



The birth of Christ is a mystery of our Faith. "And without controversy great is the mystery of piety" (1 Tim 3:16), declares the apostle Paul, and one can feel this mystery, only when it becomes his personal existential experience.

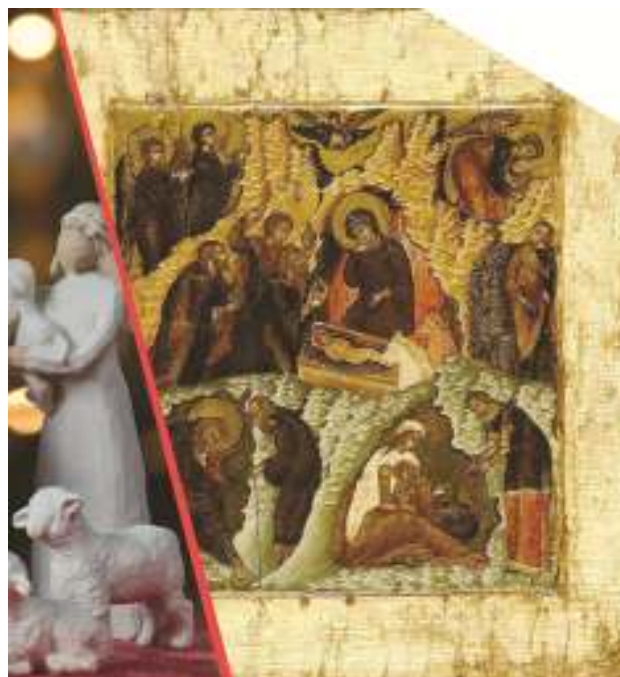
But how can one penetrate the meaning of this mystery? He must knock on the door of Bethlehem, and follow the forgotten and ignored path leading to the Stable where God was made human. This path leads to the centre of Christianity, which is the birth of God, *the Incarnation of His Son*.

Christianity is like the Stable: by its nature is something secret. You have to search if you want to find it. The root of Christianity is in fact something *humble, serene, obscure*. You need to make a special effort, if you wish to discover the path to the Stable. And when you get there, you have to stoop down, so you can enter it. That is why genuine Christianity is not attractive, and the message of the Gospels does not impress people. Because its substance has the simplicity of the shepherds, and the tears of a crying infant.

It is the extreme poverty in the Stable, as well as its amazing obscurity - which makes you think they are there, so people cannot be impressed. It may be that by this manner, Christ wanted to show that men had divested themselves of everything divine, given to them on the day of Creation, and so now have become like animals.

At this point we can ask ourselves - what is the substance of the Birth of God on Earth?

1. God becomes man, so we can become gods (by



grace). The mystery is revealed to those who seek, implore, and cry, searching to find the Truth. Such people enter the Stable, and understand the Mystery of God. The rest stay outside.

2. This act is an act of freedom, because no one will applaud your decision, because you follow someone without worldly power, and without social standing. And yet this is a heroic act of real freedom.

In an environment of indifference, spiritual anarchy, impasse, and unbelievable egotism, we once again celebrate Christmas. And we celebrate in spite of all the above. Because the event of

the Birth of Christ helps to renew our Hopes, our Faith, our Love towards both God and men. Christmas opens for us the gate to approach and understand the Stable and its Meaning.

One of the hymns of Christmas says: "Christ is on Earth; Rise-up". The reason that Christ came to earth was that the love of God could no longer tolerate His most perfect creation – man – to be a slave and hostage at the criminal hands of the devil.

Man had to be saved. And since man did not have the power to do this on his own, God came down to earth, where man lived. And on arrival, He shouted to all men: "**Rise-up**". "Rise-up", to the heights of virtue, and perfection, to Heaven, with hope and faith, with Me!

"Rise-up", all of you. You young people, with all your physical mental and spiritual powers that reside in you. Rise up from the mundane affairs of this earth, to the humility, purity, and saintliness of the world of the spirit.

Ευλογημένα Χριστούγεννα, με κέντρο τον Χριστό!





Ενα ταξίδι η ζωή μας. Αρχίζει με το κλάμα του νεογέννητου μωρού, τελειώνει με τον επιθανάτιο ρόγχο στο νεκροκρέβατο.

Κάθε αρχή του χρόνου αναπολούμε τα περασμένα, φιλοσοφούμε τα μέλλοντα. Χρόνια φεύγουν και χρόνια έρχονται. Μιά αδιάκοπη κίνηση των πάντων στο ποτάμι του χρόνου που κυλά.

Μαζί με όλα και το δικό μας πέρασμα.

Σημαδεύουμε και μεις με τη παρουσία μας και τη βιοτή μας την ανθρώπινη ιστορία. Μαθαίνουμε, σπουδάζουμε, δραστηριοποιούμαστε, συναλλασσόμαστε και προχωρούμε. **Προς τα πού παμε όμως;**

Ποιός ξέρει να απαντήσει σωστά αυτό το ερώτημα;

«Ἄνθρωπος ὡσεὶ χόρτος αἱ ἡμέραι αὐτοῦ, ὡσεὶ ἄνθος τοῦ ἀγροῦ οὕτως ἐξάνθησεν. Ὅτι πνεῦμα διήλθεν ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ οὐχ ὑπάρξει καὶ οὐκ ἐπιγνώσεται ἔτι τὸν τόπον αὐτοῦ» (Ψαλμ. 102:15-16). Ο αιώσιος νόμος του Θεού διακρίνει την ουσία του πράγματος και αξιολογεί σωστά τη ζωή μας.

Σα το χόρτο στο χωράφι οι μέρες μας. Σαν ἄνθος λουλουδιού που λίγο ανθίζει και σύντομα μαραίνεται. Φύσηξε αεράκι και το εξαφάνισε και δεν ξέρει ούτε το τόπο που φύτευσε.

