



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **September 9, 2012** ✠

Postfeast of the

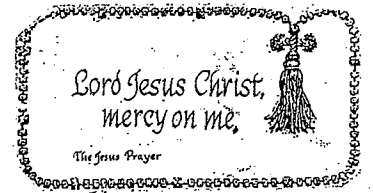
Nativity of the Most-Holy Theotokos

Holy and Righteous Ancestors of God,

Sts. Joachim and Anna

St. Theodosius of Chernigov (1696)

A barren woman
bears the Theotokos
who sustains our life,
The Heaven of God,
the Divine Bride,
is born on earth,
according to the promise!



⇒ ***Many Years! Newly Illumined Maxim Landar !***

***Most-Holy Theotokos,
save us!***

✠ **Thurs. Sept 13 6:30pm Feast of the Elevation of the Cross**

✠ **Fri. Sept. 14 – 10:00am – Divine Liturgy - Feast of the Cross**

✠ **This Saturday, Sept. 15 – Saturday Night Youth Psalm-a-thon (After Vespers)**

✠ **Sept. 16 – Church School begins / Council Meeting / Junia Boyer - baby shower**

✠ **October 7 – Annual Parish Meeting / Oct. 28 - 35th Anniversary Banquet**

Always Open

✠ Prayer consists not only in standing and bowing before God in body, and in reading written prayers, but even without that it is possible to pray in mind and spirit at all times and in every place. You can do it while walking, sitting, reclining, among people, and in solitude. Raise up your mind and heart to God, and so beg mercy and help from Him. For God is everywhere and in every place, and the doors to Him are always open, and it is easy to approach Him, not as with man.

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

I See My Own Face

✠ In looking upon the faces of others, I see my own face, for we are all as one, created by God, from one single man, from the same blood, and all equally after the image of God - and therefore we must look upon all purely, unsuspiciously, not cunningly, not avariciously, but with pure godly love.

St. John of Kronstadt

Never Despondent

✠ One must never, for any reason, become despondent, for we are carried in the hands of God's Providence. Our concern is to be true to the Lord. And the Lord purposely reveals the weaknesses of him to whom He wishes to grant His gift of discernment. For the beginning of the soul's enlightenment is the perception of its own sins and its insignificance... **St. Ignatius Brianchaninov**

Stuck in the Mud?

✠ "We have no excuse, however, when we don't want to repent and confess, but rather we prefer to remain stuck in the mud. Some people do not confess because they have the impression that they will fall into the same sins. This simply means that they add more and more layers on top of the old layers of mud. Yet, when they stain their clothes, they wash them and take care not to soil them again; and when they are stained again, they clean them once again." **Elder Paisios (+1994)**



THE NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS

The Most Holy Virgin Mary was born at a time when people had reached such a degree of moral decay that it seemed altogether impossible to restore them. People often said that God must come into the world to restore faith and not permit the ruin of mankind.

The Son of God chose to take on human nature for the salvation of mankind, and chose as His Mother the All-Pure Virgin Mary, who alone was worthy to give birth to the Source of purity and holiness.

The Nativity of Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary is celebrated by the Church as a day of universal joy. Within the context of the Old and the New Testaments, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was born on this radiant day, having been chosen before the ages by Divine Providence to bring about the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God. She is revealed as the Mother of the Savior of the World, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Most Holy Virgin Mary was born in the small city of Galilee, Nazareth. Her parents were Righteous Joachim of the tribe of the Prophet-King David, and Anna from the tribe of the First Priest Aaron. The couple was without child, since St Anna was barren.

Having reached old age, Joachim and Anna did not lose hope in God's mercy. They had strong faith that for God everything is possible, and that He would be able to overcome the barrenness of Anna

even in her old age, as He had once overcome the barrenness of Sarah, spouse of the Patriarch Abraham. St Joachim and Anna vowed to dedicate the child which the Lord might give them, to the service of God in the Temple.

