

Christ is Born!



Glorify Him!

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **December 29, 2013** ✠

The Sunday after the Nativity

Postfeast of the Nativity

The Righteous St. Joseph the Betrothed,

St. David the King, & St. James, the Brother of the Lord

The 14,000 Holy Innocents Slain by Herod at Bethlehem

How shall I tell
of this great mystery?
He Who is without flesh
becomes Incarnate!
The Word puts on a body!
The Invisible is seen!
He Whom no hand can
touch is handled!
And He Who knows no
beginning now begins to be!
The Son of God
becomes the Son of Man:
Jesus Christ, the same
yesterday, today,
and forever!

🔔 ***Christ is Born! Glorify Him!*** 🔔

- ⇒ Today ~ Children's Christmas Program after Liturgy !
- ⇒ We are in the Fast-Free *Twelve Days of Christmas* – Now thru January 4!
- ⇒ Note: Next Sunday, January 5, the Eve of Theophany, is a *fasting* day.

This Week:

- ✠ **Tues. Dec. 31 6:30pm** Vespers and New Year's Blessing Service
A Happy and Holy New Year to all!
- ✠ **Next Sunday, January 5 ~ Eve of Theophany – Great Blessing of Water at the end of the Divine Liturgy**
- ✠ **Monday, January 6 10:00am ~ Divine Liturgy ~ Feast of Holy Theophany**
⇒ A Second Great Blessing of Water after Liturgy
- ✠ **Tues. January 7, 10:00am ~ Old Calendar Nativity Divine Liturgy**



✠ The Lord reconciled heaven and earth in His Incarnation, bringing heaven to earth, and raising earth to heaven, and establishing all of it under His mind, under His headship. Through Christ we are reconciled with the Holy Trinity and the Angels of God, with one another, and with the created nature around us. St. Nikolai of Ochrid

✠ " 'He who has seen the Son has seen the Father' (Jn. 14:9): for in all things the Son is like Him Who begat Him; begotten Life of Life, and Light of Light, Power of Power, God of God; and the characteristics of the Godhead are unchangeable in the Son; and he who is counted worthy to behold Godhead in the Son, attains to the fruition of the Father. This is not my word, but that of the Only-begotten: 'Have I been so long a time with you, and have you not known Me Philip? He who has seen Me, has seen the Father' (Jn. 14:9)." ~ St. Cyril of Jerusalem (5th C)

✠ "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 molds 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 (7th C)

The Messenger of Peace ~ St. Ephraim the Syrian, Hymn 8 On the Nativity 1-5

Blessed is the Messenger who came bearing a great peace. By the mercy of His Father, He lowered Himself to us. Our own debts He did not take up to Him. He reconciled His Lordship with His servants. Glory to Thy Dawn, divine and human!

Glorious is the Wise One, Who allied and joined Divinity with humanity, one from the height and the other from the depth. He mingled the natures like pigments and an image came into being: the God-man. O Zealous One who saw Adam who had become dust and the accursed serpent devouring him. Reality dwelt in what had lost its flavor. He made him salt by which the cursed serpent would be blinded!

Blessed is the Compassionate One Who saw, next to paradise, the lance that barred the way to the Tree of Life. He came to take up the body that would be struck so that by the opening in His side He might break through the way into Paradise.

Glorious is the Compassionate One Who did not use violence, and without force, by wisdom He was victorious. Glory to Thy Dawn, divine and human!

"...He comes not as a fierce man of war, threatening all things living with death, but as a newly born babe, bringing the hope of rebirth and life into the entire realm of death; He comes--but the land of destruction does not meet, does not embrace, does not praise, does not even see its Saviour, and does not hear the Word of God keeping silence in a manger. Virtually in vain does the glory which Jesus Christ had with God the Father before the world was (John 17:5) on the lips of the angels, follow Him descending into the world and pursuing Him, attain even unto the earth."
St. Philaret of Moscow (1867)

