derive what they say from the one Holy Spirit. Our Lord Jesus Christ does not allow us to entertain any doubt on this point, for He says most clearly in their presence: 'It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you' (Mt. 10:20). Since we possess an authentic doctrine concerning God that has come down to us from above through holy Fathers, we exult in it..."

St. Cyril of Alexandria

✘ "The tribes of Judah and Levi were united by a fusion of their lines of descent, and that is why Matthew assigns Christ's family to the tribe of Judah. And the Apostle says, 'for our Lord has sprung out of Judah' (Heb. 7:14). Thus from the tribe of Levi may be counted a heritage that is priestly and filled with holiness, while from the tribe of Judah - to which David and Solomon and the rest of kings belonged - there shines forth the splendor of a royal descent. And so, by the testimony of the Scriptures, Christ is shown to be at once both king and priest."

St. Ambrose of Milan

✘ "A person is never entirely bad. Each person has his good and bad points. When you remember his good points, you pray for him, you are moved, your soul feels for him, and you entreat God for him. And as for his bad side, he is not to blame, but our enemy the devil is. Therefore, don't be sad, my child, and don't remember the past. For those things have passed."

Elder Joseph the Hesychast

✘ "We celebrate the holy and life-giving and bloodless sacrifice in the churches, not in the belief that the offering is the body of an ordinary man like ourselves, and similarly with the precious blood, but instead accepting that it has become the very own body and blood of the Word who endows all things with life. The Savior Himself testifies to this when He says: 'The flesh is of no avail; it is the spirit that gives life' (Jn. 6:63). Because it became the Word's own flesh it is therefore regarded as life-giving and actually is so."

St. Cyril of Alexandria

✘ "The Lord is everything to me: He is the strength of my heart and the light of my intellect. He inclines my heart to everything good; He strengthens it; He also gives me good thoughts; He is my rest and my joy; He is my faith, hope and love; He is my food and drink, my raiment, my hope and love; As a mother is everything to her infant, so, likewise the Lord is everything to me, when I yield myself wholly unto Him."

St. John of Kronstadt

✘ "The humility which in due time and by God's grace, after many struggles and tears, is given from heaven to those who seek it is something incomparably stronger and higher than the sense of abasement felt by those who have lapsed from holiness. This higher humility is granted only to those who have attained true perfection and are no longer under the sway of sin."

St. John of Karpathos

The First and Second Adam ~ The First and Second Eve

~ St. Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies (+150AD)

"And thus, as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin,
so is it rescued by a Virgin..."

That the Lord then was manifestly coming to His own things, and was sustaining them by means of that creation which is supported by Himself, and was making a recapitulation of that disobedience which had occurred in connection with a tree, through the obedience which was exhibited by Himself when He hung upon a tree, the effects also of that deception being done away with, by which that virgin Eve, who was already espoused to a man, was unhappily misled,—was happily announced, through means of the truth spoken by the angel to the Virgin Mary, who was also espoused to a man. For just as the former was led astray by the word of an angel, so that she fled from God when she had transgressed His word; so did the latter, by an angelic communication, receive the glad tidings that she should sustain God, being obedient to His word.

And if the former did disobey God, yet the latter was persuaded to be obedient to God, in order that the Virgin Mary might become the patroness of the virgin Eve. And thus, as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so is it rescued by a Virgin; virginal disobedience having been balanced in the opposite scale by virginal obedience. For in the same way the sin of the first created man receives amendment by the correction of the First-Begotten, and the coming of the serpent is conquered by the harmlessness of the dove, those bonds being unloosed by which we had been fast bound to death.

For indeed the enemy would not have been fairly vanquished, unless it had been a man born of a woman who conquered him. For it was by means of a woman that he got the advantage over man at first, setting himself up as man's opponent. And therefore does the Lord profess Himself to be the Son of Man, comprising in Himself that original man out of whom the woman was fashioned, in order that, as our species went down to death through a vanquished man, so we may ascend to life again through a victorious one; and as through a man death received the palm of victory against us, so again by a man we may receive the palm of victory against death. ✠ ✠ ✠

He Continues to Give Thanks...

✠ "The man of understanding restrains his own will... Thus through self-control he practices the other virtues as well. He looks on himself as in God's debt for everything, finding nothing whatsoever with which to repay to his Benefactor, and even thinking that his virtues simply increase his debt. For he receives and has nothing to give. He only asks that he may be allowed to offer thanks to God. Yet even the fact that God accepts his thanks puts him, so he thinks, into still greater debt. But he continues to give thanks, ever doing what is good and reckoning himself an ever greater debtor, in his humility considering himself lower than all men, delighting in God his Benefactor and trembling even as he rejoices (cf. Ps. 2:11)." **St. Peter of Damascus**

✠ "It is pointless for someone to say that he has faith in God if he does not have the works which go with faith. What benefit were their lamps to the foolish virgins who had no oil (Mt. 25:1-13), namely, deeds of love and compassion?" **St. Gregory Palamas**

The One Born in a Cave in Bethlehem Speaks...