Childlessness was considered among the Hebrew nation as a Divine punishment for sin, and therefore the righteous St Joachim and Anna had to endure abuse from their own countrymen. On one of the feastdays at the Temple in Jerusalem the elderly Joachim brought his sacrifice to offer to God, but the High Priest would not accept it, considering him to be unworthy since he was childless.

St Joachim in deep grief went into the wilderness, and there he prayed with tears to the Lord for a child. St Anna wept bitterly when she learned what had happened at the Jerusalem Temple. Never once did she complain against the Lord, but rather she prayed to ask God's mercy on her family.

The Lord fulfilled her petitions when the pious couple had attained to extreme old age and prepared themselves by virtuous life for a sublime calling: to be the parents of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, the future Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Archangel Gabriel brought Joachim and Anna the joyous message that their prayers were heard by God, and of them would be born a most blessed daughter Mary, through Whom would come the Salvation of all the World.

The Most Holy Virgin Mary surpassed in purity and virtue not only all mankind, but also the angels. She was manifest as the living Temple of God, so the Church sings in its festal hymns: "the East Gate... bringing Christ into the world for the salvation of our souls".

The Nativity of the Theotokos marks the change of the times when the great and comforting promises of God for the salvation of the human race from slavery to the devil are about to be fulfilled. This event has brought to earth the grace of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of Truth, piety, virtue and everlasting life. The Theotokos is revealed to all of us by grace as a merciful Intercessor and Mother, to Whom we have recourse with filial devotion.



The First Anniversary of Archbishop's Dmitri's Repose

by Fr Basil Zebrun, August 24, 2012

One year ago, on August 28 (Old Calendar Dormition), our beloved Archbishop Dmitri fell asleep in the Lord. Since his retirement in March of 2009, and especially during the last twelve months, our Diocese has felt the need for a resident ruling hierarch to shepherd the Southern flock. Archbishop Nikon -- who has been a blessing as our locum tenens -- stated at the 35th Assembly in Miami that with the repose of His Eminence, "a void came into our hearts that cannot be filled, and in some sense should not be filled, for no one can replace the First Apostle to the South." He also reminded us that "the Diocese is still dealing with grief, manifesting itself in various ways within the Church: anger, sorrow, and with faith in the Risen Christ as well."

Many people can identify with Archbishop Nikon's words. Although life continues in the Diocese and in our parishes, the presence of our founding father is sorely missed. It is a testimony, however, to his vision and leadership that in spite of the fact that he was not known for attention to administrative detail, essential principles and structures remain after his repose -- as well as the faith of those he nurtured in Orthodoxy -- that enable the Diocese to carry on its tasks of parish development and mission.

Archbishop Nikon further stressed that while the Cathedral in Dallas continues to progress in constructing a final resting place for Archbishop Dmitri, the true monument to his life is not a building; rather it is the lives of the people, essentially the way we conduct ourselves as followers of Jesus Christ: "you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 9:2). Finally, we were encouraged in Miami to make Archbishop Dmitri proud by carrying on with the work of evangelism.

Assuredly this work will continue, and part of the effort will be the election of another ruling hierarch for the South. This topic was addressed repeatedly at the Assembly, and it is possible -- though not a given -- that an election will take place as early as January or February, in conjunction with the Annual Diocesan Clergy Conference.

I cannot help but think, however, that in some ways it is providential that the process of election has not progressed. True, we have been without a ruling bishop for three and a half years, and a resident hierarch will provide possibilities and a stability to Diocesan life that are not currently feasible. In addition, it can be asserted that we are not fully a Diocese without the presence of a bishop.

But in light of Archbishop Nikon's assessment of our grief, it may be that we need to mourn the passing and celebrate the life of Archbishop Dmitri on the 1st Anniversary of his repose, before we participate in the task of electing a second father in Christ. Perhaps we need this time -- alone as it were -- to assess the meaning of this occasion, to consider prayerfully the gift of the Archbishop's fatherly leadership, and in our "anger and sorrow," put to rest any ambiguities in our hearts...

