

The Shepherd

*An Orthodox Christian
Pastoral Magazine*

VOLUME XLVI

NUMBER 5

JANUARY 2026





FROM THE FATHERS

‘THERE ARE THREE THINGS that especially pertain to the practice of religion, namely: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. For by prayer we obtain Divine favour, by fasting we extinguish the concupiscences of the flesh, by almsgiving sins are redeemed (see Daniel 4:24), and by all three together the image of God is renewed in us.’

SAINT LEO THE GREAT, POPE OF ROME, + 461 A.D.

‘THE PEOPLE asked him (John the Baptist) saying, “What shall we do then?” For they were stricken with terror, and sought his counsel. “He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.” (Luke 3:10-11). From this one learns how greatly the works of mercy profit us, since they, before others, are counselled us as fruit worthy of repentance. Hence Truth Himself said the same: “Give alms, and behold, all things are clean unto you” (Luke 11 :41). And again He says: “Give and it shall be given unto you” (Luke 6:38). Hence also was it written: “Water quencheth a flaming fire, and alms resisteth sin” (Ecclus. 3:33). Hence again was it written: “Shut up alms in the heart of the poor, and it shall obtain help for thee against evil” (Ecclus. 24:4). Hence, finally, the good father admonishes his blameless son, saying: “if thou have much, give abundantly; i f thou have little, take care even so to bestow willingly a little” (Tob.4:9).’

SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT, POPE OF ROME, 540 - 603 A.D.

‘JOHN (the Baptist) is called an angel (*angellos* / messenger: Mark 1:1) not by community of nature according to the heresy of Origen, but by the dignity of his office; for *angellos* in Greek is in Latin *nuntius* (messenger), by which name that man is rightly called, who was sent by God, that he might bear witness of the light, and announce to the world the Lord coming in the flesh; since it is evident that all who are priests may by their office of preaching the Gospel be called angels, as the Prophet Malachias says, “The lips of the priest keep knowledge, and they seek the law at his mouth, because he is the Angel of the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 2:7).’

VENERABLE BEDE OF JARROW, 672 - 735 A.D.

‘IT IS FRUIT, fruit and fruit alone that the Lord seeks from man, that living tree. Good fruit is a God-loving heart, but bad fruit is a heart filled with self-love. All other things, that a man has and enjoys – status, power, honour, health, wealth, learning – these are no more than the leaves of the tree. “Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matt. 3:10). Even non-Christian peoples rate good works above fine words. So much the more must it be the rule among the followers of Christ.

‘At a certain gathering of Athenians, at which envoys from Sparta were present, one old man was going from bench to bench, trying to find somewhere to sit down. The Athenians mocked at him, and no-one gave him his seat. When the old man drew near the Spartans, they all leapt to their feet and offered him their places. Seeing this, the Athenians expressed their gratitude to the Spartans in well-rounded phrases. To this the Spartans replied: “The Athenians know what is good, but do not do it.” He who does good is like a tree that bears good fruit for its owner. And the well-spring of goodness in man is a good, God-loving heart.’

SAINT NICOLAS VELIMIROVIC, + 1956 A.D.



The Temptations in the Wilderness

By Alexandros Kosmatopoulos

In the narrative of the event of the baptism of Christ, the Forerunner is hesitant and in awe at the prospect of baptising Jesus: 'I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?' Jesus insisted, however, and replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness' (Matt. 3:14-16). Time has to be completed, the past has to be completed, a long period of preparation has to be completed for the way to appear between the baptism in water and the baptism of fire (Matt. 3:11).

I believe that the baptism of fire involves an encounter with the powers of darkness. The battle is fought not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the principalities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph. 6:12).

With these words, Saint Paul implies that these powers claim to be of a transcendental nature and that they play an important role in people's lives. Christ's encounter with the devil introduces us to the struggle with this ancient evil.

After His baptism in the Jordan, Christ went out into the wilderness, to a place which is like a mirror, insofar as you can't hide anything there. He underwent temptations for forty days, without tasting food. He didn't go into the wilderness in submission to some command, or to 'follow His own free will'. It was the Spirit Who led Him there.

The three temptations He was subjected to encapsulate not only the whole history of the world, but also the attitude of those whose sole desire is to walk in the Lord's footsteps. Christ triumphed over the same temptations that Adam gave in to and thus He neutralised their effects. He rejected the

blandishments of the devil and, in so doing, undertook the task of saving the world.

Who is the devil, this mysterious personality who, these days, is considered to be entirely mythical? When the Evangelists and Saint Paul call him the ruler of the world and the god of this age, they know what they're talking about. Above all else, Satan seeks to deceive and delude, to show an illusory path as the true way, which is, at the same time, liberating. He did not hold to the truth, for there is no truth in him (Jn. 8:44). When he can't deceive, he transmogrifies, as he did in the case of Job when he became a public prosecutor. The devil doesn't present a positive stance towards Jesus. He's simply derogatory. And yet, he's the lord of all the kingdoms of the world, and all of our actions are based on his way of doing things and his machinations...

