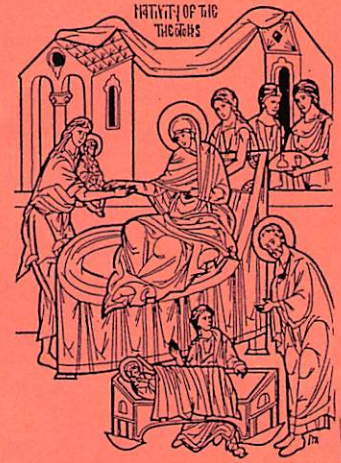


THE UNIVERSAL EXALTATION OF THE PRECIOUS AND LIFE-GIVING CROSS



## Fire & Light

### St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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**September 11, 2016**

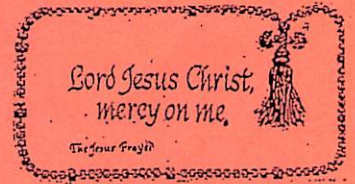
**Postfeast of the**

**Nativity of the Theotokos**

**Sts. Sergius & Herman of Valaam (1353)**

**St. Euphrosynus the Cook of Alexandria (9<sup>th</sup> C)**

**Old Calendar – Beheading of St. John the Baptist**



☞ **Inquirer's Class – Tuesday, September 13**

✝ **Wed. September 14, 6:00am Divine Liturgy – Elevation of the Cross ✝**

☞ **Annual Parish Meeting, Next Sunday, September 18**

✝ **Once the great St. Macarius asked the devil why he looked so depressed, 'You have defeated me', he said, 'because of your humility.'**

### On the Holy Icons ~

✝ **St. Basil the Great said, "The icon makes present what it represents."**

✝ **St. John of Damascus:**

"Of old, God the incorporeal and uncircumscribed was never depicted. Now, however, when God is seen clothed in flesh, and conversing with men, I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter, I worship the God of matter, who became matter for my sake, and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter. I will not cease from honoring that matter which works my salvation. I venerate it, though not as God..."

"I honor all matter, and venerate it. Through it, filled, as it were, with a divine power and grace, my salvation has come to me. Was the thrice-happy and blessed wood of the Cross not matter? Was the sacred and holy mountain of Calvary not matter? What of the life-giving rock, the Holy Tomb, the source of our resurrection -- was it not matter? Is the holy book of the Gospels not matter? Is the blessed table which gives us the Bread of Life not matter? Are the gold and silver, out of which crosses and altar-plate and chalices are made not matter? And before all these things, is not the body and blood of our Lord matter? Either stop venerating all these things, or submit to the tradition of the Church in the venerating of images, honoring God and his friends, and following in this the grace of the Holy Spirit. Do not despise matter, for it is not despicable. Nothing that God has made is. Only that which does not come from God is despicable — our own invention, the spontaneous decision to disregard the law of human nature, i.e., sin."

Remembering the victims  
of the 9/11 Terrorist  
Attacks...

## **The Nativity of the Most-holy Theotokos**

The Holy Virgin Mary was born of aged parents, Joachim and Anna. Her father was of the lineage of David, and her mother of the lineage of Aaron. Thus, she was of royal birth by her father, and of priestly birth by her mother. In this, she foreshadowed Him Who would be born of her as King and High Priest. Her parents were quite old and had no children. Because of this they were ashamed before men and humble before God. In their humility they prayed to God with tears, to bring them joy in their old age by giving them a child, as He had once given joy to the aged Abraham and his wife Sarah by giving them Isaac. The Almighty and All-seeing God rewarded them with a joy that surpassed all their expectations and all their most beautiful dreams. For He gave them not just a daughter, but the Mother of God. He illumined them not only with temporal joy, but with eternal joy as well. God gave them just one daughter, and she would later give them just one grandson-but what a daughter and what a Grandson!

Mary, Full of grace, Blessed among women, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Altar of the Living God, the Table of the Heavenly Bread, the Ark of God's Holiness, the Tree of the Sweetest Fruit, the Glory of the race of man, the Praise of womanhood, the Fount of virginity and purity-this was the daughter given by God to Joachim and Anna. She was born in Nazareth, and at the age of three, was taken to the Temple in Jerusalem. In her young womanhood she returned again to Nazareth, and shortly thereafter heard the Annunciation of the Holy Archangel Gabriel concerning the birth of the Son of God, the Savior of the world, from her most-pure virgin body. ~ *From the Prologue*

## **Mediatress for Everyone**

✠ Our Panagia (Theotokos) hastens everywhere. She bestows her grace abundantly upon anyone who fervently cries out to her. She is a mediatress to Christ for everyone, because she was deemed worthy to give birth to the Lord and to become the Mother of God. She carries Him in Her arms and continuously entreats Him. Since we sinners do not have the boldness to run directly to God from the start, we cry out to His Mother. She regenerates us; she intercedes; she anticipates all our afflictions. She is our protectress and helper, more honorable than all the angels, beyond compare more glorious than the Cherubim and Seraphim, second in rank only to the Holy Trinity. Oh, but she is so good, so sweet, that you want to embrace her at every moment and obtain consoling grace. The more you love, the more you are loved.

