



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 907-9447

Visit stsymeon.com

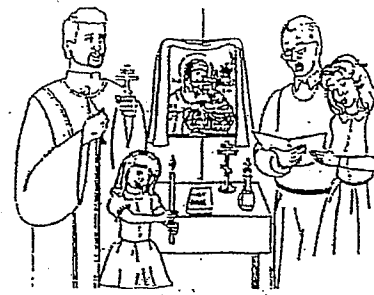
✘ **January 4, 2015** ✘

Sunday before Theophany

**The Prefeast of Theophany
Synaxis of the Apostles of the 70**

Christ is Born! Christ is Baptized!

THE BLESSING OF HOMES



✘ **Tomorrow, Jan. 5, 6:30pm ~ Theophany Vespers and the Great Blessing of Water**

➤ **Note: Tomorrow - the Eve of Theophany - is a *fast* day.**

Remember to bring your bottle or vessel for Holy Water.

✘ **Tuesday, January 6 10:00am ~ Divine Liturgy ~ Feast of Holy Theophany**

⇒ **Second Great Blessing of Water after Liturgy**

✘ **Wed. January 7, 10:00am ~ Old Calendar Nativity Divine Liturgy**

➤ **House Blessings begin: See Father to schedule your House Blessing. Time is limited.**

PREPARATIONS FOR THE BLESSING OF YOUR HOME

➤ **A lighted candle, (especially a blessed baptismal or wedding candle), an icon, and a bowl of sanctified water received from the Church at the Feast of Theophany should be placed on a table covered by a clean white tablecloth, or at the family Icon corner. An empty bowl should be prepared if you do not have sanctified water, which Father will have in reserve. We try to face east for the prayer service, if manageable.**

2) All radios, TV's, computer games, etc., should be turned off.

3) All who are present in the house should come together and stand by the table where the service takes place.

4) Those who can sing should join in the singing of the responses.

5) One may list the first names of household members and those of the immediate family, clearly printed on a sheet of paper.

6) The head of the house leads the priest from room to room (except bathrooms) as he blesses them with sanctified water.

7) If it is a family custom to give a gift to the priest on this occasion, it should be given in an envelope at the conclusion of the service.

{Adapted from a 1988 Christ the Savior Cathedral Bulletin, Miami, by + Father George Gladky, our parish founder.}

✘ **"Be zealous to assemble more frequently to render thanks, to celebrate the Eucharist, and to praise God. For when you meet together frequently, the powers of Satan are destroyed and danger from him is dissolved in the harmony of faith." - St. Ignatius of Antioch**

✘ **"No one in the Church is deprived of the Holy Spirit, and to everyone is given the spirit of responsibility and concern for the Church, the spirit of active membership." - Fr. Alexander Schmemmann**

Multiculturalism Is a Failure - Walter Williams

German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that in Germany, multiculturalism has "utterly failed." Both Australia's ex-prime minister John Howard and Spain's ex-prime minister Jose Maria Aznar reached the same conclusion about multiculturalism in their countries. British Prime Minister David Cameron has warned that multiculturalism is fostering extremist ideology and directly contributing to homegrown Islamic terrorism. UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage said the United Kingdom's push for multiculturalism has not united Britons but pushed them apart. It has allowed for Islam to emerge despite Britain's Judeo-Christian culture. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair said the roots of violent Islamism are not "superficial but deep" and can be found "in the extremist minority that now, in every European city, preach hatred of the West and our way of life."

The bottom line is that much of the Muslim world is at war with Western civilization. There's no question that the West has the military might to thwart radical Islam's agenda. The question up for grabs is whether we have the intelligence to recognize the attack and the will to defend ourselves from annihilation.

Multiculturalism is Islamists' foot in the door. **At the heart of multiculturalism is an attack on Western and Christian values. Much of that attack has its roots on college campuses among the intellectual elite who see their mission as indoctrinating our youth.** In past columns, I've documented professorial hate-America teaching, such as a UCLA economics professor's telling his class, "The United States of America, backed by facts, is the greediest and most selfish country in the world." A history professor told her class: "Capitalism isn't a lie on purpose. It's just a lie." She also said: "(Capitalists) are swine. ... They're bastard people." Students sit through lectures listening to professorial rants about topics such as globalism and Western exploitation of the Middle East and Third World peoples.

