

Lord, it is good for us to be here

Why does the Church year
begin on September 1? | 7

St Modestus on the
Dormition | 8

Book Review: The Life
of Moses by St Gregory
of Nyssa | 13

«ΑΥΧΝΟΣ ΤΟΙΣ ΠΟΙ ΜΟΥ Ο ΝΟΜΟΣ ΣΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΦΩΣ ΤΑΙΣ ΤΡΙΒΟΙΣ ΜΟΥ» ΨΑΛΜ 118, 105

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ΑΥΧΝΟΣ

A GREEK ORTHODOX PERIODICAL



« ...Τον
κόσμον ού
κατέλιπες
Θεοτόκε... »



Στη γιορτή της Κοιμήσεως της Θεοτόκου, η Εκκλησία μας ψάλλει εξαισίους ύμνους που μακαρίζουν και τιμούν την «αιμακάριστον και παναμώμητον και Μητέρα του Θεού ημών».

Χαρακτηριστικό είναι πως ενώ γιορτάζουμε την Κοίμηση της Παναγίας και θά'πρεπε, δικαιολογημένα να το θεωρούμε σαν πένθιμο και λυπητερό γεγονός, οι τόνοι της ψαλμωδίας είναι γιορταστικοί. Μάλιστα, η όλη γιορτή προσλαμβάνει τον χαρακτήρα μεγάλου πανηγυρισμού. Και αυτό γιατί η Εκκλησία πιστεύει πως η Παναγία και όταν κοιμήθηκε, δεν εγκατέλειψε το κόσμο.

Ακούμε στο Απολυτίκιο της Γιορτής: «...εν τη κοιμήσει τον κόσμον ού κατέλιπες Θεοτόκε. Μετέστης προς την ζωήν, Μητρη υπάρχουσα της ζωής».

Η Κοίμηση της Παναγίας-Μητέρας μας δεν είναι κοίμηση ενός κοινού θνητού. Γιατί εκείνη είναι που γέννησε τον Αρχηγό της Ζωής. Και επομένως ήταν πολύ φυσικό ότι Αυτήν – όπως μας πληροφορεί και το Κοντάκιον της ημέρας – «τάφος και νέκρωσις ούκ εκράτησεν, ως γαρ Ζωής Μητέρα προς την ζωήν μετέστησεν, ο μήτραν οικήσας αιπιάρθενον». Δηλ. Αυτήν που είναι η Μητέρα της Ζωής – του Κυρίου ημών Ιησού Χριστού – ούτε ο τάφος ούτε ο θάνατος μπόρεσαν να την κρατήσουν, γιατί Αυτός, ο

Υιός της και Κύριος, την μετέστησε στην αιώνια ζωή. Την μετέφερε στον ουρανό, Αυτός που πήρε την ανθρώπινη φύση Του, μέσα στην παρθενική και αγιασμένη μήτρα της.

Να λοιπόν η αιτία για τους πανηγυρικούς τόνους της Γιορτής. Βέβαια αναγνωρίζουμε πως τα λόγια μας είναι φτωχά για να μιλήσουν επάξια γι'Αυτήν. Παρά ταύτα τολμούμε γιατί νιώθουμε μια οικειότητα μ'Αυτήν, όπως τα μικρά παιδιά με τη μάνα τους. Τα χέρια της που σπαργάνωσαν, που κοίμησαν, κι' ανάθρεψαν τον Θεό και Λόγο, είναι πηγή ευεργεσιών και θαυμάτων για όλους τους Χριστιανούς. Όχι. Αυτή ποτέ δεν μας εγκατέλειψε.

Γράφει ο Φώτης Κόντογλου «Η Παναγία είναι η Μητέρα της Ορθοδοξίας. Από το πνευματικό της μύρο ευωδιάζει όχι μονάχα η Εκκλησία αλλά και ολόκληρη η ζωή μας».

Προστρέχουμε λοιπόν κοντά της, ιδιαίτερα τον 15αύγουστο, και γνωρίζοντας πως και μετά την Κοίμησή της, παραμένει κοντά μας επικαλούμεθα τη Χάρη της.

Ζητούμε απ'Αυτήν την παρηγοριά, τη προστασία, την μεσιτεία της, την άμεση βοήθεια, ακόμη και την «πάσαν ελπίδα μας» σ'Αυτήν την αναθέτουμε.

Πλήθος τα θαύματα της Παναγίας

στο πλήρωμα της εκκλησίας μας. Όποιος την επικαλέσθηκε δεν έφυγε ποτέ με άδεια χέρια από κοντά της. Ιδιαίτερα στις ώρες του πόνου ή του άμεσου κινδύνου, σ'Αυτήν – σαν από ένστικτο – στρεφόμαστε.

Και όταν οι θλίψεις και οι ανάγκες της ζωής μας κυκλώνουν από παντού, ή η αρρώστια χτυπά την πόρτα μας, τα χείλη μας χωρίς καν να σκεφθούν, θα ψελλίσουν δυό μόνο λέξεις: «Παναγία μου!...».

Μήπως και μεις, αφού τόσα πολλά της χρωστούμε, θά'πρεπε κάτι να κάνουμε προς τιμήν της; Και πρώτα απ'όλα – Μια προσπάθεια μίμησης των αρετών της. Η αγνότητά της πάντα θα ελέγχει τον τρυφηλό και αμαρτωλό κόσμο μας. Η σεμνότητα και η ταπεινοφροσύνη της ελέγχει την οίηση και την επίδειξη της τεχνολογίας μας. Η υπακοή της στο θείο θέλημα μας θυμίζει πως η αληθινή ζωή του αυθεντικού ανθρώπου αρχίζει από τη στιγμή που το θέλημά του βρίσκεται σε τέλεια αρμονία με το θέλημα του Θεού Πατρός.

Τέλος, η αγάπη και αφοσίωσή της στο Θεό και Υιό της μας θυμίζει πως και μεις οφείλουμε την ίδια αγάπη προς τον συνάνθρωπό μας. Το αποτέλεσμα είναι μια ζωή ενάρετη, ειρηνική και χριστιανοπρεπής.

Χαρά Θεού η ζωή μας. Χαρά και για την Παναγία-Μητέρα μας που με τη Χάρη της πάντα θα μας συνοδεύει.

