

“КРАСНОЕ СОЛНЫШКО”

“SUNSHINE”

CHURCH BULLETIN

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH “ST. VLADIMIR”, HOUSTON

SEPTEMBER, 2009

**Mother of God of Vladimir**



Treasure of Russia, the miraculous icon of the Mother of God of Vladimir is among the best known in the Western World. It's one of the oldest icons of the type Eleousa (Virgin of Tenderness, Tender Mercy, Merciful Love, Loving Kindness). The icon can be recognized by the arm of the Child around the neck of the mother. The face of the Virgin that is looking towards us is full of warmth and human comprehension, but also with deep sadness.

The icon of the Virgin of Vladimir is known in Russia since 1131 when she was taken from Constantinople to Kiev. In 1155, prince Andrei Bogolioubski took off to the North to found a new capital. That was Vladimir. He took with him the icon from Kiev. He was captivated by its splendor. It was in that period that the icon started to work miracles and attracted large numbers of faithful. In 1395, the icon was transported to Moscow. Up to three times when threatened by an invasion from the East, Moscow was saved by a miraculous intervention involving the icon.

*Bibl.: Maria Donadeo, Icônes mariales russes, 1990, p. 11; Egon Sendler S.J., Les icônes byzantines de la Mère de Dieu, 1992, pp. 83-164.*

The Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God was painted by the Evangelist Luke on a board from the table at which the Savior ate together with His All-Pure Mother and Righteous Joseph. The Mother of God, upon seeing this image, exclaimed, *"Henceforth, all generations shall call Me blessed. The grace of both My Son and Me shall be with this icon."*

In the year 1131, the icon was sent from Constantinople to Rus to holy Prince Mstislav (April 15) and was installed in the Devichi monastery in Vyshgorod, the ancient appanage city of the holy Equal of the Apostles Princess Olga.

The son of George Dolgoruky, St Andrew Bogoliubsky, brought the icon to the city of Vladimir in 1155 and installed it in the renowned Dormition cathedral which he built. At this time the icon received its name of the Vladimir Icon. The icon was first brought to Moscow in the year 1395. Thus, the blessing of the Mother of God established the spiritual bonds of Byzantium and Rus via Kiev, Vladimir and Moscow.

Very important events in Russian Church history have occurred before the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God: the election and elevation of St Jonah, advocate of an Autocephalous Russian Church (1448), and of St Job, first Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia (1589), and of His Holiness Patriarch St Tikhon (1917).

The enthronement of His Holiness Pimen, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, occurred on a day of celebration in honor of the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God on May 21, 1971.



## THE ICONS OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

The icon is not a portrait or a picture. It is a likeness of a divine, heavenly appearance, and we pray not to the icons themselves, but through them we reach the depicted Prototype. For this reason there is nothing worldly or carnal in icons, and their forms reveal to us the mystery of the invisible, divine world. It is not faces, but images that look out at us from icons, and the profound gaze of these images imparts to them an expression of strict yet kindly repose and a grief devoid of pain, both alien to worldly vanity. Artistic perspective has no place in an icon. Nature and architectural details are depicted in it to intensify movement and the expression of emotion. The icon truly becomes an icon only through consecration. Through consecration the impassable boundary between a religious picture, however lofty its religious content and artistic merit, and an icon, however modest it is in this regard, is crossed. The consecration of an icon with holy water imparts to it the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is revealed in certain icons in the form of a special mercy of God – their miraculous nature. Iconographers were usually monks, and they approached their work with prayer and fasting. Icons are not signed by the iconographer, since they are painted not for personal glory, but for the glory of God.



### Icons of the Mother of God are of three types:

1) The **Eleousa** (Merciful, Compassionate). This form arose in Byzantium in the 11th century, and conveys an affectionate relationship between the Infant and His Mother, Who foresees the sufferings that await Him. The divine Infant's cheek touches that of the Mother of God Who, inclining Her head, supports the Infant Who movingly encircles Her neck with His arm.

*(The "Vladimir" Mother of God. Andrei Rublev. 1408.)*



2) The **Hodigitria** (the Guide). According to tradition this icon was painted by the Evangelist Luke and sent by Empress Eudocia (399-453) to Constantinople. In this icon the divine Infant is held in the arms of His Mother, yet does not touch Her cheek, but sits a little withdrawn, gazing out before Him. The Theotokos points to the Infant Saviour (the Way) with Her right hand, and Christ holds a scroll in His left hand, while with His right hand He conveys His divine blessing. (The Kazan, Tikhvin, Smolensk and Iveron icons are of this type.)

*The Iveron Mother of God*



3) The **Orans** (the Virgin of the Sign). In this type of icon the Mother of God is depicted with upraised arms, the preeternal Infant in Her womb. Here the depiction of the Mother of God is frontal, half-figure or full-figure, Her hands raised to the level of Her shoulders, Her palms facing out towards us. Her body bears a circle in which appears a round representation of the divine Infant. This icon depicts the Conception – the mystery of the appearance of Christ in the world. (The Kursk-Root and the Novgorod Theotokos of the Sign icons are of this type.)

*The icon of the Mother of God "Of the Sign"*

<http://www.holy-transfiguration.org>



### **The Beheading of St. John the Baptist.**



The preaching of John the Baptist was of short duration. Having prepared people to receive the Saviour, he ended his life with a martyr's death. Soon after the baptism of the Lord, John was put in prison by the Galilean King Herod. This Galilean King, Herod Antipas, was the son of Herod the Great, who slaughtered the fourteen thousand Bethlehem infants.

John upbraided King Herod because he had married his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, even though his brother was still alive. Herodias became embittered against for this and wanted Herod to kill him. But Herod would not agree to this because he considered John to be a great prophet and feared the people. However, to appease her, he put John in prison. Herodias was not satisfied with this, especially as Herod himself listened with pleasure to the admonitions of John and often acted on his words.

About a year passed after the Forerunner's imprisonment, when Herod celebrating his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers, and officers, and a thousand leading men of Galilee. Salome, the daughter of Herodias and stepdaughter of Herod, also came to this banquet. She danced for Herod, which pleased him and his guests.

Herod said to her, "Ask me for whatever you wish," and he swore he would have given her even half of his kingdom.

She went and asked her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

Herodias answered, "The head of John the Baptist."

Salome with haste returned to Herod and said, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

Herod was exceedingly sorry; but because of his oaths and his guests, he did not want to break his word to her, and sent a soldier to the prison to cut off the head of John. The soldier fulfilled the order of the king, brought the head of John the Baptist on a platter and gave it to Salome, and Salome gave it to her mother Herodias.

When his disciples heard of the death of John the Baptist, they came, and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

The day of the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist is commemorated by the Holy Orthodox Church on the 29th of August (11 September NS) and is called the Beheading of John the Baptist. A strict fast is prescribed on this day in order to remind us of the strict life of St. John the Baptist for which he was blessed by God and to avoid the excesses of Herod which led to such a terrible sin. The Holy Church teaches that St. John the Forerunner is the greatest of all saints after the Mother of God.

*Note: See the Gospels of St Mathew 14:1-12; St Mark 6:14-29; and St. Luke 9, 7-9.*

*<http://www.orthodoxphotos.com>*



### **Commemoration of orthodox soldiers killed on a battle fields**

In Russia there are days set aside for the commemoration of Orthodox soldiers killed in battle: September 11, the commemoration of the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist; and Saint Demetrius Saturday, the Saturday before the feast of Saint Demetrius of Thessalonica, which is observed on November 8 (N.S.) Saint Demetrius Saturday was instituted by Dimitri Donskoy after the Battle of Kulikovo Field in 1380.



## St. Alexander Nevsky

(1219-1263)

St. Alexander Nevsky was Russia's "knight in shining armor." His reputation as a man of exceptional valor and surpassing virtue inspired a visit by a German commander who told his people when he returned: "I went through many countries and saw many people, but I have never met such a king among kings, nor such a prince among princes." The Russians called him their "prince without sin."



He was born just four years before the fierce Tatars, under the leadership of Ghengis Khan, came galloping across the steppes of Kievan Rus'. The once flourishing city state--whose social, cultural and spiritual achievements boasted few rivals in Western Europe--had been weakened by quarrelling princes and attacks of warring tribes, and it was an easy prey for the massacring and pillaging Asiatic aggressors. Fortunately, the Mongol Horde's primary interest in conquest was financial gain, and although it imposed a heavy tax on its subjects, they were left to govern themselves and retained their traditions and religion intact. Nevertheless, the yoke of foreign sovereignty was burdensome; individual princes were reduced to acting as feudal landlords for their Mongol lords, and inclinations toward a national unity--the dream of Grand Prince Vladimir--were stifled. A strong leader was needed if the land of Rus' was to have any hope of healing internal strife, of throwing off the Tatar yoke, and establishing its identity as a nation state.

The baneful effect of internal dissension was a lesson which came early to Prince Alexander, as he witnessed his father, Prince Yaroslav Vsevolodovich, struggle with the proudly independent spirited boyars of Novgorod. It was there that the boy grew up. Like most noble youths of his time, he had barely learned to walk before he was lifted into the saddle. Training in the martial arts was combined with an education based upon the Scriptures. Under the influence of his mother, who was popularly called "the holy queen" on account of her piety and charitable deeds, the young prince developed a profound spiritual life. He engrossed himself for hours in reading the Old and New Testaments.

He was still an adolescent when in 1236 his father became Grand Prince of Kiev (a position of primacy among the princes), leaving Alexander in charge of Novgorod. Its characteristically unruly citizenry was gradually won over by the uncommon wisdom and youthful charm of its new ruler. Meanwhile, the Tatars were moving north; they overran Ryazan, Moscow and the Russian capital of that time, Vladimir. They were prevented from reaching Novgorod only by the surrounding marshes. But the city was spared this disaster only to face a greater threat, this time from the west.