Christ's attitude is a model of humility. His answers [to the devil and his temptations] are taken from the Old Testament and aren't arbitrary. He doesn't face temptation as an individual, even a distinguished one. He enters completely into the position of the person who's tied to God, thus demonstrating, at the same time, His divine origins. Jesus' divinity is expressed through humility.

Hearkening to the voice of Christ means casting off all claims to power, as well as any ideological orientation. Christ doesn't ask us to follow rules, but to listen to His words. If people refuse to listen, they're hammering out their own ineluctable fate and they can't blame God for that. 'If you hold to my teaching, you are truly my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free' (Jn. 8:31-32). Freedom comes from the truth of His words and is not an abstract notion to which we can all give whatever meaning we want. His truth frees us from the chains forged by our fulfilled or unfulfilled desires, testing us as we are or as who we think we are.

'And when the devil had finished all his temptations, he left him for a time.'



THE VENERATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

BY PROTOPRESBYTER MICHAEL POLSKY

Continuation from the previous issue

2. THE OBEDIENCE OF THE CHILD JESUS TO HIS MOTHER¹

The All-holy Virgin and Joseph sought for the Child Jesus ‘with great sorrowing’ for the course of three days, until in the end they found Him in the Temple at Jerusalem ‘in the midst of the doctors’. With what grief, meekness and tenderness did the All-holy Virgin pronounce those words of reproach: ‘Child, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? Such pain Thou hast occasioned, what suffering Thou hast brought; how Thou hast exhausted us by this behaviour! Behold, Thy father and I ...What hast Thou done unto us?’

‘How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?’ Of course, they knew perfectly well that Joseph was not His father. ‘And they understood not the saying which He spake unto them’, as to how, precisely, He must be about His heavenly Father’s business. And Mary ‘kept all these sayings in her heart’, as things precious, beloved and noteworthy, but yet not understood until the time. How the work of this Child would develop, how it would be manifest, how the salvation of people would be effected – all this was hidden from the Mother of the Lord.

She did not comprehend, but she believed and she kept His words with love and humility. And the Child did not reject or decline from the demands of parental obedience. Whilst possessing the highest rights and already fully aware of His duty, He did not disregard the lowlier human duties and He took to heart the ‘great sorrow’ and the concern of those related to Him by the flesh. ‘And was subject unto them.’ No more did He disobey or grieve His mother.

¹ Luke 2:41-52

Under her protection, subject to her, in the normal way of family life, He 'increased in wisdom and stature, and in the love of God and man'. His being subject to His fleshly parents, and particularly to the Mother to whom only He was related according to the flesh, did not hinder His preparation for His ministry among the people, but rather it went along with the Divine plan and worked with that ministry. The Lord accepted obedience to the Heavenly Father and to the earthly mother in the first days of His conscious life as a child.

3. *THE INTERCESSION OF THE LORD'S MOTHER FOR THE PEOPLE*²

The fact that the All-holy Virgin sincerely 'kept all these words, and pondered them in her heart', as well as those things which He said and which were said of Him (Luke 2:19, 51), and that she oversaw all the 'growing and strengthening in spirit, being filled with the wisdom and grace of God' of her Child, as an Infant, Youth and mature Man (Luke 2:40, 52) led in the end to her calling her Son to work His first miracle, to the beginning of signs and wonders for the salvation of the people, to the very start of His ministry, and to the conversion to the Faith of His first disciples.

Her presence and participation in this definite and crucial moment in His life and work, at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, was necessary. From His mother the Lord received the first call to work miracles, and to take up His acts of mercy and benefaction towards the race of man.

The lack of wine at the marriage feast was the circumstance which required the All-holy Virgin to inform her Son and desire Him to help the poor people. The need and poverty in the house were apparent. Acquaintances of the holy family of the poor carpenter from Nazareth had with difficulty provided a wedding meal, but it was soon finished. It was only so that the wedding supper should not be overshadowed by the insufficiency and poverty becoming apparent, that the heart of the All-holy Virgin was disclosed as being sensitive to the needs of her neighbour, compassionate, sincerely loving, responsive, touchingly caring and tender.

² John 2:1-11.

And for the first time we hear of an appeal, intercession and petition for the needs of man from the lips of the Mother of God to her Divine Son, just as He begins the work of the salvation of mankind. The kind-hearted heart of the All-holy Virgin Mary, herself the representative of the race of man and sensitive to the afflictions of the latter, intercedes; it brings the needs of people before the Saviour and calls Him to the work of salvation and to the working of His first miracle at the very outset of His ministry.

‘They have no wine,’ says the Virgin. ‘What is that to Me and thee?’ answers Christ,³ or put another way, ‘What matter is it to Me and you that they have no wine? According to the understanding of men, it is not the concern of us, as guests; let the hosts themselves worry about this.’

