



He Came Down From Heaven For Our Salvation

“Who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven” (From the Creed)

Christmas is the celebration of the Incarnation of God: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

But why did God become human?

Many people say that the only reason Christ was born was to save us from our flawed human nature. We know that Adam and Eve became subject to pain, suffering and physical death through their disobedience against God. From that moment, it seems that sin - against one's own self, against others, and against God - became a basic human trait.

Without being aware, we slip into a mode of thinking where we believe that the whole reason why God became Man was only to save us from our sinful state and its consequences.

This is part of the reason. After all, it is true that our Church services are full of the language of salvation. For example, during the Liturgy in most Sundays in the Church Year we chant, “Save us O Son of God, who rose from the dead.”

God loves us. He feels compassion for His creation. A phrase the Fathers use, which has become absorbed into our prayers is, “through the compassion which comes from the love of mankind.”

Out of this compassion, He came down from Heaven, He took on flesh, and He saved us. Nevertheless, God was not compelled to come

down to Earth to save us. God is above every need or compulsion. We know that He saves us because He is God.

Saving us was only a partial reason, however, because the Creed says that Christ came down from Heaven “for us” first and foremost, followed by “for our salvation.”

Sin is the abuse of the free will that God gifted to us. But we must not believe that the abuse of free will, that sin itself, compelled the Word of God to become the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

Some Fathers say that God so loved His creation, His children, that He always wanted to be a part of it, and would have become human even if mankind had not fallen.

As St Nicholas Cabasilas, explains, “man was originally fashioned according to a kind of yardstick and criterion ... to be capable of receiving God. And God did not create human nature with any other purpose in mind ... rather, He created it with this end in view, that, when it was fitting for Him to be born, He might receive His Mother from it; having first established this purpose [the Incarnation] as a kind of standard, He then fashioned man in accordance with it.”

This is the climax of everything set in motion with the Birth of Christ. God made us with the purpose of becoming one with us. We were created to receive God. What could be more joyous?



Οι Τρεις Ιεράρχαι

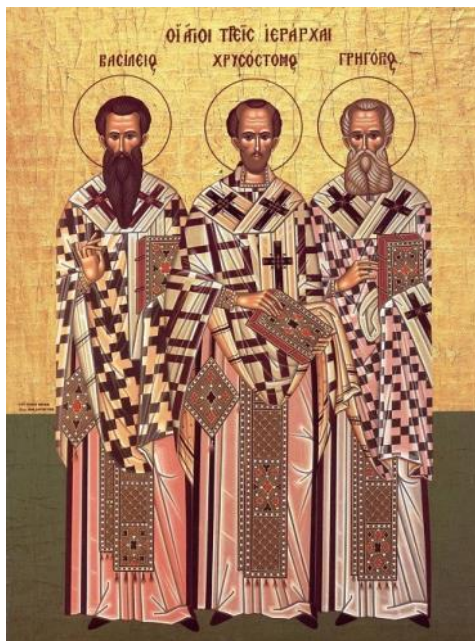
Στις 30 του Ιανουαρίου η Εκκλησία μας γιορτάζει τη μνήμη των Τριών Ιεραρχών - όλων μαζί.

Γιατί, ενώ ο καθένας έχει τη δική του μνήμη, η Εκκλησία μας τους έκρινε ως τους πύο περιφανείς και εξέχοντες ώστε να καθιερώσει από τον 11^ο αιώνα κοινή γιορτή και για τους τρείς.

Είναι πράγματι ο Μέγας Βασίλειος, Ο Γρηγόριος ο Θεολόγος και ο Ιωάννης Χρυσόστομος «**οι μελίρρυτοι ποταμοί της σοφίας**» και «**οι τρείς μέγιστοι φωστήρες της τρισηλίου Θεότητας**» όπως το απολυτίκιο της γιορτής τους μας υπενθυμίζει. Στο λίγο χώρο που έχουμε στη διάθεση μας μόνο λίγα επιγραμματικά μπορούμε να σημειώσουμε.

1^ο: Ασύγκριτοι σαν παιδαγωγοί

Ο Μ. Βασίλειος τονίζει την αξία του τρόπου διδασκαλίας: «**Το μάθημα που παραδίδεται στους μαθητές με χάρη και ευχαρίστηση, εισχωρεί στις ψυχές των μαθητών και παραμένει πάντα ζωντανό.**» Ο Γρηγόριος ο Θεολόγος απευθύνεται στους διδασκάλους κάθε εποχής προτρέποντάς τους: «**Γίνου φως και έτσι θα φωτίσεις. Αγίασε τον εαυτό σου και έτσι θ'αγιάσεις τους άλλους. Προσέγγισε συ το Θεό και θα φέρεις κι άλλους κοντά Του.**» Όσο για τον Ι. Χρυσόστομο τα λόγια του αξίζει ν'ακουσθούν σήμερα: «**Να η αιτία της παραστρατημένης νεότητας. Οι αδιάφοροι γονείς και οι ανεύθυνοι παιδαγωγοί.**»



2^ο: Θαυμαστοί κοινωνικοί εργάτες

Όλοι τους υπηρέτησαν τον Άνθρωπο σαν το «**τιμιώτερον απάντων των ορωμένων.**» (Ι. Χρυσ.). Δηλαδή, ο άνθρωπος είναι το τιμιώτερο από όλα όσα βλέπονται. Στην ιστορία των ανθρώπων πρώτοι αυτοί εφάρμοσαν το «**αγαπάτε αλλήλους**», σε τέτοια υψηλή κλίμακα. Με νοσοκομεία, λεπροκομεία, πτωχοκομεία, γηροκομεία κ.λ.π.