Encouraged by the Roman Pope who desired the conversion of Russia to Catholicism, the Swedes and Germans took advantage of Russia's weakened state and prepared to

attack. As a staunch Orthodox Christian, Alexander recognized that conquest from the west would deal a mortal blow at the very heart of Russia—the Orthodox Church, a fate incomparably worse than political subjugation by the Tatars. In 1210, well armed Swedish troops moved onto Novgorod territory. Preparing his men to repel the invaders, St. Alexander encouraged them with his now famous affirmation: "God is not in might but in Truth. 'Some trust in princes and some in horses, but we will call upon the Lord our God.'" The Russian forces, their Prince in the lead, were crowned with success after a fierce battle on the shores of the Neva.



Victories followed against the Livonian Germans and the Lithuanians. The Russian north-east, devastated by the Tatars, looked with hope upon the young warrior prince. His fame reached the ears of the Mongol lord, Khan Batu, who desired to see this Russian hero. It was a perilous honor. Before being presented to the Khan, the Russian princes--whose authority depended on his approval--were required to fulfill certain pagan traditions: walk through fire, bow down to a bush and to the shadows of deceased khans, etc. Alexander would in nowise consent to such idolatry and, strengthened by Holy Unction, prepared himself to accept the death penalty which Prince Michael of

Chernigov had paid under similar circumstances.

Arriving in the Golden Horde' s capital at the mouth of the Volga, Alexander at once confessed his Christian convictions: "O King," he said, bowing before the Khan, "I bow before you because God has favored you with authority, but I shall not bow before any created thing. I serve the One God. Him alone do I honor and Him alone do I worship." Khan Batu was so impressed by the courage and handsome demeanor of the young prince that to everyone's amazement he accepted his refusal and received him with due honor.

Gaining the respect of the Khan was a triumph for Alexander, but it did not insure peace. The remaining course of his life as Grand Prince of Russia was spent in securing its western borders against persistent German campaigns, in subduing the Novgorodians' defiant opposition to the Khan's poll tax, and in diplomatically placating the Khan's anger which flared intermittently in response to indiscretions committed by the lesser princes. Although it was 200 years before Russia was free of Tatar control, St. Alexander's skill and self-sacrificing devotion which he brought to the Herculean task set before him as ruler, and his commitment to the preservation of Orthodoxy at the core of a growing national consciousness, made him a hero of both historic and spiritual dimensions. He died as he was returning from one of his exhausting journeys to the Khan, having taken the Great Schema on his deathbed. His respected spiritual advisor, Metropolitan Cyril, was serving the Divine Liturgy in Vladimir when he saw the Prince's soul being carried aloft by angels and announced to those present: "Brethren, know that the sun of the Russian Land has now set." In 1547 St. Alexander was glorified by the

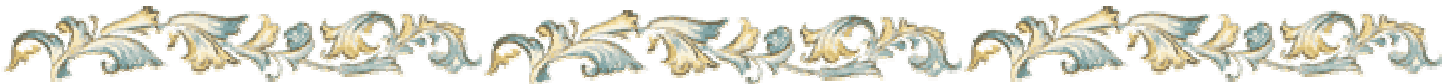
Church which celebrates his memory on the day of his repose, November 23, and the day of the translation of his incorrupt relics, August 30 (September 12), 1724, to the St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra in St. Petersburg, where they rest to this day.

<http://www.roca.org>



### **The Beginning of the Church's Year**

On this day, when the Jews celebrated the new summer, the Savior, came to Nazareth where He was brought up and entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day as was His custom, and read these words of the Prophet Isaiah: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed Me ... to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord*" (Luke 4, 18:19). On the first of September 312 the Emperor Constantine the Great won a victory over Maxentius. After this Christians were granted complete freedom to confess their faith. In commemoration of these two events the fathers of the First Ecumenical Council decided to begin the New Year on the first of September (See January 1, March 1 and the Paschalia). In its hymns for this day the Holy Church prays "Creator and Fashioner of all things visible and invisible" "bless the crown of the year", "grant fruitful seasons and rains from heaven for those on earth", "bless our comings and goings, direct the works of our hands and grant us forgiveness of offences", "grant peace to Thy churches", "overthrow heresies", "protect our cities unbesieged, make glad our faithful Sovereigns by Thy power, giving them victories against enemies".



### **Sts. Zacharias the Prophet and Elizabeth the Righteous, the Parents of the Precious Forerunner**



"The Holy Prophet Zachariah and the Righteous Elizabeth were the parents of the holy Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist of the Lord, John. They were descended from the lineage of Aaron: St Zachariah, son of Barach, was a priest in the Jerusalem Temple, and St Elizabeth was the sister of St Anna, the mother of the Most Holy Theotokos. The righteous



spouses, "walking in all the commandments of the Lord (Luke 1:6), suffered barrenness, which in those times was considered a punishment from God.

*Icon of St. Elizabeth the Righteous,*

*Icon of the Holy Prophet Zacharias*

Once, during his turn of priestly service in the Temple, St Zachariah was told by an angel that his aged wife would bear him a son, who "will be great in the sight of the Lord" (Luke 1:15) and "will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias" (Luke 1:17).

*Icon of the Archangel Gabriel appearing to St. Zacharias*



Zachariah doubted that this prediction would come true, and for his weakness of faith he was punished by becoming mute. When Elizabeth gave birth to a son, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit she announced that his name was John, although no one in their family had this name.

They asked Zachariah and he also wrote the name John down on a tablet. Immediately the gift of speech returned to him, and inspired by the Holy Spirit, he began to prophesy about his son as the Forerunner of the Lord. [Note: The conception of St. John the Forerunner is celebrated on September 23rd, while his birth is celebrated on June 24th]

When King Herod heard from the Magi about the birth of the Messiah, he decided to kill all the infants up to two years old at Bethlehem and the surrounding area, hoping that the new-born Messiah would be among them.

*St. Elizabeth with St. John the Forerunner in the Wilderness*



Herod knew about John's unusual birth and he wanted to kill him, fearing that he was the foretold King of the Jews. But Elizabeth hid herself and the infant in the hills. The murderers searched everywhere for John. Elizabeth, when she saw her pursuers, began to implore God for their safety, and immediately the hill opened up and concealed her and the infant from their pursuers.

In these tragic days St Zachariah was taking his turn at the services in the Temple. Soldiers sent by Herod tried in vain to learn from him the whereabouts of his son. Then, by command of Herod, they murdered this holy prophet, having stabbed him between the temple and the altar (MT 23: 35). Elizabeth died forty days after her husband, and St John, preserved by the Lord, dwelt in the wilderness until the day of his appearance to the nation of Israel.



## REFLECTION

(by St. Nikolai Velimirovich)

"Men strive in vain to discover those things that God intentionally conceals from them. If God had not permitted, men would never have found gold and silver beneath the earth, or the power of steam or the glow of electrical light. In vain, Herod slaughtered countless children in Bethlehem in order to slay One. That One was hidden from the sight and sword of Herod. In vain did Herod seek John. Behold the wonder: soldiers pursued the



aged Elizabeth, who was fleeing with John in her arms—and could not catch up with her! The enraged Herod summoned Zacharias and demanded: "Give me your son John!" The aged priest meekly replied: "I am now serving the Lord God of Israel. I know not where my son is." Insane with rage, Herod ordered Zacharias slain in place of John. The servants of the king entered the Temple and asked Zacharias: "Where have you hidden your son? Give him to us for the king has so ordered. If you do not give him to us, you yourself will die." Zacharias replied: "You will kill my body but the Lord will receive my soul." Thus Zacharias was slain, but Herod was not content with that. The wicked king had no peace, day or night, for he was tormented by a foreboding that John could be that newborn king proclaimed by the Magi from the East. Herod tried to find him, but in vain, for God had intentionally hidden him."

*Icon of Sts. Zacharias and Elizabeth, with their son, St. John the Forerunner*



## HYMN OF PRAISE

### The Nativity of the Most-holy Mother of God

O greatly desired and long awaited one,  
O Virgin, thou hast been obtained from the Lord with tears!  
A bodily temple of the Most-holy Spirit shalt thou become,  
And shalt be called Mother of the Eternal Word.

The Burning Bush they called thee,  
For thou wilt receive within thyself the divine fire:  
Ablaze with fire but not consumed,  
Thou shalt bear the Golden Fruit and offer it to the world.

Thou shalt be the Bearer of Him Who bears the heavens,  
To Whom all of heaven offers up praise!

The Miracle of miracles shall come to pass within thee,  
For thou shalt bear heaven, thou who art `more spacious than the heavens!"

Thou art more precious to us, O Virgin, than precious stones,  
For thou art the source of salvation for mankind.  
For this, may the entire universe glorify thee,  
O Most-holy Virgin, O white Turtledove!

The King of Heaven shall desire to enter the world,  
And shall pass through thee, O Beautiful Gate!  
O Virgin, when thou dost become woman thou shalt bear Christ for us;  
From thy body, the Sun shall blaze forth.

### **THE NATIVITY OF THE MOST-HOLY THEOTOKOS**

Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich  
*From "The Prologue from Ohrid"*



The Holy Virgin Mary was born of aged parents, Joachim and Anna. Her father was of the lineage of David, and her mother of the lineage of Aaron. Thus, she was of royal birth by her father, and of priestly birth by her mother. In this, she foreshadowed Him Who would be born of her as King and High Priest. Her parents were quite old and had no children. Because of this they were ashamed before men and humble before God. In their humility they prayed to God with tears, to bring them joy in their old age by giving them a child, as He had once given joy to the aged Abraham and his wife Sarah by giving them Isaac. The Almighty and All-seeing God rewarded them with a joy that surpassed all their expectations and all their most beautiful dreams. For He gave them not just a daughter, but the Mother of God. He illumined them not only with temporal joy, but with eternal joy as well. God gave them just one daughter, and she would later give them just one grandson-but what a daughter and what a Grandson! Mary, Full of grace, Blessed among women, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Altar of the Living God, the Table of the Heavenly Bread, the Ark of God's Holiness, the Tree of the Sweetest Fruit, the Glory of the race of man, the Praise of womanhood, the Fount of virginity and purity-this was the daughter given by God to Joachim and Anna. She was born in Nazareth, and at the age of three, was taken to the Temple in Jerusalem. In her young womanhood she returned again to Nazareth, and shortly thereafter heard the Annunciation of the Holy Archangel Gabriel concerning the birth of the Son of God, the Savior of the world, from her most-pure virgin body.