'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah,' says Peter to our Lord atop Mount Tabor upon His divine Transfiguration (Matthew 17:4).

Luke adds in his Gospel that Peter 'did not know what he was saying' (Luke 9:33). Mark further points out in his Gospel that Peter 'did not know what to say for they were greatly afraid' (Mark 9:6). St Cyril of Alexandria notes that prior to our Saviour's passion, resurrection, and ascension, it was impossible for Peter to be with Christ and to stay within the heavenly tents. Other Fathers state that Peter did not know what he was saying because he numbered Christ among the servants Moses and Elijah.

In his excitement Peter characteristically expresses both the inexpressible gladness he felt in the presence of the transfigured Lord, and his selfless love for Him (for he did not seek a tent for himself). Compare Peter's excited misstatement with 1 John 3:2, 'beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' Peter was not aware that the Grace that shone from Christ at Mount Tabor was but only a fragment of the Grace of God; a fragment only because his human faculties could not possibly bear the presence beyond the blinding radiance of Christ's Transfigured person. Nor was he aware that the law could not be fulfilled by remaining on the mountain.

So what do we take from Peter's words? We come to understand that the Transfiguration is a spiritual event in our lives. Spiritual, in that God is revealed to us who approach the feast with spiritual eyes. We do not expect to see the radiance of a bright sun. Rather, we approach to partake in the divine presence which is manifested in the uncreated light of the Godhead - a light that is only perceived through the power of the Holy Spirit, not bodily eyes.

Therefore, Peter is not wrong to say that 'it is good for us to be here.' The grace of the Holy Spirit having touched him, causes Peter to proclaim the spiritual joy he experiences. Not only was it good for Peter to be there, he (and we) were created to be in that presence. Peter and the two other present disciples are also transformed on the mountain, having felt and communicated with the Grace of God. That is a calling each of us must heed so that we too may descend the mountain 'walk[ing] in newness of life' (Romans 6:4). These fruits of developed spiritual living seem far from us, almost unachievable. Yet, in participating in liturgical life, cultivating prayer, and cleansing our spiritual eyes, through His Grace we too may encounter the divine and ineffable beauty of His virtues (5th Ode, Katavasia Dormition).



HOLY CHRISMATION

ΑΓΙΟ ΧΡΙΣΜΑ - ΑΓΙΟ ΜΥΡΟΝ



The immersion of the person in water during Baptism signifies the forgiveness of all sins, the death of the old and sinful self, and their elevation to a new person in Jesus Christ.

Although those who come out of the baptismal font are reborn, cleansed spiritually, justified and sanctified, they continue to remain as infants spiritually. They are no different from newly-born babies who are full of health, but nonetheless need air and light, as well as care and nourishment, so that they can grow up to a mature physical adulthood.

The same applies in the case of the spiritual life. Such newly-baptised people need the protection of the Holy Spirit and the receipt of its gifts, which are needed to live the new life in Christ. This divine protection is given immediately after Baptism by the Mystery of Holy Chrismation.

This Mystery, also known as Holy Myrrh, was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ when He was in Jerusalem during the feast of the Tabernacles. There He promised to those who thirst spiritually: 'He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water' (John 7:38). Jesus meant that the Holy Spirit would be given to those who believed in Him.

At the time of the Apostles the Holy Spirit was given to those baptised by the 'laying of hands.' From the second century until the sixth century it was gradually replaced by Chrism (Holy Myrrh). The Bishop, or presbyter, would apply a small amount of Holy Myrrh on various parts of the body of the newly baptised. This was done successively on: the forehead, the nose, the front and back of chest, the eyes, the mouth, and the ears, with the celebrant saying, 'The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.'

In the Greek Orthodox Church, and the so-called Oriental Orthodox Churches, the anointing with Holy Myrrh is performed immediately after Baptism. The first example of this was shown by Apostle Paul in Ephesus. He laid his hands on 12 new disciples, immediately after they were baptised, to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:6-7).

The same procedure was used by Tertullian and St Cyprian (both of Carthage), St Cyril of Alexandria, and many more eminent fathers of the early Church. The most telling reason for this practice was given by St Cyril of Jerusalem. He stated in his catechism, that after Christ was baptised in the river Jordan, and was

climbing out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended on Him. So when we ascend out of the waters of the baptismal font we similarly receive the Holy Spirit. Just as the bread of the Holy Eucharist is no longer common bread after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, but the body of Christ, similarly the Holy Myrrh no longer is simply oil, but the gift of the Holy Spirit possessing the energies of its divine nature.

The Holy Myrrh is prepared by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in a special ceremony and is made up of numerous aromatic fluids in special order. It is distributed to all the Autocephalous Churches and Archdioceses under the Jurisdiction of the Patriarchate. Churches with their own Patriarchate prepare and use their own Holy Myrrh in their jurisdiction.

What are the gifts (charismata) the Holy Spirit bestows upon the faithful? Saint Ambrose lists the seven mentioned by Isaiah (11:1-3). Apostle Paul mentions nine such gifts, which are officially accepted by the Church: 'The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control' (Galatians 5:22-23).

The Holy Chrism received by the newly baptised Christian is the Grace of the Holy Spirit, which resides from then on in their heart.

It is therefore more than obvious that the Holy Chrism received by the newly baptised Christian is the Grace of the Holy Spirit, which resides from then on in their heart. There it cultivates illumination of the mind (nous), inspiration of love for God, and prayer and hope of Eternal life.

As far as we are concerned, it is up to us to activate the power of energies and gifts of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Repentance and eternal Salvation can only be achieved with the help of the third person of the Holy Trinity! It should be the fervent desire of every Christian to live their life in such a manner, so that the Holy Spirit can come and reside permanently in their heart. Our motto in this life should be the advice of Saint Seraphim of Sarov to those who asked him for spiritual help, 'My child, try to get the Holy Spirit in your heart.'

Father Dumitru Stăniloae

St Anthony the Great writes, 'The truly intelligent man pursues one sole objective: to obey and to conform to the God of all... For knowledge of God and faith in Him is the salvation and perfection of the soul.' Fr Dumitru Stăniloae is regarded as the greatest Romanian theologian of the twentieth century. His life was centred around an active struggle to come closer to Christ, and the expression of a steadfast faith in the Orthodox Church.

