

# *The Shepherd*

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## FROM THE FATHERS

“LUKE begins not with the earliest forebears [in his genealogy of Christ] but the most recent, and working his way back from Joseph the Betrothed, does not stop at Abraham, nor, having included Abraham’s predecessors, does he end with Adam, but lists God among Christ’s human forebears (Lk. 3.23-38); wishing to show, in my opinion, that from the beginning man was not just a creation of God, but also a son in the Spirit, which was given to him at the same time as his soul, through God’s quickening breath (Gen. 2.7). It was granted to him as a pledge that, if, waiting patiently for it, he kept the commandment, he would be able to share through the same Spirit in a more perfect union with God, by which he would live for ever with Him and obtain immortality.”

SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS, + 1360 A.D.

“YOU who are preparing yourselves to meet the feast of Christ’s Nativity, ask yourselves: Have you preserved that spiritual birth from God which we each received in Baptism? Are you always heedful of your Divine sonship and the sacred treasure of the Spirit which you acquired in Baptism? Have you grown closer to God through faith and love, like His beloved children? Have you loved one another as befits children of God? Have you despised ugly, evil and all-destructive sin? Have you loved truth and every virtue? Have you loved immortal and eternal life prepared in a land which will not pass away, and to which we are called by Him Who now has come to our corrupt earth? These

are questions which we must ask ourselves now and decide; our decisions cannot be only with our minds, but above all, with our hearts and with our very deeds. In general, we should not allow ourselves to celebrate any Christian feast without seriously considering: What is its meaning and what is its purpose? What is our responsibility towards it? We must know the Christian meaning behind every feast. Then the feast will become profitable for our soul's salvation. Otherwise, the enemy of our salvation will snatch us and turn the feast of God into a feast of the flesh, of profligacy, as so often happens."

SAINT JOHN OF CRONSTADT, + 1908 A.D.



# A Time of Preparation:

## On the Beginning of the Nativity Fast

WE HAVE BEGUN the joyous and holy Nativity Fast. The fast begins on 15<sup>th</sup> / 28<sup>th</sup> November, or forty days before the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and ends on the feast itself on 25<sup>th</sup> December, or 7<sup>th</sup> January according to the secular calendar. Just as the Jews wandered in the wilderness for forty years before entering the Promised Land, the Holy Church leads us for forty days into the wilderness of the Fast before entering into God's promise revealed on the Nativity. For the Jews, it was in order to shake off the bonds of slavery - physical, mental, and spiritual. An entire generation of people born and raised in Egyptian slavery were to die before those who no longer remembered being slaves and those who were born free were allowed to enter the "land flowing with milk and honey" (Exod. 3:8). And so it is with us: we must shake off the bonds of slavery to sins and passions—physical, mental, and spiritual. We must cease being slaves of sin and become friends of Christ by keeping His commandments (John 15:14).

There are several aspects of the fast, all of which are important and connected to each other. The first thing about which many people think are the limitations in the quality and quantity of foods that we eat. The Nativity Fast is not as strict as some other fasts; fish is allowed on all Saturdays and Sundays, except the last weekend before Nativity, and on several Church Feasts...

Why do we fast from foods? Because we are whole beings. Christ did not come to save our souls only, but all of us: soul, body, mind, spirit, will - and as many "parts" as one would wish to count. He took our entire human being upon Himself, all of our human nature, and "made a man every whit whole" (Jn 7:23). In the God-given order, our spirit is to pull us to God, our soul is to find its inspiration in the direction of the spirit, and our body is to be nourished in doing the will of the Father (Jn 4:34; cf. Matt. 4:4). Sin perverts this divine order, and our flesh feeds on this world and becomes a slave to food, our soul finds inspiration in the things of the flesh, and our spirit no longer hungers for God but finds its direction in the passions of the soul.

The Holy Church gives to us times of fasting in order to help heal and restore our corrupted nature. An athlete does not win a prize before patiently exercising discipline and being "temperate in all things" (1 Cor. 9:25). And if we are to receive an "imperishable wreath" (*ibid.*), we must do the same and begin by taking control of that in us which is most material, restoring the divinely-ordained order and reaching to that which is the most spiritual. If we cannot control our bellies, how can we hope to control our tongues and thoughts, how can we hope to even begin to fight our passions? We must learn to discipline our bodies, because without this foundation we cannot begin to build the walls of the temple of our soul. And just as the purpose of a foundation is not in itself, but in that which can be built upon it, the purpose of taking control of our flesh is in freeing the soul from being controlled by it.

This year [2009, but what he writes applies to all the worldly celebrations leading up to the contemporary Mammonmas - ed], the beginning of our Nativity Fast came on the day after Thanksgiving. I know that for some, the main dish was not a turkey or a pumpkin pie, but other people,

whom they tore apart and devoured by gossip, judging, evil talk, and back-stabbing. What good is their fast if they continue to feast on humans? What good is their abstinence from meat if their tongue flings about like a butcher's cleaver?

The King and Prophet David says, "Keep thy tongue from evil" (Ps. 33:13), and "I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth" (1, 2). If we want our fast to be more than a weight-loss programme, we must follow the regimen prescribed by the Prophet. We should learn to control our tongue and our thoughts by directing both to communion with God. At all times but especially during fasts, we must be "sober and watchful," because our "adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). But in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we have a sure protection from the attacks of the devil.