Με άλλα λόγια, εξάσκηση της φιλανθρωπίας σε βάθος και έκταση τέτοιου βαθμού που ακόμη και με τα σημερινά δεδομένα θεωρείται έργο υπέρογκο και απλησίαστο.

Ιδιαίτερα ο Μ. Βασίλειος και ο Ι. Χρυσόστομος, πριν ακόμη γίνουν επίσκοποι εξασκούσαν θαυμαστή φιλανθρωπία στις ιδιαίτερες πατρίδες τους. Το κοινωνικό τους έργο αυξήθηκε έτι περισσότερο όταν έγιναν Επίσκοποι.

Η «**Βασιλείας**» ήταν μια ολόκληρη πόλη φιλανθρωπίας και κοινωνικής πρόνοιας. Στην ιστορία έχουν μείνει μνημειώδεις οι Λόγοι του Χρυσοστόμου «**Περί Ελεημοσύνης**». Ενώ ακόμη και στο τόπο της εξορίας του, Κουκουσόν, φροντίζει για τους αναξιοπαθούντες αδελφούς της περιοχής.

3^ο: Υπόδειγμα θρησκευτικών αρχηγών

Και οι τρείς τους κατάνεαν από πλουσιόσπιτα. Όμως με τη θέληση τους διαλέγουν τη ζωή της φτώχειας, της ανέχειας, της εγκράτειας. Γίνονται οι «**επιστήμονες**» της Ιερωσύνης. Πρότυπα επισκόπων. Άριστοι ερευνητές της Αγίας Γραφής. Διακεκριμένοι ιεροκήρυκες.

Μέγας ο Βασίλειος. Θεολόγος και «ποιητής του Χριστιανισμού» ο Γρηγόριος. Χρυσούς στο στόμα, για την ευγλωττία του ο Ιωάννης.

Οι εθνικοί, αν και ειδωλολάτρες, διδάσκαλοι τους, τους θαύμαζαν. Τους πρόσφεραν καθηγητικές θέσεις, ζήλευαν τα ρητορικά, τα πνευματικά τους ταλέντα.

Μ'αυτού, απ'τη στιγμή που γνώρισαν το Χριστό, τα΄δωσαν όλα για την Πίστη Του. Πολέμησαν με δύναμη τις αιρέσεις. Στα θέματα της πίστεως δεν γνώριζαν συμβιβασμούς και υποχωρήσεις. Γνωστός, γεμάτος παρρησία, ο διάλογος του Μ. Βασιλείου με τον ύπαρχο Μόδεστο. Γνωστοί οι αγώνες του Γ. του Θεολόγου στην Κωνσταντινούπολη για να αναστηλωθεί η Ορθοδοξία, να εδραιωθεί το δόγμα περί του Αγίου Πνεύματος.

Γνωστή και η στάση του Χρυσοστόμου έναντι των ισχυρών,

ιδιαίτερα απέναντι στην ασεβή και κενόδοξη αυτοκράτειρα Ευδοξία.

- ❖ Ο πρώτος, πεθαίνει νεότερος από τους σκληρούς αγώνες του για την πίστη.
- ❖ Ο δεύτερος, για την ειρήνη της Εκκλησίας, παραιτείται του Πατριαρχικού θρόνου.
- ❖ Και ο τρίτος, πεθαίνει εξόριστος στα άγρια και αφιλόξενα βουνά της Αρμενίας, για την Αλήθεια.

Και οι τρείς τους ανεδείχθησαν γίγαντες της αρετής και της πίστεως.

Εγνώρισαν και αγάπησαν βαθύτατα τον **ένα**, τον **μοναδικό**, τον **Θεάνθρωπο Ιησού**.

Αυτόν τον πνευματικό ήλιο των ανθρώπων, οι Τρείς Ιεράρχαι διδάσκουν, με τη ζωή και τα έργα τους και εμείς να Τον μάθουμε και να Τον αγαπήσουμε.

Current Issues

Christmas - An Invitation from Heaven

The birth of Jesus Christ is described by the writers of the Holy Gospels with respectful apprehension. This is because they realised that this wondrous event was a heavenly invitation to every human being. The first worshippers of Christ were the shepherds, who were informed by the angels. Of the wise and educated, however, only the Magi (wise men) from the East responded to this invitation and came to worship the newborn King. In contrast, other astrologers saw the unusually bright star in the sky but made no effort to discover its significance.

The worship of the Magi, which was made with **simplicity** and **humility**, represents their acceptance of the perpetual invitation of Heaven: to accept in our heart the Newborn Saviour. God has also been sending us invitations for over 2000 years. He sends us invitations in writing, secretly, verbally, and even miraculously. Everyone on earth has

received one or more invitations from Him. They arrive through reading the pages of the Holy Bible or a spiritual book or by being present at the time of a miraculous event. But let us ask ourselves: do we have the eagerness of the Magi when we receive an invitation from God? Often, instead of being willing to act, we remain unmoved and offer various excuses or at best a lukewarm response.

The Magi made their arduous journey to see the newborn King. Their excitement and devotion would have been even greater if they knew that the King was also God who would establish a new order on both Heaven and earth. We, in our generation know that He is God, and that our journey will not

end in a stable to see the child Jesus. It will instead end in Heaven, where we shall meet the triumphant Christ! How, then, can we justify our disinterest to receiving Jesus Christ into our hearts?