### **REFLECTION**

St. Dionysius the Areopagite writes of the immeasurable joy, the outer and inner radiance, and the indescribable fragrance that he sensed in the presence of the Holy

Theotokos when he visited her in Jerusalem. In his zeal, he says that if he had not known the One True God, he would have recognized her, the Holy Virgin Mary, as God. The Holy Virgin made such a powerful and unique impression on men during her earthly life- and she received an incomparably greater power and glory after her physical death when, by the will of God, she was exalted above the heavenly hosts. Her power comes from her ceaseless prayer for the faithful, for all those who turn to her for help. When St. John of Novgorod and his people prayed to her for help against a hostile army, he understood that she was simultaneously praying to the Lord with tears in their behalf, and Novgorod was miraculously saved. As she was compassionate toward her crucified Son, so the Holy Most-pure One is also compassionate toward all those in need, to, where, after the priest prayed over him before the icon of the Holy Theotokos, he received his sight. The first monk at Pochaev saw a fiery pillar extending from earth to heaven, and in that flaming pillar he saw the Holy Theotokos. She was standing on a rock. On the spot where she stood, a spring of healing water sprang forth: even today, it heals many of the sick.



### HOMILY

on the equality of the Son and the Father  
*Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich*

The Son can do nothing of Himself but what He seeth the Father do (John 5:19).

Brethren, how are we to understand these words? In the same way as some heretics understood them-that is, that the Son is lesser and weaker than the Father? In no way. The mouths that interpreted these words of the Lord this way spoke blasphemy. We must understand these words as our Holy Fathers understood them-that the Son is equal to the Father in all things; and that, because of their equality of will, love, and wisdom, the Son can do nothing contrary to the Father's will, or contrary to the love of the Father, or contrary to the wisdom of the Father. Thus, the Father cannot do anything contrary to the Son, and the Holy Spirit cannot do anything contrary to the Father or the Son. Everything that the Father wills and loves and thinks, is also willed, loved and thought by the Son and the Holy Spirit. Harmony unequalled; unity undivided; being inexpressible! Therefore, it is obvious that the Son can and will do nothing of Himself-nothing of His own accord, nothing without harmony and unity with the power of the Father and the will of the Father. The Lord Himself further witnesses that this interpretation is true by His words: For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will (John 5:21). Do you see the equality of will and power? That which the Father wills, the Son wills also; that which the Father can do, the Son can also do. Therefore, let no one separate Their Divinity, and thus bring down a curse upon himself. God cannot be divided, and one who tries to divide Divinity-and to lessen one Person and to exalt the other Person-cannot be saved.

**O Most-holy Trinity our God, Three in Persons, and One in Essence- Life, Light and Love-look down upon us, and have mercy on us.**

**To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.**



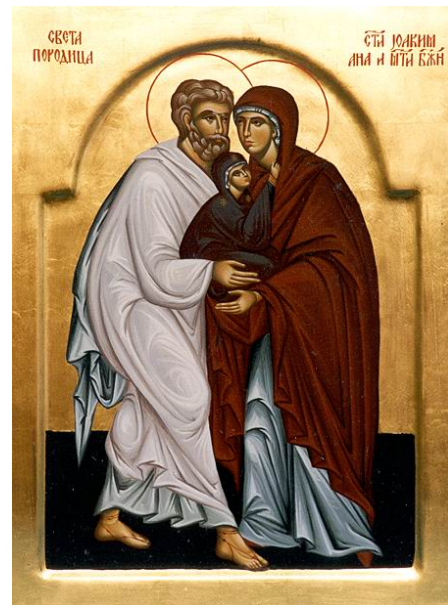
**The Synaxis of The Holy & Righteous Ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna**  
Commemorated on September 22nd



*Icon depicting Sts. Joachim and Anna, and in the center, their daughter, the Theotokos (Icon courtesy of [www.eikonografos.com](http://www.eikonografos.com))*

"Righteous Saint Joakim, son of Barpathir, was a descendant of King David, to whom God had revealed that from the descendants of his line would be born the Saviour of the world. Righteous Saint Anna was the daughter of Matthan and through her father she was of the tribe of Levi, and through her mother – of the tribe of Judah. The spouses lived at Nazareth in Galilee. They were childless into their old age and all their life they grieved over this. They had to endure derision and scorn, since at that time childlessness was considered a

disgrace. But they never grumbled and only but fervently prayed to God, humbly trusting on His will. Once during the time of a great feast, the gifts which Righteous Joakim took to Jerusalem for offering to God were not accepted by the priest Ruben, who considered that a childless man was not worthy to offer sacrifice to God. This pained the old man very much, and he, regarding himself the most sinful of people, decided not to return home, but to settle in solitude in a desolate place. His righteous spouse Anna, having learned, what sort of humiliation her husband had endured, in prayer and fasting began sorrowfully to pray to God for granting her a child. In his desolate solitude and with fasting Righteous Joakim also besought God for this. And the prayer of the saintly couple was heard: to both of them an Angel announced, that there would be born of them a Daughter, Who would bless all the race of mankind. By order of this Heavenly Messenger, Righteous Joakim and Anna met at Jerusalem, where through the promise of God was born to them the Daughter, named Mary.



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Saint Joakim died a few years later after the Entry into the Temple of his Blessed Daughter, at about age 80. Saint Anna died at age 70, two years after him, spending the time in the Temple alongside her Daughter." (from the Prologue of St. Nikolai)

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"Sts Joachim and Anna are often invoked by couples trying to have children."

## Why we commemorate the Saints Joachim and Anna?

by Fr. Vasile



I always asked myself why we commemorate the Saints Joachim and Anna at the end of almost every church service. Beside the Savior and the Theotokos only the “holy and righteous ancestors of God” are never omitted from any daily dismissal.

*May Christ our true God through the intercessions of His all-immaculate and all-blameless holy Mother [...] of the holy and righteous ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna and of all the Saints, have mercy upon us and save us, forasmuch as He is good and loves mankind.*

I always understood this as a Christological formula meant to emphasize that Jesus Christ – God Himself – was born out of a human mother with regular human parents. And this is correct.

There is however another thing that is curious, the fact that the Holy parents are always commemorated in conjunction with the saint(s) of the day and all the saints. This to me cannot be a coincidence; it has to have a meaning, and this meaning is linked with the feast that precedes the commemoration of the holy couple: the Nativity of the Theotokos.

Going back one step we have to ask ourselves first what is a saint? A saint, would answer a theologian, is a person that has reached theosis, the likeness of God and rejoices in communion with the Lord in heavens.

The concept of theosis however is a concept that was missing in the days of the Old Testament. We know from various Biblical and Holy Tradition sources that the patriarchs, the prophets and all the righteous of the Old Testament were still going into hell, and were not entering directly in communion with God after their death. Theosis became possible only after incarnation. “God became man so man could become a god” is the patristic formula of St. Athanasius the Great. Christ is the One that made theosis possible by opening the way from sin to virtue, from hell to paradise. So we cannot really talk of saints and paradise, in the Christian acceptance before Christ.

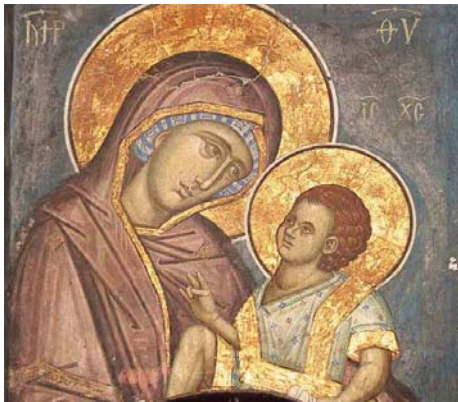
Here is an excerpt however from the matins service of the Nativity of the Theotokos:

*“Theotokos, you are mystical Paradise, for without husbandry you have blossomed Christ, by Whom the very lifebearing tree of the Cross in the earth has been planted”.*

Why are the Fathers calling her "Paradise" and in other place "God's own heaven" or the "gate to paradise" ? The immediate response is because she accepted to give birth to God incarnate therefore making possible the salvation of human race.

But there is another element easily overlooked, why did she accept the task presented by Gabriel the Archangel? Tradition sources say that at the Annunciation moment, when the Archangel explained her mission, all the righteous of the Old Testament were trembling with fear waiting for her answer. They knew that she was free and not conditioned to say "yes" and, using her God given freedom of choice, she could have said "no" to such a difficult and rather strange task for a young girl.

The same Fathers however explain that she could not have answered anything else but "yes" for the very same reason she could have said "no". She was free to choose indeed, but she also possessed something that she achieved in the years she spent in noetic prayer in the Holy of the Holies of the Temple: real spiritual discernment. She did not understand her mission through human reason, but by opening her whole being to the will of God: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word." (Luk 1:38). Her answer could not have been anything else but "yes" because by free choice her will was one with the will of God. One can say that at that moment she was already in communion with God.



For the Virgin Mary Annunciation is what Pentecost will be for the Apostles later on: an acceptance into grace and an activation of her full spiritual potential through communion with God. More so, bearing the Son of God in her womb, she will be in continuous communion with Christ like the saints will be in paradise. The regular exchange that happens between a mother and her unborn on a physical level happened here also on a spiritual level. She will give Him flesh and in exchange He will bestow upon her His saving grace. She will

give Him earthly life while paradoxically taking life herself from the very source of life.

By being the Bearer of God, she became actually the first human being to reach theosis, a full, uninterrupted Communion with God. We can say therefore that The Holy Virgin is the first of the Saints, in the Christian acceptance of the term. Theotokos is consequently the source of all the following saints, the mother not just of Christ but of all those that will follow in his footsteps and will acquire the communion in grace with God.

This is why, in my humble opinion, the "holy and righteous ancestors of God Joachim and Anna" are commemorated together with all the saints, because they have given birth to the Theotokos, the very gate through which all saints will enter paradise.