~ Blessed Elder Joseph the Hesychast ("Monastic Wisdom")

## **Two from St. Macarius of Optina**

### **~ On the Cross:**

✠ To bear the cross does not mean only visible, external sorrows, but also internal spiritual ones. One must endure darkness, faintheartedness and similar things as well. For God sends this for the destruction of our pride and acquiring of humility.

✠ We seek and desire sweet, spiritual enjoyment; I do not argue, it is pleasant-but it is lower than the cross. It is granted to us through the cross and without the cross it cannot last. It comes to us and leaves us according to the degree that we travel the way of the cross and humility.

## **Clouded Thinking**

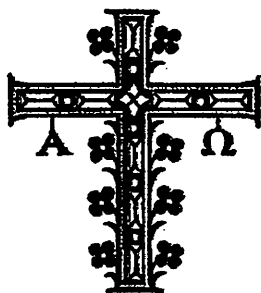
✠ They (the Apostles) had such a point of fear and despair that in their clouded thinking they thought Jesus was uncaring or indifferent about their salvation (on the stormy Sea of Galilee). How many of us, when distressed or pressured, lose our self-control, become hopeless and, some to ourselves, some aloud, repeat the complaint, "Lord, do you not care that we are perishing?" But! The One we say doesn't care pleads for us as eternal High Priest that we do not lose our faith."

+ Blessed Bishop Augustinos of Florina

## CONCERNING THE CROSS OF OUR LORD

Before the time of Christ, the cross was an instrument of punishment; it evoked fear and aversion. But after Christ's death on the Cross it became the instrument and sign of our salvation. Through the Cross, Christ destroyed the devil; from the Cross He descended into Hades and, having liberated those languishing there, led them into the Kingdom of Heaven. The sign of the Cross is terrifying to demons and, as the sign of Christ, it is honored by Christians. The Lord manifested it in the sky to the Emperor Constantine as he was going to Rome to fight the tyrant who had seized power, and the Emperor, having fashioned a standard in the form of a cross, won a total victory. Having been aided by the Cross of the Lord, the Emperor Constantine asked his mother, the Empress Helen, to find the actual Life-giving Cross, and the devout Helen went to Jerusalem where, after much searching, she found it.

Many healings and other miracles were wrought and continue to be wrought by the Life-giving Cross and also by its depiction. Through it the Lord preserves His people from all enemies visible and invisible. The Orthodox Church solemnly celebrates the finding of the Cross of the Lord, recalling at the same time the appearance, of the Cross in the sky to the Emperor Constantine. On that and other days dedicated to the Holy Cross, we beseech God that He grant His mercies not only to individual people, but also to all Christendom, to the whole Church. This is



well expressed by the troparion to the Cross of the Lord, composed in the eighth century, when Saint Cosmas, Bishop of Maiuma, a friend (and step-brother) of Saint John Damascene, wrote the service to the Exaltation of the Cross of the Lord:

"Save, O Lord, Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance, granting Orthodox Christians victory over their enemies,<sup>1</sup> and guarding Thy commonwealth with Thy Cross."

The beginning of this prayer is taken from the twenty-seventh Psalm. In the Old Testament the word "people" designated only those who confessed the true faith, people faithful to God. "Inheritance" referred to everything which properly belonged to God, God's property, which in the New Testament is the Church of Christ. In praying for the salvation of God's people (the Christians), both from eternal torments and from earthly calamities, we beseech the Lord to bless, to send down grace, His good gifts upon the whole Church as well, and inwardly strengthen her.

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<sup>1</sup> Literally, "granting the kings victory over barbarians."

The petition for granting "victory" (originally the hymn referred to right-believing Orthodox kings), i.e., to the bearers of supreme authority, has its basis in Psalm 143, verse 10, and recalls the victories King David achieved by God's power, and likewise the victories granted Emperor Constantine through the Cross of the Lord. This appearance of the Cross made emperors who had formerly persecuted Christians into defenders of the Church from her external enemies, into "external bishops," to use the expression of the holy Emperor Constantine.