Only God can give us the true life

St. Athanasius explains that when humanity chose to break its relationship with God (through disobedience) we cut ourselves off from the Source of Life. However God did not take life from us (He does not take back the gifts He gives) but we removed ourselves from it. And so we die. We not only die physically, but we have a process of death at work in us. St. Paul speaks of this process as "corruption." This movement away from and towards death and destruction reveals itself in the many broken things in our lives. We hurt and kill each other. We hurt and destroy creation. We are weak and easily enslaved to powerful things such as drugs and alcohol. We are dominated by greed, envy, lust, anger, etc. We cannot help ourselves in this matter because we do not have life within ourselves. Only God can give us the true life that alone can make us well. — Fr. Stephen Freeman

The King has Come!

In our time nobody would consider it possible for everyone to be converted to a universal monasticism or a realization of a truly Christian, and universal State. The Church remains "in the world," as a heterogeneous body, and the tension is stronger than it has ever been; the ambiguity of the situation is painfully felt by everyone in the Church.

A practical program for the present age can be deduced only from a restored understanding of the nature and essence of the Church. And the failure of all Utopian expectations cannot obscure the Christian hope: the King has come, the Lord Jesus, and His Kingdom is to come.

- Fr. Georges Florovsky

A Sermon On the Day of the Nativity

Quietly, without fanfare, the Son of God descended and was incarnate upon the earth. As a drop of dew falls to the ground, so the Power from on High came upon the Most Holy Virgin, and from her was born the Savior of the world.

But the world did not notice this great act of God. Mankind was busy, each one preoccupied with his own personal concerns. Their attention was directed towards conspicuous worldly events.

Rome was assuring its rule over the known world. Greece was polishing its arts, refining indulgence of the flesh. Eastern peoples sought metaphysical answers in physical phenomena. The Jews fervently thirsted for freedom from foreign occupation and awaited a deliverer in the person of the Messiah – an earthly king.

However, worldly undertakings did not satisfy man, even when successful. The feeling of the “stagnation of the spirit” became more and more palpable. In essence, many began to feel that the world, mired in vanity and vice, was headed for ruin.

It was not only the Jews who awaited a deliverer; the most thoughtful of the gentiles, the pagans awaited also, awaited One Who would save humanity from destruction. But each imagined His coming according to his own fancy. Being fleshly, they were unable to comprehend the spiritual. No one awaited a meek, humble Savior, adorned not with earthly, but heavenly glory. Yet, He was exactly that: “the One Who desires that all should be saved and come to a knowledge of the Truth.”

Neither by external power nor by haughty wisdom comes the Savior to rule the people. He comes in the semblance of a servant to take upon Himself the sin of Adam, to bear the burden of humanity, having been accessible to all. In accordance with this, He is born in a cave near a small town, whence at the time of census the family of the righteous Joseph, wealthy only in good works, had retreated. None of those living on earth had expected the Ruler of Creation, the Redeemer, to come in such poverty.

Even the prince of this world, the proud opponent of God – the devil – found himself duped, failing to recognize in the Newly-born One, Him of Whom he had become jealous while still an angel. The pre-eternal mystery of the salvation of the human race was hidden from demonic power. It was attainable only by those who beheld the voice from heaven and directed their sight there.

The angels, heralding Christ’s arrival, were heard by those poor shepherds of Bethlehem whose only source of wisdom was the open book of God’s wisdom revealed in the beauty of His creation untouched by the sinful hand of man.

As for the rest of humanity which had not hearkened unto the angelic hymn: for them, the heavens by the bright light of the shining Star in essence declared: “unto His own hath come the True Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world...” The heavens to all declared the glory of God.

Yet it was only the Magi Kings, who were searching in the heavens for the revelation of God’s providence, ready to go anywhere to find the truth, who hearkened unto the proclamation of the heavens. Having gathered up their treasures to present as gifts to the New-born King, they left behind their thrones, abandoned their native lands, and went, not knowing even where they went, following only the direction of the Star, which declared to them the way to the Kingdom eternal. The journey was difficult, but the star of Bethlehem illumined the way. And

the Wise Men, defeating all obstacles, obediently followed the steps shown to them by the heavens, having forsaken their own wills.