It is incredibly hard to lose one's father. It is equally difficult to lose a father in Christ who has shown us the way to salvation. But part of the healing process will be to use the 1st Anniversary of his repose as a time to appreciate all that the Archbishop shared with his flock, while striving to apply his patience and wisdom to the realities of our own lives. A priest of our Diocese recently mentioned that he is just now beginning to understand why His Eminence did many of the things as he did, both administratively and pastorally, and that he misses that example very much. It is true that we often do not realize the full worth of those around us until they have gone to their rest, even someone of Archbishop Dmitri's stature.

... I am reminded of the words of Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann. In an article for the occasion of America's Bicentennial, reflecting upon the history of Orthodoxy in this country he wrote that, "To love is to remember. And to remember with love is truly to understand that which one loves and remembers, to appropriate it as God's gift." On this 1st Anniversary then, we may ask ourselves, "What is it that we understand with regard to God's gift of His Eminence?"

Saint Paulinus of Nola (c. 355 - 431): Poem 6 on The Theotokos

"AFTER the holy Gabriel has served as the messenger to Zacharias (Luke 1:5-20), he made a second Journey with much loftier purpose: to Mary who was betrothed to a husband but chosen rather of God (Luke 1:26-30), since to bear the Salvation of the world this chaste maiden preserved her virginity undefiled.

When his person, distinguished with heavenly comeliness, stood before her eyes, he said: 'Maiden, more blessed than all maids past, present or to come, in the whole world traversed by the orb of the sun, thou hast been chosen by the great God to be called the Mother of Him Whose Father is God Himself. Come, then, and in thy blessedness conceive this burden, for thou art unstained by a husband and unprofaned by any intercourse, but pregnant by the word of God. Let thy womb provide a body for Him Who made heaven and the earth, the sea and the stars, Who always was, is now, and ever shall be throughout the ages, the Lord of the world and the Creator of light. He Himself, the Light of heaven, will put on mortal limbs through thine aid, and appear before the eyes and assemblies of men. Untroubled, raise thy spirits to the reward of such great glory. God will give thee strength and faith, for He hath resolved to be thy Son, though He is the Son of the Lord, and He ruleth and directeth all things by His nod' (see Luke 1:30-35).

With these words at once he left her gaze and the earth, and made for the upper air he knew so well with easy motion. The commands of God were fulfilled. The maiden immediately believed, and her ready faith added to the virtue of her earlier life. The seed lay hidden with its causes unrevealed, and fashioned a body which was God's. The holy Burden grew, and her devoted womb cherished the Lord of Heaven.

Meanwhile her Child, though not yet born, impelled holy Mary in her pregnant state to journey forth and visit Elizabeth again, who, though now of an age to command respect, was carrying, and was soon to bear, the boy beloved of the Lord. The mother hearkened to her son, for the power of her faith was strong, and she went where she was bidden. John stirred in his mother's womb, and filled her heart with divine inspiration. The Prophet was as yet unborn and enclosed within the womb, but already he saw things past and things to come, as a prophet does.

When Elizabeth at a distance saw Mary radiant with a fiery light, she bestirred herself from afar and went forth to meet her with swift steps. Stretching out adoring hands, she cried, 'Rejoice, mother of the Lord, rejoice, devoted maiden! Though thou hast not shared a marriage-bed and hast known no marital intercourse, thou shalt bring forth God. So crucial was it for thee to be chaste, that thou mightest win the title and reward of Bride Unwedded. But why hath the glory of this ministry fallen to me, when I am undeserving and unworthy of so great a gift? Why hath the Glory of Heaven descended to our hearth and poor abode, introducing into our dark recesses so powerful a Light? May He show Himself gentle and mild to those who worship Him, and after His Birth may He grant the Grace that he indicated before.' With these words, she clasped Mary in her arms and received her embrace, and in reverence to God implanted kisses on that devoted womb."

Endless Forgiveness

"Modern interpretations of the commandment in the Torah reflect an (incorrect) individualistic attitude. The first commandment is that you love God with all your mind, all your soul, and all your strength, and the second is that you love your neighbor as yourself. The only way you can prove you love God is by loving your neighbor, and the only way you can love your neighbor in this world is by *endless forgiveness*. So, "love your neighbor as yourself." However, in certain modern editions of the Bible, I have seen this translated as, "You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself." But that's not what it says."