We must be careful to avoid being lukewarm towards Him or thinking that we cannot see Him as the Russian astronaut Gherman Titov said. Titov was the second human to circumnavigate the Earth in 1961, and on his return to earth he boasted that he did not see God. Later, at a reception in Moscow, he met Patriarch Alexios, who asked him

whether he knew God. Titov was startled, and asked, "what do you mean?" The Patriarch replied, "how can you say that you have not seen somebody whom you do not know. How did you imagine you would see God?" Titov responded, "in reality, I do not know how to recognise Him." "Come with me", the Patriarch replied, "and I will show you how to see

God, and next time you are in space you will see Him. You can be certain that you will see Him."

There is a secret as to how a Christian can see the Newborn Christ. He needs **a sincere intention** with **humility**. He must examine things objectively, without preconceptions. He must live "**a life of Christ**", tasting the hidden **joy of prayer** and experiencing **the Grace of the Mysteries** of the Church. Then, he will discover that the Star Christ does not stand on the material outer space, where the astronauts spend their time, but He stands and moves inside the spiritual space of our soul. No telescope can see that **Star**; but it can be seen by all faithful people, and even by those who are blind!



Από Τους Αγίους Της Εκκλησίας Μας

Ο Όσιος Μακάριος ο Μέγας, ο Αιγύπτιος
(η μνήμη του τιμάται 19 Ιανουαρίου)

Ο Όσιος Μακάριος ο Μέγας, ο Αιγύπτιος, ήταν ένας από τους πρώτους ιδρυτές του μοναχισμού. Γεννήθηκε τον 4ο αιώνα μ.Χ. σε ένα μικρό χωριό στην Αίγυπτο. Από νεαρή ηλικία ένιωσε στην ψυχή του την κλήση προς τον Θεό, να αφιερωθεί σε ζωή ασκήσεως και προσευχής. Αφού έμεινε για τρία χρόνια στην έρημο της Νιτρίας, αποφάσισε να ακολουθήσει τον Άγιο Αντώνιο «τον Μέγαν», και έγινε αφιερωμένος μαθητής του.

Ο Όσιος Μακάριος αγωνίσθηκε πολύ εναντίον των δαιμόνων. Όπως αναφέρει το απολυτίκιο του, «νηστεία, αγρυπνία, προσευχή, ούράνια χαρίσματα λαβών» δηλαδή, με την νηστεία, την αγρυπνία και την προσευχή, ο Όσιος Μακάριος έλαβε δωρεές από το Θεό. Για την προσευχή έλεγε χαρακτηριστικά ότι δεν χρειάζονται πολλά λόγια, αλλά μόνο ότι ο νους πρέπει να επικεντρώνεται στον Θεό.

Μετά από 10 χρόνια έντονου ασκητικού αγώνος, ο Άγιος Αντώνιος έστειλε τον Όσιο Μακάριο στο μοναστήρι της Σκήτης, όπου έγινε ηγούμενος.

Περνούσε τον περισσότερο χρόνο του συνομιλώντας με τον Θεό, και δεν έπαυσε να χύνει δάκρυα μετανοίας. Η φήμη του Αγίου Μακαρίου σιγά σιγά εξαπλώθηκε, λόγω των αρετών του, και πολλοί τον επισκέπτονταν. Στην ηλικία περίπου 40 χρόνων, ακολουθώντας την προτροπή του Μεγάλου Αντωνίου, δέχθηκε να χειροτονηθεί ιερέας.

Ο άγιος Μακάριος μας άφησε πολλά θεολογικά συγγράμματα που είναι βασισμένα στη δική του πνευματική εμπειρία. Χαρακτηριστικές είναι οι 50 Πνευματικές Ομιλίες που μας μεταφέρουν την πνευματική σοφία του. Επίσης ο Άγιος Μακάριος ο Μέγας μας άφησε αρκετές πρωινές και βραδινές προσευχές.

Το κύριο θέμα που συναντάμε στα συγγράμματα του Αγίου Μακαρίου είναι ότι ο πιο υψηλός στόχος και σκοπός της ζωής μας είναι να ενωθεί η ψυχή μας με τον Θεό. Όπως αναφέρει στην 26η Ομιλία του, «όπως ο Κύριος ντύθηκε το σώμα, εγκαταλείποντας κάθε αρχή και εξουσία, έτσι και οι Χριστιανοί ντύνονται το Άγιο Πνεύμα και αναπαύονται.»

Επίσης έγραψε αρκετά για την αρετή της ταπεινώσεως. Από την ίδια 26η ομιλία μας λέει : «Αν λοιπόν ο Θεός καταδέχτηκε να υποστεί τόσες βρισιές και παθήματα και τόση μεγάλη ταπείνωση, σύ, που από τη φύση σου είσαι βρωμερός και θνητός, όσο και αν ταπεινωθείς, θα μπορέσεις να κάνεις τίποτε παρόμοιο με τον Κύριό σου;»

Ο Άγιος Μακάριος κοιμήθη το 391 μ.Χ. Τα ιερά λείψανα του βρίσκονται στο Κοπτικό Ορθόδοξο Μοναστήρι που φέρει το όνομα του, στην Αίγυπτο.

From the Saints of our Church

St Macarius the Great of Egypt, the Lamp of the Desert (Commemorated 19th January)

St Macarius is one of the founding fathers of monasticism. He was born in the fourth century AD in the village of Jijber, Egypt. From a young age, he realised his calling from God was to apply himself to a life of asceticism and prayer. Having dwelt in the Nitrian desert for three years, he went to Saint Anthony the Great and became his devoted disciple and follower.

St Macarius struggled against demonic attacks. As his apolytikion states "By fasting, vigil and prayer thou didst obtain heavenly gifts..." His view on prayer was that it did not require many words; rather, the mind should be concentrated on God.

