



# ΛΥΧΝΟΣ

A GREEK ORTHODOX PERIODICAL FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

«Λύχνος τοῖς ποσὶ  
μου ὁ νόμος σου  
καὶ φῶς ταῖς  
τρίβοις μου»

Ψαλμ 118, 105

Volume 36, Issue 1

DECEMBER - JANUARY 2021



**T**his year was definitely one for the history books with so many changes, rules and restrictions that affected all people everywhere. These life changing events included lockdowns, isolation, quarantine, wearing face masks, working from home, worshipping from home, panic buying, religious and national days cancelled and so on.

Some time ago, another life changing event happened. However this was not life threatening and to the dread of humanity, but rather it brought life and was in accordance with God's perfect will and absolute love for us. This event surpassed all historical events before and since, being the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was so significant that it divided history into two, that is Before Christ (BC) and Anno Domini (AD, being Latin for "in the year of our Lord").

Despite its eternal significance, this event at the time remained mostly unnoticed by the world. Besides Mary and Joseph, only some local shepherds were immediately present, and the Magi visited later. "So humble is our Lord, that He being God did not consider it robbery to take the form of a servant and become man" (Philippians 2:6-7). Can you imagine, the incarnate God who is co-creator with the Father and the Holy Spirit, refers to Himself not as Saviour, or Lord, or Son of God, but as "the son of man." What humility! What love! What a God!

But the question must be asked, "why did God become human?" We know that after the tragic fall of Adam and Eve, creation was left disconnected from the Creator and plunged into spiritual darkness. It was necessary then for "the light of the world" to be manifest into the world to guide mankind out of this darkness (John 8:12). His birth ushered in the age of grace whereby those who believe become a new

creation, reconciled to God through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). The Evangelist alludes to this when he writes that the Holy Spirit will come upon and overshadow the Virgin (Luke 1:35), in the same way the Spirit of God moved over the waters before creation (Genesis 1:2).

The angels chant "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). This *peace* refers to the reconciliation of Heaven and Earth and our reconciliation with God. The *good will* (ευδοκία), according to St Nikodemos the Hagiorite, suggests that the Incarnation was the original will of

God so as to give humanity the ability to become deified, to become "godly" by grace. This was only possible through the hypostatic union of the divine (uncreated) and human (created) natures of Christ. Thus Jesus would always have lovingly united Himself with His creation, whom he made in His image and likeness, and the Incarnation was not in response to mankind's fall.

What changed in the original plan was that the fall of Adam and Eve brought mankind's need to attain

salvation and be reconciled eternally to God through the crucifixion, death and resurrection of the God-man Christ. A new beginning for humanity, a restart which commenced with the Incarnation of Christ.

May this Christmas and new year be a new beginning for all of us. Not merely a return to a "new normal", but a renewal of our spirits through Him who is the beginning and end of all things. History has taught us that events come and go, that importance and urgency today is forgotten and neglected tomorrow, but the mercy and love of God endures forever. If we accept this, our lives will not be reduced to a meaningless series of events, but will be unique opportunities that lead us to the Heavenly Kingdom. A Merry and Blessed Christmas!



# ΤΑΠΕΙΝΩΣΙΣ

# ΚΑΙ ΧΑΡΙΣ



**Ο**λοι μας αγωνιζόμαστε για την τελειότητα. Εν τούτοις, δεν υπάρχει, ούτε και θα υπάρξει στο κόσμο αυτό, άνθρωπος τέλειος. Μόνο ο Θεός είναι τέλειος. Για τον κάθε άνθρωπο αρμόζουν τα λόγια του προφητάνακτος: **«ιδού γαρ εν ανομίαις συνελήφθην και εν αμαρτίαις εκίσσησέ με η μήτηρ μου»** (Ψαλ. 50).

Εκείνος που θεωρεί τον εαυτό του σπουδαίο, εκείνος που βλέπει τις τάχατες αρετές του, και νομίζει πως είναι σωσμένος, αυτός βρίσκεται έξω από την Εκκλησία και πολύ μακριά από το σωτήριο φως του Θεού. Γι' αυτό η αληθινή ταπείνωση αναπηδά όχι από την αυτοεκτίμηση αλλά από τη συγκλονιστική ενθύμηση των αμαρτημάτων μας.

Οι ρίζες των αρετών είναι βυθισμένες και τρέφονται από την ταπεινοφροσύνη του ανθρώπου, από το αγιασμένο τούτο φρόνημα που μας κάνει να αποστρέφουμε το βλέμμα μας από τον εαυτό μας, και να κοιτάζουμε τον αδελφό μας με υπομονή και ειλικρινή αγάπη. Ο ταπεινόφρων γνωρίζει πολύ καλά πως δεν σώζεται από τα έργα του - όσο καλά και να 'ναι - αλλά από τη χάρη, το έλεος, και την Αγάπη του Θεού.



Στη **«Μίμηση του Χριστού»**, ο ευλαβής συγγραφέας γράφει **«πρέπει να θυμάσαι τις αμαρτίες σου με βαθύτατο πόνο και μεγάλη λύπη και να μη φαντασθείς ποτέ ότι είσαι κάτι για τα καλά έργα που έκαμες. Επειδή στην πραγματικότητα δεν είσαι παρά ένας αμαρτωλός υποταγμένος στα πολλά σου πάθη»**.

