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Christ is Born! Glorify Him! Hristos se Naște! Măriţi-L!



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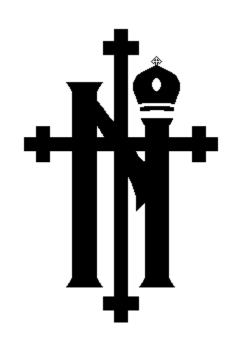
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OUR COVER: Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ from Romania.



All Good Wishes & Many Years to

His Eminence Archbishop NATHANIEL

on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of his Enthonement as Ruling Hierarch of the ROEA on November 17.

> Întru Mulți Ani Stăpâne!

PASTORAL LETTER 2009



NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Christ is born! Let us glorify Him!

"O Lord my God, I will sing a birthday hymn, a song on the Forefeast to you who by your birth gives me a divine rebirth and leads me up to my first excellence."

Compline: Canon, Ode I, b.

Beloved Spiritual Children in Christ,

Reverend Clergy, Venerable Monastics and Devout Faithful of our God-protected Episcopate:

"May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send you grace and peace," and from us, hierarchal blessings!

It is Orthodox tradition to celebrate the Feastday of one's patron saint which is the day on which the saint fell asleep in the Lord. Sometimes death came from the natural weakness of the body and sometimes by martyrdom. In any case, we celebrate the entrance of the saint into the realms of the heavenly and unending kingdom on the day of falling asleep.

Orthodox Christians also have a special "birth day," the day of their baptism into Christ. This is a very important day in the life of the Christian, for on this day we begin a new existence, a new birth into a spiritual and authentic life in God. It would be good for each of us to know and give special recognition to our "baptism birth day."

In some parts of the world, in particular North America, it is the custom to celebrate the physical birth of an individual, the day in which we "enter" the world. In this case, the celebration is centered on an individual and not on someone else, as is the case in celebrating one's patron saint. Congratulations are offered for a long life and happiness and prosperity in this world. Part of that celebration is in joining together to sing the song, "Happy Birthday to You."

Paul, Bishop of Emesia, calls us together to celebrate the Birthday of Christ in a special way: "It is fitting that on this day we should exhort your pious devotion, that you form together with us a holy choir..." to sing together in honor of the Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We bring to your attention this reminder of a "birth-day," because of the hymn quoted above in which it is stated that, "I will sing a birthday hymn" to you O Lord my God! Strange as this may seem to say that we sing a birthday hymn to God, we do sing this to our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ who was born in the flesh. In the Creed, we confess: "I believe ...in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God,...who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man." By incarnate, we mean that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, taking on our human nature, living on earth, dying on the cross and being buried, arising on the third day and ascending into heaven.

Jesus, eternal Son of God, was born in the village of Bethlehem, a village which still exists. His mother, the Holy Virgin Mary, gave birth to him in a stable for want of a room in the village inn. At his birth, shepherds left their flocks to come to see him as they had been informed by a host of angels. Wisemen from the east left their cities to come to see the Christ child, for they had been lead to him by an unusually long-visible star. The unusual visit of these Wisemen to worship the "new-born King of the Jews" caused much wonder in the capital city of Jerusalem. This wonder turned the ruler, Herod, into a furious tyrant who issued a command to murder all male children born in Bethlehem and in the surrounding area. Herod would have no future child-king live to take away his throne! All of this is told to us in the Gospel of Saint Luke who, no doubt, heard it from Saint Peter who learned these things from the Virgin Mary herself. ²

A Christian, in addition to reading the New Testament, must also read the Old Testament, because, in addition to proclaiming the history of the presence and actions of God in human history, the Old Testament includes the prophecies and psalms proclaimed centuries before the birth of Christ referring to his coming on earth as Messiah, or "Chosen one of God." It is in these prophecies and psalms that the unique events, such as the virgin birth, the appearance of the star, and the worship of the Wisemen are foretold. In other words, these references which long before preceded the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem, were fulfilled in his birth inasmuch as such was the divine plan of God.

Saint John the Beloved states: "No one has ever seen God: it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart who has made him known." Jesus, Only-Son of God, the Messiah, came to reveal to us the

promise of the Father, that is, the gift of reconciliation and salvation into eternal existence. Certainly, it is only by the coming of our Lord Jesus and through his Gospel that the Old Testament comes to be fulfilled. It was the Christ himself who opened the minds and hearts of his disciples to the fulfillment of the prophets and psalms after his resurrection during his forty days with them before his ascension into the heavens.

The second part of the hymn states, "your birth gives me a divine rebirth." What does this mean, "your birth gives me a divine rebirth?" Aren't we already born? What rebirth do we need? We are born of our parents, mother and father, but are re-born in baptism which is a "divine" rebirth. We even have "Godparents!" We are baptized into Christ and are clothed with Christ. We are "re-newed"; we have a divine new beginning through the birth of Jesus. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus clarifies for us: "There are many celebrations corresponding to each of the mysteries of Christ! Yet they all have one completion, my perfection and refashioning and restoration to the state of the first Adam". 4

The rest of the hymn states that we are "...lead to our first excellence," which is to the state of being before the fall of Adam and Eve. This then, is the calling of all humanity by God's grace to struggle, to work, to become what Adam and Eve were before their sin and the resulting unhappy rejection from the Paradise into which they had sojourned. Saint Irenaeus of Lyon reminds us that: "...Christ Jesus our Lord and God, Savior and King...would bestow on (the righteous) as a grace the gift of incorruption and clothe them with everlasting glory." ⁵

Dearly beloved, Christ took on our human nature so that he would be like us in everything except in sin. In taking on our human nature, he lifted it up. "You have taken our fallen human nature on your shoulders, O Christ, and in ascending, you took it to God the Father." Saint Leo, Pope of Rome, exhorts us: "...the Birth Day of Life Itself...fills us with gladness. No one is excluded from sharing in this cheerfulness, for the reason our joy is common to all men. Our Lord, the Conqueror of sin and death, since there was no one free from servitude, came that He might bring deliverance to all."

This "birthday hymn" we propose to offer to God is not the common song we join in singing to one another; rather, it is the song of all humanity to its Creator, Savior and Sanctifier. It is a song of unspeakable joy and thanksgiving that God has not abandoned fallen humanity, but rather has come among us, as St. John states in his Gospel: "Something which has existed since the beginning, that we have heard, and we have seen with our own eyes; that we have watched and touched with our hands: the Word, who is life - this is our subject. That life was made visible; we saw it and are giving our testimony." 8

In a hymn of Vespers of the Nativity, we sing: "Come, let us greatly rejoice in the Lord as we tell of this present mystery. The middle wall of partition has been destroyed; the flaming sword turns back, the cherubim withdraw from the tree of life, and I partake of the delight of Paradise from which I was cast out through disobedience." Of course, this hymn was chanted last evening at the vespers during which you would have heard this and other explanations of our holy faith. How good our Holy Church is to proclaim to her faithful the wonders of God in holy hymns and services.

Thus, we come together as a "holy choir" to sing this "birthday hymn" to Christ our Lord, while at the same time, in a mystical way, we are singing it to ourselves. We are singing that it is also our birth, a new birth made possible through Jesus' coming on earth to prepare us to return to our true home, the heavenly kingdom. It is there where we shall meet our patron saints, and it is there where we shall become what we had been, true children of God, true sons and daughters, true in his image and likeness.

Dearly beloved, on this celebration of the Birth of Christ Jesus, let us be courageous in our lives; let us put first things first; let us rejoice in God's love for us and greet him on this day of his incarnation with songs of joy and with resolutions to seek with our whole life the Kingdom of Heaven.

Christ is born! Glorify Him! The Messiah is among us! Let us go forth and receive Him!

+ NATHANIEL, Archbishop of Detroit Romanian Episcopate

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 5, par. 1
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² Luke 2:1-20

³ John 1:18

⁴ On the Nativity of Christ, 16-125

⁵ Against the Heresies, 1-9-4

⁶ Vesting of the hierarch

⁷ Homily Three, par. 1, 11-2

^{8 1} John 1-2

⁹ "Lord I have Called," 1

THE HOLY ANGELS: OUR GUIDES AND GUARDIANS

by Hieromonk Calinic (Berger)

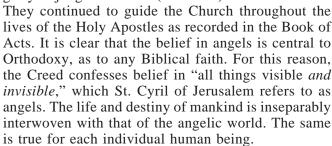
ORTHODOX

THOUGHT

and life

There is not a single significant event recorded in the Holy Scriptures that does not include the presence and contribution of angels. This includes the very creation of the material world (Job 38:7). Angels good and evil - are present in all Old Testament turning points: at the garden of Eden, throughout the lives of the Patriarchs, the giving of the law to Moses,

the worship in the temple, the taking possession of the promised land, etc. Similarly, they accompany the entire life of Jesus Christ: angels address the Virgin Mary, announce His birth to shepherds, strengthen him in fasting, are present at His Passion, Resurrection, Ascension, and, according to Christ's own testimony, will accompany Him when He returns in glory to judge the world (Mt 25:31).



Hence, each and every Christian is given a "radiant angel" at baptism. According to Christ, "in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father" (Mt 18:10). In other words, the presence of an angel is a manifestation of personal holiness, of a person who is constantly in communion and communication with God, in our midst. Who are they? What is our relationship with them?

To begin, angels are not cute, little baby-faced "cherubs" as they are depicted most frequently in Western art. Rather, from the Holy Scriptures we know that they are imposing, powerful, even intimidating. Even when they take a human form do they retain these characteristics. They always manifest a commanding, divine authority. Angels worship God, abide in His presence, receive His words directly, are sent to reveal His will, and at times even to effectuate it.

Among the most important tasks of angels is to guide and protect men. This is a sign of blessing from God. St. Basil the Great refers to the guardian angel as a "protector" and "shepherd" of the believer entrusted to him. From the daily prayers and the various canons to angels read in church, we learn that our guardian angels know us intimately. They rejoice when we do

well and sorrow when we do evil - they are even embarrassed for us. Their vigilance is unfailing, so long as we do not "drive them away." So, an angel is a sign of God's blessing but, as with all His blessings, it is also dependent upon our own behavior. For this reason, the Church continually petitions for "an angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian" in all its ser-

vices. The contingency of this blessing is most succinctly expressed in God's words to Moses: "Behold, I send an angel before you, to keep you in the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for My name is in him" (Exodus 23:20-1). These words are applicable to all who have

an angel with them.

How are we to understand the nature of angels? On the one hand, they are spiritual, "bodiless," "pure intellects," such that they need only to think of a place and they are there instantly. This is not so hard to believe, since even in our material world our voices can travel through phone connections instantly all over the globe. Yet angels do have a spiritual "body," for only God is purely immaterial. Thus, the angels cannot be in multiple places at the same time, which is evident from the Biblical witness (Dan 10:13). St. John of Damascus articulates the Church's teaching most concisely: "An angel is an intellectual essence, in perpetual motion, with free will, incorporeal, ministering to God, having obtained by grace an immortal nature ... it is not as they really are that they reveal themselves to worthy men ... they are present after the manner of a mind and energies, and cannot be present and active in various places at the same time... They are guardians of the divisions of the earth... They behold God according to their capacity, and this is their food."

The proper relationship between the angelic and human orders was distorted in the fall of mankind, since Adam not only rebelled against God but submitted to the rebellious advice of a fallen angel. The devil became the "prince of this world" to whom its human "power" and "glory" were delivered (Lk 4:6). Only Jesus Christ restored man's proper relation with angels by settling that score. Thus, he comes to judge Jesus but "has nothing in Me" (Jn 14:30) and on the contrary is himself "cast out" (Jn 12:31) and judged Cont. on page 16

THE PSALMS, AND MY GRAIN OF SAND

by Psa. Nicole Mitescu

Women at the Well

I used to watch my students come through the door of my classroom when I was still teaching, and as I got to know them better, it was easy to pick out the ones who were coming in with a grain of sand in their

Do you know that feeling? Some people describe it as a chip on their shoulder or getting out of bed on the wrong side. But it always seemed to me that it was an interior problem, in their minds and spirits, like a grain of sand irritating an oyster. No matter what anyone did, it was the wrong thing for them. Holi-

days, ice cream and blue skies would still be wrong because if you mentioned them, they would suddenly prefer to be alone in a dark room with their favorite TV program.