Run to Christ in prayer, but be watchful that your prayer does not become like "a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1). Pay close attention to the words of prayers; make them not just someone's words repeated by you, but truly your own words that come from your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole mind (cf. Matt. 22:37).

Run to Christ in reading the Gospels, but be watchful that it does not become a chore whose meaning is forgotten the minute that the book is closed. Ask the Most Holy Theotokos to help you keep all the things that you read in the Gospels and to ponder them in your heart (cf. Luke 2:19, 51) as you go about your day, glorifying God for His abundant mercy to us.

Run to Christ in reading the lives of His saints, but make sure that you own life follows in the footsteps of the holy men and women that came before you. We do not study the lives of the saints for their literary value or as some pastime before we go to bed. They are a living example of what it means to be a Christian, and to love God, and to love one another.

Most importantly, run to Christ in the Communion of His Body and Blood, but do so in humility and repentance, lest with the morsel Satan enter into you, as he did into Judas (Jn 13:27).

May the all-merciful God bless this time of our fasting. May He accept our small human efforts and by His divine grace “which always healeth that which is infirm and supplieth what is lacking,”<sup>1</sup> receive our prayers and guide our lives toward His commandments. May He “sanctify our souls, make chaste our bodies, correct our thoughts, and purify our intentions”<sup>2</sup> that together with “the assemblies of angels and the choirs of martyrs”<sup>3</sup> we may always glorify the Holy Trinity. Amen.

**Footnotes:**

1 From the proclamation/bidding formulary of clerical ordination.

2 From a prayer at the Hours.

3 From the Prayer at the Nativity of Christ for Spiritual Children.

***Priest Sergei Sveshnikov***

*We have made some minor changes to the translation to accord with British English and our church usage.*



# ON THE FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS

SAINT CÆSARIUS OF ARLES, +542 A.D.

TODAY, dearest brethren, we are celebrating the feast of those infants who, the Gospel text tells us, were killed by King Herod, and for this reason our land, the fruitful mother of heavenly soldiers and such great virtues, should rejoice with the greatest exultation. Behold, the wicked enemy could never have helped the blessed infants as much by submission as he did by his hatred. As today’s most sacred feast shows us, the grace of benediction shone forth in the blessed infants as much as cruelty against them abounded. For we heard a little while ago that when King Herod was pursuing Christ, thousands of happy boys were killed. As the prophet said, “Rachel mourns her children, she refuses to be consoled because her children are no more” (see Jer. 31:15; Matt. 2:18). The blessed mother of the triumphant, the land of illustrious warriors, rich in children, for a

short time seemed to the eyes of the foolish to be bereaved. But she never was in need of consolation, nor did she bewail the sons whom she acquired with enviable sorrows, even while she lost them. Blessed are you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, who suffered the cruelty of King Herod in the death of your sons, and at the same time granted to offer to God a white-clad group of peaceable, sinless infants.

We are celebrating in a fitting manner the feast of those children whom the world brought forth to eternal life more blessedly than birth from their mothers' womb bore them. They acquired the dignity of eternal life before they received enjoyment from the present one. The precious death of the other martyrs has merited praise in their confession of faith; the death of the infants has been pleasing in its consummation. Death itself, which put an end to their present life, afforded a beginning of glory for them at the very beginning of their life. The wickedness of Herod took them away as they were nursing at their mothers' breasts. Rightly are they called "the blossoms of martyrdom" (Prudentius, *Cathemerinon* 12.125), since a kind of frost of persecution along with cold unbelief consumed them in their very beginning, like the first emerging buds of the Church. For this reason it is proper to give ceremonial honour to the infants who were killed for Christ's sake, not to grieve over them; to manifest our intention in the divine Mysteries and not in tears, because the one who was the source of their being hated was also the reason for their crown. The same one who was the cause of hatred is also the reason for their reward. While Herod was planning murder for the infants, Joseph was advised by an angel to take Christ the Lord into Egypt, a land full of idols. After the persecution by the Jews and the intent on the part of a wicked people to kill Christ, Christ Himself deigns to cross over to the gentiles, who were given over to idols. Leaving Judea, He is carried to a world which did not know Him, to be worshipped.

Because in Sacred Scripture, dearest brethren, we know that good and just men have always suffered persecution from the wicked, if we notice carefully, we will discover that those who perpetrate it suffer greater punishments than those who seem to suffer it. For every man who persecutes another in his body