After ten years of intense asceticism Abba Macarius was sent by St Anthony to the Skete monastery and was made abbot. He spent most of his time conversing with God and never ceased to weep, repent and work. St Macarius soon became famous for his virtues and many people visited him. At about the age of 40, following St Anthony's urging, he accepted ordination to the priesthood.

The Saint left theological writings that are based on his own personal experience. Fifty Spiritual Homilies provide us with his spiritual wisdom. Saint Macarius the Great also wrote many morning and evening prayers.

The main theme of St Macarius' writings is on our highest goal and purpose - the union of the soul with God, "as the Lord put on the body, leaving behind all principality and power, so Christians put on the Holy Spirit, and are at rest" (Homily 26). He also spoke on our need for humility, "if God condescends to such insults and sufferings and humiliation (His passion and crucifixion), you, who by nature are clay and are mortal, no matter how much you are humiliated, will never do anything similar to what your Master did. God, for your sake, humbled Himself and you will not be humbled for your own sake?!" (Homily 26, 25-26).

The Saint died in the year 391AD. His holy relics are located in the Coptic Monastery of St Macarius the Great, in Egypt.



Questions & Answers

A clergyman of our Archdiocese answers ...

Why do we have to go to a Priest for Confession?

Hy immediate answer is that this is what our Lord and the Church advise us. Our Lord who loves us very much knows what is good for us much better than we do. Actually, anyone who has truly been to Confession, and by this I mean anyone who has confessed very honestly, bravely, and with true contrition, would not need an answer to this question. They would have experienced for themselves the peace and Grace that results from this blessed Sacrament.

The Bible teaches us that we should go to a priest for Confession. In James 5:16 we read, "Confess your trespasses to one another." After His Resurrection when granting the Holy Spirit to His disciples, Jesus said to them: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23).

The Apostles thus received the authority to forgive sins on earth. They then transmitted this authority to their successors, the Bishops and Priests. And only they, as canonical and lawful successors of the Apostles, have the power to grant forgiveness and remission of sins.

The Church is a hospital for our soul. St John Chrysostom said, "Enter into the Church and wash away your sins. For here there is a hospital and not a court of law. Do not be ashamed again to enter the Church, be ashamed when you sin but not when you repent." It is very sad if we have a serious physical illness, however a spiritual illness is even worse. For example if we have anger, or hatred, or pride and always want to have our own way, then the misery that is created is worse than physical illness.



We go to Confession because we need our sins to be forgiven. It is special if we receive not only forgiveness, but also healing of our spiritual illnesses. The Priest we go to for Holy Confession can become our spiritual guide. He can give us advice, encouragement, and we can benefit from his wisdom and discernment. It will help us enormously if, with his help and encouragement, we come to understand our spiritual illnesses. Once we diagnose our problems we can slowly come to cleanse

our heart from the passions.

As an example, someone may confess to their priest that they get angry frequently. They come to understand that their temper hurts others and creates hardship, and they make a commitment to try very hard to not get angry. This is good. Even better, however, is to use the help of their Spiritual Father to truly understand what it is deep in their heart that leads to them becoming

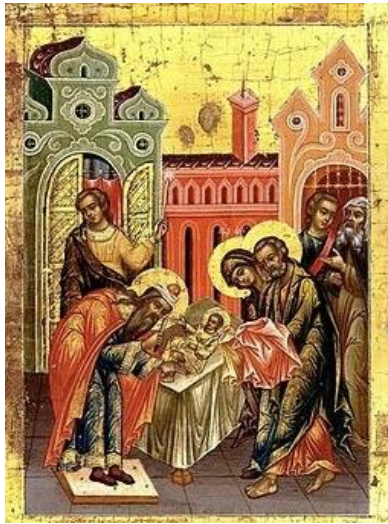
angry. Is the fundamental problem that they judge others and therefore others annoy them and irritate them? At an even deeper level is there pride, an exaggerated sense of self-importance? Or perhaps there is addiction to technology, or pornography, or money - and this addiction is contributing to them being very irritable.

Our biggest problem is not others, nor anything external to us. Our biggest problem is our sins. Thanks be to the Lord that He has granted us His Church, where we can receive remission of our sins and healing of our spiritual infirmities. One of the main ways this happens involves us finding a holy Spiritual Father, and once we have discovered him we go to him regularly for Confession and for spiritual guidance.

† Fr D. K.



Circumcision of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (Luke 2:20-21; 40-52)



Following His birth, our Lord was circumcised on the eighth day in accordance with Jewish custom, and was named 'Jesus' (Luke 2:21).

Abraham's covenant with God meant that every male descendant after him was to be circumcised (Genesis 17:10-12). This marked man's union with God.

Christ's circumcision was a sign of His

submission to this covenant between man and God. Beyond His incarnation, Christ shows us also that He was born under the law (Galatians 4:4) and that He was subject to the weakness of human nature. By reason of this subjection, He underwent circumcision. Christ had no need to bear the mark of His unity with God for He was in fact one with God by nature. But just as He was later baptised, Christ led by His humble example and submitted even to be circumcised - so as to bear the mark of His humanity and fulfil the law.

St Paul compares circumcision and baptism in Colossians 2:11-12, referring to baptism as a "circumcision made without hands." Indeed, just as circumcision involves cutting away some flesh, baptism involves the cutting away of sin, the putting on of Christ.

But what does Christ's circumcision mean for us?

First, it shows us another example of His great condescension and love for us.

Secondly, it reminds us of God's covenant with man and the new covenant we have received through Christ.

Thirdly, it causes us to reflect on the particular efforts we have undertaken on our own circumcision - in a spiritual sense, remembering the words from Deuteronomy 30:6, "the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may love." In other words, true life is to be found by dedicating our lives to God. Physical circumcision involves cutting away a small portion of skin but spiritual circumcision requires cutting away that which hinders our relationship with God and truly liberates us to love Him.