Born on 16 November 1903 in Vladeni, Romania, Fr Dumitru was the youngest of five children in an impoverished but pious Orthodox family. He would later relate that growing up in the small village of Vladeni had a fundamental impact on his faith as all parts of everyday life were intrinsically intertwined with the Church.

In 1922, Dumitru left to study theology at the University of Czernowitz. However, within a year, he felt disillusioned with his education and went to Bucharest to study philosophy. It was here where Dumitru would be convinced by the local Metropolitan to return to theology. One year after being married, Fr Dumitru was ordained to the diaconate in 1931 and to the priesthood in 1932. He began lecturing at the Theological Academy in Sibiu, where he would stay until 1946.

The end of the Second World War brought forth dramatic changes in the Romanian political system. The government was overthrown, and

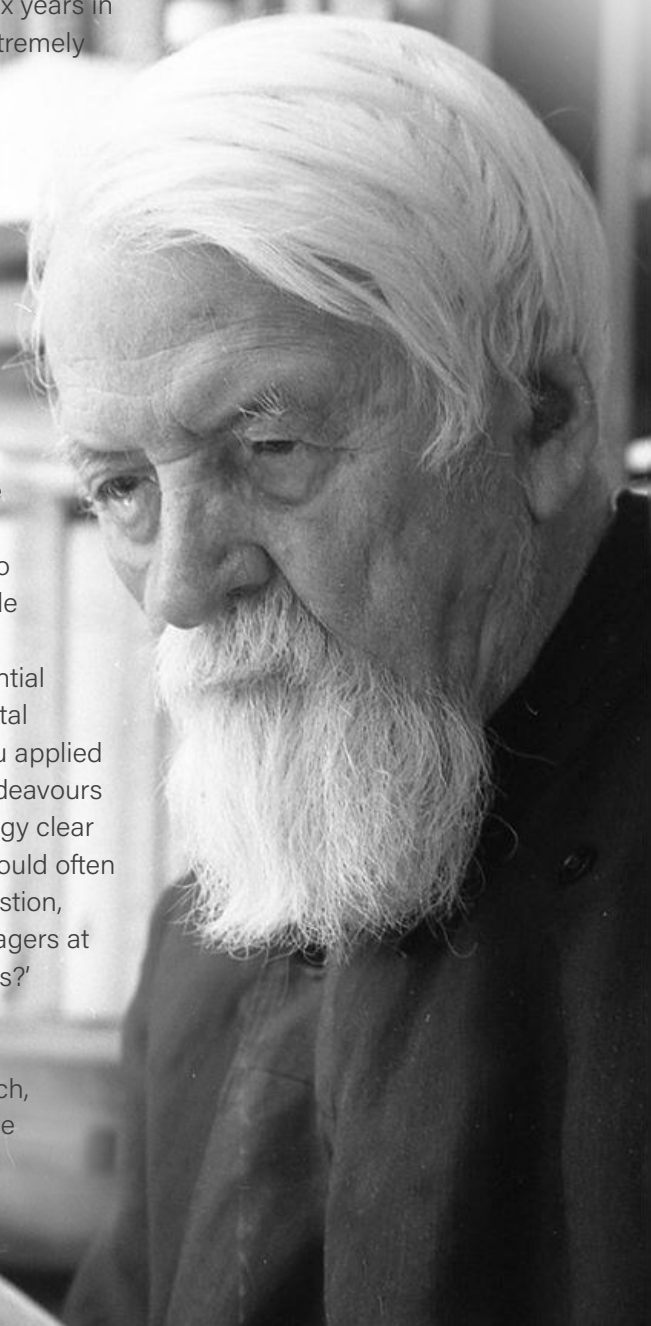
control was seized by communists, who undertook a systematic campaign against Orthodoxy. Despite the political opposition, Fr Dumitru would continue teaching theology in Bucharest. In 1950, he joined a group called the Burning Bush, which focused on the renewal of Orthodoxy in Romania and sought to keep the faith alive.

In 1958, Fr Dumitru would be arrested by government authorities and would spend six years in prison, enduring extremely difficult conditions.

Upon his release in 1963, Fr Dumitru undertook the task of making the faith accessible to the Romanian people and helping students in their theological studies. He was responsible for the translation of the Philokalia into Romanian, alongside the publication of several other influential works. A fundamental principle Fr Dumitru applied to his academic endeavours was to make theology clear and succinct. He would often ask himself the question, 'How would the villagers at home feel about this?'

After many years of service to the Church, Fr Dumitru Stăniloae reposed in the Lord on October 5, 1993.

Fr Dumitru was undeniably intellectually brilliant and a pivotal figure in Romanian theology. However, throughout the course of his life, it is apparent that his true intelligence lay in the decision to constantly struggle towards the Kingdom of Heaven. Through his works and teachings, Fr Dumitru truly sought to bring Christ into the lives of a people living in the most adverse of circumstances.



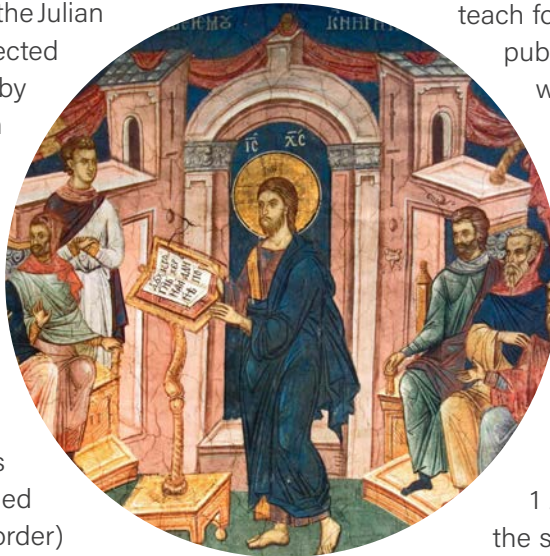


Why Does the Ecclesiastical Year begin on 1 September?

The calendar that we use evolved in Europe, primarily under the Roman Empire and specifically under the Church of Rome. It was called the Julian Calendar and, after being corrected for minor calculation errors by Pope Gregory, it became known as the Gregorian Calendar. In both of these calendars, 1 September was the start of the yearly cycle.