Some public school boards have banned songs and music containing references to Santa Claus, Jesus or other religious Christmas symbols. The New York City school system permits displays of Jewish menorahs and the Muslim star and crescent, but not the Christian Nativity scene. One school district banned a teacher from using excerpts from historical documents in his classroom because they contained references to God and Christianity. The historical documents in question were the Declaration of Independence and "The Rights of the Colonists," by Samuel Adams.

The U.S. is a nation of many races, ethnicities, religions and cultures. Since our inception, people from all over the world have immigrated here to become Americans. They have learned English and American history and celebrated American traditions and values. They have become Americans while also respecting and adapting some of the traditions of the countries they left behind. By contrast, many of today's immigrants demand that classes be taught -- and official documents be printed -- in their native language. Other immigrants demand the use of Shariah, practices that permit honor killing and female genital mutilation.

Multiculturalists argue that different cultural values are morally equivalent. That's nonsense. Western culture and values are superior. For those who'd accuse me of Eurocentrism, I'd ask: Is forcible female genital mutilation, as practiced in nearly 30 sub-Saharan African and Middle Eastern countries, a morally equivalent cultural value? Slavery is practiced in Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Sudan; is it morally equivalent? In most of the Middle East, there are numerous limits placed on women, such as prohibitions on driving, employment and education. Under Islamic law, in some countries, female adulterers face death by stoning, and thieves face the punishment of having their hand severed. In some countries, homosexuality is a crime punishable by death. Are these cultural values morally equivalent, superior or inferior to Western values?

Multiculturalism has not yet done the damage in the U.S. that it has in western European countries -- such as England, France and Germany -- but it's on its way. By the way, one need not be a Westerner to hold Western values. Mainly, you just have to accept the supremacy of the individual above all else. (*ed. The individual made in God's Image.*)

- Walter E. Williams is a professor of economics at George Mason University.

On Forgiveness ~ Let's invite more forgiveness into our homes for a blessing in 2015!

The Holy Fathers teach us that the one who forgives always wins. Whatever the occasion may be, if you forgive, you immediately cleanse your soul and become fit for Paradise. If you have forgiven those who plotted to murder you, you have become equal to the martyrs. If you have forgiven an insult, you have gained peace and won the Kingdom of Heaven. If you have generously overlooked the rumors and slanders against you, you have dulled the sting of your foe. If you have returned good for evil, you have shamed your enemy. If you have swallowed a sarcastic insult to your honor, you have become worthy of heavenly honors. If, being of higher rank in life, you have asked the pardon of a lesser man, you have not only NOT disgraced yourself, but you have furthered your spiritual maturity. If you were not to blame but asked the offender to forgive you, you have thus helped his soul to be delivered from the hell of hatred and have covered many of your own sins, too. If you have abased your pride, you have exalted your humility. - Archimandrite Seraphim Aleksiev (+1993)

Why Do We Have Our Homes Blessed?

Begin Everything with Prayer

Since we are reminded in Scripture to begin whatever we do with prayer, it has been the practice of Orthodox Christians for centuries to have new dwellings blessed either before or just after settling in. This has been extended to one's business or office, and even college dorm rooms. "The service performed by the priest to bless the new dwelling is somewhat similar to the consecration of a church [in the Russian practice] in that holy water, holy oil, and incense are used and a lesson from the holy Gospel is read. All the rooms of the house are sprinkled with holy water and each of the four outer walls are anointed with the sign of the Cross with holy oil, a candle placed before them, and after the censing of the house, the lesson from the Holy Gospel is read [in Greek practice the service of the Small Blessing of Waters is generally done]. At the conclusion of the blessing, the inhabitants are blessed with holy water: the husband first, followed by the wife and then the children - the oldest first. Relatives and friends present are then blessed." (Marriage and the Christian Home, by Rev. Michael B. Henning, p.24.)

