

The Shepherd

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FROM THE FATHERS

“NOW on your account, O son of man, Christ was born, and the Son of God came that He might make you to live. He became a **Child**, becoming a man, being also God. He Who was the Lawgiver became a **Reader**, and He took the book in the synagogue, and He read, saying, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and for this reason He hath anointed me, and hath sent me to preach the gospel unto the poor.’ Like a **Subdeacon** He made a whip of rope, and He drove forth from the temple all those who sold oxen, and cattle, and doves, and other things. Like a **Deacon** He girded a napkin about His loins, and washed the feet of His disciples, and He commanded them to wash the feet of their brethren. Like a **Priest** He sat among the priests, and taught the people. Like a **Bishop** He took bread, and blessed and brake it, and gave to His disciples. He was beaten for your sake, that is to say, for your sake He was crucified, and for your sake He died. Yet you for His sake will not even endure insult! He rose as God. He was exalted as God. All these things for our sake, all these things by Divine Providence, all these things properly and in due order did He do that He might redeem us. Let us then be watchful, and strenuous, and constant in prayer, and let us do everything which will please Him, and will gratify His friends, so that we may be redeemed and live.”

FROM THE SAYINGS OF THE DESERT FATHERS

“THE LORD did not come to make a display. He came to heal and to teach suffering men. For one who wanted to make a

display the thing would have been just to appear and dazzle the beholders. But for Him Who came to heal and to teach the way was not merely to dwell here, but to put Himself at the disposal of those who needed Him, and to be manifested according as they could bear it, not vitiating the value of the Divine appearing by exceeding their capacity to receive it.”

SAINT ATHANASIUS THE GREAT, +373A.D.

“WAKE UP, O man! For it was for you that God was made man. Rise up and realise it was all for you. Eternal death would have awaited you had He not been born in time. Never would you be freed from your sinful flesh had He not taken to Himself the likeness of sinful flesh. Everlasting would be your misery had He not performed this act of mercy. You would not have come to life again had He not come to die your death. You would have perished had He not come.”

SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, +430A.D.

“CHRIST’S BIRTH was not necessity, but an expression of omnipotence, a sacrament of piety for the redemption of men. He Who made man without generation from pure clay made man again and was born from a pure body. The hand that took up clay to make our flesh deigned to assume a body for your salvation. That the Creator is in His creature and God is in the flesh brings dignity to man without dishonour to Him Who made him. Why then, man, are you so worthless in your own eyes and yet so precious to God?”

SAINT PETER CHRYSOLOGUS, +450A.D.

“OUR SAVIOUR, dearly-beloved, was born today: let us be glad. For there is no proper place for sadness, when we keep the birthday of the Life, which destroys the fear of mortality and

brings to us the joy of promised eternity. No one is kept from sharing in this happiness. There is for all one common measure of joy, because as our Lord, the destroyer of sin and death, finds none free from charge, so is He come to free us all. Let the saint exult in that he draws near to victory. Let the sinner be glad in that he is invited to pardon. Let the gentile take courage in that he is called to life. For the Son of God in the fulness of time, which the inscrutable depth of the Divine counsel has determined, has taken on Him the nature of man, thereby to reconcile it to its Author: in order that the inventor of death, the devil, might be conquered through that which he had conquered.”

SAINT LEO THE GREAT, POPE OF ROME, +474 A.D.

“GOD THE WORD was made man for this reason, that that very nature which had sinned, fallen, and become corrupt should conquer the tyrant who had deceived it.”

VEN. JOHN OF DAMASCUS, + 780 A.D.

“HE COMES not as a fierce man of war, threatening all things living with death, but as a newly born babe, bringing the hope of rebirth and life into the entire realm of death; He comes, but the land of destruction does not meet, does not embrace, does not praise, does not even see its Saviour, and does not hear the Word of God keeping silence in a manger. Virtually in vain does the glory which Jesus Christ had with God the Father before the world was (John 17:5), on the lips of the angels, follow Him descending into the world and pursuing Him, attain even unto the earth.”

SAINT PHILARET OF MOSCOW, + 1867 A.D.



Christmas Homily

† METROPOLITAN PHOTII OF TRIADITZA, 2021

FIRST HIERARCH OF OUR SISTER CHURCH, THE OLD
CALENDAR ORTHODOX CHURCH OF BULGARIA

“Jesus is born in the flesh, and the Timeless One is seen in time as a babe, loosing my long-time offences; and through His unspeakable poverty, He now maketh me rich who became poor through transgressions that wreak corruption.”

Menaion, 21st December, Fourth Ode of the First Canon of Matins

(This homily was preached in the Covid lockdown period, but that very probably lends to its instructing us regarding coping with the tribulations that are now before us.)

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Divine Infant Christ, children of the Holy Orthodox Church!

We are celebrating the birth of the pre-eternal God in the flesh, during days of a difficult trial - a novel sickness having swept over mankind. We are not celebrating as we are accustomed. But should we not use these circumstances to our benefit by trying to delve deeper into the essence of the celebration?