The Lord has His own thoughts and concerns, which are more important and which now concern Him. But if in these words, ‘What is that to Me and thee?’ and further on, ‘Mine hour is not yet come,’ there is a [deeper] thought, then it means this: ‘Why do you appeal to Me and remind Me about the hour which is not yet come? The Lord gives His mother’s words, ‘They have no wine,’ a completely different meaning.

She speaks of one thing, and at the same time He considers another, and reflection on this other thing is not consonant with a wedding feast for Him and does not bring joy. Why do you speak of this now? For His hour was to be that supper and that night, of which the Gospel speaks, saying ‘Jesus, knowing that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father...’ (John 13:1).

The start of His ministry was at a wedding supper, and the consummation and conclusion of the ministry was to be at the Mystical Supper with the disciples. Both here and there, there would be wine. At the first supper there is the changing of the water into wine; at the second, wine into blood. And both there and here it is for the disciples. His ministry starts and concludes with one miracle in similar circumstances. ‘Why are you concerned about the wine, when My hour has not yet come?’ –

³ The translation in most Protestant versions of the Gospels has ‘What have I to do with thee?’ as if the Saviour, Who gave us the commandment to honour our parents (Exodus 20:12) were somehow rejecting His own mother. No doubt the translators were unduly influenced by their preconceived ideas in this instance – *translator*

in such a way does the Lord speak. This tender, mild rebuke against an innocent and slight reminder concerning the future wine of His blood not only does not, however, negate the Virgin's request, but to the contrary He wholly accepts that request. And thus indeed it is that the All-holy Virgin understood the words of her Son, that her petition was heard and would be fulfilled, and so as a ready and quick helper she gave her directions to the servants.

‘Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it,’ she said. In these words there is contained the one commandment, the one teaching of the holy Virgin concerning her Son. These words are crucial and they outline the only means of salvation for all – obedience to her Son. The Mother of the Lord speaks thus, and so from heaven does His Father also speak: ‘This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased, hear ye Him’ (Matt. 17:5).

These words of the All-holy Virgin are wholly sufficient to inform us how she thought of her Son. These words reveal how much she knew of His Divine power, what she expected of Him, how she desired people should relate to Him. ‘Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.’ See what a sermon the race of man has for itself from the lips of the All-holy Virgin Mary at the very outset, at the very start of the Lord's ministry!

‘This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee.’ This beginning was inaugurated at the petition of His Mother, who was sensitive to people's needs. The first petition of the Mother coincided with the beginning of the Saviour's ministry and with the first miracle of His mercy and love towards the race of man. Thereafter His mercy was poured forth in miracles without end, but for the inauguration, heart-felt participation and petition for this He first hearkened unto His Mother, the intercessor before Him concerning the needs of mankind.

‘And manifested forth His glory.’ Only thirty years after His birth, the Lord through this miracle manifested His glory before the people. Until this moment, that glory had been hidden – no one knew of it, except the All-holy Virgin. Now at the wedding she alone is found to be conversant with His actual power, and she contributed to its manifestation both by her petition to her Son and by her instruction to the servants. Her role was replete with meekness and humility. Nothing was manifest except kindheartedness, the movement of a heart which lived by love.

She herself can do nothing, and can give no other help other than directing [us] to her Son. She has no glory of any kind for herself and does not seek it, but arranges all for the glory of the Son. She is the handmaiden of the glory of God.

‘And His disciples believed on Him.’ Naturally they only now believed on Him, recognising in Him the power of God. The All-holy Virgin did not need this confirmation. From Him she only needed help for the people. But earlier, before the holy Apostles and many times more than they, she knew her Son, believed in Him and had served Him all her life.

Having come to believe in the Saviour, not without her mediation, the Apostles could learn from no one more than from her the details of the Annunciation and the Nativity of Christ, and they recorded this in the Gospels exactly as she had handed it down and as she desired. In faith and service to Christ she thus led the holy Apostles as also in sequence of time, and she did so as well in the power and depth of her own faith, which did not experience those doubts which the faith of the holy Apostles experienced. She excelled and was senior to the holy Apostles in all things.

4. THE ENDEAVOUR OF THE LORD’S MOTHER TO PROTECT HER SON⁴

In Capernaum the Lord and His disciples ‘went into an house, and the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when those close to Him heard (where He was), they went out to lay hold on Him: for they said, He is beside Himself. And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the power of the prince of demons casteth He out demons’ (Mark 3:19-22).

It was rumoured among the people that He was beside Himself. It was not that all those close to Him themselves thought this and believed this, but this rumour necessitated their coming to take Him home. The scribes from Jerusalem said straight out that He was possessed of demons. More than once there arose divisions among the Jews concerning Him, and some said directly, ‘He hath a demon, and is mad; why hear ye Him?’ (John 10:20).

⁴ Mark 3:30-35.

What did the mother feel, when her Son had to bear these insults? How did she bear with the blasphemy and calumny, which the mass of unbelievers and evil people wove around Him? How painful it was for her, how she suffered for her Son, knowing Him and understanding Him as only a mother can. In what other way could she protect her own dear and darling Son, save only by coming to 'take Him' home from amidst the company of the unbelieving? If they were dishonouring Him and slandering Him in this way, was it not better that He depart from among those evil people?