is recognised as first suffering persecution in his own heart. If he takes something of the wealth of the man whom he is persecuting, he causes a still greater loss to himself, because no one secures an unjust gain without a just loss. Where there is gain, there is also a loss: a gain in the money-coffers, but loss in one's conscience. When a man takes another's clothing he loses his honesty; if he acquires money, he loses his sense of justice. Men, however, do this because they refuse to pay attention to the last day. If they were willing to think continually about the day of their own death, they would keep their minds away from every wanton lust or wickedness. But because they are unwilling to think about this in a salutary manner now, afterwards they will have to suffer without any remedy. For the last day will come for them, Judgment Day, when it will not be possible for them to repent or save themselves from eternal death by good works. The sinner is tormented even by this punishment, that when he is dying God will not be mindful of him, since while he was alive he forgot about God. The day of judgment will come, on which the foundations of the mountains will be moved, and the earth "shall burn to the depths of the netherworld" (Deut. 32:22); when the "heavens will be destroyed in flames" (2 Ptr. 3:12); when "the sun will be darkened, the moon will not shed her light, the stars will fall from the sky" (Matt. 24:29); when sinners and all wicked men will be hurled "into the pool of fire, and the smoke of their torments shall rise forever and ever" (Rev. 14:11); "wailing will be heard there, and the grinding of teeth" (Matt. 8:12). The time will come, dearest brethren, when no good man will fare ill, and no wicked man well. The last day will come, I repeat, when good men will be separated from the wicked, the just from the unjust, those who praise God from those who blaspheme Him. The time will come when they will all be separated so that no good man, as has already been said, will fare ill, and no wicked man well.

Why, then, is it not so now? Perhaps it is, but what is now in secret will then be made manifest. Read Sacred Scripture; walk with me, if you can, "into the sanctuary of God" (Ps. 72:15), perhaps there, if I can, I will teach you. Or rather learn with me from Him who taught me that even now there is no good for the wicked, and that things are better for the good than for the wicked,



even though the full enjoyment of good things has not come yet, just as the final punishment of the wicked has not come. If you carefully heed the law of God, perhaps you understand with me that nothing is well for the wicked. I beseech you, and I ask you: Why are things not well for you? You are likely to reply: Poverty chokes me, trouble pursues me, and perhaps also bodily pain and fear of my enemy. So it is bad for you because you suffer evil circumstances, and good for the man who endures himself as an evil person? There is a great difference between suffering in the midst of evil and being wicked. You are not what you suffer. You suffer evil but are not wicked yourself; that other man does not suffer evil but is wicked. Therefore do not be deceived; it cannot happen that it is not well for you who suffer evil and is good for the one who is evil. Now since he is wicked, do you think that he does not also suffer evil when he endures himself? It is bad for you because you in your body suffer evil from another; is it well for him when he suffers himself as evil within his heart? It is not good for you if you have an unproductive farm, but is it good for him when he has a bad soul? Be good, you who possess good things. Riches are good, and so is gold, silver, household possessions - all of these things are good. What makes you good is how you act with them, not what they are. Have possessions which make you good, not those which make you evil. What are these? you say. Pass judgment and act justly. These are the good things which you possess; be good yourself in the midst of your good possessions. Blush at your possessions; do not be wicked in the midst of them, lest you perish along with them. God, the Creator and regulator of all things, distributed the gift of gold and silver to men precisely in order that by nature and variety it might be good in itself. An abundance of it, however, should not lift up a man, nor a lack of it crush him. When offered, it blinds the wicked, and when it is taken away, it torments them. This comes about because when money is acquired it gives a false joy, and when it is lost it leaves real sadness.

Let us learn, then, to love true riches, that is, integrity and justice, peace and compassion. These are called just riches, because they are granted for good and just merits. They are also called true riches, because whoever possesses them will not

want but like the Apostle is content if he has food and clothing (cf. Phil. 4:11). Therefore it is wrong to consider as riches earthly riches, which do not take away poverty, since the more a man who loves them has, the more will he burn with the bitter want of avarice. How, then, are they riches, when a want of them increases as they increase, and since they do not bring satisfaction but arouse further desires on the part of their friends, the greater they are? Do you think a man is rich when, if he owned less, he would need less? Well, therefore, someone said: “Your love of money grows as fast as the money itself” [Juvenal, Satires 14.139]. The fury of desire is augmented by an increase of money, for all avaricious and covetous men seem to be sick with dropsy. Just as a man with dropsy thirsts all the more, the more he drinks, so the avaricious or covetous man runs a risk by acquiring more and is not satisfied with it when it does abound.

For our part, brethren, as we recall that we are “strangers and foreigners” (Heb. 11:13) in this world, let us keep for ourselves on the journey of this life only what we need for food and clothing. Let us further direct as much as we can to eternal bliss through alms for the poor. Then when on Judgment Day the covetous and avaricious, because of the barrenness of their good works, merit to hear: “Out of My sight, ye condemned, into that everlasting fire” (Matt. 25:41), because of your good deeds we will be able to hear: “Come, ye have My Father’s blessing! Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry and ye gave Me food, I was thirsty and ye gave Me drink, I was naked and ye clothed Me” (Mt. 25:24-36). To this blessedness may our Lord Himself lead us under His protection: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.



“ALWAYS have the fear of God in your heart, and remember that God is always with you, everywhere, whether you are walking or sitting.”

SAINT GENNADIUS OF CONSTANTINOPLE, + 471 A.D.

# From the Writings of the Reposed Athonite Elder, Priestmonk Arsenii

## *Temptation*

DAY AND NIGHT there stand before a man's soul two counsellors; one is a light-bearing angel, and the other a spirit of darkness. To whichever of them the soul inclines, that one will draw close to him and become beloved of him. At the departure of the soul from the body, as Saint Macarius the Great says, this comes to pass: If the soul has fulfilled the will of God, then light-bearing angels will take it and bear it into Paradise. But if the soul was careless about its salvation and followed the promptings of the spirit of darkness, then the cruel demons will overpower it and take it down to their dwelling place, to the abyss of Hades, where it will be detained until the universal Judgment of God, at which it will be recompensed according to its deeds.

