



SIGNS OF THE SEASON (CONTINUED)

By Fr. Dennis Buck

“Continued,” indeed!

One great thing about the celebration of Christ’s birth in the Orthodox Church is that, if one is paying attention, it doesn’t stop. The Christmas season continues on and on, from one commemoration to the next: the Nativity, the Theotokos the next day, the Holy Innocents, the Righteous Kinsmen of the Lord the Sunday after, the Circumcision (with St. Basil, of course), up to Theophany and beyond—even to St. John the Baptist the next day and the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple on February 2. The Church even commands us NOT to fast between Christmas and the eve of Theophany, January 5. “Celebrate the feast and come with gladness...” indeed!

But in order to make the “Christmas spirit” last through the year, we do have to be paying attention to what the season is about. The birth of the Christ Child is the ultimate sign of God’s love for us. He shares His own Being with His creation; becomes fully a part of it in order to bring it—us—out of the realm of sin, captivity and death to His Kingdom of righteousness, freedom and life. At this time, we have the opportunity to keep in mind, through our worship, everything that has to do with the coming of the Incarnate Word into the world. If we choose to pack everything away on December 26 and continue as if little except an annual breather (with that, often a great deal of anxieties!) and a few parties have occurred, well, we’re just that much the poorer for it.

It is part of God’s gift to us of the life of His Holy Church that we have several signs that can keep the coming of the Child and its meaning before our eyes.

- Continued on next page -



The Faithful Servant

NEWSLETTER OF
SAINT CATHERINE
THE GREAT MARTYR
ORTHODOX CHURCH



CONTENTS

SIGNS OF THE SEASON	Pages 1-3
Photos of His Beatitude’s visit to St. Catherine	Pages 2 & 3
Meeting of the Lord	Page 4
Luke 2:22-40	Page 5
Theophany and Chrismation	Page 6
February Calendar	Page 7

SIGNS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

I'd like to dwell on two of those here. I have mentioned these frequently over the years, including in these pages, but I think it is well worth reminding ourselves.

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, since for our sake the eternal God is born as a little Child. (Kontakion of the Nativity)

Those Byzantines sure did love paradox in their poetry, didn't they? We can hear this practically every week, for example, in the hymns of Vespers, but listen to what we have in these few lines: "Virgin... gives birth..." "birth... Transcendent One" "a cave...the Unapproachable One" "Angels...shepherds... Wise Men..."

But for all those, here comes the big one: "...the Eternal God was born as a little Child." And this is a refrain throughout the season. Before Christmas we hear that the Eternal God is about to be born as a little Child, and in the hymns in the days that follow, we hear the He has been born...etc. Sure, this is the Church's refrain for the season! This one line from a hymn goes far beyond that, though. What else can we say about the meaning of the Nativity of Our Lord: "...the Eternal God was born as a little Child." The story is wonderful, of course, but if we want to contemplate the meaning of it all, there it is—the whole feast summed up in one line. The Only-Begotten Son and Immortal Word of God, by Whom all things are created and have their existence, "born as a little Child!" Let's just contemplate that for the year to come!

And what, then, are we to do with that thought once we affirm it and remind ourselves of it? Look to the other end of the "Twelve Days of Christmas." Listen to the epistle reading at Liturgy for the feast, Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7. We need to go back to it time and time again through the year, if we want to



His Beatitude's visit to Saint Catherine's consisted of an evening discussion of his new book "Of What Life Do We Speak? Four Pillars for the Fulfillment of the Apostolic Work of the Church." He shared how it was partially inspired by his five years as Primate of the Orthodox Church of America. There is a lot of valuable information in this little book and well worth the time reading it by the Faithful.



bring that good old Christmas Spirit back into our lives:

The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for Himself a people of His own who are zealous for good deeds...

When the goodness and kindness of God our Savior appeared, then, not by reason of good works we did ourselves, but according to His mercy, He saved us through the baptism of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, Whom He has abundantly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, justified by His grace, we may be heirs in the hope of life everlasting.

So God is with us, has come among us, for our salvation, not because we deserve or have earned it but simply by His grace and love which He pours out upon us, uniting us to Him in our own baptism by His Holy Spirit so richly poured out upon us, to live His life in this world in expectation of the life to come! These are the consequences of the Nativity of Jesus Christ for us in this world and in the next!

In the narratives of the Nativity in the Gospel according to St. Luke, it is said that His mother, Mary, "kept these things in her heart." If we follow her example, keeping the saving coming of Christ before our eyes and in our hearts, minds and souls, we will be keeping the true spirit of Christmas through the year, through our lives, and into the eternal Kingdom of God which begins on earth in the celebrations of these days.



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Meeting of the Lord

Luke 2:22-40

Guest article by Right Reverend
Father Zachariah, former parishoner who has
recently moved to North Carolina.

