

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

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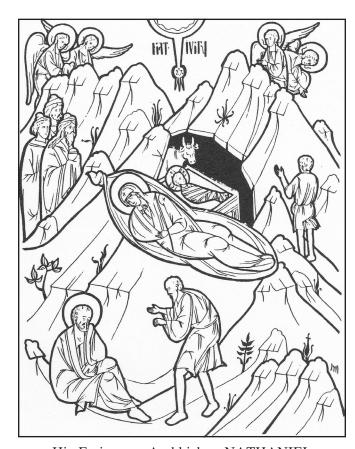
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COVER: Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ — 19th Century (Sibiu, Romania) from the book "Pictură Țărănească pe Sticlă," Editura Meridiane, București, 1975.



His Eminence, Archbishop NATHANIEL His Grace, Bishop IRINEU with the *Solia* & Chancery Staff

wish the Reverend Clergy, Monastics and Faithful throughout the Episcopate

God's blessings and all good wishes for the Feasts of the Nativity and Theophany of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

CHRIST IS BORN! LET US GLORIFY HIM! HRISTOS SE NAȘTE! MĂRIȚI-L!

PASTORAL LETTER 2011



NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Christ is born! Let us glorify Him!

"The mystery hidden before all time and unknown even to the angels was revealed to men through you, O Birthgiver of God, that God becoming man in a non-confused union willed to accept the cross for us; thus, he resurrected Adam the first-fashioned and saved our souls from death."

Theotokion, Tone 4

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!

In the Theotokion Hymn cited above, while first of all giving glory to God, certain matters are brought to our attention: first, that there is a divine hidden mystery to be contemplated; second that this mystery was revealed only at a specific time to humankind; third, that God himself became man and sacrificed himself for humanity; fourth, that he restores fallen Adam and all humanity to unending life; fifth, that these matters, the mystery, the sacrifice, the exaltation came about through the willingness, acceptance and participation of a woman who lived and lives in perfect harmony with God and humankind.

"The mystery which has been hidden from eternity" (Eph. 3:9), "...the message which was a mystery hidden for generations and centuries and has now been revealed..." (Col.1:26) is how the Apostle Paul describes the birth of Christ into this world. This is what he preached to Jew and Gentile. St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "He has let us know the mystery of his purpose, the hidden plan he so kindly made in Christ from the beginning...that he would bring everything together under Christ, as head" (Eph. 1:9f). God has "let us know!" Beloved, we have no excuse to not respond to God, for he himself has "let us know" the scope of Christ's birth into this world, and he expects a response from each of us. Let us glorify him!

When we greet each other saying: "Christ is born," we are referring to the fulfillment of this divine mystery which was revealed to all humanity through the incarnation or taking-on of our human nature by God just as it was foretold in the prophets, announced by angels and attested to in the New Testament of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ and lived and witnessed to by Orthodox Christians.

The name "Christ" means "the anointed one". He is the one begotten of God the Father to announce to all the Good News, the Gospel: that God is love and loves all humanity which he made in his own image and likeness; three persons: the All-Holy Trinity, one in Divine Nature, divine love without end. God the Father is love and loves all humanity. God the Son, the Christ, is love and loves all humanity. God the Holy Spirit is love and loves all humanity.

This great love of God is that he invites all humankind to renew itself, person by person, to the original state of Adam, the "first-fashioned," a state from which all humankind is fallen. Now by our choice and through baptism and through his grace, we are to live in harmony with God and man in this life and thus be graced into everlasting life. This is the "salvation of our souls," which is our personal unending existence of which the hymn speaks.

Christ "...was born of the Father before all ages; he is light of the light of the Father; he is true God of true God, begotten of the Father but not made..." through human intercourse. He is of one essence with the Father. Through Christ Jesus, all things came to be (Creed).

Jesus the Savior, Christ the Anointed one who brought the Good News, him do we glorify. It is because of his work to restore Adam to his dignity and to restore each of us to that same original beauty that Christ is glorified by all the powers of heaven and earth and by us when we respond, "Glorify him!"

St. Ephrem the Syrian reminds us: "For the angel said, 'You shall call his name Jesus', "that is, Savior" 'for he shall save his people from sins.' This name therefore refers not to his nature but to his deeds" (Commentary on Tatian's Diatesarion 25). Coming among us, he willingly sacrificed himself on the cross to restore our fallen human nature to the pre-fallen existence and beautiful nature of the first Adam. Here then is Divine Love in action, a continuation of the loving act of creation and restoration and salvation, on and on into eternity and forever.

It was the realization that we had turned our back on God that the fear of Death made humankind turn inward, mistaking a distorted understanding of the true purpose of life. The true purpose is to return to God in this life through knowledge of his love and to move into the joy of unending life in the age to come. By his voluntary and willing act of sacrifice on the cross, Jesus our Lord, overcame and destroyed the power of Death, which put into humankind a fear of annihilation.

The Lord first had to take on our human nature to dwell among us. He did this through the willingness of a woman, herself of human nature, our Most Blessed Lady, the Virgin Mary. John the Monk exclaims: "Wonder! God is come among humanity; he that cannot be contained is contained in a womb; the timeless enters time, and great mystery: his conception is without seed, his emptying past telling!" (Stichera of the Annunciation). St. Bede says: "Because death made its entrance through a woman, it was fitting that life return through a woman [who] produced for the world the Author of salvation" (Homilies on the Gospels 1:3).

Jesus took on our human nature through the power of the Holy Spirit and by the acceptance of the Holy Birthgiver of God, Mary. St. Cyril of Jerusalem reminds us of what Paul the Apostle says: "God sent his Son born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4), not that he was born of a man and a woman [FC 61:246-47]; and thus, we confess his virgin birth and the perpetual virginity of his Mother. Returning to the hymn, we understand that it was through the Virgin Mary that Christ Jesus was born, and the divine mystery of salvation "hidden before all time" was finally revealed to humankind.

Why was this mystery not known sooner? Precisely because the revelation of the mystery could only be when the person through whom the mystery could be revealed, could be approached, and that person was the Virgin Mary. This was the "fullness of time" of which Scripture speaks; the time when this holy woman would say to the Archangel Gabriel, "Let it be to me as you said" (Luke 1:38).

This mystery, that is, that God whom no man can see, came to be seen (John 1:1) to take on our human nature in Christ Jesus, was not revealed to the angels, God's ministers and messengers, before it would be made known to humankind. It was only the Archangel Gabriel ("Strength of God") who came with God's invitation to the maiden in Nazareth, that the hidden mystery became announced. St. Leo the Great explains: "Before the Redeemer was born in the flesh, there was discord between us and the angels, from whose brightness and holy perfection we were separated...but since we now acknowledge our King [Jesus], the angels receive us as fellow citizens...now they are at peace with us...now they honor us as friends" (Homilies on the Gospels 8:2).

Let us draw to a close this reflection on the present feast of the Birth of Our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ by listening attentively to the words of Paul to the Church in Ephesus, that sum up those matters on which we have been contemplating: "Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ. Before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ, to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his presence, determining that we should become his adopted sons, through Jesus Christ for his own kind purposes, to make us praise the glory of his grace, his free gift to us in the Beloved, in whom, through his blood, we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of our sins... Now you too, in him, have heard the message of the truth and the good news of your salvation, and have believed it" (Ephesians 1:3-7,13).

God chose us from all eternity, and in time revealed his divine mystery to us. He now calls us to live in love in this world that he has created and sustains. He wants our praise for his love and grace which lifts us up again. He has bestowed on us forgiveness of our sins. He has invited us to be with Christ under whom will be all things in the age to come.

He asks that we live what we believe, and thus give glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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

+ NATHANIEL
By the mercy of God, Archbishop of Detroit
and The Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America

WHY WAS JESUS BORN OF A VIRGIN?

By Hieromonk Calinic (Berger)

and life

The canonical New Testament contains two independent infancy narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The Virgin Birth of Jesus is consequently an inalienable part of the earliest Christian traditions. However, unlike His Resurrection from the dead, the Virgin Birth did not occupy a central place in Apostolic preaching. The earliest Gospel, Mark, does not mention the Virgin Birth tradition. The closest St. Paul comes to mentioning it is when he writes, "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the

law" (Gal 4:4). John's Gospel, which makes the pre-existence of Christ a central theme and brings attention to Jesus' mother, similarly begins with Jesus' baptism – that is, His public ministry, not His birth and childhood. While these apparent omissions were never an issue in the early Church, scholars today have brought them under scrutiny. What are we to make of them?

Whether taken by themselves or in the context of the entire New Testament, the infancy narratives are distinct from the preaching of the Cross and Resurrection in two fundamental ways: (i) First, unlike the ministry and death of Jesus which were *public* events, and unlike the Resurrection which was subsequently witnessed by many, the Virgin Birth did not have any immediate or subsequent public witnesses. Therefore, as would be the case with any private or semi-private event in human history, we do not have multiple attestations and corroborating witnesses of the event at our disposal. (ii) Secondly, the apostolic preaching centered on the totally new beginning given to humanity through the Cross and Resurrection. These were the great acts and signs wrought by Christ, which confirmed who He is. While the pre-existence of Christ figures strongly into this message of cosmic salvation in Paul and John (e.g. Phil 2:5-15, Gal 4:4, Rom 8:3, John passim), the Virgin Birth is not made explicit by them in their preaching. The early Church however saw it as clearly implied.

If we consider the meaning of the pre-existence of Christ, then it becomes clear that it cannot be separated from the Virgin Birth. Jesus was fully human, with a human will, soul and mind. If we deny this, we threaten the real depth of meaning in Jesus' life, crucifixion and Resurrection as a man. On the other hand, Christ is not a "mere man" – He is also God. In other words, as God He did not dwell *in* a man but *became* a man. If we upset the balance of these two poles – divinity and humanity, the uncreated and the created

- which are united together in the single person of Christ, we threaten the all-encompassing view of salvation which is present in the New Testament and the entire tradition of the Holy Orthodox Church. The Virgin Birth ensures that God did not dwell in a preconceived human being; rather, He created His own particular human existence in the womb of the Virgin Mary in a manner which was miraculous and above nature.

At the risk of generalization, we might point out

that in those traditions (i.e., Protestant) where there is a lack of interest in the Mother of God, we also find there a lack of understanding of the full importance of her giving birth as a virgin. We also find in these traditions a reductionist view of redemption, wherein salvation is reduced to a juridical "atonement" which views Christ's death as somehow appeasing God's honor or even wrath. Such

a view of redemption is rejected in Orthodox theology. Due to our limitations in space, we cannot address all the issues here.