*Rejoice, only veritable east gate that only the Logos has gone through.*

*Rejoice, for in your giving birth you shattered Hades' bars and gates.*

*All-lauded one, rejoice, divine entrance of those who are being saved*

*(from the canon of the Akathist Hymn).*



## **Kursk-Root Icon of the Mother of God, Protectress of the Russian Diaspora**

*Commemorated September 21<sup>st</sup>*



On September 8<sup>th</sup> (new stile September 21<sup>st</sup>), 1295, on the day of the Nativity of the Most-Holy Mother of God, a small force of hunters from Rylsk came to hunt at the Tuskora river, 27 versts from Kursk. One of the hunters, an honorable and pious man, seeking prey in the woods, found a small icon lying face down on the root of a tree. He had barely lifted it to inspect it when the spot upon which the icon lay burst out with a strong spring of pure water. The icon turned out to be of the type referred to as the "Sign" of the Mother of God. The hunter who found the icon knew that this was no ordinary occurrence. He called his companions and together they built a small wooden chapel, into which they placed this icon. The residents of Rylsk, hearing of the newly-appeared icon of the Mother of God, began to visit it for veneration, and many miracles began to appear from it.

In 1385 the Kursk region was again swept by the Tatars. They tried to burn down the chapel and its Icon, but the wooden structure would not burn. The priest who lived by the chapel, Fr. Bogolep, explained to them that the reason for this miracle was the Icon itself. The incensed Tatars hacked the Icon in half and tossed the pieces in different directions, then burned the chapel.

They took the priest prisoner and was forced to tend to Tatar flocks. Some time later he was ransomed by emissaries of the Muscovite Grand Duke who were on their way to the Golden Horde, and he returned to the place where the chapel had stood. After a long search, while praying and fasting, he found both halves of the holy Icon, placed them side by side, and they grew together seamlessly, exhibiting only something "like dew".

In 1676 the holy Icon traveled to the Don River for blessing the Don Cossack troops. In 1684 Tsars Ivan and Petr Alekseevich sent a copy of this Icon with the order that it accompany Orthodox troops into battle. In 1687 the holy Icon was sent to the "Great Army." In 1689 copies of the holy Icon were given to the armies in the Crimean campaign. In 1812 a copy of the holy Icon was sent to Prince Kutuzov and the battling troops. Before his icon St. Seraphim of Sarov prayed and was healed.

On the night of 7-8 March, 1898, conspirator revolutionaries-atheists tried to blow up the Miracle-working Icon with a hellish bomb, but the Lord Jesus Christ glorified His Most-Pure Mother yet more, for despite the terrifying destruction in the cathedral surrounding the Icon, it remained untouched.

On 12 April 1918, the holy Icon was stolen from the cathedral of the Monastery of the Sign of the Mother of God and stripped of its ornamentation, but on 2 May it was found and returned to its place.

Finally, in 1919, while accompanying Bishop Feofan of Kursk and Oboyan' and some monks of the Monastery of the Sign, the holy Icon crossed the border to the neighborly

Serbia. In 1920 it again, at the behest of General Wrangel, visited Russia at the Crimea and remained there until the final evacuation of the Russian Army in the first days of November, 1920. The holy Icon returned to Serbia, where it remained until 1944, when, together with the Synod of Bishops, it went abroad, to Munich (Bavaria) with Metropolitan Anastassy. In 1951 Metropolitan Anastassy moved from Munich to America. Since 1957 the Icon had resided in the main cathedral dedicated to it in the Synod of Bishops in New York. The holy Icon regularly travels to all the dioceses of the Russian diaspora.

[www.synod.com](http://www.synod.com)



### **The Lesna Icon of the Mother of God**



The Lesna Icon was found on 14 September 1683 by a shepherd, Alexander Stelmashuk, of the town of Lesna, Bel'sky uezd, Grodnenskaya guberniya, in a thick forest on a pear tree surrounded by a bright light.

The holy icon did not stay with the shepherd. It was confiscated by a Catholic Polish landowner. Misfortunes which then befell him moved him to give the icon to an Orthodox church in the town of Bukovich, near Lesna. Then again it was taken away by Catholics and placed in a Catholic church, which, in 1863, was handed over to the Orthodox faithful. At the same time the holy icon was returned.

The icon is carved into a dark red oval stone. Some 500 miracles from it have been counted. Its feast day is on Pentecost, and on 8 September. The Icon is kept in France, at Lesna Convent in Provemont. Only once did it leave the Convent--on the 1000-year anniversary of the Baptism of Russia in Paris.



### **The Exaltation of the Honorable Cross**

Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich

*The Prologue from Ohrid*

Two events in connection with the Honorable Cross of Christ are commemorated on this day: first, the finding of the Honorable Cross on Golgotha and second, the return of the Honorable Cross from Persia to Jerusalem. Visiting the Holy Land, the holy Empress Helena decided to find the Honorable Cross of Christ. An old Jewish man named Judah was the only one who knew where the Cross was located, and, constrained by the empress, he revealed that the Cross was buried under the temple of Venus that Emperor





Hadrian had built on Golgotha. The empress ordered that this idolatrous temple be razed and, having dug deep below it, found three crosses. While the empress pondered on how to recognize which of these was the Cross of Christ, a funeral procession passed by. Patriarch Macarius told them to place the crosses, one by one, on the dead man. When they placed the first and second cross on the dead man, the dead man lay unchanged. When they placed the third cross on him, the dead man came back to life. By this they knew that this was the Precious and Life-giving Cross of Christ. They then placed the Cross on a sick woman, and she became well. The patriarch elevated the Cross for all the people to see, and the people sang with tears: "Lord, have mercy!" Empress Helena had a silver case made and set the Honorable Cross in it. Later, the Persian Emperor Chozroes conquered Jerusalem, enslaved many people, and took the Lord's Cross to Persia. The Cross remained in Persia for fourteen years. In the year 628 the Greek Emperor Heraclius defeated Chozroes and, with much ceremony, returned the Cross to Jerusalem. As he entered the city Emperor Heraclius carried the Cross on his back, but suddenly was unable to take another step. Patriarch Zacharias saw an angel preventing the emperor from bearing the Cross on the same path that the Lord had walked barefoot and humiliated. The patriarch communicated this vision to the emperor. The emperor removed his raiment and, in ragged attire and barefoot, took up the Cross, carried it to Golgotha, and placed it in the Church of the Resurrection, to the joy and consolation of the whole Christian world.

## **REFLECTION**

Just as a candle is lighted from another candle, so also a good work is born from a good work. A patrician wanted to donate a gold cross to a church. He summoned a young but experienced goldsmith, gave him a great deal of gold that he weighed out, and told him to fashion whatever sort of cross he desired. The poor goldsmith, seeing what a large donation this patrician was making for the sake of his soul, became inflamed with love for God in his own heart, and decided that he would add his own ten pieces of gold to the amount of the patrician's gold. When the cross was completed, the patrician weighed it, and discovered that it was heavier than the gold that he had given to the young man. He immediately began to scold the young man as a thief, suspecting that he had taken some of the gold and replaced it with some other heavy metal. When the young man saw the patrician so angry, he confessed his deed. He said: "I added from my gold, as the widow gave two mites, in order to receive Christ's reward with you." Hearing this, the patrician's heart was touched, and he said to the honorable young man: "From this day, I take you as my son, and the heir of all my goods."

## **Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross (Elevation of the Cross)**

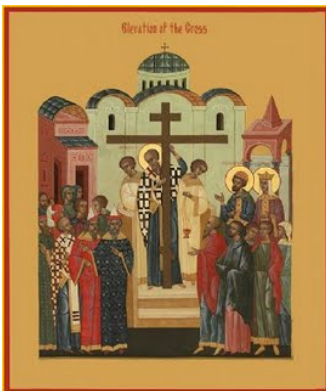
The East Orthodox Church celebrates one of its most important and solemn feasts - the Holy Cross Day. The legend of that church feast takes back to the times when the Christians had no possession over the cross on which Jesus Christ had been crucified. In the year 312 A.D., Emperor Constantine I the Great left with his army for Rome to liberate the capital city of the tyranny of Emperor Maxentius.



Constantine's army was inferior in number and so he asked God for support. In the following night, Constantine saw an inscription up on the sky saying "In hoc Vincens", which means "This will help you win". A grand victory followed, and Constantine became the only Emperor of the Empire. That prediction truly turned him towards Christianity, and he made the cross its emblem. The Christian religion was finally allowed and persecutions of Christians stopped. A few years later, in the year 326, his mother, Queen Helena, visited the holy places of Palestine and wished to find the holy cross on which Jesus had been crucified. Following the instructions of an old Jew, after some hard digging, in 326 Queen Helena's men managed to find the three crosses. Later, in 335, a small church was built on top of the cave of the grave of Jesus, which was officially sanctified on September 14th, 335, and that day has remained to be celebrated ever since as the Holy Cross Day.

### **St John Maximovitch on The Exaltation of the Precious Cross**

Before the time of Christ, the cross was an instrument of punishment; it evoked fear and aversion. But after Christ's death on the Cross it became the instrument of our salvation. Through the Cross, Christ destroyed the devil; from the Cross He descended into hades and, having liberated those languishing there, led them into the Kingdom of Heaven. The sign of the Cross is terrifying to demons and, as the sign of Christ, it is honored by Christians.



*"O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance. Grant victory unto Orthodox Christians over their adversaries, and by the virtue of Thy Cross, preserve Thy community."*

The beginning of this prayer is taken from the twenty-seventh Psalm. In the Old Testament the word "people" designated only those who confessed the true faith, people faithful to God. "Inheritance" referred to everything, which properly belonged to God, God's property, which in the New Testament is the Church of Christ. In praying for the salvation of God's people (the Christians), both from eternal torments and from earthly calamities, we beseech the Lord to bless, to send down grace, His good gifts upon the whole Church as well, and inwardly strengthen her.

The petition for granting "victory to kings" (Grant victory to Orthodox Christians over their adversaries) (ie: to the bearers of Supreme authority), has its basis in Psalm 143,

verse 10, and recalls the victories of King David achieved by God's power, and likewise the victories granted Emperor Constantine through the Cross of the Lord.

