

“КРАСНОЕ СОЛНЫШКО”

“SUNSHINE”

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*The most pure Temple of the Savior,
The precious Chamber and Virgin,
The sacred Treasure of the glory of God,
Is presented today to the house of the Lord.
She brings with her the grace of the Spirit,
Which the angels of God do praise.
Truly this woman is the Abode of Heaven!*

Kontakion in Tone 4



The Entry into the Temple of the Most-holy Theotokos

"When the Most-holy Virgin Mary reached the age of three, her holy parents Joachim and Anna took her from Nazareth to Jerusalem to dedicate her to the service of God according to their earlier promise. It was a three-day journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem but, traveling to do a God-pleasing work, this journey was not difficult for them. Many kinsmen of Joachim and Anna gathered in Jerusalem to take part in this event, at which the invisible angels of God were also present. Leading the procession into the Temple were virgins with lighted tapers in their hands, then the Most-holy Virgin, led on one side by her father and on the other side by her mother. The virgin was clad in vesture of royal magnificence and adornments as was befitting the ``King's daughter, the Bride of God" (Psalm 45:13-15). Following them were many kinsmen and friends, all with lighted tapers. Fifteen steps led up to the Temple. Joachim and Anna lifted the Virgin onto the first step, then she ran quickly to the top herself, where she was met by the High Priest Zacharias, who was to be the father of St. John the Forerunner. Taking her by the hand, he led her not only into the Temple, but into the ``Holy of Holies," the holiest of holy places, into which

no one but the high priest ever entered, and only once each year, at that. St. Theophylact of Ohrid says that Zacharias ``was outside himself and possessed by God" when he led the Virgin into the holiest place in the Temple, beyond the second curtain-otherwise, his action could not be explained. Mary's parents then offered sacrifice to God according to the Law, received the priest's blessing and returned home. The Most-holy Virgin remained in the Temple and dwelt there for nine full years. While her parents were alive, they visited her often, especially Righteous Anna. When God called her parents from this world, the Most-holy Virgin was left an orphan and did not wish to leave the Temple until death or to enter into marriage. As that would have been against the Law and custom of Israel, she was given to St. Joseph, her kinsman in Nazareth, after reaching the age of twelve. Under the acceptable role of one betrothed, she could live in virginity and thus fulfill her desire and formally satisfy the Law, for it was then unknown in Israel for maidens to vow virginity to the end of their lives. The Most-holy Virgin Mary was the first of such life-vowed virgins, of the thousands and thousands of virgin men and women who would follow her in the Church of Christ."

(St. Nikolai Velimirovich - Prologue of Ochrid)



St. Gregory Palamas on the Entrance of the Theotokos to the Temple

Discourse on the Feast of the Entry of Our Most Pure Lady The Theotokos into the Holy Of Holies



Icon of St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki

"If a tree is known by its fruit, and a good tree bears good fruit (Mt. 7:17; Lk. 6:44), then is not the Mother of Goodness Itself, She who bore the Eternal Beauty, incomparably more excellent than every good, whether in this world or the world above? Therefore, the coeternal and identical Image of goodness, Preeternal, transcending all being, He Who is the preexisting and good Word of the Father, moved by His unutterable love for mankind and compassion for us, put on our image, that He might reclaim for Himself our nature which had been dragged down to uttermost Hades, so as to renew this corrupted nature and raise it to the heights of Heaven. For this purpose, He had to assume a flesh that was both new and ours, that He might refashion us from out of ourselves. Now He finds a Handmaiden perfectly suited to these needs, the supplier of Her own unsullied nature, the Ever-Virgin now hymned by us, and Whose miraculous Entrance into the Temple, into the Holy of Holies, we now celebrate. God predestined Her before the ages for the salvation and reclaiming of our kind. She was chosen, not just from the crowd, but from the ranks of the chosen of all ages, renowned for piety and understanding, and for their God-pleasing words and deeds.

In the beginning, there was one who rose up against us: the author of evil, the serpent, who dragged us into the abyss. Many reasons impelled him to rise up against us, and there are many ways by which he enslaved our nature: envy, rivalry, hatred, injustice, treachery, slyness, etc. In

addition to all this, he also has within him the power of bringing death, which he himself engendered, being the first to fall away from true life.

The author of evil was jealous of Adam, when he saw him being led from earth to Heaven, from which he was justly cast down. Filled with envy, he pounced upon Adam with a terrible ferocity, and even wished to clothe him with the garb of death. Envy is not only the begetter of hatred, but also of murder, which this truly man-hating serpent brought about in us. For he wanted to be master over the earth-born for the ruin of that which was created in the image and likeness of God. Since he was not bold enough to make a face to face attack, he resorted to cunning and deceit. This truly terrible and malicious plotter pretended to be a friend and useful adviser by assuming the physical form of a serpent, and stealthily took their position. By his God-opposing advice, he instills in man his own death-bearing power, like a venomous poison.