The concept of 'a new year' started in the Roman Empire a few years before Christ, primarily to mark the point where taxes would be charged. This was called in Latin 'Indictus' (declaration or order) and it was a term adopted by the Church, since the community regarded 1 September (Indictus), as the starting point for the yearly cycle.

Some other supporting points are that in agrarian society in Europe, September is harvest and replanting time, that is 'a new start'.



Finally, our tradition teaches us that it was on 1 September that Jesus entered the temple to teach for the first time, thus beginning His public missionary work, and in many ways the beginnings of the Church as we know it.

The Church celebrates this day each year, marking it with special prayers requesting good weather, crops, peace and harmony.

An interesting question to research is when and how did 1 January take on the label of being the start of the new year, considering it is the middle of European winter.

In the church hymns, documents and tradition, there is no mention of the new year on 1 January, which is the feast day of the Circumcision of our Lord and the feast day of St Basil the Great.

+ Fr. NS



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Panagia Portaitissa

Icons were hidden during the 9th century iconoclast period of Byzantine emperor Theophilus. A devout widow from Nicea in Asia Minor kept the Panagia Portaitissa icon in her private chapel. One of the iconoclast soldiers who came to the widow's house struck the icon with his sword, and blood began to immediately flow from the Virgin's gashed cheek. The soldier instantly repented, renounced the iconoclast heresy, and entered a monastery.

After praying for guidance before the icon, the widow put it out to sea. The icon did not sink but stood upright on the water, drifting towards the west. This moved the widow's son to dedicate himself to God and he settled at the Iberian Monastery (Iveron) on Mt Athos. Prior to his death he recounted to the other monks how his mother had set the icon on the waves, and this story was handed down the generation of monks.

In the latter half of the 10th Century, the Iveron monks saw a pillar of fire rising from the sea towards the heavens. It continued for several days and nights. The monks soon saw the icon of the Virgin which seemed to be standing upright on the surface of the water, giving off rays of light.

Panagia appeared in a vision to a monk named Gabriel and directed him to convey to the abbot and the Iveron brothers that she wished them to have her icon as their help and salvation. She told monk Gabriel to approach the icon on the waters, without fear, and to take it with his hands.

Gabriel obediently walked upon the waters as though upon dry land, took up the icon, and brought it back to the shore. The icon was then brought into the monastery and placed in the altar.

The icon repeatedly disappeared from the church, and was found each time above the gates of the monastery.

The Blessed Virgin told Gabriel in a dream that this was the place which she had chosen, so that she could protect the monks and not be protected by them. Thus the icon took the name of 'Portaitissa', which means 'keeper of the gate.'

To this day its presence in the monastery and on the Holy Mountain is regarded as a guarantee that the Theotokos will protect the Athonite monks.

Numerous miracles have been performed through the Panagia Portaitissa icon. It is celebrated on August 15, and during Bright Week when the finding of the icon is commemorated with a procession to, and a liturgy in, the chapel on the shore at the spot where monk Gabriel took it out of the sea.

Since being found in 1004 AD, the icon has never left Mount Athos. Copies of it were sent to Russia in 1648 (commemorated on October 13) and in 1656. Other copies were subsequently made and various miracles have been attributed through these as well.



St Modestus on The Dormition

St Modestus (Patriarch of Jerusalem - commemorated December 16) lived in the early seventh century when the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos was first starting to be celebrated throughout the Orthodox Church. For this reason, there is much that we can learn from his Homily on the Dormition of the Virgin.

Being an early author on the Dormition, St Modestus went where those before him did not. It appears that because he did not have that prior written tradition on the Dormition, much of his basic narrative consists of the typology of the Theotokos that is seen in the Old Testament. For this reason, there are references to the Theotokos being the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:2): 'the mortal bush which contained the fire of divinity.'

A key theme is the role that the Theotokos played in our salvation through giving birth to Christ.

A constant refrain of St Modestus is "O most blessed Dormition of the Mother of God", followed by a description of Christ's saving work. By repeating this St Modestus, tells his flock to treat the Dormition as a blessed feast - something that may be taken for granted today.

The other key theme in this work is the presence of the Angels at the events of the Dormition. By announcing the Dormition of the Theotokos and by being present at her funeral, the angelic orders played a key role in the events. Additionally, through the Angels 'who rejoiced in exultation to receive her as the Mother of the Lord', we too learn how to rejoice at the Feast of the Dormition and venerate 'the sublime glory of the divine grace and power' that accompanies the Theotokos.



Επτά νέοι της Εφέσου υπηρετούσαν μαζί στον ρωμαϊκό στρατό κατά τον τρίτο αιώνα, και ήταν στενοί χριστιανική φίλοι: ο Μαξιμιλιανός, ο Ιάμβλικος, ο Μαρτινιανός, ο Ιωάννης, ο Διονύσιος, ο Εξακουστοδιανός και ο Αντωνίνος.

Όταν ο αυτοκράτορας Δέκιος (249-251 μ.Χ.) έφτασε στην Έφεσο έφεραν μπροστά του τους επτά νέους επειδή δεν πρόσφεραν θυσία στους ειδωλολατρικούς θεούς. Αυτοί όμως ομολόγησαν την αγάπη τους για τον Χριστό.

Ο Δέκιος τους αφαίρεσε τα στρατιωτικά τους διακριτικά, αλλά τους άφησε ελεύθερους να το ξανασκεφτούν στην απουσία του. Οι νέοι κρύφτηκαν σε μια σπηλιά

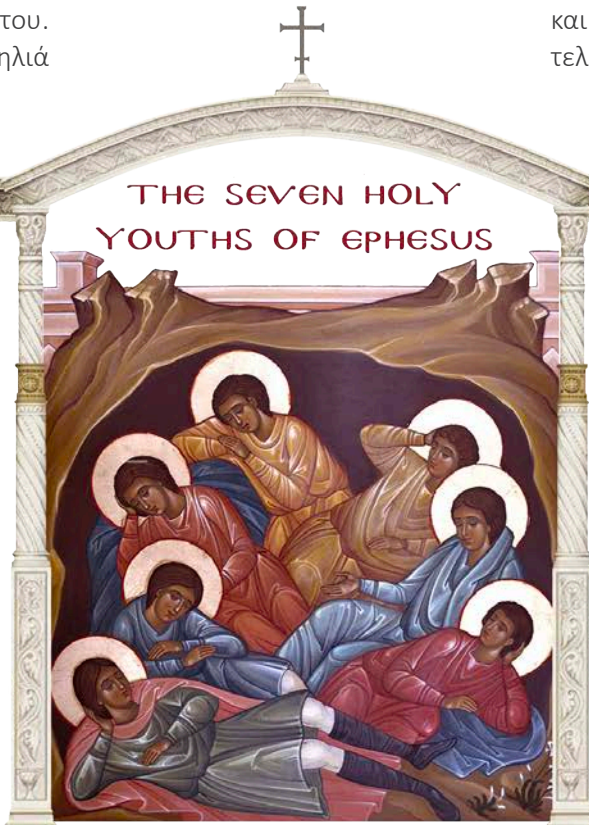
στο όρος Όχλον και ασκήτευαν προετοιμαζόμενοι για το επικείμενο μαρτύριο τους.