Notice that the hymnographer does not say “Jesus was born in the flesh,” but “Jesus is born in the flesh.” Why? Because we do not consider today’s great and holy festival - as do the non-Christians - as a ritualistic remembrance of an event that happened more than two thousand years ago. It is a communion with a great mystery; it grants a new purpose and a new goal to the entire sequence of historical events which occurred in time. It is not accidental that nothing in the services of the Orthodox Church leads to the past; the past is only referred to in order to point to the future.

In celebrating the Birth of the God-man we participate in an unrepeatable event. This is the Orthodox understanding of each and every feast of the Church. Every feast of the Church gives us the possibility to understand, and thus to experience, the spiritual

significance of that which God has done for man, simultaneously being a deed of the present and of the future. Through celebrating the feasts, the sacred events become contemporary with our life. Of course, they are not repeated in time, but in the present, in our life through the feast we are connected with these events and are transfigured in a manner through which we too could experience them, as did the first witnesses of them. In this sense we ourselves are also called to become contemporaries and witnesses, to step into so-called liturgical time: which is “now” and “today” and “unto the ages.” For this reason in the texts of the Church services every sacred event is related as happening now, as in the present, as a present event, which directly affects us - regardless of whether the Christians celebrating gather in the catacombs of Rome, in beautiful churches or out under the open sky, with the heavens for a dome - regardless of every circumstance, regardless of the spirit of the times.

“Jesus is born in the flesh and maketh us rich with an unspeakable poverty.” To be enriched with the poverty of Christ, this very day, so that this supremely rich poverty continues to grow in us tomorrow, and forever - how should we understand this? Saint Gregory Palamas says “He Who possesses inexhaustible treasures willingly subjects Himself to such poverty that there is not found any place for Him in an earthly lodging... from the very womb of His mother He is numbered with the servants (being ranked with them) - He Who by nature is Lord of the whole world.” God created the world out of nothing, and behold how the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus of Nazareth came to make us rich with Himself. Behold a Stranger Who, in His own words “hath nowhere to lay His head” (Matt. 8:20), Who, at the same time, offers to us the richness of His own Divinity; this He offers to all who would open their eyes and see that their imaginary riches will consign them to endless poverty.

Our selfishness, self-love and hidden self-worship speak to us: “But we are your greatest treasure,” they reassure us, “we are the core of your ‘self,’ we are ‘you.’ Don’t ever forget this truth, otherwise you will lose yourself. Anyhow, be good, do good, but to the extent that we allow you.”

“This voice is deceiving you,” says the supremely rich Poor Man “giving of yourself won’t hurt you; the more you give of yourself the richer you will become, all the more you will be filled with richness, which no one will be able to take away from you, which will remain and multiply both in this age and in the age to come.”

It is up to us which voice we listen to. It is up to us to permit the God-man to enrich us with His own “unspeakable poverty.”

Do you notice your neighbour? Do you act sensitively, in a Christian way, towards your fellow men? Are you considerate to them in these turbulent days of trial, or have you sunk into the world of your own personal anxieties and fears fuelled by endless “discoveries” about the essence of the pandemic? As much as you are able do you protect your neighbour from involuntarily infecting him, or are you careless about this, only thinking, above all, about yourself? Are you concerned with how you could offer him help? Are you ready to give, or rather do you look to receive? The answer to these questions will testify in our heart, according to our actions, as to which of these voices we are inclined to listen.

In times of peace and in times of war, in times of poverty and illness and in quiet times the Church has, does and will declare the glad tidings of the terrible mystery of Christ’s Nativity: “Today is born of the Virgin He that holdeth all creation in the palm of His hand, in swaddling clothes is He wrapped Who by essence is the unapproachable God...in a poor manger reclineth the Only-Begotten Son, seen as a man...”

Yes, in the life of the Church the past, present and future are experienced in an indissoluble oneness. And this is so because, through the life in Christ, eternity meets with time, it sanctifies time; it envelops us in every single aspect of created time. Only by living in Christ will we make ourselves rich with His “unspeakable poverty” - the only gift through which we discover God, and in Him, discover ourselves, discover our neighbour so that we meet with ourselves and with all men. Amen!

On the Eight-Day Circumcision of Our Lord Jesus Christ, with a Panegyric, in a few words, for Basil the Great

SAINT AMPHILOCHIUS OF ICONIUM, +394 A.D.

The Law is a Shadow

The great Paul declared that the written “Law possesses a shadow of future good things, not the very image itself” (Heb. 10:1). For it is just so with painters who have set their sights on the original form and the living shape: first, using black pigment they carefully outline the form of their subject in shadows on the canvas. Then, artfully mixing up different colours, and casting them in shadow and light, they clearly display the original shape through imitation of its form.