Αυτή είναι ὅλη η ζωή μας, το πέρασμά μας πάνω στο πρόσωπο της γης. Είναι αλήθεια πως μερικά λουλούδια φαντάζουν πίο πολύ από τα άλλα. Μερικά είναι αδύναμα, ισχνά, άλλα με ποικιλίες χρωμάτων που εντυπωσιάζουν. Μερικά αντέχουν πίο πολύ στον άνεμο. Μα τελικά ὅλα εξαφανίζονται, ήρθαν, πέρασαν, έφυγαν. Άλλα λουλουδάκια θά'ρθουν να αντικαταστήσουν αυτά που έφυγαν για να



επαναληφθή ξανά ο ίδιος κύκλος.

«Ἄνθρωπος... ὡσεὶ ἄνθος τοῦ ἀγροῦ». Ὅλων μας οι ζωές ἄνθος λουλουδιού μέσα στο ἀπέραντο χωράφι της Ἀνθρωπότητας.

Μα εσύ φτιάχνεις τον ανθό, εσύ τον χρωματίζεις, εσύ τον επεξεργάζεσαι. Θα τα καταφέρεις να κρατήσει πίο πολύ;... Να ελκύσει το ενδιαφέρον των άλλων;... Ίσως προς στιγμήν να το κατορθώσεις. Μα πάντα στο τέλος

αμείλικτα το ίδιο αποτέλεσμα. Η εξαφάνιση, το σβήσιμο, η φθορά. Έτσι και ο ἄνθρωπος με το χρόνο...

Μόνο και κάνεις κάτι διαφορετικό... Είναι κάτι ἀγριολούλουδα - σεμπερβίντες τα λένε - (seber, vides = πάντα ζουν). Αυτά φυτρώνουν σε κακοτοπιές και δύσβατα μέρη. Ο μίσχος τους ισχνός και αδύναμος, μα ο ανθός τους κεκριμπάρι που χρυσίζει στον ήλιο. Διαρκούν χρόνου γύρισμα, σκορπίζουν με τη λάμψη τους ελπίδα και φως σ'όσους τα βρίσκουν. Στολίδι της φύσης... Λίγο χώμα τα φτάνει και παραμένουν πάντα με τη φρεσκάδα του νέου. **«Δίκαιοι δὲ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ζῶσι» (Σοφ. Σολ. Ε: 15).**

Να το μυστικό... Να ντυθούμε τον νέον ἄνθρωπον **«καὶ ἐνδυσάμενοι τὸν νέον τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν» (Κολασ. Γ: 10).** Το πέρασμα αυτών των ανθρώπων που συνεχώς ανανεώνονται, και γίνονται καινούργιοι - σύμφωνα με το Χριστό που τους έκτισε - σημαδεύει την ανθρώπινη ιστορία. Γίνονται πόλοι έλξεως, παράδειγμα για μίμηση, πρεσβευτές μας στο θρόνο του Κυρίου και Θεού μας. Το πέρασμά τους από τη γη, μιά αέναη κίνηση προόδου, από τα εδώ και τα τώρα, στα επέκεινα και αιώνια.

Δεν ποθεί και η δική σου ψυχή τέτοιο πέρασμα;



Current Issues

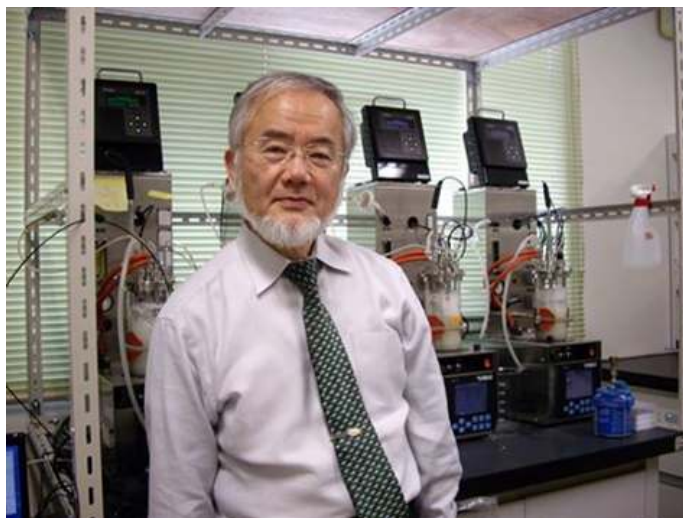
Lose Weight, Become a Saint!

2016 Nobel Prize Winner Scientifically Proves that Fasting is Good for Health!

The Japanese Professor Yoshinori Ohsumi won the Nobel Prize for Physiology and Medicine this year, for discovering the processes of how cells deal with their contents. The process of **autophagy** (αυτο-φαγία) is a purely Greek word, meaning "self-eating". When the organism is under stress (that is, has no access to substances it uses for its health - an example is fasting), it produces increased energy using its internal resources, consuming rubbish and even disease-producing bacteria that have accumulated inside it over the recent past. As a result, some of the cells cannot sustain the process of self-eating and die, whilst the majority gets rid of excess parts, and the whole organism (whether human or animal) gets rid of unnecessary cells. In the process new cells are formed, the organism is rejuvenated and therefore is also protected from senility. What is interesting, the Nobel Prize Committee confirmed the findings, and the fact that abstaining from food is wholesome - the body truly cleans itself.

The discovery has wider implications for human health than the health of the individual cell, rejuvenation of the whole organism and delay of the onset of senility. It has a beneficial effect on obesity in that it can cause the body to shed some of its mass, and therefore it has become a powerful tool in the hands of nutritionists.