—Fr. Thomas Hopko

On the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets

Fr. Stephen Freeman, Glory to God for All Things Blog 8/28/2012

“Christians are not a “people of the Book.”

“Now therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22).

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There are a number of statements in the New Testament that deeply contradict the near “fetish” that some attach to the Bible. One of these is found in an admonition St. Paul offers to the young Timothy. He describes the Church as “the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” Were most people in the Protestant South in which I live asked what is the “pillar and ground of the truth,” they would answer, “the Bible.” And they would be wrong.

Another example is the quote from Ephesians offered above. Though St. Paul describes Christ Himself as the foundation of the Church (in 1 Corinthians), here he expands that metaphor, describing Christ as the “cornerstone,” with the Apostles and Prophets being the Church’s foundation. In neither case does he describe the Bible as a foundation, though, in popular Evangelical culture, it would not be unusual to hear the Scripture described as our foundation.

What would be lacking in these misperceptions of the Scripture, is proper regard for the Church as a “living” temple. Christ did not come into the world to deliver a book. Such notions, sometimes enshrined in the concept that once the New Testament was complete, the task of the early Church was complete as well, are but Christianized versions of Islam. Christians are not a “people of the Book.” Such a thought is deeply distorting of the Christian gospel.

St. Paul’s vision (and the reality given by God) is of a Church that is composed of a living community of persons (the whole communion of saints). That whole living community of persons is the pillar and ground of truth. Its foundation is composed of a living body of persons (the apostles and the prophets) just as Christ himself, its cornerstone, is alive. This is the Church that reads the Scriptures and is itself “our epistle written in the fleshy tables of the heart” (2 Cor. 3:3).

Those who make a sharp contrast between the Scriptures and the Fathers, as though everything was simply a text and the Fathers a very inferior text, fail to understand the character of a Church that is truly alive. Were someone to ask if I believe the Fathers are “inspired,” I would answer, “Of course.” How can the Fathers be Fathers and not be inspired? If what they wrote and said is not by the Holy Spirit then it is useless. Is their writing to be held as equal to the Scriptures? They themselves would immediately cry, “No!” Just as the mouth of a river cannot be compared to the source of a river – though they be the same river. But if someone cannot discern that the waters are the same, then something is deeply lacking.

Oddly, the Apostles themselves very likely did not regard their own writings to be comparable to the writings of what they called the “Scriptures” (grammata). But without the writings of the Apostles and the Gospels given to us, we would not know how to read the Scriptures of the Old Testament. When the Old is read through the New, then the Old itself becomes the New. Those who continue to read the Old Testament as though it were somehow not the New Testament, do not know how to read the Scriptures. They are drinking from a foreign river.

But even as we have to learn to read the Scriptures, so we have to learn to read the Fathers. Not all Fathers are of equal importance, and not everything written by a single father is as important as everything else he wrote. The nightmare of a loose canon!

The simple fact is that we are indeed built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets as a living temple. There is no substitute for the life of that temple. Only in the context and community of the living Church of God can we learn how to read, whether Apostles or Prophets or the Fathers. Those who have wrenched the Scriptures out of the context of the living, Orthodox Church, have only wrested for themselves error and delusion. They are like the sorcerer's apprentice – able to read the words of the spells but knowing nothing of their magic. They conjure up a wrathful God and fearful visions of the world's end. The results of their faulty readings are all around us.

Oddly (not really) most of the content of the Apostles' writings, deal with how to be the true and living Church of God. It is full of admonitions towards humility and forgiveness, patience and forbearance. It warns about those who do not obey their leaders and of the many false prophets and leaders to arise. There is no instant key to understanding the Scriptures, but whoever begins to read them in their proper and living context begins the journey on the path for which they were written.

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30-31).