Back to "The Fall"

From Scripture we know that whatever God created was good, but with "the Fall", evil entered the world, corrupting the creation. God the Father sent His Son Jesus to save it by effecting a "new creation". This is celebrated at Theophany, specifically with the Great Blessing of Water. "The consecration of the waters on this feast places the entire world - through its

'prime element' of water - in the perspective of the cosmic creation, sanctification, and glorification of the Kingdom of God in Christ and the Spirit." (The Orthodox Faith, Vol. II, Worship, by Fr. Thomas Hopko, p.127.) All the readings, hymns, prayers, and actions of the day speak of God's presence in our entire world and universe, His creation. Through water all of the creation is once again sanctified by God, becoming good again, the way God had intended.

The Feast Of Theophany

The Feast of Theophany (or Epiphany) commemorates the Baptism of our Lord in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. We know from the troparion of the day that "the Trinity was made manifest" to us. But there's more to it than this. "When Jesus descends into the depths of the river, there occurs a profound upheaval. It is not the one baptized who is purified, for he is spotless; but it is the water that is transfigured and illumined. This water, which was believed to be transparent and purifying, is in fact polluted, inhabited by evil spirits, servants of the old gods. ... By purifying the elements, by sanctifying matter, Jesus frees the cosmos from the powers of evil." (The Incarnate God, Vol. I, Catherine Aslanoff, French edition editor, translated by Paul Meyendorff, p.163.)

The Great Blessing of Water and the Home

The Great Blessing of Water takes place at the end of that day's Liturgy. Since our homes cannot be brought to the Church, the Church - through the priest and cantor - go to the homes. There

the service of blessing, which began in the church, is finished with the sprinkling of water in the home. Traditionally, in most Orthodox parishes, the priest personally visits all his parishioners each year to pray with them in the place where they live, and to bless their surroundings with the newly sanctified water of Theophany (January 6/19). By sanctifying our living quarters, our private place, we extend the grace of God to our individual dwellings. (In very large parishes a yearly visit may not be possible. In areas of the country where the winter is harsh, sometimes houses are blessed at the beginning of the ecclesiastical year in September.) We also bring the blessed water to our homes to use throughout the year to bless our homes and to drink whether we are ill or as part of our daily prayer life. "There are many occasions in family life when a sip of holy water can help to remind us of the blessing that was given 'to bestow sanctification', 'unto healing of soul and body', 'to be a fountain welling forth unto life eternal', as the priest prayed in the litany of Epiphany day." (Little Falcons: Water, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1998, p.33.)

Weaving Christ into Our Lives"

The blessing of homes by these holy waters maintains the spiritual association between the 'family church' and the parish, as well as again providing for the sharing of God's spiritual gifts. ... This annual blessing is not as elaborate as the blessing of the new dwelling, but because of this it should not be overlooked, for it is in this way that the grace of God is extended to individual dwellings." (Marriage and the Christian Home, p.25.)

If the priest comes to bless the home when the children are present, they have the opportunity to see the parish priest in a different and personal situation. If the priest permits, they can lead the way through the house, or hold a candle. They can show him their rooms or pets or favorite toys. They receive a blessing with water. For children, the house blessing shows the connection of the

Church to the home.

In Summary

What does it mean to ask God to bless something? All things in the world have been spoiled right along with us. God must bless His world again in order for it to be the way that He wants it to be. For this reason God sent His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the world: to bless everyone and everything that He made, to make all things good again. When the priest comes to bless our homes, he asks God to have mercy on the house, to rid it of every evil and to fill it with every blessing. What a wonderful way to begin the New Year!

REFLECTIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR

O Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tent? Who shall dwell on the holy hill? He who walks blamelessly, and does what is right, and speaks the truth from his heart; who does not slander with his tongue, and does no evil to his friend, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbors; in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honors those who fear the Lord; who swears to his own hurt and does not change; who does not put money out at interest, and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

(Psalm 15.1-5)

PRAYER:

O Lord, in my desire to love my fellow man, help me to do this always unselfishly. Whenever my neighbor needs me, let me come to him without reservation. And whatever my profession or business may be, enable me to do my job conscientiously and to the best of my ability. Amen.

THE HOLY THEOPHANY (EPIPHANY) OF OUR LORD, AND GOD, AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST.