And to be honest, there have been days and perhaps even weeks when I have felt that same grain of sand. I've tried to puzzle it through - was it tiredness, stress, depression, hidden anger, or was it just plain "overload" of stuff I didn't really want to do? Or, perhaps boredom and not enough to do? Whatever it is, it makes the person with this irritating

grain of sand miserable, and by extension, everyone who is around him or her.

Anyway, it seems to be an inevitable part of our human nature, not a very good part, but one we try more or less successfully to overcome or at least hide.

I was thinking about it, because I have discovered a big help – if not a cure – for treating this grain of sand. While reading the Matins service, I stopped to read the six morning Psalms. They are great! You need to read all six of them, one after the other, to get the full benefit. They take you from feeling overwhelmed by those all negative forces outside of you (your "enemies") to being overwhelmed by your own sinfulness, to feeling the full weight of despair, then suddenly the sun breaks through and you are remembering to be thankful to God for all his blessings, love and forgiveness towards you. The final Psalm seems to sum up what all the other Psalms have been saying.

If you have an Orthodox Study Bible (with both the Old and New Testaments in it), the numbers of the Psalms are 3, 37, 62, 87, 102, 142 (the Septuagint numbering – if you have another version of the Bible, the Psalms are probably 3, 38, 63, 88, 103 and 143).

The reason I like these Psalms is that they are so honest with their emotions. No false cheerfulness, no fake faith, no half-hearted humility here, but real emotions that we all feel from time to time. And it's only when we recognize and face our feelings that we can start to work on them. With that grain of sand in your heart, it is surely easy to blame everyone and everything else for what is wrong in your life. But when you read these Psalms, whether you are sad or afraid or angry, whatever the emotion is, you find it

> expressed there and you find God's way for you to get beyond it.

> As I was thinking about surely made it sound very

this, I wondered if perhaps the suggestion of reading these Psalms might sound a bit like a "snake oil" sales pitch. You remember in the old Western movies when the medical salesmen would come around with their wagon full of some "snake oil potion" that was supposed to cure all your ailments. Of course, the potion was generally useless if not actually harmful, but the slick-talking salesman

good. The modern-day equivalent is probably the infomercials that offer us everything from amazing kitchen gadgets to rapid ways to lose weight ("But wait!" they tell you, "For only \$19.99, you can find happiness with a 30-day money back guarantee!"). However, I can do much better than that. These Psalms are free – and there is so much more! They come with an eternal guarantee from God to help our spiritual growth and healing.

This made me think about the analogy, or the symbolic reality, of the Church as a hospital – many of the great Church Fathers made this comparison, and I think in today's world it is especially appropriate. The Psalms are just one of the Church's great medicines.

We hear friends and neighbors say that they are "spiritual" but they feel no need to be part of a church. This sounds so odd to us Orthodox. We are continually aware that we are sinners in need of God's mercy but, for us, the place to heal the wounds that sin inflicts on us is in our church. We belong to the Orthodox Church as a whole, and we belong to a

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SOLIA NOV/DEC 2009

ORTHODOX BROTHERHOOD, USA



Participants at the 42nd Annual Orthodox Brotherhood Conference, Hermitage, Pennsylvania with His Eminence, Archbishop Nathaniel (center).

The Orthodox Brotherhood, USA held its 42nd Annual Brotherhood Conference on the weekend of October 16-18, 2009 at Holy Cross Orthodox Church in Hermitage, Pennsylvania.

Brotherhood President Nick Avramaut opened the conference by referencing two important functions of the Brotherhood – promotion and sponsorship of charitable works and enhancement of the bonds of Christian brotherhood among its members. He noted that in keeping with the spirit of those goals, during the past year, the Brotherhood continued to offer its support through donations to Camp Vatra and by providing Orthodox calendars and prayer books to our members and parishes in the Episcopate. He also noted that the Brotherhood continued to provide services through hours of volunteer work to the Church Congress, Camp Vatra and other Auxiliary events, as well as to our own local parish activities.

He concluded by extending his gratitude to the members of the National Board, especially to the Brotherhood's Spiritual Advisor, Fr. Dimitrie Vincent. Highlights of the Conference consisted of:

An educational forum, with presentations made by V. Rev. Archmandrite Joseph Morris, who presented on the topic of *The Stewardship of the People of God*, Psa. Stefanie Y. Yazge, who presented on *How Is the Laity To Do Ministry*, and Archbishop Nathaniel, who

spoke and answered questions on the continuing dialogue between our Episcopate and the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of America;

Election of a new slate of officers for the 2009 – 2010 year as follows: James M. Carabina, President; Ron Muresan, Vice President; Pauline Trutza, Secretary; Marie Avramaut, Treasurer; John Hategan, Membership Chairman; Val Pufescu and George Cantor as Congress Delegates (Luminita Nikodin as Alternate Delegate) and Gus Vincent and Mary Sankey as Auditors.

Finally, the Brotherhood's evening banquet was dedicated to Archbishop Nathaniel in honor of his 25th Anniversary as the ruling hierarch of the Episcopate (November 17, 1984) and in honor of his 10th Anniversary as Archbishop (elevated to the rank of Archbishop on October 20, 1999 by the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America). The Archbishop made a special presentation, noting the deep appreciation of the Brotherhood for his dedication to, sacrifice for, and leadership of the Episcopate.

December marks the kick-off of the Brotherhood membership drive. Annual dues are only \$20.00 and may be sent to the Membership Committee Chairman John Hategan at 33919 Reserve Way, Avon, Ohio 44011.

Participant

MEDITATION FOR CHRISTMAS

by A Monk of the Eastern Church

... "The shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord has made known unto us" (Lk. 2:15). Let us, too, go even to Bethlehem. In spirit, let us climb that hill "unto the hills, from whence comes my help" (Ps. 121:1). Climbing up to Bethlehem implies an effort; but shall we let such a great occasion slip by?

"Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem. . . To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. .. "(Lk. 2:4-5). It is no longer Caesar Augustus, but the King of kings who decrees that "all the world should be taxed. . . every one into his own city" (Lk. 2:1,3). Each person must declare sincerely which city he has chosen, to which group he allies himself. Some will choose Rome; others Athens. Shall I choose riches, or power, or intelligence? No. Those cities are not for me. I shall not even choose Jerusalem, the place where God manifests his glory. During my earthly life, I wish to be a citizen of Bethlehem, and to have that humility and that poverty as my share; with Mary, with Joseph and with Jesus, I would like my name to be enrolled in that little town which may be despised or ignored by men, but is so great before God.

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy. . unto you is born this day. . . a Savior. . ." (Lk. 2:10-11). The birth of Jesus at Bethlehem is not a far-distant historical event which is of no concern to me. And, if it does concern me, it is not merely because I am a member of the great human collectivity. The message of Christmas is not addressed to humanity in general; it is addressed to each person in particular. It reaches each soul in a way that is unique and exceptional. This joy is announced to me in a different way than to any one else; it is to me and for me that a Savior is born. Let us recognize the Nativity of Christ as a very personal gift. Let us receive this gift with faith and thankfulness.

"And lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was" (Mt. 2:9). The Magi followed the light which was given to them faithfully: being obedient to this light, they were led by it to the child. If I try to be faithful to the full measure of light that God has given me, if I have the courage to leave all to follow the star, if I decide to be true and obedient to my conscience (whatever may happen), and ready to "bear witness of the Light. . .that was the true Light, which enlightens every man that comes into the world" (Jn. 1:7,9), the divine light will not fail, in spite of my ignorance, to lead me - not in any abstract way, but through all the concrete circumstances of life, and

whenever it is needed - right up to the Child in whom I have placed all my hope.

"And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn" (Lk. 2:7). This birth in a manger declares that Jesus wants to be counted among the poorest, among the most humble; he will be found among the disinherited, the sick, the prisoners, the sinners. I would rather be poor with Jesus than be rich without Jesus. I prefer to be in a cave with Jesus, Mary and Joseph than in the inn where there is no room for them. Then, too, we must accept the fact that, for those who love Jesus, there is no place in this world. "The Son of man has not where to lay his head" (Lk. 9:58).

"And this shall be a sign unto you; you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. . . " (Lk. 2:12). I seek a God and Lord, and I find a tiny child. The message of Christmas is a message of childhood: "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein" (Lk. 18:17). God does not ask us to renounce the adult knowledge and discretion needed to accomplish our earthly tasks, but, in our relations with him, he wants us to return to the trusting simplicity of a child. The child has faith in his father; he walks hand in hand with him; he knows that his father will lead him where he needs to go, he knows that his father will protect him, feed and shelter him; he allows himself to be led by his father, eyes shut without the least anxiety. When he speaks to his father, he does not try to use any complicated formula, he says quite simply and affectionately what he wants to say. And this is what the little child of Bethlehem symbolizes for us. Furthermore, Jesus' childhood is more than a model to be imitated; it is one of those mysteries of the Savior's life which, although they are historical and transitory, also have an eternal reality; Christmas is a favorable time at which to honor the mystery of Jesus' childhood.

"They saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Mt. 2:11). Like the Magi, we offer our treasures and we offer the little child the most precious things we have. In spirit we offer gold, the sign of Jesus' sovereignty over all riches and all created things, a sign also of our own detachment from earthly goods. In spirit we offer incense, the sign of adoration, for Jesus is not only the king of the universe, he is our God. We offer in spirit myrrh, the spice with which we honor in advance the death and burial of Jesus and through which too, is

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The Psalms ... Cont. from page 6

parish in particular. It is a place where we meet and grow with a specific group of other Orthodox who are also seeking healing and salvation. The Church is the Body of Christ, and somehow in God's plan for us, this parish, this community, becomes our spiritual family, helping each one of us on our individual paths ever closer to God.

In the Church, there are many medicines. Two especially important ones are Confession and Holy Communion. In Confession, we ask God's forgiveness for our sins – it reveals the wounds to the Physician. In the Holy Eucharist, Communion, in which we are spiritually and physically in the presence of God, those wounds are healed.

St. Simeon the Translator understood about the grain of sand, although he used a different image to describe the problem. Part of his prayer, which we read after Communion, says, "Burn me not, my Creator, but instead enter into my members, my veins, my heart and burn the thorns of all my sins." Confession and Communion are very powerful aids or "medicines" against our sinfulness and spiritual weakness.

The Church is a holy place, filled with God's healing presence and people who need healing. We are all "spiritually ill" and in need of the Church's help in a similar way that a sick person needs a hospital. You may not like the food at the hospital, or the doctors, nurses or medical tests. But once you recognize that you are seriously ill, you know that it is the best place to be in order to get well. The bed may be uncomfortable, but the medical specialists are there to help you in your struggle. The goal of all of it is to be healthy again. Neither the Church nor the hospital can "guarantee" a cure, but they offer you the best help and medicines on your own journey toward that goal.

Yet the Church is not a hospital in the sense of being a place of last resort, a place you are afraid to go to unless you are very ill. Instead, it is a place to find love and forgiveness and healing on a continual basis. We need to be part of the Church every single day of our lives. It gives us a structure – the church year of feasts and fasts, the services, the candles and incense and singing, the prayers and sacraments that accompany all the important events in our lives – all designed to help us to maintain our spiritual health. And it offers us its humanity also, so that in our efforts to discern and do God's will, we all remember the importance of unity, of faith, of love, of forgiveness.

The Church as hospital helps us not only with big problems, but also with our grains of sand. I found the six Psalms in the service of Matins to help me with my grain of sand. I would encourage each of you to find a part of a service, a prayer, one of the hymns, and make it a healing part of your spiritual lives too.