Δυστυχώς, οι άνθρωποι που έχουν το φρόνημα του κόσμου κι όχι του Θεού, τρέμουν τις ταπεινώσεις που μπορεί να υποστούν και πληγώνονται βαθιά όταν χρειαστεί να ταπεινωθούν. Νομίζουν πως το σπουδαιότερο πράγμα στο κόσμο είναι η λεγόμενη αξιοπρέπεια, δηλαδή η υπερηφάνεια, η οίηση, και η εσωτερική κουφότητα του ανθρώπου.

Δεν καταλαβαίνουν, γιατί δεν έχουν το φωτισμό του Αγίου Πνεύματος, πως αληθινά αξιοπρεπείς είναι

οι ταπεινοί που δεν προσβάλλουν τον Θεό και δεν αντιστέκονται στη χάρη της αγάπης Του.

Ο Απόστολος Ιάκωβος στην καθολική επιστολή του, μας συμβουλεύει **«ο Θεός υπερηφάνους αντιτάσσεται, ταπεινοί δε δίδωσι χάριν»** (Ιακ. δ'6). Ο Θεός πάει αντίθετα στους υπερηφάνους που για τις ηδονές τους, περιφρονούν το Θεό και το θέλημά Του και προτιμούν το κόσμο παρά το Θεό, ενώ στους ταπεινούς που απαρνούνται τις ηδονές τους και το κόσμο για χάρη του Θεού, τους δίνει τη χάρη Του. (Ερμ. Π. Τρεμπέλα)

Αλλοίμονο, ο κόσμος μας σήμερα είναι βυθισμένος στην ανομία. Σαν άτομα, σαν κοινωνίες και σαν έθνη, αμαρτάνουμε εξακολουθητικά και θεληματικά εναντίον του Θεού και του Ευαγγελίου Του. Μια διαστροφή των συνειδήσεων έχει επέλθει και οι άνθρωποι δεν αναγνωρίζουν πια το κακό, τα αμαρτήματά τους, τι είναι σωστό στα «μάτια» του Θεού, και τι νόμιμο. Πουθενά λόγος για μετάνοια, για συντριβή της καρδιάς, για αποκατάσταση της Αλήθειας του Θεού. Μας λείπει το έντονο, σταθερό, πνευματικότατο φως της ταπεινοφροσύνης. Μας λείπει η συνειδητά χριστιανική ζωή.

Ετοιμαζόμαστε να γιορτάσουμε Χριστούγεννα αυτές τις μέρες. Μη μας διαφύγει λοιπόν το γεγονός πως ο θείος μας Λυτρωτής για να φέρει εις πέρας το μεγάλο έργο της σωτηρίας μας, την ταπεινοφροσύνη εντύθηκε.

Ο Ίδιος ταπεινώθηκε και ευλόγησε την ταπείνωση **«Μάθετε απ' εμού, ότι πράος ειμί και ταπεινός τη καρδία, και ευρήσετε ανάπαυσιν ταις ψυχαίς υμών»** (Ματθ. ια' 29). Μάθετε από μένα ότι είμαι πράος και ταπεινός στο φρόνημα και την εσωτερική διάθεση και θα βρείτε ανάπαυση και γαλήνη στις ψυχές σας. (Ερμ. Π. Τρεμπέλα)

Ο Κύριος του ουρανού και της γης ήρθε στο κόσμο με άκρα ταπείνωση. Αν είμαστε σωστοί μιμητές Του, να δεχτούμε την ταπείνωση ως κανόνα ζωής. Να μοσχοβολήσει όλος ο βίος μας από την ευωδία της ταπεινοφροσύνης. Σίγουρα τότε και η θεία χάρη του Κυρίου θα μένει για πάντα μαζί μας.



# Current Issues

## Our Byzantine Heritage – A Proud Past!

The Byzantine Empire had its origin in the early 4th century when Constantine the Great moved Rome, which was then the capital of the Roman Empire, to a little known Hellenic town of Byzantium. This town straddled the Straits of Bosphorus, in today's Turkey, and it marks the meeting point between Asia and Europe.

The view from the shore was unbelievably exotic, littered with numerous little beaches in the beautifully expansive Sea of Marmara on one end, and the Straits of Dardanelles at the other end. The site was strategic in controlling trade between the Mediterranean and the Black seas.

The Empire reigned for 11 centuries until the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the longest period of any empire on earth, and as "New Rome" it was a continuation of the Roman Empire.

The history of the Empire was written by numerous people, but none from firsthand knowledge. This mammoth task was extensively undertaken by a non-Hellene, the Englishman and accomplished historian Sir Steven Runciman. For this purpose, Sir Steven learnt all the languages of the Middle East: Arabic, Iranian, Turkish, Hebrew, Syrian, Armenian, and Georgian. Since childhood he was speaking Greek and Latin fluently. In his period in England, "doing classics" was the hallmark of a well-educated person.

All his efforts in learning languages and studying history were directed towards one objective - to study the history of Byzantium first hand. In this he succeeded beyond his dreams, because he is now recognised world-wide as a key authority on the Byzantine Empire: its history, culture, religion, and its society.

Sir Runciman studied all the written sources about his subject, and also studied the archaeological sites and writings. He wrote about Byzantium with love and respect, using exquisite language for the purpose.