Only such an impulse of compassion of the Mother towards her Son, and pain for Him, and the desire to protect and safeguard Him from the evil rumours of the people and the slanders can explain this endeavour to take the Lord home.⁵ 'Then came His mother and His brethren, and standing outside the house, sent unto Him to call Him' (Mark 3:31).

Although the 'Lord's brethren' (Acts 1:14, 1 Cor. 9:5) later turn out to be numbered among the Apostles and are themselves made such, yet concerning some of them it is permissible to say that at the start they 'did not believe in Him' (John 7:2-10). Nonetheless all the kinsfolk of the Saviour according to the flesh shared a common concern for Him and were of one mind with His mother in desiring to take Him out from among those who did not wish Him well.

The Lord always employed teaching only from life, deriving from life, and taught from life, and every circumstance in life gave Him a subject for instruction. So it is here. His kinsfolk are calling for Him? O, He has many kinsfolk! – 'Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and My sister, and mother,' said the Lord. In this way, from relatives according to the flesh only, [He indicates] one that is His true relative, according to the spirit, and not only according to the flesh. And we saw that she who was uniquely a relative according to the spirit of Christ the Son of God was His mother according to the flesh. She, and all those who, in this same power, are related to her according to the spirit of obedience to the will of God, are made His true kinsmen: mother, sisters, brothers.

⁵In English translations this desire is ascribed to the Lord's 'friends', but the Slavonic / Russian, which Fr. Michael uses, has 'close ones' which would include His kinsmen and thus particularly His mother – translator

He Who taught that ‘every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life’ (Matt. 19:29), naturally himself fulfilled all this, and He left His relatives according to the flesh that He might obtain for Himself hundreds and thousands more kinsfolk for the Kingdom of God. But if the Lord taught, ‘Honour thy father and thy mother’ (Matt. 19:19), then His leaving them was not dishonouring them but a form of higher honour. By such then as were close and dear to Him, as they were, He obtains the multitude.

The Gospel does not recount whether, when they called for Him, the Lord was seen by his relations or whether He was not seen by them. And many of the commonplace events of the Lord’s life are not recounted. However, we do know of the love of Christ, how He, after as it were raising an objection to His mother, fulfilled her request in Cana; how, after as it were refusing help to the Canaanitish woman, He did heal her daughter (Matt. 15:22); how not being under an obligation to pay tax to the Temple, He nonetheless paid it (Matt. 17:24).

It was just the same here; of course He fulfilled the wish of His relatives and saw them, and calmed them down, and reminded them once again that He ‘must be about’ His ‘Father’s business’, in the service of the will of the Father. The Lord, without rejecting the love of His kinsfolk, directed it through a true, spiritual, and not a carnal, channel. An earthly love, that which is carnal and a temptation, that which turns aside from the struggle for salvation, was shown Christ not only by His kinsmen but even by the most devoted of the Apostles, Peter (Matthew 16:23).

5. THE BLESSING OF THE VIRGIN MARY BY THE WOMAN IN THE CROWD⁶

‘As He spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto Him, Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked! But He said, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.’

The woman’s delight at the Lord’s words, for ‘a multitude of the people heard him gladly’ (Mark 12:37), was naturally

⁶ Luke 11:27-28

transferred to the person of the Divine Preacher Himself. It was precisely because He was so wondrous, beautiful and endlessly wise that His mother, having such a Son, was fortunate and so blessed. The woman enters into the joy of His mother, ingenuously envying her, and in praising her Son in the first place, through Him she also praises His mother. But He, 'receiving not honour from man' (John 5:41), Himself blesses all those who hear the word of God and keep it.

This is true blessedness. For this reason actually He is blessed Himself, as the archetype of fulfilling the word of God, and blessed also, precisely through this fulfilling of the word of God, is His mother, for only through its fulfilment was she deemed worthy to be the Mother of the Lord. Herein is the essence of blessedness both for her and for everyone. If the woman proposes that His mother is blessed, then let her come to know why she is blessed and how she herself might be made blessed together with her and others.

Like the Mother of the Lord, all those who with her keep the word of God are worthy of blessing and glorification. That which is unto the salvation of all is what is important to the Lord in every instance. How was the All-holy Virgin Mary made Mother of the Lord? And, by the same token, how are those, who follow after her example, made His kinsfolk? She recognized the will of God. Only this brought her so close to the Lord. In this fact and on this basis is the cause of her kinship with the Lord and that of every man; it is the condition on which each person can be made His kinsman, as was the All-holy Virgin Mary.

The 'blessed among women' receives a blessing from women in the person of this woman. Even during the lifetime of the Lord Jesus Christ, before Him and in His hearing this blessing was pronounced and it was accepted by Him. And He has set up His mother as an example to all, manifesting the essence of her righteousness, thanks to which she became His mother.