Όταν επέστρεψε από την στρατιωτική του εκστρατεία, ο αυτοκράτορας διέταξε να σφραγιστεί η σπηλιά με πέτρα, εξασφαλίζοντας έτσι τον θάνατο τους από την πείνα. Στην είσοδο του σπηλαίου τοποθετήθηκαν δύο μεταλλινες πλάκες, με τα ονόματα των νέων και λεπτομέρειες για το μαρτύριο τους.

Ο Θεός, όμως, θαυματουργικά έβαλε τους νέους σε ύπνο μέχρι τον 5ο αιώνα. Ξύπνησαν από τον λήθαργο όταν ο ιδιοκτήτης

του αγροκτήματος άνοιξε την είσοδο της σπηλιάς. Ο Ιάμβλικος τότε πήγε στην Έφεσο για να αγοράσει ψωμί, αλλά κρατήθηκε ως ύποπτος διότι είχε παλιά νομίσματα. Οδηγήθηκε στον Επίσκοπο. Μια αίρεση που διεδίδετο εκείνη την εποχή ήταν η Ανάσταση των Νεκρών κατά τη Δευτέρα Παρουσία. Ο Επίσκοπος κατάλαβε ότι είχε γίνει θαύμα. Όταν πήγε με άλλους στη σπηλιά, βρήκαν τους υπόλοιπους αγίους, ζωντανούς, μαζί με τις πλάκες που περιγράφαν λεπτομερώς ιστορικό τους. Χαίροντες όλοι κατάλαβαν ότι ο Θεός έδειχνε την αλήθεια της Ανάστασης των Νεκρών.

Λίγο μετά οι άγιοι νέοι ξάπλωσαν και ξανακοιμήθηκαν, παραδίδοντας τελικά την ψυχή τους στον Κύριό τους.



Commemorated August 4

Seven sons of illustrious Ephesus citizens shared a close bond of Christian friendship whilst serving in the Roman military during the third century: Maximilian, Iamblicus, Martinian, John, Dionysius, Exacustodianus and Antoninus.

When emperor Decius (249-251 AD) arrived at Ephesus the seven youths were brought before him because they didn't offer sacrifice to the pagan gods but boldly confessed their love for Christ. Decius stripped them of their military insignia, and freed them to reconsider in his absence. The youths hid in a cave on Mount Ochlon, and practised asceticism in preparation for their impending martyrdom.

Upon returning from his military campaign the emperor ordered that

the cave be sealed with stone, thus guaranteeing death by starvation. Two metal plaques that had the names and details of the seven youths, and the account of their martyrdom, were secretly placed within the cave's entrance.

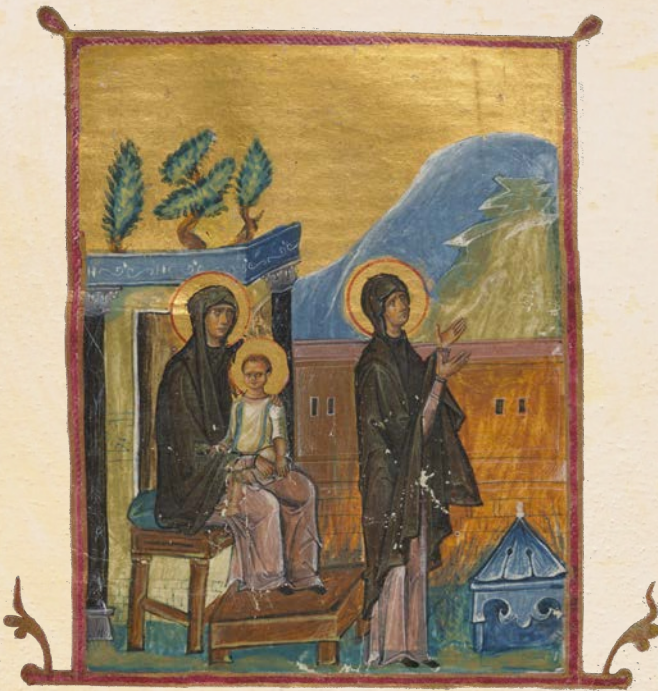
God placed the youths into a miraculous sleep until the 5th

century. They awoke from their slumber when the land owner opened the cave's entrance. Iamblicus went to Ephesus to buy bread but was detained on suspicion of hoarding old coins. He was taken to the administrator: the Bishop. A heresy denying the Resurrection of the Dead at the Second Coming was spreading at that time. The Bishop understood that a miracle had unfolded. When he went with others to the cave they found the remaining saints alive, along with the plaques detailing their story. Rejoicing, everyone comprehended that God was showing the truth of the Resurrection of the Dead.

Shortly after the holy youths lay down and fell asleep again, finally surrendering their souls to their Lord.

Hannah and Samuel

1 Kingdoms (or 1 Samuel) 1 – 2:11



The first book of Kingdoms in the Old Testament describes how Israel moved from being led by Judges appointed by God, to being ruled by kings. Once God liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and were led to the Promised Land, God appointed Judges to rule the Israelites, of which Samuel was the last. The first book of Kingdoms begins with the life of Hannah, the mother of Samuel. He was the Prophet who anointed David as king of Israel.

The story of Hannah reveals how we, as members of the Church, should approach Christ. It is easy to forget that although the figures of the Old Testament lived thousands of years before us, they were also human and struggled against the same hardships we face. Hannah was no different. In her marriage to a man named Elkanah she was unable to have children. Not only was barrenness deprecated in her times, but Hannah's struggle was made worse in the scorn she endured at the hands of her husband's second wife, Peninnah, who had many children herself.