Our Church offers us the true faith and genuine healing, not false guarantees. So let us pray with

God's help that our thorns may become roses and our grains of sand may be changed into beautiful pearls.

Meditation ... Cont. from page 8

represented our own renunciation of bodily pleasures. Lord Jesus, accept my offering.

"And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen..." (Lk. 2:20). Lord Jesus, before we leave Bethlehem, or come to the end of this feast of the Nativity, allow us to see something of what the shepherds saw, to hear something of what they heard, and to receive in our hearts the message which is preached to us from the manger.

"You are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:27). The feast of Christmas is the feast of the mystical Body, for it is through the Incarnation that men have become members of Christ. Whatever theological interpretation we give to this great spiritual and patristic affirmation of our incorporation into Christ, we must believe that with the Incarnation, an ineffable union - that passes all understanding - began, in human flesh, between Jesus Christ and men. Beyond the particular historical event which took place at Bethlehem and through which the Son of God took on a visible human body, another event took place that concerns the whole human race: God, in becoming incarnate, in some way weds and assumes the human nature which we all share and creates between himself and us a relationship which, without its ever ceasing to be that between the Creator and his creature, is also that between the body and its members. There is union without confusion. Christmas allows us to become most deeply conscious of what is our true nature, human nature, regenerated by Jesus Christ.

"And the Word was made flesh" (Jn. 1:14). These words summarize and express the feast of Christmas perfectly. If we give them their full meaning, we will understand that they do not only concern the mystery by which the Son and Word of the Father became man: this formula also carries an implication of a moral and practical order. Our flesh is often a source of temptation and sin to us. May the Word of God therefore become flesh in us, may it enter into our body. May the power of this Word (for there can be no question of its being an Incarnation in substance) pass from the exterior to the interior, and so, into our bodies; then the law of the Spirit will prevail over the law of the flesh. Christmas will have a true meaning for us only if our own flesh becomes transformed, changed and ruled by the Word made flesh.

Excerpted from the book The Year of Grace of the Lord: A Scriptural and Liturgical Commentary on the Calendar of the Orthodox Church, pp. 68-71. SVS Press, 1980.

NATIVITY SERMON

by Saint John Chrysostom

I behold a new and wondrous mystery!

My ears resound to the shepherd's song, piping no soft melody, but loudly chanting a heavenly hymn!

The angels sing!

The archangels blend their voices in harmony!

The cherubim resound their joyful praise!

The Seraphim exalt His glory!

All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead herein... on earth and man in heaven. He who is above now, for our salvation, dwells here below; and we, who were lowly, are exalted by divine

Today Bethlehem resembles heaven, hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices and, in place of the sun, witnessing the rising of the Sun of Justice!

Ask not how this is accomplished, for where God wills, the order of nature is overturned. For He willed. He had the powers. He descended. He saved. All things move in obedience to God.

Today He Who Is, is born! And He Who Is becomes what He was not! For when He was God, He became man - while not relinquishing the Godhead that is His ...

And so the kings have come, and they have seen the heavenly King that has come upon the earth, not bringing with Him angels, nor archangels, nor thrones, nor dominions, nor powers, nor principalities, but, treading a new and solitary path, He has come forth from a spotless womb.

Yet He has not forsaken His angels, nor left them deprived of His care, nor because of His incarnation has He ceased being God. And behold,

Kings have come, that they might serve the Leader of the Hosts of Heaven;

Women, that they might adore Him Who was born of a woman so that He might change the pains of childbirth into joy;

Virgins, to the Son of the Virgin...

Infants, that they may adore Him who became a little child, so that out of the mouths of infants He might perfect praise;

Children, to the Child who raised up martyrs through the rage of Herod;

Men, to Him who became man that He might heal the miseries of His servants;

Shepherds, to the Good Shepherd who has laid down His life for His sheep;

Priests, to Him who has become a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek;

Servants, to Him who took upon Himself the form of a servant, that He might bless our stewardship with the reward of freedom (Philippians 2:7);

Fishermen, to the Fisher of humanity;

Publicans, to Him who from among them named a chosen evangelist;

Sinful women, to Him who exposed His feet to the tears of the repentant woman;

And that I may embrace them all together, all sinners have come, that they may look upon the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the

Since, therefore, all rejoice, I too desire to rejoice! I too wish to share the choral dance, to celebrate the festival! But I take my part, not plucking the harp nor with the music of the pipes nor holding a torch, but holding in my arms the cradle of Christ!

For this is all my hope!

This is my life!

This is my salvation!

This is my pipe, my harp!

And bearing it I come, and having from its power received the gift of speech, I too, with the angels and shepherds, sing:

"Glory to God in the Highest! and on earth peace to men of good will! "

FINANCIAL REPORT

EPISCOPATE SUPPORTERS		
Dumitru & Mariana Sandulescu, Troy, MI \$500.00		
John & Mary Vilcu, Griffin, SK\$200.00		
Alexa & Florica Mindea, Morton Grove, IL \$100.00		
Carrie Steski, Winnipeg, MB\$100.00		
M/M Stephen Maximo, Philadelphia, PA\$30.00		
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Adela Price, New Castle, PA\$25.00		
Psa. Silvia Yova, Fairlawn, OH\$25.00		
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(Hierarch Travel Fund)		
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Doru & Una Posteuca Apple Valley MN \$300.00		

Doru & Una Posteuca, Apple Valley, MN \$300.00 (IMO Zamfira Posteuca)

Cont. on page 15

HIERARCHAL SCHEDULE

September 30 – October 1. Ottawa, ON. Annunciation Cathedral. Wednesday: Rite of Nomination, Proclamation and Acceptance by Arhimandrite Irenee. Vigil for Feast of Protection of the Mother of God. Thursday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy & Consecration of Bishop Irenee (Rochon) for Quebec City (OCA) – concelebration with Metropolitan Jonah and several hierarchs. Banquet.

October 1-5. Regina / Ft. Qu'Appelle, SK. St. George Cathedral / Romanian Orthodox Deanery Centre. Friday/Saturday: Canada Deanery Meeting. ARCOLA & Brotherhood Annual Conference. Sunday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy.

October 9-11. Cleveland, OH. St. Mary Cathedral. Saturday: Episcopate Council Meeting. Evening: Great Vespers. Reception for Cathedral's 105th Anniversary. Sunday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Ordination to Holy Priesthood of Deacon Rares Onofrei. Banquet.

October 16-18. Hermitage, PA. Holy Cross. Friday: Reception for Annual Orthodox Brotherhood Annual Conference. Saturday: Annual Brotherhood Conference. Evening: Great Vespers. Dinner. Sunday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy.

October 23-25. New York, NY. St. Dumitru. Saturday: Great Vespers. Sunday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Banquet for 70th Anniversary.

October 26. Hermitage, PA. Holy Cross. Funeral & Burial of Nick Moga.

October 27-31. Ligonier, PA. Antiochian Village. Tuesday: Guest of Ukranian Metropolia retreat. Wednesday-Friday: Orthodox Christian Laity Annual Meeting and Road to Unity Conference. Saturday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy concelebrated with Metropolitan Jonah and Bishop Melchizedek.

October 31-November 1. Fairlawn, OH. Presentation of Our Lord. Saturday: Great Vespers. Sunday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Lunch.

November 2-7. Regina, SK / Lennard, MB. St. Elias the Prophet. Tuesday: Funeral Service and Burial of V. Rev. Fr. Nicolae Marioncu.

November 8. Dearborn Heights, MI. Sts. Peter & Paul. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Ordination to the Holy Priesthood of Deacon Mircea Vasiu.

November 13. Hartford, CT. Holy Transfiguration Mission. Pastoral Visit. Te Deum.

November 14. Manchester, NH. St. John of Suceava Mission. Pastoral Visit. Divine Liturgy.

November 14-15. Woonsocket, RI. St. John the Baptist. Saturday: Great Vespers. Banquet for 75th Anniversary of Ladies Auxiliary. Sunday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Luncheon. Sunday evening: Cambridge, MA. Nativity of the Ever-Virgin Mary Mission. Pastoral visit. Akathist. Reception.

November 19-22. Washington, DC area. Friday

CHILDREN LOVE THE MANGER



Treasuring our annual tradition to keep our city children in touch with the experience of the manger, the children of St. Mary Cathedral in Cleveland once again spent a Sunday afternoon at the farm. It seems to be the perfect appetizer before the "entrée" to the Nativity fast. Supervised by their teachers and parents, the younger groups of our Church School visited again the Phillips Farm, in Seville, Ohio. There, they had the chance to experience the simplicity of life, the blue skies and fresh air, the sheep, the oxen and the straw of the manger. A bonfire not only warmed the cold little fingers, but also stirred up the imagination of the young and favored story telling. The fun was abundant and the hot dogs, cider and marshmallows were great. Our talented Victor Lupu played the guitar and sang for us. The hayride was of course the thrill of the day. Yes, there were no tractors in Jesus' time, but the stillness of the farm of today brings anyone closer to the humbleness of His time. Our fun time and family bonding combined the Northeast Ohio fall colors at the farm and a few, but pointed religious teachings, have made our practical Bible lesson a biblical archeology experience for all. The upcoming celebration of the Birth of Christ will certainly be more vivid for those who attended.

Fr. Remus Grama

evening: Hagerstown, MD. St. Philothea Mission. Vespers. Pastoral Visit. Friday night: Potomac, MD. Visit to future site of St. Andrew Mission. Saturday morning: Falls Church, VA. St. Mary. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Pastoral Visit. Saturday evening: Alexandria, VA. Holy Cross. Great Vespers. Reception. Pastoral Visit. Sunday: Potomac, MD. St. Andrew Mission. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Banquet. Pastoral Visit.

November 29. Detroit, MI. St. Raphael of Brooklyn. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Pastoral Visit.

CELEBRATING "80 YEARS" OF THE ROEA

The following is an excerpt of a speech by V. Rev. Fr. Dimitrie Vincent delivered to the Orthodox Brotherhood at their Annual Conference at Holy Cross Church in Hermitage, PA on October 17, 2009.

In the past eighty years, the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America has given birth to four generations of faithful people in North America. In this time, we have defined our vision, created our identity, developed our community through work and thus our own history. The story of our Episcopate has taken shape and our leaders and heroes have emerged. Their lives and stories over these 80 years form our legacy, which is to be shared and passed on to future generations. There are literally hundreds of clergy and laity that have fought for, protected, nurtured and shaped the development of our Episcopate and the lives her people.

The early Church fathers taught us through their lives that, "Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the people be; just as where Christ Jesus may be, there is the Catholic Church" (Ignatius, 1st-2nd c). They also taught us that, "Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every kind of grace" (St. Irenaeus, 2nd c). Archbishop Nathaniel and Archbishop Valerian have kept these teachings and balance in the Church as they worked to unite the Episcopate.

Archbishop Valerian, of thrice blessed memory, under whom the Brotherhood was founded with his encouragement and blessing, was described by Archbishop Nathaniel in the Introduction to the book <u>Dearly</u> Beloved, this way:

Among the people of every nation, there are leaders who, by the sheer power of their innate gifts, rise to positions of authority and power. By their action, they shape life and lives around them. . . Among the Romanian people, one such individual is Valerian Viorel Trifa. . . from the time of his public address as bishop, Valerian Trifa expressed his intention to work for a unity of all American Orthodox. [Installation July 4, 1952, p 29]

Archbishop Nathaniel, who in October celebrated 10 years as our Archbishop, and in November celebrated 25 years since his enthronement as ruling Bishop of the Romanian Episcopate, has dedicated his life to steering the Church, passed on to him, through the watery shoals of this truly unique historical time. Fr. Vasile Hategan, of blessed memory, wrote at the time of his Archpastoral elevation in 1999:

Archbishop Nathaniel has his own unique personality and style. . . Fate would have it that he was elected during a time of political turmoil in Romania and that he would have to spend much of this time and efforts to meet many problems of these newly-arrived Romanians, though he al-

ways looked beyond them, visualizing a united and autocephalous Orthodox Church in America with its own patriarch.