6. THE LORD'S LOVE FOR HIS MOTHER⁷

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother and the other women. 'When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, He saith unto His mother:

⁷John 19:26-27

Woman, behold thy son! Then saith He to the disciple: Behold, thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto himself.'

Until this time the mother of the Lord did not need any such protection, because she had such in the person of her own Son, Who always cared for His mother. Now another period dawns. The mother is bereaved, losing the support and protection of her only Son. She is left alone.

It is clear from Christ's action on the cross, that the Lord's care for His mother was constant but that only now does its root cause emerge in the change in her position, when His care for her is about to be curtailed and brought to a close. There remains only for Him to make His last dispositions concerning her settlement.

The Lord always had love for His mother according to the flesh, actually an earthly love, and He had a concern for her material and spiritual wellbeing throughout all His life, from infancy, from His first conscious days, when He could only be 'subject' unto her (Luke 2:51). It is only such an ever-present concern which can explain this last [expression of], concern for her.

The beloved disciple of the Lord, who alone was able, because of the particular qualities of his character, to deputise for the Lord Himself with regard to His All-pure Mother, became a new Son for her in place of Him, and he is the greatest witness that the Lord loved and revered His mother. This is greater and better than what He was able to do for her. It was only through His beloved disciple that He was able to convey, express and manifest His love to His mother to a sufficient degree.

The mother of the Lord is mother only of Him alone, the Divine Person Who, for our salvation, voluntarily accepted human nature from her. Uniquely among all the mothers of the whole world, she was never left a former mother of a human person, for when the Lord left the world, He, her one and only born Son, made the human person, John, her son by adoption. Just as He Himself, not being the Son of Joseph, was adopted by him, so now in place of Himself, Mary adopts John. This was her first son from among the peoples, from among human beings, and in his person all Christians become her sons and daughters in this way.

You see the common nature of mankind, taken from her by the Lord, actually made her mother of the whole of mankind. For this reason, having made John hers by adoption, the Lord also makes all of us, Christians, hers by adoption, and grants her permission to be called the mother of all peoples, even though essentially, by nature, she is mother only of the one Divine Person, her Son. In John, in her first son from among people, we, all peoples, and more especially the Christians, become her children.

When the Lord had completed the work of redemption for the people and offered human nature itself in sacrifice, in due time was the first bearer of His redeemed nature made fully mother of His beloved disciple and of all people. From this time forth, His mother becomes mother of all. This is the New Eve and ‘mother of all the living’ (Gen. 3:20). Just as after the fall into sin Adam named his wife, so after the redemption of Adam’s sin the Lord called His Mother. Mary is first of the redeemed, but after her then come all peoples.

We see, in accordance with the writings of the Gospel, the Mother of the Lord in an advisory way taking part at the start of the Lord’s manifestation on earth; in its middle, at His approaching the ministry that was saving for the whole race of mankind, and at the end of His earthly life.

In these accounts from the Holy Gospel there is quite sufficient substance to indicate what significance the Mother of the Lord has in the work which He perfected for the salvation of people. In the most essential moments of the Lord’s ministry, all the holy lineaments of her character are manifest, and her relationship with her Son and with people are shown with sufficient clarity and expression. The short references of the Word of God concerning the All-holy Virgin Mary are also replete with the deepest significance and edification, as are all the other words of Scripture. Her greatness is clearly recognised, and the honouring of her blessedness and her being blessed among all generations are firmly, reasonably and thoroughly founded by the same Divine Word.



OROS OF THE HOLY GREAT CHURCH OF CHRIST ON THE BAPTISM OF CONVERTS FROM THE WEST

MANY ARE THE MEANS by which we attain our salvation. And these, so to speak, in a ladderlike fashion are interlinked and interconnected, all aiming at one and the same end. First of all, then, is the Baptism which God delivered to the sacred Apostles, such being the case that without it the rest are ineffectual. For it says: 'Unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven' (John 3:5).

The first manner of generation brought man into this mortal existence. It was therefore imperative, and necessarily so, that another, more mystical manner of generation be found, neither beginning in corruption nor terminating therein, whereby it would be possible for us to imitate the author of our salvation, Jesus Christ. For the baptismal water in the font takes the place of a womb, and there is birth for him who is born, as Chrysostom says; while the Spirit, Which descends on the water, has the place of God Who fashions the embryo.

And just as He was placed in the tomb and on the third day returned to life, so likewise they who believe, going under the water instead of under the earth, in three immersions depict in themselves the grace of the Resurrection on the third day, the water being sanctified by the descent of the All-holy Spirit, so that the body might be illumined by the water which is visible, and the soul might receive sanctification by the Spirit, Which is invisible.

For just as water in a cauldron partakes of the heat of the fire, so the water in the font is likewise transmuted, by the action of the Spirit, into Divine power. It cleanses those who are thus baptised and makes them worthy of adoption as sons. Not so, however, with those who are initiated in a different manner. Instead of cleansing and adoption, it renders them impure and sons of darkness.

