



## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

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✘ **November 23, 2014** ✘

**Holy Great Prince,**

**St. Alexander Nevsky (1263)**

**St. Amphilochius of Iconium (395)**

**St. Metrophanes of Voronezh (1703)**

### **Advent: The Nativity Fast**

**Today is IOCC Sunday**

✘ **Many Years! Newly Illumined Child Helen Simmelink!**

⇒ **Tues., November 25 6:30pm - Inquirer's Class**

#### **United Appeal Fund**

- **Beginning in January: One Sunday a month will be designated as a "United Appeal Sunday." An extra basket will be out that Sunday. The money collected goes to the United Appeal Fund, and then can be sent to IOCC, or to other charity needs.**

### *Happy Thanksgiving !!!*

"You should continually and unceasingly call to mind all the blessings which God in His love has bestowed on you in the past, and still bestows for the salvation of your soul."

~ St. Mark the Ascetic

## **The Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos**

On the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple, Mary is taken as a child by her parents Joachim and Anna to be raised in the Jerusalem Temple. From her earliest years, she gave herself completely to God, to searching out and following His will. She reached the highest level of perfection, becoming the standard of what humanity is capable of becoming. In the words of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, she is not the great exception but the great example. There is an infinite wealth of learning for us in the contemplation of her life, particularly in this season when we celebrate her entrance into the Temple.

The Temple of the Old Testament was a place, a Temple of stone. But when God chose to dwell on earth, He did not come to a place but to a *person*—the Virgin Mary became the Living Temple that held Christ. In the Feast of the Entrance, the Church is inviting us to enter into the mystery of Mary's life there. Let us look at the Old Testament Temple itself to see what it can teach us about our own life with God.

Today let Heaven greatly rejoice!  
and let the clouds pour down  
gladness! at the great and  
mighty acts of our God!  
For behold, the Gate  
that faces the East,  
born according to the promise  
from a barren and fruitless womb,  
and dedicated to God as  
His dwelling, is led today i  
nto the Temple  
as an unblemished sacrifice!  
Let David greatly rejoice,  
striking upon his harp!  
She is led to the King,  
with her virgin companions,  
her escort, in her train!  
Within the tabernacle of God,  
His place of atonement,  
shall she be raised  
to become the dwelling of Him  
Who was begotten of the Father  
without change before all ages  
for the salvation of our souls!

~ Postfeast – Nov.22

The Temple was both the dwelling place of God and the place where man worshipped Him. It had a wall of enclosure and three parts: the outer court or porch; the Holy Place; and the Holy of Holies. The wall protected and concealed the Temple. From the outside, the treasures within it were not immediately apparent. Our protection is the Church—not so much its physical walls but the spiritual enclosure holding the treasure of the Commandments, the Holy Scripture, and all its teachings.

The outer court, where anyone could go, was a very busy place, with many rooms where the sacrifices were prepared. This corresponds to our outward lives and daily activities; it is here that we strive to keep the commandments of God. When our daily lives are shaped by this effort, we are not only sanctifying all those activities, we are also doing something that is absolutely essential to being permitted to go deeper into the Temple.

Further into the Temple was the Holy Place where only priests were allowed to enter to offer the prepared sacrifice on behalf of the people. Among these sacrifices were thank offerings and sin offerings. We are called to this same priestly activity in our own hearts—to offer prayers of repentance and gratitude, to intercede for those whom we love and for the world, and to offer praise and adoration, contemplating the God Who created us.

The innermost room was called the **Holy of Holies**, which held the Mercy Seat guarded by Cherubim, and the Ark of the Covenant. Here the high priest entered once a year to make reparation for the people. There was no formal prayer service; he did his work in the silence of his heart, in the very presence of God. In the New Covenant, the high priest is Jesus Himself, and when He ascended in glory into the heavenly Holy of Holies, the very presence of His Father—He not only performed reparation, but literally took us with Him. This action on the part of Christ enables us to have union with God Himself, a communion of love so deep that not even words of prayer are necessary.