For the Christian on the other hand, it confirms that fasting, abstaining from certain foods during certain periods of the year (see details in preceding issue of "Lychnos", Vol 31, Issue 5, 2016), is of bodily as well as mental benefit, shown now to be proven even scientifically by Professor Ohsumi! But the exercise of fasting during Church ordained periods is not meant to benefit our body alone. During those periods, we are supposed to improve our spiritual lives i.e. pray longer and with more devotion, increase reading of the Bible and



other spiritual books, suppress our passions (sins and sinful habits performed serially, and which we have little or no strength to control), attend more Church services, partake of the Sacraments more frequently, be more active in spreading the Gospel message, and perform more good works of love and sacrifice.

However, in spite of all the above, one wonders at the Supreme love of God for

us, Who endowed His Church, with the wisdom to include fasting as one of the saving measures for man. Yes, Christ fasted first in the desert, but the subsequent details were ordained by the Holy Fathers through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It took humanity 21 centuries, to discover the wisdom of the benefits of fasting for our body. But the spiritual and more important benefits of fasting have been known since the time of Jesus Christ!

All Saints fasted avidly, almost all their lives. God was pleased with this, gave them enormous strength to advance in the Spirit, and declared them Saints by adorning their lives with extraordinary qualities and powers. Recall the enormous virtue and foresight of St Paisios. Monks eat twice a day, and nutritionists lately started advising obese patients to eat twice a day! And the same is suggested by the "self-eating" theory (above).

It is exceptional to find an obese or even overweight monk. The majority die quite old!

We, who are blessed to belong to the Orthodox Church, thank and glorify God, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who helped us to continue the holy practice of fasting, and pray that our brothers and sisters in other Christian Communities, may return to this saving and God ordained measure. Who knows - one day some of them may end-up as saints!



From the Saints of our Church

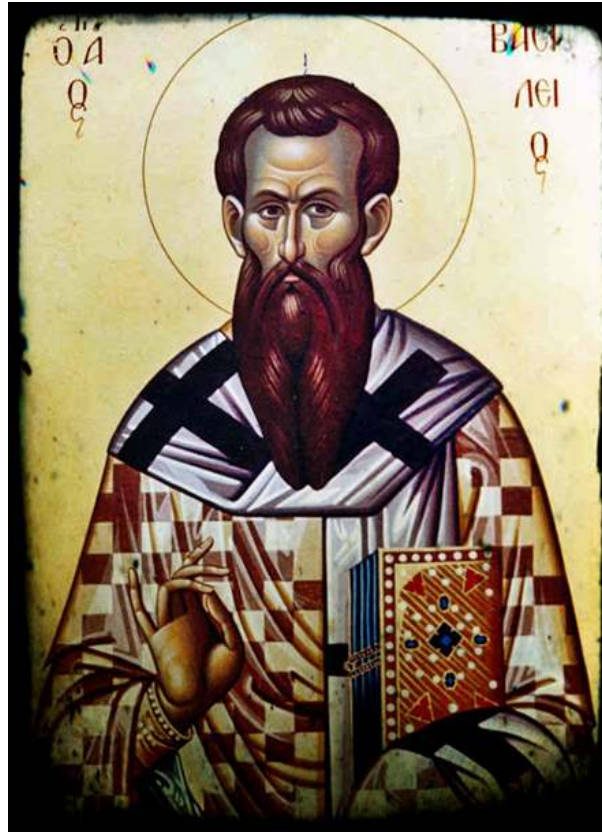
Our Holy Father Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia Commemorated January 1st

Basil the Great was born at Caesarea in Cappadocia in 330 AD into a distinguished family. Saint Basil's early years were spent learning the principles of faith from his mother and grandmother. Proving an excellent student, Basil searched for the best teachers in Palestine, in Constantinople and finally Athens, the centre of scholarship. His reputation preceded him there through Gregory the Theologian, whom he had known in Cappadocia.

Their friendship developed into spiritual brotherhood in which they mutually discovered God and acquired virtue. United in charity, they shared quarters, a strict diet, an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and an intellectual daring.

Having completed his studies, Basil parted from the culture of ancient Greece. Returning in 357, he found that his sister Macrina had transformed his family home into a monastery. Thereafter, Basil abandoned his promising career in academia. He was baptised and learnt asceticism in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine and Syria. He withdrew to a wild valley near his family, stripped himself of all possessions and tended to the work of God without distraction. Many people visited Basil and were greeted by tender affection, patience and simplicity. He began to compose his *Rules*, a foundational charter of monasticism, which laid out a coenobitic model under the direction of a single father.

Later elected metropolitan, Basil daily preached the ascetic way of life he had practised. When famine hit Caesarea, Basil implored the rich to distribute their goods with his own example and eloquence. When



drought struck, he prostrated before God until the rain came.

The Emperor Valens, a follower of the heretical Arius, banished Basil, and found that his son became violently feverish, only recovering once the banishment was reversed. When the Arians threatened to seize Nicaea, Basil proposed that the contending parties pray in turn in front of the closed doors of the church. The prayers of the Arians were inept, but as soon as the Saint raised his hands in prayer, the doors flew open to shouts of joy from the faithful!

Basil chose the correct moment to step forward on issues of doctrine, with

discernment and clarity. He was the first of the Fathers to declare in boldness that the Holy Spirit is fully God, of the same nature as the Father and the Son.

As Bishop, Basil commissioned a 'city of charity' just outside Caesarea, later known as the Basiliad (Βασιλειάδα). It consisted of hospices, hospitals and a school, all centred around a church.

By the age of 49, Basil's body was worn out by austere asceticism and disease. His funeral was an extraordinary triumph: even the pagans and Jews mourned his death. Described in the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon: 'the great Basil, the minister of grace, who has explained the truth to the whole earth', the great Father of the Church took his place beside the throne of the King of Heaven on the 1st January, 379 AD.