So too the Law of the Spirit, just as in living forms and pure objects, envisions the good things prepared in heaven for those who are worthy: now the shadows and types of these things, through Moses and the Old [Testament], were faintly sketched out beforehand. But through Christ and the New [Testament], the teachings of piety and truth, indeed cast to such an extent in very florid and bright colours, have been set before the eyes of those who see the brighter form of celestial and unseen good things. Just as when the form has been arranged in colours, and has received its proper beauty, the shadow which was laid down is hidden and passes away: so now while good things have been hidden in heaven, when later they are revealed, the same image of the things, passing away, will cease to be.

As it is written, “Then the prophecies will pass away, then forms of knowledge will cease: for we know only partially, and we prophesy only partially. But when completion has come, then

what is partial will pass away” (1 Cor. 13:8-10). So therefore as the old things have gone away, while all the new things have come to be; and the shadows and the types have passed away, while the images of things themselves have suddenly become visible through the grace of the Spirit and the apostolic wisdom of God, let us disregard the rest of the legal types, and the shadows: let us have regard instead for the finely etched form of the things itself.

Christ and the Law

Also does the divine apostle say: “forgetting what is behind, and stretching toward what is ahead, we pursue the goal, to the reward of God’s portion above [Phil. 3:13]; so that we may no longer be children tossed about by waves, and borne about by every wind” (that is, spirit) “of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14), let us speak and discern and reason not like children - in the manner of the child-minded, or mindless!, Jews - but “let us attain to the perfect man, to the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13), through both performing and contemplating in a spiritual manner His Law. For this did the only-begotten Word of God become flesh for us. For this did the Lord God show himself to us as a child: so that which is childish and imperfect of our intellect may be transformed into perfection and firmly virile mind.

On this account also the Exalted One took part in the legal purifications and observances, and the other shadowy traditions, and indeed even in circumcision on the eighth day. The result is that He, paying back our debt in these matters, and liberating us from all of the legal servitude and childish behaviour, delivered us. For the commandment of circumcision was necessary, and it was unavoidable: not only insofar as it occurred in the older Law, and was received of old from Abraham, and was affirmed by Moses himself and the Law, and the prophets in turn unto future generations as a custom; but, because it was given by God as a sign of the greater and spiritual circumcision, out of necessity the thing itself oppressed all with its yoke: until the Lawgiver, in similarity to us, in His love of mankind, shared in the same flesh, and, in the likeness of others,

deigned likewise to be circumcised, thereupon demonstrating through the greater circumcision, that which is in Baptism, how the former remained imperfect and functioned ineffectively, He annulled it and put a stop to it. Now Jesus is circumcised according to His own eight-day Law, not so that He might teach us to be circumcised, but so that He might put a stop to circumcision; rather, so that He might divest us of the preconception of the old, useless [Law], and reveal the power of the new and salvific one; so that He might abolish [circumcision] according to the flesh, and cause it to sprout anew according to the spirit; for Christ is circumcised in a refutation of the former [Law's] weakness and in an affirmation of the latter [Law's] strength.

For He did not come to abolish the Law (*cf.* Matt. 5:27), as if it were foreign, but rather He came fulfilling it by this deed, as His own and having been established by Himself, as His own doctrine and the commandment of God. He came fulfilling the letter, and preaching the spirit. And just as the best painter first engraves the outline of the truth “in himself,” so to speak, and so makes clear the image’s beauty, through which he might more accurately strive toward it and craft the perfection of the model, with great clarity and inspiration; so also circumcision according to the flesh outlines not only a reckoning of sins, and the circumcision of Christ in Baptism (*cf.* Col. 2:12), but indeed also subtly and in shadows it describes the resurrection and alteration of all, according to which all carnal discernment of human beings is circumcised and excised, and transformed into another living being.

Circumcision according to the flesh is like some obscure and shadowy prototype. So also the eight days were first established as law. This octave, I think, alludes to the eternal and future octave; when the time for the image of the things themselves (so to speak) and of the circumcision in the spirit was not yet ripe, it became necessary for circumcision according to the flesh to be established as law. But now that it has appeared in the spirit, through Christ, through Him it was necessary for circumcision in the flesh to be annulled for all people. For if indeed the reason and the Law for circumcision in the flesh and animal sacrifices

was perfect, and able to perfect those who kept them correctly, at no time and in no way would they be able to be dissolved (*cf.* Heb. 10:1-4). For the word of the Lord, as it is written, remains forever (*cf.* Es. 40:8).

But then it was given as a discipline of the imperfect of habit and of the children until the time of their correction: when perfection became clear in its time, it was entirely necessary for the imperfect and weaker to be annulled and diminished. It was necessary, at the rising of the sun, for the moon and the stars to grow dim and shrink; and when the true circumcision and ministry were laid bare, it was necessary for the shadowy perceptions of the truth and the types to withdraw.

Because of this, accordingly God the Word first became flesh, and on this the eighth day today was bodily circumcised: so that, discharging on our behalf the debt in the letter, the law of the spirit was introduced for all eternity: and the worse was concealed and covered over by the better. Through this also the priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek has been cut off from the priesthood according to the order of Aaron (*cf.* Heb. 7:5, 11), so that the shadows have been ended, while the truth has been allowed to speak freely; and so that the imperfection and childishness of the legal traditions have been hidden from sight, while the perfection and magnificence of the Gospel doctrines have been brought to light.