The Church, inwardly strong by God's grace and protected outwardly, is, for Orthodox Christians, "the city of God," God's community, His commonwealth, where the path to the Heavenly Jerusalem has its beginning. Various calamities have shaken the world, entire peoples have disappeared, cities and states have perished, but the Church, in spite of persecutions and even internal conflicts, stands invincible; "for the gates of hell shall not prevail against her" (Mt. 16:18). Today, when world leaders try in vain to establish order on earth, the only dependable instrument of peace is that about which the Church sings:

"The Cross is the guardian of the whole world; the Cross is the beauty of the Church. The Cross is the might of kings; the Cross is the confirmation of the faithful. The Cross is the glory of angels and the wounder of demons."

- St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco (†1966)

### REFLECTION from the Prologue

Mysterious is the power of the Cross no matter how unexplainable, it is true and indisputable. Yet, St. John Chrysostom speaks of the custom of his time that the sign of the Cross is attached "on the emperor's diadem, on the accouterments of the soldiers and tracing it on parts of the body: the head, the breast [chest] and the heart and also on the table of oblations and over beds." "If it is necessary to expel demons", says he, "we use the Cross and it also helps to heal the sick."

St. Benedict made the sign of the Cross over a glass which contained poison and the glass burst as though it were struck by a stone. St. Julian made the sign of the Cross over a glass of poison brought to him and drank the poison, but he did not feel any pain in his body. The Holy Female Martyr Vasilissa of Nicomedia enveloped herself with the sign of the Cross, stood amidst the flames and remained unharmed. The Holy Martyrs Audon and Senis crossed themselves when the wild beasts were released on them and the beasts became docile and meek as lambs. Among the ascetics of old, as it is today, the sign of the Cross was the most powerful weapon against the temptations of the demons. The most horrible fears of the devil vanish into nothing, as smoke, when man traces the sign of the Cross over himself. Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself willed to the one time sign of crime and shame, the Cross, following His Crucifixion on the wood of the Cross, all victorious power and might.

✠ It is impossible for someone to quit the habit of sinning unless he hates sin. Likewise it is impossible for someone to receive forgiveness for his sins unless he confesses them. Feeling hatred against sin is an indication of true repentance, just as confession is an indication of contrition, which comes to the heart through shame.

- St. Isaac of Syria

## **The Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross – September 14**

The pagan Roman emperors tried to completely eradicate from human memory the holy places where our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and was resurrected for mankind. The Emperor Hadrian (117-138) gave orders to cover over the ground of Golgotha and the Sepulchre of the Lord, and to build a temple of the pagan goddess Venus and a statue of Jupiter.

Pagans gathered at this place and offered sacrifice to idols there. Eventually after 300 years, by Divine Providence, the great Christian sacred remains, the Sepulchre of the Lord and the Life-Creating Cross were again discovered and opened for veneration. This took place under the Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337) after his victory in the year 312 over Maxentius, ruler of the Western part of the Roman Empire, and over Licinius, ruler of its Eastern part. In the year 323 Constantine became the sole ruler of the vast Roman Empire.

In 313 he had issued the Edict of Milan, by which the Christian religion was legalized and the persecutions against Christians in the Western half of the Empire were stopped. The ruler Licinius, although he had signed the Edict of Milan to oblige Constantine, still fanatically continued the persecutions against Christians. Only after his conclusive defeat did the 313 Edict of toleration extend also to the Eastern part of the Empire. The Holy Equal of the Apostles Emperor Constantine, having gained victory over his enemies in three wars with God's assistance, had seen in the heavens the Sign of the Cross, and written beneath: "By this you shall conquer."

Ardently desiring to find the Cross on which our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, St. Constantine sent his mother, the pious Empress Helen (May 21), to Jerusalem, providing her with a letter to St. Macarius, Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Although the holy Empress Helen was already in her declining years, she set about completing the task with enthusiasm. The Empress gave orders to destroy the pagan temple and the statues in Jerusalem. Searching for the Life-Creating Cross, she made inquiry of Christians and Jews, but for a long time her search remained unsuccessful.

Finally, they directed her to a certain elderly Hebrew by the name of Jude who stated that the Cross was buried where the temple of Venus stood. They demolished the pagan temple and, after praying, they began to excavate the ground. Soon the Tomb of the Lord was uncovered. Not far from it were three crosses, a board with the inscription ordered by Pilate, and four nails which had pierced the Lord's Body (March 6).

In order to discern on which of the three crosses the Savior was crucified, Patriarch Macarius alternately touched the crosses to a corpse. When the Cross of the Lord touched the dead one, he came to life. Having beheld the raising of the dead man, everyone was convinced that the Life-Creating Cross was found.