This appearance of the Cross made emperors who had formerly persecuted Christians into defenders of the Church from her external enemies, into "external bishops," to use the expression of the holy Emperor Constantine. The Church, inwardly strong by God's grace and protected outwardly, is, for Orthodox Christians, "the city of God." Heavenly Jerusalem has its beginning. Various calamities have shaken the world, entire peoples have disappeared, cities and states have perished, but the Church, in spite of persecutions and even internal conflicts, stands invincible; for the gates of hell shall not prevail against her (Matt. 16:18).

Today, when world leaders try in vain to establish order on earth, the only dependable instrument of peace is that about which the Church sings:

*"The Cross is the guardian of the whole world;  
the Cross is the beauty of the Church,  
the Cross is the might of kings;  
the Cross is the confirmation of the faithful,  
the Cross is the glory of angels and the wounding of demons."*  
(Exapostilarion of the Exaltation of the Cross)



### **St. Ludmilla the Martyr, the princess of Bohemia**

"The Holy Martyr Ludmilla, a Czech (Bohemian) princess, was married to the Czech prince Borivoy. Both spouses received holy Baptism from St Methodius, Archbishop of Moravia and Enlightener of the Slavs.



As Christians, they showed concern for the enlightening of their subjects with the light of the true Faith, they built churches and invited priests to celebrate the divine services. Prince Borivoy died early at age 36. St Ludmilla, as a widow, led an austere, pious life and continued to be concerned for the Church during the reign of her son Bratislav, which lasted for 33 years.

Bratislav was married to Dragomira, with whom he had a son, Vyacheslav [also known as St. Wenceslaus]. After the death of Bratislav, eighteen-year-old Vyacheslav came on the throne. Taking advantage of the inexperience and youth of her son, Dragomira began to introduce pagan manners and customs in the country.

St Ludmilla, of course, opposed this. Dragomira came to hate her mother-in-law and tried to destroy her. When St Ludmilla moved away to the city of Techin, Dragomira sent two boyars in secret to murder her. St Ludmilla was praying at the time, and the two assassins entered the house and carried out Dragomira's orders.

The relics of the holy Martyr Ludmilla were buried in Techin in the city wall. Numerous healings occurred at her grave. Prince Vyacheslav transferred the body of St Ludmilla to the city of Prague and placed it in the church of St George."



### **Sts. Sophia, Faith, Hope and Love the Martyrs of Rome**

The Holy Martyrs Saints Sophia and her Daughters Faith, Hope and Love -  
Commemorated on September 30th



"The Holy Martyrs Saint Sophia and her Daughters Faith, Hope and Love were born in Italy. Their mother was a pious Christian widow who named her daughters for the three Christian virtues. Faith was twelve, Hope was ten, and Love was nine. St Sophia raised them in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. St Sophia and her daughters did not hide their faith in Christ, but openly confessed it before everyone.

An official named Antiochus denounced them to the emperor Hadrian (117-138), who ordered that they be brought to Rome. Realizing that they would be taken before the emperor, the holy virgins prayed fervently to the Lord Jesus Christ, asking that He give them the strength not to fear torture and death. When the holy virgins and their mother came before the emperor, everyone present was amazed at their composure. They looked as though they had been brought to some happy festival, rather than to torture. Summoning each of the sisters in turn, Hadrian urged them to offer sacrifice to the goddess Artemis. The young girls remained unyielding.

"Brought before the emperor, these four held each other's hands 'like a woven wreath,' humbly but steadfastly confessed their faith in Christ the Lord and refused to offer sacrifices to the pagan idol Artemis. Before their suffering, the mother encouraged her daughters to endure to the end: 'Your heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, is eternal health, inexpressible beauty and eternal life. When your bodies are slain by torture, He will clothe you in incorruption and the wounds on your bodies will shine in the heavens as stars.'"

Then the emperor ordered them to be tortured. They burned the holy virgins over an iron grating, then threw them into a red-hot oven, and finally into a cauldron with boiling tar, but the Lord preserved them.

The youngest child, Love, was tied to a wheel and they beat her with rods until her body was covered all over with bloody welts. After undergoing unspeakable torments, the holy virgins glorified their Heavenly Bridegroom and remained steadfast in the Faith.

They subjected St Sophia to another grievous torture: the mother was forced to watch the suffering of her daughters. She displayed adamant courage, and urged her daughters to endure their torments for the sake of the Heavenly Bridegroom. All three maidens were beheaded, and joyfully bent their necks beneath the sword.

In order to intensify St Sophia's inner suffering, the emperor permitted her to take the bodies of her daughters. She placed their remains in coffins and loaded them on a wagon. She drove beyond the city limits and reverently buried them on a high hill. St Sophia sat there by the graves of her daughters for three days, and finally she gave up her soul to the Lord. Even though she did not suffer for Christ in the flesh, she was not deprived of a martyr's crown. Instead, she suffered in her heart. Believers buried her body there beside her daughters.

The relics of the holy martyrs have rested at El'zasa, in the church of Esho since the year 777."

"The name Sophia means "wisdom" in Greek; as for her daughters' names, Faith, Hope, and Love (Charity), they are Pistis, Elpis, and Agape in Greek, and Vera, Nadezhda, and Lyubov in Russian."



### **From the Fathers**

#### **Inward and Outward Fasting**

*From the talks of the Elder Barsanuphius of Optina:*



Fasting is twofold: outward – abstinence from forbidden foods, and inward – abstinence in all the senses, especially sight, and from everything impure and foul. The one and the other are indissolubly connected to each other. Some people understand only outward fasting. So, for instance, one person joins a group of people and in conversation the judging of his neighbors begins. He takes an active part in it, and steals much from the honor of the neighbor. Dinnertime comes. The guest is offered cutlets, suckling pig, and so on. He resolutely declares that he will not eat non-fast foods. "Go ahead, eat," his hosts persuade him, "after all, not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth" (Matt. 15:17). "No, I'm strict about that," he declares.

Such a man doesn't even understand that he has already broken the inward fast, in judging his neighbor.

And this is why sobriety is so important. Laboring for his salvation, a man little-by-little purifies his heart from envy, hatred and slander, and love is instilled in it.

## Saint Nicholas Velimirovic of Zica on Pride



No one, not even the Lord Himself, takes pleasure in instructing the proud. No one wants to give instruction to him who cries out that he knows everything. Mysteries shall be revealed to the meek, says the wise Sirach (Sirach 3:19). David also speaks of God, saying: He guides the meek to justice, He teaches the meek His way (Psalm 25:9). The proud person is he who wants to teach everyone yet does not want to be taught anything by anyone. The humble man is he who does not wish to teach anyone but continually desires to be taught by someone, no matter whom. An empty ear of corn raises its head above the field, and the full ear of corn hangs down with a bowed head.

O proud man, if only your guardian angel would somehow remove the veil from your eyes and show you the endless open sea of all that you do not know. You would kneel before every man before whom you have exhibited pride and kneel before every man whom you have belittled. You would cry out lamenting: “Forgive me, forgive me! I do not know anything!”

*\* This excerpt was taken from the book “The Prologue of Ohrid” by St. Nicholas Velimirovic*

## Saint Simeon the New Theologian on Glorifying God



Let us consider how we should glorify God. We cannot glorify Him in any way other than that in which He was glorified by the Son; for in the same way as the Son glorified the Father, the Son in turn was glorified by the Father. Let us, then, diligently use these same means to glorify Him who allows us to call Him ‘our Father in heaven’, so that we may be glorified by Him with the glory that the Son possesses with the Father prior to the world (cf. Jn. 17:5). These means are the cross, or death to the whole world, the afflictions, the trials and the

other sufferings undergone by Christ. If we endure them with great patience, we imitate Christ’s sufferings; and through them we glorify our Father and God, as His sons by grace and coheirs of Christ.

*\* This quote was taken from the book “The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Vol 4”*

## Saint Alexander of Svir on Repentance

Offer a pure repentance to the Lord God Who is powerful to cleanse us of our sins; for there is no sin which conquers God’s love of mankind. Wherefore, brethren, let us fall down before Him often with tears and confess to Him our sins, and He will save us with eternal salvation. For repentance is the way and the key to the Kingdom of Heaven, without which no one can enter into it. Let us keep to this path, O brethren; for the path now in this short life is



narrow and sorrowful, but later in that endless future life there shall be abundant and unutterable rewards.

*\* This excerpt was taken from the book "The Northern Thebaid" which was compiled and translated by Fr. Seraphim Rose and Herman Podmoshensky*

### **Bishop Augustine Kantiotis of Florina on Despair**



Our Church offers the life of Saint Mary of Egypt as an excellent example of repentance. No other man or woman must despair, no matter how many sins they have committed and say that there is no salvation for me. No! There is a way of salvation for all sinners; it is the way which leads to Golgotha, to the Cross of our Lord. One drop of His blood suffices to erase and extinguish all sins. If the cross was not risen we sinners would be in despair. Not now, however. Let us approach the Crucified One. Let us kiss His immaculate feet. Let us sprinkle them with our tears, as did Mary of Egypt. Our conviction is what the Gospel says, that Christ came to be sacrificed and with His precious blood to redeem the world (1 John 1:17). Grace defeats sin.

<http://www.augoustinos-kantiotis.gr/>



### **"The Orthodox Christian Family"**

#### **On Marriage and Family Life**

*Excerpts from notes made by the Royal Martyr Empress Alexandra Fedorovna*



#### **Love between the spouses**

The main requisite in a family is unselfish love. Each spouse should forget his own ego and dedicate himself to the other person. Each one should blame himself and not the other person when something goes wrong. One needs to possess restraint and patience, since impatience can spoil everything. A harsh word can delay the merging of the spouses' souls for months. There should be a desire on both sides to make the marriage a happy one and to overcome everything that stands in the way of such a goal. The strongest love has the greatest need of daily fortification. Most unforgivable of all is precisely rudeness in one's own home, towards those whom we love.

One word envelops everything, and that word is "love." Within the word "love" there is a whole volume of thoughts on life and responsibility, and when we study this volume thoroughly and attentively, each of these thoughts comes through clearly and distinctly.

Love reveals many things in a woman that cannot be seen by outsiders. It throws a veil over her shortcomings and transforms even the simplest of her traits.