The spiritual and intellectual stature of the religious people in Byzantium made a marked impression on him. He mentions the Cappadocian Fathers,

John Chrysostom, Patriarch Photios, Bryenios, Symeon the new Theologian, Gregory Palamas, and others. He exalts the advanced state of art, science and medicine.

He remains amazed at the remarkable and peaceful cooperation between Church and State for most of the existence of the Empire. Sir Steven does not ignore the machinations both within Church and State, and between one another, and he does not hide them or forgive them.

However, he appears to nurture in his heart a very tender feeling for the Orthodox Church. In an interview with the Greek Journal *Pemptousia* in July 2000, he said that he is greatly disappointed by the Western Churches, but was glad that in the next 100 years, Orthodoxy will be the only historical Church in existence!

Following this dramatic statement, he was again asked what can Orthodoxy offer to Europe and the World. He said that Orthodoxy has the great advantage of not projecting nationalism among its teachings. Furthermore, it offers the individual more broad and free views, compared to the Catholic Church.

Because of his intellect, education, and upright personality, he taught at many Universities, including that of Constantinople on Byzantine history and of Athens. He also served in several diplomatic positions for his country.

He published many books, with those pertinent to Byzantium being: *A History of the Crusades* (1951-54: Vols 1 to 3), *The Fall of Constantinople* (1965), and *The Great Church in Captivity* (1968).

He was decorated by the Hellenic Nation with the Gold Medal of the city of Athens and the Medal of Onassis. Whilst Sir Runciman had personal blemishes the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew nevertheless saw fit to decorate him when he visited London in 1996.

Sir Steven Runciman died in November 2000 leaving behind a most grateful Orthodox Church, which he presented and projected to the World in its true nature and the possible light.



## Από Τους Αγίους Της Εκκλησίας Μας

**Ο Άγιος Γερμανός της Αλάσκας**  
(Η μνήμη του τιμάται στις 13ης Δεκεμβρίου)

Ο Άγιος Γερμανός της Αλάσκας γεννήθηκε το 1756 στο Σέρπουκοβ της Ρωσίας και από μικρός τον διακατείχε ένας μεγάλος ζήλος για τον Χριστό. Σε ηλικία 16 χρονών, είχε μια θαυματουργική εμπειρία όταν επισκέφτηκε τη Λαύρα της Αγίας Τριάδος – Αγίου Σεργίου κοντά στην Πετρούπολη. Του παρουσιάστηκε μια πληγή στο λαιμό του, που άρχισε όλο να διογκώνεται, τελικά δημιουργώντας δυσκολίες στην κατάποση τροφής και παραμορφώνοντας το πρόσωπό του. Τη νύχτα, παρέμεινε στο κελί που παραχωρούσαν στους επισκέπτες, προσευχόμενος αδιαλείπτως ενώπιον της εικόνας της Θεοτόκου μέχρι να αποκοιμηθεί. Το πρωί, η πληγή είχε εξαφανισθεί.

Μετά από 5 χρόνια, πήγε στη Μονή Βαλαάμ κοντά στην Φιλανδία για να μονάσει. Ενώ ήταν εκεί, μαζί με 9 άλλους μοναχούς, επιλέχθηκε για να επιτελέσουν Ιεραποστολή στο Νησί Κοδιάκ στη Βόρεια Αμερική. Το ταξίδι διήρκεσε ένα χρόνο και φτάνοντας εκεί το 1794, αρχίζουν να διακονούν τους ιθαγενείς Αλεούτους και πολλοί έγιναν Χριστιανοί. Στη συνέχεια, κτίστηκαν σχολεία και Ιεροί Ναοί.

Αργότερα, ο Άγιος Γερμανός μετακόμισε στο Νησί Σπρους της Αλάσκας, και στην αρχή κατοίκησε σε μια σπηλιά.

Εκδήλωνε υποδειγματικά την αρετή της ταπεινώσεως. Κοιμόταν πάνω σε ένα ξύλινο πάγκο, και έβαζε τα συμφέροντα των άλλων πάνω από τα δικά του. Δεχόταν πολλούς επισκέπτες, έκτισε σχολείο για τα ορφανά, και είχε ιδιαίτερη αδυναμία για τους Αλεούτους. Κατά τη διάρκεια μιας πανδημίας που είχε πλήξει τη περιοχή, εργάστηκε ακούραστα για να περιποιηθεί τους ασθενείς και να παρηγορήσει τους ετοιμοθάνατους, χωρίς να λογαριάζει τη δική του υγεία.

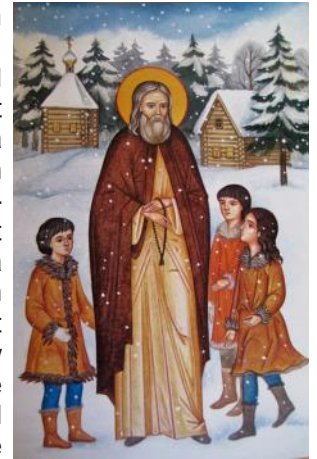
Αφιέρωσε όλη τη ζωή του στην διακονία του Κυρίου, αγωνιζόμενος με ζήλο στο ιεραποστολικό του έργο. Μετέστρεψε πολλούς στη Χριστιανική πίστη. Τέλος κοιμήθη εν Θεώ ειρηνικά στο κελί του στο Νησί Σπρους, σε ηλικία 81 χρονών στις 13ης Δεκεμβρίου, 1837.