If Adam had been sufficiently strong to keep the divine commandment, then he would have shown himself the vanquisher of his enemy, and withstood his deadly attack. But since he voluntarily gave in to sin, he was defeated and was made a sinner. Since he is the root of our race, he has produced us as death-bearing shoots. So, it was necessary for us, if he were to fight back against his defeat and to claim victory, to rid himself of the death-bearing venomous poison in his soul and body, and to absorb life, eternal and indestructible life.



It was necessary for us to have a new root for our race, a new Adam, not just one Who would be sinless and invincible, but one Who also would be able to forgive sins and set free from punishment those subject to it. And not only would He have life in Himself, but also the capacity to restore to life, so that He could grant to those who cleave to Him and are related to Him by race both life and the forgiveness of their sins, restoring to life not only those who came after Him, but also

those who already had died before Him. Therefore, St. Paul, that great trumpet of the Holy Spirit, exclaims, "the first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45).

Except for God, there is no one who is without sin, or life-creating, or able to remit sin. Therefore, the new Adam must be not only Man, but also God. He is at the same time life, wisdom, truth, love, and mercy, and every other good thing, so that He might renew the old Adam and restore him to life through mercy, wisdom and righteousness. These are the opposites of the things which the author of evil used to bring about our aging and death.

As the slayer of mankind raised himself against us with envy and hatred, so the Source of life was lifted up [on the Cross] because of His immeasurable goodness and love for mankind. He intensely desired the salvation of His creature, i.e., that His creature would be restored by

Himself. In contrast to this, the author of evil wanted to bring God's creature to ruin, and thereby put mankind under his own power, and tyrannically to afflict us. And just as he achieved the conquest and the fall of mankind by means of injustice and cunning, by deceit and his trickery, so has the Liberator brought about the defeat of the author of evil, and the restoration of His own creature with truth, justice and wisdom.

It was a deed of perfect justice that our nature, which was voluntarily enslaved and struck down, should again enter the struggle for victory and cast off its voluntary enslavement. Therefore, God deigned to receive our nature from us, hypostatically uniting with it in a marvellous way. But it was impossible to unite that Most High Nature, Whose purity is incomprehensible for human reason, to a sinful nature before it had been purified. Therefore, for the conception and birth of the Bestower of purity, a perfectly spotless and Most Pure Virgin was required.

Today we celebrate the memory of those things that contributed, if only once, to the Incarnation. He Who is God by nature, the Co-unoriginate and Coeternal Word and Son of the Transcendent Father, becomes the Son of Man, the Son of the Ever-Virgin. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8), immutable in His divinity and blameless in His humanity, He alone, as the Prophet Isaiah prophesied, "practiced no iniquity, nor deceit with His lips" (Is. 53: 9). He alone was not brought forth in iniquity, nor was He conceived in sin, in contrast to what the Prophet David says concerning himself and every other man (Ps. 50/51: 5). Even in what He assumes, He is perfectly pure and has no need to be cleansed Himself. But for our sake, He accepted purification, suffering, death and resurrection, that He might transmit them to us.



God is born of the spotless and Holy Virgin, or better to say, of the Most Pure and All-Holy Virgin. She is above every fleshly defilement, and even above every impure thought. Her conceiving resulted not from fleshly lust, but by the overshadowing of the Most Holy Spirit. Such desire being utterly alien to Her, it is through prayer and spiritual readiness that She declared to the angel: "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord; be it unto Me according to thy word" (Lk. 1:38), and that She conceived and gave birth. So, in order to render the Virgin worthy of this sublime purpose, God marked this ever-virgin Daughter now praised by us, from before the ages, and from eternity, choosing Her from out of His elect.

Turn your attention then, to where this choice began. From the sons of Adam God chose the wondrous Seth, who showed himself a living heaven through his becoming behavior, and through the beauty of his virtues. That is why he was chosen, and from whom the Virgin would blossom as the divinely fitting chariot of God. She was needed to give birth and to summon the earth-born to heavenly sonship. For this reason also all the lineage of Seth were called "sons of God," because from this lineage a son of man would be born the Son of God. The name Seth signifies a rising or resurrection, or more specifically, it signifies the Lord, Who promises and gives immortal life to all who believe in Him.

And how precisely exact is this parallel! Seth was born of Eve, as she herself said, in place of Abel, whom Cain killed through jealousy (Gen. 4:25); and Christ, the Son of the Virgin, was born for us in place of Adam, whom the author of evil also killed through jealousy. But Seth did not resurrect Abel, since he was only a foretype of the resurrection. But our Lord Jesus Christ resurrected Adam, since He is the very Life and the Resurrection of the earth-born, for whose sake the descendents of Seth are granted divine adoption through hope, and are called the children of God. It was because of this hope that they were called sons of God, as is evident from the one who was first called so, the successor in the choice. This was Enos, the son of Seth, who as Moses wrote, first hoped to call on the Name of the Lord (Gen. 4:26).