Questions & Answers

A clergyman of our Archdiocese answers ...

Why Do We Celebrate Christmas on 25 December?

In the first century the Church did not celebrate the birth of Christ. It is important to remember that in the very first few years of the Church, the only feast days being celebrated were those to do with the death and resurrection of Christ: that is, Pascha. After a few decades the Church desired to also celebrate the Epiphany of our Lord on 6 January. This meant celebrating the fact that God took on human form and visited us: “God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us!” Later the Church decided to break up the Epiphany feast into its components: the birth, baptism, the circumcision and the entering into the temple. These commemorations were each given different dates and you can be sure there was a lot of debate about the dates. In some parts of Christendom the feast of Christmas was celebrated on 6 December, while in other parts it stayed on 6 January. Eventually the majority of Christian bishops agreed to celebrate on 25 December. Interestingly, the Armenian Orthodox Church, which broke away from the Universal Church in the fourth century and thus did not change its practice of celebrating Christmas, still celebrates Epiphany as a combined commemoration of the birth and baptism of Christ, just as the Church did in the 2nd – 3rd century.

The actual date of the birth of Jesus Christ is unknown. No date is given in the Bible, only some hints according to certain historical events that happened at that time. In those days, birthdays were not recorded, nor were they considered important. Most people measured their ages by making a connection to a historical event. For example, they would say: “Mark was born during the reign of Tiberius” rather than on a particular date. So the birth date of Jesus was most probably never recorded. If the Church was to celebrate Christmas, they would have to select a date.

The earliest known indication of a celebration of Christmas comes in a passing statement by St Clement of Alexandria who mentions that the Egyptians of his time celebrated the Lord's birth on 20 May. At the end of the 3rd century, many Churches celebrated it in the winter, and this was only accepted in Rome in the middle of the 4th century. The first recorded date of Christmas being



celebrated on December 25th was in 336AD, during the time of the Emperor Constantine (306-337). A few years later, Pope Julius I officially declared that the birth of Jesus would be celebrated on the 25th December.

There are several theories surrounding the question as to why 25 December was chosen as the day to celebrate the nativity of our Lord. One theory is that 25 December was chosen to Christianise the pagan

festival which some Christians were still celebrating, even as late as the 4th Century. This festival was the “birthday of the unconquered sun” which was a celebration of the sun god at the time of the winter solstice.

Another theory is that the 25 December is exactly nine months from the Annunciation by Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary that she would give birth to Christ. 25 March had already been chosen by the Church and it was only natural to put Christmas nine months later.

December 25th might have also been chosen because the Winter Solstice and the ancient pagan Roman midwinter festivals called 'Saturnalia' and 'Dies Natalis Solis Invicti' took place in December around this date. It was also the time of the Jewish festival of lights called Hanukkah. So, it was a time when people already celebrated things and it was good to give a Christian focus in that period of the year.

By the end of the fourth century, most Church jurisdictions all over the known world had agreed to celebrate the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ on 25 December.

Around the 1920s the Orthodox Churches around the world decided to move from the Julian Calendar to the Gregorian Calendar, because the Julian Calendar was mathematically flawed and was thirteen days behind. When the calendar change was made, some jurisdictions such as Moscow, Serbia and Mount Athos, were given the blessing to stay on the “Old Calendar”. As a result these churches remain 13 days behind. This means that churches still on the Julian calendar celebrate Christmas on 6 January and they celebrate Epiphany on 19 January.

† Fr N. S.





Gospel Reading Sunday 1st January (Luke 2:20-21,40-52)

During the period between Christmas and Theophany, many of the Gospel readings are focused on the life of the young Jesus. One reading during this period is Luke 2:40-52. In this passage we read that Jesus' parents would go to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. When Jesus was twelve years of age, He went to Jerusalem with His parents, as was the usual custom. When the feast was over, the young Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem for three days. His parents initially assumed He was with them in the travelling company. However when they realized He was not there, they immediately returned to Jerusalem.

After three days of searching, they found the young Jesus in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening and asking questions. All who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and His answers: even from a young age He was full of wisdom!

When His parents found Him they said, as any parent would: "Son, why have you done this to us? We have sought you anxiously" (v 48). Jesus replied: "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (v 49). Even from a young age, Jesus had complete love for His Heavenly Father!

Jesus then left with His parents, "and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart" (v 51). This verse reveals two key points. One is that Jesus was above all obedient to the will of His Father, and then was *willingly* subject to his earthly parents. Can we say that we are obedient to the will of God in our own life? And then, can we say that we give our parents the same respect that Jesus gave willingly to his earthly parents? The second point is the humility of Panagia, which enabled her continued spiritual growth. Why? Because initially she asked Jesus why He had caused such anxiety to His parents. But upon hearing the profound wisdom of His response, she said no more on this topic, but kept the words "in her heart". In our spiritual life, the challenge is for us to mimic the humility of Panagia, continue to learn, and always keep the words of Jesus in *our* hearts. ✠



Visit to St Paul's Theological College

In December 2014, with the blessings of His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos and His Eminence the Metropolitan of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, the Orthodox Christian Society travelled to Medan, Indonesia, on their second missionary visit to the request of Fr Chrysostomos Manalu, an Orthodox priest of Indonesian background.

As part of our Missionary visit, we were asked by the Parish Priest of St Demetrius, Medan, Father Chrysostomos Manalu, to present short seminars on the Orthodox Faith to the teaching staff and students of the **Saint Paul Theological College in Medan**, which was founded in 2005.