The Church teaches that the Most-Holy Theotokos literally entered the Temple as a child through its outer wall so that she could become the innermost Holy of Holies—the dwelling-place of God. As she sojourned within its protective walls, immersed in the traditions of her Jewish faith, she grew in knowledge of the Scriptures and love of God, keeping the Commandments and serving Him continually. The Aposticha verses from Vespers of the Entrance of the Theotokos beautifully summarize this time in the young Mary's life:

***“Anna, truly blessed by God’s grace led with gladness into the Temple of the Lord the pure and Ever-Virgin who is full of grace, and she called the young girls to go before her with lamps in hand. “Go, child,” she said, “to Him Who gave thee to me; be an offering and a sweet smelling incense. Go into the place which none may enter: learn its mysteries and prepare yourself to become the pleasing and beautiful dwelling-place of Jesus, Who grants to the world great mercy!”***

In many of the Church hymns that we sing throughout the year, countless times the Theotokos is compared to what was in the Holy of Holies. She has become the Mercy Seat, higher than the Cherubim who guard it, and the Ark of the Covenant. This is what each one of us is called to become! To paraphrase Fr. Thomas Hopko, life in the Holy of Holies is “sheer celebration, joy, praising God, divine contemplative revelry.” We are born to spend our lives seeking this communion with God, living in expectation of life in the Kingdom—all of which the Most-Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary herself has perfectly fulfilled.



ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL  
ORTHODOX BISHOPS  
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Office of the Secretariat

To the Most Reverend Clergy, Venerable Monastics and  
Devout Faithful of the Holy Orthodox Churches in the Americas:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

During this holiday season, many of us are turning our thoughts to welcoming beloved family and friends into our homes, to share with them the best that we have to offer, and to share our gratitude for the many blessings our Heavenly Father has bestowed upon us.

As we prepare to open our homes to guests who are dear to us, please consider welcoming one more guest into your heart with whom to share your blessings.

Sharing Christ's love with our brothers and sisters in need and caring for them in the same way that we would wish to be cared for lifts us all closer to Him, and expands the reach of His Kingdom. This "hands-on" expression of our faith is how International Orthodox Christian Charities, or IOCC, puts Orthodoxy into action daily, tirelessly responding to Christ's call to help our neighbors in need without discrimination.

IOCC, which serves as the humanitarian arm of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States America, has been sharing the compassion of the Orthodox faithful with those in need since 1992. With the generous support of our church parishes, IOCC has delivered nearly \$500 million in humanitarian assistance to vulnerable families and communities in more than 50 countries. Through IOCC's close work with the Church, almost two million Syrian people either displaced or living as refugees have received relief to help ease their suffering as a result of the current war; impoverished parents in Greece have access to fresh, nutritious food and medical care for their children; struggling farmers in the West Bank are learning new ways to grow cash crops and rise out of poverty, and survivors of epic flooding in Serbia and Bosnia have the supplies and tools needed to restore their damaged homes.

St. James wrote, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." (James 2:14-26) We are called upon, in Christ's name, to care for those who are suffering in the face of poverty, war or natural disaster. By sharing today with the "least of our brothers", we reveal the truth of our love, compassion, faith, courage, and commitment to our relationship with our Lord.

May this blessed season fill you and your family with the Holy Spirit, and join you in love and harmony as you celebrate the blessings of our merciful God during Thanksgiving and always.

With paternal blessing and love in Christ,

The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America

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For someone to teach another, he must be healthy in his soul and free of passions. There is no use in building the house of another, your own being destroyed. Furthermore, he who teaches others, without putting to practice any of that which he teaches is like a spring which irrigates and flows over all that is around it, while it is filled with every sort of dirt. (*Abba Poimen*)

## THE RE-CREATING CHRIST

All considerations on sins, virtues, and the inner fight represent a somewhat inferior aspect of spiritual life, if they are not distinctly connected with the Person of our Lord. As Saint Paul so often and so powerfully repeated, a living Person has been substituted for the law. The law simultaneously subsists and is abolished in Christ – as a river at the same time subsists and is abolished in the sea where it loses itself. The secret of every spiritual victory is to look at the Lord Jesus, not at temptations and obstacles. As long as the Apostle Peter looked to his Master, he was able to walk on the sea; but, when his attention turned to the struggling waves, he began to sink. A loving and constant look at the Person of Jesus is the shortest and surest ascetical method.