Apostles, Disciples, Bishops and the Law

For this also [came] Peter and Paul, the pinnacles of the divine mysteries, for this also all of the holy apostles and disciples, educated first in the written Law, and the ones practicing circumcision in the flesh transformed circumcision into the spirit, and into Baptism, so that, the spirit of servitude having been nullified through them, the spirit of grace and of sonship has been brought to life again for us through divine Baptism in Jesus Christ. For this also all of the bishops most worthy of God, and all others, and especially Basil the Great, great in his own time, brought to life the high priesthood of the Church: not passing

bodily through the heavens, but in contemplation and in spirit, imitating that first and most divine high priest, Jesus Christ, Who also Himself entered into the innermost shrine (*cf.* Matt. 27:51), Who was there the Law of the Spirit, and the great thundering Voice of the doctrines, and Who annulled and halted the law of the letter and the circumcision in the flesh by the lofty expression of the Gospels.

Encomium of Basil

This is Basil: of glorious and famous name, firebrand of the Catholic Church: renowned sun of the Gospel truth, setting ablaze the entire earth with the rays of his theology. Inimitable in deed, and unmatched in contemplation; perfect in manner of life, and most clever in reason; consummate in virtue, and most accomplished in both divine and human learning; and fully complete, lacking in nothing. First well-trained in and equipped with all worldly wisdom and knowledge, then throwing it away to follow the footsteps of the apostles of Jesus. Well-disciplined in the highest and holy fashion, in all of the old and prophetic holy Bible, and through it raised up and strengthened directly toward the most perfect faith of Jesus Christ. He who used the Gospel as a guide and a director to true prophetic knowledge, from the prophetic divine doctrine to the precise sacred knowledge of the Gospel, passing through both to the purest recognition of the divine principles.

He is the sublime and pre-eminent pillar of the Church of God, the guiding light of theology; the ornament of the church offices; the truest human of the Father; the most fervent messenger of the Only-begotten; the most faithful steward and scribe of the Holy Spirit; the offspring of wisdom; the fullness of perception; the storehouse of knowledge; the schoolhouse of piety; the educator of the holy and divine council, and of the power and strength of Christ, the unbroken and steadfast tower. He is the director and teacher of divine fear and the Master's commandment, and of virtue, to all mankind: Basil the Great, the most majestic trumpet of the divine Word, covering the ends of the world with its mighty sound.

Basil, the Law, and Circumcision

This one, nobly preaching circumcision in the spirit, and divine Baptism, especially clearly if someone is not one of the wise men of God, he has put a stop to circumcision in the flesh. Thus also the dissolution of his body and his migration from the earth to God did not just happen to coincide with the same day as the circumcision of Jesus, between the divine birth of Christ and the Baptism, as someone might irrationally suspect. The Baptism of Christ was commemorated on 6th January: but, by proclamation, as an exaltation of Christ's birth, his Baptism, his circumcision in the spirit, exalted by that most blessed one on its sacred commemoration, then was he deemed worthy to be exalted in his passing alongside Christ. And it was decided that he would be honoured on the very same day as these annual commemorations and celebrations: so as the universal Church of all the saints in every part of the world celebrates and magnifies his most saintly and sacred commemoration, it also sings praises and extols Christ, Who is glorified with His holy and most divinely appropriate praises by all His saints; since, through him, it has been delivered from every heresy, confirmed in all piety through doctrines; and since it has been differentiated from every strange-thinking and heterodox teaching, and brought near to the Master's faith and teaching alone.

Basil the Orthodox

For also through the thundering-voiced speech of this sacred teacher, Arius was struck down by thunder and cancelled out. Also Eunomius was destroyed: and, as if by bolts of lightning (that is, by his rebuttals) he was burned to cinders and destroyed. Also Sabellius perished and disappeared; and Macedonius, who raged against the Holy Spirit, was driven away and utterly destroyed by the spirit of Basil. Apollinarius the mindless - the most mindless and senseless! - was thoroughly refuted by his divine speeches, and sent off into eternal shame. All of this, to speak simply, is the cultivation of weeds; and all of this is the diversity of God-hated heresies. As many as a long period of time before him brought to light, so many has the period after

his death continued to bring to light. Here it becomes clear that this speech was not composed as a funeral oration, even pseudonymously; it is a festal homily delivered long after its subject's death. But all of them have been cast into the fire of Basil's divine theology, set afire and consumed: no less than the holocaust offerings, and the altar of Elias, and the logs, by the fire which came down from heaven because of his prayer (*cf.* 1 Kgs 18:33-38).