About the beginning of our Lord's thirtieth year, John the Forerunner, who was some six months older than our Savior according to the flesh, and had lived in the wilderness since his childhood, received a command from God and came into the region of the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins. Then our Savior also came from Galilee to the Jordan, and sought and received baptism, though He was the Master and John was but a servant. Whereupon, there came to pass those marvelous deeds, great and beyond nature: the Heavens were opened, the Spirit descended in the form of a dove upon Him that was being baptized, and the voice was heard from the Heavens bearing witness that this was the beloved Son of God, now baptized as a man (Matt. 3:13-17, Mark 1: 9-11, Luke 3: 1-22). From these events the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ and the great mystery of the Trinity were demonstrated. It is also from this that the present feast is called "Theophany," that is, the divine manifestation, God's appearance among men.

On this venerable day the sacred mystery of Christian baptism was inaugurated; henceforth also began the saving preaching of the Kingdom of the Heavens.

■ Entry from the Great Horologion for the feast of Theophany.

FOR CONSIDERATION

Our Lord Jesus become man, so that "we may walk in Him," to live in Him, as in earthly God-man, and not to see Him from afar, to admire Him, and to philosophize about Him... "Walk ye in Him," is the commandment of commandments to live, namely in Him, and Him not adjusting Himself to us, but ourselves to Him, not changing and altering Him according to ourselves, but changing ourselves according to Him: neither remodeling Him according to our image, but remodeling ourselves according to His image. Only the haughty lunatics, these foolish, soul-destroyers, falsify and distort the God-man Christ according to their wishes and their perceptions from which there are so many "pseudo-Christ" in the world, and so many pseudo-Christians. The true God-man Christ, however, in all the fullness of His evangelical God-human reality, is in a whole present in His God-human body the Church, as much during the time of the holy Apostles as today and forever. His God-human life is extended in the God-human body of the Church to the ages of ages. Living in the Church we are living "in Him" exactly as the Christ-like Apostle orders. And this, in the most perfect and complete, measure live the Saints, a fact which explains their miraculous sanctity. Living with the soul and body in Christ, the Saints are sanctified by Him, become Christ-like, divinized, become omnipotent, in the same way in the post-apostolic period as in the apostolic period. And in the same way now, and yesterday, and tomorrow, and always "until the close of the age," they preserve the God-human image of Christ. (Col. 2:6).

■ Blessed Elder Justin Popovich (+1979)

Theophany

"Look at the faces of [the] worshippers," said Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, speaking of the Great Blessing of Water on the Feast of Theophany, ". . . and see the light and joy that shines. . ." (*Celebration of Faith*, Crestwood, 1994, p. 64). In order for us to partake of this radiance he describes, we need to prepare our hearts and minds by reflecting on the meaning of the Feast. In this way we will be able, when it arrives, to enter into its celebration and make it a part of our Christian life so that the whole year is touched by its brightness.

God Shines Forth

"Theophany" is a word derived from Greek and means "the manifestation of God." The Feast is also referred to as "Epiphany," which simply means "showing forth" or "manifestation." In the early days of the Church, there was only one celebration of the "showing forth" of God in the person of Jesus Christ which included everything we now associate with Christmas and Theophany. But in order to preserve the distinct aspects of Christ's Birth and Baptism, the two celebrations were separated. This occurred in the fourth century, during the lifetime of St. John Chrysostom, who makes reference to the change in one of his sermons (Anthony Coniaris, *Sacred Symbols That Speak*, Vol. 1, Minneapolis, 1985, p. 215). Thus Theophany came to be the celebration of the Savior's Baptism, the revelation of the Trinity and the restoration of all creation that took place on that momentous day.

When thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest! For the voice of the Father bare witness to Thee, and called Thee His beloved Son! And the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the truthfulness of His word. O Christ our God, who hast revealed thyself and hast enlightened the world, glory to Thee! (Troparion of the Feast)

In the Orthodox Church this very great Feast ranks with Pascha and Pentecost as the most sacred of celebrations.