The Star led them to Jerusalem, where they, for the first time, heard the written word of God (the Holy Scriptures); then to Bethlehem, where they beheld the Incarnate Word, God in flesh, and bowed down and worshipped the Sun of Righteousness.

The world continued to rage in its storm of passions. Herod, having heard of the birth of the eternal King, sought to kill Him. Not having found Him, he murdered a multitude of infants, yet was unable to destroy the One secretly born in a cave.

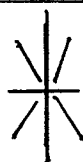
This mystery remained a mystery for those living the material earthly life. He stood amongst the people, and they knew Him not. Only gradually was He revealed to those pure in heart, those seeking Truth, ready to stand for the Truth. He was revealed to those desiring to cleanse their hearts, ready to subjugate their will to the will of Heaven. And the time arrived – the light of Bethlehem shown forth to all the ends of the world.

Once again the world storms! Some would be ready to kill the Infant and attempt to annihilate His Name. For others it is as if He does not exist. Yet in our midst He stands, revealing Himself to those “who search out His testimonies; and with their whole heart seek after Him.”

Yet the Bethlehem Star once again invisibly shines upon the world, calling all nations and each person to direct their sight to heaven; it calls us to lift up our hearts; to bow down before the Newly-born One and to rejoice with great joy for *God is with us!*

God is with us! Understand, O ye nations, and submit yourselves, for God is with us!

Fr. Gregory Naumenko – Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY, 1994

 **On the Magi and the Star:** “For we have seen His star in the east.” When you hear “Star,” do not think that it was a star such as we see, but a divine and angelic power that appeared in the form of a star. The Magi were astrologers, and so the Lord used what was familiar to them to draw them to Himself. In the same manner, the Lord astonished Peter the fisherman by the multitude of fish which he caught by the name of Christ. That the star was an angelic power is apparent from the fact that it shone even by day, and that it moved as they moved, and stood still as they rested; also, that it moved from Persia north to Jerusalem in the south. For a star never moves from north to south. “And are come to worship Him.” These Magi are seen to possess great virtue. For if they came to worship Christ in a strange land, how much more would they preach Him with great boldness in Persia?✠

St. Theophylact of Bulgaria (1108)

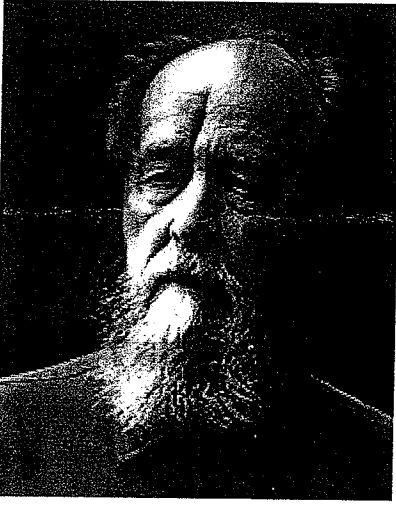
Christ the Recapitulator

For in what way could we be partakers of the adoption of sons, unless we had received from Him through the Son that fellowship which refers to Himself, unless His Word, having been made flesh, had entered into communion with us? Wherefore also He passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God...But what He did appear, that He also was: God recapitulated (“repeated”, “reiterated”, “summed up,” “re-composed”) in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power and vivify man; and therefore His works are true. ✠

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (150)

Solzhenitsyn: The Courage to be Christian

by Joseph Pearce - November 18, 2013



“In these dark days in which the power of secular fundamentalism appears to be on the rise and in which religious freedom seems to be imperiled, it is easy for Christians to become despondent. The clouds of radical relativism seem to obscure the light of objective truth and it can be difficult to discern any silver lining to help us illumine the future with hope.”

In such gloomy times the example of the martyrs can be encouraging. Those who laid down their lives for Christ and His Church in worse times than ours are beacons of light, dispelling the darkness with their baptism of blood. “Upon such sacrifices,” King Lear tells his soon to be martyred daughter Cordelia, “The gods themselves throw incense.”