Another important element of family life is the attitude of love towards one another; it is not simply love, but love nurtured within a family's daily life, love expressed in words

and actions. Courtesy in the home should not be formal, but sincere and natural. Children need joy and happiness just as much as plants need air and sunlight.

### **The spouses' responsibilities**

After the wedding is concluded, a husband's first and foremost responsibility is to his wife, and the wife's to her husband. The two of them should live for one another, give up their life for one another. Formerly each one of them was incomplete. Marriage is the joining of two halves into a single whole. Two lives are tied together in such a close union that they are no longer two lives, but one. Each one bears the sacred responsibility for the happiness and greatest good of the other for the rest of his or her life.

Each wife should know that when she finds herself in a state of confusion or difficulty, she will always find a safe and quiet harbor in the love of her husband. She should know that he will always be understanding towards her, will treat her very delicately, will even use force to defend her. She should never doubt the fact that he will empathize with her in all her difficulties. She should never be afraid to be met with coldness or rebuke when she comes to him, seeking his protection.

A husband should ask his wife's advice concerning all his affairs and all his plans, and should have confidence in her. Perhaps she does not understand business affairs in the same way he does, but she will possibly be able to make valuable suggestions, since a woman's intuition often works faster than a man's logic. But even if a wife cannot help her husband in his business, her love for him makes her deeply interested in all his concerns. And she is happy when he asks her for advice, and thus they grow even closer. A husband's hands, inspired by love, should be able to do everything. Every loving husband should have a grand heart. Many sufferers should be able to find help in a truly loving family. Every husband of a Christian wife should unite with her in love for Christ. Out of love for her he will pass all trials of faith. In sharing her life, which is filled with faith and prayer, he, too, will unite his life with Heaven. United on earth by a common faith in Christ, reforging their mutual love into love for God, they will also be eternally united in Heaven.

A loyal wife does not have to be a poet's dream, nor pretty as a picture, nor a creature of ethereal beauty whom one fears to touch, but should be a healthy, strong, practical, industrious woman, capable of coping with all family duties, and yet marked with a beauty that is granted to a soul that has a lofty and noble goal.

The primary requirement for a wife is faithfulness, faithfulness in the widest possible sense. Her husband's heart should be able to trust her completely. Absolute trust is the foundation of true love. The shadow of doubt destroys the harmony of family life. A faithful wife proves by her character and conduct that she is worthy of her husband's trust. He is sure of her love, he knows that her heart is eternally loyal to him. He knows that she is sincerely supportive of his interests. It is highly important for a husband to be able to entrust the handling of all family affairs to his loyal wife, knowing that everything will be in order. The wastefulness and extravagance of some wives have destroyed the happiness of many a couple.



## *The Royal Spouses*



is depressed, her smile helps him find new strength, just as a ray of sunshine straightens out a wilting flower.

A wife's main duty is to establish and run her household. She should be magnanimous and kind-hearted. A woman whose heart remains untouched by the sight of misfortune, who does not try to help as much as she can, is deprived of one of the major womanly characteristics that make up the basis of the female nature. A true wife shares with her husband the burden of his cares. Whatever else a man goes through during the day, when he comes home he should find himself in an atmosphere of love. His friends may betray him, but his wife's loyalty should remain constant. When darkness and misfortune befall a husband, his wife's loyal eyes look at him like stars of hope shining in this darkness. When he

### **Trials**

Through the fault of those who have become married, either one or both, wedded life can become a misfortune. The possibility of happiness in marriage is great, but one should also not forget about the possibility of its crashing. Only a correct and wise married life can help achieve ideal relations between the spouses.

You should fear the least sign of incipient disobedience or alienation. Instead of acting in a restrained manner, the husband or the wife says an ill-advised or careless word, and suddenly a small crack appears between these two hearts that up to now have been one whole, and this crack widens and widens until the spouses find themselves torn apart forever. Did you say something thoughtless? Ask forgiveness immediately. Did a misunderstanding arise between you? It does not matter whose fault it was, but do not allow it to stand between you even for an hour.



Refrain from quarreling. Do not go to sleep with a feeling of anger in your heart. There should be no place for pride in family life. You should never coddle your feeling of injured pride in scrupulously trying to determine precisely who has to ask forgiveness. Those who love truly never engage in such casuistry, but are always ready to give in and apologize.

*Empress Alexandra*

When the beauty of the face fades, the shining of the eyes dims, and with age come wrinkles, or when illnesses, sorrows, and cares leave their traces and scars, the love of a

faithful husband should remain just as deep and sincere as before. There are no measurements on earth that are capable of measuring the depth of Christ's love for His Church, and not a single mortal can love with the same depth of feeling, but nevertheless each husband must do it to the extent that such love can be recreated on earth. No sacrifice will appear too great to him for the sake of his beloved.

As the charm of physical beauty disappears with time amid cares and labors, the beauty of the soul should shine forth more and more, replacing the lost attractiveness. The wife should always be concerned above all to be attractive to her husband and not to someone else. When the two of them are alone, she should take even greater care of her appearance and not shrug it off because no one else sees her. Instead of being lively and attractive in company and then falling into melancholy and keeping quiet when left alone, the wife should remain merry and attractive even when she stays alone with her husband in their quiet home.

Both the husband and the wife should give to each other the best in each of them. Her fervent interest in all his affairs and her wise advice on all matters fortify him in the accomplishment of his daily duties and give him strength for all battles. At the same time, the wisdom and strength that a woman needs to fulfill her sacred wifely duties are to be found only in appealing to God.

Heavy work, difficulties, cares, self-sacrifice, and even misfortune lose their acuteness, bleakness, and severity when they are softened by tender love, just as cold, bare, and rugged cliffs become beautiful when wild vines entwine them with their green garlands, and exquisite flowers fill all their cracks and crevices.

Each home has its own trials, but peace reigns in a truly loving home and cannot be upset by any worldly tempests. The home is a place of warmth and tenderness. At home one should speak only with love.

Such a house can nurture only beauty and gentleness of character. One of the misfortunes of our times is that quiet family evenings are being pushed out by business, amusements, a whirling social life..

There are sorrows that wound even more than death. However, God's love can turn any trial into a blessing.

Our love for each other may be sincere and deep on sunny days, but it is never as strong as on days of suffering and sorrow, when all the previously hidden richness of the soul is revealed.

### **The importance of the home**

Every member of the family should take part in establishing the home, and complete family happiness can be attained only when everyone fulfills his or her duties.

The main center of each person's life should be his home. This is the place where his children grow up – where they grow physically, strengthen their health, and absorb everything that will make them true and noble men and women. In a home where children are growing up, they are influenced by their whole environment and all that takes place around them, and even the smallest detail can have either a wonderful or a harmful effect on them. Even the surrounding nature contributes to the formation of their future character. All the beautiful things that are seen by children's eyes become engraved upon their sensitive hearts. No matter where a child was reared, his impressions of the place where he grew up affect his character. The rooms in which our children will sleep, play, and live must be made as beautiful as our means allow. Children love pictures, and if the pictures in the home are pure and good, they will have a wonderful effect on the children and will make them more refined. But even the home itself – clean, tastefully arranged, with simple decorations and a nice view around it – has an invaluable influence on the rearing of children.

It is a great art to live together, loving each other tenderly. This must begin with the parents. Each home is like its creators. Refined natures produce a refined home, while a coarse person creates a coarse home.

Be faithful. Accept your sacred burden with reverence. The most durable ties are those which bind a person to his real home. In a real home even a small child has a voice, while the appearance of an infant affects the entire family routine. No matter how small or modest a home may be, for each member of the family it must be the most precious place on earth. It should be filled with such love, such happiness, that wherever a person travels afterwards, however many years pass, his heart must still yearn for his home. In all trials and misfortunes the home is a haven for the soul.

Each wonderful thought that comes into a child's mind afterwards strengthens and ennoble his character. Our bodies age against our will, but why should our souls not remain forever young? It is simply criminal to suppress a child's joy and force children to be gloomy and full of self-importance. Very soon life's problems will lie upon their shoulders. Very soon life will bring them anxieties, cares, difficulties, and the burden of



responsibility. So let them remain young and carefree as long as possible. Their childhood should be filled as much as possible with joy, light, and merry games.

#### *Royal Family*

Parents should not be too embarrassed to play and horse around with their children. Perhaps in those moments they are closer to God than when they are engaged in what seems to them to be important work.

Sooner or later into the life of every home comes bitter experience – the experience of suffering. There may be years of cloudless happiness, but there will definitely be sorrows.

The stream that ran for so long like a burbling brook running through flowering meadows in bright sunshine will deepen, darken, will dive into a dark gorge, or rush down like a waterfall.

In like manner flows the life of a true home – sometimes in bright sunlight, sometimes in gloominess. But be it either in light or in dark, – it always teaches us to appeal to the heavens, to the Great Home in which all our dreams and hopes are embodied, where ties that have been broken off on earth are once more reunited. For everything that we have and everything that we do – we need God’s blessing. No one except God will support us in the time of great sorrow. Life is so fragile that any parting may turn out to be final. We can never be sure that we will have the chance to ask forgiveness for offensive or injurious words, or to be forgiven.

*To be continued*



### **What is an Orthodox Man?**

*Happy is the man who becomes wise – who comes to have understanding*

*(Proverbs 3:13)*

We live today in a society where husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, have been torn from their roots, ripped from time-honored and theologically-sanctioned values about what it is to be a man, a woman, a family. The old values and roles, so easily nurtured in a largely agrarian and patriarchal society, now seem almost impossible to live in our industrialized cities. The healthy psychological bonding that used to occur naturally between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, is now a rare experience.

As if this were not a difficult enough burden for the spiritually-minded to bear, we are also now inundated by strange and sometimes aberrant notions about sexuality and role models. We live in a culture of increasing “unisex,” perversion, and immorality – on the job, at home, and sometimes even in the church.

The “women’s liberation movement” was originally an understandable reaction to irresponsible, heavy-handed, arrogant and insensitive men; but instead of raising the conscience and morality of men to the traditional nurturing and moral level of women, it had the effect of bringing women down to the more animal level of men’s behavior, while at the same time shattering the “male myth” without giving in its place a proper sense of what it is to be a man – or, for our purposes, what it is to be an Orthodox Christian man.