"Are You the One who is to come?" the sons of the earth ask the One born of the Virgin. But the One born of the Virgin glistens with matinal light amid the sons of the earth who are dark as extinguished days.

The flaming Seraphim shine in His eyes, the sapient Cherubim sit upon his lips, the lordly Thrones bolster His stance...And behold, surrounded by the angelic hosts your Leader, O soul, opens His mouth and speaks:

"In truth, I am the One for whom you have been waiting; do not hope for another. If you have been searching for the way, I am the Way.

"I am your Tomorrow from today until the end of time. Everything good that you have been expecting...is within Me. Today your Tomorrow is fulfilled in Me. And no day, from now until the last day, will bring you what I am bringing you. Lo, I am the day that has no beginning and no end...the future in its entirety cannot give you so much as a kernel of good, unless it borrows it from Me.

"All the prophets have pointed out the way that leads to Me. All the ways of the prophets come to an end and lose themselves in Me...From this time forth I am the only Way...Whoever continues to follow the way of the prophets further, will be following paths that no longer exist and will injure themselves. The prophets came to show the way; I have come to be the Way.

"Whoever wishes to follow Me, must follow Me not with his feet alone, but with all his soul, with all his heart, and with all his mind. My way is long and whoever trusts solely in his feet will drop from exhaustion. When children want to keep up with giants, they must forego walking on their own feet and sit on the shoulders of giants.

"Whoever wants to keep up with Me, must renounce his feet, his soul, his heart, his mind. Whoever renounces all this, I shall take onto My feet, into My soul, into My heart, and into My mind. And he will not be heavy for Me, nor shall I be tiring for him. However, anyone who fails to renounce everything, cannot overtake or detain me along the way.

"I am the Way, and he who follows My Way, does not journey alone but with Me...Whoever wishes to follow My Way, I Myself shall carry.

"I tell you one thing more: I am what is desired tomorrow and the Way to tomorrow. Without Me you cannot find the way to what you desire tomorrow, nor can you expect it."

O Son of God, Who hast taken on flesh for our sake, have mercy on us and begin leading us!

- a Christmas meditation by Saint Nicholas of Zica (+1956)

Some Scriptural references for the above:

Matthew 11:29-30, Matthew 16:24, Matthew 22:37, John 14:6, and Revelation 1:8

The Year of Our Lord

By the Very Rev. Georges Florovsky, D.D.

That we begin our reckoning of time with Christ's Birth is a fact which has long been but a mere convention for many. Seldom does one recall and recognize the great event from which we count time. So do we betray our ignorance and insensitivity. In ancient days, time was computed from the Incarnation of God the Word. It signifies that we live in a world which has been renewed and redeemed already, that even now we live in the realm of grace and already reckon the years of the new creature. Time itself has been illumined by the light which the darkness cannot consume. In a new and higher sense God is with us from that mysterious day forward, from that mysterious night in Bethlehem. "God was manifest in the flesh." (I Tim. 3:16) Since then we worship God who came down from heaven.

In the fullness of time God sent into the world his Son born of a woman. The Son of God became the Son of the Virgin. Here is the assurance and the beginning of salvation, the guarantee and source of eternal life. This is the reason for both, those on earth and those in heaven, to rejoice—the mystery of God-manhood, the glory of the divine Incarnation. The Kingdom of God then began and was truly revealed in history itself; in the meekness and humility of a simple life. The star of the eternal covenant stopped and shone over the cavern in Bethlehem. The humiliation of the cavern testifies that the Kingdom then revealed is not of this world. Although it happened then, in the days of King Herod, in the city of Bethlehem, this "then" is, in the true sense of the word, an everlasting "now." It was truly a beginning, the beginning of something new—of the Gospel history: It was then the New Covenant was revealed. The prophecies came true.

The divine descent is not only divine condescension, but at the same time it is the revelation of glory. Then was human nature healed through the ineffable divine assumption, and was reintroduced into communion with everlasting life. The action of grace reentered the world where it had been stopped by human sin. "Christ is born and earth and heaven are united: today God came down to earth, and man ascended into heaven." From now on human nature is inseparably united with the Godhead in the indivisible unity of the hypostasis [=Person] of the Incarnate Word. Everything became new. Thus was accomplished the pre-eternal mystery and council of love divine. "He, who established the being of every creature, visible and invisible, by a sole act of will, before all ages and before the existence of the creaturely world, determined ineffably that He himself should truly become united with human nature in the true unity of his hypostasis [=Person], thus making man God through union with him." So spoke St. Maximus the Confessor about the pre-eternal council of God. God creates the world and reveals himself in order to become a man in this world. Man is created in order that God may become man and it is by this union that man is deified. Or as St. Irenaeus of Lyons expressed it: "The Son of God became the Son of man in order that man would become the Son of God." This purpose was realized in the mystery of Christ's birth, when the foundation of the Church was already prefigured.