Is the idea of the imitation of Christ alien to the Orthodox Church? It is often said that the notion of *imitatio Christi* is a product of the Western Middle Ages and does not belong to the Orthodox mind. This assertion is superficial and untrue. Saint Basil laid strong emphasis upon the *mimesis Christou*, i.e. the imitation of Christ by the Christian, and not only in a general sense (“Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus”; Phil. 2:5, 20; I Cor. 4:16, 11:1), but in the sense of a reproduction of the deeds and words of the Savior by ourselves. Saint Basil writes: “This imitation confers on us an admirable manner of life.” And again: “every action and every word of our Lord is a rule.” Saint Gregory Nazianzen develops the same idea. We must, according to him, discover the actual and present aspect of each of Christ’s gestures: the episodes of His life – e.g. the episodes connected with the Magi, the money changers in the Temple, the Canaanite woman, Lazarus – must become episodes of our own life; Jesus slept in order to bless our sleep, He was tired in order to bless our toils, He wept in order to bless our tears.

Vladimir Soloviev expressed a similar conception very forcibly: “Before every important decision, let us evoke in our soul the image of Christ. Let us concentrate our attention upon it and ask ourselves: Would He Himself do this action? Or, in other words: Will He approve of it or not? To all I propose this rule; it does not deceive. In every dubious case, as soon as the possibility of a choice is offered to you, remember Christ. Picture to yourselves His living Person, as it really is, and entrust Him with the burden of your doubts. Let men of good will, as individuals, as social factors, as leaders of men and peoples, apply this criterion, and they will really be able, in the name of truth, to show others the way towards God.” [*By a Monk of the Eastern Church*]

## **Met. Hilarion: Militant Secularism Threatens Christianity**

November 22, 2013

by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk – (From his address at the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches.)

Militant secularism in Europe has a long history going back to the period of the French revolution. But it is only in the twentieth century in the countries of the so called socialist bloc that godlessness was elevated to the level of state ideology. As regards the so called capitalist countries, they preserved to a significant degree the Christian traditions which shaped their cultural and moral identity.



**Militant secularism is aimed not only at religious holy sites and symbols by demanding that they be removed from the public domain.**

Today these two worlds appear to have changed roles. In the countries of the former Soviet Union, in particular in Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia and Moldavia, an unprecedented religious revival is underway. In the Russian Orthodox Church over the past twenty five years there have been built or restored from ruins more than twenty five thousand churches. This means that a thousand churches a year have been opened, i.e. three churches a day. More than fifty theological institutes and eight hundred monasteries, each full with monks and nuns, have been opened.

In Western European countries we can observe the steady decline of the numbers of parishioners, a crisis in vocations, and monasteries and churches are being closed. The anti-Christian rhetoric of many politicians and statesmen becomes all the more open as they call for the total expulsion of religion from public life and the rejection of the basic moral norms common to all religious traditions.

The battle between the religious and secular worldview is today raging not in academic auditoriums or on the pages of newspapers. And the subject of the conflict is far from being exhausted by the question of belief or lack of belief in God. Today this clash has entered a new dimension and touches upon the fundamental aspects of the everyday life of the human person.

**Religious understanding of sin has been conclusively eroded in societies that until recently thought of themselves as Christian**

Militant secularism is aimed not only at religious holy sites and symbols by demanding that they be removed from the public domain. One of the main directions of its activity today is the straightforward destruction of traditional notions of marriage and the family. This is witnessed by the new phenomenon of equating homosexual unions with marriage and allowing single-sex couples to adopt children. From the point of view of biblical teaching and traditional Christian moral values, this testifies to a profound spiritual crisis. The religious understanding of sin has been conclusively eroded in societies that until recently thought of themselves as Christian.

Particularly alarming is the fact that we are dealing in this instance not only with a choice of ethics and worldview. Under the pretext of combating discrimination, a number of countries have introduced changes in family legislation. Over the past few years single-sex cohabitation has been legalized in a number of states in the USA, a number of Latin American countries and in New Zealand. This year homosexual unions have attained the legal status of 'marriage' in England and Wales and in France.