An extraordinarily relevant model for the Orthodox man today is the Holy Prophet Job in the Old Testament. Indeed, here was a man “after God’s own heart.” His life gives evidence of certain

manly characteristics by which the Orthodox man can, and should, measure himself today – providing a program of spiritual growth and struggle that is without equal.

We think of St. Job primarily in the context of his trial of faith and the afflictions of his life, for which reason the Orthodox call him “The Much-suffering.” We forget that he persevered to the end and found victory over his troubles. We seldom realize that in order to obtain this victory, he needed certain qualities of character and soul – the qualities of a true and godly man.

What are those qualities?

He was a man who did not forget God and God’s loving care for him, no matter how terrible the present affliction: God was always with me and the friendship of God protected my home (Job 29:3-4).

The Orthodox man strives never to forget God and His blessings whether in the past or in the present, and he gives this same example to his wife and children, especially in times of trial.

The Prophet loved his children and missed them sorely when he was in exile. He did not see them as an irritating intrusion into his own “lifestyle.” He rose early to pray and make sacrifice for them, in order to purify them in case they had sinned. The Orthodox man prays ardently for his children – both for wisdom in guiding them aright, and for God’s blessing and grace on them. This is also a model for a priest, who has many spiritual children.

St. Job was just and fair, both with his children and with those for whom he had responsibility outside his family. In the same way, an Orthodox man is a model of justice and even-handedness for his own children, tempering justice with mercy.

The Prophet Job received respect from old and young. Orthodox men show respect to their elders, both in the family and at work, but especially in the Church, and they earn the respect of their wives and children, doing nothing to kill this respect or to scandalize them.

The Saint was stable, like a tree whose roots always have water. An Orthodox man consciously strives to avoid the restlessness of our mobile society, recognizing the need for children to have a secure sense of place and stability in their lives.

St. Job was a seeker after God and wisdom: The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord. An Orthodox man also strives to serenely rest in God’s providence, keeping lively his commitment to the Orthodox Faith, and modeling this for his family according to his strength.

Because of all these spiritual characteristics, St. Job was able to endure terrible suffering and affliction, as a result of which the Lord blessed the last part of Job’s life even more

than he had blessed the first. Here, then, is a real example for today's men, who are often tempted to retreat into passive self-centeredness in the face of difficulty and temptation, who are too ready (and encouraged by society to do so) to jettison job, wife, and children at the slightest whim or difficulty. Here, then, is a Saint who can inspire in contemporary man a real manhood rather than a fake masculinity.

*Always obey the Lord and you will be happy. If you are stubborn, you will be ruined (Proverbs 28:14).*

Father Alexey Young



### Sorrows

#### Why they are sent and how to endure them

Sometimes sorrows are sent to us for the purpose of testing our faith and loyalty to God, and for strengthening us in this faith and loyalty. Many people, when living peacefully, think that they love God with all their hearts. Apostle Peter declared that he would never renounce his Lord; the other disciples wanted to follow Him unto death. But when the time of tribulation came - Peter renounced his Lord and Master; the disciples dispersed. And it was at this point that they realized, despite their heart-felt grief, that they had not yet reached the state in which they would find themselves later on, when they joyously suffered martyrdom and disgrace for Christ.

Without testing even iron looks like steel, pewter looks like silver, bronze looks like gold and plain glass looks like crystal, but tempering shows their true worth. The same happens with people: many appear to be meek and humble, simple and good, religious, etc., while tribulations often reveal them to be malicious, and proud, and cruel-hearted, and greedy, and envious, etc. Tribulations come in the form of loss and deprivation, grief, illness, disgrace, and those who endure the trials are found to be dependable candidates for the Kingdom of God, while those who are unable to endure are not dependable, because they still contain a large admixture of evil. Through suffering and woe in their lives, virtuous people become even more fortified in their virtue.



“Like a goldsmith, upon throwing gold into the furnace, leaves it to melt in the fire until he sees it attain the greatest purity, - says St. John Chrysostome, - so does the Lord allow the souls of men to suffer tribulations until they become pure and shining, and until they acquire great benefit from these temptations. If the goldsmith knows exactly how long he must keep the gold melting in the furnace and when to take it out, and never allows the gold to remain until it is spoiled or burned; even more so does God know, and when He sees that we have become purer, He delivers us from our tribulations, lest we stumble and fall. Let us not grumble and be faint of heart when something unexpected occurs, but let us allow the Lord to purify our soul as long as He wants; for He does it with great mercy and for our benefit.”

Suffering causes us to take stock, to look around, to ponder: are we living properly or have we, perhaps, wandered far away from the life prescribed to us by the Lord in His Gospel? St. John Chrysostome says: “When you see your woes multiplying, do not despair, but take heart. God allows them in order to shatter your indifference, to wake you up from sinful slumber. Because in times of woe everything that is extraneous is cut off, all earthly things are forgotten, man becomes more ardent in his prayer, more earnest in his charity, and passions are more easily vanquished as they flee in the face of sorrow.” “Moreover, - St. John notes elsewhere, - through the punishment and the tribulations which God sends us in this life, our future torment is greatly alleviated. Do you see how God uses all possible means so that we, even though we sin, would suffer a lighter punishment than we deserve, or would be delivered from it altogether?”

Thus, no matter how numerous and varied are the tribulations and sufferings in life, we see that not one of them is sent by chance, without a special purpose known only to Divine Providence. This makes it clear to us that we should endure all the vicissitudes of life patiently, because only in that case will our sorrows be beneficial for us and lead us to salvation. “Let us be thankful to God in all cases, - says St. John Chrysostome, - because that constitutes true gratitude. It is easy to be thankful in times of happiness, but it is noteworthy to be thankful in dire circumstances. If we give thanks for that which others blaspheme, from which others despair, - see the great wisdom in this: firstly, you have made God rejoice; secondly, you have put the devil to shame; thirdly, you have shown that what happened is not a burden to you. And at the moment in which you give thanks, - God takes away your sorrow, while the devil retreats. In other words, if you despair, then the devil, having received what he wants, stand next to you, while God, seeing your blasphemy, leaves you and your woes consequently increase. If, on the other hand, you give thanks, then the devil, not having had any success, leaves you, while God, having been honored by you, rewards you with even greater honor. There is nothing holier than the tongue which gives thanks in misfortune. It truly does not differ from the tongue of martyrs and receives the same crown as the latter. For next to this tongue stands an executioner, forcing it to renounce God through blasphemy, next to it stands the devil, who torments it with painful thoughts and darkens the heart with sorrow. Thus, whoever suffers tribulation and gives thanks to God, receives a martyr’s crown.”

Besides, we must always remember that no matter how great our suffering, it is never sent beyond the scope of our endurance. And even in the throes of the greatest suffering,



an Orthodox Christian will find comfort in church and in the Holy Writ. St. John Chrysostome says: “Whatever the sorrow that disturbs our heart, it can easily cease when we come to church, for Christ Himself is present here, and everyone who approaches Him with faith can quickly be comforted.”

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk says: “When a father leaves his son without punishment and lets him live according to his will, then it is seen that the father has rejected his son; thus, when God leaves a person without punishment, this is a sign of his rejection from God’s mercy. One of the holy fathers told the following story: how, when

he was in Alexandria, he once came to church to pray and saw a pious woman there. She was dressed all in black and, praying before an icon of the Saviour, she wept and tearfully repeated over and over again: "Thou hast abandoned me, o Lord! Have mercy upon me, o Merciful One!" Why is she crying so? - I thought. She is a widow and is probably being persecuted by someone. I will talk to her and comfort her. Waiting until she had finished praying, I came up to her and said: "Is someone causing you trouble that you are crying so?" - "Oh, no, - she said and began weeping anew, - no, father, you do not know my sorrow. I live among people and am not persecuted in any way. It is for this reason that I am crying: that God has forgotten to visit me and it is already three years that I have not been sent any tribulations. During all this time I myself have not been sick, my son has not been sick, I have not even lost a single chicken from my home. I therefore think that God has abandoned me for my sins, does not send me any woes, and so I am crying before Him, asking Him to have mercy upon me." So do God-fearing people reason when they are not sent any sorrows for a long time: they think that God has forgotten them; they look upon sorrow as a special mark of attention from God, as a special mercy."

Thus, dear brothers and sisters, remembering all of the above, let us not despair when we are visited by trials and tribulations.

*"Spiritual instruction," Moscow, 1906.*



**New column: Spiritual poetry**

**OH, ALL-HYMNED ONE!**

For all who sorrow, oh Most Pure One,  
Who art the gleam of tears all trembling in their eyes,  
To Whom turn all those who feel quite undone,  
For all who toil, oh Sharer of their sighs,  
Who from all other chosen wert by God,  
As the brightest saint Who this earth has trod,  
To bear the One Who cannot be expressed,  
To bear Him Whom God hath made manifest,  
Who art raised higher than the Cherubim,  
Transfigured well above the Seraphim,  
Oh star of heaven – bright for all eternity,  
Oh star of miracles upon this earth proclaimed,  
Undying flower of incorruptibility,  
Oh Burning Bush which burns, yet whole itself remains,  
Light of salvation, light which never dies,  
Oh earthly depth which fathoming defies,  
Who art of all the chosen loving peace,  
The comforter of all those who are banished,  
The source of sweetness of those who are famished,  
Of those in pain bright joy of prompt release,





In times of triumph, times of tribulation  
Divine protection, shield of all salvation,  
All-Hymned One, plead for those who've lost their way,  
All-Hymned One, pray for those who've gone astray.

- V. Utrenyev

Translated by Kosara Gavrilovic

## THE CROSS

*In bright memory of holy martyr-soldier Yevgeniy (Rodionov),  
executed in Chechnya on May 23, 1996.*

“Take off your cross, quick, take it off!” –  
The bully persevered,  
“You’ll stay alive then, don’t you see...  
Comply! Or you’ll be dead!”

Thus laughing viciously at him,  
The perverts kicked and jeered,  
But he was now invincible  
Under the shield of faith.

A blow into the face, another,  
The bandits’ taunting grins,  
Their wild cries “Allah akbar!”  
Did penetrate the cliffs.