In this manner, the choice of the future Mother of God, beginning with the very sons of Adam and proceeding through all the generations of time, through the Providence of God, passes to the Prophet-king David and the successors of his kingdom and lineage. When the chosen time had come, then from the house and posterity of David, Joachim and Anna are chosen by God. Though they were childless, they were by their virtuous life and good disposition the finest of all those descended from the line of David. And when in prayer they besought God to deliver them from their childlessness, and promised to dedicate their child to God from its infancy. By God Himself, the Mother of God was proclaimed and given to them as a child, so that from such virtuous parents the all-virtuous child would be raised. So in this manner, chastity joined with prayer came to fruition by producing the Mother of virginity, giving birth in the flesh to Him Who was born of God the Father before the ages.



Now, when Righteous Joachim and Anna saw that they had been granted their wish, and that the divine promise to them was realized in fact, then they on their part, as true lovers of God, hastened to fulfill their vow given to God as soon as the child had been weaned from milk. They have now led this truly sanctified child of God, now the Mother of God, this Virgin into the Temple of God. And She, being filled with Divine gifts even at such a tender age, ... She, rather than others, determined what was being done over Her. In Her manner She showed that She was not so much presented into the Temple, but that She Herself entered into the service of God of her own accord, as if she had wings, striving towards this sacred and divine love. She considered it desirable and fitting that she should enter into the Temple and dwell in the Holy of Holies.

Therefore, the High Priest, seeing that this child, more than anyone else, had divine grace within Her, wished to set Her within the Holy of Holies. He convinced everyone present to welcome this, since God had advanced it and approved it. Through His angel, God assisted the Virgin and sent Her mystical food, with which She was strengthened in nature, while in body She was brought to maturity and was made purer and more exalted than the angels, having the Heavenly spirits as servants. She was led into the Holy of Holies not just once, but was accepted by God to dwell there with Him during Her youth, so that through Her, the Heavenly Abodes might be opened and given for an eternal habitation to those who believe in Her miraculous birthgiving.

So it is, and this is why She, from the beginning of time, was chosen from among the chosen. She Who is manifest as the Holy of Holies, Who has a body even purer than the spirits purified by virtue, is capable of receiving ... the Hypostatic Word of the Unoriginate Father. Today the Ever-Virgin Mary, like a Treasure of God, is stored in the Holy of Holies, so that in due time, (as it later came to pass) She would serve for the enrichment of, and an ornament for, all the world. Therefore, Christ God also glorifies His Mother, both before birth, and also after birth.



We who understand the salvation begun for our sake through the Most Holy Virgin, give Her thanks and praise according to our ability. And truly, if the grateful woman (of whom the Gospel tells us), after hearing the saving words of the Lord, blessed and thanked His Mother, raising her voice above the din of the crowd and saying to Christ, "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the paps Thou hast sucked" (Lk. 11:27), then we who have the words of eternal life written out for us, and not only the words, but also the miracles and the Passion, and the raising of our nature from death, and its ascent from earth to Heaven, and the promise of immortal life and unending salvation, then how shall we not unceasingly hymn and bless the Mother of the Author of our Salvation and the Giver of Life, celebrating Her conception and birth, and now Her Entry into the Holy of Holies?

Now, brethren, let us remove ourselves from earthly to celestial things. Let us change our path from the flesh to the spirit. Let us change our desire from temporal things to those that endure. Let us scorn fleshly delights, which serve as allurements for the soul and soon pass away. Let us desire spiritual gifts, which remain undiminished. Let us turn our reason and our attention from earthly concerns and raise them to the inaccessible places of Heaven, to the Holy of Holies, where the Mother of God now resides.

Therefore, in such manner our songs and prayers to Her will gain entry, and thus through her mediation, we shall be heirs of the everlasting blessings to come, through the grace and love for mankind of Him Who was born of Her for our sake, our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory, honor and worship, together with His Unoriginate Father and His Coeternal and Life-Creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen."



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 death bed. 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 6/23, and the day of the translation of his incorrupt relics, August 13/30, 1724, to the St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra in St. Petersburg, where they rest to this day.



HYMN OF PRAISE
The Holy Great-martyr Catherine

(by St. Nikolai Velimirovich)

The wise Catherine, an earthly princess,
Became a martyr for Christ the Savior.
Foolish Maxentius offered her life:
If she would consent to become his wife!
The holy Catherine, pure as gold,
Replied to the emperor thus:
` ` My betrothed is the Risen Christ,
And I desire not the love of a corrupt man.
You seek my body: the rotten seeks corruption,
Even as the incorrupt spirit seeks immortality.
The physical covering must wither away,
The true man takes care for his immortal soul.
Do what you wish, and torture me-
Burn me in the fire, turn me on a wheel;
I cannot renounce my own soul,
Nor worship any but Christ as God.
Remember, O Emperor, soon you will die,
And worms will erupt from your corpse-
Worms will glorify you, worms will eat you,
A curse will accompany you, and a curse will meet you:
For you dare wage war against Christ, Who is mightier
than death.
You stand under the Rock, and He will crush you.''
Holy Catherine, Christ's virgin,
You despised the throne for eternal truth's sake;
And thus now reign in the Kingdom without end,
And sing with the angels, in the midst of sweet Paradise.