Κατατάχθηκε επισήμως στο αγιολόγιο της Εκκλησίας σαν ο πρώτος Αμερικανός Άγιος στις 9 Αυγούστου, 1970 και θεωρείται ως ο προστάτης Άγιος της Βόρειας Αμερικής.

## From the Saints of our Church

**St Herman of Alaska Wonderworker of America**  
(Commemorated on 13 December)

Saint Herman was born in 1756 in Serpukhov, Russia and had a great zeal for Christ from his youth. At the age of sixteen he had a miraculous encounter when visiting the Holy Trinity-Sergius Hermitage near St Petersburg. He had noticed a sore on his neck that began to grow large, making it difficult for him to swallow and disfiguring his face. He remained inside his cell and prayed unceasingly before the icon of the Theotokos until he fell asleep. In the morning the sore had disappeared.



After five years he went to the Valaam Monastery near Finland. While there, he and nine other monks were chosen to go to Kodiak Island in North America for missionary work. The pilgrimage took one year. Having arrived in 1794, they began to minister to the natives known as Aleuts, and many became Christians. Moreover, schools were established and churches built.

Saint Herman later moved to Spruce Island (Alaska) where he initially lived in a cave. He exemplified the virtue of humility, sleeping on a wooden bench and putting others before himself. He received many visitors and built a school for orphans and was particularly fond of the Aleuts.

During an epidemic he worked tirelessly to care for the sick and console the dying, disregarding his own well-being.

Having dedicated his life to the Lord's service, striving with zeal to conduct his missionary work and converting many to Christianity, he passed away peacefully in his cell on Spruce Island at the age of 81 on 13 December 1837. He was canonised as the First American Saint on 9 August 1970, and is considered by many as the patron saint of North America.





# Questions & Answers

A clergyman of our Archdiocese answers ...

## *What is the significance of the blessing of the waters?*

The feast of Epiphany celebrates the Baptism of Christ by St John the Forerunner. On this day, and on the day before (5 January), the Church performs the Great Blessing Service during which the Bishop or Priest calls upon the Holy Spirit to bless the waters. In many parts of the world around this time there is also another Blessing Service during which huge crowds go to the sea or river and those waters are blessed as well.

As we all know, we use water to clean. St John of Damascus says that Christ was not baptised because he had a need for cleansing, but rather that He appropriated our need for cleansing.

The same Saint goes on to explain that there existed an impression that demons lurked in water. Christ was baptised to destroy the heads of the demons, to wash us of sin and to bury in the water the old Adam.

Christ was baptized and became a model and example for our perfect Baptism which occurs with water and the Holy Spirit.

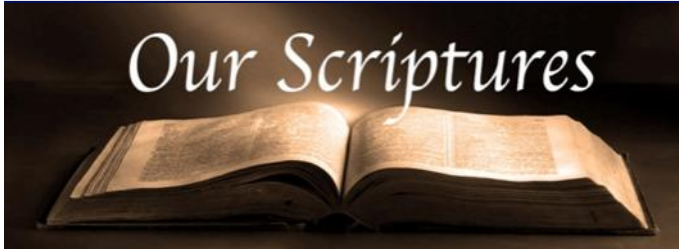
St Gregory the Theologian describes five types of baptism: (1) the baptism of Moses, which brought only temporary cleansing; (2) the baptism of St John the Forerunner, who baptized the people with the baptism of repentance; (3) the baptism of Christ, by which people become Christians and which occurs through the action of the Holy Spirit; (4) the baptism of martyrdom and blood; and, (5) the baptism of repentance and tears.

We can take two key spiritual lessons in these concepts. First, we must not fall into despair. One may have been led astray and fallen deeply into a life of sin. Sometimes people come to their senses and feel enormous shame for the sins they have committed, but believe there is no hope for them. They feel they can never return to the Church and they despair of their own salvation. The truth is that they can be cleansed, and with the help of Christ and the Church they can be transformed.

This blessed journey of return begins with repentance and confession - a spiritual guide is needed and miracles of repentance do occur. It may not be easy but if they surrender themselves to Christ and come to love Christ, bad habits and passions can be broken.



The second lesson is that if the demons do not use despair to keep us away from Christ, they may use pride and complacency. Jesus said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13). If we believe we are righteous, if we are constantly excusing ourselves, if we find fault in others and never in ourselves, then Jesus did not come for us. The truth is that we are all sinners. If we honestly examine even a section of one of our days, we will discover many feelings, thoughts, words and actions that are sinful, wrong, foolish and bad. We all need to be cleansed and transformed by Christ. As we say in the Liturgy, "may we complete the remainder of our life in peace and repentance." † Fr D. K.



## We are heirs of God through Christ (Galatians 4:4-7)

4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

There are many striking features to this passage, which is read on Christmas. Although it is the shortest reading in the Orthodox Church year, these four verses summarise the essence of the Christian message: how Christ fundamentally changes our relationship with God from a slave obedient to the Law (before the advent Christ) to the freedom of sonship.

It was God’s plan from the beginning of creation to provide a way to save man. In verse 4, the “fullness of time” refers to the historic significance of Jesus’ birth (God becoming man). Panagia was a central part of this plan, and Jesus’ birth is the fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham that salvation would come through his seed. In verse 5, we see how Jesus became one of us, born under the Law, to show us the path of salvation. Prior to the Incarnation, the Jews were under the Law. Although the Law prepared the Jews for salvation, it did not actually save. Jesus, as He is revealed in the four Gospels, frees us from the Law and makes us adopted sons of God.