The Great Blessing of Water

A unique feature of this Feast is the Great Blessing of Water, prescribed by the Church to be done once following Holy Liturgy on the eve of Theophany, and again on the Feast itself after Liturgy. In many parishes today, however, it is done only once. The service opens with special hymns as the water, placed in the center of the church, is censed. Amidst candles, and oftentimes flowers, this water represents "the beautiful world of God's original creation and ultimate glorification by Christ in the Kingdom of God" (Thomas Hopko, *The Orthodox Faith*, Vol. II, Crestwood, 1976, p. 125). Sometimes the Blessing is done outdoors where there is a natural body of water.

Three readings are used from the Prophet Isaiah which foretell the coming Savior using images of thirst and water (35:1-10, 55:1-13; 12:3-6). After the reading of the Epistle (I Cor. 10:1-4) and the Gospel (Mk. 1:9-11), there is a special Great Litany which invokes the grace of the Holy Spirit both upon the water and upon those who will receive it. The service ends with the long, very beautiful prayer "of the cosmic glorification of God, in which Christ is called upon to sanctify the water, and all men and all creation, by the manifestation of His saving and sanctifying divine presence by the indwelling of the Holy and Good and Life-creating Spirit" (Hopko, p. 126). During the singing of the Troparion of the Feast, the Cross is immersed three times in the water by the celebrant, who afterwards sprinkles the holy water "in the four directions of the world" (*ibid.*) and blesses the faithful with it.

Drawing on the Blessing in Our Daily Lives

A glance at even part of the great prayer makes evident that this blessed water is not to be confined in its use, but rather that its blessedness is meant for many needs of our daily lives:

Therefore, O King who lovest mankind, do Thou Thyself be present now as then through the descent of Thy Holy spirit, and sanctify this water. . . And confer upon it the grace of redemption, the blessing of the Jordan. Make it a source of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a remission of sins, a protection against disease, a destruction to demons, inaccessible to the adverse powers and filled with angelic strength: that all who draw from it and partake of it may have it for the cleansing of their soul and body, for the healing of their passions, for the sanctification of their dwellings, and for every purpose that is expedient (*The Festal Menaion*, Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, trs., London, 1977, p. 357).

Thus it is that the priest blesses our homes with the Holy Water, and the faithful drink it and take it home with them as a most precious gift—to be kept in a special, clean container near their icons. It is well known that this blessed water stays, as St. John Chrysostom put it, "pure and placid" for years (quoted in Coniaris, p. 206). If we should need to dispose of it, it may be poured out on a plant or in a place where it will not be walked upon, for it is holy.

There are a great many uses for sanctified water, as the above words of prayer suggest. Some Orthodox Christians bless themselves with it each morning as a reminder of their Baptism and as assistance on the road to salvation. Some bless themselves with it after Confession as a solemn physical expression of their cleansing from sin by Christ. When illness threatens, it is "protection against disease." It has power to ward off evil spirits. We can encourage our children to keep a small container of it in their room's icon corner. With it they might wish to bless a pet or a new bicycle, or "[t]hey can partake of it when they feel they have a special need for the Lord's presence at home" (Coniaris, p. 207).

HOW EACH OF US CAN AND OUGHT TO SERVE THE CHURCH {Conclusion}

+ Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky (+1988)

The Church is meek. For this reason She is in need of protection and defense. Only they must be good means for her defense. In the past, both the Byzantine and Russian Churches had external defenders: a governmental system, the emperors, the tsars; although one must admit that there were times when this defense was worse than none.

Times have changed. Now the care of the Church is entrusted by the Lord to the people of the Church Herself and so to each Orthodox Christian. In this regard we are returning to the times of the first Christians. Our times call us all to a conscious, constant sacrificial "stand for the Church," each with his talents and means. However, the principal power of service does not lie in our knowledge, abilities, and callings. The principal power is in the "infirmity" through which the power of Christ comes to abide. It is in our morality, in our living according to the law of the Gospel, according to the law of the Church. How we are to bring this about in a practical way is taught by the most perfect example of the holy martyrs and ascetics; it is demonstrated also by the Orthodox monasteries, the builders of Russia, such as the Trinity-Sergius Lavra, the Optina Hermitage, the Lavra of Pochaev and others that existed before the Revolution.