Response to an internet questioner:

The notion of various theories of inspiration is really a kind of Protestant anxiety. Having set aside the Church (as a theological reality) and the hierarchy, Protestantism was left with Scripture for its sole authority. Thus the nature of that authority has to be defined (for many of them). I find almost none of their theories to be interesting or useful. For the authority of Scripture means nothing by itself. The question always lies in the matter of interpretation. For it is not the "Scripture" that has to be inspired – it's the reading of Scripture. And that brings us back squarely to the Church. The notion of "soul competency" of the individual seems rather nonsensical to me, both in the light of the absurdities that individuals come to as a result of their delusional treatment of Scripture, and in its inherent denial of the Church – which is the "Pillar and Ground of the Truth."

The Scriptures are authoritative, when rightly read in and by the Church. There is no particular definition of inspiration that Orthodoxy has ever needed to state. The authority of Scripture is an "organic" matter. It cannot be separated from the authority of the Church, nor the present authority of Christ Himself, nor the life lived by those who hear its words. The point is not an abstracted authority, but the authority that rests in a "life lived." If the Scripture is not rightly lived, then it is not rightly interpreted. The very life and existence of the Church, lived rightly in its members, is the interpretation of Scripture. The purpose of the word is its incarnation, not its literalization (to coin a word).

And so the Church points to its life, to the lives of its saints, to the lives of the faithful through the ages. Those things certainly are not "without error," in some kind of mechanical sense, but when we live in right communion with them, they lead us to salvation. The "inspiration" of Scripture is its ability to direct us towards salvation. Salvation, true union with God in Christ, is the point of the whole economy of God with us.

The writings of the Fathers are able to lead us to salvation, when rightly read in the Church and by the Church. They are no more useful without the Church than the Scriptures are without the Church... There is an anxiety about "authority" in Protestantism because their theories are unworkable. Takes a lot of work to defend the indefensible.

About Obedience and Humility

"Likewise, you younger, submit yourselves, unto the elder. Yes, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility" (1 Peter 5:5).

Here is the principle of the true catholicity of Orthodoxy! It is based on the unconditional obedience of the younger toward the elders and on reciprocal obedience of equals among themselves, and on the humility of both the elders and the younger. Humility is a good word but better still is the word humbleness and the best word is "humble-mindedness": in essence, humble-mindedness corresponds exactly to the Greek word which the apostle used in his epistle and humble-mindedness signifies lowly thoughts about oneself and higher thoughts about God and constant admission of one's helplessness, one's ignorance, one's viciousness, one's unworthiness and constant recognition of God's power, God's wisdom, God's mercy and God's dignity.

God is the only King of mankind. That is why God opposed the wishes of the Israelites that a king be appointed for them from among the people. God rules and men serve God. Those who rule and those who submit are equally the servants of God. When it is known and recognized that God is King and that all men are servants of God then, by this, the foundation of catholicity is established, the foundation of the angelic society. Upon this foundation then is built the House of God, the angelic society, with the help of the obedience of the younger toward the elders and on reciprocal obedience of peers among themselves and upon the humble-mindedness of all. In this manner, two terrible evils are avoided in the world: tyranny, i.e., one ruling over many by force, and anarchy, i.e., mob rule, thereby avoiding mono-tyranny or poli-tyranny.

The principle of catholicity is an organic principle, i.e., the principle of life. This is the principle of mutual service, mutual help and mutual love. Brethren, may God endow us with wisdom to have recourse toward this saving principle in our lives.

From the Life of St. Savvas

"When the blessed Savvas was still young, and dwelt in the Monastery known as Flaviana, the monastery baker happened to get his clothes wet. Unable to dry them in the sun, since it was winter, he put them in the oven to dry. But then he forgot about them, and left them drying in the oven. When the need unexpectedly arose, Savvas and some of the other monks began to bake bread together with the baker. They lighted the oven, with the clothes - as we have said above - having been left there out of forgetfulness. The flames were already high when the baker remembered his clothes. Yet there was nothing he could do, for the flames were fearfully intense; and his heart was held fast by grief and despondency over the prospect of losing them.