In recent times, believing scholars (e.g. Raymond Brown) have done much to show that the *Virgin Birth* is part of the historical kernel of the legitimate, ancient Christian Tradition. Moreover, it is absolutely unique to Christianity, a similar teaching not being found in any other religious tradition whatsoever. The Virgin Birth is in the New Testament for a reason. Similarly it is in the Nicene Creed for a reason.

On the one hand, then, the Virgin birth unequivocally expresses the pre-existence and the identity of the person of Jesus Christ, who is the second Person of the Holy Trinity, the one Word of God incarnate. Yet there is more to the Virgin Birth than a simple expression of Jesus' pre-existence as the Son of God: it also points to the fact that our salvation is a recreation, a new beginning. This is evident when St. Paul called Jesus the "second Adam" (I Cor 15:22,45,47). The early Fathers Irenaeus and Justin Martyr expanded on the parallels between the old and new Adams. The Virgin Birth ensures that Jesus is the foundation of a new humanity, just as Adam was that of the original humanity. Uniquely, neither Adam nor Jesus had a human father. According to St. Irenaeus, by being born of a virgin, Jesus preserved the manner of Adam's creation. Both men were founders of humanity, and as such, in a special sense "Son of God" (Lk 3:38).

Perhaps more clearly than any other Church Father,

Cont. on page 6

Why Was Jesus ... Cont. from page 5

St. Maximus the Confessor explained this particular meaning of the Virgin Birth. In the fall of man, an irrational, egotistical attraction to bodily pleasure took root in human nature thereby altering and eventually dominating it. Pain was given to Adam and Eve by God as a therapeutic antidote for this domination – so that they would not be overly attached to earthly things - but it could not heal their fallen condition. However, the human nature of Jesus was free from the passion associated with carnal pleasure and any subsequent association with pain and death. In other words, specifically by being born from a virgin, Jesus was born outside of the cycle of pleasure and pain which holds fallen human existence. His birth was free from any natural necessity or desire. It was completely pure. Yet this could only be the case if He was born of a virgin. By being so born, He preserved the essence of our nature (its logos) but changed the way it exists (its tropos): His nature is truly human, but it is now free of this cyclic domination. He thereby literally gave humanity a new beginning.

Though the Virgin Birth was necessary, it was not enough for our salvation. Christ accepted death and all the consequences of the old humanity's cycles of pleasure, pain and sin, in order to free us from them. Jesus saves man by voluntarily enduring a death of pain which was unjust (for He was sinless), but also unwarranted (since His nature was pure, from the Virgin). He thereby created a "new use" for death: it can now be used as a voluntary means of renouncing the egotistical self in total dedication to God, the source of life.

From this perspective, it is not only the Resurrection that leads to the teaching of the Incarnation, but the Incarnation itself illumines the Cross and the Resurrection. Only when the Cross and Resurrection are held together with the Virgin Birth do we see that the death of Christ was truly and wholly voluntary. We also see that salvation in Christ goes beyond a simple "atonement." Much more than that, it consists of humanity's re-creation (in His Spirit-filled Incarnation from the Virgin), its justification before God (through His obedient death on the Cross), and its restoration to a grace-filled immortality (in the Spiritfilled Resurrection). Through all of these things, humanity is given a new origin and beginning (arche, genesis), free from sin and the cyclic domination of pleasure, pain, and death, in a life of full communion with the Holy Trinity. This new human existence is permanent: "death hath no more dominion over Him" (Rom 6:9). Christ offers all of us a participation in this renewed humanity through the Sacraments of the Church and its life in the Spirit.

St. Gregory the Theologian summarized these ideas beautifully: "We needed an Incarnate God, a God put to death, that we might live" (Or. 45.28). We are

saved by the entire life of Christ, but in particular by the Cross, Resurrection, and His divine, Spirit-filled *Virgin Birth*. Through all these things He is truly the New Adam. He wishes to share this new beginning with each of us through His restored and fulfilled human nature, to offer us this unspeakable gift. For this reason, Jesus Christ was born of a Virgin.

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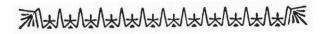
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TEXTS FOR THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

Troparion of the Nativity, Tone 4

Your nativity, O Christ our God, has dawned to the world the light of understanding; for by it, those who worshipped the stars were taught by a star to adore you, the Sun of righteousness, and to know you, the Dawn from above. O Lord, glory to You!

Kontakion of the Nativity, Tone 3

Today, the Virgin gives birth to the transcendent One, and the earth offers a cave to the unapproachable One. Angels with shepherds glorify Him; the wise men journey with the star. For our sakes, the eternal God was born as a little child.

First Canon, Ode Four, Nativity Matins

Rod of the root of Jesse, and flower that blossomed from his stem, O Christ, You have sprung from the Virgin. From the Mountain overshadowed by the forest, You have come, made flesh from her who did not know wedlock, O God who are not formed from matter. Glory to Your power, O Lord! O Christ, whom Jacob foretold in the days of old, calling You the Expectation of the nations, You have shone forth from the tribe of Judah, and You have come to plunder the strength of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria, turning their error into faith, O beautiful God. Glory to Your power, O Lord! O Master who has risen as a Star out of Jacob, You have filled with joy the watchers of the stars, who interpreted wisely the words of Balaam, the soothsayer of old. As the first fruits of the Gentiles, they were led to You, and You have openly received them, as they brought You acceptable gifts. Glory to Your power, O Lord! As dew upon the You have descended into the womb of the Virgin, O Christ, and as drops of rain that fall upon the earth. Ethiopia and Tarshish and the isles of Arabia, the kings of Saba, of the Medes and all the earth, fell down before You, O Savior. Glory to Your power, O Lord!

A Hymn of the Nativity

How is He contained in a womb whom nothing can contain?

And how can He who is in the bosom of the Father be held in the arms of His Mother?

This is according to His good pleasure,

as He knows and wishes.

For being without flesh,

of His own will has He been made flesh;

and He Who Is,

for our sakes has become that which He was not.

Without departing from His own nature

He has shared in our substance.

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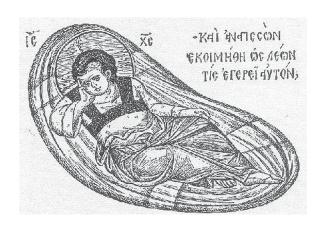
Desiring to fill the world on high with citizens, Christ has undergone a twofold birth.

Praises (Lauds) of Nativity Matins, Tone 4 (by St Andrew of Jerusalem)

Make glad, O you righteous; greatly rejoice, O you heavens; you mountains, dance for joy. Christ is born, and like the cherubim the Virgin makes a throne, carrying at her bosom God the Word made flesh. Shepherds glorify the new-born Child, magi offer the Master gifts. Angels sing praises, saying: 'O Lord past understanding, glory to You!' It was the good pleasure of the Father: the Word became flesh, and the Virgin bore God made man. A star spreads abroad the tidings: the Magi worship, the shepherds stand amazed, and the creation is filled with mighty joy. O Mother of God, Virgin who have borne the Savior, you have overthrown the ancient curse of Eve. For you have become the Mother of Him in whom the Father was well pleased, and has carried at your bosom God the incarnate Word. We cannot fathom this mystery: but by faith alone we all glorify it, crying with you and saying: O Lord past all interpretation, glory to You! O come, let us sing the praises of the Mother of the Savior, who after bearing child still remained Virgin. Rejoice, you Living City of God the King, in which Christ has dwelled, bringing to pass our salvation. With Gabriel we sing your praises; with the shepherds we glorify you, crying: O Mother of God, intercede for our salvation with Him who took flesh from you!

First Ode of the Canon of the Nativity

Christ is born, glorify Him! Christ is come from the heavens! Receive Him! Christ on the earth! Rejoice! All the earth sing to the Lord and all people joyfully praise him, for he has covered himself in glory.



THE ADVENT OF LOVE: THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

By M.C. Steenberg

The mysteries of the Christian life are many: the mystery of the crucified God, the risen dead, the sightfilled blind, the joyful broken. And present within the Church's chief mystery—the holy gifts of the holy offering, become none other than the holy body and blood-lies another mystery still: the mystery of love. This sacrament of God's creative self-communication, of dynamic love which transcends and transforms the cosmos of love's fashioning, actualizes in each human life - whether realized or not the eternal love, the very life, of the most holy Trinity. Love has come to us, love comes to us, love each day

may re-create us wholly to the active life of its own image.

The Mystery of Love, that creative, energetic life of the eternal God, stands at the center of our Christian existence. All the sacraments, all the mysteries of this life, are bound up in this; for Love has come to us, has bowed down the heavens and descended to the throne of our human heart. The self-communication of love, which ever expresses itself in the mutual love of the Trinitarian life, has communicated itself into the cosmos as light into the darkness.

Love has come to us. The holy incarnation, which the Church celebrates today in the Nativity of the Savior, is meaningless and distorted if not seen as this mystery of the advent of Love. Though such realities be true, the full meaning and purpose of this fearful birth are not summed up in the sin of human life, in the weight of sin demanding sacrifice, of the wandering, lost sheep in need of guidance. The reverent dread, the full wonder of the Nativity of God, lies in the pure and greatest mystery of Christian reality: the love that orders the cosmos, the love that creates and fashions, the love the Theologian calls God himself, comes directly, fully, gently yet forcefully into the world.

The world into which love has become incarnate has, since that advent (and never more than today), misunderstood that love and its coming. The ways and life of God are a folly to the world—a folly that would defy all knowledge outside of prayer. And so love becomes but an emotion, a feeling; and the emotion is assigned by preference, choice, perspective and position. 'Love is gentle', but gentle no longer in emulation of the Gentle Light that burns away the darkness



of sin; rather, gentle in mere and sheer acceptance—of every cancer, of any wrong. 'Love is kind', but its kindness is not as that of the one who rebuked the healed sinner, 'Go, and sin no more'; rather, a kindness which says simply, dreadfully, 'Go', and lets the sin abound.

As the Church celebrates the great mystery of the incarnation, of the holy Nativity of God according to the flesh, we are compelled by the child's visage of the pre-eternal God to take into our hearts the gentle rebuke of our worldly misconceptions.

This one is Love, who has fashioned the cosmos from the void, yet

who lays enshrined in a stable.

This one is Love, who fashions man, and bears upon His shoulders his sins.

This one is Love, who offers peace, yet overturns the squalor of the Temple stalls.

This one is Love, who forgives absolutely yet makes the highest of all demands: 'Come, take up your cross, and follow me'.