In my generation, "The Meeting of the Lord" was referred to as the "Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple". According to the Church Liturgical cycle, this Holy Day is a bridge between the two great feasts of the Nativity of Our Lord (Modern Term used is Christmas) and Pascha (Modern Term used is Easter), which are symbolically united.

With this Holy Day, the Church liturgically has terminated the childhood and has established the two natures of Our Lord and is now going forward with His fulfilment of the Law and of the prophets, in accordance with the dispensations of God the Father. It is for this reason that my generation refers to this Holy Day as a feast; with emphasis on reflection and spiritual joy for all mankind. For, this is a time for mankind to spiritually celebrate, and let us please God with holiness, peace, and unity. Let us entreat God with actions of compassion, justness, and thanksgiving for His blessings upon mankind.

The Gospel Reading (Luke 2:22-40), is divided into three segments, each segment fulfilling the Law and prophecies of the prophets of old. In the first segment (Luke 2:22-24), the Lord is brought to the Temple in accordance to the Law of Moses to be presented after His circumcision and the purification period had been completed by the Bogoroditchen (Mother of God/Theotokos), to confirm His dual nature, that of being of mankind.

The second segment (Luke 2:25-35), Simeon, a just and devout man, whom had been promise by God the Father, that he would not repose before he had seen Our Lord Christ, had gone up to the Temple as instructed by the Holy Spirit. When Simeon saw the Lord with His parents, he took our Lord in his arms and gave thanksgiving unto God the Father and stated: "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou have prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel". Simeon continues to relay a prophecy concerning the Lord and the Bogoroditchen (Mother of God/Theotokos) and Joseph and the Bogoroditchen (Mother of God/Theotokos) wonder at this prophecy spoken by Simeon.

The third segment (Luke 2:36-40), Anna the Prophetess, who served God with fasting and prayers night and day; or as we say today, 24/7 (twenty-four hours – seven days a week), coming in at the instant of Simeon exclamation; she too, gave thanks to God the Father, and spoke of Him and to all those who looked for redemption.

What is to be noted in this passage, it is written in the Law, every first-born that comes from the womb shall be called holy to the Lord; therefore, Our Lord's coming to the Temple to fulfill the Law, both as a forty-day old infant and as the First-born confirms one of His natures as belonging to mankind. However, His conception was without seed, and coming from a virginal womb through child-birth, while leaving the womb still sealed, thus, confirming His Divine Nature.

It is to be emphasized, that Our Lord had two Natures; and it is through these two Natures He understands our nature and yet, through His Divine Nature, He has come to bring us salvation and unification with our Heavenly Father. Let us remember that it is through Simeon and the Prophetess Anna that we have knowledge and confirmation later of what would become of the Child, directing attention to the suffering of Our Lord and His Death and Resurrection. It is through this Holy Day that the connection of His Nativity and the future events of His Life will culminate and clarify His elevation as mankind's Lord and Savior. Traditionally, because the Light of the World has arrived upon the completion and fulfilment of the Law, we Orthodox faithful have our candles blessed after the Divine Liturgy.

Let us give thanks unto the Lord, Who provides for our redemption and salvation of our souls through the two Natures. Glory be to our very Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom belongs the dominion and the glory, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages! Amen.

JESUS PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord

²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”^[a]),

²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”^[b]

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him.

²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.

²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required,

²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss^[c] your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.”

³³ The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,

³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

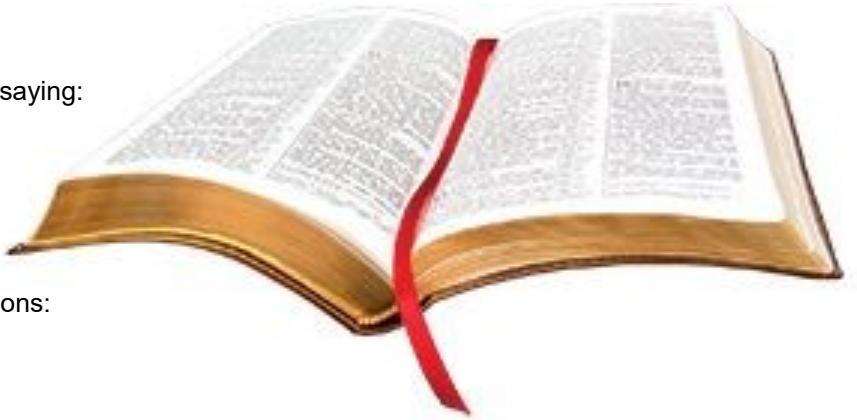
³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,

³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.^[d] She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.