From the Holy Father\$...

St Gregory of Nyssa On the Baptism of Christ

St Gregory of Nyssa, the younger brother of St Basil the Great, was one of the most influential theologians of the early Church. In his famous sermon *On the Baptism of Christ* the Saint begins by explaining the ongoing significance of baptism for the Orthodox Christian:

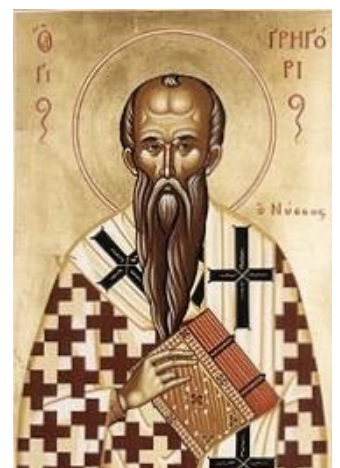
"Baptism, then, is a purification from sins, a remission of trespasses, a cause of renovation and regeneration. For as the child new-born is free from accusations and from penalties, so too the child of regeneration has nothing for which to answer, being released by royal bounty from accountability."

St Gregory goes on to note that baptism involves both an imitation and a prefiguring of Christ's life: just as Jesus was concealed in the Earth for three days, the person to be baptised is also immersed three times in water (the element akin to earth). The water depicts the cleansing that we receive through baptism, and is transformed through the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit.

The Saint lays down an ultimate challenge for us to continually prove that our baptism has changed us:

"Show me, after the sacramental grace, the change in your ways that should follow it, and make known by the purity of your conversation the difference effected by your transformation for the better. For of those things which are before our eyes nothing is altered: the characteristics of the body remain unchanged, and the mould of the visible nature is no-wise different. But there is certainly need of some manifest proof, by which we may recognize the new-born man, discerning by clear tokens the new from the old."

May we all rise to this challenge and be grateful for God's paternal gift – the Sacrament of Baptism.



Orthodox Saints of the World

IV The Spread of Christianity in the New World - the Americas

In the previous articles, we discussed how Christianity spread in the Middle East, Africa and the whole of Europe. In this article we will look more closely at the missionaries of the 'New World', particularly those in North America. We will discover four of these Saints who have particularly made an impact on Orthodox Christianity in the Americas.

St Innocent of Alaska, Equal to the Apostles and Enlightener of North America

St Innocent was a Russian Orthodox priest, missionary to Alaska, bishop, archbishop, and then Metropolitan of Moscow during the 1800s. He learned several native languages and was the author of many of the earliest scholarly works about the natives and their languages, as well as dictionaries and religious works. He also translated parts of the Bible into several native languages in Alaska.

The preaching of the Holy Gospel was a primary achievement in the life of St Innocent and occupied a special place in his apostolic service. He had a great gift of preaching. He never missed an opportunity to preach and talk to people and tirelessly instructed his clergy to do the same.

St Peter the Aleut, the Protomartyr of America

St Peter the Aleut was a native of Kodiak Island, Alaska. The Aleuts lived in the Aleutian Islands, Pribilof Islands, Commander Islands, and the Alaskan Peninsula. The word Alaxsxa in Aleut is the origin of the name of the US state of Alaska. St Peter received the Christian name of Peter when he was baptised into the Orthodox faith by the monks of St Herman. In 1815, a group of Aleut seal and otter hunters, including Peter, were captured by Spanish sailors who took them to San Francisco for interrogation. With threats of torture, the Roman Catholic priests attempted to force the Aleuts to deny their Orthodox faith.

When the Aleuts refused, the priests had a toe severed from each of Peter's feet. Peter still refused to renounce his faith and the Spanish priests ordered a group of

California Indians to cut off each finger of Peter's hands, one joint at a time, finally removing both his hands. They eventually disemboweled him, crowning his life with martyrdom. When he heard of Peter's death, St Herman was moved to exclaim, "Holy new-martyr Peter, pray to God for us!"

St Alexis Toth of Wilkes-Barre, leader of ex-Uniates into Orthodoxy

St Alexis was a missionary priest, sent from his homeland in Slovakia as a Uniate (who placed themselves under the Roman Catholic Pope's authority). The Latin environment in the United States was hostile. He recognised that in order to protect his flock he needed to lead and return them to Orthodox Christianity.



Fr Alexis was the first Uniate Greek Rite Catholic priest in America to lead his people in reunion with the Orthodox Church. In December 1892, he evangelised the immigrants in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, preaching and enlightening them about their social and religious future in America. Through his efforts over 20,000 Carpatho-Russian and Galician uniates were re-united with the Orthodox Church.

St Raphael Hawaweeny of Brooklyn

St Raphael was born in Beirut, Lebanon to Syrian refugee parents. He was educated at the Patriarchal School in Damascus, the School of Orthodox Theology in Halki Island and at the Theological Academy in Kiev.

In 1904 he became the first Orthodox bishop to be consecrated in North America. He served as bishop of Brooklyn, New York until his death. From his youth, Saint Raphael's greatest joy was to serve the Church. St Raphael saw the absolute necessity for using English in worship and in education for the future progress of the Orthodox Mission.

St Raphael founded the present-day Cathedral of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, established thirty parishes, assisted in the founding of St Tikhon's Orthodox Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania and blessed the orphanage there as well.

Χριστός γεννάται, δοξάσατε

Η υμνωδία του κανόνα του Οσίου Κοσμά του Μελωδού, αντανakλά το ύψος του πανηγυρικού λόγου του Αγίου Γρηγορίου του Θεολόγου σε ήχους όντως καρδιακούς.