This one is Love, who does not merely dismiss sin and all its tragic reality, but comes into its midst to condemn, conquer and destroy its captivating falsepower.

This one is Love, and Love is no other.

Such sin do we commit when we call or treat as love anything other than the life of the one born in Bethlehem of Mary, love's Mother. In the life in Christ, love is defined for us always by that eternal reality of the Father's great paternal love for the Son, his love worked in the sacred person of the Holy Spirit—in the mutual co-inhering love of their united Trinitarian life. It is this love which has come to us in the incarnation of the Son, for love is God and God is love, and we are proved fools in every division of such a reality.

Yet divide it we are wont to do—and perhaps amongst the chief challenges posed to us in keeping this holy feast is to see anew the singular reality that is God's life, his will, and the substance of our love—even as he is one reality who comes among us as man and God. As God has taken to himself the whole of human life and united it inseparably to his divine being, becoming for us the one known ever in two, so ought we see in our Christian life the perfect synonymity, the full and absolute union, of 'love' and 'God'. Our lives

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THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

By Fr. Cosmin Sicoe

Not too long ago, I was approached by a very loving mother who told me that sometimes she is afraid to pray for the salvation of her children, because God might allow even some tragic experiences to happen in their lives in order to bring them to salvation. Of course, as a mother, she did not want anything bad to happen to her children.

This reminded me of a beautiful double-sided icon of the Mother of God. On one side, the Mother of God was depicted with Jesus in her arms, but in this unique icon, the Mother of God has a very worried facial expression. The reason for her worries is revealed by the other side of the panel which depicts the Crucifixion of Christ. The Mother of God was worried, because she knew what was going to happen to her Son. She was worried, because she knew that "a sword will pierce through her own soul" (Luke 2:35), as the righteous Simeon prophesied to her at the Presentation of the Lord into the Temple. It is normal for a mother to be worried for her children. It is normal for a mother to wish to protect her children from any harmful experience; however, we should not forget that the Mother of God (even though she knew that her Son was born to die, to give His life for the world) did not try to stop Him from doing this, because she believed in the ineffable love and goodness of God the Father. She knew that God the Father had a plan for the salvation of humanity, and she put her trust in Him as she did at the time of the Annunciation when she said: "Let it be to me according to your word!" (Luke 1:38).

The Gospels also give us an account of somebody who did try to prevent Jesus from going to His passion: after Jesus began to speak to His disciples about His Passion, "Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying: 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!' But He turned and said to Peter: 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.' Then Jesus said to His disciples: 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it'." (Matthew 16:22-25).

Therefore, every time when we try to prevent ourselves or those whom we love from painful, but saving experiences, we "are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men". In his first letter to Corinthians, St. Paul emphasizes the same idea: "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are

perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1 Cor. 1:18, 20). We have to put our trust in God that He will provide for our loved ones and for us what is the best for us and for our salvation. We should also always keep in mind that everything, it seems to us, that we possess, we will lose one day: our jobs, our houses, our friends, our parents, our spouses, our children, even our own lives; but if, by the Grace of God, we succeed in offering "ourselves and one another and our whole life" to the One Who Is, to the only true, real and eternal Existence, then we gain everything. Therefore, let us not be afraid of some small and temporary losses or painful experiences in our lives or in the lives of our loved ones, and "let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-3).

If we have this mindset, then our deepest sorrow and tribulation becomes not a lamentation, but an angelic hymn like these beautiful selected verses from the Akathist in Praise of God's Creation:

"Glory to you for every sigh of my sorrow!"

"Glory to you, sending us failures and afflictions to make us sensitive to other people's sufferings!"

"Glory to you, no loss is irreparable when you are there, to all you give eternal life!"

And then, we can say like St. John Chrysostom at the end of his life in a painful exile: "Glory to God for all things!" Amen.

Advent of Love ... Cont. from page 8

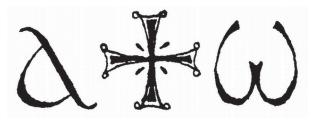
and our loving are defined by the Love who has taken our life, to make ours his and his our own.

Christ is born, and love is held out to all the world. Christ is born, and the Trinity makes manifest the extent of his compassion.

Christ is born, and life is joined to Life, will to Will, man to God.

Christ is born — let us glorify him!

Originally posted on Monachos.net - 25th December 2004 / 7th January 2005 (The feast of the Nativity according to the flesh of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ).



ASCETIC: REFLECTIONS ON THE WAY OF SELF-SACRIFICE

By Anonymous

A boy once approached his father, 'Old man, why do you fast?' The father stood silent, bringing heart and mind together, and then:

'Beloved boy, I fast to know what it is I lack.
For day by day I sit in abundance, and
all is well before me;
I want not, I suffer not, and I
lack but that for which I invent a need.
But my heart is empty of true joy,
filled, yet overflowing with dry waters.
There is no room left for love.
I have no needs, and so my needs are never met,

no longings, and so my desires are never fulfilled.

Where all the fruits of the earth could dwell, I have

where all the fruits of the earth could dwell, I have filled the house with dust and clouds;
It is full, so I am content—
But it is empty, and so I weep.

'Thus I fast, beloved, to know the dust in which I dwell.

I take not from that which I might take, for in its absence I am left empty, and what is empty stands ready to be filled. I turn from what I love, for my love is barren, and by it I curse the earth.

I turn from what I love, that I may purify my loving, and move from curse to blessing.

'From my abundance I turn to want, as the soldier leaves the comfort of home, of family and love, to know the barrenness of war. For it is only amongst the fight, in the torture of loss, in the fire of battle, that lies are lost and the blind man clearly sees. In hunger of body and mind, I see the vanity of food, for I have loved food as food, and have never been fed. In weary, waking vigil I see the vanity of sleep, for I have embraced sleep as desire, and have never found rest. In sorrow, with eyes of tears I see the vanity of pleasure, for I have treasured happiness above all, and have never known joy.

'I fast, beloved child, to crush the wall that is my self;

For I am not who I am, just as these passions are not treasures of gold but of clay.

I fast to die, for it is not the living who are raised, but the dead.

I fast to crucify my desires, for He who was crucified was He who lived, and He who conquered, and He who lives forever.'



The ascetic mind is not one of stone, cold and darkened to the outside world. Too often, those who stand apart from the heavenly struggle see it thus, and thereby see it askew. To climb is not to descend, and to grow is not to die. Those who reject the world do so not out of hatred, not out of scorn for the creation into which they have been born, but out of most profound love. It takes a true love deeper than most will ever know, to consider the world with such fondness and thanksgiving that one is willing to let it go. Hope and faith must be of the profoundest sort, if ever they are to give birth to a heart willing to break away from creation, that it might one day be united more fully to it.

The ascetic heart knows the world, and knows that it is good. It can see the tranquil pond, the azure sky, the frail leaf, and catch in every glimpse the radiant shimmer of the Divine. In all things there is God.

The ascetic heart knows creation, and rejoices in its bounty. It sees the breath drawn in and out by all creatures, watches as they mingle together in the Creator's hands. There is fawn, there is bird, there is beast, but all are life, and all life is in Christ.

The ascetic heart knows humanity. In its gentle sight there is no man, no woman—only brother and sister, father and mother, daughter and son. The family of human life is united together with a bond only this heart can truly see, and once it is seen, it is all that can be seen in man. That bond of communion, reflection of the Divine, is the nature of human being.

The ascetic heart knows itself, and knows that it is good. For all that may darken and stain its surface, the handiwork of a Craftsman is still beloved, and what was once made divine can only be sullied and perverted, but never wholly destroyed. The ascetic heart looks within, and knows of a great Beauty to be found inside its own walls.

Yet this same ascetic heart also knows of darkness. As much as it has rejoiced over its light and fullness, so much has it bewailed its void and emptiness. A brilliant light which cannot be seen suffers not always from its source, but rather from its surroundings—the ascetic heart is pure, but its purity is covered in shame. It is the unique gift of the ascetic to know this, and her divine blessing that such knowledge wells up tears of grief like none the world can call forth. To gaze deep within and see the Sun darkened with stains is to be pained in soul, to see nature perfected and destroyed at once and in the same breath. Unbridled joy and soul wrenching agony collide; and if their collision be perfect, the ascetic heart is born.



The boy approached his father, gently, 'Old man, why do you sorrow?' The old man softened his tears:

'Beloved, my sorrow is my joy.
Where there is no weeping, there is no rejoicing,
And he who has not sorrowed has never known delight.

'I sorrow for the darkness that
I see within,
for the depth of the divide I have
cast between my mind and my heart.
I sorrow, for I have become
a source of sorrow,
and if I do not weep
I shall never be healed.

'What God has blessed, I have squandered, and therefore all the mountains weep. Shall I yet rejoice? See me, an aged man of squandered days, a vessel of life confined to death—yet merry, at peace, rejoicing!

'No, beloved, let us weep.

Let us know sorrow, for then
we know ourselves, then we see.

No more in ignorance, but in truth
let us walk,
acknowledging our woe,
weeping with the earth.

When its sorrow is our sorrow,
then the weight shall crush my bones
—and crushed, I shall be reborn.

'Sorrow is the door, dear boy, the door of joy pure and true. With every tear we shed, we rejoice more fully, exist more wholly, love more purely.' And with this, the old man's words ceased, his mouth was still. And as the tears brimmed within his eyes, his joy radiated as the sun.



How captive are we, we fallen children, to the pleasures and passions that rule our lives. How we treasure the chains which imprison us, bestowing upon them garlands and wreathes, adorning them as friends. We sit bound by our desires, a lamentable state, yet we rejoice, for our eyes are shut fast; and as in a dream we see our confinement as freedom, our chains as wings.

The ascetic heart knows the darkness of this cell that is our fallen state, the chill of the stone walls that barricade us as if in tombs while yet we walk alive. And this heart knows, too, the cunning poison that is our joy, when founded in these walls—a poison sweet as honey, that dries the blood even as it tickles the tongue. The ascetic heart knows the deep reality of bondage, of the lament of all creation when a human person is bound to death, and recognizes the truth of the chains that bind him. Yet for the ascetic, the chains lose their appeal, their draw—for he knows that only the yoke offered by Christ can lead upward, inward, forward to Life.

One might feel pity, when seeing the ascetic, for he whose heart is borne aloft to God is the very man whose tears flow more freely than most, who weeps in time of rejoicing and sorrows at the festivals of the day. Yet how absent from the need for pity is the man who knows the sorrow of the world, for it is only he who knows its joy! Only when the illusion of 'life' is seen for all its empty reality, can the space within one's vision that so long it occupied be filled—at long last—with the vision of Truth.