It is said that the blood of the Martyrs is the seed of the Church and, if this is so, more bloody seed has been sown in the past century than in any of the bloody centuries that preceded it. Tens of millions have been slaughtered on the blood-soaked altars of national and international socialism in Europe, China, Cambodia and elsewhere. Today, in many parts of the world, millions upon millions are being slaughtered in the womb in the name of “reproductive rights.”

In such a meretricious age the giant figure of Alexander Solzhenitsyn emerges as a colossus of courage. Born in Russia in 1918, only months after the secular fundamentalists had swept to power in the Bolshevik Revolution, Solzhenitsyn was brainwashed by a state education system which taught him that socialism was just and that religion was the enemy of the people. Like most of his school friends, he enslaved himself to the zeitgeist, became an atheist and joined the communist party.

As we await the fall of the latest manifestation of secular fundamentalism, we need to remember that the culture of death is a parasite.

Serving in the Soviet army on the Eastern Front during the Second World War he witnessed cold blooded murder and the raping of women and children as the Red Army took its “revenge” on the Germans. Disillusioned, he committed the indiscretion of criticizing the Soviet leader Josef Stalin and was imprisoned for eight years as a political dissident.

While in prison, he resolved to expose the horrors of the Soviet system. Shortly after his release, during a period of compulsory exile in Kazakhstan, he was diagnosed with a malignant cancer in its advanced stages and was not expected to live. In the face of what appeared to be impending death, he converted to Christianity and was astonished by what he considered to be a miraculous recovery.

Throughout the 1960s Solzhenitsyn published three novels exposing the secularist tyranny of the Soviet Union and received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970. Following the publication in 1973 of his seminal work, *The Gulag Archipelago*, an exposé of the treatment of political dissidents in the Soviet prison system, he was arrested and expelled from the Soviet Union, thereafter living the life of an exile in Switzerland and the United States. He finally returned to Russia in 1994, after the collapse of the Soviet system.

In 1978, Solzhenitsyn caused great controversy when he criticized the secularism and hedonism of the West in his famous commencement address at Harvard University. Condemning the nations of the so-called free West for being morally bankrupt, he urged that it was time "to defend not so much human rights as human obligations."

The emphasis on rights instead of responsibilities was leading to "the abyss of human decadence" and to the committing of "moral violence against young people, such as motion pictures full of pornography, crime, and horror." At the root of the modern malaise was the modern philosophy of "rationalistic humanism or humanistic autonomy," which declared the "autonomy of man from any higher authority above him." Such a view "could also be called anthropo-centricity, with man seen as the center of all."

As for the Christian, he has nothing to fear but his falling into the pride of despair.

It is ultimately of little matter whether the sickness that is slowly poisoning the West is given the labels that Solzhenitsyn affixed to it, or whether we prefer to give it the name of secular fundamentalism. The disease by any other name would be as deadly.

Furthermore, this disease is not merely destructive but self-destructive. It has no long-term future. Although secular fundamentalist "progressives" might believe in a future "golden age," such an age does not exist. The future that they herald is merely one of gathering gloom and ever darkening clouds. This fate has ever been so for those who proclaim their "Pride." They have nothing to expect in the future but their fall.

As for the Christian, he has nothing to fear but his falling into the pride of despair. If he avoids becoming despondent and retains his humility, he will receive the gift of hope which is its fruit. Where there is hope there is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

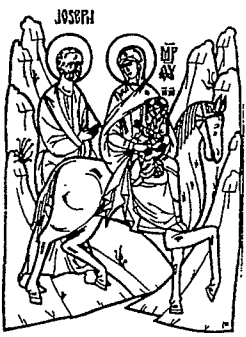
As we await the fall of the latest manifestation of secular fundamentalism, we need to remember that the culture of death is a parasite. It does not give life; it only destroys or corrupts it. Like all successful parasites it kills itself when it kills the host culture on which it feeds. It is not merely deadly but suicidal. It is unsustainable. It cannot survive.