"The Holy Great Martyr Katherine was the daughter of Constus, the governor of Alexandria in Egypt, during the reign of the emperor Maximian (305-313). Living in the capital, Katherine received a most splendid education, having studied the works of the finest philosophers and teachers. Young men from the most worthy families of the empire sought the hand of the beautiful Katherine, but none of them was chosen. She declared to her parents that she would only enter into marriage with someone who surpassed her in reputation, wealth, beauty and wisdom.

Katherine's mother, a secret Christian, sent her for advice to her own spiritual father -- a saintly elder pursuing prayerful deeds in solitude in a cave not far from the city. Having listened to Katherine, the elder said that he knew of a youth, who surpassed her in everything, such that "His beauty was more radiant than the shining of the sun, His wisdom governed all creation, His riches were spread throughout all the world ". The image of the Christ produced in the soul of the holy maiden an ardent desire to see Him. In parting, the elder handed Katherine an icon of the Mother of God with the God-Child Jesus on Her arm and bid her to pray with faith to Mary to show her a vision of Her Son.

Katherine prayed all night and was able to see the Most Holy Virgin who told Her Divine Son to look upon the kneeling of Katherine before Them. But the Child turned His face away from her saying that He was not able to look at her because she was ugly, of shabby lineage, beggarly and mindless like every person -- not washed with the waters of holy Baptism and not sealed with the seal of the Holy Spirit. Katherine returned again to the elder deeply saddened. He lovingly received her, instructed her in the faith of Christ, admonished her to preserve her purity and integrity and to pray unceasingly; he then performed over her the sacrament of holy Baptism. And again Saint Katherine had a vision of the Most Holy Mother of God with Her Child. Now the Lord looked tenderly at her and gave her a ring -- a wondrous gift of the Heavenly Bridegroom.

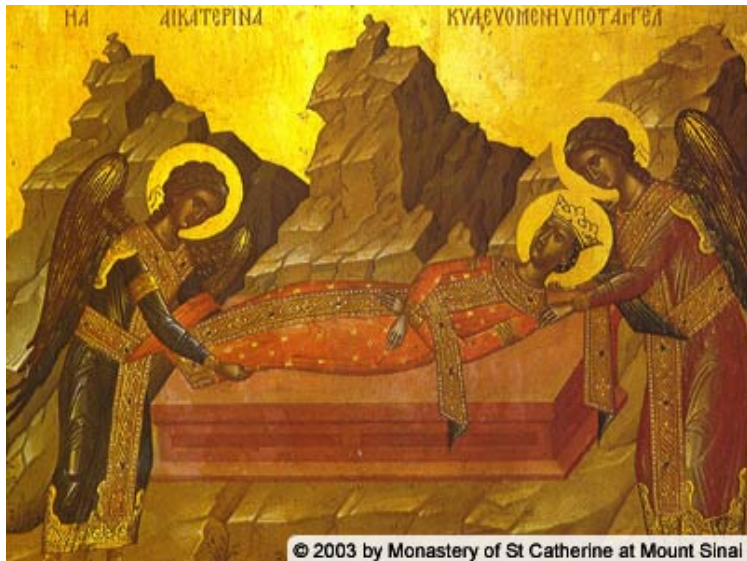
At this time the emperor Maximian was himself in Alexandria for a pagan feast day. Because of this, the feast was especially splendid and crowded. The cries of the sacrificial animals, the smoke and the smell of the sacrifices, the endless blazing of fires, and the bustling crowds at the arenas filled Alexandria. Human victims also were brought -- because they chose to die in the fire rather than deny Christ under torture. The Saint's love for the Christian martyrs and her fervent desire to lighten their fate impelled Katherine to go to the emperor-persecutor Maximian.

Introducing herself, the saint confessed her Christian faith and with wisdom denounced the errors of the pagans. The beauty of the maiden captivated the emperor. In order to convince her and show the superiority of pagan wisdom, the emperor gave orders to gather 50 of the most learned men of the empire, but the Saint got the better of the wise men, such that they themselves came to believe in Christ. Saint Katherine shielded them with the sign of the cross, and they bravely accepted death for Christ and were burnt by order of the emperor.

Maximian, no longer hoping to convince the saint, tried to entice her with the promise of riches and fame. Having received an angry refusal, the emperor gave orders to subject the saint to terrible tortures and then throw her in prison. The Empress Augusta, who had heard much about Katherine, wanted to see her. Having succeeded in convincing the military-commander Porphyry to accompany her with a detachment of soldiers, Augusta went to the prison. The strong spirit of Saint Katherine, whose face glowed with Divine grace, impressed the empress. The holy martyr explained the teachings of the Christians to the people and they believed and were converted to Christ.