Το μυστήριο το ότι «ο Λόγος σαρξ εγένετο και εσκήνωσεν εν ημίν», δεν κατανοείται απλώς με το συναίσθημα η με κάποια ευλαβική συγκίνηση, αλλά είναι μια βιωματική εμπειρία σε κάθε Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία, εκεί που σκηνώνει όλη η αλήθεια της πίστης μας ως Σώματος του Χριστού.

Μέσα στην Εκκλησία ο «Χριστός γεννάται» και είναι εκεί που Τον υμνούμε και Τον δοξάζουμε. Εκεί που οι πιστοί – οι «ελάχιστοι» - αναμένουν να υποδεχτούν τον «Μεγάλον», τον Βασιλέα των πάντων, επισήμως την ημέρα των Χριστουγέννων, όπως «ανεπισήμως» γίνεται σε κάθε Θεία Λειτουργία.

Το ότι κενώνεται η Θεότητα του δευτέρου προσώπου της Αγίας Τριάδας, από ακραία ταπείνωση, είναι κάτι ακατανόητο για τον

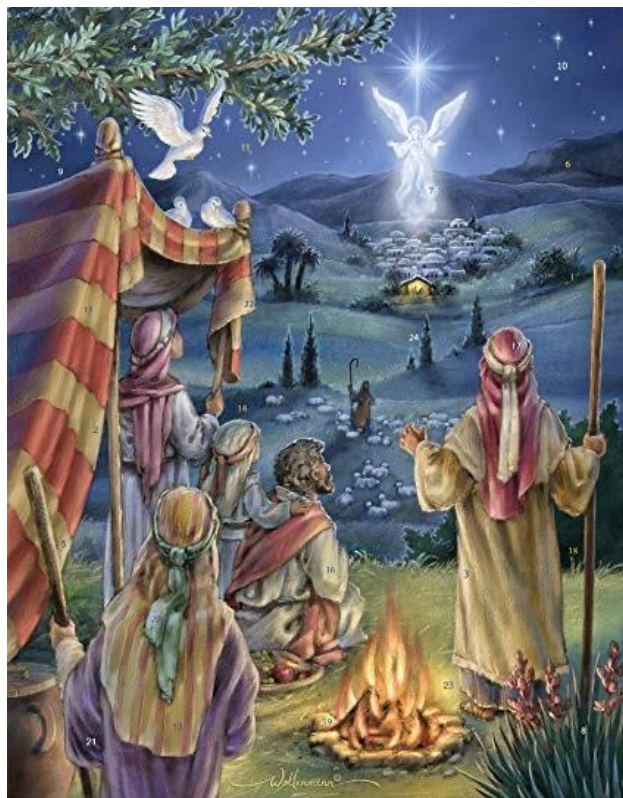
άνθρωπο. Πώς άραγε, ενώθηκε η θεία φύση με την ανθρώπινη, με την προσφορά της Θεοτόκου Μαρίας;

Ο Άγιος Παΐσιος ο Αγιορείτης, περπατώντας μία μέρα μες' το δάσος, παρακολουθούσε ένα πουλάκι που κελαϊδούσε με όλη του την καρδιά. Του δόθηκε να καταλάβει ότι τό μικρό πουλί επιτελούσε μια συνεχή δοξολογία προς τον Θεό! Ο Άγιος όμως απορούσε πόσο απείχε ο ενθουσιασμός που έδειχνε το πουλί, εν συγκρίσει με εκείνον που είχε ο ίδιος.

Μήπως θ' άπρεπε να χρησιμοποιήσει το ίδιο μέτρο ο καθένας μας, στή καθημερινή του ζωή, καθώς πλησιάζουν τά χριστούγεννα;

Διότι τό «Χριστός γεννάται» απευθύνεται στον Ενεστώτα χρόνο - στο παρόν. Καλείται λοιπόν κάθε ορθόδοξος

χριστιανός «τώρα» να δοξάσει, να προϋπαντήσει, καί μαζί με όλη τήν κτίση να ψάλλει δοξολογητικά ύμνους στον ενανθρωπίσαντα Θεόν.



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From The Old Testament



Psalm 148



In this psalm of universal praise we see creation presented as a cosmic orchestra, where each of the three individual sections are called to

lift up their distinct praise in harmonious melody.

The first section praises God from the heavens: the angelic hosts, the sun, moon and stars. In times past they were the objects of worship, but here the psalmist tells us that there is someone higher than all these that deserves praise: the Lord, “for He commanded and they were created” (v5). This praise is unceasing as the angelic hosts continuously cry out, “Holy, Holy, Holy”. The sun praises God in its brilliance all day long, and when it sets the moon rises and continues praising God all through the night.

The next harmonious section praises God from the Earth: the mountains, the depths, all trees and the forces of nature - namely fire, hail, snow, clouds and the stormy winds. Though these things do not have a voice to praise God, we are moved to praise God through them. The more we study the wisdom they were created with and see them “fulfilling His word” (v8), by not crossing their boundaries and obeying the natural laws by which they were established, the more we understand that they too join the sounds of their own chords to the great voice of the heavenly choruses.

The third harmonious section consists of everything living: the sea creatures, beasts and cattle, birds and creeping things, and all classes of humans - kings, princes, judges, the young and the elderly. St Gregory of Nyssa explains that we, as humans, are a microcosm replicating all of creation within us. He submits that, “if the entire world order is a kind of musical harmony whose artisan and creator is God,” then we are called to a higher state of life, to echo the harmony of the cosmos, where the “varied, multiform virtues, imitate the harmony of the universe while [our] human nature acts as an instrument in rhythm with God’s melody” (*On the Inscriptions of the Psalms* Ch. 3, 9).