Both of our hierarchs have struggled to help build the Church in North America during difficult and trying times. This cross of suffering love they have borne is similar, yet uniquely their own. One transitioned from a European land and culture to America, bringing his flock with him against great odds and adversity; and the other has carried on and guided his flock forward, further establishing an indigenous local Church.

We are reminded that, Every Fatherland is a foreign land and every foreign land is a fatherland (Epistle to Diognetus). The Church of Christ is a holy nation, divine and human; the material and spiritual realms are two aspects of the same incarnational life. Money and prayer go hand in hand; they are both necessary currency and tools, for the Church is in the world but not of the world.

We know that Orthodoxy in the United States was not established with mission in mind by trained persons or evangelizing monks, such as in Alaska, hundreds of years ago. However, the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate was established in 1929 as something much more than a local Romanian society or ethnic club; the founders of the Episcopate grew a local church that was more than an ethnic-centered society. It was and is a God-centered, Christ-like and Spirit-filled Body.

Like every local Eucharistic community, we in the ROEA, as part of the Orthodox Church in America, have a responsibility and duty that we accepted by our choice to be Orthodox Christians. As such, we have a calling as reason-endowed sheep to act on the command of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ today: "Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you [and] I am with you always to the end. . ." (Matthew 28: 19-20).

May all our efforts and programs in this administrative year be energized with renewed vigor and commitment to this end. Let us take the zeal of this 80th Anniversary year, and let us burn with faithfulness for a more perfect union with God, illuminating others with hope and growing in divine love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and for one another, so that we may be found worthy to hear our Lord say to us: "Well done, good and faithful stewards." Only then can we realize greater internal unity while examining the other.



World Church News

Patriarch Pavle of Serbia Falls Asleep in the **Lord** (Nov. 19, 2009) BELGRADE, SERBIA — His Holiness, Patriarch Pavle of Serbia fell asleep in the Lord on November 15, 2009 at the age of 95. On November 19, 2009, the Divine Liturgy was led by His All Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, together with His Eminence, Metropolitan Amphilochije of Montenegro and the Coastlands and Locum Tenens of the Serbian Orthodox Church; His Beatitude, Archbishop Daniel of Bucharest, Metropolitan of Muntenia and Dobrogea, Locum Tenens of the throne of Caesarea of Cappadocia, Patriarch of Romania; His Beatitude, Anastasios, Archbishop of Tirana, Durres, and All Albania; and His Beatitude, Metropolitan Christopher, Primate of the Church of the Czech lands and Slovakia. Also concelebrating were the official representatives of all 15 Autocephalous Orthodox Churches at Belgrade's Archangel Michael Cathedral, across from the Patriarchate's official Chancery. After the conclusion of the Patriarchal Divine Liturgy, Patriarch Bartholomew, together with the other Primates of the Local Autocephalous Orthodox Churches and the concelebrating hierarchs and clergy, processed to the Memorial Church of Saint Sava of Serbia, where the funeral service was celebrated in the open air before the church's main entrance. In attendance at the funeral was the President of Serbia, Boris Tadic, who offered words at an appropriate time, following sermons by Patriarch Bartholomew and Metropolitan Amphilochije on the life and legacy of the newlydeparted and ever memorable Serbian Patriarch. Also in attendance were other members of the Serbian government, foreign ambassadors and official representatives of numerous sovereign nations, inter-faith religious leaders, and over one million Serbian Orthodox faithful.

Metropolitan Jonah Signs Declaration Concerning Sanctity of Life, Marriage, Religious Freedom (Nov. 20, 2009 - OCA Communications) NEW YORK, NY — His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah, Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, and the Very Rev. Chad Hatfield, Chancellor of Saint Vladimir's Seminary, were among some 125 US religious leaders who signed a 4,700-word declaration addressing the sanctity of life, traditional marriage, and religious liberty here recently. The statement, known as the "Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience," issues "a clarion call" to Christians to adhere to their convictions and informs civil authorities that the signers will not "under any circumstance" abandon their Christian consciences. The text of the declaration, which already has generated considerable controversy, was released on Friday, November 20, 2009. "The Manhattan Declaration is the result of several months of dialogue among Orthodox, Catholic, and evangelical Christian leaders culminating in a gathering of approximately 100 leaders in New York City on September 28, 2009," Catholic News Agency [CNA] reports.

Murder of Priest Highlights Missionary Role in Russian Church (Dec. 1, 2009 - Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty) [By Kevin O'Flynn - MOSCOW] Flowers still decorate the gates of St. Thomas, the small wooden church in the south of Moscow where Father Daniil Sysovev served. They represent an outpouring of grief for the priest who had built his parish from nothing and hoped to eventually build in place of the modest wooden structure a brick church big enough to hold 2,000 people. Four red carnations adorn a photo of the priest, who was murdered November 19 after an unidentified gunman entered his church and shot Sysoyev twice. St. Thomas held a service on November 28 to mark the ninth day after the killing. Sysoyev was only 35 years old but had already built a reputation as a priest who stood out for his proselytizing work among Russia's Muslim community — a relatively new phenomena for the Orthodox Church. Andrei Zolotov, a journalist specializing in religious issues, says Sysoyev was known for his missionary zeal. "He was one of the several most prominent missionaries, and also someone who was known as a bit controversial — one of those who insisted on the necessity of missionary work among Muslims," Zolotov says. Sysoyev actively sought to convert Muslims, working in the capital city's Muslim communities and reaching out to the thousands of immigrant workers who have come to Moscow from Central Asia, the North Caucasus, and elsewhere. He would routinely go to the city's construction sites, where many immigrants are employed, and successfully converted as many as 80 people. But his work didn't stop there. He also wrote books warning Christians not to marry Muslims and posted online videos that attacked Islam. Copies of his book, "An Orthodox Response to Islam," have sold out at St. Thomas in the days since his death. Sysoyev also posted videos of himself on YouTube, in which he would often be heavily critical of the Muslim faith. In one of them, he ends his lecture with an expression of hope that all Muslims would eventually convert to Christianity. "That's it. May God help all of us," he says in the video. "We will pray so that Muslims will come to Christianity and not follow the conspiracy of the Prophet." Sysoyev's outspokenness did not go unnoticed, and he wrote that he was continually threatened by Muslims angered by his work. The Orthodox Church has come around to the importance of missionary work in Russia in recent years. Zolotov says it is a trend that has been especially Cont. on page 14

World Church News

Cont. from page 13

evident under the new patriarch, Kirill, who has led the church for less than a year. "In the last several years, missionary work has been increasingly recognized as a top priority, or one of the top priorities," Zolotov says. "Basically, the election of Patriarch Kirill to a large extent was the manifestation of this recognition that we need to carry out a mission. It is not enough to just be reconstructing the church or sit there saying how important we are for Russian history." Part of that mission is to reach out to nominal Russian Orthodox Christians who do not attend church. Different figures show that only between 3 to 10 percent of Russians attend Orthodox Church services, when as many as 80 percent identify themselves as Orthodox. But many in the church believe that missionary work extends beyond activating dormant Orthodox Christians to attempting to convert members of the Muslim community as well. Zolotov says while official church policy does not publicly endorse proselytizing of Muslims, it does not discourage priests from missionary work. Patriarch Kirill presided over Sysoyev's funeral, a gesture that many saw as emphasizing the Orthodox Church's tacit support for conversion work. . . Not all parishioners are convinced that an Islamic extremist was to blame for the killing, however. Some point instead to a land dispute. St. Thomas was facing problems getting permission to construct a larger building on its grounds. Some of Sysoyev's followers say that his death may have been connected to that dispute and not to his proselytizing work.

Data Center Underneath Orthodox Church to Heat Helsinki Homes (Dec. 1, 2009 - Web Host Industry Review) — Set upon a hillside overlooking Helsinki, the main cathedral of the Finnish Orthodox Church will be housing a computer room that will generate enough heat to warm 500 single-family houses. Located in a cave below Helsinki's Uspenski Cathedral, this two-megawatt capacity data center project could result in the world's most efficient computer room, according to Finnish energy company Helsingin Energia (www.helen.fi), which will be pumping heat from the servers to Helsinki buildings. The data center's location is another bonus for security — it is building the room in a former bomb shelter, which was carved by a WWII fire brigade underneath the cathedral as a refuge for city officials from Russian air raids.

Bulgarian Orthodox Consider Julian Christmas Date (Dec. 2, 2009 – Examiner.com) The Bulgarian Orthodox Church may be close to marking this year's Christmas as the last to be celebrated on December 25 in Bulgaria. The Holy Synod will meet in three weeks to decide if a move needs to be made back to the Julian Calendar. If this decision is to be made, Christ-

mas will once again be celebrated on January 7. The plea to make this choice was filed in late November, a similar argument having been made in 1997 with the agreement of only five bishops at the time. Currently, the Church is set to the Gregorian Calendar, which was put in place in Bulgaria in 1916. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church has celebrated Christmas on December 25 as an official holiday since the fall of communism.

FR. REMUS GRAMA RECEIVES "BISHOP POLICARP GOLD MEDAL"



Cleveland - The celebration of the 105th anniversary of the oldest Romanian Orthodox parish in the United States of America was ceremoniously observed on October 11, 2009, at St. Mary Romanian Orthodox Cathedral in Cleveland. Hundreds of faithful participated in the services and cultural events sur-

rounding this moment. His Eminence, Archbishop NATHANIEL presided over the event, assisted by the V. Rev. Dr. Remus Grama, Dean of the Cathedral and visiting clergy, among whom were V. Rev. Fr. Laurence Lazar of Southfield, Michigan and the newly-ordained Priest, Rares Onofrei. During the festive banquet, after the viewing of the documentary movie "100 Years of Romanian Orthodoxy in Cleveland," His Eminence reminisced about the 27 years of activity of Father Remus Grama and his work for the Episcopate. He underlined especially his contributions to the writing of the history of the Episcopate, materialized in his pastoral work, articles and the book "Policarp Morusca," in Romanian and English editions. In appreciation, he offered him the newly-issued Episcopate distinction, "Bishop Policarp Morusca Gold Medal." This was the second such award offered by Archbishop Nathaniel. On the same day, Father Remus and Preoteasa Elena were honored by their parishioners on their 20 years of intense pastoral work in the parish.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

Life in the Orthodox Church is not a simple matter of just attending Sunday Services, and an Orthodox woman is not just someone to prepare the coffee for those who have attended the service. Orthodoxy is not wearing a big cross, nor making the sign of the Holy Cross. These things may be an indicator of something; an act of love and piety, but without Christ's love and teachings, they remain fruitless. An Orthodox Christian woman uses the Sacramental Life of the Church to strengthen her family's faith in the Risen Lord and to practice His Commandments. She understands the necessity for Christ to be within her life, and within the life of her family and the community.

The advent of Christianity provided a voice for the cause and understanding of women as intelligent, courageous and virtuous. In effect, Christianity empowered women in an unprecedented manner. Within the pages of the Gospels, the female followers of Jesus are often described as courageous and faithful believers in His teachings. For instance, while St. Peter denied Christ out of fear, and all other male disciples except St. John fled during the crucifixion, several women stood at the foot of the cross without fear. Likewise, when men were locked indoors for fear of the Jews, the women went out to anoint the body of Jesus.

"Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene" (St. John 19.28). "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood behind them. . ." (St. John 20.19). Again within the pages of the Gospel, women are considered as honest, trustworthy and reliable, faithful witnesses. Indeed, women were the first persons to receive the news of the Resurrection of Christ and commissioned to relay to men the most important message in the annuals of history: "And he said to them, 'Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him; as he told you'..." (St. Mark 16.6-

Beyond merely praising women as trustworthy, there is also evidence in early teachings of recognizing the shared responsibility and blessings bestowed on men and women. In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul announces that there is neither male nor female, but both are considered equal in Christ's redemptive work. This represents, from a historical perspective, an illuminated and radical statement made on the status of women. In the final analysis, Christianity claims that

both men and women equally receive the gifts and virtues from the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, this tells us that the role of a woman in the church is, in a way, the same as the role of a man; it is to be a member of the body of Christ. As part of this body, the Church, we are all called to listen to God. We have many male and female saints who have given us examples of Christian ministry from which we can learn. Your challenge as a young woman or man is to look beyond some of the misconceptions that exist in the church and cultivate the gifts that God has given you. When you use them to serve humanity in His name, then you will have found your special role in the Church.

Lucy Pop A.R.F.O.R.A. President

Financial Report Cont. from page 10

Costica and Anghelina Iftimie, Chicago, IL \$250.00 (IMO Parents)
Dr./Mrs. Adam Frent, Tamarac, FL\$100.00
(IMO John Serban)
Samuel Todor, Boca Raton, FL\$100.00
(IMO Wife, Grace)
John Posteuca, Minneapolis, MN\$100.00
(IMO Zamfira Posteuca)
Tudor Murgoci, Kitchener, ON\$50.00
(IMO Wife, Emmi)

EPISCOPATE ASSESSMENT

St. Mary, Chicago, IL (2010)	\$16,380.00
Holy Cross, Hermitage, PA (2009)	\$2,000.00
St. George, Toronto, ON (2009)	\$3,580.00
Holy Trinity, Youngstown, OH (2010)	\$2,500.00
Descent of the Holy Spirit,	
Warren, MI (2009)	\$2,000.00
St. Dimitrie, Easton, CT (2009)	\$1,670.00

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Leah (Sandru) McIntyre

In October 2009, Leah (Sandru) McIntyre, a member of St. George the Great Martyr Romanian Orthodox Church, Canton, Ohio, was inducted into the Plain Local Schools Alumni Hall of Distinction. McIntyre, the daughter of Nick and Julie Sandru of North Canton, Ohio, is a 2000 graduate of the University of Cincinnati and currently an Aerospace

Systems Engineer for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Glenn Research Center in Cleveland. McIntyre's job responsibilities include being a key contributor in the Requirement Management Office team that has the overall project management and technical responsibility for the Orion Project. Orion is the Crew Exploration Vehicle consisting of the Crew Module, Service Module, Launch Abort System and Space Adapter. The Orion sits on top of a rocket that powers it into space.

The Requirement Management Office is responsible for identifying and managing the resources, schedule and technical expertise required for accomplishing the Orion requirement tasks. As part of this team, McIntyre is the Interface Requirements Lead for the entire project. Prior to this, McIntyre's experience has been leading the Water Thermal Control System (WTCS) for the Fluids and Combustion Facility (FCF). The FCF consists of two refrigerator-sized racks that house NASA-designed hardware to conduct experiments on board the International Space Station. McIntyre helped design, test and procure the WTCS, which has a primary purpose of providing cooling to all FCF equipment by removing all waste thermal energy to the International Space Station, Internal Thermal Control System and Moderate Temperature Loop.

McIntyre is affiliated with the following organizations / awards: Systems Engineering, Space Mission Excellent Program Level II, Engineering Process Group; Wings of Success, two awards; INCOSE in 2007, American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics; Group Achievement Award for FCF Development Team; and Significant Contributions to the management and development of the Orion requirements. While at GlenOak High School, McIntyre volunteered at the McKinley Museum, played varsity tennis, was a member of National Honor Society, and won first

place at the state competition representing GlenOak at the Ohio High School Space Olympiad.

Leah (Sandru) McIntyre's parents, grandparents and great-grandparents have all been faithful, dedicated members of St. George (Canton). Congratulations to Leah in her fascinating career, and may God continue to bless her and her family (husband Greg and son Case, and a second son expected in January) with peace, safety, honor and good health.

The Holy Angels Cont. from page 5

by Christ (Jn 16:11). For this reason, we can only have a proper relationship to angels through Jesus Christ, who "is so much better than the angels" and is worshipped by all of them (Heb 1:4,6). Angels were present throughout the life of Christ and even witness to the Gospel (1 Tim 3:16; Rev 14:6), yet they are not above apostolic authority (Gal 1:8; 1 Cor 6:3). Christ is their head as He is the head of the Church (Eph 1:10, Col 1:20). On this account, the Mother of God also has a special place among the angels as she does in the Church, being confessed to be the "Queen of the Heavenly Host" who is "more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious than the Seraphim."

Today, the popularity of "angels" and other spiritual phenomena has reached a new high. A word of caution must therefore be added. Much of this contemporary fad is just a re-run of an age-old temptation which expresses mankind's desire to be led by a higher intelligence – a being from another world who gives guidance for every type of (worldly) activity - without, however, any moral accountability to God. Such occurrences are well known in the Lives of Saints, in which demons appear as angels, giving guidance and even "praying" for others who are now prepared to do their every bidding. So, we Orthodox do believe in spirits - in angels and demons - but not without discernment. The Apostle John therefore advises his flock "to test the spirits, whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1), and St Paul warns that "Satan himself appears as an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14). The Holy Fathers teach that one should never give credence to visions and apparitions of other beings.

Our guardian angels do make their presence known, however, in other tangible ways. For example, through the peace that comes from their protection, the intuition that they can give to guide us, a feeling of holiness in churches where they too worship, and above all, by inspiring devotion to Jesus Christ, whose creatures they are and whom they serve, "for in Him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him" (Col 1:16). As such, then, we should see our angels: as messengers, guides, protectors, and as helpers in all things, but most especially in drawing closer to Christ. Let us not neglect to ask their prayers for us.

Scrisoare Pastorală la Nașterea Domnului, Dumnezeului și Mântuitorului Nostru Iisus Hristos 2009

Hristos se naște! Măriți-L!

«Doamne Dumnezeul meu, laudă de naștere, și cântare de praznic înainte voi cânta ție, celui ce cu nașterea ta dumnezeiască înnoire mi-ai dat, și la bun neamul cel dintâi m-ai adus.»

(Slujba Pavecerniței Ajunului Crăciunului, Canonul, Peasna 1, stihul 2).

Iubitului nostru cler, cinului monahal și dreptcredincioșilor creștini ai Episcopiei noastre de Dumnezeu-păzite,

"Har vouă şi pace de la Dumnezeu, Tatăl nostru, şi de la Domnul nostru Iisus Hristos" (I Cor. 1; 3), iar de la noi părintească dragoste și arhierești binecuvântări!

Iubiți credincioși,

Este o tradiție ortodoxă de a celebra sărbătoarea unui sfânt în ziua cînd acel sfânt s-a mutat la Domnul. Uneori moartea a venit pe calea naturală a bătrâneții, iar alteori sfinții au suferit moarte martirică. În ambele cazuri noi sărbătorim intrarea sfinților respectivi în împărăția veșnică a raiului, în ziua în care ei au adormit.

Creştinii ortodocşi au, deasemenea, o zi specială de "naştere", în ziua botezului lor în Hristos Domnul. Aceasta este o zi foarte importantă în viața unui creştin, pentru că în această zi noi începem o existență nouă, o naștere din nou într-o viață spirituală și autentică în Hristos. Ar fi bine ca fiecare dintre noi să dăm importanța cuvenită acestei zile de "naștere prin botez".

În unele părți ale lumii, în special în America de Nord, există obiceiul de a sărbători nașterea fizică a unui individ, ziua când "intră" în lume. În acest caz, sărbătoarea este centrată pe un individ și nu pe altcineva, ca în cazul sărbătoririi zilei unui sfânt patron al cuiva. Urări de bine pentru o viață lungă, fericire și prosperitate în această lume sunt oferite. O parte a acestei celebrări constă în a ne aduna împreună și a cânta "La mulți ani! Happy Birthday to You!"

Pavel, Episcop de Emesia, ne cheamă să sărbătorim Nașterea lui Hristos într-un mod special: "E bine ca în această zi să vă îndemnăm la pioase rugăciuni, să formăm împreună un cor sfânt'¹ pentru a cânta împreună în cinstea Nașterii Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos. Vă atragem atenția asupra acestui fel de a sărbători "ziua de naștere", pentru că în imnul menționat la începutul scrisorii noastre, se spune că "voi cânta ție, Doamne Dumnezeul meu, laudă de naștere, și cântare de praznic înainte!" Oricât de ciudat ar părea ca noi să cântăm un imn de naștere lui Dumnezeu, cu adevărat, noi cântăm aceasta Domnului, Dumnezeului și Mântuitorului nostru Iisus Hristos care S-a născut cu trup. În Simbolul Credinței, noi mărturisim: "Cred ... într-Unul Domn, Iisus Hristos, Fiul lui Dumnezeu,...care pentru noi oamenii și pentru a noastră mântuire, s-a pogorât din ceruri și s-a întrupat de la Duhul Sfânt și din Fecioara Maria și s-a făcut om." Prin întrupare, înțelegem că Hristos s-a născut din Fecioara Maria, luând natura noastră omenească, trăind pe pământ, murind pe cruce și fiind îngropat, pentru a învia a treia zi și a se sui la ceruri.

Iisus, veșnicul Fiu al lui Dumnezeu, s-a născut în satul Betleem, o localitate care încă există. Maica Sa, Sfânta Fecioară Maria, L-a născut într-un staul aflat într-o peșteră, lîngă un han. La Nașterea Sa, păstorii și-au lăsat turmele pentru a veni să-L vadă așa cum le-au spus cetele îngerilor. Magii de la Răsărit au plecat din orașele lor să-l vadă pe Pruncul Hristos, fiind conduși spre Dânsul de o stea deosebit de strălucitoare. Vizita neobișnuită a acestor magi care au venit să se închine "Regelui nou-născut al evreilor" a generat multă uimire în orașul capitală – Ierusalim. Această uimire a transformat pe regele Irod într-un tiran furios care a ordonat ca toți copiii de parte bărbătească născuți în împrejurimile Betleemului în acea perioadă să fie omorâți. Irod nu vroia ca Acest Copil să devină viitor rege în locul său! Toate ne sunt istorisite în Evanghelia după Sf. Luca care, fără îndoială, a auzit aceste lucruri de la Sf. Apostol Petru, căruia i le-a spus Însși Fecioara Maria. ²

Orice creştin trebuie să citească nu numai Noul Testament ci şi Vechiul Testament, pentru că pe lângă istoria prezenței şi acțiunilor lui Dumnezeu de-a lungul istoriei omenirii, Vechiul Testament cuprinde profeții şi psalmi care proclamează cu secole înainte Nașterea lui Hristos, referindu-se la venirea Sa pe pământ ca Mântuitor sau "Alesul lui Dumnezeu." În aceste profeții şi psalmi ni se descriu aceste evenimente unice ale Nașterii din Fecioară, ale apariției stelei pe cer şi ale închinării magilor. Cu alte cuvinte, aceste lucruri profețite cu mult înainte de Nașterea Mântuitorului în Betleem, s-au împlinit în Nașterea Sa pentru că așa a fost planul divin al lui Dumnezeu.

Sf. Ioan Evanghelistul ne spune: "Pe Dumnezeu nimeni nu L-a văzut vreodată; Fiul cel Unul-Născut, Care

este în sânul Tatălui, Acela L-a făcut cunoscut." ³ Iisus Hristos, Unul-Născut Fiu al lui Dumnezeu, Mântuitorul, a venit pentru a ne descoperi făgăduința Tatălui, care este darul împăcării și mântuirii în existența vesnică. Cu sigurantă, numai prin venirea lui Iisus Hristos și Evanghelia Sa s-a împlinit Vechiul Testament. Hristos a fost Cel care a deschis inimile si mintile ucenicilor Săi spre întelegerea profetiilor si psalmilor, după Învierea Sa, în timpul celor patruzeci de zile petrecute cu ei înainte de Înălțarea Sa la ceruri.