As Father Chrysostomos explained in his own words about the College: "Our aim is to spread the light of Orthodoxy through this School, to spread the light of Orthodoxy, because without the necessary knowledge it is difficult for us to preach faith in Indonesia. This is why the School of Theology was established as a basis for the further dissemination of the Orthodox Faith."

The College has been accredited by the Government of Indonesia as a Higher Education Institution. Students attend for four years, with over 1000 students having graduated from the establishment. It is important to note that the majority of the students are not Orthodox, some are Roman Catholic, but most of them are Protestants.

Father Chrysostom said: "it is not uncommon for some students to decide to become Orthodox at some point during their studies." Initially, the only members of the staff were Father Chrysostom and his Presbytera Elizabeth, who teach free of charge as the School has no revenues to cover these costs.

Father Chrysostom continues: "The contribution of this School is immense. Firstly, it educates young people who prepare to become teachers committed to cultivating the Orthodox Faith in the world. So, prospective teachers have already been in contact with the Orthodox Faith and have come to appreciate its beauty and richness, which is something they will pass on to their young children as well."

So it was within this spirit that we were split into three groups of three, and asked to present short seminars to all the students on topics such as asceticism and worldly comfort, the use of icons in the Orthodox Church, and the significance of the Resurrection of Christ. We presented Orthodoxy.

Following these sessions, we all met together for a stimulating question and answer session where it was clearly apparent that the basic fundamentals of Orthodoxy had stimulated the interest of the non-Orthodox and Orthodox students alike. ✠



Fr Chrysostom and Dr John Psarommatis presenting aspects of Orthodox Christian Faith to students of the College.



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(Above) St Paul's Orthodox Theological College, Medan, Indonesia.



Fr Chrysostom and Dr John Psarommatis during a Question and Answer session at the College.



Encountering the Mystery, by His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

Published by Image, 2008.

Encountering the Mystery by His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew I is a warm work drawn from his personal experience of living the riches our Orthodox Christian faith has to offer.

This very readable book focuses on encountering, which means essentially to meet face to face. The book's title presents a paradox: How is it that one meets mystery face to face? Furthermore, when one meets mystery face to face, what does one see? What does one do? Rarely does an encounter exist without struggle, a struggle toward understanding - ourselves and others.

Sin, he explains, is not merely making evil choices, but in fact the result of an inability to make rightful - or righteous - choices. It is the state of captivity to compulsions or passions, where one is quite literally passive and not subjective, controlled and not creative, fallen and not free. It is subservience to the force of hardened habit.

In response 'Repentance' (μετάνοια) 'literally means seeing things through a different perspective' and 'signifies an inner transformation that inevitably involves a change in one's entire worldview' to God, to people, and the way we treat the world. Prayerfulness, asceticism and humility underpin this transformation, which requires commitment and courage. He describes the influential role of monastic spirituality and the sacraments, and explains how the cultivation of virtue has both personal and global dimensions.

The Ecumenical Patriarch addresses how God is unknowable and yet is profoundly known; invisible and yet personally accessible; distant and yet intensely present. The infinite God is truly intimate in relating to the world. Rarely does one find such a rich and profound, yet simply written, book that covers the breadth of richness in Orthodoxy and applies it simply and practically to everyday existential issues facing humanity, including contemporary issues such as: freedom and respect for human rights, social justice and globalization, global warming and destruction of the natural environment, world poverty economics, religious fundamentalism, nationalism and war, and our obligation to preserve this earth and leave it better for future generations. The Ecumenical Patriarch elucidates these themes with the humble self-confidence of one who has liturgically lived the Orthodox Church's dogmas, and found them true to his own experience of the living God.





◊ διάκονος **Στέφανος** ήταν ο πρώτος από τις εκατοντάδες χιλιάδες των μαρτύρων, που με το αίμα τους στερήσαν το οικοδόμημα της Εκκλησίας. Ήταν ο Αρχιδιάκονος, που διάλεξαν οι πιστοί των Ιεροσολύμων για να προσφέρει τις υπηρεσίες του, στα κοινά συσσίτια, τις τράπεζες αγάπης των Πρώτων Χριστιανών.

Άνδρας μορφωμένος, μαθητής του νομοδιδασκάλου Γαμαλιήλ, ένας από τους εβδομήκοντα μαθητές του Χριστού, αφιέρωσε τη ζωή του στο κήρυγμα του ευαγγελικού λόγου και στη φιλανθρωπική δράση. Ο ευαγγελιστής Λουκάς, τον χαρακτηρίζει ως «**άνθρωπο γεμάτο πίστη και Άγιο Πνεύμα**» (Πραξ. ΣΤ' 5), και επισημαίνει ότι οι συνομιλητές του δεν μπορούσαν να αντιμετωπίσουν τη σοφία του. Ο χαρισματικός λόγος του, η προσωπικότητα και τα θαύματά του προσέλκυαν πολλούς στην πίστη του Χριστού, γι αυτό οι φθονεροί Ιουδαίοι αντιδρούσαν και για να του κλείσουν το στόμα, διέδιδαν ότι τον άκουσαν να βλαστημεί το Μωσλή και το Θεό και τον οδήγησαν στο Συνέδριο για να απολογηθεί.