The devil sharp-sightedly and tirelessly watches our tiniest inclinations and our actions; he is, according to the explanation of the Prophet King, sitting in ambush (*see Ps. 9:28*). When we are occupied with the concerns of life, then he leaves us in peace, then he cuts short the various fantasies and the building of castles in the air; and in such instances, when we think or do something sinful, he appears as our helper.

He never takes a holiday from watching, but continuously distracts a man from everything that is beneficial for the soul, inclines him to everything evil, and thereby each one of us can be persuaded. Start, for instance to say prayers, and immediately you will be weighed down by sleep, laziness, lack of time, from wherever they come; then worries arise about things that are seemingly necessary. You come to church and only take pleasure in anticipating the end of the service - this means it is oppressive for you.

So it is that everything beneficial for the soul is achieved by labour and with an inner struggle. For a luxury you are not grieved about spending a lot, but you do not want to give a little now and again to the poor; why is this? Some who enjoy reading worldly things will spend all night in this occupation, but as soon as they take up a spiritual book they start to yawn, to stretch, and they finish with it, as a book that will wait for some time in the future. All this is worked by the actions of the evil spirit that we cannot see, but which day and night seeks the destruction of our souls.

Some might ask, why does the devil strive so tirelessly for our destruction? Since his falling away from God, the devil has been filled with evil, he reigns like a king within it, and just like fire he is always seeking something to consume, just as the evil, living within the devil, constantly seeks self-satisfaction. Such is his character and that of all the passions - take, for instance, love of money, which even though it might amass an incalculable treasure does not cease from wanting even more.

The devil knows that eternal punishment faces him, but the evil reigning within him allows no place for fear, nor for any other kind of sensitivity; everything is sucked up, everything beaten down by it. We can observe something similar in people who have been subjugated because of their passions. Even though they know that they cannot escape death, standing before the Judgment Seat of God and being condemned to eternal torment, all the same, as is said, it passes by their ears, it does not prevent them from taking pleasure in the passions.



“O LORD, Who hast mercy upon all, take away from me my sins. Take away from me the heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh, a heart to love and adore Thee, a heart to delight in Thee, to follow and to cherish Thee, for Christ His sake.”

PRAYER OF SAINT AMBROSE OF MILAN, + 397 A.D.

# THE COMING MONTH

IN EFFECT the whole of the month of December is dedicated to the **Great Feast of the Nativity of our Saviour at Bethlehem**. The first twenty-four days fall within the Nativity Fast, and the two Sundays before Christmas are dedicated to the Old Testament forebears and forerunners of our Saviour. The remaining seven days are within the Great Feast itself.

In the Vespers service for the feast, we chant: “Come, let us rejoice in the Lord as we declare this present mystery. The middle wall of partition is broken asunder; the flaming sword is turned back, the Cherubim withdraw from the Tree of Life, and I partake of the Paradise of Delight, whence I was cast out before through disobedience. For the identical Likeness of the Father, the express Image of His eternity, taketh the form of a servant, and without undergoing change He cometh forth from a mother that knew not wedlock. For that which He was, He hath remained, even true God; and that which He was not, He hath taken upon Himself, becoming man out of love for man. Unto Him, let us cry: O God, Who art born of a virgin, have mercy on us.”

On the second day of the feast, we hymn the All-holy Virgin who gave birth to our Saviour, and on the Sunday after the feast day itself, we celebrate three kinsmen of the Saviour, Saint Joseph the Betrothed, the holy Prophet, King and Psalmist David, in whose city He was born, and the holy Apostle James, the Brother of God, the first Bishop of Jerusalem. St James is, in fact, the eldest son of Joseph the Betrothed, and thus not the Saviour’s actual brother, although he is called such because of the close family ties and because of the spiritual affinity. As a liturgical verse declares it: “Thou art a carpenter’s son, but also the brother of the Lord, Who built all with a word, O blest James.” This year these two commemorations coincide.

Among the saints we celebrate in December, we have the **Holy Martyr Filoftea (Philothea) of Wallachia** (7<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup>). She was born in Trnovo, then the capital of Bulgaria, in

the earliest years of the thirteenth century. Her father was a farmer, and her mother was from Wallachia. She died when Filoftea was still a child, and her father remarried. The child was often punished by her stepmother, who accused her of being disobedient, and of giving their possessions away to the poor. Her father chastised her for this, but Filoftea continued to attend church services and to do good to others, just as her mother had taught her. As she grew older, she was adorned with the virtues of prayer, virginity, and almsgiving. She used to bring food to her father, who was out working in the fields. Not all of the food reached him, however, because the girl would give some of it to the poor children begging in the street. When he complained to his wife that she did not prepare enough food for him, she replied, "I send you plenty of food. Ask your daughter what she does with it." Becoming angry with Filoftea, her father decided to spy on her to see what happened to the food. From a hiding place, he saw her giving food to the poor children who came to her. In a violent rage, he took the axe from his belt and threw it at the twelve-year-old girl, hitting her in the leg. The wound was mortal, and she soon gave her pure soul into God's hands. The man was filled with fear and remorse, and tried to lift his daughter's body from the ground, but it became as heavy as a rock. Then the wretch ran to the Archbishop of Trnovo to confess his sin and explain what had happened. The Archbishop and his clergy went with candles and incense to take up the martyr's body and bring it to the cathedral, but even they were unable to lift it. The Archbishop realised that St Filoftea did not wish to remain there, so he began to name various churches, monasteries and cathedrals to see where she wished to go. Not until he named the Monastery of Curtea de Arges in Romania were they able to lift her holy relics and place them in a coffin. The Archbishop wrote to the Romanian Voievode Radu Negru, asking him to accept the saint's relics. The Archbishop and his clergy carried the holy relics in procession as far as the Danube, where they were met by Romanian clergy, monastics, and the faithful. Then they were carried to the Curtea de Arges Monastery. Many people have been healed at the tomb of St Filoftea in a small chapel of the monastery, and those who