In verse 6, we are told that as sons, God sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts so that we can have an intimate relationship with Him, and call Him “Father.” We can only call God “Father” because of faith in Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. As verse 7 makes clear, through our faith in Jesus, we become adopted sons and gods by Grace. In the Divine Liturgy, we pray just prior to, and in preparation for, the Lord’s Prayer: “And make us worthy, Master, that we may with boldness and without condemnation dare to call upon you, the heavenly God, as Father, and say.”

Christmas is a time to consider our relationship with God. This reading contains many important messages that are worthy of meditation all year round.

## From the Holy Fathers...

### St John Chrysostom: And the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us (John 1:14)

In commencing Homily 11 on the Gospel of St John the laity are first exhorted by St John Chrysostom to study the Scriptures. Then he turns his attention to explain the phrase: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

He explains that the Word becoming flesh is an “ineffable honour” – transforming humanity. The condescension of Christ, the Master, in taking on the form of his servants allowed humanity to be elevated from “disgrace and darkness, to glory unspeakable”, without diminishing the glory of God.

The word “became” was considered important by the Saint as it anticipated the attacks of those who would deny the true Incarnation of Christ. It was not “an appearance, an act, an allegory”, but “His assuming of real flesh.” Again, St John emphasises that this did not change the Divine substance, only where it dwelt.

Dwelling in flesh, God the Word and flesh became one and raised up “the tabernacle of David that had fallen” (Amos 9:11). Humanity needed this, as it could not be raised up in any other way but through Christ, the God-man. Taking on human nature was not a temporary dwelling, but is “always with Him.”

In concluding, St John reminds us that it is our time to repay Christ for his mercy by avoiding worthless occupations which distract and divert us, and by looking after our souls. This is beneficial to us, for it is “utter madness and worthy of untold punishments” not to do so.







## St Nicholas the Wonderworker

**I**n the old days (ie. Old Testament), the incorporeal and infinite God was never depicted. Now, however, when God has been seen clothed in flesh, and talking with mortals, I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter, I worship the God of matter, who became matter for my sake, and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter.

It is fitting that we remember St John of Damascus on December 4, three weeks before the Incarnation of our Lord. St John, the defender of icons during the iconoclast period in the 8th Century, wrote on how God becoming man validated the use of images to “worship the God of matter.”

Two days after St John’s feast day we celebrate St Nicholas, the holy Archbishop of Myra, Wonderworker, and Father of our Church – whose icon we will examine. St Nicholas is

recognised by the faithful as the intercessor for seafarers. For this reason, fishermen, sailors and seaports throughout the world honour the saint.

The 14th Century church of St Nicholas ‘Orphanos’ is a half hour, uphill walk from the port of Thessaloniki. It is a church renowned for the well-preserved frescoes which have covered its interior walls since its 1310 to 1320 construction.

The first image that meets the pilgrim, directly opposite the entry and above the door to the nave, is the much repainted depiction of St Nicholas surrounded by fishermen in a boat.



The fresco is damaged, however, to the right of the boat, St Nicholas is also depicted lifting a man out of the waves. It is symbolic that this icon rests above the door to the nave, as the word “nave” stems from the Greek word for “boat.” This reminds the worshipper that in entering the Church we enter the Ark of Salvation.

According to the Synaxarion, when travelling to the Holy Land St Nicholas calmed the winds of the storm which threatened the ship. Through his prayers he also healed one of the sailors who had fallen from the mast. After his death, the saint miraculously assisted many ships. In one account, likely the one depicted in the icon, he appeared at the helm of a ship caught in a storm and delivered it safely to port. Another account describes how a man who had fallen overboard called upon the saint and, to the astonishment of his family, found himself at his home.

Moreover, the image of the boat in iconography is frequently used to represent the Church with Christ as the Helmsman. In fact, in both of the depictions in the icon we are reminded of events in the life of Jesus: calming the seas, and lifting Peter out of the waves.

Through such icons we recognise that the beauty of iconography lies in its considered depiction of the life of Christ and the saints in assisting us to “worship the God of matter.” We call upon St Nicholas to strengthen and guide us so that we can navigate the storms and tribulations of life, and arrive at the port of our loving God with faith and reverence.

## Ο Άγιος Ιγνάτιος Αντιοχείας ο «Θεοφόρος»

**Κ**ατά την πορεία μας προς την εορτή των Χριστουγέννων, η Εκκλησία μας καλεί να ετοιμάσουμε την καρδιά μας ώστε να μπορεί να γεννηθεί εκεί ο Χριστός μας.

Όταν κατασκηνώσει στην καρδιά του πιστού ο Θεός τότε φλογίζεται όλος ο άνθρωπος, γεμίζει από θείο ζήλο. Ζει και πεθαίνει για τον Χριστό.

Ένα παράδειγμα τέτοιου ανθρώπου είναι ο Άγιος Ιγνάτιος ο θεοφόρος, ο οποίος γεννήθηκε στη Συρία. Πρωτοχριστιανική παράδοση μας λέει πως αυτός ήταν το παιδί που ο Κύριος είχε πάρει στα χέρια Του όταν δίδασκε στα Ιεροσόλυμα και είπε «... εάν μη στραφήτε και γένησθε ως τα παιδιά, ου μη εισέλθητε εις την βασιλείαν των ουρανών» (Ματθ. ιη'3).