Nevertheless, in her suffering, Hannah never forgot God and remained steadfast in her faith. Every year 'she went up to the house of the Lord' and earnestly fasted and 'prayed ... lamenting and weeping' to be granted

'a son' whom she would dedicate to Him (1 Kingdoms 1:7, 10-11). Saint Cyprian remarks on the nature of Hannah's prayer to God when alone in His temple in Shiloh, stating, 'She spoke not with her voice, but with her heart, because she knew that thus God hears; and she effectually obtained what she sought, because she asked it with belief.'

Let us emulate Hannah, 'silently and modestly' bringing to God our afflictions in prayer, with what Saint John Chrysostom notes is a 'contrite heart,' speaking nothing of 'those who revile us.'

Indeed, 'the Lord remembered' Hannah and she 'bore a son' whom she named Samuel (1 Kingdoms 1:20). According to her promise to God, after having weaned her son, Hannah went with Samuel to Shiloh to 'lend him to the Lord all the days which he lives to be fruitful to the Lord.' (1 Kingdoms 1:28).

Hannah's life prophesies that of Saint Anna, who after being ostracised from her community due to her barrenness and earnestly entreating God for a child, gave birth to Mary, the Mother of God. Like Hannah, Anna also dedicated her child to the Lord when Mary was only three. Just as these women with faith and 'earnest zeal' made 'spiritual objects [their] first care,' St John Chrysostom urges all parents to bring their children 'up in the training and admonition of the Lord' (Ephesians 6:4).

The story of Hannah finishes with her hymn of praise to the Lord. Let us emulate Hannah's patience and steadfast faith in God, crying out alongside her with all our soul, 'My heart is strengthened in the Lord; My horn is exalted in my God' (1 Kingdoms 2:1).



1ST ODE OF THE KATAVASIES OF THE HOLY CROSS

«Σταυρὸν
χαράξας Μωσῆς,
ἐπ'εὐθείας ῥάβδῳ,
τὴν Ἐρυθρὰν
διέτεμε, τῷ Ἰσραὴλ
πεζεύσαντι, τὴν
δὲ ἐπιστρεπτικῶς,
Φαραὼ τοῖς ἄρμασι
κροτήσας ἠνώσεν· ἐπ'
εὐρους διαγράψας, τὸ
ἀήττητον ὄπλον, διὸ
Χριστῷ ἄσωμεν·
τῷ Θεῷ ἡμῶν, ὅτι
δεδόξασται».



*“A Cross Moses traced
out as he cut the Red
Sea in a straight line
with his rod for Israel
as they marched on
foot; and then united
it again overwhelming
Pharaoh with his
chariots as with other
line he marked out
the invincible weapon.
Therefore, let us sing
to Christ our God, for
he has been glorified.”*

The first ode of the nine hymns which are collectively known as the Katavasies of the Cross, are chanted from the 1st August until the Feast Day of the Raising of the Holy Cross on September 14th. It is based on the events recounted in Exodus 15:1-19, where after the escaping Israelites crossed the seafloor of the miraculously divided Red Sea, Moses closed the waters once more with the horizontal movement of his staff – tracing out the sign of the Cross. In the process the army of Pharaoh, which had been chasing down the fleeing Israelite nation, was drowned. A representative verse is verse 5: ‘Pharaoh’s chariots and army he has cast into the sea.’

The miraculous and saving crossing of the divided Red Sea has long had symbolic meaning in the tradition of our Church. It has been represented as the crossing from the land of the dead and of slavery, being this life with its enslavement to sins and passions, to the promised land of the living God in the next life.

It has also been seen as a type of Holy Baptism, in which by passing through water blessed with the sign of the Cross, physical death is not the end of things but a simple crossing over into divine immortality. In both symbols, the pre-eminence of the Holy Cross is ever-present. We cannot flee from the passions without taking up our Cross as Christ asks us, and drowning them in the waters of His grace. As Saint Paul so aptly states, ‘And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires’ (Gal. 5:24).

And indeed, after being lifted from the baptismal waters which the priest sealed with the sign of the Holy Cross, a cross is placed upon the neck of the newly illumined Christian, signifying that from this point on their own life and struggles will be ever identified with that ‘invincible weapon,’ the Holy Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Life of Moses by Saint Gregory of Nyssa

St Gregory of Nyssa is one of the Cappadocian Fathers and is regarded as one of the most profound mystical teachers of our faith. In *The Life of Moses* he goes beyond a literal and historical interpretation of scripture to reveal the mystical teachings hidden within the text. In answering a question on how to live a virtuous life, St Gregory elaborately parallels the Exodus narrative with the Christian spiritual journey, which begins with the sensual worldliness of Egypt and progresses to the mystical contemplation of God.

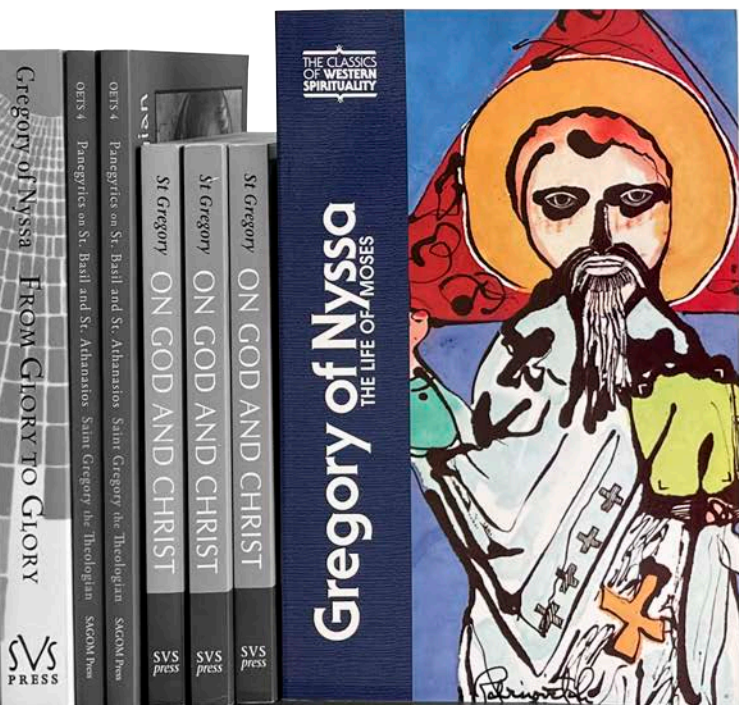
The main theme of this book is eternal spiritual progress. St Gregory argues that only God is perfect and infinite, and that for us finite humans the state of perfection is impossible. Nevertheless, as we were made with a desire and the capacity to participate in the divine nature, which is unlimited, then our desire also stretches out to the limitlessness of God. As we move towards the perfect God, we approach perfection. The closer we get, the more we desire to see Him. We never arrive, we simply continue along this path of sanctification, or theosis, for eternity.