Christians came in a huge throng to venerate the Holy Cross, beseeching St. Macarius to elevate the Cross, so that even those far off might reverently contemplate it. Then the Patriarch and other spiritual leaders raised up the Holy Cross, and the people, saying "Lord have mercy," reverently prostrated before the Venerable Wood. This solemn event occurred in the year 326.

During the discovery of the Life-Creating Cross, another miracle took place: a grievously sick woman, beneath the shadow of the Holy Cross, was healed instantly. The elderly Jude and other Jews there believed in Christ and accepted Holy Baptism. Jude received the name Cyriacus and afterwards was consecrated Bishop of Jerusalem.

During the reign of Julian the Apostate (361-363) he accepted a martyr's death for Christ (see October 28). The holy Empress Helen journeyed to the holy places connected with the earthly life of the Savior, building more than 80 churches, at Bethlehem the birthplace of Christ, and on the Mount of Olives where the Lord ascended to Heaven, and at Gethsemane where the Savior prayed before His sufferings and where the Mother of God was buried after her death.

St. Helen took part of the Life-Creating Wood and nails with her to Constantinople. The holy Emperor Constantine gave orders to build at Jerusalem a majestic and spacious church in honor of the Resurrection of Christ, also including under its roof the Life-Giving Tomb of the Lord and Golgotha. The temple was constructed in about ten years. St. Helen did not survive until the dedication of the temple, she died in the year 327. The church was consecrated on September 13, 335. On the following day, September 14, the festal celebration of the Exaltation of the Venerable and Life-Creating Cross was established.

Another event connected to the Cross of the Lord is remembered also on this day: its return to Jerusalem from Persia after a fourteen year captivity. During the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Phocas (602-610) the Persian Emperor Khozroes II in a war against the Greeks defeated the Greek army, plundered Jerusalem and captured both the

Life-Creating Cross of the Lord and the Holy Patriarch Zachariah (609-633).

The Cross remained in Persia for fourteen years and only under the emperor Heraclius (610-641), who with the help of God defeated Khozroes and concluded peace with his successor and son Syroes, was the Cross of the Lord returned to the Christians.

With great solemnity the Life-creating Cross was transferred to Jerusalem. Emperor Heraclius in imperial crown and royal purple carried the Cross of Christ into the temple of the Resurrection. With the Emperor went Patriarch Zacharios. At the gates by which they ascended Golgotha, the Emperor suddenly stopped and was not able to proceed farther. The holy Patriarch explained to the Emperor that an angel of the Lord was blocking his way. The Emperor was told to remove his royal trappings and to walk barefoot, since He Who bore the Cross for the salvation of the world from sin had made His way to Golgotha in all humility. Then Heraclius donned plain garb, and without further hindrance, carried the Cross of Christ into the church.

In a sermon on the Exaltation of the Cross, St. Andrew of Crete (July 4) says: "The Cross is exalted, and everything true gathers together, the Cross is exalted, and the city makes solemn, and the people celebrate the feast".



### **Repose of St John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople**

The Repose of Saint John Chrysostom: Saint John Chrysostom died on September 14, 407, but because of the feast of the Exaltation of the Life-Creating Cross of the Lord, the commemoration of the Saint was transferred to November 13, where the account about him is located. On January 27 we commemorate the transfer of the holy relics of St. John Chrysostom from Comana to Constantinople, and on January 30 is the celebration of the Synaxis of the Three Hierarchs.

## ***This and That***

☞ **Alistair MacIntyre: *After Virtue*** (last paragraph):

It is always dangerous to draw too precise parallels between one historical period and another; and among the most misleading of such parallels are those which have been drawn between our own age in Europe and North America and the epoch in which the Roman Empire declined into the Dark Ages.

Nonetheless certain parallels there are. A crucial turning point in that earlier history occurred when men and women of good will turned aside from the task of shoring up the Roman imperium and ceased to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance of that imperium. What they set themselves to achieve instead— often not recognizing fully what they were doing— was the construction of new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness.

If my account of our moral condition is correct, we ought also to conclude that for some time now we too have reached that turning point. **What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community** within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another— doubtless very different— St. Benedict.

☞ **Should Christians be globalists, rather than nationalists, since Christianity is a universal religion?** Are the aims of what is called globalism, a worldwide economic system that benefits an elite, to be imposed by them as a form of imperial domination, compatible with either the means or ends of those of Christianity? Clearly, no. What is nationalism? Is it jingoism and prejudice? Those are surely contrary to Christian conscience.