Ο Ιγνάτιος ανετράφη με τους Αποστόλους και απήλαυσε τα πνευματικά τους νάματα. Κατά πάσαν πιθανότητα μαζί με τον σύγχρονο του Πολύκαρπο Σμύρνης υπήρξαν μαθητές του Αγ. Ιωάννου του Θεολόγου. Στον επισκοπικό θρόνο της Αντιοχείας ανέβηκε το 70 μ.Χ. περίπου.

Όταν ο αυτοκράτορας Τραϊανός διέταξε διωγμό εναντίον των Χριστιανών, ο Ιγνάτιος υπεράσπισε τα της Εκκλησίας και υποστήριξε την αλήθεια της πίστεως μας.

Ο Τραϊνός διέταξε να συλλάβουν τον Ιγνάτιο και να τον πάνε στη Ρώμη.

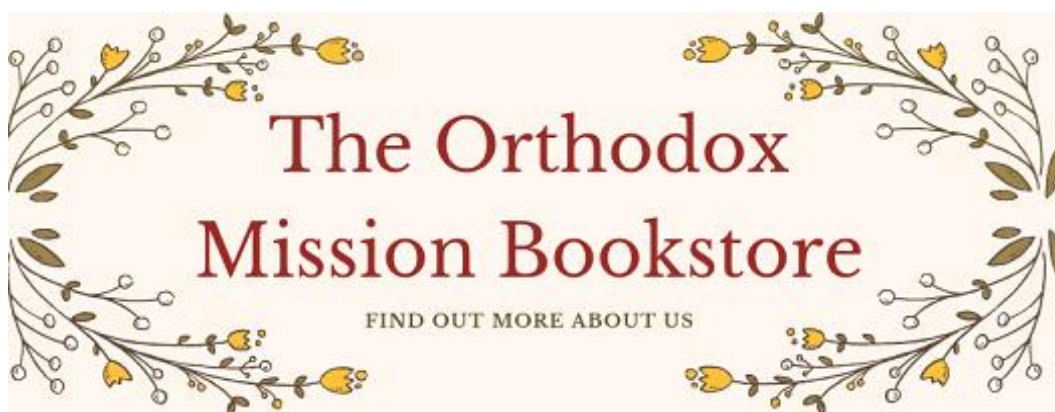
Οι Χριστιανοί εκεί προσπάθησαν, να σώσουν τον Άγιο από το μαρτύριο, αλλά αυτός τους έλεγε «μη με εμποδίζετε να με φάνε τα λιοντάρια διότι ο εμός έρωσ εσταύρωται».

Τα άγρια Θηρία εξαπολύονται πάνω του. Τα φοβερά δόντια τους σχίζουν τις σάρκες του. Μα ο μάρτυς χαίρεται που μαρτυρεί για τον Χριστό. Οι ειδωλολάτρες μαινούνται, μα οι χριστιανοί θαυμάζουν την τόλμη του.

Μαρτύρησε το 108 μ.Χ. και γιορτάζουμε την μνήμη του στις 20 Δεκεμβρίου.



Είθε το φλογερό παράδειγμα του Άγ Ιγνατίου να μας συγκινήσει και να γίνει οδοδείκτης στην δική μας πορεία προς την συνάντησή μας με τον νεογέννητο Ιησού αυτά τα Χριστούγεννα.



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## From The Old Testament



### Abraham and Melchizedek

In Genesis 14 we read the story of how Abraham warred against the King of Sodom to rescue Lot. After his success, Abraham met a mysterious man named Melchizedek, King of Salem, who is described as a “priest of God Most High” (Gen 14:18). Melchizedek's name and title respectively translate as “King of Righteousness” and “King of Peace.” Melchizedek then blessed Abraham and, in turn, Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe.

This event is remarkable. Abraham was the father of the Jews and God had directly made a covenant with him, yet he made an offering to Melchizedek. Thus, St. Paul writes, “now consider how great this man [Melchizedek] was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils” (Hebrews 7:4). Despite his evident holiness, Melchizedek is a highly mysterious figure as he does not appear elsewhere in Genesis. We do not know anything about his ancestry, his genealogy, or his life.

We do know, however, that Melchizedek is considered by the Church Fathers as a type or symbol of Christ. Indeed, the Psalmist writes that the Messiah will be “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 109:4).

St Paul expands on this theme heavily in his Epistle to the Hebrews where he discusses the difference between the earthly priesthood of the Levites and the eternal priesthood of Melchizedek. The former is comprised of ordinary humans who make sacrifices on behalf of the people as an intercession to God. Although those sacrifices are beneficial, they are ultimately imperfect and incomplete as the priests themselves are unholy.

To properly unite man with God, it was necessary for there to be a new (and holier) priest together with a new sacrifice. This was fulfilled by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Nativity. Unlike the earthly priesthood, the priesthood of Christ according to the order of Melchizedek is eternal and has the power to transform us, when we let it.



### Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica

Elder Thaddeus (Strabulovich) of Vitovnica was one of the greatest modern Serbian elders. He was born in 1914 in Vitovnica in Serbia to working class parents, and was named Tomislav.

At the age of 15 he was told by doctors that he only had five years to live. He joined the monastery of Milkovo in Serbia where he became a novice under the guidance of Russian monks who had fled there due to persecution.