A doua parte a imnului spune: "cu nasterea ta, dumnezeiască înnoire mi-ai dat." Ce înseamnă aceasta, "cu nașterea ta, dumnezeiască înnoire mi-ai dat?" Nu suntem noi deja născuți? Oare de ce renaștere avem nevoie? Suntem născuți din părinții noștri, mamă și tată, dar suntem renăscuți prin botez, care este o "renaștere" dumnezeiască. Avem până și nași! Suntem botezați în Hristos și îmbrăcați în Hristos. Suntem "înnoiți"; avem un început nou, dumnezeiesc prin Nașterea lui Hristos. Sf. Grigorie de Nazians ne arată că: "Sunt multe feluri de a sărbători, corepunzând fiecărei taine a lui Hristos! Cu toate acestea, toate au un singur scop, desăvârșirea si restaurarea noastră la starea întâiului Adam." 4

Restul imnului afirmă că noi suntem "...la bun neamul cel dintâi aduși", care este starea în care s-au aflat oamenii înainte de căderea în păcat a lui Adam și a Evei. Aceasta este chemarea întregii omeniri, să se străduiască, ca prin harul lui Dumnezeu, să devină ceea ce Adam și Eva au fost înainte de căderea lor în păcat și de alungarea lor din Rai. Sf. Irineu al Lyonului ne amintește că: "...Iisus Hristos, Domnul, Dumnezeul, Mântuitorul și Împăratul nostru... va pogor'' peste cei vrednici darul nestricăciunii și ''i va îmbrăca cu mărire nesfârșită." 5

Iubiti credinciosi,

Hristos a luat natura omenească pentru ca să fie ca și noi în toate cu excepția păcatului. Luând natura noastră umană, El ne-a ridicat. "Ai luat natura noastră omenească căzută pe umerii Tăi, Hristoase, si în Înăltarea Ta, ai ridicat-o la Dumnezeu Tatăl." 6 Sf. Leo, Papa Romei, ne îndeamnă: "... Ziua Nașterii Vieții Însăși... ne umple de bucurie. Nimeni nu este exclus de la a se împărtși în această bucurie, pentru că bucuira aceasta este a tuturor oamenilor. Domnul nostru, Biruitorul păcatului și al morții, întrucât nimeni nu era liber de păcat, a venit ca să aducă izbăvire tuturor." 7

Această "cântare la naștere" pe care noi o oferim lui Dumnezeu nu este cântarea obișnuită pe care noi o cântăm la sărbătorirea zilei de naștere unul altuia; ci, este cântecul întregii omeniri către Ziditorul, Mântuitorul și Sfințitorul ei. Este un cântec de nemărginită bucurie și mulțumire că Dumnezeu nu a părăsit omenirea căzută, ci a venit între noi, precum Sf. Ioan afirmă în Evanghelia sa: "Ce era de la început, ce am auzit, ce am văzut cu ochii noștri, ce am privit și mâinile noastre au pipăit despre Cuvântul vieții, aceea vă vestim. Şi viata s-a arătat și am văzut-o și mărturisim...' 8

Într-un imn la Vecernia Nașterii, cântăm: "Veniți să ne bucurăm de Domnul, această taină de acum spunând, peretele cel din mijloc al zidului s-a stricat, sabia cea de foc se întoarce, și heruvimul se depărtează de la pomul vieții și eu desfătării raiului mă împărtșesc, din care am fost lepădat pentru neascultare.'' 9 Acest imn se cântă seara la Vecernie, în timpul căreia auzim și alte explicații ale sfintei credințe. Cât de frumos proclamă credincioșilor Sfânta noastră Biserică minunile lui Dumnezeu prin cântări sfinte!

Astfel, ne adunăm ca un "cor sfânt" pentru a aduce laudă la nașterea Domnului Hristos, în timp ce, în același timp, într-un mod mistic, cântăm nouă înșine. Cântăm pentru că este în același timp nașterea noastră, o renaștere posibilă prin venirea lui Hristos pe pământ pentru a ne pregăti de întoarcerea în adevărata noastră casă, împărția cea cerească. Acolo ne vom întâlni cu sfinții noștri ocrotitori, și acolo vom deveni ceea ce am fost, adevărati copii ai lui Dumnezeu, adevărați fii și fiice, cu adevărat după chipul și asemănarea lui Dumnezeu.

Iubiti credinciosi,

La această sărbătorire a Nasterii lui Iisus Hristos, haideti să fim curajosi în vietile noastre; haideti să punem lucrurile dintâi, întâi; haideți să ne bucurăm în dragostea lui Dumnezeu pentru noi și să-L întâmpinăm în această zi a Întrupării Sale cu imne de bucurie și cu determinarea de a căuta cu toată ființa noastră Împărăția Cerurilor!

> Hristos se naste! Măriti-L! Hristos în mijlocul nostru! Hristos din ceruri, întâmpinati-L!

+Nathaniel, Din mila lui Dumnezeu, Arhiepiscop al Detroitului si al Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române din America

- ¹ Omilia a 5-a, par. 1
- ² Luca 2:1-20
- ³ Ioan 1:18
- ⁴ Despre Nașterea lui Hristos, 16 125
- ⁵ Adversus Haeresus, 1-9-4

- ⁶ Rugăciune la îmbrăcarea arhiereului
- ⁷ Omilia a treia, par. 1, 11-2
- ⁸ I Ioan 1:1-2
- ⁹ Doamne strigat-am, Stihirile Praznicului, Stihira Întâi

Cuvânt de Suflet

Noiembrie - Decembrie 2009

GÂNDURI PENTRU SĂRBĂTORILE CRĂCIUNULUI.

Iubiți Frați Preoți și iubiți Cititori:

"Închinămu-ne Nașterii Tale Hristoase, arată-ne nouă și dumnezeiască arătare a dumnezeirii Tale".

Noi, prin Dumnezeu putem înțelege minunile lui Dumnezeu. Într-o alcătuire în care amintim şi naşterea Mântuitorului, şi Arătarea Lui, şi Răstignirea Lui, şi învierea Lui, şi înălţarea Lui.

Zicem: "Te-ai născut precum însuți ai voit; te-ai arătat precum însuți ai socotit; te-ai răstignit cu trupul, Dumnezeul nostru, din morți ai înviat, călcând moartea; Te-ai înălțat întru slavă, Dumnezeul nostru, Cel ce toate le împlinești și ne-ai trimis nouă pe dumnezeiescul Duh, ca să lăudăm și să mărim Dumnezeirea Ta". Numai prin Duhul Sfânt înțelegem noi lucrurile acestea mai presus de noi. Şi chiar şi cu Duhul Sfânt, le înțelegem la măsura noastră. De unde știm? Pentru că la Schimbarea la Față, troparul spune: "Te-ai schimbat la Față, Hristoase, Dumnezeul nostru, arătând ucenicilor mărirea Ta'', cât puteau ei să cuprindă. Şi mai zicem: "strălucească și nouă, păcătoșilor, lumina Ta cea pururea fiitoare, pentru rugăciunile Născătoarei de Dumnmezeu, Dătătorule de lumină și ne mântuieste''.

Toate acestea ni le pune în atenție Sfânta noastră Biserică, toate acestea sunt taine ale credinței noastre. Pentru toate acestea ne pregătim cu înainteprăznuire, toate acestea le trăim la măsurile noastre, si să nu uităm niciodată cuvintele Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur: "Constiința curată face sărbătoare". Deci sărbătoarea nu e o zi anume; dacă n-ai conștiință curată, nu poți trăi sărbătoare nici atunci când este sărbătoare. Iar cine are constiința curată se poate gândi la evenimentele sărbătorite nu numai când e sărbătoare calendaristică, ci oricând. Omul care crede si are constiintă curată, oricând poate trăi evenimentele de la sărbători; și niciodata nu le poate înțelege și nu le poate trăi omul care nu are conștiința curată. "Fericiți cei curați cu inima" a zis Domnul Hristos, "că aceia vor vedea pe Dumnezeu''. În urcuşul nostru către sărbătoarea Nașterii Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos avem prilejul să auzim în biserică și să spunem noi înșine: "Hristos Se naște măriți-L, Hristos din ceruri, întâmpinați-L, Hristos pe pământ, înâlțați-vă, Cântați Domnului tot pâmântul și cu veselie lăudați-L, popoarelor, că S-a preamărit." Spunem "Hristos Se naște" și apoi urmează un îndemn: "Măriţi-L". De unde este Hristos? Din Cer. Şi trebuie să-l întâmpinăm. Hristos Cel din ceruri după firea dumnezeiască vine pe pământ, și zicem: "Hristos pe pământ, înalțați-vă" Sculați-vă, cei leneși, "Cântați Domnului tot pământul și cu veselie lăudați-l, popoarelor". De ce? "că S-a preamărit". Și tot în șirul gândurilor de felul acesta se adaugă și: "Taină străină văd și preamărită, cer fiind peștera, scaun de heruvimi Fecioara, ieslea sălășluire întru care S-a culcat Cel neîncăput, Hristos Dumnezeu, pe Care, lăudându-L, Il mărim''.

Deci, ce spunem? Spunem să privim la peștera în care S-a născut Domnul Hristos. Şi ce este pentru noi peștera în care S-a născut Domnul Hristos? Nu este o simplă peșteră, ci este cer.

"Taină străină vad şi preamărită, cer fiind peştera, scaun de heruvimi Fecioara, ieslea sălăsluire întru care S-a culcat Cel neîncăput, Hristos Dumnezeu, pe Care, lăudându-l, Il mărim." şi mai spunem la sărbătoarea Nașterii Domnului: "Nașterea Ta, Hristoase Dumnezeul nostru, răsărit-a lumii lumina cunoștinței. Că întru tine cei ce slujeau stelelor (magii) de la stea s-au învățat să se închine ție, Soarelui Dreptății, și să te cunoască pe Tine, Răsăritul cel de Sus, Doamne, mărire ție". Aici vorbim cu Domnul Hristos.

"Fecioara astăzi pe Cel mai presus de ființă naște și pământul peștera Celui neapropiat aduce. Îngerii cu păstorii măresc, iar magii cu steaua călătoresc. Că pentru noi S-a născut prunc tânăr. Dumnezeu Cel mai înainte de veci". Mântuitorul nostru Cel mai înainte de veci, S-a făcut om pentru vremelnicie și pentru veșnicie. În fața acestor evenimente, cât înțelegem noi din ele, ne adresăm Mântuitorului nostru și zicem: "Ce-ți vom aduce ție, Hristoase Dumnezeule? Că te-ai arătat pe pământ ca un om, pentru noi. Fiecare din făpturile Tale mulţumită aduce ție: îngerii cântare, cerurile steaua, pustiul ieslea, iar noi pe Preasfânta Fecioară.

Dumnezeule, cel mai înainte de veci, miluieşte-ne pe noi". Ne gândim la Mântuitorul nostru şi vrem să-I aducem ceva. Ce să-I aducem? Inimă curată: "Inimă curată zideşte într-u mine, Dumnezeule, şi duh drept înnoieşte înlăuntrul meu" (PS.50). Aşa cum cerul a adus steaua, îngerii au adus cântarea, să aducem şi noi din partea noastră inimă curată; şi pentru că, oricât am aduce, totdeauna e prea puţin faţă de cât ar trebui să aducem, trebuie să-I cerem lui Dumnezeu să ne miluiască pe noi, sporindu-ne râvna şi sporindu-ne cunoştinţa de Dumnezeu.

Prin urmare și noi trebuie să-I oferim lui Dumnezeu ceva, și îi oferim ceea ce purtăm în suflet, mai ales dorința de a ne asemăna cu Mântuitorul. Întruparea Fiului lui Dumnezeu s-a făcut "pentru noi și pentru a noastră mântuire".