Η απολογία του Στεφάνου υπήρξε πρότυπο τόλμης και θάρρους. Με τη βαθιά θεολογική κατάρτιση και τη ρητορική του ικανότητα ανέτρεπε τις κακοδοξίες των Ιουδαίων, προκαλώντας την οργή και το φθόνο τους, και ενώ το μίσος του Ιουδαϊκού Συνεδρίου



κορυφωνόταν εναντίον του, η Χάρη του Θεού τον περιέβαλλε θαυματουργά. «**Να, βλέπω ανοιγμένους τους Ουρανούς**», αναφώνησε «**και τον Υιό του ανθρώπου στα δεξιά του Θεού!**» (Πραξ. Ζ' 56). Οι Ιουδαίοι, μόλις άκουσαν τα λόγια αυτά, όρμησαν εναντίον του, τον άρπαξαν, τον έσυραν έξω από την πόλη και άρχισαν να τον λιθοβολούν. Βροχή έπεφταν οι πέτρες. Το αίμα έτρεχε απ' όλο του το σώμα και πότιζε τη γη. Η ψυχή του όμως χαιρόταν, γιατί σε λίγο θα συναντούσε τον Ιησού που

είχε υπηρετήσει με τόση αγάπη. «**Κύριε Ίησού, δέξαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου**» (Πραξ. Ζ' 59), ψιθύρισε.

Τα χτυπήματα τσάκιζαν το σώμα του. Και κείνος γονατιστός προσεύχονταν στο Θεό να συγχωρήσει αυτούς που τον λιθοβολούσαν. «**Κύριε μη καταλογίσεις σ' αυτούς αυτήν την αμαρτία**» (Πραξ. Ζ' 60). Μ' αυτά τα συγκλονιστικά λόγια της συγγνώμης παρέδωσε την αγία του ψυχή στο Χριστό.

Ο πρωτομάρτυρας Στέφανος στέλνει στη σύγχρονη εποχή το μήνυμα πως **Άγιος είναι εκείνος που παίρνει στα σοβαρά τη σχέση του με τον Θεό, αναζητά να μάθει τι θέλει ο Θεός και αγωνίζεται να ανταποκριθεί**. Τότε αγιάζεται, γεμίζει από το Πνεύμα του Θεού και γίνεται φορέας αγιασμού για τους άλλους και για τον κόσμο ολόκληρο.

Η Εκκλησία μας γιορτάζει τη μνήμη του στις 27 Δεκεμβρίου.



Orthodox Youth Groups (Ορθόδοξες Χριστιανικές Ομάδες)

Dear Teenager,

Come to fellowship («Ομάδα») and you will find a Person who loves you more than anyone else – a Person who is a father, brother, and a good friend to you – *all at once*. That Person is our Lord Jesus Christ.

At Ομάδα you will find friends whom you can trust and who have the same goals in life as you. Learn all about your Church at Ομάδα and how to live your Orthodox Faith.

Ομάδα organises two major camps per year, sporting activities, bush walks and other fun activities.

Even if you receive religious education at School or attend Greek Orthodox Colleges, you will still benefit enormously from being at Ομάδα.

Christian Youth Groups for young people aged 14-18 are held in the following Parishes:

For Boys

Transfiguration, Earlwood (Saturdays 4 - 6:30 pm)
All Saints, Belmore (Fridays 6 – 8 pm)
Resurrection, Kogarah (Fridays 6:30 – 8 pm)
St Ioannis, Parramatta (Saturdays 5 – 6:45 pm)

For Girls

Transfiguration, Earlwood (Fridays 6:30 - 8 pm)
All Saints, Belmore (Fridays 6:30 – 8 pm)





Psalm 135

Ἐξομολογεῖσθε τῷ Κυρίῳ Give Thanks to the Lord.

Because the line “for His mercy endured forever” appears in each of its twenty-six verses, this Psalm, along with Psalm 134, is known in Orthodox worship as the *polyeleion* or “manifold mercy”. It starts with three introductory verses, as St Jerome states: *'Give thanks to the Lord of lords' refers to the Son. The 'God of Gods' to the Father. We give thanks, therefore to the Father and to the Son.*

After these verses that call for the praise of God, one may distinguish three stanzas in this Psalm. Stanza 1, verses 4-9, we may think of as the ‘cosmic stanza’, because it deals with God’s work of Creation described in Genesis.

In Stanza 2, verses 10-22, we move from Genesis to Exodus. This is the ‘history stanza’, which contains material from the Books of Exodus, Numbers and Joshua. Stanza 3, verses 23-26, speaks of God’s continuing care for His people throughout the ages. Thus Psalm 135 pursues a threefold theme: creation, deliverance and the continued care of the redeemed, like the Nicene Creed. The mercy which He bestows on His Saints and faithful ones, is forever!

Blessed Augustine writes: *‘To Him that led His people through the wilderness.’ Us, too, He leads through the drought and bareness of this world, so we will not perish in it. ‘And Og, king of the land of Basan’. The...king of ‘confusion’. For what else does the devil heap together but confusion?’ And He gave their land as an inheritance’... ‘An inheritance for Israel His servant’. For He gives them, who once the devil owned, for a heritage to the seed of Abraham, that is, Christ. ‘For in our humiliation the Lord remembered us’... ‘And redeemed us from our enemies’ by the blood of His only-begotten Son. ‘He that gives food to all flesh’, that is, to the whole race of mankind, not Israel alone, but Gentiles also; and of this food is said, ‘My flesh is meat indeed’ (John 6:55).*



Psalm 135 insists that the root of all of God’s activity is mercy. When we deal with God, everything is mercy: all we will ever discover of God will be the deepening levels of His great, abundant, overflowing, rich and endless mercy. “For His mercy endures forever” is the eternal song of the Saints!



Elder Haralambos of Dionysiou

The Athonite Elder Haralambos Dionysiatis was another of that luminous generation of eminent elders hailing from the southern region of the Athonite peninsula, the caves of Little Saint Anna.

Elder Haralambos was born in Russia in 1910 to pious Greeks who had emigrated from

Pontos. He was popular in the world, capable and sociable, with a bright future available to him. However the call to the angelic habit consumed him in a way no calling of a life in the world could. Even prior to the day of his renunciation, Haralambos lived in the world as an ascetic. He would work through the day and keep prayerful vigil through the night.