The sorrow of the ascetic is not a hopeless sadness, but a hope-filled lament for all that is distant from God. It is the heart weeping for its loss, even in the same breath that it receives its gain, just as the father wept for his prodigal son even as the latter rushed with longing into his father's arms. The tears wept in this divine sorrow are tears of purification, the divine waters of baptismal grace welling up anew from the depths of the heart, purifying flesh and soul as they ascend upward and outward, finally to fall to the waiting earth.

It is in sorrow that the ascetic heart finds the doorway to joy. A heart petrified so long by the dry passions and fleeting winds of worldly desires becomes hardened, parched, incapable of change or growth. It is this parched earth that the ascetic waters with her tears, pained at her heart's barrenness, but stirred with profoundest joy at the knowledge that each drop of water transforms the very earth itself.

As sorrow gives rise to tears, so is the hardened heart softened. As the heart is softened, holiness is

born. As holiness is born, so divine transformation occurs. And where God transforms life, there all joy and hope, love and peace are found. Thus does the ascetic sorrow, for in sorrow is the door to life.



The boy approached his father, sat and questioned, 'Old man, why are you alone? Why your solitude?' The elder sighed, his breath light as the sky:

'All the world is one, beloved, kept entire in the hand of God. Solitude is an illusion, a fleeting vision; for when one is still he is never alone.

'And yet the world turns, turns with haste toward its ends fleeting, fallen, manmade all. And we, too, turn, glancing here and there, with vision rushed, blurred; never one, but divided.

'I am alone, beloved, for the sake of our communion.

Only in solitude is stillness born, only there is it nurtured—
that great gift by which we live.

Divine silence can be found but when the heart is still: alone in its quest, alone with God.

Thus solitude brings quiet, and quiet the stillness where whispers cease, and here, the voice of God.

'Hear me well, dear boy:
my solitude is my communion;
alone, we are together.
In solitude I see Christ whole,
for I am wholly His.
By this vision I am transformed,
my eyes at last beholding Life,
and Life reviving the blood of my veins.
I am Adam, wailing alone before the gates.
I quiet my tears to hear God beside me
—and am healed.

'Thus my solitude, thus am I alone:
to know the depth of Christ within
and heal all that is without.
For when in solitude I come to know God,
I am united to Him in love,
united to Him who fills all,

And my solitude becomes my communion, as alone I embrace the world.'



The call to retreat is mystical. There is divine grace even in the pin-prick voice of the inspired conscience, which through its love for the way of the Cross takes note of the desert, there sees a palace, and calls with longing for its transformation into home. It is the voice which called Christ into the sands of Judea, Anthony into the dunes of Egypt, Saba into the valleys of Palestine, and every human person into the desert of his own life. With echoes of the voice of God, this chord within the human soul seeks retreat, departure from the ways of extravagance and ease, and builds within the heart the desire for battle in the solitude of the sand.

Who has lived and not at some time heard—however faintly—this call? In the busiest moments, in the most absorbed, who has not felt the inexplicable desire for solitude, for a place of silence and peace in which to make sense of the world's stage? Perhaps but for a fleeting instant, yet this desire is truly felt, and that instant can change the soul. There is crisis, for in the infinite smallness of that single moment, the great magnitude of life is felt, and a sense of distance formed.

It is the gift of the ascetic heart to live in this moment, to cultivate the seed of so precious an instant into the fruit of a whole life changed, woven to the garment of Christ. In this heart the moment of the call is extended to the span of life, for the call is sweet, and the heart knows that such an invitation cannot but be heeded. Love answers Love, for it is the One who is the essence of love whose voice has pierced the soul.

Thus is born the desire for retreat. Yes, to retreat is to flee, but the ascetic flees the world not to abandon it, rather to embrace it. It is not that she hates the world that the ascetic runs, but because she loves it too dearly to be captive to it falsely. To love the world in sin is to shame both the lover and the loved, to deny the holiness of both. Retreat becomes the means for purification, for sanctification, that holy may meet holy, and in purity embrace at last.

Solitude becomes communion, true communion, for our unity as brother and sister is naught but for our union with Christ, and this is in us all most fallen. Fragmented, torn from Christ and ourselves, we can never be whole. The family of humanity is a great and marvelous image formed after the nature of a puzzle with pieces intertwined, embracing. But if each piece will not itself be one, then the puzzle may never be fit. Thus the ascetic plunges into solitude, departure, for here the broken self is healed. Here distractions falls before the gates of contemplation, and fallen being finds reality in communion with the Maker of all. Here, alone, the thread is re-spun, strengthened, puri-

fied, brightened, that it may be woven as never before into the fabric of humanity.

Christ will be all in all, and all in Him must be one. But community without self is illusory, finite. The ascetic sees this, and in the vision sees response in flight. Alone, alone in the solitude of prayer, does he join the world at last.



The boy knelt at his father's knees, 'Dear man, how do you pray?' The old man sighed a gentle sigh, smiling in his eyes. All questions came to this. Here the great meeting place of life, and of its nature the elder spoke:

'Beloved, prayer is life, and apart from it is only darkness.

It is the breath of the soul which yearns for God, joining with His breath, becoming one.

Prayer is the only light by which men can see, the only vision they are called to adore, for it is union with God and in this union—everything.

'Prayer is the quiet of a storm-tossed will, an intellect guarded from the seas, a mind centered upon God Most High.

It is stillness wrought in the midst of motion, in which all that moves is God, and with Him, all the world.

Prayer knows no words, if it is true, for words belittle the presence of the Divine, confound the conversation of Him who is all in all.

True prayer is beyond words, transcending speech and thought, communing with One who is greater than these, Who works beyond them, and in Whose presence they are no longer required.

Prayer is the stillness of the tongue, of the mind, of the heart, that God and these may come together apart from words—one.

'To pray, beloved, is to gather with Christ at the shores of eternity;

To realize that these shores are within, manifested in each human heart—the infinite contained in the finite.

The One who came as Man and dwelt in a womb, now dwells in the very heart of man.

Prayer is His energy, His activity, vibrant in the human soul, alive through His very Spirit, stirring life to new heights in the soul that has become quiet, still enough to feel His breath.

'We pray in our weakness, beloved, for it makes us strong;
We pray in our strength, for it makes us humble;
We pray in height and depth, for prayer is our center—
It is the heart and nature of being, the very root of spiritual life.
We pray when we know not how to pray, for then it is not we, but Christ who prays in us; and the groanings of His Spirit show the way.

'To pray, dear child, simply sit. Ask for the blessing of Him with Whom you wish to commune. Call Him near to you, for without Him you have already lost. Then close your eyes, child, and banish every thoughtthe good as well as the bad. Whisper out only for His mercy, and you shall receive it. Let your heart be still, Let your thoughts descend within, for in the heart is Christ, and only His wings will give you flight. Then rest there, beloved, in that place of still silence: It is time for the Lord to act.

'Prayer shall move you,
 if only you will let it.

It will bear you to new heights,
 transform your life and being;

But it will cost you your life,
 your mind, your heart—
 everything.

It will take of your time and energy,
 it will consume your life;

But there is no reward greater than prayer.

So work, child.

Open your heart—and pray.'



The ascetic heart is ultimately a heart of prayer. It is this heart that yearns for communion with God Most High, and will sacrifice all the world for such union. It is the heart willing to cast aside every hindrance and sinful chain that weighs down the soul from its proper dwelling place in the bosom of Christ God, that the race to obtain the prize may be fought more fully, more readily.

In prayer, the ascetic finds his home; for prayer is the union of man with God, and this the state for which humanity was created at the dawn of time. Such union, wrought by the grace of God in concert with the faithful work of man, is the only true life of the human race. Apart from it, life is but a shadow; within it, the smallest man or woman radiates more brightly than the very sun.

True prayer is not speech, nor is it discussion. These are steps along the path to true, inner prayer, but they are not the goal. Speech is forged of words, and words of finite minds, and finite minds are ultimately incapable of grasping the fullness of divine Truth. Thus words begin the ascent, provide the path which leads to the mountaintop, but cannot reach its peak.

At the height of prayer all speech must cease. The God who transcends speech energizes the human soul and body to the attainment of intimate, personal union with Himself, whence knowledge and communion are of experience and not of words. The heart of prayer communes with God not through any mediating speech or conversation, but through direct connection and communion. God lifts the ascetic to Himself in prayer, and there she comes to know God.

What a mystery is this union of prayer! How can it be that God and man, Creator and created, come together as one? Yet God is not blasphemed in such a notion; all the saints and the whole witness of the holy Church testify to this most personal of unities that is the heart of prayer. Shall we sinful men know greater truths than they? The wish of the Saviour was, and remains, that He and man might be one; in prayer, when prayer be inner and true, His wish is born a reality.

The ascetic prays, and strives to pray. Her prayer is weak, yet it leads to perfection. And this the most profound of mysteries, that prayer, the fruit and goal of all ascetic labor, stands also as that labor's greatest tool. The perfect is attained by the imperfect, and outer, base prayer shall eventually lead to glory. Though prayer be the target, it is also the bow by which the arrow is launched to hit the mark; and so the ascetic heart prays, that it might learn to pray. His cry remains, 'Teach us to pray. Pray within us.'

The ascetic life is summed up in prayer, and prayer is attained by the ascetic life. There can be no true prayer in a soul untrained and unprepared, thus for the call of prayer the whole world is charged to take up the ascetic walk. This walk and this heart are not reserved for a select few, for only the monastics or the clergy, or the greatest of saints; they are the charge of every human person, the call of every human life. In the midst of any station, there can the ascetic heart be fostered—there can it flourish.

It is the gift of the ascetic heart to know, truly know the world, and it is the gift of the unworthy world to possess the call to this heavenward life. It is the very source of life, for life is in God and God is in prayer; it is the upward call of Christ Jesus in a world of fallen passions; it is the charge of heaven, the life of the angels, offered to frail humanity by a loving and benevolent God. Let there then be no delay: arise, take up this yoke so deft and yet so light to bear, and find in its ultimate struggle the only true peace and rest for the human soul.

Source: Monachos.net — Orthodoxy through Patristic, Monastic & Liturgical Study.

PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE MESSIAH

Genesis 3:14-15 First Announcement Salvation through Shem Genesis 9:24-27 Abraham & blessing of all nations Genesis 12:1-3 Descendant of Judah Genesis 49:8-12 Star out of Jacob Numbers 24:15-19 Prophet like the Prophet Moses Deuteronomy 18:15, 18 David's House will last 2 Samuel 7:16 forever Son of God and World Ruler Psalm 2 King and Priest Psalm 110 Innocent Sufferer Psalm 22 Death loses its hold Psalm 16:9-11 Fallen Tent of David Amos 9:11-15 Blessing under David the King Hosea 1-3 Son of the Virgin Isaiah 7:13-14 Emmanuel: God with us. Deliverer Isaiah 8:8-10 New-born King Isaiah 8:23b-9:6 Root of Jesse Isaiah 11:1-5 Pagan World Isaiah 2:2-4

Blessings of Messianic Age

Bethlehem is his birthplace Prince of Peace establishes his Kingdom Holy Branch Messianic Kingdom under David's son Isaiah 32:1-5, 15-17 Isaiah 35:4-5,10; 4:2 Isaiah 11:6-9

Micah 5:1-3

Isaiah 11:11-16

Isaiah 19:18-25

Psalm 72 Jeremiah 23:5-6

Jeremiah 31:22 Jeremiah 31:31-34

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HIERARCHAL SCHEDULE

July 10 - November 21, 2011

July 10-16. Grass Lake, MI. Vatra Romaneasca. Camp Vatra for Seniors.

July 24-August 6. Grass Lake, MI. Vatra Romaneasca. Camp Vatra for Juniors.

August 5-6. Ellwood City, PA. Transfiguration Monastery. Friday: Vigil of Patronal Feast concelebrated with Bishop Michael (New York/New Jersey). Saturday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy concelebrated with Bishop Michael and Bishop Melchizedek of Pittsburgh. Holy Unction Service.

August 7. Ellwood City, PA. St. Elias. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Lunch. Pastoral Visits.

August 11. Detroit, MI. Pastoral Visit to Psa. Eleonora Lazar.

August 12-14. Colleyville, TX. St. Mary. Friday: Visit with Archbishop Dimitrie (Royster). Saturday: Visit to new Greek Church. Great Vespers at St. Mary. Supper. Sunday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy concelebrated with Bishop Irineu. Banquet.

August 15. Rives Junction, MI. Dormition Monastery. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy for Patronal Feast. Holy Unction service.

August 17-18. Southfield, MI. St. George Cathedral. Wednesday: Wake service for Psa. Eleonora Lazar. Thursday: Funeral Service for Psa. Eleonora Lazar.

August 21. Rives Junction, MI. Dormition Monastery. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy.

August 28. Rives Junction, MI. Dormition Monastery. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy.

September 4. Rives Junction, MI. Dormition Monastery. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy.

September 8. Grass Lake, MI. Vatra Romaneasca. St. Mary Chapel. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy concelebrated with Bishop Irineu. Memorial Service. Luncheon.

September 11. Southfield, MI. St. George Cathedral. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Memorial Service for Victims of 9/11 and Virgil Barbu.

September 14. Phoenix, AZ. Holy Cross Mission. Attended Liturgy for the Patronal feast.

September 16-18. Phoenix, AZ. Holy Cross Mission. Friday: Pastoral Visit and Discussion with Parish Council. Saturday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Blessing of Ground. Banquet. Sunday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy.

September 25. Rives Junction, MI. Dormition Monastery. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy.

September 28 – October 1. Chicago, IL. St. Mary. Episcopate Congress. Thursday: Clergy Conference. Episcopate Council Meeting. Friday: Congress Sessions. Saturday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy concelebrated with Archbishop Nicolae (ROAA) and Bishop Irineu. Banquet.

October 2. Rives Junction, MI. Dormition Monastery. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy.

October 3-5. Syosset, NY. OCA Chancery. Holy Synod Meeting.

October 6-8. Pittsburgh, PA. OCL Annual Conference. Thursday: Board Meeting. Friday: St. Mary (OCA) OCL Conference. Vespers. Saturday: St. Mary (OCA). OCL Conference and Presentation.

October 9. McKees Rocks, PA. St. Andrew. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Banquet.

October 9-10. Falls Church, VA. Protection of the Mother of God. Sunday Evening: Wake Service for Armand Scala. Monday: Funeral Service for Armand Scala

October 15-16. Canton, OH. St. George. Saturday: Great Vespers. Cultural Event. Sunday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy and Banquet for 100th Anniversary.

October 23. Rives Junction, MI. Dormition Monastery. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy.

October 27-30. Easton, CT. St. Dimitrie. Saturday: Consecration of New Church concelebrated with Bishop Ioan Casian (ROAA) and Bishop Irineu. Sunday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Lunch.

October 31 – November 4. Seattle, WA. OCA All America Council.

November 5-6. Chicago, IL. St. Mary. Saturday: Great Vespers. Sunday: Consecration of New Altar Table and Iconostasion. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy concelebrated with Bishop Irineu.

November 7-10. Phoenix, AZ. Annual Clergy Confertreat.

November 11-12. Anaheim, CA. St. Mary. Saturday: Consecration of New Church concelebrated with Archbishop Nicolae (ROAA), Bishop Benjamin (San Francisco & West), Bishop Petroniu of Salaj (Romania), Bishop Irineu.

November 13. Pomona, CA. St. Anne. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Pastoral Visit.

November 20-21. Rives Junction, MI. Dormition Monastery. Sunday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Evening: Vigil for feast of Entrance of Birthgiver of God in the Temple. Monday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy for the feast.

Prophecies ... Cont. from page 14

Shepherd and his Flock Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:22-25

Servant of God Isaiah 40-55

Isaiah 42:1-7 Isaiah 49:1-9a

Isaiah 50:4-9 (10-11)

Zechariah 12:9 – 13:1

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 Prince of Peace enters

Holy City
Sacrifice in Messiah's

Time

Time Malachi 1:10-11 Forerunner Malachi 3:1,22-24

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FINANCIAL REPORT

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Prophecies Cont. from page 15
Prophecies Cont. from page 15

Outpouring of Holy

Spirit Joel 3:1-5 Son of Man Daniel 7

Compiled by An Orthodox Monk. Published in "Orthodox Spiritual Resources in Preparation for the Nativity of Christ," Commission of Religious Education of The Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America.

Scrisoare Pastorală la Nașterea Domnului, Dumnezeului și Mântuitorului Nostru Iisus Hristos pe anul 2011

Hristos se naște! Măriți-L!

"Taina cea din veac ascunsă și de îngeri neștiută, prin tine, Născătoare de Dumnezeu, celor de pe pământ s-a arătat, Dumnezeu întrupându-Se întru unire neamestecată și Crucea de voie pentru noi primind; prin care înviind pe Cel întâi zidit, a mântuit din moarte sufletele noastre."

Troparul Născătoarei de Dumnezeu glasul al 4-lea

Iubitului nostru cler, cinului monahal și dreptcredincioșilor creștini ai Episcopiei noastre de Dumnezeupăzite,

"Fie ca Dumnezeu Tatăl și Domnul nostru Iisus Hristos să vă dăruiască har și pace, iar de la noi arhierești binecuvântări!"

În troparul citat mai sus, mai întâi se aduce mărire lui Dumnezeu, dar atenția ne este atrasă de anumite lucruri: în primul rând, că este vorba de o taină dumnezeiască ascunsă care ni se descoperă; al doilea, că această taină a fost descoperită omenirii la un anumit timp; al treilea, că Dumnezeu însuși a devenit om și s-a jertfit pentru omenire; al patrulea, că a ridicat pe Adam cel căzut și întreaga omenire la viață veșnică; al cincilea, că toate acestea: taina, jertfa, înălțarea au fost dăruite nouă prin bunăvoința, acceptarea și participarea unei femei care a trăit și trăiește în armonie perfectă cu Dumnezeu și omenirea.

"Taina cea din veac ascunsă" (Efeseni 3: 9) "... Taina cea ascunsă din veacuri şi din neamuri; iar acum s-a arătat..." (Coloseni 1:26) aşa descrie Sf. Ap. Pavel naşterea lui Hristos în această lume. Aceasta este ceea ce el a propovăduit evreilor şi neamurilor. Sf. Pavel a scris efesenilor: "Făcându-ne cunoscută taina voii Sale, după bunăvoinţa Sa, astfel cum hotărâse în Sine mai înainte, ... ca toate să fie cuprinse iarăşi în Hristos..." (Efeseni 1: 9-10). Dumnezeu ne-a arătat! Iubiţi credincioşi, nu avem nici o scuză dacă nu răspundem lui Dumnezeu, pentru că El însuşi ne-a arătat motivul nașterii lui Hristos în această lume şi El așteaptă un răspuns de la fiecare dintre noi. Măriţi-L!

Atunci când ne întâmpinăm unul pe celălalt spunând: "Hristos se naște!", ne referim la împlinirea acestei taine dumnezeiești care s-a descoperit întregii lumi prin întruparea sau luarea naturii noastre omenești de către Dumnezeu așa cum a fost anunțat mai înainte de către prooroci, vestit de către îngeri și atestat în Noul Testament al Domnului, Dumnezeului și Mântuitorului nostru Iisus Hristos, trăit și mărturisit de către creștinii ortodocși.

Numele de Hristos înseamnă Unsul. El este Cel Unul Născut din Dumnezeu Tatăl ca să vestească tuturor Vestea cea Bună, Evanghelia; că Dumnezeu este iubire şi iubeşte întreaga omenire pe care El a făcut-o după chipul şi asemănarea Sa. Trei Persoane, una fiind în natura dumnezeiască, iubire dumnezeiască fără sfârşit. Dumnezeu Tatăl este iubire şi iubeşte pe toți oamenii. Dumnezeu Fiul, Hristosul, este iubire şi iubeşte pe toți oamenii. Dumnezeu Duhul Sfânt este iubire şi iubeşte pe toți oamenii.

Această măreață iubire a lui Dumnezeu constă în faptul că El invită întreaga omenire să se înnoiască în sine, persoană după persoană, la starea originară pe care a avut-o Adam, cel "întâi creat", o stare din care întreaga omenire este căzută. Acum, prin alegerea noastră, prin botez și prin harul Său, noi suntem chemați să trăim în armonie cu Dumnezeu și oamenii în această viață și în acest fel să moștenim viața veșnică. Aceasta este "mântuirea sufletelor noastre", este viața veșnică de care vorbește troparul.

Hristos "...S-a născut din Tatăl mai înainte de toţi vecii; Lumină din lumină; Dumnezeu adevărat din Dumnezeu adevărat, născut, iar nu făcut, Cel de o fiinţă cu Dumnezeu Tatăl, prin Care toate s-au făcut." (Crezul)

Iisus Mântuitorul, Hristos Unsul care a adus Vestea cea Bună, pe Acesta îl preamărim.Pentru că l-a restaurat pe Adam la demnitatea dintâi și pentru că ne ridică pe fiecare dintre noi la acea frumusețe dintâi, de aceea este preamărit Hristos de către toate puterile cerești și pământești și de către noi când răspundem: "Măriți-L!"