Holiness In Our Times

Elder Cleopa of Romania (1912-1998)

Elder Cleopa was born Constantin Ilie in Sulița, Romania in 1912 into a pious family. Uninterested in the things of the world from a young age, he entered the monastery of Sihastria together with two of his brothers at the age of seventeen. He was tonsured with the name of Cleopa in 1937.



Against his will, he became abbot of Sihastria in 1942 at the age of thirty. He was not abbot for long when the political situation worsened in Romania with the rise of communism. He was repeatedly arrested by the secret police, and often fled into the mountains to evade them. However, the elder always considered those years of solitude as the most blessed times of his life.

With his return in 1964, after living as a hermit, Elder Cleopa continued to give spiritual advice to monks and lay people. As a spiritual father he ministered not only to the monks of his monastery, but also to the inhabitants of the region ranging from people of influence to common folk.

His reputation began to spread throughout Romania and the whole world and he was visited by the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Romania. After the fall of the communist regime he was a symbol of Romania’s spiritual revival.

Elder Cleopa reposed in the Lord on the 2nd of December 1998, having predicted the time of his death. His funeral was attended by around 10,000 people, and the New York Times printed his obituary. His impact on Orthodoxy in Romania was such that his influence continues to this day, including through Patriarch Daniel of Romania who was one of his spiritual children.

The soil of the tomb of this abbot, spiritual father, missionary, confessor and hesychast has worked many miracles, and so many people take this soil that the monks have had to carry wheelbarrows of earth to Elder Cleopa’s grave, to fill in the hollows left by the faithful. May he intercede for us!



What we Hear in Church



Oikos of Christmas Day

«Τὴν Ἑδέμ Βηθλεὲμ ἤνοιξε, δεῦτε ἴδωμεν· τὴν τρυφὴν ἐν κρυφῇ εὖρομεν, δεῦτε λάβωμεν, τὰ τοῦ Παραδείσου ἔνδον τοῦ Σπηλαίου. Ἐκεῖ ἐφάνη ρίζα ἀπότιστος, βλαστάνουσα ἄφρουν· ἐκεῖ εὐρέθη φρέαρ ἀνώρυκτον, οὐ πιεῖν Δαυὶδ πρὶν ἐπεθύμησεν· ἐκεῖ Παρθένος τεκοῦσα βρέφος, τὴν δίψαν ἔπαυσεν εὐθύς, τὴν τοῦ Ἀδάμ καὶ τοῦ Δαυὶδ διὰ τοῦτο πρὸς τοῦτο ἐπειχθώμεν, οὗ ἔτεχθη, Παιδίον νέον, ὁ πρὸ αἰώνων Θεός.»

“Bethlehem has opened Eden, come, let us see; we have found delight in secret, come, let us receive the joys of Paradise within the cave. There the unwatered root whose blossom is forgiveness has appeared. There has been found the undug well from which David once longed to drink. There a virgin has borne a babe and has quenched at once Adam’s and David’s thirst. For this, let us hasten to this place where there has been born a little Child, God before the ages.”

This hymn is the first verse of the most famous work of St Romanos the Melodist, his first kontakion on the Nativity of Christ. The ‘unwatered root’ that St Romanos refers to is a direct reference to Isaiah 11:1, “And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse and a blossom shall come up from his root.”

The imagery of the unwatered root that blossoms is not only referring to the Birth of Christ but also to the manner of His conception. St Leo the Great tells us that “this shoot signifies the Blessed Virgin Mary, who sprang from the stock of Jesse and David and was made fruitful by the Holy Spirit, bringing forth a new flower of human flesh, from a mother’s womb to be sure, but through a virgin birth.”

The reference to the undug well from which David “once longed to drink” is particularly insightful.

Taken from the 2nd Book of Kingdoms, 23:13-1, it is in reference to an incident during the campaign of King David and the army of Israelites against the invading army of the Philistines. They were encamped outside Bethlehem, which the Philistine army had occupied. King David longed to quench his thirst and three of his mightiest soldiers volunteered to break through enemy lines and dig for the well which was by the gate of the city of Bethlehem. Having secured the water, they brought it to David but he refused to drink of it, pouring it out onto the earth before God, saying, “O Lord, forbid that I should do this, that I should drink of the blood of the men who went at [the risk of] their lives.”

Christ is the living water which quenched David’s and Adam’s thirst, as well as ours. The ‘blood of men’, that is, all human effort and sacrifice could never secure our salvation and offer eternal life. This was only achieved through the coming of the Living Water, Christ, “God before the ages.”



The Enlargement of the Heart

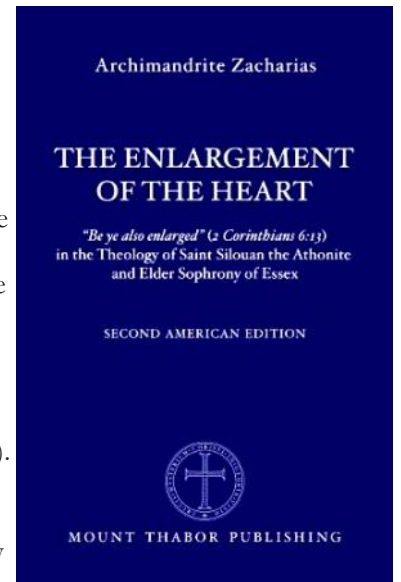
All serious Orthodox Christians will benefit from reading *The Enlargement of the Heart*. It contains a series of excellent lectures on the nature and purpose of human existence. These were given by Archimandrite Zacharias from the Monastery of St John the Baptist (Essex, UK). His lectures are based on the theology of his spiritual father, the very recently canonised St Sophrony of Essex, and his spiritual ‘grand-father’ St Silouan the Athonite.