This is the exalted Basil, not only of the church of Caesarea, of which he was proclaimed bishop: and not only in his own time, and in his own generation, but in all the lands and cities of the world, and for all of eternity, useful to all people, he is declared the most salvific teacher to Christians. What sort of birth he had as his beginning, and dwelling and upbringing, and zeal for the holy teachings! How that most blessed one turned from Greek learning to Christian holy wisdom! By the best manner of life, by the finest reason, he surpassed almost every philosopher who came before and after him, and thereafter, mounted on his high priestly throne, and like a fully-illuminating lamp set on the candelabra of the holy churches, he shone forth upon the whole world with vigorous sacred reason: and how against the heresiarchs and those struggling against the truth he battled firmly, as a shepherd driving Arabian wolves away from his flocks.

And he struggled against impious emperors, engaged with lawless governors, and erected the most illustrious trophies of victory against all of them: and in a good and rich pasture, and by a display of sacred marvels and speeches, and by an explanation of celestial and divinely perfect laws, he himself as the good shepherd of Christ's flock, and as the sacred high priest, without evil, undefiled, having left behind sins, and (if such a thing should be dared) having become more exalted than the many heavens, and himself working in the gospel of salvation for many, was later released from this humble tabernacle, and in the place of the wondrous tabernacle unto the house of God in the voice of exultation and the ringing echo of profession of the celebrants as he passes through, and he has laid down with the first born children of the celestial Sion and taken rest with them. I

suppose that all of these things have been sufficiently philosophised and psalmodised in the sacred speeches of the divine Gregory [A reference to Gregory the Theologian, who delivered a funeral oration after Basil's death, not to Basil's own brother Gregory of Nyssa] and I have now undertaken to speak at too much length about them.

Honouring Basil and Christ's Circumcision

But let us glorify today the memory of our God-bearing father. Let us resound with hymns of this teacher of virtues and with well-earned and divinely inspired praises. Let us be instructed by him on how to honour virtue, and let us honour him in his debt as the true father, as we have been begotten in Jesus Christ through the Gospel, and as we have been transformed into God-like children by his teaching, which penetrates our inner man.

How shall we honour him? Let us be circumcised! Not according to the flesh of our foreskins, as that Old Israel does, but let us circumcise the interior person of the heart: stripping away all of the hidden passions of the soul and of the mind, or killing them: and having eagerly died together with Christ, and having been crucified with Him and buried with Him in the shedding of the body of sinful flesh, in the circumcision of Christ, in Baptism (*cf.* Col. 2:12): so we along with the great teacher in his other divinely worthy exhortations, and even especially in the speeches exhorting us to approach Baptism, let us not permit circumcision according to the flesh: let us rise up to Baptism! Let us run from the shadow, and let us run to truth; let us come out to John.

For now the voice crying out in the wilderness has echoed piercingly, and calls the world to it. Now the voice runs ahead of the Word, and the groomsman ahead of the groom, and the messenger is sent in advance of the emperor, and goes ahead to straighten his ways: and to make ready the people that have been prepared for the Lord, he stands by at the Jordan. Now Jesus after His circumcision in the flesh on the eighth day according to the Law, comes to John at the age of thirty, to be baptised in the water: so that, bringing a halt to the immature

circumcision of the letter, He might establish as law perfection in the Spirit; now the great herald, and forerunner, in a great voice orders the crowds in the desert to repent: “Because the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2).

For where the king is, the kingdom is always there with him. Where the King of Heaven is near, in the water of Baptism, of necessity also the kingdom of heaven has come there: but now the one who truly and well takes his name from the kingdom of man, that is, Basil (Basileios) who takes his name from the kingdom (basileia), next after that great Baptist, who himself on this day commemorates his release today; both in silence and in voice, he prepares all the people for the Baptism of the Spirit. Now let us prepare the paths of our God; let us flatten out his roadways; let us straighten out his courses. Let us prepare our hearts to be worthy of the appearance in the Jordan of the Great King Christ, through works of repentance; and, buried with him through Baptism and rising up with him into a new life, let us glorify and reign together with Him, forever and ever: Amen.



THE COMING MONTH

Naturally, **Christmas**, the feast of our **Saviour’s Nativity** is our paramount celebration in December, and indeed it covers the whole month. The first twenty-four days of December are within the **Nativity Fast**, through which we prepare ourselves spiritually for the feast, and the remaining days of the month constitute the days of the feast itself. Furthermore the two Sundays immediately before the feast day itself anticipate the Saviour’s Nativity in the flesh, by celebrating His forebears and the prophets who proclaimed the coming mystery. And the first day of January takes up the very same theme, celebrating His circumcision on the eighth day.