This idea is very reassuring in that God is not asking the impossible and also gives a wide perspective into an eternal life that will never become mundane. It is also encouraging because every step we take today puts us further along our eternal path towards perfection.

Drawing on the Alexandrian allegory approach to biblical exegesis, the book reflects St Gregory's spiritual sense of the scriptures. He shows that the ultimate value of the Bible is not in its historical teachings but in its ability to elevate the soul to God. Nearly every event in Moses' life is shown to point to something deeper and more profound. For instance, when Moses asks God to reveal Himself and is granted only to see His back parts, St Gregory explains that in our spiritual progress, which is eternal, we follow behind God looking forward but never overtake Him.

Building on the theme of spiritual progress, he classifies three stages of spiritual ascent corresponding to the authentic spiritual experiences Moses had with God: first in light; then in the cloud; and, finally in the darkness. Moses' experience on Mt Sinai is used to explain the deep spiritual meaning of God's invisible incomprehensibility by using apophatic or 'negative' theology. St Gregory notes that what is divine is beyond all knowledge and comprehension and thus any understanding we obtain of God is in 'the seeing that consists in not seeing' which Moses experiences as he passes into the 'luminous darkness.'

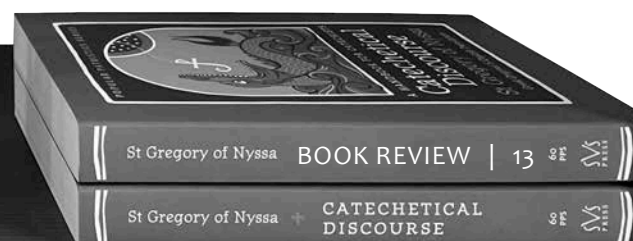
The author encourages the reader to persist in their spiritual progress by transferring in their own life the things contemplated spiritually from the literal events in Moses' life. Not out of fear of punishment or for the hope of a reward, but rather for the purpose of becoming God's friend, which is the only thing worthy of honour and desire.



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ΤΑ ΠΡΟΣΩΝΥΜΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΙΩΑΝΝΗ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΟΥ

Ο Άγιος Ιωάννης ο Θεολόγος έχει στολισθεί από την εκκλησία με διάφορα προσωνύμια, τα οποία αναδεικνύουν την αγνότατη προσωπικότητά του.

Ο Κύριος τον διάλεξε να γίνει από ψαράς ιχθύων «Απόστολος», και με αυτό τον τρόπο να ψαρεύει ψυχές.

Μαζί με τον Πέτρο και τον αδελφό του Ιάκωβο, ήταν ένας από τους τρεις μαθητές του Ιησού, οι οποίοι βάσει των αρετών που είχαν, ήταν έτοιμοι να δεχθούν μεγάλες αποκαλύψεις. Ο Ιησούς τους διάλεγε να είναι μαζί του στις μεγάλες και κρίσιμες στιγμές, όπως στην Μεταμόρφωση Του. Για αυτό ονομάζεται «Εκλεκτός» μαθητής.

Με την χάρη του Αγίου Πνεύματος, ο ολιγογράμματος ψαράς έγινε «Ευαγγελιστής», ο συγγραφέας του τέταρτου κατά σειρά ευαγγελίου.

Ονομάζεται από την Εκκλησία μας και ως «Θεολόγος». Δύο μόνο άλλοι άγιοι, ο Άγιος Γρηγόριος ο Θεολόγος και ο Άγιος Συμεών ο Νέος Θεολόγος, έχουν αυτή την τιμή. Η καθαρότητα της καρδιάς του, του έδωσε την δυνατότητα να εκπληρωθεί σ' αυτόν ο μακαρισμός του Κυρίου: «οι καθαροί στην καρδιά θα δουν τον Θεό». Έτσι μπόρεσε να γράψει το πιο θεολογικό από όλα τα ευαγγέλια, το οποίο αρχίζει γεμάτο θεολογία με το «Εν αρχή ην ο Λόγος, και ο Λόγος ην προς τον Θεόν, και Θεός

ην ο Λόγος». Δεν είναι υπερβολή αν πούμε ότι έγραψε το πιο κορυφαίο βιβλίο που έχει γραφτεί και που θα γραφτεί ποτέ.

Αγαπούσε πολύ τον Ιησού και για αυτό τον λόγο Τον ακολούθησε στις πιο δύσκολες στιγμές της ζωής Του, όπως στην «δίκη» Του και στον σταυρό Του. Η μεγάλη αγάπη που είχε για τον Χριστό τον έκανε να νιώσει την αγάπη που έχει ο Χριστός για όλο τον κόσμο. Για αυτό τον λόγο στο ευαγγέλιο του με ταπεινώση απέκρυπτε το όνομα του, και αυτό-ονομαζόταν «ο Αγαπημένος μαθητής του Ιησού».

Αυτή η έντονη αίσθηση της αγάπης που είχε ο Ιησούς προς αυτόν, κάνει φυσιολογική την εγγύτητα προς τον Κύριον, και πέφτοντας στο στήθος του Ιησού κατά την διάρκεια του Μυστικού Δείπνου ονομάζεται και ως ο «επιστήθιος» μαθητής του Ιησού.

Ο Κύριος τον ονόμασε «Υιό της βροντής» καθώς εβρόντησε τα δόγματα της Πίστεως, με τον λόγο και το κήρυγμα του.