The lectures cover a range of topics, including “*Man’s Birth into Eternal Life*”, “*Prayer: the Way of Creation*”, and “*Spiritual Fatherhood as a Ministry of Reconciliation between Man and God*”, as well as a 30-page analysis of the famous commandment given to St Silouan on how to avoid pride: to “*keep your mind in hell, and despair not*”.

It is fitting that such spiritually challenging topics are illuminated through the theology of two modern spiritual giants of the Church, and not mere academic leaders. True theology, after all, is not the study of God, but the experience of God, and both St Silouan and St Sophrony have experienced God in a way few others have. This lends an authenticity to the experiences and lessons contained within the book.

One major advantage of *The Enlargement of the Heart* is its lecture-style format, complete with the questions that were posed to Archimandrite Zacharias as well as the answers he gave. This makes the presentation of otherwise challenging theological material much more engaging, and the Q&A section often contains questions that the reader themselves might have.

Ultimately, the unifying theme of the book is found in the title, which is a reference to 2 Corinthians 6:13. In that passage St Paul urges the Corinthians to open wide and enlarge their hearts. Similarly, *The Enlargement of the Heart* challenges all of us to embrace the true nature of human existence: to become like God, which means to become all-love.





HOLY MATRIMONY

Marriage is a sacrament of the Church through which the union of man and woman is blessed by God. That Jesus chose a wedding to enact His first earthly miracle is the most profound indication of the dignity attributed to the union of man and woman by God.

The primary purpose of marriage is to unite two people into a communion of love for their mutual companionship and as an aid to *theosis*, or sanctification, being the attainment of the Eternal Kingdom. As read by the priest at the end of the service “take their Crowns unto Your kingdom and preserve them blameless, guileless and unstained unto the ages of ages. Amen.”

In marrying, spouses learn God’s commandment to “love thy neighbour as thy self.” In giving up their individual will and accepting the other’s will, the spouse learns to sacrifice for the other, just as Christ sacrificed Himself for the Church.

The Marriage service is full of ritual and symbolism that reflects the theology of the church. It is comprised of two parts being the Betrothal Service (Engagement) with the official blessing of the rings, and the Marriage Service with the crowning of the Bride and Groom. Orthodox marriage is not viewed as a legal contract, and there are no oaths or vows made.

Prayers are read asking God to set an unbroken unity on the couple blessing them with peace, oneness of mind and a spirit of truth and love. Praying for their salvation, preserving them in the faith and granting them an honourable marriage.

The celebration of Marriage contains the same elements as the sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation, as well as the Eucharist:

(1) **The offering** - in the Eucharist the bread and wine is offered whilst in marriage the Church offers the bride and

groom who in turn offer themselves to one and another and to God;

(2) **The anamnesis**, or memorial, in the Eucharist consists of grateful evocation of Christ’s whole work of salvation and in the celebration of marriage we recall with gratitude: the historic Old Testament miracles performed by God for married couples, the mystical model of Christ’s marriage to the Church, and the wedding in Cana;

(3) **The epiclesis** or invocation in which the Holy Spirit is asked to effect the same miracles on this particular occasion. In the Eucharist it is the transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ whilst in marriage it is the “crown them with glory and honour” in which they are transformed into a living cell of Christ’s Body.

The crowns placed on the couple also symbolise victory for those who “have fought the good fight” of the Christian life and the couple are crowned king and queen of their own household. At the same time the hymns remind them that they are to live virtuous lives as did the Saints and Martyrs whose faith and sacrifice they are called to emulate. In this way they become witnesses (martyrs) to the faith and heirs of the Kingdom;

(4) **The communion**, or the couple’s participation in the life of the Kingdom. The man and woman united by the Holy Spirit are now united in Christ. The cup of wine, from which the bride and the bridegroom drink together, is shared as a sign of that unity. It is also in remembrance of the miraculous wine at the wedding in Cana. In addition, it is a relic of the practice which up until the fifteenth century included

Communion with pre-sanctified Gifts.

The Priest performs the Dance of Isaiah whilst holding the Holy Gospel in his hands and leading the couple three times around the ceremonial table. This highlights the Church’s prayerful desire that the couple will walk through life led by the infallible and secure Word of God and inspired by the Church.



NEWS and VIEWS

Sunday School Concerts

The Sunday Schools of the Orthodox parishes of Sydney held their annual concerts throughout the months of November and December.

His Eminence, Archbishop Makarios wrote the following message in a memento given to all the children: “My dear child, I feel great joy as the Almighty God has deemed me worthy to communicate with you for the first time, following my appointment as Archbishop of Australia on the occasion of the end of another successful year for our Sunday Schools.

As you may have found during these lessons, we strive to give you all the provisions for life and, at the same time, to ‘breathe into’ you timeless values, such as respect for your parents and fellow human beings, offering to people in need, love, friendship, but most importantly faith in Christ who is the Guarantor of success and happiness in our lives.

In the difficult times we are living in when even basic values are in crisis, Sunday School becomes more necessary than ever. Therefore, I would like to thank you personally for your presence at Sunday School in the past year, and invite you to attend our Sunday School in the next school year.

To the young people leaving to study in Colleges and Universities, I wish you strength and all the best for your future. I warmly ask you not to forget that whatever happens to you, the Church’s embrace will always be open for you.

With paternal wishes and love in Christ,
Your Archbishop MAKARIOS of Australia.”



The students of the Sydney Parishes of St Nicholas, St George, and St Stylianos performing at their concerts.

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