Just three years ago, the question arose: When heretics come over to us, are their baptisms acceptable, given that they are administered contrary to the tradition of the holy Apostles and

divine Fathers, and contrary to the custom and ordinance of the Catholic and Apostolic Church?

We, who by divine mercy were raised in the Orthodox Church, and who adhere to the canons of the sacred Apostles and divine Fathers, recognise only one Church, our Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. It is her Mysteries [i.e. sacraments], and consequently her Baptism, that we accept. On the other hand, we abhor, by common resolve, all rites not administered as the Holy Spirit commanded the sacred Apostles, and as the Church of Christ performs to this day. For they are the inventions of corrupt men, and we regard them as strange and foreign to the whole Apostolic tradition.

Therefore, we receive those that come over to us from them as unsanctified and unbaptized. In this we follow our Lord Jesus Christ Who commanded His disciples to baptise ‘in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit’ (Matt. 28:19); we follow the sacred and divine Apostles who order us to baptise aspirants with three immersions and emersions, and in each immersion to say one name of the Holy Trinity.

We follow the sacred Dionysios, peer of the Apostles, who tells us to ‘dip the aspirant, stripped of every garment, three times in a font containing sanctified water and oil, having loudly proclaimed the threefold hypostasis of the Divine Blessedness, and straightaway to seal the newly baptised with the most divinely potent myron [i.e. chrism], and thereafter to make him a participant in the super-sacramental Eucharist;’ and we follow the Second and Quinisext holy Œcumenical Councils, which order us to receive as unbaptised those aspirants to Orthodoxy who were not baptised with three immersions and emersions, and in each immersions did not loudly invoke one of the divine Hypostases, but were baptised in some other fashion.

We too, therefore, adhere to these divine and sacred decrees, and we reject and abhor baptisms belonging to heretics. For they disagree with, and are foreign to, the divine Apostolic dictate. They are useless waters, as Saints Ambrose and Athanasius the Great said. They give no sanctification to such as receive them, nor avail at all to the washing away of sins.

We receive those who come over to the Orthodox Faith, who were baptised without being baptised, as being unbaptised, and

without danger we baptise them in accordance with the Apostolic and synodal canons, upon which Christ's holy and Apostolic and Catholic Church, the common Mother of us all, firmly relies.

Together with this joint resolve and declaration of ours, we seal this our Oros [*tome*], being as it is in agreement with the Apostolic and synodal decrees, and we certify it with our signatures.

In the year of salvation 1755,

Cyril, by God's mercy Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome, and Œcumenical Patriarch

Matthew, by God's mercy Pope and Patriarch of the Great City of Alexandria, and Judge of the Œcumene

Parthenios, by God's mercy Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and all Palestine.

Note: The Patriarch of Antioch, Sylvester, was not present at the Synod which issued this Oros, but was in agreement with the declaration and expressed his approval.

POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

I WONDER if you might have a few minutes to help me with a small matter. I am searching for information about the Holy Thorn of Glastonbury and have found several books and articles that are helpful. There are some points that I seem to not be satisfied with what I've found. Have you visited the Holy Thorn of Glastonbury? If not, do you know someone who has? What did you think of it? Or what did another person tell you? Do you know if the Holy Thorn begins to bloom during the Gregorian Calendar month of December? Or does it actually bloom just before 'Old Christmas' as we observe it on January 7th Julian Calendar? J.R. Iowa, U.S.A.

HAVE I VISITED the Glastonbury Thorn? I used to be able to see Glastonbury Tor from the top of my mother's garden! I

am from Somerset. My mother and grandmother are buried at Wedmore, where King Alfred treated with the Danes, about eight miles from Glastonbury. Of course the original thorn was cut down by Cromwell's men, but there are now several successor thorns in the old abbey grounds there. I understand that it flowers twice a year – once at the normal spring time, and once at the end of the first week of January. It used to flower on Christmas Day but when they changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in the eighteenth century the thorn refused to change calendars. Apparently they send a sprig of the flowering thorn to H.M. King Charles III when it flowers in winter. So the thorn is an Old Calendarist!

What is more problematic is whether St Joseph of Arimathea had anything to do with Glastonbury. It is clear that there was an ascetic community there from the very earliest centuries of Christianity, and that many saints are associated with it and the subsequent Monastery, but there seems to be no mention of St Joseph until the later Middle Ages, and some of the evidence adduced to back up the story is just silly.

There is, for instance, in the parish church there, a very fine medieval tomb with the initials 'JA' (not even IA!) on it, and this has been claimed as St Joseph's! Also of course there is a tomb of the saint in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem – not the one he gave for the Saviour, but his own nearby. My step-father farmed at Church Farm, Priddy, a village about ten miles from Glastonbury, and there is a legend that the church there was founded by the Saviour, when, as a boy, he visited Britain with St Joseph of Arimathea who came here trading tin.