"Savvas, unable to bear seeing his brother thus grieved, and inwardly filled with ardent compassion, took no thought either for his own body or the fire; and, arming himself with the sign of the Cross, immediately entered the oven just as he was. He trampled on the flames, just as he had previously trampled on pleasures; and he thus rescued the clothes from the fire, and emerged from the oven unharmed. The flames showed reverence for him, not for the sake of piety, as was the case with the Three Youths of old, but rather on account of the love that he had for his brother."

✠ When you read the Gospels, Christ speaks to you; when you pray, you are speaking to Him... The Bible should be read not just for analysis, but as an immediate dialogue with the living Word Himself - to feed our love for Christ, to kindle our hearts with prayer and to provide us with guidance in our personal life.

~ St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (1783)

How Times Have Changed

by Walter E. Williams, July 31, 2012

Having been born in 1936 has allowed me to witness both societal progress and retrogression. High on the list of things made better in our society are the great gains in civil liberties and economic opportunities, especially for racial minorities and women. People who are now deemed poor have a level of material wealth that would have been a pipe dream to yesteryear's poor. But despite the fact that today's Americans have achieved an unprecedented level of prosperity, we have become spiritually and morally impoverished compared with our ancestors.

Years ago, spending beyond one's means was considered a character defect. Today not only do people spend beyond their means but also there are companies that advertise on radio and TV to eliminate or reduce your credit card and mortgage debt. Students saddled with college loans have called for student loan forgiveness. Yesterday's Americans would have viewed it as morally corrupt and reprehensible to accumulate debt and then seek to avoid paying it. It's nothing less than theft. What's worse is there's little condemnation of it by the rest of us.

Earlier this year, as a result of a budget crunch, the Philadelphia School District had to lay off 91 school police officers. During the 1940s and '50s, I attended Philadelphia schools in poor neighborhoods. The only time we saw a policeman in school was during an assembly period when we had to listen to a boring lecture about safety. Because teacher assaults are tolerated – 4,000 over the past five years in Philadelphia – school police are needed. Prior to the '60s, few students would have thought of talking back to a teacher, and no one would have cursed, much less assaulted, a teacher.

I couldn't have been more than 8-, 9- or 10-years-old when one time, on the way home from school, my cousin and I were having a stone fight with some other youngsters. An elderly black lady walked up to my cousin and me and asked, "Does your mother know you're out here throwing stones?" We replied, "No, ma'am," praying that the matter rested there. Today an adult doing the same thing risks being cursed and possibly assaulted. Fearing retaliation, adults sit in silence as young people use vile language to one another on public conveyances, in school corridors and on the streets.

Yesteryear there was little tolerance for the kinds of crude behavior and language that are accepted today. To see a man sitting on a bus or trolley car while a woman is standing used to be unthinkable. Children didn't address adults by their first name. By the way, over the course of my nearly 45 years of teaching, on several occasions, students have addressed me by my first name. I have told them that I don't mind their addressing me by my first name but that my first name is Professor.

Much of what's accepted today would have been seen as bizarre and lowdown yesteryear. Out-of-wedlock childbirth was a disgrace and surely wouldn't have occasioned a baby shower. Popular TV shows such as "The Jerry Springer Show" and "Maury" feature guests who openly discuss despicable acts in their personal lives, often to the applause of the audience. Shame is going the way of the dinosaur.

You say, "Williams, you're just old-fashioned and out of touch with modern society." Maybe so, but I think that a society's first line of defense is not the law but customs, traditions and moral values. These behavioral norms – transmitted by example, word of mouth, religious teachings, rules of etiquette and manners – represent a body of wisdom distilled over the ages through experience and trial and error. They include important legal thou-shalt-nots – such as shalt not murder, steal, lie or cheat – but they also include all those civilities one might call ladylike or gentlemanly behavior. Police officers and courts can never replace these social restraints on personal conduct. At best, laws, police and the criminal justice system are a society's last desperate line of defense.

Walter E. Williams is the John M. Olin distinguished professor of economics at George Mason University, and a nationally syndicated columnist.