Among the commemorations in December we have:-

The **Holy Martyrs Eustratius, Auxentius, Eugene, Mardarius and Orestes** (13th / 26th). These Saints lived during the years of Diocletian and Maximianus (284-305) the impious Emperors, when the duke Lysias was governor of the province of Limitanea, and Agricolaus administered all the provinces of the East. These five Martyrs revered Christ, but hid the fact that they were Christians, out of fear of these tyrants and persecutors. Of these, Saint Eustratius came from the city of Aravraka, and held the position of secretary and the rank of military commander. He had the desire to boldly express his faith in Christ, but feared the outcome of this action. For this reason he gave his officer's belt to a servant and commanded him to go to the church of the city of Aravraka and leave it there. The Saint took this action having in mind the following: if his belt, which was left at the entrance of the Holy Sanctuary, was found and taken by the priest Auxentius, it would have been a divine indication that he could step forth and reveal his faith and suffer a martyr's death which he desired. But if the belt was found and taken by someone else, it meant that he would keep his faith in secret because it was not time yet to express it. The servant complied with the Saint's request, and upon returning, told him that his belt was found and taken by the priest Auxentius. So the Saint took the view that his testifying for the sake of Christ would have a good outcome. Indeed, he then presented himself to Lysias and told him with frankness that he believed in Christ. In addition, the Saint came forth before Lysias as the leader among other saints who came from the military class, and was the first to declare himself a Christian. Lysias, became furious and immediately deposed him. Then, he commanded the executioners to make him go through terrible tortures. First they removed his clothes and left him naked, and after stretching his body on the ground with a special machine, they started beating him mercilessly with whips. Then, he was tied with a rope and lifted up. They lit a big fire under his body and burnt him. They then mixed salt and vinegar and poured the mixture over his burned body parts. After all this, they battered his sides with stones. The Saint and Martyr, however, by the miraculous intervention of God, was then found perfectly healthy. This led Saint Eugene to join the

faith of Christ. Then the executioners put iron shoes which had spikes inside them on Saint Eustratius' feet, and led him to Sebaste of Nicopolis in Armenia along with Eugene. On the way to Nicopolis, Saint Mardarius saw him driven this way and started blessing him for his endurance and patience. Then, he consulted his wife, who encouraged him to also become a martyr for the love of Christ. Therefore Mardarius came running to Eustratius, tied on himself the shackles, and told the soldiers that he was a Christian. Lysias commanded his soldiers to bring Saint Auxentius before him. The tyrant attempted to persuade him to return to paganism, but the Saint refused categorically by stating that he remained steadfast in the faith of Christ. Lysias then became incensed and commanded his executioners to behead Auxentius. When Mardarius was led to trial, despite the efforts of the tyrant to dissuade him, he stayed committed to Christ. Lysias resented this and made the Saint go through torture. Therefore, they first pierced his ankles with an iron, and after passing ropes through the holes, they hung him up facing down. Then, they burnt his kidneys and back with hot rods. So, in this way, Saint Mardarius became a Martyr and delivered his spirit to the Lord. Then the judges led Saint Eugene in. But he also remained steadfast in his faith in Christ. That is why the executioners cut off his tongue from the root and crushed his legs with clubs. From this suffering the Martyr Eugene surrendered his soul into the hands of the Lord. After this, Lysias went to the exercise field in order to drill his soldiers. Among them, there was a soldier named Orestes. This soldier was a Christian, but until that time, he had hidden his faith. At some point during his throwing of the javelin, the Cross that he was wearing came out of his clothes and appeared in the open. So after this incident, he had to confess his faith. Lysias was left dumbfounded by this revelation and on his orders the other soldiers tied Orestes with iron chains together with Saint Eustratius. But he did not keep them in Nicopolis to judge them himself, but sent them to Sebaste to be judged by Agricolaus. Lysias perhaps feared that by miracles the Saint would attract many others to the faith of Christ. Before Agricolaus, Saint Eustratius who was very well educated and had excellent theological and philosophi-

cal training, analysed throughout Christ's teachings for the salvation of man. With his words, the Saint caused astonishment but in the tyrant unspeakable anger. After this, the Saint was imprisoned. There, in prison during the night, he was visited by the Bishop of Sebaste, Saint Blaise, and was given Communion. Then Saint Eustratius give him the text of his will and asked him for its faithful execution. After some time the tyrant commanded his executioners and they first laid Saint Orestes over a fiery grid-iron. There the Saint completed his life and delivered his spirit to the Lord. Then the executioners lit a furnace and threw Saint Eustratius inside it. This is how his life ended and how the five holy Martyrs received from the Lord the crown of martyrdom. Their sacred relics were later taken to Constantinople, and were enshrined in a church dedicated to them, the Holy Five Companions.

Our **Venerable Father Tryphon of Pechenga and Kola** (15th / 28th), in the world Metrophanes, was born in June 1495 in the Novgorod region into a priestly family. The pious parents raised their son in the fear of God. From his early years Tryphon had resolved to devote his life to apostolic deeds and to go to the pagan Laplanders and proclaim the Gospel of Christ. He knew of them only through the accounts of fish vendors. Once, while praying in the forest he had heard a voice, "Tryphon, this is not your place. An empty and thirsty land awaits you." Forsaking his parental home, the Saint went out onto the Kola Peninsula and halted at the banks of the Pechenga River, where the Lapps lived. There he began to carry on trade with them. The Saint first acquainted himself with the pagan beliefs of these people and studied their language, and then began to preach the Christian faith to them. The Lapps greeted the words of the Saint with great mistrust. The holy preacher suffered much hardship, enduring hostility and even beatings. But gradually, through his wise and kindly words and meekness, many were converted to Christ. With the blessing of Archbishop Macarius of Novgorod, Metrophanes and Saint Theodoret built a church for the newly-converted, and Metrophanes was tonsured and renamed Tryphon. In 1532 he founded the Pechenga-Trinity Monastery for those eager for the monastic life, "on the cold sea, on the frontier