In 1950, upon his arrival at New Skete, he was welcomed to the brotherhood with a rule of 3,000 prostrations. The strict asceticism practised by the brotherhood was coupled with a program of nightly vigils and unceasing prayer. The Jesus prayer and prostrations immediately set the novice’s heart aflame with divine zeal. His guide was the ever-memorable Elder Joseph the Hesychast, who recognised and developed Haralambos’ thirst. He received an education in the patristic traditions and excelled in obedience, hesychia and prayer.

After the repose of Elder Joseph in 1959, Elder Haralambos was tricked into becoming spiritual father of the brothers of the Holy Monastery of Dionysiou. He remained there until retreating in 1967, but his reputation as a gifted spiritual guide had spread throughout Athos and beyond. After humbly rejecting calls to become abbot of Dionysiou, he finally yielded in 1979. He implemented change to the Monastery’s typikon introducing, among other things, frequent partaking of Holy Communion. Above all, he taught noetic prayer and the life of hesychasm.

So short an article cannot do justice to a truly angelic life. The reader is strongly encouraged to read Monk Joseph Dionysiatis’ biography of the Elder to explore the teachings and simplicity of a contemporary God-bearer.✠





What we Hear in Church



FROM THE HOLY FATHERS...

Dismissal Hymn of the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord – January 1st

«Μορφὴν ἀναλλοιώτως ἀνθρωπίνην προσέλαβες, Θεὸς ὢν κατ' οὐσίαν πολυεύπλαγχνε Κύριε· καὶ Νόμον ἐκπληρῶν περιτομὴν, θελήσει καταδέχει σαρκικὴν, ὅπως παύσης τὰ σκιώδη, καὶ περιέλῃς τὸ κάλυμμα τῶν παθῶν ἡμῶν. Δόξα τῇ ἀγαθότητι τῇ σῆ· δόξα τῇ εὐσπλαγχνίᾳ σου· δόξα τῇ ἀνεκφρράστῳ Λόγε συγκαταβάσει σου.»

"Without change you took a human form, by nature being God, O most compassionate Lord; and fulfilling the Law, you willingly accepted circumcision in the flesh, that you might banish shadows, and strip away the covering of our passions. Glory to your goodness; glory to your compassion; glory to your ineffable condescension, O Word!"

In this modern, civilised world we live in, it may be difficult to understand why our Church celebrates the perpetration of a barbaric act against a newborn baby. Characteristic are the Old Testament accounts: "Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet" (Exodus 4:25, see also Joshua 5:3).

Christ Himself was to remind the Jews that although circumcision was a precept of the Mosaic Law, it existed before Moses, being a physical sign of the covenant between God and Abraham: "Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers)" (John 7:22).

We can only comprehend this Feast within the prism of Christ's Love of mankind. It is only out of His unfathomable love for us, that Christ accepts the circumcision of the flesh. Christ, being born in a specific place and time, underwent all the customs and traditions He was born into.

Christ shows that as the Law-giver, He had to abide by the Law. Furthermore, in being circumcised, Christ reveals that He was truly human. How could Christ save humanity if he did not receive a completely human body in his Incarnation?

Even more deeply though, Christ underwent physical circumcision to open the way to the more essential "circumcision" as the Hymn explains, the stripping away of the covering of our passions. Apostle Paul explains: "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter" (Rom 2:28-29). This is achieved in Christ's own Baptism, which He gave to the Church. St John of Damascus interprets the link between physical and spiritual circumcision – namely Baptism: "...the circumcision was a sign, dividing Israel from the Gentiles with whom they dwelt. It was, moreover, a figure of baptism. For just as the circumcision does not cut off a useful member of the body, but only a useless superfluity, so by the holy baptism we are circumcised from sin."



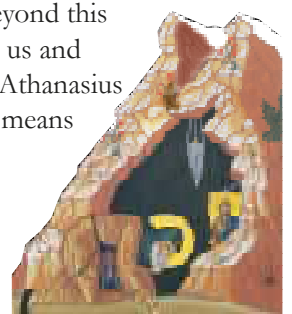
St Athanasius - On the Incarnation.

We may have heard the phrase 'God became man so that man could become God', and wondered how such an event could be possible? For how could God, in his omnipotence and perfection, become human like us? And more so, how could we humans, fallen and prone to sin, ever contemplate becoming like God?

St Athanasius, a fourth century bishop of Alexandria, penned his treatise 'On the Incarnation' to consider this very paradox. According to Athanasius, our fall from paradise left God with a 'Divine Dilemma'. We were created in the image and likeness of God, and in fact "For God created man for immortality, and made him an image of His own eternity. But death entered the world by the envy of the devil" (Wisdom 2:23-24). How could an all-good God allow his creation to perish, to become undone? How could God redeem His creation? Or perhaps the question is: *Who* could redeem His creation?

The answer to this, according to Athanasius, is simply: "Who else, but the Word of God, who in the beginning made all things out of nothing". And so God the Word took on a human body, and by this body provided salvation for all through overcoming death by His sacrifice and Resurrection.

St Athanasius goes on to explain why Christ needed to take on a human body, just like ours. Christ spent time on earth, with bodily senses as we do. Jesus needed to eat and drink and sleep, as we do. In this way, He showed us a way of living a life united with God. For his disciples and apostles, He revealed His Grace by his works and example on Earth. We too take the same example. God, in his wisdom, understands that as humans, we find it difficult to contemplate things beyond this world, and so He came down for us and revealed a new way of life. As St Athanasius says: "He manifested Himself by means of a body in order that we might perceive the Mind of the unseen Father. He endured shame from men that we might inherit immortality."





The Blessing of Our Homes at Theophany

On the 6th January every year we celebrate the Baptism of Christ in the river Jordan by St John the Baptist. This is known as the Feast of Theophany (Θεοφάνεια) meaning "God revealed" or Epiphany.