entreat her intercession receive help from her. Each year on 7<sup>th</sup> December there was a festal pilgrimage to the Monastery, and people come from all over Romania. The holy Virgin Martyr Filoftea is venerated in Romania, Bulgaria, and throughout the Orthodox world. Her feast day coincides with that of Saint Ambrose of Milan, the name saint of our Bishop, Metropolitan Ambrose.

**Saint Anne's Conception of the All-holy Virgin Mary** (9<sup>th</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup>). The Righteous Ancestors of God, Joachim and Anne who lived in Nazareth in Galilee piously in accordance with the Mosaic law, but until deep old age they remained childless. On one feast the righteous Joachim, according to the custom of the law, gave gifts and offerings to God in the Temple in Jerusalem. The High Priest Issachar, who was accepting the offerings of the numerous throngs of people, refused to accept the gifts from Joachim, telling him: "It is not right to accept gifts from you as from a true Israelite, for you are childless; because of some kind of heavy sin you have not received the blessing of God." Struck by the High Priest's rebuke, as though by the awesome verdict of the judgment of God Himself, the righteous man had no time even to withdraw from the altar, as a new heavier insult struck him. One of the others bringing his gifts, pushed him away, and said: "Depart from here, did you not hear that you are unworthy to bring gifts to God together with us, because you have not left offspring for Israel." With deep humility Joachim accepted this accusation as if it were from the mouth of God Himself, and with deep sadness left the Temple. With a painful heart he recognised himself unworthy not only to remain in the sight of the house of God, but also to return to his own house, and he withdrew to the desert. In fasting and repentance, in tears and prayer he spent forty days, imploring the Lord to forgive him all his sins, to remove his dishonour in Israel, and to bless him in old age by the birth of a child. The inexpressible sadness of heart struck the righteous Anne also, when she heard about the disgrace of her spouse before the altar of God by the numerous throngs of the sons of Israel on the day of the great feast of the Lord. She herself was judged by all as guilty, unworthy to even see the light of God because she was

deprived of God's blessing. Having confined herself to her room, in fasting and repentance, in tears and in sighing she cried out to the Lord day and night, imploring Him not for her sake, but for the sake of the piety of her righteous spouse, to relieve them from the curse of childlessness and to bless the fruit of her womb. Being alone in the garden under the shade of the laurel tree, Saint Anne saw a bird's nest, about which the mother flew feeding her nestlings. Everything in nature, Saint Anne thought, gives birth, everything is by the blessings of God – the birds of the sky, the animals of the forest and the very earth in growing various fruits, but she alone is deprived of happiness and the blessings of God. Even more fervently Saint Anne began to pray to the Lord and the Lord heard her tearful prayer. She heard the voice of the angel proclaim to her: "God has granted you the desire of your prayer. Thou wilt conceive and give birth to the Most Blessed Daughter, whom all on bended knees will bless and who will be the salvation of the world; her name will be Mary." Heartened by the heavenly annunciation, Saint Anne quickly sped to Jerusalem to pour out before the Lord in His sacred Temple her feelings of thanksgiving and the joy that filled her heart. At the same time the heavenly messenger was revealed to the weeping and praying Joachim in the desert with the same joyful annunciation, and with the confirmation of his words directed him to go to Jerusalem, where he found his wife. Before the doors of the Temple of God the rejoicing spouses met, and with one voice glorified and thanked the Lord God over and again, Who saw their humility; with one voice they promised before the Lord to devote to Him their promised child. Soon, after returning to their home, the pious spouses were even happier with the fulfilment of the divine promise. Saint Anne conceived in her womb and "began to grow the divine rod, who will sprout the mysterious flower of Christ, the Creator of all." In the hymns of the day, we chant: "Thou art He that once gave the great Isaac as a son to Sarah in deep old age by Thine overshadowing and Thy promise. Thou, O Almighty, art He that opened the barren womb of Hannah, the mother of Samuel Thy prophet. And now Thou doest look upon me, and accept my supplications and fulfil mine entreaties, cried the