On the following day they again brought her to the judgment court where, under the threat of being tortured on a wheel of spikes and nails, they urged that she recant from the Christian faith

and offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. The saint steadfastly confessed Christ and she herself approached the wheel; but an Angel smashed the sharp tools, which broke up into pieces that hit pagans who were passing by. Having beheld this wonder, the empress Augusta and the imperial courtier Porphyry with 200 soldiers confessed their faith in Christ in front of everyone, and they were beheaded. Maximian again tried to entice Saint Katherine, proposing marriage to her, and again he received a refusal. She confessed her fidelity to the Heavenly Bridegroom Christ, and with a prayer to Him she herself put her head on the block under the sword of the executioner and was beheaded." At her execution, milk flowed from her wounds instead of blood by the Grace of God."



"Following her martyrdom, angels bore her body to the peak of Mount Saint Catherine, where they rested until they were translated to the catholicon of the Holy Monastery of Sinai. Here they continue to emit a sweet fragrance, and many miracles are wrought to this day. The veneration of Saint Catherine spread throughout the West, especially after the translation of relics of Saint Catherine to Rouen by Symeon Pentaglosses, in the early eleventh century. The numerous pilgrims to the monastery from that time resulted

in the gradual change of name from the Holy Monastery of Sinai to that of Saint Catherine's Monastery."

(<http://www.sinaimonastery.com>)

"The marble chest containing the relics of Saint Catherine is located at the south side of the sanctuary in the catholicon of the holy monastery. It is the construction of Procopius the stonemason, who took nine years to complete the shrine in honor of Saint Catherine. This shrine replaced the earlier marble chest, which is preserved today in the monastery's treasury. Inside are to be found two precious reliquaries given by the Russian Empire for this purpose, the one enshrining the precious head of the martyr, and the other her left hand. The relics of Saint Catherine are brought out for the veneration of the faithful on special occasions, at which time each pilgrim is given a silver ring bearing the monogram of the saint, in honor of the ring that Saint Catherine received from Christ. These are preserved by pilgrims as a blessing from the saint."



Kursk Korennaya - "The Sign"

This icon was invented in the forest on the bank of the Tuskar River some 27 versts from the site of the city of Kursk devastated by Khan Batu. In 1295, a hunter stumbled upon an icon lying face down on the roots of a tree. He picked it up and saw a clear spring gushing from the ground, The

hunter told the people of the nearby town of Rylsk about his find. Soon the icon, which attracted a stream of pilgrims, began to work various miracles. Prince Vassily Shemyaka of Rylsk had the icon moved to his capital, but failed to come to meet it himself and on the same day he was struck with sudden blindness. Having realized that this was a punishment for his guilt, the Prince repented and went to pray before the icon. His prayers brought him a speedy recovery. The Prince then built a church dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin and installed the icon in it. The holy image, however, miraculously reappeared at the spot where it had been found and where a small chapel had been built in its honor. In 1383, the whole of that area was once again devastated by the Tatars, who set the chapel on fire and cut the icon in two. Later on, however,



the priest who used to conduct prayer services in the chapel found the splinters of the icon and joined them together. In 1597, Tsar Feodor Ioannovich ordered the icon to be brought to Moscow and, after having been adorned, the holy image was returned to the original spot where later the same year the Korennaya Hermitage was founded and a Church of the Icon of the Mother of God "The Life-Bearing Spring" began to be built. In the subsequent years the icon was more than once brought to Kursk. Putivl and other cities to be temporarily kept there. In 1612, the residents of Kursk founded a monastery of "The Sign" dedicated to the Kursk Root (Korennaya) Icon of the Mother of God as a token of their gratitude to the Most Holy Virgin for their deliverance from the Polish invaders, and the icon was permanently installed there. At present, the icon is in the United States. Feast days: September 8/21, November 27/December 10 and

the 9th Friday after Easter.

The Wonderworking Kursk Icon

The Kursk Root Icon of the Mother of God of the Sign dates from the 13th century, and is one of the most ancient icons of the Russian Church.

In the 13th century, during the dreadful period of the Tartar invasion of Russia, the devastated province of Kursk was emptied of people and its principal city, Kursk, became a wilderness. The residents of the city of Rylsk, which had been preserved from invasion, often journeyed to the abandoned site of Kursk to hunt. One of the hunters, going along the bank of the river to Skal, which was not very far from ruined Kursk, noticed an icon lying face down on the ground next to the root of a tree. The hunter picked it up and found that it was an icon of the Sign, like the famous one enshrined and venerated in the city of Novgorod. At this time, the icon's first miracle was worked, for no sooner had the hunter picked up the sacred image than an abundant spring of pure water began flowing from the ground. This took place on September 8th in the year 1295.

The hunter constructed a simple wooden chapel and placed the newly manifested image of the Mother of God in it. The residents of Rylsk began to visit the place of the manifestation of this holy object and the icon was glorified by miracles all the more. Prince Vasily Shemyaka of Rylsk ordered that the icon be brought to the city of Rylsk itself and this was done in a solemn

manner: The people of the city went forth to meet the icon of the Mother of God – but Shemyaka himself disdained to attend the festivities – and became blind. Repenting, he received healing, and moved by this miracle, Shemyaka constructed a church in the city of Rylsk in honor of the Nativity of the All-holy Theotokos. There the miraculous icon was enshrined on September 8th, the anniversary of its manifestation, appointed as the annual feast date.