Among the Russians at Milkovo was Elder Ambrose, a disciple of the Optina Fathers. It was from him that Fr Thaddeus learned the Jesus Prayer.

After the repose of his Elder he moved to the Gornjak monastery and was tonsured in 1935. Later that year he was ordained a hierodeacon, and in 1938 he was ordained a hieromonk in the Rakovica monastery in Belgrade. During World War II, like many other Serbian churchmen, he was arrested by the Gestapo.

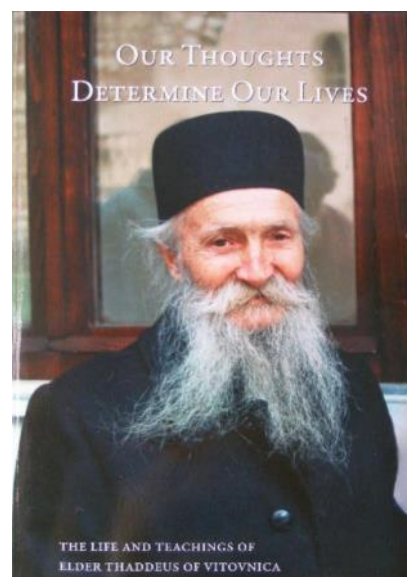
After first being made an abbot in 1949, Elder Thaddeus became the hegumen at Vitovnica Monastery from April 14, 1962 until the end of March 1972. He dwelt around Vitovnica for much of his remaining life.

The Elder became well-known and was greatly sought after for guidance. It is due to his many spiritual children, mostly Serbians but also Bosnian converts from Islam, that we can enjoy his life and teachings collected in the book *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives*. Here are some of his teachings:

“Our thoughts determine our whole life. If our thoughts are destructive, we will have no peace. If they are quiet, meek, and simple, our life will be the same, and we will have peace within us. It will radiate from us and influence all beings around us.”

“Work hard to have good thoughts and goodwill towards friends and enemies and you will see what good fruit you and everyone around you will receive.”

He departed this life on 13 April 2003 and is buried in the monastery of Vitovnica.





## What we Hear in Church



### Ὁρθρος των Χριστουγέννων

«Ὁ ἀχώρητος παντί, πῶς ἐχωρήθη ἐν γαστρὶ; ὁ ἐν κόλποις τοῦ Πατρὸς, πῶς ἐν ἀγκάλαις τῆς Μητρός; πάντως ὡς οἶδεν ὡς ἠθέλησε καὶ ὡς ἠϋδόκησεν· ἄσαρκος γὰρ ὢν, ἐσαρκώθη ἐκὼν· καὶ γέγονεν ὁ Ὡν ὁ οὐκ ἦν δι' ἡμᾶς· καὶ μὴ ἐκστὰς τῆς φύσεως, μετέσχε τοῦ ἡμετέρου φυράματος. Διπλοῦς ἐτέχθη, Χριστὸς τὸν ἄνω, κόσμον θέλων ἀναπληρώσαι» (Κάθισμα Γ'. Ἦχος δ').

### Service of Matins for Christmas Day

“How is he contained in a womb, whom nothing can contain? How held in his Mother’s arms, he who is in the Father’s bosom? This is all as he knows, as he wished and as he was well pleased. For being without flesh, willingly he was made flesh; and He Who Is, for our sake has become what he was not; without departing from his own nature he shared in our matter; wishing to fill the world on high, Christ was born in two natures. own nature he shared in our matter; wishing to fill the world on high, Christ was born in two natures” (Kathisma III. Mode 4).

When engaging with the awesome mystery of the incarnation of the Word of God, the hymnographers of our Church cannot fail but expose the limits of their own humanity.

However, these hymns are not just an opportunity for a display of poetic flair. They serve principally to teach us the theology of Christmas.

This hymn is filled with patristic sayings. For example, “... as he wished and as he was well pleased” is a quote of St Athanasios the Great from his Sermon on the Nativity: “He entered the Virgin’s womb as he wished, he was conceived as He was well pleased.” The phrase, “become/has become what He was not” is encountered in numerous Fathers, such as St Proclus’ Sermon on the Nativity where we read, “[f]or while remaining Who He was, He became what He was not; For he was God, and is God, and will be God.” The words “in our matter”, which was used by the Fathers to highlight the complete adoption of our own human nature by the Word of God, is likely to have first appeared in the writings of St Gregory of Nyssa, and has been borrowed and used by Saints Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, John of Damascus, Gregory Palamas and others.

But it seems that the sentiment that moves us the most in human terms, is expressed in the opening questions: “[h]ow is he contained in a womb?”, “[h]ow held in his Mother’s arms?”

These are not interrogative questions, but questions which highlight our inability as humans, as creations of God, to completely comprehend the Birth of God. It is a mystery that goes beyond all human understanding. In a way, it reflects the sentiment expressed by Panayia, Mary, the Mother of our Lord, the Bearer of God, in her question of the Archangel Gabriel, “[h]ow can this be, since I do not know a man?” (Luke 1:34).

The previous hymn of Christmas Matins has already provided us with the answer: “where God so wills, the order of nature is overcome.”



### Further Up and Further In: Orthodox Conversations with C.S. Lewis by Edith Humphrey

C.S. Lewis (1898-1964) remains one of the most prominent modern Christian authors in the West. Many of his works such as the *Chronicles of Narnia* (including *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*), *Mere Christianity* and *The Screwtape Letters* are widely read by both Christians and non-Christians to this day.