Sf. Efrem Sirul ne aminteşte: "Pentru că îngerul a zis: «şi vei chema numele lui Iisus», adică Mântuitor, «pentru că El va mântui poporul Său din păcate.» Acest nume, deci, nu se referă la natura Sa, ci la faptele Sale." (Comentariu biblic 26 la Diatessaronul lui Taţian). Pogorându-Se între noi, El s-a jertfit de bunăvoie pe cruce pentru a restaura natura umană căzută, la existenţa dinaintea căderii şi la frumoasa natură a întâiului Adam. Vedem aici Dragostea Dumnezeiască în acţiune, o continuare a iubitorului act al creaţiei, restaurării şi mântuirii, mereu şi mereu în veşnicie şi pentru totdeauna.

Realizând că ne-am întors de la fața lui Dumnezeu, frica de moarte a făcut ca omenirea să se aplece spre înauntru, înțelegând greșit adevăratul scop al vieții. Adevăratul scop al vieții este întoarcerea la Dumnezeu în această viață prin cunoașterea dragostei Sale și mutarea la bucuria vieții veșnice a veacului ce va să vină. Prin acest act voluntar și voit al jertfei pe cruce, Domnul nostru Iisus Hristos a depășit și distrus puterea Morții, care pusese în omenire frica de anihilare.

Domnul a trebuit să ia firea omenească pentru a locui printre noi. El a înfăptuit aceasta prin bunăvoința unei femei, ea însăși de natură omenească, a Prea Binecuvântatei Fecioare Maria. Ioan Monahul exclamă: "O minune! Dumnezeu locuiește între oameni; El cel neîncăput, a încăput în pântece; Cel fără de timp intră în timp, și mare taină; nașterea Sa este fără de sămânță, iar deșertarea Sa dincolo de cuvânt!" (Stihira Bunei Vestiri). Sf. Bede spune: "Pentru că moartea a intrat printr-o femeie, era potrivit ca viața să se întoarcă tot printr-o femeie.... (care) a dăruit lumii pe Autorul mântuirii." (Omilii la Evanghelii 1: 3).

Iisus a luat firea noastră omenească prin puterea Duhului Sfânt şi prin acceptarea Prea Sfintei Născătoare de Dumnezeu, Maria. Sf. Chiril al Ierusalimului ne aminteşte ceea ce Sf. Ap. Pavel a spus: (Galateni 4: 4) "Dumnezeu a trimis pe Fiul Său, născut din femeie," nu pentru că el ar fi fost născut din bărbat şi femeie şi prin aceasta noi mărturisim nașterea Sa din fecioară şi pururea fecioria Maicii Sale. întorcându-ne la imn, noi înțelegem că prin Fecioara Maria, Hristos S-a născut şi că Taina cea dumnezeiască a mântuirii "din veac ascunsă" a fost descoperită, în sfârșit oamenilor.

De ce nu a fost această taină descoperită oamenilor mai devreme? Tocmai pentru că revelarea acestei taine putea fi făcută numai când persoana prin care taina putea fi descoperită exista, şi această persoană a fost Fecioara Maria. Aceasta a fost "plinirea vremii" de care vorbeşte Scriptura; timpul când această sfântă femeie va spune Arhanghelului Gavriil: "Fie mie după cuvântul tău!" (Luca 1:38)

Această taină, că Dumnezeu pe Care niciun om nu-L poate vedea, (Ioan 1: 1) să ia firea noastră omenească în Iisus Hristos, nu a fost descoperită îngerilor, slujitori şi vestitori ai voii lui Dumnezeu, înainte de a fi cunoscută oamenilor. Numai Arhanghelului Gavriil ("Puterea lui Dumnezeu"), care a venit cu invitația lui Dumnezeu către Fecioara din Nazaret, a fost această taină descoperită. Sf. Leon cel Mare explică: "înainte ca Răscumpărătorul să se nască cu trup, era neînțelegere între noi şi între îngeri, de a căror lumină şi sfântă perfecțiune noi eram separați..., dar întrucât acum noi primim pe împăratul Hristos, îngerii ne primesc și ei ca și concetățeni..., acum ei sunt în pace cu noi..., acum ei ne onorează ca prieteni." (Omilii la Evanghelii 8: 2)

Haideţi să încheiem aceste gânduri la prezenta sărbătoare a Nașterii Domnului, Dumnezeului și Mântuitorului nostru Iisus Hristos, ascultând atent cuvintele Sf. Ap. Pavel adresate Bisericii din Efes care sumarizează toate acestea despre care am vorbit astfel: "Binecuvântat fie Dumnezeu și Tatăl Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos, Cel ce, întru Hristos, ne-a binecuvântat pe noi, în ceruri, cu toată binecuvântarea duhovnicească; Precum întru El ne-a și ales, înainte de întemeierea lumii, ca să fim sfinți și fără de prihană înaintea Lui, mai înainte rânduindu-ne, în a Sa iubire, spre înfierea întru El, prin Iisus Hristos, după buna socotință a voii Sale, spre lauda slavei harului Său, cu care ne-a dăruit pe noi prin Fiul Său cel iubit; întru El avem răscumpărarea prin sângele Lui și iertarea păcatelor, după bogăția harului Lui." "Ca Dumnezeul Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos, Tatăl slavei, să vă dea vouă duhul înțelepciunii și al descoperirii, spre deplina Lui cunoaștere." (Efeseni 1: 3-7, 13)

Dumnezeu ne-a ales din veșnicie și la timpul potrivit ne-a descoperit taina Sa dumnezeiască. Acum, El ne cheamă să trăim în iubire în această lume pe care El a creat-o și-i poartă de grijă. El vrea să-L preamărim pentru iubirea și harul Său ce ne ridică din nou. El a pogorât peste noi iertarea păcatelor noastre. El ne-a invitat să fim împreună cu Hristos sub care vor fi toate în veacul ce va să fie.

El ne cere să trăim ceea ce credem și prin această să aducem mărire Tatălui și Fiului și Duhului Sfânt. Amin.

Hristos se naște! Măriţi-L! Mântuitorul este între noi! Întâmpinaţi-L!

+NATHANIEL

Din mila lui Dumnezeu, Arhiepiscop al Detroitului și al Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române din America

18

Părintele Neamului Românesc, Mitropolitul Andrei Şaguna

1808 - 1873

Mitropolitul Andrei Şaguna a fost cel mai mare Ierarh al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române din Transilvania, în decursul secolului XIX.

"O BISERICĂ ADEVĂRATĂ ESTE ATUNCI CÂND DĂ SFINȚI."

Acest lucru este extraordinar de înălţător când Biserica ridică la rang de Sfânt un mare om a lui Dumnezeu care nu numai că a trudit cu timp şi fără timp pentru bunul mers al Bisericii lui Hristos, dar a luptat pentru drepturile Bisericii şi a neamului pe care l-a slujit cu multă credinţă până la plecarea sa în veşnicie. S-a născut la Mişcolţ, la 20 decembrie 1808, din părinţi macedo-români, anume Naum şi Anastasia. După ce termină şcoala Greco-valahă din orașul natal, urmează gimnaziul, apoi dreptul şi filozofia la Budapesta şi în cele din urmă studiază teologia ortodoxă în orașul Vârșeţ din Banatul Sârbesc.

În anul 1883 este tuns în monahism la Mitropolia din Carloviţ, cu numele de Andrei, fiind hirotonit apoi diacon şi preot. Astfel, din tinereţe îşi închină viaţa lui Hristos. În anul 1842 ajunge profesor la Seminarul Teologic din Vârşeţ, apoi devine Egumen la mânăstirile sârbeşti Hopovo şi Covil. În anul 1846 este numit vicar general al Episcopiei Sibiului, iar în aprilie 1848, este ales şi hirotonit episcop al Ardealului. După 16 ani de rodnică activitate bisericească, culturală şi naţională, în anul 1864, episcopul Andrei Şaguna ajunge Mitropolit al Ardealului şi părinte duhovnicesc al tuturor românilor de peste Carpaţi, pe care îi păstoreşte încă nouă ani de zile.

În anul 1873 îşi dă sufletul în mâinile lui Dumnezeu. Şedinţa Sfântului Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române din luna Iulie 2011, a aprobat canonizarea acestui mare Ierarh şi trecerea lui în calendarul Ortodox cu zi de pomenire pe 30 Noiembrie.

Mitropolitul Andrei Şaguna rămâne în istoria neamului, ctitorul cel mai mare al școlii și culturii Ardelene. Printre multele realizări ale vrednicului de pomenire Mitropolit Andrei mă voi opri la câteva lucruri, traducerea Bibliei (1648-1688), înființarea Institutului Teologic din Sibiu în 1850, care astăzi îi poartă numele și înființarea publicației Telegraful Român în 1853. Dar pentru apărarea Ortodoxiei și întărirea vieții duhovnicești și culturale în Transilvania, Episcopul Andrei Şaguna a înființat, în anul 1850, o vestită tipografie eparhială la Sibiu, care a fost ca o binecuvântare dumnezeiască pentru toți.

În ziua hirotoniei sale în Arhiereu, Episcopul Andrei Şaguna a rostit aceste cuvinte: "Cea mai mare parte a vieții mele pururea în osteneală mi-a fost și îmi va fi.



Dar și cea mai mare bucurie mi-a fost și îmi va fi și în viitor, a învinge toate piedicile. Cred cu tărie că, fiind umbrit de puternicul scut a lui Dumnezeu, voi putea împlini scopul vieții mele întregi, ca pe românii ardeleni din adâncul lor somn să-i deștept și cu voia să-i trag către tot ce este sfânt, adevărat și bun." Episcopul Andrei Şaguna s-a dovedit de la început a fi un adevărat părinte al românilor din Transilvania, un apărător înflăcărat al Ortodoxiei dreptmăritoare, dar în același timp, și un apostol luminat de Duhul Sfânt, care punea mai presus de toate dragostea în Hristos și unirea națională, decât ura, vrajba si dezbinarea confesională. Cu înțelepciunea și cu sufletul lui pașnic, el a contribuit cel mai mult la marea adunare de unitate românească din mai 1848, de pe Câmpia Libertății. Fiind oricând gata de jertfă pentru cauza Bisericii și a înfrățirii tuturor românilor din Transilvania, marele Ierarh a zăbovit 7 luni la Viena, stăruind zi de zi pentru independența națională și religioasă a Transilvaniei și nu s-a întors până nu s-au ușurat suferințele poporului nedreptățit.