But the icon was discovered to be missing from the cathedral in Rylsk – and was found at the place of its original appearance. The residents of Rylsk repeatedly brought it back, but each time it returned to its former place. Then, understanding that the Mother of God was well pleased for her image to dwell in the place of its discovery, they eventually left it there in peace. Innumerable pilgrimages streamed to the site and services of supplication were celebrated there by the priest Bogoliub who dwelt at the site of the wooden chapel and struggled there in asceticism.

In the year 1383, the province of Kursk was subjected to a new invasion of savage Tartars. They set fire to the chapel, but it refused to burn, even though they piled up fuel all around it, and so the superstitious barbarians fell upon the priest Bogoliub, accusing him of sorcery. The pious priest denounced their foolishness and pointed out to them the icon of the Theotokos. The malicious Tartars laid hold of the holy icon and cut it in two, casting the pieces to either side. The chapel then caught fire and the priest Bogoliub was carried off a prisoner.



In his captivity, the God-loving elder kept the Faith, placing his hope on the all-holy Mother of God, and this hope did not fail him. One day as he was guarding flocks and passing the time by singing prayers and doxologies in honor of the Theotokos, emissaries of the Tsar of Moscow passed by on the road.

They heard this chanting, arranged to ransom the priest from captivity, and Bogoliub returned to the former site of the chapel. There he found the pieces of the miraculous icon which the Tartars had cast away. He picked them up and straightway they came together, firmly joined though signs of the split remained. Learning of this miracle, the residents of Rylsk again attempted to transfer the icon to their city, but once more the miraculous image was found in its former place. A new chapel was then built on the original site of the icon's appearance and here it remained for about 200 years.

The city of Kursk was revived in the year 1597 at the command of Theodore Ivanovich of Moscow. This pious Tsar, who had heard of the miracles of the icon, expressed his desire to behold it, and in Moscow the icon was greeted with great solemnity. The Tsaritsa, Irene Theodorovna, adorned the holy icon with a precious riza. At the command of the Tsar, the icon was set in a silver-gilt frame upon which were depicted the Lord of Hosts and prophets holding scrolls in their hands. The icon was subsequently returned and, with the close cooperation of the Tsar, a monastery was founded on the site of the chapel. A church, dedicated to the Life-bearing Spring, was built above the same spring that had appeared when the icon was first revealed and

the monastery attached to it was called the Kursk Root Hermitage in honor of the manifestation of the icon at the root of the tree.

During an invasion of Crimean Tartars, the icon was transferred to the cathedral church of Kursk, and an exact copy was left at the Hermitage. Tsar Boris Godunov bestowed many precious gifts for the adornment of the icon and even the pretender, the false Dimitry, who desired to call attention to himself and to win the support of those who lived in the vicinity of Kursk, venerated this icon and placed it in the royal mansions where it remained until the year 1615.

While the icon was absent from the city of Kursk, the miraculous help of the Theotokos did not forsake that city: In 1612 the Poles laid siege to Kursk, but many of the citizens saw the Mother of God and two radiant monks above the city. Captured Poles related that they, too, had beheld a woman and two radiant men on the city walls, and that this woman made threatening gestures at those who were conducting the siege. The citizens then vowed to construct a monastery in honor of the all-holy Theotokos and to place the miraculous icon in it. The besiegers were quickly put to flight and in gratitude to their heavenly helper, the people of Kursk built a monastery in honor of the all-holy Theotokos of the Sign.



Every year on Friday of the ninth week after Pascha, the icon of the Sign was solemnly borne in procession from the Kursk Cathedral of the Sign to the place of its original manifestation at the Kursk Hermitage, where it remained until September 12. On September 13, it was again solemnly returned to the city of Kursk. This procession was instituted in the year 1618 in memory of the transfer of the icon from Moscow to Kursk and to commemorate its original appearance.

In the year 1812, the Kursk Civic Society sent to General Kutuzov a copy of the miraculous icon of Kursk, setting it in a silver-gilt frame. The commander expressed his gratitude to the citizens of Kursk and his belief that Kursk would remain free, thanks to the protection of the Queen of Heaven.

In March of 1898 a group of anarchists, desiring to undermine the faith of the people in the wonder-working power of the icon, decided to destroy it. They placed a bomb in the Cathedral of the Sign, and at two o'clock in the morning a horrendous explosion rent the air and all the walls of the monastery were shaken. The frightened monastic brethren rushed immediately to the cathedral, where they beheld a scene of horrible devastation. The force of the blast had shattered the gilded canopy above the icon. The heavy marble base, constructed of several massive steps, had been jolted out of position and split into several pieces. A huge metal candlestick which stood before the icon had been blown to the opposite side of the cathedral. A door of cast iron located near the icon n'ad been torn from its hinges and cast outside, where it smashed against a wall and caused a deep crack. All the windows in the cathedral and even those in the dome above were shattered. Amid the general devastation, the holy icon remained intact and even the glass

within the frame remained whole. Thinking to destroy the icon, the anarchists had, on the contrary, become the cause of its greater glorification.