chaste and barren Anne with lamentation; and the Benefactor hearkened unto her. Wherefore with joy she conceived the Virgin that beyond words conceiveth the Word of God.” The righteous Joachim and Anne, by their patient continuing in piety, even though it seemed their hopes were unfulfilled for a long period, grant us wonderful examples of how we should continue steadfast in the Faith even when it seems we are achieving nothing. The Orthodox Church calls the conception by Saint Anne of the Most Holy Theotokos most glorious, nevertheless it is far from the idea of recognising her as immaculate, as in the idea of perfect freedom from ancestral sin. The only sinless one is the Word of God the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man, incarnate from the Most Holy Virgin Mary through the infusion of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35; 1 Ptr 1:19, 2:22; 1 John 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26), and the Holy Fathers agree that the Most Holy Virgin Theotokos Mary was conceived from barren parents, and that, though it is wonderful, it was not beyond the usual laws of human birth. The Church teaches, that the Most Holy Virgin was born according to the ordinary law of human birth, but for the mystery of the incarnation of the Word of God she was cleansed by the Spirit in soul and body. In the hymn we have quoted from the service of the day, mention is made of the Prophetess Hannah and she is also commemorated on this day. We also commemorate the Venerable Æthelgifu, the foundress of Shaftesbury Abbey, and it is for this reason that when, in 1988, the High Court gave us permission to return the sacred relics of Saint Edward to our church in Brookwood, we arranged to do so on this feast.

**Our Holy Father Spyridon of Tremythus the Wonderworker** (12<sup>th</sup> / 25<sup>th</sup>) was born towards the end of the third century on the island of Cyprus. He was a shepherd, and had a wife and children. He used all his substance for the needs of his neighbours and the homeless, for which the Lord rewarded him with a gift of wonderworking. He healed those who were incurably sick, and cast out demons. After the death of his wife, during the reign of Constantine the Great, he was consecrated Bishop of Tremythus, Cyprus. As a bishop, the saint did not

alter his manner of life, but combined pastoral service with deeds of charity. According to the witness of Church historians, Saint Spyridon participated in the sessions of the First Œcumenical Council in the year 325. At the Council, the saint entered into a dispute with a Greek philosopher who was defending the Arian heresy. The power of Saint Spyridon's plain, direct speech showed everyone the importance of God's wisdom before human wisdom: "Listen, philosopher, to what I tell you. There is one God Who created man from dust. He has ordered all things, both visible and invisible, by His Word and His Spirit. The Word is the Son of God, Who came down upon the earth on account of our sins. He was born of a Virgin, He lived among men, and suffered and died for our salvation, and then He arose from the dead, and He has resurrected the human race with Himself. We believe that He is one in essence with the Father, and equal to Him in authority and honour. We believe this without any sly rationalisations, for it is impossible to grasp this mystery by human reason." As a result of their discussion, the opponent of Christianity became the saint's zealous defender and later received Baptism. After his conversation with Saint Spyridon, the philosopher turned to his companions and said, "Listen! Until now my rivals have presented their arguments, and I was able to refute their proofs with other proofs. But instead of proofs from reason, the words of this Elder are filled with some sort of special power, and no one can refute them, since it is impossible for man to oppose God. If any of you thinks as I do now, let him believe in Christ and join me in following this man, for God Himself speaks through his lips." At this Council, Saint Spyridon displayed the unity of the Holy Trinity in a remarkable way. He took a brick in his hand and squeezed it. At that instant fire shot up from it, water dripped on the ground, and only dust remained in the hands of the wonderworker. "There was only one brick," Saint Spyridon said, "but it was composed of three elements. In the Holy Trinity there are three Persons, but only one God." The saint cared for his flock with great love. Through his prayers, drought was replaced by abundant rains, and incessant rains were replaced by fair weather. Through his prayers the sick were healed and

demons cast out. A woman once came up to him with a dead child in her arms, imploring the intercession of the saint. He prayed, and the infant was restored to life. The mother, overcome with joy, collapsed lifeless. Through the prayers of the saint of God, the mother was also restored to life. Another time, hastening to save his friend, who had been falsely accused and sentenced to death, the saint was hindered on his way by the unanticipated flooding of a stream. The saint commanded the water: "Halt! For the Lord of all the world commands that you permit me to cross so that a man may be saved." The will of the saint was fulfilled, and he crossed over happily to the other shore. The judge, apprised of the miracle that had occurred, received Saint Spyridon with esteem and set his friend free. Similar instances are known from the life of the saint. Once, he went into an empty church, and ordered that the lampadas and candles be lit, and then he began the service. When he said, "Peace be unto all," both he and the deacon heard from above the resounding of a great multitude of voices saying, "And with thy spirit." This choir was majestic and more sweetly melodious than any human choir. To each petition of the litanies, the invisible choir sang, "Lord, have mercy." Attracted by the church singing, the people who lived nearby hastened towards it. As they got closer and closer to the church, the wondrous singing filled their ears and gladdened their hearts. But when they entered into the church, they saw no one but the bishop and a few church servers, and they no longer heard the singing which had greatly astonished them. Saint Simeon Metaphrastes, the author of his *Life*, likened Saint Spyridon to the Patriarch Abraham in his hospitality. Sozomen, in his *Church History*, offers an amazing example from the life of the saint of how he received strangers. Once, at the start of the Forty-day Fast, a stranger knocked at his door. Seeing that the traveller was very exhausted, Saint Spyridon said to his daughter, "Wash the feet of this man, so he may recline to dine." But since it was Lent there were none of the necessary provisions, for the saint "partook of food only on certain days, and on other days he went without food." His daughter replied that there was no bread or flour in the house. Then Saint Spyridon, apologising to his guest,