**In many historically Christian countries the traditional family is enduring a serious crisis**

We have to state clearly that those countries that have recognized in law homosexual unions as one of the forms of marriage are taking a serious step towards the destruction of the very concept of marriage and the family. And this is happening in a situation where in many historically Christian countries the traditional family is enduring a serious crisis: the number of divorces is growing, the birthrate is declining catastrophically, the culture of a family upbringing is degraded, not to mention the prevalence of sexual relations outside of marriage, the increase in the number of abortions and the increase of children brought up without parents, even if those parents are still alive.

Instead of encouraging by all means possible traditional family values and supporting childbirth not only materially but also spiritually, the justification of the legitimacy of 'single-sex families' who bring up children has become the centre of public attention. As a result, the traditional social roles are eroded and swapped around. The notion of parents, i.e. of the father and the mother, of what is male and what is female, is radically altered. The female mother is losing her time-honored role as guardian of the domestic hearth, while the male father is losing his role as educator of his children in being socially responsible. The family in its Christian understanding is falling apart to be replaced by such impersonal terms as 'parent number one' and 'parent number two'.

**The family in its Christian understanding is falling apart to be replaced by such impersonal terms as 'parent number one' and 'parent number two'.**

All of this cannot but have the most disastrous consequences for the upbringing of children. Children who are brought up in families with 'two fathers' or 'two mothers' will already have views on social and ethical values different from their contemporaries from traditional families.

One of the direct consequences of the radical reinterpretation of the concept of marriage is the serious demographic crisis which will only grow if these approaches are adhered to. Those politicians who are pushing the countries of the civilized world into the demographic abyss are in essence pronouncing upon their peoples a death sentence.

What is to be the response of the Christian Churches? I believe deeply this response can be none other than that which is based on Divine Revelation as handed down to us in the Bible. Scripture is the common foundation which unites all Christian confessions. We may have significant differences in the interpretation of Scripture, but we all possess the same Bible and its moral teaching is laid out quite unambiguously. Of course, we differ in the interpretation of certain biblical texts when they allow for a varied interpretation. Yet much in the Bible is stated quite unambiguously, namely that which proceeds from the mouth of God and retains its relevance for all subsequent ages. Among these divine sayings are many moral commandments, including those which concern family ethics.

**The Bible does not know of any alternative forms of marriage.**

In speaking out against all forms of discrimination, the Church nonetheless must vindicate the traditional Christian understanding of marriage as between a man and a woman, the most important mission of which is the birth and upbringing of children. It is precisely this understanding of marriage that we find on the pages of the Bible in the story of the first human family. This same understanding of marriage we also find in the Gospels and the apostolic epistles. The Bible does not know of any alternative forms of marriage.

Unfortunately, not all Christian Churches today find within themselves the courage and resolve to vindicate the biblical ideals by going against that which is fashionable and the prevalent secular outlook. Some Christian communities have long ago embarked on a revision of moral teaching aimed at making it more in step with modern tendencies.

It is often said that the differences in theological and ethical problems are linked to the division of Christians into conservatives and liberals. One cannot but agree with this when we see how in a number of Christian communities a headlong liberalization is occurring in religious ethics, as a rule under the influence of processes taking place in secular society. At the same time the witness of the Orthodox Churches should not be reduced to that of conservatism. The faith of the Ancient Church which we Orthodox confess is impossible to define from the standpoint of conservatism and liberalism. We confess Christ's truth which is immutable, for 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever' (Heb. 3:8).

We are not speaking about conservatism but of fidelity to Divine Revelation which is contained in Scripture. And if the so called liberal Christians reject the traditional Christian understanding of moral norms, then this means that we are running up against a serious problem in our common Christian witness. Are we able to bear this witness if we are so deeply divided in questions of moral teaching, which are as important for salvation as dogma?

### **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever**

In this regard I would like to speak about the Church's prophetic vocation. I recall the words of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann who said that a prophet is far from being someone who foretells the future. In reminding us of the profound meaning of prophecy, Schmemmann wrote: 'The essence of prophecy is in the gift of proclaiming to people God's will, which is hidden from human sight but revealed to the spiritual vision of the prophet' (Schmemmann, *The Celebration of Faith*, vol.1: I Believe..., p.112).

We often speak of the prophetic voice of the Churches, yet does our voice actually differ much from the voice and rhetoric of the secular mass media and non-governmental organizations?... This message, of course, would be hard to swallow for the powerful of this world. However, in refusing to proclaim it, we betray our vocation and in the final run we betray Christ.