During the Bolshevik revolution, the icon was removed from the Cathedral of the Sign on April 12, 1918. Search was made for the icon hut without result. The holy object was discovered under the following circumstances: Not far from the monastery there lived a poor girl and her mother who for three days had not had anything to eat. At that time Kursk was controlled by the Bolshevik regime. On May 3, the girl, a seamstress, went off to the marketplace in search of bread. Returning home at about one o'clock in the morning, she passed by a well which, according to tradition, had been dug by St. Theodosius of the Caves. There, on the edge of the well, she beheld a package wrapped in a sack, and when she opened it, in the package she found the sacred icon, which apparently had been left there by those who had stolen it.

At the end of October 1919, when the White Russian Army was evacuating the city of Kursk, twelve monks of the monastery transferred the icon to the city of Belgorod, from which it was again transferred — first to Taganrog and Ekaterinodar, and then to Novorossiisk. During the evacuation, with the permission of Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) who was then President of the Higher Ecclesiastical Administration in Southern Russia, the icon was taken aboard the steamship St. Nicholas by Bishop Theophan of Kursk on March 1, 1920, and was transported to the city of Thessaloniki. On April 3, Bishop Theophan took the icon to the city of Pec, the ancient capital of Serbia. For four months the icon remained in Pec, and in September, at the request of Baron Wrangel, it was returned again to the Crimea. A year after departing from the city of Kursk, on October 29, 1920, the holy image again left its native land during the evacuation of the White Army and those Russian people who refused to submit to the Soviet regime. After arriving again in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, with the blessing of Patriarch Dimitry, the holy icon remained with Bishop Theophan in the Serbian monastery of Yazak on Frushkaya Mountain. From the end of 1927, the icon was to be found in the Russian church of the Holy Trinity in the city of Belgrade.

With the blessing of the Synod of Bishops, Bishop Theophan bore the icon around to various places where the scattered Russians dwelt. During World War II, when Belgrade was subjected to bombardment and other tribulations associated with the war, the miraculous icon became a rampart of hope for all that approached it with sincere prayer.

The steadfast companion of those Russian people who did not accept the satanic authority, this great and ancient holy object, which remained in Moscow during the dreadful turmoil of the 17th century, was removed from Yugoslavia in the autumn of 1944 together with those who again fled the godless regime.

After the Second World War the Icon was taken to Germany, where it remained for five years, comforting the Orthodox flock all over Western Europe, wearied by the tribulations of the War. Then it was taken to America. Initially it was kept at a hermitage, but later it was moved to the purpose-built Orthodox Cathedral of the Mother of God of the Sign in New York City. Many believe that if this Cathedral and the area around it were spared in the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, it was because of the presence of the Icon there.

Today the Icon is taken from Orthodox parish to parish all over the world and its fame is international. It is known for countless miracles, healings and for assistance in misfortunes. It was before this icon that the bedridden St. Seraphim of Sarov received complete healing. St. John the Wonderworker of Shanghai and San Francisco passed away before this same icon. How we should venerate this great and remarkable icon! It is a wellspring of the miraculous grace of God, granted willingly at the intercessions of His most-pure Mother, who is the Mother of all faithful Christians. For seven centuries faithful people have prayed before the miraculous Kursk Root Icon of the Mother of God and received help according to their faith.



The Holy Apostle Andrew the First-called



Andrew, the son of Jonah and brother of Peter, was born in Bethsaida and was a fisherman by trade. At first he was a disciple of St. John the Baptist, but when St. John pointed to the Lord Jesus, saying, Behold the Lamb of God! (John 1:36), Andrew left his first teacher and followed Christ. Then, Andrew brought his brother Peter to the Lord. Following the descent of the Holy Spirit, it fell by lot to the first apostle of Christ, St. Andrew, to preach the Gospel in Byzantium and Thrace, then in the lands along the Danube and in Russia around the Black Sea, and finally in Epirus, Greece and the Peloponnese, where he suffered. In Byzantium, he appointed St. Stachys as its first bishop; in Kiev, he planted a Cross on a high place and prophesied a bright Christian future for the Russian people; throughout Thrace, Epirus, Greece and the Peloponnese, he converted multitudes of people to the Faith and ordained bishops and priests for them. In the city of Patras, he performed many miracles in the name of Christ, and won many over to the Lord. Among the new faithful were the brother and wife of the Proconsul Aegeates. Angered at this, Aegeates subjected St. Andrew to torture and then crucified him. While the apostle of Christ was still alive on the cross, he gave beneficial instructions to the Christians who had gathered around. The people wanted to take him down from the cross but he refused to let them. Then the apostle prayed to God and an extraordinary light encompassed him. This brilliant illumination lasted for half an hour, and when it disappeared, the apostle gave up his holy soul to God. Thus, the First-called Apostle, the first of the Twelve Great Apostles to know the

Lord and follow Him, finished his earthly course. St. Andrew suffered for his Lord in the year 62. His relics were taken to Constantinople; his head was later taken to Rome, and one hand was taken to Moscow."