of Murmansk.” Tsar Ivan the Terrible helped him and richly endowed the monastery. In 1548 the monks of the Kola Monastery, under the abbacy of Saint Theodoret, expelled their abbot due to the strictness of his monastic rule. This drove the violent monks to enter the monastery of Saint Tryphon, which forced Tryphon to abandon his monastery. Tryphon, with a small group of monks, for eight years wandered, collecting alms, which he sent to the monastery. In his absence, the brethren who remained there voluntarily moved the monastery closer to the mouth of the river, to a place more convenient for fishing and trade. In 1556 Tryphon returned here with a new abbot, Gury, and an imperial charter giving the monastery concessions. From this time on, Tryphon nurtured his violent brotherhood until the end of his life. At the bank of the nearby river, Saint Tryphon erected a church in honour of the Dormition, where he would retreat for prayer and silence. The Enlightener of the Lapps died in old age on 15th December, 1583, at the age of 88, having lived there almost sixty years. Local veneration of Saint Tryphon began soon after his death. Shortly before his death, Saint Tryphon predicted to the brethren of his monastery their death by the sword and the ruin of the monastery. Six years later, this came true. In 1589, the Swedes destroyed the Pechenga Monastery. Later, by order of Tsar Theodore, the monastery was transferred to the Kola Peninsula. On the site of the restored monastery a church was built and named for Saint Tryphon. Over the Saint’s grave a church was constructed in honour of the Meeting of the Lord. Saint Tryphon has often come to the aid of perishing seamen, who call upon his name with faith.

Saint Michael the Synkellos and Confessor (18th / 31st) was born at Jerusalem around 761 into an Arab family of pious Christians and at the age of three was dedicated to the service of God by his parents. Around 786 he became a monk at the Lavra of Saint Sabbas. After the death of his father, he persuaded his mother and sisters to go to a monastery in Jerusalem. Venerable Michael lived in the monastery for twelve years, for many years subjecting himself to every form of hardship, eating a few vegetables two or three times a week, and allowing himself a little bread on the weekends. The abbot then chose Michael to be

ordained a priest on account of his virtuous way of life. Following this, he received permission from the abbot to withdraw into a quiet cave. At that time two brothers entered the monastery, Saints Theodore and Theophanes, who later became known as Confessors and were called "the Branded." They were assigned by the abbot to be disciples of Saint Michael, and with his blessing they were ordained priests. In around 811, at the age of fifty, Michael was appointed to be the synkellos (or chancellor) of Patriarch Thomas I of Jerusalem. Father Michael and his two disciples then went to the Monastery of the Spoudaei, which was near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. A year prior to this Michael responded to certain Frankish monks who took up residence at the Mount of Olives and had added the *filioque* to the Creed. At this time there reigned the Iconoclast Emperor Leo the Armenian. The Patriarch sent Saint Michael to him in 815, together with the holy brothers Theodore and Theophanes, as well as his own brother Job, with the hope that they might persuade the emperor to cease his persecution against the Orthodox. The emperor subjected Saint Michael to beatings and sent him off into exile. Later having returned from exile, the monk again suffered for the veneration of holy icons under the Emperor Theophilus. The companions of Saint Michael, Theodore and Theophanes, were subjected to horrible torments: upon their foreheads with red-hot brands inscriptions in iambic verses were made mocking their Faith. This is how they received the title "the Branded." Again condemned, Saint Michael was sent with his brother Job to a cell in the Praetorium. After the death of Theophilus, the Empress Saint Theodora restored the veneration of holy icons, and ordered the return of Christians banished by the Iconoclasts. She made the offer that Saint Michael might occupy the Patriarchal Throne in place of the deposed Iconoclast, Grammaticus. But the Holy Confessor declined this offer. Thus upon the Patriarchal Throne entered Saint Methodius, another disciple of Saint Michael. Michael served as the synkellos to Patriarch Methodius and accepted the post as abbot of the Chora Monastery in Constantinople. Saint Michael the Confessor to the end of his days toiled in the position of synkellos and as abbot of Chora Monastery. After

bidding farewell to the Empress Theodora and her son, as well as Patriarch Methodius, he spent his final days in prayer. On 18th December, 845, he fell ill; he reposed on 4th January, 846, at Chora Monastery. He was interred at the same monastery next to Saint Theodore the Branded and Patriarch Germanus I. Venerable Michael was also known as a homilist and grammarian. He is especially known for elegant encomiums to Saint Dionysius the Areopagite and the Archangel Michael. He is also credited with liturgical hymns and a poem on the restoration of the icons.



POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

“IS it CORRECT to say that every church that is either under the Pope or cooperates with him, like the church of Constantinople nowadays, serves Satan?” - by email.