ANOTHER BLESSED CHRISMATION

In the sacrament of Chrismation we receive “the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit” (See Rom 8, 1 Cor 6, 2 Cor 1.21–22). If baptism is our personal participation in Easter—the death and resurrection of Christ, then chrismation is our personal participation in Pentecost—the coming of the Holy Spirit upon us.

The sacrament of chrismation, also called confirmation, is always done in the Orthodox Church together with baptism. Just as Easter has no meaning for the world without Pentecost, so baptism has no meaning for the Christian without chrismation. In this understanding and practice, the Orthodox Church differs from the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches where the two sacraments are often separated and given other interpretations than those found in traditional Orthodoxy.

Chrismation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, is performed in the Orthodox Church by anointing all parts of the person’s body with the special oil called Holy Chrism. This oil, also called myrrh is prepared by the bishops of the Church on Holy Thursday. It is used in chrismation to show that the gift of the Spirit was originally given to men through the apostles of Christ, whose formal successors in the world are the bishops of the Church (see Acts 8.14; 19.1–7).

In chrismation a person is given the “power from on high” (Acts 1–2), the gift of the Spirit of God, in order to live the new life received in baptism.

Excerpt from an article on OCA.com regarding the celebration of Baptism and Chrismation.

Link: <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/chrismation>



Above: Newly Enlightened Jennifer Bastardi is united to Christ and the Orthodox Church. Sponsor Daria Riegler stands as witness to this miracle.



Theophany! Fr. Dennis blessing the waters.

The sixth of January is the feast of the Epiphany. Originally it was the one Christian feast of the “shining forth” of God to the world in the human form of Jesus of Nazareth. It included the celebration of Christ’s birth, the adoration of the Wise-men, and all of the childhood events of Christ such as His circumcision and presentation to the temple as well as His baptism by John in the Jordan. There seems to be little doubt that this feast, like Easter and Pentecost, was understood as the fulfillment of a previous Jewish festival, in this case the Feast of Lights.

Excerpt from an article on OCA.com regarding the celebration of Epiphany or Theophany as it is often called.

Link: <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-church-year/epiphany>



When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan the worship of the Trinity was made manifest! For the voice of the Father bare witness to Thee, calling Thee his Beloved Son. And the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the truthfulness of his Word. O Christ our God, who hast revealed Thyself and hast enlightened the world, glory to Thee (Troparion).

February, 2019 Calendar St. Catherine Orthodox Church Hagerstown, Maryland

Reader	2/3 TBA	2/10 Dawn	2/24 Katlin
Prosfora	2/3 Buck	2/10 Buck	2/24 Xidis
Coffee Hour Cleanup	2/3 Powell	2/10 Sisterhood	2/24 Frushour
Church Cleaning	2/2 Powell	2/9 Heatwole	2/23 Salcutan

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
3 Sts. Simeon & Anna 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy ?Book Discussion Alison Cloonan	4	5	6	7	1 7:30 PM Vespers	2 Meeting of the Lord in the Temple 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy 6:30 PM Vespers
10 Sunday of Zacchaeus 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy Parish Council St. Haralambos Harry Sterling	11	12	13	14	8 St. Theodore the General Teddy Chapin	9 6:30 PM Vespers
17 Publican & Pharisee Beginning of Tridion 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy Sisterhood	18	19	20 No fast	21	22 No fast	23 6:30 PM Vespers
24 Prodigal Son 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy	25	26	27	28		

March Rotations:

Reader	3/3 TBA	3/10 Dawn	3/17 Hughes	3/24 Katlin	3/31 Dennis H.
Prosfora	3/3 Riegler	3/10 Riegler	3/17 Kebetz	3/24 Kebetz	3/31 Buck
Coffee Hour Cleanup	3/3 Heatwole	3/10 Kuehnle/Newby	3/17 The Guys	3/24 Powell	3/31 Sisterhood
Church Cleaning	3/2 Chaney	3/9 Kuehnle/Newby	3/16 Knox	3/23 Buck	3/30 Koenig

Visit our website www.saintcatherineorthodoxchurch.org to read another special article by guest writer Fr. Zachariah titled Orthodox Glorification of the Bogoroditschen (the Mother of God). Here is an excerpt from his article:



Questions often asked by non-liturgical groups and non-Orthodox individuals: "Why do the Orthodox faithful worship Mary" and "why is so much emphasis found in the worship services and private prayer"?

Let's clear up the first misunderstanding! The Orthodox faithful do not worship the Mother of God; to do so, would be a violation of one of God the Father's commandments and therefore, would be a serious sin (reference: Exodus 20:2-3), "I AM the Lord your God... you shall have no other gods before Me." However, the Orthodox faithful do greatly glorify and honor the Mother of God for many reasons.

The Faithful Servant Newsletter

Saint Catherine the Great Martyr Orthodox Church
433 Liberty Street
Hagerstown, MD 21740