Beyond being well-written and entertaining, his writings are all deeply theological. For these reasons Professor Edith Humphrey undertook the task of conversing and comparing Lewis to Orthodox theology, drawing on some of Lewis’ less well-known works.

Each chapter covers a theme explored in Lewis’ writings, with one text by Lewis and one other text (often Orthodox) discussed in detail to delve into the theme.

This format allows the reader to gain a better understanding of Lewis’ thinking and how it both aligns and differs from the Orthodox phronema and theology.

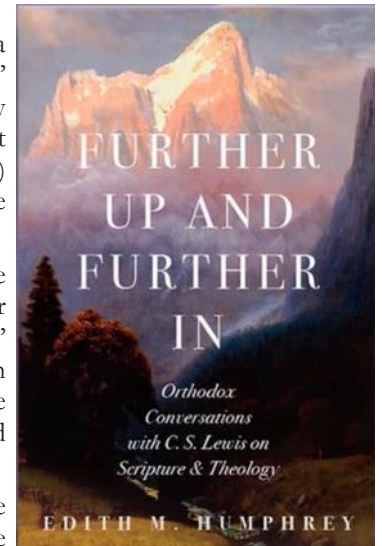
Themes explored include miracles, asceticism, justice and sacraments.

One such chapter explores Creation through a comparison of the *Chronicles of Narnia* and Fr Alexander Schmemmann’s, *For the Life of the World*. Here the creation narrative in Narnia is recounted and analysed through an Orthodox scriptural understanding and the dependence of the inhabitants of Narnia on Aslan is shown to reflect the Orthodox understanding of humanity’s relationship with God as one of love and thanksgiving.

This book takes its title, *Further Up and Further In*, from the words of the mouse Reepicheep in *The Last Battle* – the last of the Narnia books. It also reflects the aims of an Orthodox life in getting ever closer to God.

This book can assist in this struggle by allowing us to better explain our faith to outsiders and by answering some of our own doubts.

*Further Up and Further In* is by no means an easy read and can be conceptually difficult at times, but on the whole it is worthwhile reading.







*The series on our Creed continues*

**M**aker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

“O Lord, Your works shall be magnified greatly; You made all things in wisdom” (Ps. 103:24).

From Genesis to Revelation, the Scriptures overflow with expressions of great wonder and doxology towards God the Creator. Creation itself reveals God, reflecting His power, wisdom and craftsmanship. The act of creation was not something that happened ‘by chance’ or ‘by accident’, but rather it was a deliberate and free expression of God’s creative will. It was the outcome of His infinite love, wisdom and goodness; being that the created world might participate in His own blessedness and beauty.

As Creator, the Trinitarian God is ontologically distinguished from all that is created. God IS - as He revealed to Moses before the burning bush: “I AM He Who IS.” That is, He is not made, unlike all things that are created.

This great chasm between God and His creation does not, however, indicate a God Who is distant and unapproachable. Rather, through His uncreated divine energies, God is constantly present - sustaining and providing for His creation.

In Genesis 1:1, we read “In the beginning God made heaven and earth.” The famous six days of creation mentioned in Genesis are not taken literally in the Orthodox tradition. Instead, they denote vast periods of time, over which the act of creation gradually progressed and culminated with the crown of creation – Man.

St Cyril of Jerusalem, commenting on the ‘how’ of creation, states that this is an intricate mystery which cannot be analysed and understood with human capabilities. The Bible is not a scientific text explaining how the world was made, but rather proclaims Who lies behind it.



Psalm 32 proclaims the Holy Trinity as Creator of the world: “By the word of the Lord [the Son] the heavens were established, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth [the Holy Spirit]” (verse 6).

A significant teaching of our Orthodox Faith is that God created the world out of nothing (ex nihilo). That is, He brought creation “from non-being into being” (Divine Liturgy prayer). This is in stark contrast to the problematic creation beliefs of various pantheistic traditions, Manicheism and ancient philosophies, which assert that God formed the world from pre-existing matter. The Orthodox teaching highlights the ontological chasm between the Uncreated God and the created world, thus proclaiming God’s omnipotence, creation’s dependence on Him, and that creation is a product of His will.

The Scriptures and Church tradition affirm that the immaterial angelic orders came into being before the material world, after which, the irrational material world (earth, stars, water, animals, plants) was created. Last of all, Man was made in a unique manner – in the

image of God – and received the breath of life (the grace of the Holy Spirit) making him a living soul.

Man was given dominion over all living things. He was bestowed with the responsibility of transforming Himself and all of creation, leading both to a more perfect communion with God. After the fall however, as a result of sin, not only Man, but “the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs” (Romans 8:22), eagerly looking for the time of redemption, when our All-Merciful God will establish “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

*We will turn to the second article of our Creed in the next edition of Lychnos.*



# NEWS and VIEWS



## 65 Year Celebration of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society

His Eminence Archbishop Makarios visited the Greek Orthodox Christian Society at the Orthodox Mission Centre in Kingsgrove on Saturday 21 November 2020. After a short presentation of songs and chanting by our youth, His Eminence spoke in English on this year's motto: "Bear one other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2). His talk is available for viewing on the Greek Orthodox Christian Society Sydney YouTube website.



«ΛΥΧΝΟΣ» is a bimonthly publication of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society,  
under the auspices of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

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