După încetarea revoluției din anii 1848-1849, Episcopul Andrei Şaguna a început, cu grele sacrificii, opera de restaurare, înfrumusețare și zidire din nou a zeci de biserici ortodoxe, în locul celor jefuite și distruse

Cont. la pag. 22

Conferința Clerului Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române din America 8-11 Noiembrie 2011



Conferința a fost organizată cu binecuvântarea Înalt Prea Sfințitului Arhiepiscop Nathaniel de către Departamentul de Educație Religioasă a Episcopiei noastre, condus de către Părintele Ian Pac-Urar, Ph.D., la Franciscan Renewal Center din Phoenix, Arizona.

Conferința a avut ca tematică prezentarea "A înțelege consilierea în mediul pastoral". Conferențiar a fost Părintele Profesor George Morelli, Ph. D., Psiholog specializat în probleme maritale și de familie, coordonatorul Departamentului de Consiliere Pastorală a Arhiepiscopiei Ortodoxe Antiohiene din America.

Prezentarea a fost făcută atât în Power Point cât şi oral de către Părintele Morelli şi a fost urmată de discuții asupra temelor prezentate. Preoții prezenți au avut posibilitatea să pună întrebări şi să ceară lămuriri atât Părintelui Profesor Morelli cât şi Înalt Prea Sfințitului Arhiepiscop Nathaniel. Conferința a fost un bun prilej pentru clericii prezenți de a împărtăşi din experiențele proprii, de a se ruga şi de a discuta împreună cu ierarhul lor.

Participant

Parohia Sfânta Maria din Chicago, Illinois, a Sărbătorit 100 de ani de la Înfiinţare

Un eveniment deosebit de important pentru comunitatea ortodoxă română din Chicago a fost sărbătorirea, pe 5 si 6 noiembrie, a o sută de ani de existență a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Sfânta Maria.

Festivitățile au început cu slujba Vecerniei Mari de sâmbătă seara, urmată de o slujbă de pomenire a tuturor celor care, de-a lungul anilor, au participat activ la zidirea comunității Bisericii Sfânta Maria, precum și a celor care au jertifit din puținul lor pentru construirea și menținerea locașului de cult și nu mai sunt printre noi. După slujba Vecerniei, a urmat, în sala socială a Parohiei, un moment de divertisment intitulat: "Bun Venit Acasă!". Cele trei grupuri de dansuri populare românești ale Parohiei au dansat



20



foarte frumos primind aplauzele celor prezenți.

A doua zi, duminică, înainte de Sfânta Liturghie, Înalt Prea Sfinţitul Arhiepiscop Nathaniel, împreună cu Prea Sfinţitul Episcop Vicar Irineu şi asistaţi de un sobor de preoţi (P.C. Protopop Simion Pavel, P.C. Protopop Laurence Lazar, P.C. Arhimandrit Teophan Koja, P. C. Pr. Anton Frunză, P.C. Pr. Nicolae Izbaşa, P. C. Pr. Bogdan Florea din România) şi diaconi (P.C. Arhidiacon David Oancea şi P. C. Ierodiacon Sebastian Dumitraşcu) au mutat Sfintele Moaşte din masa cea veche a altarului în noua sfântă masă sculptată în lemn de stejar şi s-au binecuvântat icoanele şi noul iconostas.

Apoi a fost tuns întru citeţ domnul Nicolae Florea. A urmat Sfânta Liturghie arhierească la sfârşitul căreia Părintele Roman Braga a rostit un cuvânt de învăţătură în care a subliniat rolul fiecărui credincios în parte la zidirea Bisericii, Trupul lui Hristos. La slujba Vecerniei a participat şi P.C. Pr. Mousa Haddad de la Biserica Antiohiană Adormirea Maicii Domnului din Alsip, IL, la Sfânta Liturghie un sobor de măicuţe condus de Maica Stareţă Gabriella de la Mânăstirea Adormirea Maicii Domnului din Rives Junction, Michigan, iar la banchet, P.C. Pr. Ioan Lupescu.

Festivitățile s-au încheiat cu un frumos banchet aniversar la Restaurantul Biaggio la care au participat peste 430 de invitați. În cadrul banchetului Dl. Jonel Maiogan, unul dintre președinții comitetului de aniversare (Dl. Ioniță Kișereu fiind celălalt președinte) a ținut un discurs aniversar în care a elogiat activitatea înaintașilor de-a lungul celor 100 de ani de existență a Parohiei. În acest timp, oaspeții au vizionat o prezentare video realizată de către Dl Dorin Ladan și planșele aniversare realizate de către Dl. Nick Gibb. Apoi au rostit discursuri Dna. Alexandra Balaci, Președinta Consiliului Parohial, Dl. Consul al României Lucian Leuștean, P.C. Protopop Simion Pavel, Prea Sfințitul Episcop Irineu și Înalt Prea Sfințitul Arhiepiscop Nathaniel.

În final a vorbit P.C. Părinte Paroh George Ursache (sub a cărui păstorire s-au făcut renovările masive de la Biserică din ultima perioadă), care a mulţumit celor care au organizat festivităţile, tuturor participanţilor si în primul rând celor doi ierarhi.

Dăm slava lui Dumnezeu şi mulţumim tuturor celor care au participat, ajutat, donat şi încurajat acest moment aniversar.

Participant





Părintele Neamului ... Cont. de la pag. 19

prin satele şi oraşele ardelene. În câţiva ani, toate bisericile din eparhie erau înnoite, împodobite cu cărţi de cult, cu icoane, cu veşminte şi cu slujbe alese. La acestea au contribuit, alături de credincioşii ardeleni, şi cei din Moldova şi Ţara Românească, cu care se simţeau dintodeauna fraţi. Un ajutor deosebit a dat şi Mânăstirea Neamţ, care trimitea cu carele cărţi de slujbă şi alte daruri la Episcopia Ortodoxă de la Sibiu.

Dar un lucru foarte important pe care l-a lăsat Mitropolitul Andrei Şaguna pentru Biserica Ortodoxă, a fost reînfiinţarea vechii Mitropolii Ortodoxe din Transilvania, desfiinţată în anul 1701. La 24 decembrie, 1864, Episcopia din Sibiu este ridicată la rang de Mitropolie, cu autonomie proprie, desprinzându-se de Mitropolia sârbă de la Carlovitz. Pentru buna organizare a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române din Transilvania, marele Mitropolit a dat, în anul 1868, un renumit Statut Organic, care avea la bază deplina colaborare sinodală între clerici şi mireni. Astfel s-a dovedit a fi unul din cei mai mari legiuitori bisericeşti.

Menţionăm faptul că singura instituţie bisericească care mai foloseşte Statutul Şagunian înfiinţat în 1868 este Episcopia Ortodoxă Română din America de la Vatra Românească. Tot în cadrul acestei Eparhii Româneşti de pe Continentul American funcţionează şi Societatea "Andrei Şaguna" formată din toţi clericii care au absolvit şi studiat la Institutul Andrei Şaguna din Sibiu, al cărui Preşedinte este P.C. Părinte Dr. Remus Grama, care, prin stăruinţa noastră, a primit din partea I.P.S. Mitropolit Laurenţiu Streza al Ardealulului "Crucea Şaguniană" în anul 2007, ca semn al legăturii noastre de suflet cu Biserica Ortodoxă Română care ne-a format şi pregătit şi cu Institutul Teologic Andrei Şaguna din Sibiu.

Aşa a trăit şi aşa s-a jertfit acest mare Ierarh al Bisericii lui Hristos. Rolul său a fost, pe drept cuvânt, providenţial şi avea un suflet devotat de adevărat păstor, plin de înţelepciune şi curaj. La 28 iunie 1873, Mitropolitul Andrei Şaguna s-a strămutat la cele veşnice şi a fost înmormântat ca un simplu călugăr în curtea Bisericii din Răşinari – Sibiu, slujba a fost foarte simplă aşa cum a lăsat, slujită de un singur preot şi fără predică, smerenie desăvârşită şi la plecarea din lumea aceasta.

În decursul istoriei s-au adus mai multe elogii marelui Mitropolit; amintim câteva crâmpeie din cuvântarea Mitropolitului Nicolae Bălan, urmaş vrednic în scaunul lui Şaguna, rostite la mormântul Mitropolitului în 31 mai 1943: "Personalitatea lui se proiectează azi covârşitor peste gândurile noastre, ca unul dintre marii Părinți ai neamului care i-au oblăduit existența în trecut și l-au înzestrat cu puteri și cu mijloace care aveau să-i aducă izbăvirea. Opera lui a fost un izvor de tărie și de viață, pentru că a fost clădită pe tot ceea ce înțelepciunea și experiența trecutului fixaseră în tradiția poporului ca element trainic și sănătos. Mai

presus de toate, însă, marea personalitate a lui Şaguna a ridicat conştiința de sine a poporului din Ardeal şi încrederea lui în viitor prin păstorirea lui plină de demnitate şi de energie, prin impunătoarea prestanță cu care românismul se vedea reprezentat. Conştiința demnității şi a valorii proprii, insuflată de Şaguna smeritului nostru popor, i-a devenit izvorul unei puteri mereu crescânde, care a grăbit sosirea ceasului de libertate din 1918 şi a dăruit țării mame încă o ramură românească mândră, trează şi luptătoare. Din pilda lui Şaguna să sorbiți, dragi tineri, îndemnul de a vă ține strâns pe lângă Biserică, pentru ca să vă umpleți conștiințele de puterea şi de dragostea de neam."

La fel menționa și în cuvântul său Regele Ferdinand I, la comemorarea celor 50 de ani de la mutarea la cele vesnice a Mitropolitului Andrei Saguna: "însufletit de imensa personalitate a lui Şaguna, am venit să aducem prinos de recunoştință acestui apostol al neamului românesc. Unul din acesti stâlpi uriasi a fost Saguna, această odraslă macedoneană, care a izbutit să refacă o mitropolie românească pentru Transilvania și Banat; care a trezit conștiința neamului, prin dezvoltarea școlii și Bisericii. Se cuvine să ne închinăm în fața faptelor lui Saguna; în fața mormântului lui și să ne gândim la marea pildă dată prin înălțarea sa deasupra tuturor patimilor, cuprinzând statornic orizonturi largi, îmbrățișând totalitatea problemelor naționale, cu ținta hotărâtă a Unirii tuturor Românilor și a întăririi neamului."