But the road from Bethlehem to Zion is long, and is leading us through Gethsemane and Golgotha. Already in Bethlehem the newborn Godchild is presented with funeral offerings by the Wise Men from the East. "Today God leads the Wise Men to worship through the star, prefiguring His three-day burial in gold, frankincense, and myrrh." The very doors of the Bethlehem cavern are nearly stained with the innocent blood of the children who were killed for Christ's sake. The way of the Cross is mysteriously foreshown. The Lord is born for this very hour of the Cross, "For this cause came I unto this hour." (John 12:27) The Lord is born for

death and crucifixion: "He had a body that he might take death upon himself." So wrote St. Athanasius the Great. Through the voluntary passion and death is the Christmas joy transfigured into Resurrection joy. This is the second and higher victory of life. In the very birth of Christ the order of nature is potentially overcome. It is not so much that the natural birth is sanctified as that the higher is prefigured and revealed. "The tongue cannot tell the mystery of thy birth."

In the Birth of Christ is revealed not only the glory of God-manhood, but also the mystery of God-motherhood. The Church testifies to the mystery of the Incarnation in very precise and vigorous terms, calling us to a responsible firmness and exactness in our confession of faith. Through the use of the important name "Theotokos" the Church confesses the glory of the divine Incarnation, the glory of the Only Begotten who was then born of the Virgin, according to his humanity. St. John of Damascus said: "This name includes the whole mystery of salvation." For this glorious name testifies to the oneness of the divine human personality. We contemplate the duality of natures in the inseparable unity within the indivisible hypostasis [=Person] of the Incarnate Word. To the Indivisible One are ascribed both glory and humiliation. "If the one who gave birth is the Mother of God, then the One who is born of her is a true God and a true man. For how could God, having existed before all ages, be born of a woman without becoming man!"

The incomprehensible mystery of God-motherhood is not exhausted by birth only, even as natural motherhood is not exhausted by the fact of physical birth. The fulfillment of motherhood lies in sacrificial love. By this love for the one born the passive self-centeredness of the heart is broken. In this love is shown the natural image of love for another person, for the neighbor, "as thou lovest thyself." In its depth and its fulfillment motherhood has not only a physical, but also a spiritual meaning. These features of the true natural motherhood are transcended in the ineffable virginal God-motherhood. The love of the Virgin for the One Who was born of her can be neither transient nor limited.

In the pure love of the Mother of God there is nothing arbitrary, nothing casual, there is no partiality. This love includes the Cross; it is crucified with the redeeming love of the Son. Actually one cannot truly love Christ if one does not follow Him in His love of the Cross; if one does not love the whole human race with Christ and in Christ. The love of the Mother of God receives its fulfillment in that it becomes our protection and intercession for us. The word mother always indicates love, especially the name of the Mother of Light. "Great is the power of the Mother's prayer to the merciful Lord."

In the mystery of Incarnation the Divine Love is disclosed as descending and bringing peace and goodwill into the world. But human love is also disclosed as answering the Divine Revelation in meekness and obedience.

"If one should ask what we are worshipping and adoring, the answer is ready: we are honoring love." (St. Gregory of Nazianzus) "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..." (John 3:16)

This is the mystery of Christmas—and now in the days of sacred memories we sing and solemnize it. We are remembering not only what has already happened and passed, but that which was fulfilled. We are now reckoning the years of grace, the years of our Lord. For so has God loved the world.

Editorial from the St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly, Winter 1952, Vol. 1, No. 2.

INCARNATION THOUGHTS

✘ "The divine Logos, who once for all was born in the flesh, always in His compassion desires to be born in spirit in those who desire Him. He becomes an infant and moulds Himself in them through the virtues. He reveals as much of Himself as He knows the recipient can accept; He does not diminish the manifestation of His own greatness out of lack of generosity but estimates the receptive capacity of those who desire to see Him." **St. Maximos the Confessor**