Evil is nihilistic, which is another way of saying that it is ultimately nothing.

Let's not forget that Hitler's promise of a Thousand Year Reich lasted only twelve years. In similar vein, the communist revolution which according to Marx would usher in the end of history, is itself a ruined remnant of history. Little could Solzhenitsyn have known when he languished as one of the many millions in the Soviet prison system that he would outlive the Soviet system and, furthermore, that his own courage would play an important part in that very system's collapse.

Returning to the imagery of gloom-laden skies with which we began, we should remind ourselves that clouds and the shadows they cast are transient. Evil is nihilistic, which is another way of saying that it is ultimately nothing. It is only a temporary blocking of the light. "Above all shadows rides the Sun," as the ever-humble Samwise Gamgee proclaims in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Even in these dark days, as Solzhenitsyn reminds us, every cloud has a silver lining.



St. Joseph the Betrothed

✦ St. Joseph is remembered in the Orthodox Church on the Sunday after the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord. According to Holy Tradition, because he was a just man, as St. Matthew records in his Gospel (1:19), God chose Joseph, already elderly in years, to take the Most Holy Virgin from the Temple into his home, to protect her, to provide for her and to be known as her husband so that she, being a virgin, would not suffer slander when she was found to be with child.

It is taught by most of the Holy Fathers that St. Joseph had been married in his youth and was a widower when he took in the Most Holy Virgin. It is believed that he fathered the children referred to as the “brethren” of the Lord in the Scriptures.

As recorded in the Gospel of St. Matthew (1:16), the holy and righteous Joseph was of the royal lineage of King David, who is also remembered on the Sunday following the Nativity. Although of royal heritage, St. Joseph was a simple carpenter who lived in the town of Nazareth. It was the lot of this righteous man of royal lineage, yet of lowly station in life, to be chosen by God to become the protector of the purity of the All-Holy Virgin and the foster father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

In this regard, St. Jerome wrote, “In His boundless wisdom God always employs the simplest of means. What was the best way to effect the Incarnation of the Son of God? To reveal openly the All-Holy Virgin’s virginal state would have meant to bring attention to the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ prematurely, without proper preparation. And a threefold purpose was accomplished by Joseph’s betrothal to the Virgin: quiet obscurity was assured for Christ until the appointed moment, an unsullied imperviousness to slander was assured for the All-Holy Virgin and masculine defense was provided for her and the Divine Infant. All of this was accomplished by the sacred betrothal of St. Joseph to the Virgin Mother.”

A deeply pious man, St. Joseph was exceptionally acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures and lived in accordance with the Law of Moses. Thus he understood, when an angel appeared to him in a dream and revealed the identity of the child in Mary’s womb, recalling the prophesy of Isaiah, “Behold, a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son and they shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is God with us” (Isaiah 7:14). In his role as foster father, he named the Child as instructed by the angel (Matt. 1:21). He fled with the Theotokos and the new-born Christ Child into Egypt when danger threatened them and chose their place of residence when that danger had passed.

The holy family settled in Nazareth, where, as the Gospel says of Christ’s formative years, the Lord “was subject unto them,” that is, to St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary. Church Tradition tells us that the Lord Jesus also worked as a carpenter, a trade he learned from His foster father. Joseph fell asleep in the Lord before the beginning of Christ’s public ministry. When the Lord began to preach boldly in the synagogue, it is noted in the Gospel that “all spoke well of Him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, and they said, ‘Is this not Joseph’s son?’” (Luke 4:22).

The troparion for his feastday contains these words, “Proclaim the miracle to David, the ancestor of God, O Joseph! Thou hast seen a Virgin give birth, with shepherds didst offer glory and with the Magi didst worship, having received the news from the angel. Beseech Christ God to save our souls!”

O godly St. Joseph, who has been crowned with glory for your faithful kinship and care of Christ, pray in this season of His Holy Nativity that He would save those who honor and glorify Him as their Lord and God and Savior!