Hotărârea Sinodului arhidiecezan din 1874 a fost respectată până în ziua de astăzi. Nu doar că Facultatea de Teologie din Sibiu îi poartă numele "Andrei Şaguna", dar an de an, la 30 noiembrie, de ziua Sfântului Andrei, au loc parastase de pomenire a Mitropolitului, la urma cărora se cântă și imnul compus de Dimitrie Cunţan, pe versurile lui Zaharia Boiu.

"Românime mult cercată, Pune doliu înnoit; Că pierduşi o stea din ceriu-ţi, Pe Andrei Mitropolit! Da, Andrei întâi chematul, Da, Andrei adânc oftatul, Ce ca viaţa te-a iubit, Ah, Andrei a adormit!

Viaţa lui de fapte-nalte, Ca diamante, şir de şir; Moartea lui în suferinţe, Moarte sfântă de martir! Unde-s lacrimi, unde-i jale, Juste cum sunt ale tale?! Unde e a lor finit? Ah, Andrei a adormit!

O, Părintele-îndurării, Cel ce totul cârmuiești, Care și-n cercări profunde Todeauna ne iubești, Pe Andrei îl odihneşte, Unde viaţa înfloreşte! Nemurirea şi-a gătit;

DA, ANDREI TU N-AI MURIT!"

Într-adevăr, în conștiința credincioșilor ortodocși ardeleni, Mitropolitul Andrei Şaguna n-a murit. Sentimentul de prețuire față de Mitropolitul Andrei s-a transformat curând în cinstire și chiar într-un cult al sfințeniei sale. Mitropolitul Andrei Şaguna a început să fie considerat Mesia al românilor ardeleni ortodocși, după cum a menționat chiar Ioan Slavici, într-un articol din anul 1880: "El le-a venit ardelenilor ca un om trimis de la Dumnezeu și ardelenii au cunoscut ca s-a ivit un Mesia în mijlocul lor."

În același articol, același prozator transilvănean menţiona că "astăzi chiar creştinii ortodocși din Ardeal îl socotesc între sfinţi." Iar trei deceni mai târziu, istoricul Nicolae Iorga depunea mărturie asupra faptului că "puţine nume sunt așa de populare în Ardealul românesc, ca a lui Şaguna. Chipul lui cu ochii strălucitori și larga barbă rasfirată e în mintea tuturora, și în conștiinţa generală a intrat faptul definitiv că acest maiestos bătrân a fost pe scaunul său de arhiereu, ca pe un tron de rege, un cârmuitor de oameni și un îndreptător al vremurilor, cărora nu li s-a supus ca exemplarele obișnuite ale omenirii, ci le-a întors de pe povârnișul lor, spre culmea lui. Cât se va vorbi limba noastră, ARDELEANUL de LEGEA RĂSĂ-

Moş Crăciun

Astăzi, la copilul bun o să vină Moş Crăciun.

La băieții ce se bat le aduce-un băț sub pat.

La fetiţa lenevioară îi aduce doar o cioară.

La copiii ce n'ascultă le aduce ceapă multă.

Dacă nu vorbiţi frumos vă aduce doar un os ş'un papuc de Cuţu ros.

Deci, copii, să fiţi cuminţi, ascultaţi-i pe părinţi şi #n Noaptea de Ajun o să vină Moş Crăciun, Moş Crăciunul blând şi bun cu o traistă plină, plină (oh, ce greu e să o ţină!) de bomboane, jucării.

Crăciun fericit, copii!

Florica Ichim Baţu

RITULUI - și poate mâine și cel unit cu Roma – va ține minte acest fapt."

Şi tu mare păstor care străjuieşti şi azi din înălţimea cerului asupra turmei ce ai păstorit-o, roagă-L pe Dumnezeu să ne ajute la împlinirea gândurilor noastre şi coboară încă o dată, vie şi caldă, binecuvântarea ta arhierească peste poporul şi neamul tău.

Bucură-te, sfinte Andrei, înțelept ierarh a lui Hristos! + I R I N E U Episcop Vicar

Blânde, Sfinte Nicolae

Blânde, Sfinte Nicolae sufletul mi-e greu; du-te tu în puşcărie la băiatul meu.

N-a pus ghetele la uşă poate i le-au luat, are mâinile'n cătuşă, părul i-au tăiat.

N-are candelă, icoană rugile să-şi spuie. Blând din psalmi parcă-l veghează un Hristos în cuie.

Du-te, Sfinte Nicolae şi la pruncul meu, aminteşte-i de iubirea de la Dumnezeu.

Du-te, intră ca toți sfinții blânzi și cuvioși. Te așteaptă oropsiții cu ochi plânși și roși'.

Încălzeşte-i tu în suflet când în trup e frig, dă-le pâinea cea eternă când de foame strig'.

Sunt batrână şi de-acuma somn în trup se lasă; Îngrijeşte-l tu, preasfinte până vine 'acasă.

Spune-i tu, poveşti cu Îngeri, rugăciuni de crin. Eu adorm... păzeşte-mi puiul blânde sfânt...

Amin.

Florica Ichim Baţu

Întrebări și Răspunsuri

ÎNTREBARE:

În perioada aceasta a Crăciunului cineva mi-a bătut la uşă spunându-mi că aceasta ar fi o sărbătoare păgână, Iisus născându-se în timpul verii pentru că păstorii erau cu oile la păscut (Luca 2,8) pe câmp, deci nu aveau ce căuta cu oile prin troienile de zăpadă. Ce ne puteți spune despre data Crăciunului? (D.I., Evanston, IL)

RĂSPUNS:

Sf. Luca a fost de profesie medic şi a scris Evanghelia tocmai pentru a lămuri din punct de vedere istoric autenticitatea celor prezentate. De aceea, el încadrează foarte precis în date istorice evenimentul Naşterii Domnului, pentru ca să nu poată cineva să nege autenticitatea reală şi istorică a întrupării. (Luca capitolul 1 şi 2)

Împăratul Cezar Augustus a dat porunca unui recensământ al populației imperiului roman. Pentru a fi înlesnită realizarea acestui plan fiecare trebuia să meargă la locul de naștere al neamurilor lui și să se înscrie acolo.

Iosif şi Sfânta Fecioară au mers la Betleem unde sa născut Iisus, detaliile găsindu-le în scrierile evangheliştilor. Betleemul este situat în Iudeea unde clima e mediteraniană fiind mult mai blândă.

Că sărbătoarea Nașterii Domnului ar fi o sărbătoare păgână pune un semn de întrebare destul de grav asupra sănătății mintale a celor care v-au bătut la uşă. Dacă sărbătoresc Ziua României înseamnă că mă refer la o ţară care se numește România și nu Patagonia, iar dacă sărbătoresc ziua de naștere a lui Iisus înseamnă că e ziua de naștere a lui Iisus și nu ziua lui John Doe chiar dacă acesta, s-a născut și el pe 25 decembrie.

Dar mai întâi câteva date despre începutul sărbătoririi Crăciunului. Creștinii pentru care ziua morții este considerată ziua nașterii întru cele veșnice, au sărbătorit pe sfinți în ziua când au murit, ca început potențial al învierii, o adormire ca trecere "de la moarte la viată și de pe pământ la cer". Foarte rar este sărbătorită data nașterii trupești în calendarul ortodox și atunci numai în cazuri excepționale care au influențat istoria mântuirii neamului omenesc, cum ar fi nașterile Mântuitorului Iisus Hristos (25 decembrie), Maicii Domnului (8 septembrie) și Sf. Ioan Botezătorul (24 iunie). În primele veacuri, Nașterea și Epifania (Botezul Domnului) se sărbătoreau pe 6 ianuarie. Dezvoltându-se cultul și pentru sublinierea liturgică a celor două evenimente capitale în viața creștinilor s-a căzut de acord din secolul al IV-lea ca Nașterea Domnului să fie celebrată separat pe 25 Decembrie. De ce pe 25 și nu pe 24 ori 26? Simplu: 25 Martie, Buna Vestire (zămislirea

Domnului) plus nouă luni dau exact data de 25 Decembrie. Trebuie, de asemenea, să înțelegem că timpul e o constantă pe care Dumnezeu a creat-o pentru noi, oamenii. Dumnezeu nu e afectat de timp şi spațiu. Dumnezeu este omniprezent şi veşnic. "Osingură zi, înaintea Domnului, este caomiedeanişiomiedeanicaozi." (2 Petru 3, 8)

Cei care vorbesc de Crăciun ca fiind o sărbătoare păgână aduc ca argumente sărbătorirea în aceeași perioadă de timp a solstițiului de iarnă la egipteni, diferit de cel al romanilor, de diferite sărbători legate de astronomie și mitologie: Dies Natalis Solis Invicti (nașterea zeului soare invincibil), misterele eleusine, saturnaliile, nașterea lui Dionisos, Yule la triburile germanice, etc. Coincidența de timp festiv nu amestecă mitologicul cu istoricul. Dimpotrivă, unii Sfinți Părinți nu au găsit nimic rău în aceasta, cultul luminii la alte popoare fiind un fel de proorocie așa cum "magii de la stea s-au învățat să se închine ție, Soarelui Dreptății" fiind vorba de o diferență colosală între "nașterea" lui Mitra ca zeul al soarelui înscris în orizontul ciclic și temporal și Nașterea lui Iisus care fiind și Hristos ni se oferă ca "orizontul cel de sus" al veșniciei, acest "Răsărit de Sus" izbăvindu-ne din ciclul sisific al temporalului si mortii.

O altă "păgânizare" a Crăciunului ar fi bradul, luminile de Crăciun şi cadourile ce le facem unul altuia. Oare nu a auzit nimeni de simbol? Bradul la triburile germanice era simbolul nemuririi prin aceea că era mereu verde. Deosebirea între păgâni şi noi e că ei se închinau bradului (creaturii), iar noi îl folosim ca simbol, o literă care ne duce simbolic la Creator.

Relaţia dintre sărbătorirea Naşterii Domnului şi celelalte sărbătoriri ale păgânilor e exemplificată de folosirea pietrelor, sau cărămizilor luate din diferite temple păgâne şi zidite într-o biserică creştină. Atât timp cât deasupra zidirii va fi o cruce şi înlăuntru un altar ea va fi biserică şi nu parte templu al lui Mitra sau Dionisos şi parte biserică. Crucea dă sens nou nu numai creaturii, ci la întreaga zidire. La fel şi cu sărbătorile. Faptul că data Naşterii Domnului se suprapune peste datele unor vechi sărbători păgâne nu înseamnă că noi nu sărbătorim în data de 25 Decembrie Nașterea Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos.

Pr. Dr. Dumitru Ichim