✘ "With this purpose did the God of all things become man, that is, in order that by suffering in the flesh, which is susceptible of suffering, He might redeem our whole race, which was sold to death; and that by working wondrous things by His divinity, which is unsusceptible of suffering, through the medium of the flesh He might restore it to that incorruptible and blessed life from which it fell away by yielding to the devil; and that He might establish the holy orders of intelligent existences in the heavens in immutability by the mystery of His incarnation, the doing of which is the recapitulation of all things in Himself. He remained therefore, also, after His incarnation, according to nature, God infinite, and more, having the activity proper and suitable to Himself, - an activity growing out of His divinity essentially, and manifested through His perfectly holy flesh by wondrous acts economically, to the intent that He might be believed in as God, while working out of Himself by the flesh, which by nature is weak, the salvation of the universe." **St. Hippolytus of Rome (2nd C)**

✘ "We confess, then, that the Lord Jesus Christ assumed all the natural and innocent passions of man. For He assumed the whole man and all man's attributes save sin. For sin is not natural, nor is it implanted in us by the Creator, but arises voluntarily in our mode of life as the result of a further implantation by the devil, though it cannot prevail over us by force. For the natural and innocent passions are those which are not in our power, but which have entered into the life of man owing to the condemnation by reason of the transgression; such as hunger, thirst, weariness, labor, the tears, the corruption, the shrinking from death, the fear, the agony with the bloody sweat, the succor at the hands of angels because of the weakness of the nature, and other such like passions which belong by nature to every man. All, then, He assumed that He might sanctify all. He was tried and overcame in order that He might prepare victory for us and give to nature power to overcome its antagonist, in order that nature which was overcome of old might overcome its former conqueror by the very weapon wherewith it had itself been overcome." **St. John of Damascus (8th C)**

"The Logos restores human nature to itself. First, He became man and kept His will dispassionate and free from rebellion against nature, so that it did not waver in the slightest from its own natural movement even with regard to those who crucified Him; on the contrary, it chose death for their sake instead of life, thereby demonstrating the voluntary character of His passion, rooted as it is in His love for humankind. Second, having nailed to the Cross the record of our sins, He abolished the enmity which led nature to wage an implacable war against itself ... making peace and reconciling us through Himself to the Father and to one another: our will is no longer opposed to the principle of nature, but we adhere to it without deviating in either will or nature." **St. Maximos the Confessor**

"Let us have faith in Him who has participated in our nature and granted it in return the glory of His own nature, and let us seek how to acquire this glory and see it. How? By keeping the divine commandments. For the Lord has promised to manifest Himself to the man who keeps them, a manifestation He calls His own indwelling and that of the Father, saying, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and will make our abode with him'..." (John 14:21) **St. Gregory Palamas**

Reasons To Fast

God Himself established fasting. In the Old Testament, preparation for a special holy occasion included fasting and prayer. The New Testament often mentions fasting. Our Lord fasted Himself for 40 days before going out to preach. Fasting is clearly not optional inasmuch as Our Lord said, regarding fasting *When you fast* (Matt. 6:16), rather than *If you fast*. Our Lord, speaking of His disciples, said that after His departure, they would fast: *when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then they shall fast*.

Our Lord also said that we can overcome the devil only through prayer and fasting. When His disciples reported to Him that they had been unable to cast out a demon, Our Lord explained to them that *this kind* [the devil and his foul spirits] *goeth not out but by prayer and fasting*. If we are given but two weapons--prayer and fasting-- in our battle against the demonic powers, we should not cast one of these weapons aside and ignore it. What soldier who knows only two weapons work against a particular enemy would throw one away?

Apostolic writings also mention fasting. St. Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians, speaking about marriage, counsels that husbands and wives not deny one another *except it be for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer, and come together again*. Clearly, fasting and praying together are a part of Christian marriage, according to the Apostle.

It is amazing to me, that most Protestants ignore fasting although it is documented in the Scriptures. So much for *sola scriptura*. They neglect fasting, no matter how many times the Scriptures mention it. The Church has established fasting periods that actually total up to about half of the year, averaging about 180 days, when you add them all together. Each of the seasons has its particular fasting period: the winter fast before Christmas; the spring fast of Great Lent; the summer Apostles fast; and the fall Dormition fast. Throughout the rest of the year, two more days a week--Wednesday and Friday--are assigned to fasting, with individual special fast days connected with feasts, as well, such as the Eve of Theophany, the Beheading of St. John the Baptist, and the Elevation of the Holy Cross.

Apart from being a spiritual discipline, fasting is also very healthy. Everyone should avoid meat and dairy products two days per week, in order to help keep animal fats and related cholesterol problems under control. Contemporary physicians are making no great discovery, of what the Church has known for thousands of years. The original commandment that God gave to our ancestors Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was a fasting commandment: *eat of the fruit of all the trees but this one*. If the fall of mankind and the loss of paradise were the result of breaking a fasting commandment, we should probably not ignore the fasts.

Father Alexander Lebedeff

FOR CONSIDERATION

All the programs I ever made—all failed. For this reason, I let God make the program of my life.

■ Elder Epiphanius Theodoropoulos (+1989)