Καλείται και «Παρθένος», και είναι ο μόνος από όλους τους αγίους που καλείται με αυτό το επώνυμο. Η

αγνότητα της ψυχής του, του έδωσε την δυνατότητα να κρατήσει την παρθενία του, και στο σώμα, και στον νου, αλλά ιδιαίτερα και στην ψυχή του. Αυτή η παρθενία του στην ψυχή δείχνει το φρόνημα του, το οποίο ήταν εντελώς ξένο προς την αμαρτία.

Ο Κύριος, πάνω στον σταυρό, εμπιστεύθηκε την Παναγία Μητέρα Του στον Ιωάννη, Την οποία περιέλαβε στο σπίτι του. Ο Ιησούς λέγει στην Παναγία «Ίδε ο υιός σου» και στον Ιωάννη λέγει «Ίδού η Μητήρ σου». Έτσι γίνεται ο «Υιός της Παρθένου» και συνεπώς και ο «Αδελφός του Ιησού».

Είναι ο «Ευαγγελιστής της αγάπης» επειδή όχι μόνο αναφέρεται στην αγάπη στο ευαγγέλιο και στις επιστολές του, αλλά γιατί την βίωνε: «Αγαπάτε αλλήλους», «Ο Θεός αγάπη εστί». Συνεχώς έλεγε στους μαθητές του, «παιδιά μου, να αγαπάτε ο ένας τον άλλο».

Η Εκκλησία μας θεώρησε άξιο τον Άγιο Ιωάννη τον Θεολόγο να έχει όλα αυτά τα προσωνύμια που τον στολίζουν και τον καθιερώνουν ως ελκυστικότερο παράδειγμα για μίμηση απ' όλους τους Χριστιανούς.





‘... And in the Holy Spirit...’

Article 8 of our Creed completes the depiction of the Holy Trinity by bringing into focus the third Person of the Godhead – the Holy Spirit. This particular Article was formulated at the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381 AD and can be seen as a direct response to the false teachings of the heretics (‘Pneumatomachians’) at that time who attacked the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

With each phrase of this Article, the Church Fathers proclaim that the Holy Spirit is God, of the same essence (ομοούσιος), and worthy of the same honour (ομότιμος) as the Father and the Son.

The title ‘Lord’ (also used for the Son and Father in the Scriptures) denotes the sovereign power and authority shared by all three Persons of the Holy Trinity. It signifies that the Holy Spirit is not a created being or servant subject to the Son or the Father. The use of ‘Lord’ also affirms that the Holy Spirit is indeed His own Person (Πρόσωπο), and not some impersonal power or energy as the heretics preached.

Christ Himself witnessed to the personhood and divine nature of the Holy Spirit when He told the disciples about His own impending

departure: ‘I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Paraclete (Παράκλητος) that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth’ (John 14:16-17). The Church Fathers comment that ‘another’ shows the difference in Person (Πρόσωπο), and ‘Paraclete’ (applied to both the Son and the Spirit) signifies the common divine essence shared by the Two.

That the Holy Spirit is Lord and worthy of the same worship and glory as the Son and Father is apparent in the Scriptures. Christ’s commission to the Apostles to ‘make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matthew 28:19) does not suggest the existence of a hierarchy within the Godhead. Rather, it indicates that the presence of one Person of the Holy Trinity implies the presence of the other two, for though distinguished in Person, yet they remain indivisible in essence.

In the book of Acts (5:3-4) Apostle Peter clearly identifies the Holy Spirit as God when he asks Ananias ‘... why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit ...? ...You have not lied to men but to God.’

In his first letter to the Corinthians (12:11), Apostle Paul describes the distribution of spiritual gifts: ‘But

one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.’ St John Chrysostom deliberately highlights the phrases ‘as He wills’ (i.e. not ‘as He was ordered’), and that the Spirit ‘distributes’ (i.e. He is not ‘distributed’), to emphasise the authority of the Holy Spirit.

‘For He blows where He wills, and upon whom, and whenever and however much He wishes’ says St Gregory Nazianzus, who presided over the Second Ecumenical Council. We are greatly indebted to St Gregory, a ‘living temple’ of the Holy Spirit and the par excellence Theologian of the Holy Spirit, for his groundbreaking work on setting forth Orthodox dogma on the Holy Spirit. The following excerpt is from his Oration (41) on Pentecost:

‘The Holy Spirit always was and is and will be, without beginning, without end, but is always ranked and numbered with the Father and the Son ... the Spirit is always participated in but does not participate, perfects but is not perfected, fills but is not filled, sanctifies but is not sanctified, deifies but is not deified ... He is life and creates life, He is light and distributes light, He is the goodness itself and source of goodness...’

News & Events



Omatha Annual Retreats 2022



In a Christ-filled atmosphere of joy the Orthodox Youth Fellowships (Omathes) participated in their 2022 Annual Retreats. The Girls Omathes attended their retreat at the Royal National Park from 4-8 July, and the Boys Omathes retreat was held in Wyee from 11-16 July. The theme of this year's retreats was "Take courage! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Both camps were blessed with the presence of Geronda Eusebios, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Panagia Pantanassa, who celebrated the Divine Liturgies. The Boys Omatha was particularly blessed to celebrate the Feast of St Paisios the Athonite at Pantanassa Monastery.







At their respective retreats, the boys and girls were split into four groups dedicated to the Apostles Peter, Paul, John the Theologian, and Thomas, where they further explored the key theme and learned about the Apostles. Throughout their programs they participated in Bible studies, talks by guest speakers, indoor and outdoor games, common meals, and daily prayer. All who participated returned home feeling inspired to renew their spiritual lives and to struggle towards holiness.



Key Dates

AUGUST






1  Monday Fast begins Procession of the Holy Cross	6  Saturday TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD
15 Monday DORMITION OF THE THEOTOKOS	24  Wednesday Kosmas of Aetolia
27 Saturday Martyr Phanourios	29  Monday BEHEADING OF JOHN THE FORERUNNER

SEPTEMBER

1 Thursday Ecclesiastical New Year Symeon the Stylite	8 Thursday BIRTH OF THE THEOTOKOS
14  Wednesday EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS	16  Friday Great Martyr Euphemia
23  Friday Conception of John the Forerunner	26 Monday John the Evangelist



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-  (02) 9787 9779
-  editor@lychnos.org
-  www.lychnos.org
-  @orthodoxjourneyaustralia
-  @orthodoxjourney_australia