The distant mountains were crystal-clear,  
Blue flowers sloped o’er the dell,  
And thus without renouncing Christ,  
The Russian soldier fell.

The severed head did fall and roll,  
The dagger dripped with blood,  
And softly the ensanguined grass  
A prayer whispered aloft.

His soul had taken flight beyond,  
Mourned only by the birds.  
The mother awaits a living son...  
While he – for all ages yet to come –  
Immortal shall return.

- Nikolay Tal'kov

Translated by Natalia Sheniloff



## ANGEL

At midnight an angel was flying the sky  
And quietly singing a song.  
The moon, and the stars, and a legion of clouds  
Attended that holiest song.  
He sang of the bliss of the innocent souls  
Sojourning in sweet paradise;  
He sang of the greatness of God, and his praise  
Was truly unfeigned and sincere.  
An infant soul in his embrace he did bear  
To a world full of sorrow and tears;  
The sound of his song did remain in that soul,  
Though wordless, yet very alive.  
And later the soul languished long in this world,  
Still filled with a wondrous desire,  
For earth's boring songs could not ever replace  
The power of heavenly tones.



- Mikhail Lermontov  
Translated by Natalia Sheniloff

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## MISCELLANEOUS

### FOR NEWCOMERS:

# Welcome

Welcome! Thank you for joining us for prayer and praise! Your presence brings us joy.

Stewardship — freely contributing our God-given time, talent and treasure in gratefulness for all He has done for us — is how we support and maintain this house of the Lord. Our parish takes collections during services; also you may present your offerings at the beginning or at the end of the Divine Liturgy, or any time during other services to the people at the candle stand.

Communion literally means "having in common", or "spiritual unity." It is a sign that we already have in common "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" as one Church (Ephesians 4:5), for it joins us not only to Jesus Christ, but to each other as well (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Thus, only Orthodox Christians, prepared by self-examination and confession, prayer and fasting (1 Corinthians 11:27-32), may partake of it during the Divine Liturgy.

Please enjoy some light refreshments and informal fellowship with us after church during tea hours, movie presentations or regular birthday celebrations every month!



### **SAINT VLADIMIR CHURCH NEW WEBSITE**

For those who do not know yet, our church has a new website – [www.saintprincevladimir.org](http://www.saintprincevladimir.org)

The website has English and Russian versions.

Please, check more frequently the site, the “Announcements” and all other pages. Thank you to all parishioners involved in this important work.



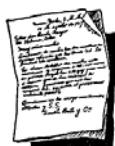
### **SPECIAL THANKS**

**Thank you** very much to Elena Texas who donated and brought from Kiev four new vestments for altar boys so necessary for our church.

**Thank you** to Tatiana and Rustik who donated icons and Prayer books for our Church!

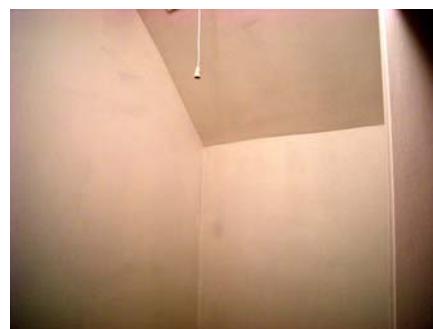
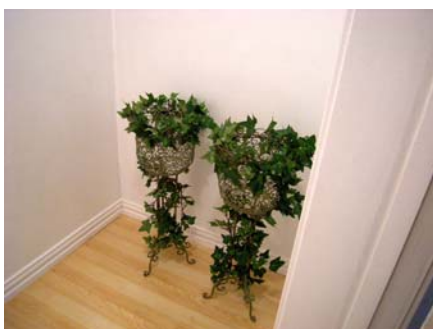
**Thank you** to Sofia and Elena who donated icons from “St. Trinity Seraphim’s” Monastery in Diveevo, Russia.

**Many thanks!** We are very thankful to Mr. Boris K., the father of our parishioner Elena Konrdakova. He was so kind to bring new utensils for the Altar and the Church from Russia. The order on behalf of the Church was placed with Sofrino. May God grant you many years for your time and efforts!



**Thank you** to Tatiana Sheiko for preparing a letter to thank the Abbess and the nuns from St. Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Monastery for their gift of icon of St. Paraskevi.

**Thank you** to the Building Comity Chairman Vladislav Sharin and his helper Konstantin Nation, and anyone else who helps out with the remodeling of the Baptism changing room next to the choir loft. Your time and efforts are greatly appreciated! The room will be ready very soon!

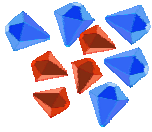


**NEWS FROM THE CHURCH CHOIR**  
CHOIR DIRECTOR - George Tokarev



**CHOIR REHEARSALS**

Choir rehearsals will be held every second Sunday of the month from now right after the Liturgy in the choir loft or in the parish house. The next rehearsal will be held on October 11th. If you would like to join the choir please come to one of the choir rehearsals and/or contact the choir director. The participation of the rehearsals is greatly appreciated.



**BEAUTIFUL STONES mounted on the icons of the Mother of God “Kazanskaya” and “Pribavlenie uma” in our church!**

Elena Kondrakova has surprised us with such a nice gift! Thank you very much!



**“BLESSED HONEY” SALE FUNDRAISER**

You can donate to our church by buying small jars of “Blessed honey” available at the kiosk. Donations go directly for the fund of St. Xenia Sisterhood. Thank you for your generosity!



**BIRTHDAY LIST UPDATE:**

In order to organize every month our Parish Birthdays celebrations I encourage you to e-mail me the date of your and your family members’ birthdays. ([marinova@bcm.tmc.edu](mailto:marinova@bcm.tmc.edu)) Thank you!



Posted by the Senior-Sister Ekaterina.

*(Some sources for this issue have been used from the web net as indicated)*

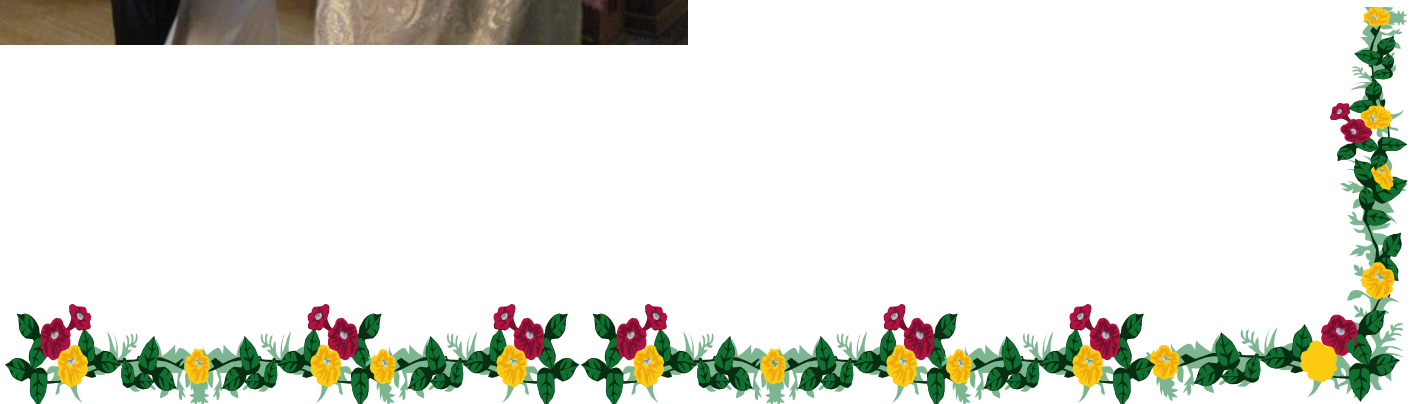
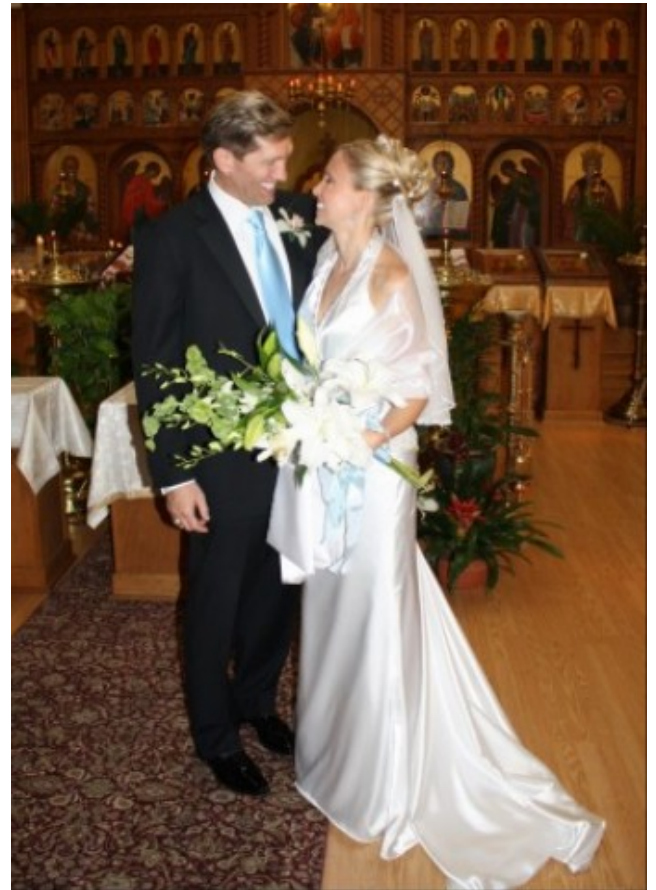




## PARISH ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Wedding

Congratulations to newlyweds *Natalia & David*: **God grant you many years!**



## PHOTO GALLERY

**Kursk Root Icon of the Mother of God in Russia: Kursk - September 27, 2009**  
Thousands Join a Procession of the Cross From Kursk-Root Hermitage to Znamensky Cathedral With the Kursk-Root Icon of the Mother of God On the Apodosis of the Nativity of the Mother of God.

*Kursk (Photo-report)-www.synod.org*



Church Feast days in "St. Vladimir" - September 2009