ordered his daughter to cook a salted ham from their larder. After seating the stranger at table, he began to eat, urging that man to do the same. When the latter refused, calling himself a Christian, the saint rejoined, "It is not proper to refuse this, for the Word of God proclaims, 'Unto the pure all things are pure'" (Titus 1:15). Another historical detail reported by Sozomen was characteristic of the saint. It was his custom to distribute one part of the gathered harvest to the destitute, and another portion to those having need while in debt. He did not take a portion for himself, but simply showed them the entrance to his storeroom, where each could take as much as was needed, and could later pay it back in the same way, without records or accountings. There is also the tale by Socrates Scholasticus about how robbers planned to steal the sheep of Saint Spyridon. They broke into the sheepfold at night, but here they found themselves all tied up by some invisible power. When morning came the saint went to his flock, and seeing the tied-up robbers, he prayed and released them. For a long while he advised them to leave their path of iniquity and earn their livelihood by respectable work. Then he made them a gift of a sheep and sending them off, the saint said kindly, "Take this for your trouble, so that you did not spend a sleepless night in vain." All the Lives of the saint speak of the amazing simplicity and the gift of wonderworking granted him by God. Through a word of the saint the dead were awakened, the elements of nature tamed, the idols smashed. At one point, a Council had been convened at Alexandria by the Patriarch to discuss what to do about the idols and pagan temples there. Through the prayers of the Fathers of the Council all the idols fell down except one, which was very much revered. It was revealed to the Patriarch in a vision that this idol had to be shattered by Saint Spyridon of Tremythus. Invited by the Council, the saint set sail on a ship, and at the moment the ship touched shore and the saint stepped out on land, the idol in Alexandria with all its offerings turned to dust, which then was reported to the Patriarch and all the bishops. Saint Spyridon lived his earthly life in righteousness and sanctity, and prayerfully surrendered his soul to the Lord. His relics repose on the island of Corfu (Kerkyra), in a church

named after him. The Venerable Elder Ambrose of Optina, in one of his letters to his spiritual children, mentions a miracle witnessed by the great Russian author Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol (1809-1852). Gogol visited Optina Monastery to submit for publication his book on George the Recluse of Zadonsk to Father Porphyrius Grigorov, and he told him about a miracle he saw with his own eyes that took place while on a pilgrimage to the island of Kerkyra, where he went to venerate the incorrupt relic of Saint Spyridon. On the day when Gogol went to venerate the Saint, it was his feast day on 12<sup>th</sup> December, when the sacred relic is processed throughout the city with great solemnity. Among those present was a certain English traveller who was a Protestant, and thus sceptical that Saint Spyridon's body remained incorrupt in a miraculous manner. Instead, he believed there must have been hidden cuts on his back by which they embalmed the body. The Englishman later had the opportunity to approach the relic closer, hoping to examine the matter, when suddenly something happened that astonished and horrified him and those present. In front of everyone, Saint Spyridon slowly rose from his coffin and turned his back on the doubter, as if inviting him to examine his back for an incision. This miracle was witnessed by many people, including Nikolai Gogol who related the event and stated how it sent shockwaves to his very soul. As for the Englishman, unfortunately his fate is not known to us.



“WHENEVER we enter the church and draw near to the heavenly mysteries, we ought to approach with all humility and fear, both because of the presence of the angelic powers and out of the reverence due to the sacred oblation; for as the Angels are said to have stood by the Lord's body when it lay in the tomb, so we must believe that they are present in the celebration of the Mysteries of His most sacred Body at the time of consecration.”

VENERABLE BEDE OF JARROW, + 735 A.D.

## *A Miracle Which Confirms the Traditional Church Calendar*

### **A Revelation of the Theotokos to the Virtuous Monk Boris**

(Nicolas in the Schema)

### **of the Holy Monastery of Valaam**

(†7<sup>th</sup> May 1969)

ON 25<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER, 1925, there was a division of people in Valaam as to the “old” and “new” style calendars. They began to force us to go to the new style. Many of the brothers remained true to the old style. Legal proceedings began. The church administration arrived; there was a court with Abbot Paulinus in charge. They began to summon the brothers one by one, and many were expelled from the monastery. Then my turn also came. I went into the room, and there sat Abbot Paulinus with others from the church administration. Father Abbot said, “Here is a slave of God; ask him.” One of them said that he would speak and that everything should be recorded. They asked, “Do you accept Fr. Paulinus as Abbot?” “Will you go to church services according to the new calendar?” I could not answer this question; it was as if my tongue had become paralysed. They hesitated and said, “Well, why aren’t you answering?” I couldn’t say anything. Then they said: “Well, go on, slave of God, and think this over.”