In today's context, when in many countries and regions of the world the revival of religion is underway and yet at the same time aggressive secularism and ideological atheism is raising its head... Today, as always, we are called upon to be messengers of the Word of God, the Word which is 'quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword' (Heb. 4: 12); the Word which is not bound (2 Tim. 2: 9). It is only then that we can bring to Christ new souls, in spite of the resistance of the 'rulers of the darkness of this world' (Eph. 6: 12). ...

*Address by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, At the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches — Busan, the Republic of Korea, 1 November 2013*

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### **Elder Paisios – on Peace Organizations**

\_ Geronda, do the peace organizations established by various countries help in bringing peace to the world?

\_ It depends. There are some who begin with good intentions. But when all sorts of unrelated people - sorcerers, fire-worshippers, cultic religious types of all persuasions - enter into the mix and attempt to work together, how can there be a common purpose or a common ground for peace? God forgive me, but such things are the devil's rags. Can peace be achieved through sinful association? How can there be peace, when people are not reconciled with God? Only when man is reconciled with God can inward and outward peace come. But for us to be reconciled with God, we must first attain awareness, we must repent, we must live in accordance with God's commandments, and then the Grace and peace of God will enter into us, enabling us to also help create peace around us.

## **The Winter Fast**

And hence, we warn you, beloved, in fatherly affection, to make this winter fast fruitful to yourselves by bounteous alms, rejoicing that by you the Lord feeds and clothes His poor, to whom assuredly He could have given the possessions which He has bestowed on you, had He not in His unspeakable mercy wished to justify them by their patient labor, and you for your works of love. Let us there fast on Wednesday and Friday, and on Saturday keep Vigil with the most blessed Apostle Peter\*, and he will deign to assist with his own prayers our supplications and fastings with alms.

~ St. Leo the Great, Pope of Rome (+461)

\* He mentions the Apostle's intercession probably because he was preaching in St. Peter's Basilica, the Saint of the Church aiding the congregation there.

## **The True Manna**

✠ It is a marvelous thing that God rained manna on the fathers, and that they were fed by daily nourishment from Heaven. Therefore, it is said 'Man hath eaten the bread of Angels' (Ps. 77:25). Yet all those who ate that bread died in the desert but this food which you receive, this 'living bread, which came down from Heaven,' furnishes the substance of eternal life, and whoever eats this bread 'will not die forever'; for it is the Body of Christ. ~ St. Ambrose of Milan (5<sup>th</sup> C)

## **Sons of His Mother**

✠ Just as we all receive of His (Christ's) fullness, so do we all partake of the immaculate flesh of His all-holy Mother which He assumed, and so, just as Christ our God, true God, became her son; even so we, too - O, the ineffable love for mankind! - become sons of His mother, the Theotokos, and brothers of Christ Himself, as through the all-immaculate and ineffable marriage which took place with and in her, the Son of God was born of her, and from Him in turn, all the Saints.

~ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *On the Mystical Life*, Vol. I

## **Our Little Effort**

We must not despair when we struggle and continuously see nothing but the slightest progress. We all do nearly nothing --- some a little more, some a little less. When Christ sees our little effort, He gives us an analogous token; and so our nearly nothing becomes valuable, and we can see a little progress. For this reason we must not despair, but hope in God.

Blessed Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

## **Perfect Humility**

The man who has succeeded in recognizing the measure of his weakness has attained to perfect humility and knowledge of God. For this reason, being ever moved to thanksgiving, he continually abounds in the gifts of divine grace. A mouth which always gives thanks to God receives God's blessing; and a heart that abides in continuous gratitude to God always receives an increase of grace. Humility precedes grace, just as pride runs before temptation.

~Abba Isaac

## **The Waves of Temptation**

No matter how much the waves of temptation rise up against your soul, always hasten to Christ! The Savior will always come to your aid and will calm the waves. Simply believe that the Lord has providentially arranged such experiences for your soul's healing. Do not reject them, trying to seek your own bodily peace and imaginary tranquility; for it is better to be shaken, and yet endure. If you will gain an insight from this, it will greatly lighten your struggle; and you will gain more peace than if you do not.

St. Leo of Optina (+1841)