Well, it is true that tin from the British Isles was traded in those times, but I think we have no evidence that St Joseph was involved in that trade, or that he knew Jesus when He was a boy, or that the Boy Jesus founded any churches. Much as my family connections would induce me to want to believe some at least of these stories, I suspect that we can only assume that they are legends. Of course, what you must do, is come and visit England and then you can visit these holy places for yourself.



THE COMING MONTH

THE GREAT FEAST of Theophany falls in January, on the 6th/19th. The feast's name means the manifestation or showing forth of God, and it celebrates the **Lord's Baptism by John in the River Jordan**. It is one of the foremost of the Twelve Great Feasts in the year, because the Lord's Baptism, of course, inaugurates our own, and as the Saviour and Lover of mankind Himself said: 'Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God' (John 3:5). The feast is, therefore, of fundamental importance for us.

The record of the Lord's Baptism in Jordan is contained in three of the four Gospels (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; and Luke 3:21-22), and it is also one of the clearest manifestations of the mystery of the Most-holy Trinity, for the Three Divine Persons were revealed there. The Father was heard to speak from heaven; the Son was present in the river waters, and the Spirit was seen in the form of a dove. Doubtless this is the primary reason that the feast is called the Theophany for previously the mystery of the Triune Godhead had only been hinted at in prophecies and revealed through enigmatic signs. Now, with the coming of the Saviour, it is revealed more clearly.

The feast is also called the festival of illumination. This is because God is light and the Lord was revealed, a Great Light, as the prophets had foretold, to the 'people which sat in darkness' and 'in the shadow of death' (Matt. 4:16). The knowledge of the Three Divine Persons is itself participation in that light. Also, anciently on the eve of the festival catechumens were often baptised, and so themselves 'illuminated'.

The feast is one of the most ancient of those in the Church calendar. In the second century, Clement of Alexandria mentions it, and in the third century it seems already to have been quite well established.

Baptism is a washing, and the question must be asked why, if He were sinless, as we confess, the Lord was baptised? The Fathers are unanimous in asserting that this was not because He had any need of cleansing. Rather it was so that He might

crush the head of the serpent; that He might bury sin in the waters and all the old Adam (i.e. all that pertains to the fallenness of our nature); that He might fulfil the Law; that He might reveal the mystery of the Trinity, and that He might sanctify and cleanse the waters so that they might become the medium for our cleansing and Baptism.

Among the Saints we celebrate in January, we have a host of the greatest ascetics. Their feasts and lives remind us that, after His Baptism, our Saviour went out into the desert, where He fasted and prayed and contested with Satan. They also give us encouragement as we turn with our hearts and minds towards Great Lent, and to the extent that each one of us is able, begin our own desert experience.

We also have:

The Synaxis of the Seventy Apostles (4th/17th January). In St Luke's Gospel (10:1-5) it is recorded that the Lord appointed seventy disciples and sent them out in pairs to preach His coming. Some of these original seventy later fell away, but just as the betrayer Judas was replaced in the number of the Twelve by St Matthias, so those who left the company of the seventy were replaced by others who took up their apostolic labours.

After the day of Pentecost, the seventy also continued their preaching ministry travelling, some individually and some as helpers of the Twelve, throughout the known world. Many of them became the first bishops in the Church, and later consecrated others to continue their ministry thus inaugurating the church hierarchy that we have to this day. Many of them died as martyrs. These seventy have their own feasts throughout the year, but the present festival was appointed so that they might be celebrated together and so that it would be clear that they are all honoured equally by the faithful.

The **Holy Martyr Tatiana** (12th/25th) is so popular among the Russians, among whom her name or its shortened form, Tanya, is often given to girls, that it is hard not to think that she must have been a Russian. In fact she was an Italian, from Rome, and lived centuries before Russia existed. She was from an eminent and rich Roman family and was brought up as a

Christian. She was ordained as a deaconess and, as such, served by visiting the sick and the imprisoned.

At that time the Emperor Alexander Severus reigned. His mother had been a Christian, and it is said that he dallied with the idea of Christianity, even having statues of Christ and Abraham put among those of his pagan gods. Nonetheless, his advisors instituted a persecution of the Christians, and Tatiana was apprehended and put to torture. During her tortures, eight of those engaged in this gruesome work were deemed worthy to see four Angels guarding her. They were converted and were themselves beheaded, dying as Christian martyrs. After the cruellest torments, in the year 225, Saint Tatiana was executed by beheading, and her father went to the scaffold with her.

The **Venerable Albinus of Canterbury** (14th/27th) was a disciple of St Adrian, the Abbot of the Monastery of Sts Peter and Paul in Canterbury, which had been founded by St Augustine, and is more commonly known as St Augustine's. On the death of St Deusdedit, the Archbishop of Canterbury, a priest named Wighard was chosen to succeed him and sent to Rome to receive consecration as a Bishop. However, he died on arrival in the city, and Pope Vitalian choose the Abbot Adrian to be Archbishop.

This Adrian had been born in Africa but was leading the monastic life in a house near Naples. He declined to be consecrated but suggested St Theodore of Tarsus. In the end, the Pope agreed to this on condition that Adrian should accompany Theodore to England and be his advisor. St Theodore became one of the greatest Archbishops of Canterbury, and Adrian was appointed abbot of the monastery in the city.