God hath chosen the weak of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are (I Cor. 1 :26-28). The quiet, meek, laborious life of the monastery sheds such a beneficial and varied influence far beyond its own physical limits! And what a good result is granted just by contact with this world, as many different persons can testify!

Those who think that prayer, fasting, temperance, ascetic labor, and the struggle with vices have only the goal of personal salvation and thus those who practice these good works, as it were, conceal in themselves a subtle spirit of egotism, are gravely mistaken. **Rather, internal work on oneself is an investment in the Church.** This is a gathering in of the powers of the Church, a collecting of the Church's wealth, which does not consist in the number of persons, not in large and opulent church buildings, not in sonorous choirs, not even in impressive statistics about philanthropy - but rather in the moral life of Her members.

One must serve the Church as the one body of Christ, a single organism, a single substance. Each one's personality is the plot of land entrusted to him for him to labor over, clean up, and produce fruit on. In working on ourselves, we work for the whole, for the entire Church, for Her Head, the selfless Savior. In letting one's plot grow over, neglecting it, condemning it, we bring harm not only to ourselves but also to the Church. By not gathering for our own soul, we scatter what belongs to the Church.

Our service to the Church consists in this: that through our personal Christian life the spirit of the Gospel values flows into the life of the world, thus putting the enemies of the Church to shame. In our personal qualities lies the pledge of the internal unity of the Church as a whole and of the parish in particular; from this source come mutual understanding, obedience, unanimity in goals, friendly labor for the glory of God and the glory of the Church. Thus a completely unique Church atmosphere is established. In such an atmosphere a person feels that he is in a special world, which gives rest and joy to the soul, refreshing and renewing it. One strives to come to it as if to a new earth, the earth of the meek. In it one feels the beneficial power of the Church within oneself. It is easier in such circumstances for the soul to open up to the reception of the breath of the Grace of God that abides in the Church. But if this spirit is absent; if within the groups of the Church there are divisions, discord, the struggle of ambition and self-love, then can one, in such circumstances, speak of the power of the Church? ✠ ✠ ✠

ON THE NEW YEAR

*St. Barsanuphius of Optina, on Jan. 1st, 1913
(after the Liturgy—on the year of his repose).*

St. Barsanuphius is one of our lesser known Orthodox saints who possessed the gifts of clairvoyance and of healing people afflicted with physical and spiritual ailments. A small story best demonstrates the divine gifts the saint possessed.

One of his spiritual sons, Fr. Innocent Pavlov, recalled his first Confession with the elder. He became fearful because the saint seemed to know his innermost thoughts, reminding him of people and events which he had forgotten. St. Barsanuphius spoke gently and told him that it was God who had revealed to him these things about Fr. Innocent. "During my lifetime, do not tell anyone about what you are experiencing now," he said, "but you may speak of it after my death."

† † †

I greet all of you gathered here with the New Year. I congratulate you with the joys that I hope the Lord might send you in the coming year. I congratulate you also with the sorrows that will inevitably visit you this year: perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow, or in the near future.

Incidentally, do not be confused by sorrows or fear them. Sorrows and joys are closely bound up with each other. This may seem strange to you, but remember the words of the Savior: *A woman when she is in travail hath*

sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. (Jn 16:21). Day turns to night, and night turns to day, bad weather turns to good; so also does sorrow turn into joy, and joy into sorrow.

The Apostle Paul pronounced threatening words against those who do not endure any punishment that comes from God: *If you are left without punishment, you are illegitimate children.* Do not be depressed; let those be depressed who do not believe in God. For them, of course, sorrow is onerous, because they know only earthly pleasures. But people who believe in God should not despond, because through sorrows they receive the rights of sons, without which one cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.



Scorning the impious decree, the Children brought up together in godliness feared not the threat of fire, but standing in the midst of the

flames, they sang: 'O God of our fathers, blessed art Thou. (Irmos of the Nativity of Christ, tone 1, canticle 7).

Sorrows are that very threat of fire, or trial, but we must not fear them; rather we must be like the godly children and sing unto God in our sorrows, believing that they are sent to us by God for our salvation. May the Lord save you all, and lead you to the Kingdom of Unwaning Light! Amen.