I began to pray to the Mother of God, my “Surety,” in my heart. “Tell me and indicate my life’s path: Which side should I go to, the new or old style? Should I go to the cathedral or somewhere else?” And I, the sinful one, prayed to the Mother of God during my obedience in the kitchen. When I finished my evening obedience, I went to my cell and thought in the simplicity of my heart, “Why don’t you answer me, Mother of God?” But the grace of God did not abandon me, a sinner. He wants salvation for all. Suddenly the cathedral appeared before me, the same as it is: the same height, length and width. I was amazed at this miraculous apparition - how could it enter my small cell? But my inner voice said to me: “Everything is possible with God. There is nothing impossible for Him.” “Well,” I thought, “one must go

to church in the cathedral according to the new style.” Then, as I was thinking thus, a blue curtain came down from above, in the middle of which was a golden cross. The cathedral remained behind the curtain. I remained on this side. The cathedral became invisible to me, and the inner voice said to me: “Go to the old style and hold to it.” And I heard a woman’s voice coming from above the corner: “If you want to be saved, hold fast to the traditions of the Holy Apostles and the Holy Fathers.” And then the same thing was repeated a second time, and the third time the voice said: “If you want to be saved, keep fast to the tradition of the Holy Apostles and Holy Fathers, but not these ‘wise’ men.” After this miracle, everything disappeared and I remained alone in my cell. My heart began to rejoice that the Lord had indicated the path of salvation to me, according to the prayers of the Mother of God. And ever since that time, I remember this great miracle for the salvation of man.



## POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

*“COULD you sometime clarify the Church’s teaching about the so-called ‘Old Testament Trinity’ icon that sometimes appears in miniature on icons of St Alexander [of Svir] to symbolise his vision of the Most Holy Trinity? Some years ago, you corrected me when I may have suggested that the visitors to Abraham were indeed the Persons of the Trinity, based on the icon. Were the visitors merely angels (as it says in the biblical account) and their appearance taken to be symbolic of the Trinity, or were they indeed the Most Holy Trinity taking angelic form?” - T.G., **Frimley Green.***

THE principal Angel figure there is believed to be God the Son, and the other two were angel ministers unto Him. The fact that there are three of them together is a revealing of the Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, and it is for this reason that the depiction is used as an icon of the Trinity. Sadly the most common alternative, - one that has become quite common in the past two centuries, - is one which suggests numerous erroneous beliefs, showing the Father as an old man, the Son as a young one, as if the Father has taken human form and is older than the Son, and the Holy Spirit represented as a dove

flying between them and looking rather inconsequential in comparison with the two full figures, as if He were of lesser importance. In the narrative in Genesis, it will be noted that Abraham always addresses himself to one Person, that is God the Son. And also we see that the two Angels then journey to Sodom where they were greeted by Lot, Abraham's nephew, while Abraham stood before the Lord, and pleaded for mercy to be shown if any could be righteous in that city. In the Rublev icon of the 'Old Testament Trinity,' it should also be noted that the central angel is clothed in a red garment partly covered by a blue cloak, as He is in the icons of the Incarnate Lord, our Saviour Jesus Christ. The red represents His Divinity, and the cloak put on is blue representing His human nature. In passing we might mention that the Mother of God is most commonly depicted wearing a blue garment and wrapped in a red shawl, since she, being a human being, has in the words of St Athanasius the Great, "become by grace what God is by nature."



## *NEWS from the Richmond Diocese of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece*

### **NEW CATECHUMEN**

ON THE EVE of what is now his name day, **Michael Latham** of Camberley made his vows as a catechumen at the end of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, 7<sup>th</sup> / 20<sup>th</sup> November. The vows were taken and the prayers read by **Archimandrite Daniel**. Michael is named after the Archangel Michael, whose feast day fell on the Monday. May he ever live under his heavenly protection.

### **BURIAL AT SAINT EDWARD'S**

ON Monday, 7<sup>th</sup> November, **Radojka Sormaz**, a long-time friend of our community, was laid to rest in the Serbian section which adjoins our own. Her funeral was served by the **Priest Dragan Lazic** of Saint Sava's Church in London and the **Priest Stefan** from the Oxford Parish of the Ascension. May her memory be eternal.



## ***GIFTS TO SAINT EDWARD'S***

A GOLDEN hanging lamp has been given by **Fr Borislav and Presbytera Marina Popov** in memory of the recently reposed Dimitar, Stefan and Anna, their parents. It has been hung before the icon of the Platytera above the high place of the altar.

AN ICON of the **Ven. Paisius Velichkovsky of Neamt**, painted in Romania, has been given to the church by **Alexandra Galbeaza**.

## ***VISITORS***

AS WELL as the many individuals and family groups who visited over the month, we had:

On Wednesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> November, **Charlotte Parker** and **Shân Mughal** of the **Historic Environmental Planning Team** of **Surrey County Council** visited the Brotherhood and spent some time in the church, asking questions and taking photographs. They were accompanied by **Lucy Coleman Talbot** of the **Brookwood Cemetery Office**.

On Friday, 11<sup>th</sup> November, **Dave Legrand** brought a number of student R.E. teachers to see the church. They spent some time with us, asking many questions about our faith and worship.

ON Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> November, a group from the **Najmee Baag Muslim community** on the north side of the cemetery were shown our mortuary building, the former Anglican Chapel in the cemetery, which is identical to their building, the former non-conformist chapel on the site of the north station of the Necropolis Railway, which they are hoping to renovate.

# ***Practical Tip***

WHEN you come to confession, always remember to do two things which many of us seem to neglect. Many come and list their sins or even explain them, but more is needed. First of all you must also firmly resolve to strive never to repeat them. And secondly you must also ask for forgiveness. Judas admitted his sin and even paid back his ill-gotten gains (Matt. 27:5), but he neglected to ask the Lord for forgiveness and perished.