✦ ✦ ✦

✦ “Having seen the wonderful Birth of Christ, let us shun this vain world and set our minds upon godly things. God came from heaven in order to raise us up to heaven” (from the *Akathist to the Sweetest Lord Jesus*), while the devil and flesh drag us down to earth. Christ calls and draws us to the life eternal, while the devil allures us by the temporal life, and attaches us to temporal things, concealing the eternal in darkness, or making men disbelieve in eternal life. Observe his snares, and do not be allured by the earthly life.

St. John of Kronstadt

✧ Nothing will help us if we are not generous and forgiving towards human weakness in others.

St. Nikolai Velimirovich (+1959)

Sharing the Child

We were the only family with children in the restaurant...

I sat Erik in a high chair and noticed everyone was quietly eating and talking...

Suddenly, Erik squealed with glee and said, "Hi there."

He pounded his baby hands on the high-chair tray... his eyes were wide with excitement and his mouth was bared in a toothless grin... he wriggled and giggled with merriment... I looked around and saw the source of his merriment...

It was a man with a tattered rag of a coat; dirty, greasy and worn. His pants were baggy with a zipper at half-mast and his toes poked out of would-be shoes.... His shirt was dirty and his hair was uncombed and unwashed... his whiskers were too short to be called a beard and his nose was so varicose it looked like a road map... We were too far from him to smell, but I was sure he smelled...

His hands waved and flapped on loose wrists. "Hi there, baby; hi there, big boy. I see ya, buster," the man said to Erik...

My husband and I exchanged looks, "What do we do?"...

Erik continued to laugh and answer, "Hi, hi there."

Everyone in the restaurant noticed and looked at us and then at the man...

The old geezer was creating a nuisance with my beautiful baby...

Our meal came and the man began shouting from across the room, "Do ya know patty cake? Do you know peek-a-boo? Hey, look, he knows peek-a-boo."

Nobody thought the old man was cute...

He was obviously drunk...

My husband and I were embarrassed...

We ate in silence; all except for Erik, who was running through his repertoire for the admiring skid-row bum, who in turn, reciprocated with his cute comments...

We finally got through the meal and headed for the door....

My husband went to pay the check and told me to meet him in the parking lot...

The old man sat poised between me and the door. "Lord, just let me out of here before he speaks to me or Erik," I prayed....

As I drew closer to the man, I turned my back trying to side-step him and avoid any air he might be breathing.... as I did, Erik leaned over my arm, reaching with both arms in a baby's "pick-me-up" position...

Before I could stop him, Erik had propelled himself from my arms to the man's...

Suddenly, Erik in an act of total trust, love, and submission laid his tiny head upon the man's ragged shoulder... the man's eyes closed, and I saw tears hover beneath his lashes... His aged hands full of grime, pain, and hard labor-gently, so gently, cradled my baby's bottom and stroked his back...

No two beings have ever loved so deeply for so short a time...

I stood awestruck...

The old man rocked and cradled Erik in his arms for a moment, and then his eyes opened and set squarely on mine...

He said in a firm commanding voice, "You take care of this baby." Somehow I managed, "I will," from a throat that contained a stone...

He pried Erik from his chest-unwillingly, longingly, as though he was in pain....

I received my baby, and the man said, "God bless you, ma'am, you've given me a wonderful gift."

I said nothing more than a muttered thanks.

With Erik in my arms, I ran for the car...

My husband was wondering why I was crying and holding Erik so tightly, and why I was saying, "My God, my God, forgive me."

I had just witnessed Christ's love shown through the innocence of a tiny child who saw no sin, who made no judgment; a child who saw a soul, and a mother who saw a suit of clothes...

I was a Christian who was blind; holding a child who was not...

I felt it was God asking-"Are you willing to share your son for a moment?"

When He shared His for all eternity...

The ragged old man, unwittingly, had reminded me, "To enter the Kingdom of God, we must become as little children."

The Christian is a true spiritual home of Christ, which is built on good deeds and right doctrines.

- St. Athanasius the Great (4th C)