The Troparion we joyously chant on this day proclaims: "When Thou wast baptised in the Jordan, O Lord, the worship of the **Trinity was made manifest**, for the voice of the **Father** bore witness to Thee, calling Thee His beloved **Son**. And the **Spirit** in the form of a dove confirmed the certainty of the Word. O Christ our God, who has appeared and hast enlightened the world, glory be to Thee."

He who is God immerses himself in His creation and sanctifies it and the waters turn back. The water of the Jordan needed His presence to become sanctified and to become an agent for cleansing us. We too partake of this sanctification in the waters of our own baptism.

Traditionally, our Orthodox Priests visit all their parishioners in their homes to pray with them and to bless their homes with the sanctified water of the Theophany service. The priest will bring with him the Holy water, basil branches (βασιλικό) for sprinkling the water, and the Cross. The faithful guide the priest to all the rooms and especially the iconostasis (icon stand). As he enters and moves around the house we can all join him in chanting the above Theophany troparion. The sprinkling of the Holy water is to rid the house of all evil and to fill it with every blessing.

We also bring Holy water home to use throughout the year to bless our homes and to drink, whether we are ill or as part of our daily prayer life. Water has always been crucial for life and so partaking of this water is purifying and cleansing.

It is a pious custom among the faithful to give the priest a donation for his time and effort, but this should never be thought of as a requirement.

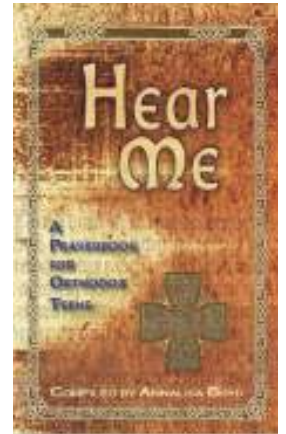


Hear Me: a Prayerbook for Orthodox Teens.

Compiled by Annalisa Boyd, published by Conciliar Press, 2007

"Do not forsake prayer, for just as the body becomes weak when it is deprived of food, so also the soul when it is deprived of prayer draws nigh to weakness and noetic death" (St Gennadius of Constantinople).

"Hear Me" is a prayer book compiled by Annalisa Boyd to help one express their yearning to their creator. This book strives to cover all the prayer needs for an Orthodox teenager.



It offers a daily prayer rule achievable by all, with a section compiled for different situations that one may encounter. It also provides a checklist for Confession based upon the Ten Commandments, allowing one to thoroughly reflect when preparing for this essential sacrament. Furthermore, it offers practical advice and encouragement from different acclaimed texts like the Philokalia, the Ladder of Divine Ascent and the Bible, concerning many trials and passions one might be experiencing like gluttony, anger, addiction, taming the tongue, and the passions of the flesh. Coupled with this passage of spiritual rejuvenation is the Saint that is designated to the specific passion, allowing one to read their life, encouraging them to emulate the Saint and providing them with a source of intercession before God. As St Silouan the Athonite said: "The saints hear our prayers and have the power from God to help us." This simple, practical and easy-to-read book gets better though! The final segment of this book offers answers to challenging, commonly-held questions that pertain to the Faith and one's responsibility in their relationship with God. This section offers advice to some of the following predicaments: "I keep committing the same sin", "I think I'm in love", "My friend is depressed", "I can't control my anger", "I am anxious all the time", "I can't forgive" and other plights that one may go through.

"Hear Me" is a spiritual treasure for those struggling to travel upon the narrow road and enter the small gate that leads to life.



A wide range of Orthodox Christian books is available from the Orthodox Mission Bookstore, 217 Bexley Rd., Kingsgrove.
Ph: (02) 9787 9779 E-mail: editor@lychnos.org
Internet: www.orthodoxbookstore.org.au

NEWS and VIEWS

Sunday School Concerts

Throughout the months of November and December, the Sunday Schools of the Orthodox parishes of Sydney held their annual concerts to celebrate the end of another successful Sunday School Year. His Eminence, Archbishop Stylianos, wrote the following message in a memento given to all the children:

My beloved child,

The Sunday School Classes for this year have once again come to an end. As such, we are given the opportunity to graciously remember how important the people and the things of God are in our lives.

Please remember, my child, that in contrast to Mathematics, Geography and History, the Sunday School lessons always revolve around eternal truths concerning God, others and yourself. Having a firm knowledge of such truths means that you are progressively becoming more of a consciously adopted child of God and the Church.

For this reason, our gratitude is great to all those – the untiring Teachers and Parents – who, in one way or another, help and contribute to the success of the Sunday Schools of our Archdiocese.

May you all continue with great zeal in the year to come.

With deep paternal love

Archbishop STYLIANOS of Australia

Sunday Schools will resume again in March 2017. For more information, contact your local parish priest. ✠



The High School Boys of Sunday School (Μέσον) of St Catherine's Parish, Mascot, performing at their annual concert on the 4th December.



The Primary School Sunday School Class (κατώτερο) of the Resurrection of our Lord Parish, Kogarah, chanting a hymn at their concert on the 27th November.



The Sunday School children of the Parish of St Demetrios, St Mary's, chant the dismissal hymn of St Demetrios at their concert on the 4th December.

**Ακούτε το ραδιοφωνικό πρόγραμμα
«Η ΦΩΝΗ ΤΗΣ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΙΑΣ»**

κάθε Κυριακή:

10:45 π.μ. στο 2MM-AM 1665

11:00 π.μ. στο 2ERA-FM 151.675 (scanner)

5:30 μ.μ. στο Galaxia FM 151.850 (scanner)

κάθε Πέμπτη:

3:30 μ.μ. στο Radio Club AM 1683

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