Domnul Hristos a spus uncenicilor Săi după învierea Sa din morți: "Mergând, învăţaţi toate neamurile, botezându-le în numele Tatălui şi al Fiului şi al Sfântului

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ROLUL FEMEILOR ÎN BISERICA ORTODOXĂ

Viaţa spirituală în Biserica Ortodoxă nu se rezumă doar la a fi prezent Duminica la slujba religioasă, iar viaţa femeii ortodoxe nu se rezumă la a prepara cafeaua pentru cei ce participă la agapa de după Sfânta Liturghie. A fi Ortodox nu înseamnă a purta o cruce la gât, ori a te închina, ori a colecta bani pentru un scop anume. Toate acestea au rolul lor, dar fără dragostea pentru Mântuitorul Iisus Hristos şi învăţăturile Lui, nu au sens. Femeia ortodoxă se foloseşte de slujbele Bisericii Ortodoxe în a întări credinţa familiei în Dumnezeu şi a practica cele Zece Porunci. Ea înţelege nevoia ca Domnul nostru Iisus Hristos să fie parte din viaţa ei şi a familiei, şi în general din viaţa comunităţii în care trăieste.

Creștinismul s-a dovedit a fi o voce pentru cauza femeilor care au fost considerate ca inteligente, curajoase și virtuoase. În paginile Sfintelor Evanghelii, femeile care l-au urmat pe Mântuitorul Hristos sunt descrise ca fiind curajoase și adânc credincioase. De exemplu, în timp ce, de frică, Sf. Petru a negat de trei ori că-l cunoaște pe Hristos și ceilalți apostoli, cu excepția Sf. Ioan, au fugit în timpul răstignirii Mântuitorului, femeile au stat la picioarele crucii fără teamă. De asemenea, când barbații s-au închis în casă de frica evreilor, femeile au mers să ungă trupul lui Hristos. "Lângă crucea lui Iisus erau Maria, mama Lui, sora mamei lui, Maria, soția lui Cleopa, și Maria Magdalena". (Ioan 19:25). "În aceeași seară, în prima zi a săptămânii, uşile unde stăteau apostolii fiind închise de frica evreilor, Iisus a venit și a stat în mijlocul lor" (Ioan 20:19).

Vedem, aşadar, din paginile Sfintei Evanghelii, că femeile l-au urmat pe Mântuitorul şi dincolo de moartea Sa pe cruce, fiind martore credincioase. Primele persoane care au primit vestea învierii lui Iisus Hristos şi care au fost încredinţate să comunice cea mai importantă veste din anuarele istoriei, au fost femeile. "Iar îngerul le-a zis: "Nu vă înspăimântaţi! Căutaţi pe Iisus Nazarineanul, cel răstignit? A înviat! Nu este aici. Iată locul unde a fost pus. Dar mergeţi şi spuneţi ucenicilor Lui şi lui Petru că merge în Galileea, mai înainte de voi şi acolo îl veţi vedea, după cum v-a spus."... (Marcu 16: 6-7).

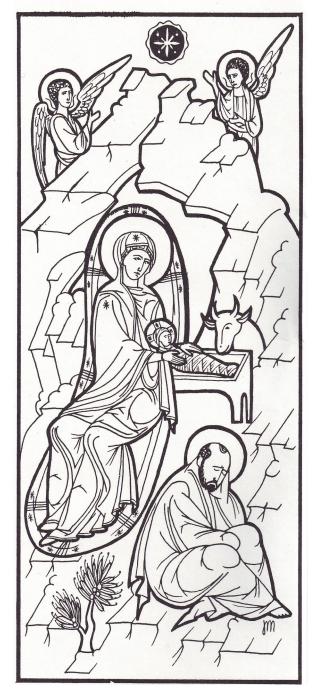
Mai mult, nu numai că Noul Testament ne înfăţişează femeile ca fiind credincioase şi urmând noua învăţătură, ci ne prezintă şi faptul că, atât bărbaţii cât şi femeile au aceeaşi responsabilitate în faţa lui Dumnezeu. În Epistola către Galateni, Sf. Apostol Pavel spune că, de acum, nu mai este nici bărbat, nici femeie, ci amândoi sunt consideraţi egali în faţa lui Hristos. Aceasta reprezintă, din punct de vedere istoric, cea mai radicală afirmaţie despre statutul femeii până în acel moment. În analiza finală, Creştinismul afirmă că şi bărbaţii şi femeile primesc în egală măsură darurile Sfântului Duh.

În final, aceasta ne arată că rolul femeii în Biserică

este complementar rolului bărbatului, amândoi fiind mădulare ale Trupului lui Hristos. Fiind cu toții Trupul lui Hristos, suntem chemați să ascultăm de învățăturile Lui. Avem mulți sfinți în Biserica Ortodoxă, atât bărbați cât și femei, care ne-au dat exemple ce înseamnă să trăiești ca un adevărat creștin.

Ce trebuie să facem, ca şi creştini ortodocşi, este să cultivăm darurile date nouă de Dumnezeu. Folosind aceste daruri în folosul semenilor noştri şi în numele lui Hristos, putem afirma că ne îndeplinim rolul nostru în Biserică.

Lucy Pop, Președinta - A.R.F.O.R.A.



ÎN MEMORIA VREDNICULUI DE POMENIRE PĂRINTE NICOLAE ZELEA - DOI ANI DE LA PLECAREA ÎNTRU DOMNUL (1916-2007)



Despre Părintele Nicolae Zelea, slujitor întru Hristos și pentru oameni, mi-a fost greu să scriu, atunci în septembrie 2007, când a răspuns chemării înălţimilor cereşti.

Ajuns la vârsta marilor împliniri, Părintele Nicolae Zelea păstra în ființa sa resursele fizice și spirituale de a veghea, cu o aleasă generozitate sufletească, până în ultima clipă la Casa Domnului, Biserica "Sfântul Gheorghe" din Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Încă din prima Duminică, când am păşit pragul acestei biserici, în 1995, am auzit spunându-se că este "părintele ortodoxiei" în acea parte a provinciei, ctitorind patru parohii: "Sfântul Gheorghe" - Toronto, (1954) "Sfântul Ioan Botezătorul" - Kitchener, (1967), "Sfânta Cruce" - London, (1987) şi "Sfântul Nicolae" - Ottawa, (1989).

Prezenţa Cucerniciei Sale la Sfânta Liturghie sădea mare bucurie în inimile noastre. Cuvântul Părintelui era ziditor, cu o mare tărie spirituală, purtător de Duh Sfânt, care ne învăluia ca o apă binecuvântată.

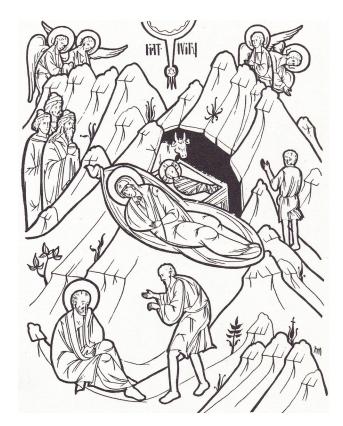
Împovărați de ispite şi păcate, îngenuncheam la spovedanie, care nu dura prea mult; după mărturisire, inimile erau uşurate, iar fețele luminoase, ca de sfinți. Lua pe umerii săi păcatele noastre. Iubirea lui față de semeni era nemărginită.

Obișnuia să oficieze la sărbătorile hramurilor în Locașurile Sfinte unde așezase prima piatră. Creștinii locurilor îl așteptau cu evlavie și emoție. Înviora privirile celor din jur, radiind bunătate și înțelegere, izvorâte din dăruirea față de oameni, limpede și simplă ca adevărul însuși.

Iubea mult "Vatra". Regreta că în ultimii ani, din motive de sănătate, nu a mai putut fi prezent la toate evenimentele ei. Îmi amintesc că pe 20 august 2007, la Săptămâna Câmpului Românesc din Hamilton, unde a conferențiat și IPS Arhiepiscop Nathaniel, ne-a spus: "Să aveți grijă de Vatra!".

Părintele Nicolae Zelea a rămas în sufletele noastre, ca o adevărată conștiință creștină ortodoxă a exilului românesc, o legendă vie a unor vremuri memorabile, peste care nu ar trebui să se așterne colbul uitării.

Alexandru Tomescu



ETERNUL COLIND ROMÂNESC

Taina şi minunea întrupării Fiului lui Dumnezeu s-a vestit la poporul român şi a fost tălmăcită în decursul veacurilor în incantația şi frumusețea colindelor. Poporul nostru, a cărui obârșie urcă până la vremea vestirii mesajului mântuirii neamului omenesc prin Iisus Hristos, a primit dintru început dumnezeieştile adevăruri şi le-a îmbrăcat într-o poezie de aleasă simțire şi fior al credinței, ca o adevărată comoară de suflet. Puține neamuri ale lumii au întâmpinat Nașterea Mântuitorului Hristos exprimând bogăție neasemuită de sentimente în versul şi refrenul de colind, precum românii.

În colindele străbune se cuprinde o sublimă şi subtilă "teologie populară", despre mântuirea adusă lumii de către Hristos Dumnezeu, din iubirea părintelui ceresc, mărturisită la toată intensitatea şi curăția bucuriei duhovniceşti. "Astăzi s-a născut Hristos" Mesia chip luminos" Lăudați şi cântați şi vă bucurați!" De o frumusețe unică și netrecătoare, colindele sunt asemenea unor flori, răsărite pe "pajiştea" sufletului credincios și în care s-a strâns nectarul învățăturii creştine, izvorâtă din pagini de Scriptură şi din prețioasa Tradiție a Bisericii dreptmăritoare.

Din străvechime, prin mijlocirea colindelor, s-a

moștenit, în șirul lung de generații, un buchet de alese virtuți ce au împodobit sufletul românului, precum iubirea de Dumnezeu și de oameni, înfrățirea și buna înțelegere cu semenii, bunătatea și milostenia, nădejdea și omenia.

Intrate de timpuriu în panoplia spirituală a tradiției românești, colindele sunt oglinda în care se reflectă componenta religioasă a spiritualității neamului nostru. Ele constituie deopotrivă elementul valoros și bine articulat al bogatei și perenei noastre culturi populare.

Cântând sau ascultând "colindul sfânt şi bun" ne simţim una în credinţă şi trăire cu moşii şi strămoşii noştri şi păstrăm în vatra sufletului fiorul unirii cu Dumnezeu şi cu neamul românesc de pretutindeni. Colindul străbun este "sfânt" prin mesajul său mântuitor că Fiul lui Dumnezeu vine în lume "să se nască şi să crească, să ne mântuiască". Colindul strămoşesc este şi "bun" fiindcă "vestea minunată" ne luminează şi transfigurează viaţa, ne aduce bucurie şi mângâiere. Colindul românesc este "sfânt şi bun", ca icoană a credinţei fiilor Bisericii noastre şi scumpă zestre a spiritualităţii tradiţionale.

Pr. Dr. Nicolae Stoleru, Note de lectură

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Duh", sau "Mergeţi în toată lumea şi propovăduiţi Evanghelia la toată faptura. Cel ce va crede şi se va boteza, se va mântui, şi cel ce nu va crede, se va osândi".

Aşadar, credinţa ne descoperă tainele şi tainele ne dau putere şi ne dau avânt pentru cele bune, pentru cele curate, pentru cele înalte. Iată nişte gânduri pe care le putem avea, pentru că ni le oferă Sfânta noastră Biserică. Iată nişte gânduri pe care le putem avea, pentru că se spun, se exprimă la Sfintele Slujbe, dacă suntem cu luare-aminte, dacă urmărim adevărurile cuprinse în ele.