Adrian was extremely learned, and fluent in Latin and Greek, and St Albinus learned from him. On Adrian's death in 710 AD, he succeeded him as abbot, a position he held for twenty-two years. It was mainly at his prompting that St Bede undertook to write his Ecclesiastical History. On his death, he was laid to rest next to his abba, St Adrian, in the Church of the Mother of God. Later with other Canterbury Saints, his relics were taken up and enshrined near the altar of St Gregory in the monastery.

The Holy Martyrs Spevsippus, Elevsippus, Melevsippus and their grandmother Leonilla (16th / 29th). The names of the first three here look particularly odd to us. I have spelled them with a V rather than the usual 'u' because it will help you to pronounce them. The 'ippus' at the end of each name is the same as the second part of the more common name Philip, and means 'horse'. The three young martyrs are portrayed on their icons riding horses, and are perhaps best known because they feature on a very well-known icon of Sts Florus and Laurus, where as usual they are shown riding spirited horses. They were three brothers and were triplets, and were brought up as pagans. Their grandmother; Leonilla, became a Christian, and under her influence the three youths were also converted.

Having been baptised, in their youthful fervour they went around and smashed all the pagan idols in their district. They were accused and brought before the judge, and openly confessed their new-found Faith. Leonilla was sent into the prison to counsel them to save their lives by denying Christ. Of course, she took the opportunity to do just the opposite. They were nailed to trees and tortured, eventually burned, and thus perfected in martyrdom.

NBS from the Richmond Diocese of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece

TWO BAPTISMS

Two baptisms were celebrated before the hours and the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple (21st November/4th December). The mysterion was celebrated by **Archimandrite Daniel (Toyne)**.

- **Adrian Cummins**, a former member of the Antiochian Archdiocese was renamed **Nicolas** after the Tsar Martyr 4th/17th July). The Godparent is **Pavel Tosev**.

- **Michel Simonian**, a former Roman Catholic, is named for the Archangel Michael, his Godparent being **Reader Antoine Doucet** who had travelled specially from France to be present at the baptism.

Both the newly-baptised received Holy Communion at the Divine Liturgy and attended as many of the weekday services as they were able, wearing their baptismal robes, returning on the eighth day for the de-robing prayer. May God grant them both to remain firm in the Orthodox faith and to receive the crown of salvation.

NEW CATECHUMEN

On Sunday 1st/14th December, **Luke Marshall**, a former Protestant, made his catechumen vows at the end of the Divine Liturgy receiving his new name **Aidan** in honour of St. Aidan of Lindisfarne (August 31st/13th September). May God grant him to remain firm in his journey to Holy Baptism.

VISITORS TO THE BROTHERHOOD

On Thursday 20th November **Archimandrite Adrian** and **Fr. Menas of Holy Ascension Skete, Maine** visited Saint Edward Brotherhood bringing with them a gift of incense. They were able to see the church and later to talk with Fr. Alexis. Fr. Adrian, despite serious physical infirmities was intrepid in his desire to visit as many of the holy places in England as was possible. The visitors planned to be in Europe for around two weeks before returning to the U.S.A.

GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

Fr. Deacon Ioan Turcu on a recent visit to Romania purchased for the church a beautiful new gold altar table cross, a new gilt chrismon brush and a silver liturgical lance.

H.S.H. Prince Donatus of Hohenzollern very kindly gave a generous supply of firewood for our Old Mortuary stove and arranged for it to be delivered for us. For his almsgiving may God greatly bless him.

SAINT TRYPHON GARDENING GROUP

On Saturday 6th December members of the St. Tryphon Gardening Group spent a day strenuously weeding in the vegetable patch and cleaning the area around the church grounds. Once again, we are grateful to them.

NEW FONT

We now have a new baptismal font, the old one being around forty years old, and no longer to be trusted to hold a large volume of water. The new font is an inflatable Lumi Pro Duo ice bath used by athletes and seems to work perfectly for its new purpose, for athletes of Christ. The new font was blessed before the baptisms of Nicolas and Michel.

DONATIONS TO THE AFRICAN MISSIONS

Thank you to all who have set up standing orders to help the Church's missions in Africa. A regular donation can be set up via the link to CAF Bank on our website: <https://saintedwardbrotherhood.org/donate>. Please use the reference 'AFRICA' so we are able to distinguish donations to this appeal from general donations. The total donated from February until November is £2763.63.

Practical Tip

IF YOU are having your home blessed with Theophany Water by the priest, you should prepare a table in front of your icon corner, covered with a cloth, with a lighted candle, and a bowl (used only for holy things) for the Theophany Water. You should also try to arrange for the whole family to be there for the blessing, and, especially if your family is large, write down the names of the family members for the priest to commemorate. During the blessing, he should be taken round the whole house or flat, and any outbuildings or garages, and, if you have them, grounds.