But what does loving our neighbor mean? It means we must be concerned first with our neighbor, right next to us. If we prove we don't care for those living here, and favor what harms our own neighbors and countrymen, then the claim to be serving "globally" others is willful deception – as the foreign policy of wars, coups, occupations, sanctions and financial hegemony over other countries proves. You can't "love mankind but hate people."  
~ Fran Macadam

☞ **Two Worlds:** We should not divide our lives into two worlds. Even monks have to wash dishes... If we concede that some of our life is drudgery, mindless, but needful, while other parts of our life are interesting and of value to God, then we have ourselves created a two-storey universe of our inner world. "This part of my life is of no value – while this part is of great value." This, of course, is nonsense. Even service in the Holy Altar frequently includes washing dishes.

... God is everywhere present and filling all things. He is even present and filling the various tasks of "drudgery" we undertake. No task is beneath us. The Mother of God changed the diapers of the God of Heaven. Our love for those around us should be no less. We are moved when we read in John that 'Jesus wept' at the grave of Lazarus, His friend. The Theotokos had long before heard Him weep and wail as all children do. Nor should any mother (or father) give less value to the weeping of their own children. God has invested everything with His love, transforming the world into the stage of our salvation. Glory to God for all things and in all things – always and everywhere.

– Fr. Stephen Freeman

## **Elder Joseph of Optina (+ 1901 – Spiritual son of Elder Ambrose of Optina)**

### **Instructions**

The Elder gave this instruction to a certain nun: "If the deeds or sins of your neighbor disturb you and take away your peace of soul, then remember this:

If the sinfulness of your neighbor, which you want to correct, disturbs your spiritual peace and irritates you, you also sin. You cannot correct sinfulness by sinfulness; it is corrected by meekness. Zeal which wants to destroy every evil is itself a great evil.

Remember that there is a beam in your own eye, and you are pointing out the mote in your brother's eye.

There are imperfections which are inevitable as well as ones which are even beneficial. Good is tried by evil.

The example of God's longsuffering should bridle our impatience which robs us of peace.

The example of our Lord Jesus Christ shows us with what meekness and patience we must bear human sinfulness. If we are not in a position of command over others, then we must look at their evil-doing with dispassion.

Every man condemns those sins of his neighbor by which he himself is censured.

Nothing quiets and pacifies us about our neighbor's actions so much as silence, prayer and love.

Someone speaking of a relative who had committed suicide tried to prove that God could forgive even him. To this the Elder replied, "It is not our place to pass judgment concerning this. The Lord is able to forgive even this, but it is our concern to fulfill what the law commands. Judges must pronounce punishment on the offender according to the law, although the Tsar is able to show mercy. St. Basil the Great was praying for the Emperor Trajan when he heard a voice saying, "Do not dare to pray for such people."

The Elder said, "Man's conscience is like an alarm clock. If the alarm goes off, and you get up right away, knowing that you've got to go to your obedience, then afterward you'll always hear it. But if for a few days in a row you don't get up right away, saying, 'I'll stay in bed a little longer,' then finally you won't be awakened by the alarm at all."

The Elder said, "Contradiction is the strongest trait in a man. If it is in accord with his own desire, a man will sometimes do a most difficult task; but just order him to do something easy, and immediately he'll get upset. Nevertheless, one has to obey, although the order may appear wrong. Five disciples came to an Elder and asked to be received into the monastery. He told them to go plant some cabbages with the roots at the top and the leaves in the earth. Two of them started to plant as he had ordered, but the other three said, 'That's no way to plant cabbage,' and began to plant them their own way. When the Elder came to see how they were doing, those who had planted as he had said, he received into the monastery, but not the others."

He also said, "The more a tree is shaken by the wind, the more roots it puts out to strengthen it, but one which has been amid calm falls over right away."

A nun said to the Elder, "Batushka, bless me to reserve in advance a permanent cottage for myself." The Elder replied, "Reserve some *patience* for yourself! It is said, 'In your patience gain ye your souls.' Without patience not even a temporary home will be built, let alone a permanent one. Patience gives birth to consolation, and such consolation is genuine. But we always search for something a little easier. What is easy for the body is not beneficial for the soul, and what is beneficial for the soul is labor for the body. With labor must we enter the Heavenly Kingdom."

The Elder Joseph was told that there was a bad harvest again... "Yes," he said, "there is a dearth of everything, except sin. The Lord sends us bad harvests because now even the simple folk have completely stopped observing the Fasts. And so one is thus forced to fast, whether he wants to or not."

✠ ✠ ✠

(to be continued)