Aşa că vă dau o sugestie: să vă gândiţi mai mult la ceea ce se spune, să vă gândiţi mai mult la comorile Ortodoxiei, să vă gândiţi mai mult la ceea ce ne dă Dumnezeu în gând pentru mântuirea noastră, pentru binele nostru, pentru societatea în care trăim. Să nu uităm de Dumnezeu, să nu uităm de rugăciune şi, mai ales, să căutăm să cuprindem în conştiinţa noastră, în cugetul nostru, cele ce ni se oferă pentru noi şi pentru a noastră mântuire.

Acum la ceas de aleasă şi Sfântă Sărbătoare a praznicului Nașterii Mântuitorului nostru Iisus Hristos, Anul Nou 2010, şi Sărbatoarea Botezului, să fie pentru noi toți prilej binecuvântat de bucurie, de sănătate, de pace în lume şi în sufletele noastre, de unitate şi iertare, de belşug în casele noastre, pregătindu-ne aşa cum se cuvine să-L primim pe Mântuitorul Iisus Hristos

în viața și în conștiința noastră. Să fim mai buni! Sărbători fericite și binecuvântate tuturor!

Închei cuvântul meu cu poezia "COLIND" de Vasile Voiculescu.

În coliba întunecoasă. Din carne si os lucrată A intrat Hristos deodată Nu făclie ce se stinge, Nu icoană ce se frânge Ci El însuşi, trup şi sânge Preschimbat pentru făptură Într-o scumpă picătură, Dulcea Cuminecătură, Coliba cum L-a primit S-a făcut cer strălucit Cu boltă de mărgărit Şi pe ea soare şi stele Cu luceferi printre ele. În mijloc tron luminos Şi pe el Domnul Hristos Care mult se bucura Duhul Sfânt Se-alătura Şi acolo rămânea Şi acum şi pururea.

Şi noi, Doamne, ne-am sculat Colibele am curățat

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Educarea Creștină a Familiei

Cuviosul Lazăr

Cuviosul Lazăr s-a născut în Asia din părinți creștini. La nașterea sa, un nor luminos s-a arătat în casă, semn al vieții sfinte pe care avea să o ducă. În copilărie, învăța cu dragoste despre creștinism. Crescând, 1-a cuprins dorul să meargă la Sfântul Mormânt gândea să fugă acolo.. Pentru a-l opri, părinții l-au închis în mănăstirea Orovilor. Profitând de neatenția călugărilor, foarte tânărul Lazăr a reuşit să fugă. Pe drum a găsit un tovarăș de călătorie, dar acesta, în loc să-i fie sprijin a încercat să-l vândă sarazinilor. Prin grija lui Dumnezeu, un creștin a auzit cum se făcea tocmeala și i-a spus lui Lazăr, iar acesta a reușit să scape fugind într-un munte din apropiere. Rătăcind prin munte, a întâlnit un călugăr căruia i-a povestit totul, iar acesta l-a sfătuit, ținând cont de vârsta lui fragedă și de lipsa de experiență în lupta spirituală, să amâne plecarea la Ierusalim și să stea, pentru un timp în mănăstirea din acest munte, la care călugărul era stareţ. Lazăr a înțeles că așa era bine, a intrat în mănăstire și pentru mulți ani a dus viața aspră a călugărilor. După moartea starețului, Lazăr s-a retras singur într-o peșteră. Cu timpul, în jurul lui s-au strâns mai multi călugări. Vestea despre sfințenia lui se dusese până departe și mulți erau cei ce veneau să îl vadă. Deci s-a văzut nevoia construirii unei mănăstiri, ceea ce s-a si făcut.

După mulți ani, Cuviosul Lazăr a decis că este timpul să meargă la Ierusalim. Şi mergând acolo, după ce s-a închinat la locurile sfinte s-a retras la lavra Sfântului Sava. După 6 ani a fost hirotonit preot de către Patriarhul Ierusalimului, iar după alți 7 ani sa retras în pustie unde si-a construit un stâlp pe care a stat mulți ani de zile luptându-se cu ispitele și nevoile. Îndemnat de o voce divină, a plecat înapoi spre patria lui. Pe drum, trecând printr-o pădure i-au ieșit în cale 2 urși, dar neputând să fugă a făcut asupra lor semnul crucii și urșii s-au dat la o parte lăsându-l să treacă. După un drum greu și anevoios, Cuviosul Lazăr s-a întors la mănăstirea Orovului, de unde fugise în tinerețe. Şi s-a dus vestea despre întorcerea sa și lume multă venea să îl vadă și a venit, fericită, și mama sa. Dar tatăl murise. De acolo Cuviosul Lazăr a plecat la sihăstria din dreptul muntelui Galisiului unde a stat pentru un timp, ducând o viață sfântă și muncind greu la îmbunătățirea sufletelor credincioșilor. Doritor de singurătate și rugăciune în liniște, s-a retras într-o peșteră din vârful muntelui, unde s-a luptat cu multe ispite și greutăți. Cu timpul, au început să se strângă călugări în jurul său, deci, s-a gândit să construiască o mânăstire. Într-o noapte, într-un loc, i s-a arătat un stâlp de foc care ajungea până la cer și a văzut îngerii urcând și coborând pe el. A știut că acela e locul unde trebuie să construiască mănăstirea. Şi acolo a construit mănăstirea, făcând și un stâlp . "Şi s-a suit deasupra

lui, luând numai o haină de piele, cu capul descoperit și desculț și purtând fiare grele." (Viețile Sfinților pe Noiembrie). Cuviosul Lazăr a făcut multe minuni, printre care, săturarea a şapte sute de monahi cu 3 pâini binecuvântate de el. Îmbolnăvindu-se grav, Cuviosul Lazăr își aștepta sfârșitul, dar ceilalți călugări se întristaseră atât de mult, încât, Cuviosului făcândui- se milă de dânșii s-a rugat la Maica Domnului săi mai dea timp de trăit. Cuviosul Lazăr a văzut-o pe Maica Domnului cerînd de la Domnul nostru Iisus Hristos să-i mai dea 15 ani. Şi într-adevăr, Cuviosul Lazăr a mai trăit 15 ani, ducând o viață plină de nevoințe, iar în ultimul an suferind mult. A știut dinainte când va muri, dar nu le-a spus ucenicilor. Când a trecut la Domnul, un nor luminos s-a arătat la stâlpul pe care își dăduse sufletul Cuviosul Lazăr și călugării, văzând norul luminos, se strângeau la stâlp. Cuviosul Lazăr a făcut minuni și după moartea sa.

Cuviosul Lazăr se sărbătorește în fiecare an pe 7 Noiembrie.

Întrebări pentru părinți:

- Am fost tulburați gândindu-ne la încercarea tânărului Lazăr de a fugi la Ierusalim și de pericolul prin care a trecut pentru că nu și-a ascultat părinții? Ne cer copiii noștri sfatul când au de luat hotărâri importante? Am reuşit să ne apropiem sufleteşte de ei astfel încât să ne spună toate frământările lor și atunci când sunt derutați să fie dornici să asculte opinia noastră? Şi totuşi, se întâmplă uneori că oricât de mult am încerca și oricât am explica, tinerii fac tot ceea ce vor ei, uneori, cu rezultate triste pentru ei și pentru alții. Suntem noi gata săi iertăm pe copiii noștri, așa cum Tatăl nostru din ceruri ne iartă pe noi, și suntem noi gata să-i ajutăm să iasă din necaz? Iar dacă au greșit foarte, foarte rău, făcându-ne să spunem : "m-a făcut de râs în fața lumii" avem noi dragostea necesară de a trece peste mândria noastră și peste "ce zice lumea" și apropiindu-ne de ei, cu iubire, să-i aducem înapoi la viața normală a unui adevărat creștin? Grea e viața părinților din ziua de azi, dar nici viața tinerilor nu e uşoară. Nu mă refer numai la viața fizică si materială ci mai mult la viața spirituală care este bombardată de tot mai multe și mai multe ispite, îndoieli, incertitudini, minciuni.
- Oare Cuviosul Lazăr a mai cerut timp pentru că îi era frică de moarte şi pentru că vroia "să-şi trăiască viața"? Nu. Cuviosul Lazăr era pregătit şi chiar bucuros să plece din această "vale a lacrimilor", dar grija pentru ucenicii săi l-a făcut să ceară mai mult timp. Aşa cum unele mame, suferind mult, deşi sunt gata "să plece" mai cer încă timp să-şi mai crească, oleacă, copiii. Ce a făcut Lazăr cu

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Educarea ... Cont. de la pag. 23

timpul primit? I-a ajutat pe ucenicii săi, a postit si mai mult "căci în cele şapte zile ale săptămânii nu mânca nimic, iar când trebuia să mănânce, hrana lui era verdețurile crude" (Viețile Sfinților pe Noiembrie). Iar în ultimul an a avut dureri groaznice de picioare, care i se umflaseră și "erau pline de răni". Oare noi am fost vreodată în pericol de a muri (accident sau boală grea) și ni s-a mai dat timp de trăit? Cum am folosit timpul în plus care ni s-a dat? Dar cum folosim timpul pe care îl trăim drept acum? Înțelegem noi că fiecare zi din viața noastră e un cadou de la Dumnezeu? Înțeleg copiii noștri acest lucru? Oare, de câte ori, când i-am întrebat pe copiii noștri ce fac ei ne-au răspuns: "killing time" ("omor timpul")? Oare timpul nostru ne-a fost dat pentru a fi omorât sau pentru a fi folosit? Şi oare ce sunt jocurile pe internet și televizorul decât "killing time", timp care ar trebui să fie timpul de familie, când părinții și copiii stau de vorbă unii cu alții, își împărtășesc necazurile, se ajută, timp în care părinții și bunicii pot să le vorbească copiilor despre religia lor, să-i învețe să se roage, să-i învețe să se poarte, să-i învețe ce e bine și ce e rău. Știm noi să ne folosim timpul astfel încât să sărbătorim în familie sărbătorile creștine, măcar cele mai importante dintre ele? Dar oare avem un calendar creştin în casă, ne uităm în el și știu copiii noștri cum să cerceteze acest calendar? Poate, doar oamenii aflați pe pragul morții înțeleg adevărata valoare a timpului, pe care n-o să-l mai aibă. Fie ca Dumnezeu să ne ajute să folosim cu înțelepciune timpul nostru rămas.

Maica Preoteasă

Cuvânt de Suflet Cont. de la pag. 22

Uşi, ferestre, toate-s noi, Doamne, intră și la noi! Trup tu dormi? Domnul te paște! Suflete, scoli și cunoaște Luminos Prunc că Se naște În peştera inimii, în palatul Treimii. Dară Pruncul cine mi-I? Mi-e Hristosul Dumnezeu Coborât în pieptul meu. Maica Sfântă-n brațe-L ține, Duhul Sfânt cu drag L-alină, Îngeri cu raze se-nchină. Nu dorm, trupul meu îmi spune, Ci-ncleştat de grea minune Stau în multă rugăciune, Să mă mişc nu se cuvine, Căci cu harul care vine, Raiul tot se află-n mine.

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COLINDUL BRADULUI

- Norule cu stele'n gaică n'ai văzut pe Sfânta Maică? De-atâta hălăduire, de drumeagul ei n'ai ştire? Norule cu frunza rară n'ai văzut Sfânta Fecioară?
- ... ba şi eu m'am legănat tot a freamăt luminat, tot mereu hălăduind când a cer, când a colind şi-am văzut-o, măre, sus, se ruga pentru Iisus.

Timp puţin mai e'n căuş, Pruncul n'are legănuş, n'are faşă, scutece... Bradul zice: "Uite ce, Maică Sfântă, Preacurată, trupul meu i-L fac covată, vântul bate, tragănă, și Pruncul ți-L leagănă, steaua'n şovăire ninge glas nespus, dar nu-L atinge. Prin dumbrăvile de fagi vor veni trei regi și magi și păstorii cu un miel slăvind pe Emanuel. șterge-ți ochii de șiroaie, iată-mi inima - copaie ca să doarmă'n cald şi'n lin... Lerui Doamne, ler... Amin.

Dumitru Ichim