I WOULD SAY that only a pharisee of the strictest order or a buffoon would say such a thing. It is true that they are falling into error and that is why we do not commune with them, and it is true that error is inspired by the evil one. But there are degrees. Think of other sins also inspired by the evil one. Our Saviour says “that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:28), but few people would be judgmental and tactless enough to label him an adulterer. He might progress and start arranging to see her more often in various ways, but still who would be vicious enough to still label him an adulterer? It goes on - he might find ways and opportunities to touch her inappropriately, but until he had consummated his sin with her, only a bigot would call him an adulterer. There is a parallel in the case you ask about. In those ecumenical Churches (and it is not only Rome that we have to worry about - what about the Anglicans, the Protestants and others?), there may indeed be some who are deliberately or unwittingly serving Satan, but the vast majority of those who endorse ecumenical ideas are, I suspect, simply

adopting current and prevalent erroneous ideas - they have no intention of serving Satan. Our part should not be to use the tactics of the mob and pour scorn or derision upon them, but to call them back to the true yardstick of the Faith, with which we can clearly discern the true path and can see the menace of their present convictions. And remember the folk proverb which contains much truth in it: "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar." I would stand well clear of anyone promoting the vinegar approach; sober Orthodox do not condone the sin and they warn against it, but they show love towards the sinner.



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

HOLY ANGELS' DAY

ON the feast of the **Synaxis of the Holy Angels**, Thursday, 8th / 21st November, the catechumen **Lucie Brazil** of Wokingham was baptised and chrismated at Saint Edward's Church. The mysteria, celebrated by **Priestmonk Sabbas**, were held before the reading of the Hours and the Divine Liturgy, and at the Liturgy for the first time Lucie received the holy Mysteries. She very much heartened us by her clear reading of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer - so many young people today seem only able to mumble! Her godmother is **Aquilina Steel**. Please remember them both in your prayers.

At the end of the Liturgy on that day, **Michel Simonian** of Woking made his vows and was received as a catechumen, being named for the **Holy Archangel Michael**, by whose holy prayers may he in time also receive the grace of Holy Baptism.

NEW CATECHUMEN

ON Sunday, 4th/17th November, the feast of the Venerable Ioannikius the Great, at the end of the Divine Liturgy, **Harry Anelay of Coventry** made his vows as a catechumen and was given the Christian name of **Maximus** after the **Venerable Maximus the Confessor** (feast day: 21st January / 3rd February). Please support him on his path to Holy Baptism and pray for him.

JOURNEY TO GREECE

BETWEEN 11th and 14th November, **Fr Thomas** visited the **Holy Angels' Convent at Afidnai** in Greece to help the sisters there with their book-binding project. While in Greece, he visited the **Monastery of Saints Cyprian and Justina at Fili**, and was taken by **Metropolitan Ambrose** and **Fr Ieronymos** to visit the historic monastery of **Daphni** in Attica.

LITURGY IN EAST ANGLIA

OVER the weekend of 3rd/16th and 4th/17th November, **Archimandrite Daniel (Toyne)** celebrated the divine services in the small chapel of **St Olaf** where the **Liggy Camp** is held in the summer months. There were about thirty people present and the children were able to do the singing for most of Vespers and the Liturgy thanks to lessons from **Taisia Doucet**, who in turn got some help from **Sr Lydia** in Sweden when necessary. This reportedly heartened the adults there and lifted their spirits.

GIFTS TO SAINT EDWARD'S

OUR King Edward Orthodox Trust Co Ltd trustee, **Simon Teague**, has donated a hand-painted icon of **Saint Ignatius the God-bearer of Antioch** to the church. And **Fr Borislav** and **Presbytera Marina Popov** have given an icon of **Saint Paulinus of York and Rochester**; their son is presently a rasophor monk in our small community and bears that name. Both icons were painted by the sisters of the **Holy Angels'**

Convent in Afidnai, and brought to us by Fr Thomas.

VISITORS

IN addition to the usual daily number of people who call in to see the church or the exhibition room, on Friday, 22nd November we had an arranged visit from **Tour Guides of the City of Westminster** and those of the **City of London** visit the church.



Practical Tip

AFTER the Nativity feast we have Theophany, the Baptism of our Saviour, and then in January we have a host of monastic saints, as we approach the beginning of the Lenten Triodion period. This, of course, reflects the fact that after His Baptism our Saviour went out into the desert where He was tempted. But it is also a very necessary warning for those of us who are adult converts to Orthodoxy. Many of us seem to consider that as soon as we are baptised we have made it. Some even go so far as to set themselves up as teachers of Orthodoxy. They fail to follow the Saviour's course and instead relax on their supposed laurels. They even fail to see what baptised infants go through - after their Baptism they have to learn, to be instructed, to be trained in the Christian life, and so to struggle and to meet with temptations. This also applies to those who are baptised in their adult years, and should be remembered.



“LET no one think, my fellow Christian, that only priests and monks need to pray without ceasing and not laymen. No, no; every Christian without exception ought to dwell always in prayer.”

SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS. + 1360 A.D.