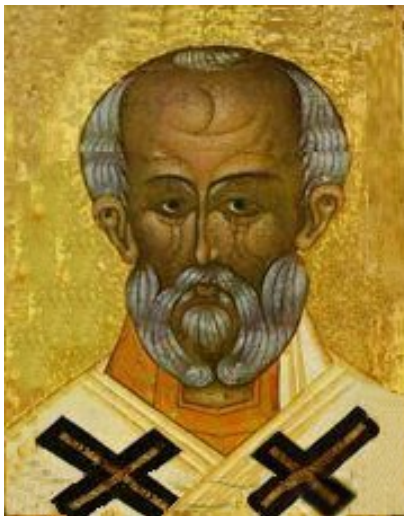
(from the Prologue of Ochrid by St. Nikolai Velimirovich)

"In Sinope [Pontos, St. Andrew] prayed for the imprisoned Matthias, his chains fell from him, and the cell door opened. The people beat Andrew, breaking his teeth and cutting his fingers, and left him for dead in a dung heap. Jesus appeared to him and healed him, telling him to be of good cheer. When the people saw him the next day, they were amazed and believed. In Patras, Andrew healed the wife of the proconsul Aegeates of an incurable disease of the eyes. He healed a paralytic, lepers, and all manner of disease. Aegeates heard all of this and arrested Andrew. He tried to compel him through beatings to sacrifice to idols and so restore idolatry in his country. When Andrew refused, he was tied to a cross upside down so that he would live longer and suffer more. Twenty thousand of the faithful stood by and mourned. Even then, Andrew taught them and exhorted them to endure temporary sufferings for the kingdom of heaven. Out of fear of the people, Aegeates came to remove Andrew from the cross. Andrew, however, said that Aegeates could still become a Christian, but that he had already seen Jesus and he would not allow himself to be removed from the cross. Suddenly, a heavenly light illumined Andrew for about half an hour, and then he gave up his spirit."

(Excerpt from the 2005 Daily Lives, Miracles, and Wisdom of the Saints by Tom and Georgia Mitrakos)



St. Nicholas Archbishop of Myra the Wonderworker



Protector of seafarers and ports, protector of widows, children, orphans, virgins, families, travel (especially by sea), protector against evil thoughts, for help in distress or poverty.

Our father among the saints Nicholas of Myra, Wonder-worker, was the archbishop of Myra in southern Asia Minor in the fourth century. While widely honored and venerated, not only in the Orthodox Church, but throughout most Christian groups, little is known historically of the life of Nicholas. He is known to have been archbishop of Myra and he may have participated in the Council of Nicea in 325. In addition to being honored as the patron saint of many countries, notably Greece and Russia, and of cities, he is the patron of many occupational groups, most notably of sea-farers.

Life and tradition

By tradition, Nicholas born in the province of Lycia in the southern part of Asia Minor in the city of Patara to well-to-do parents. The date of his birth is not known. Having inherited his parents' estate, he became known for his generous gifts to those in need. As a youth, he made pilgrimages to Palestine and Egypt. He was subsequently consecrated Archbishop of Myra as the fourth century began. He was imprisoned during the persecutions of Diocletian and released by

Constantine after his ascension to emperor. Nicholas was noted for his defense of Orthodoxy against the Arians. He is reputed to have been present at the Council of Nicea, but his name does not appear among any documents from that era. He died in Myra on December 6 in a year uncertain, but between 342 and 352.

St Nicholas the Wonderworker Many of the details of his life that we have appeared during medieval times. St. Methodius, Patriarch of Constantinople, in the middle of the ninth century produced a life of Nicholas in which he noted that the life of Nicholas was unknown to most of the Christians of the time, thus indicating his composition was probably based mainly on legend. Methodius noted that Nicholas was raised well by pious and well-to-do parents and related how Nicholas contributed from his inheritance the dowry for three daughters of a citizen of Patara who had lost all his money.

His feast was being celebrated by the time of St. Justinian two centuries after his death. After Methodius' life of Nicholas became available, Nicholas was acclaimed and honored throughout Europe and especially in Italy. When Myra was captured by the Saracens in 1034, many Italian cities planned to "rescue" his relics. In 1087, forces from Bari, Italy, attacked Myra and carried away his relics from the lawful Greek guardians in Myra to Bari where they were enshrined in a new church. His fame increased. The story of his rescue of sailors in the Aegean Sea during his lifetime established him as the patron of mariners. His popularity in Russia rose to the point that almost all churches had some sort of shrine honoring St. Nicholas.

Secular fame

In time his fame in northern Europe as a saintly bishop began changing to that of a giver of gifts to children, usually done on December 6. As immigrants from the Germanic and Nordic lands settled in the United States the image of St. Nicholas, or "Sinterklaas," as he is known among the Dutch, slowly changed to that of "Santa Claus" with little tie to the spirituality of Christianity.

Orthodoxwiki



Our Father among the Saints Nicholas the Wonderworker Archbishop of Myra in Lycia

Troparion Tone 4

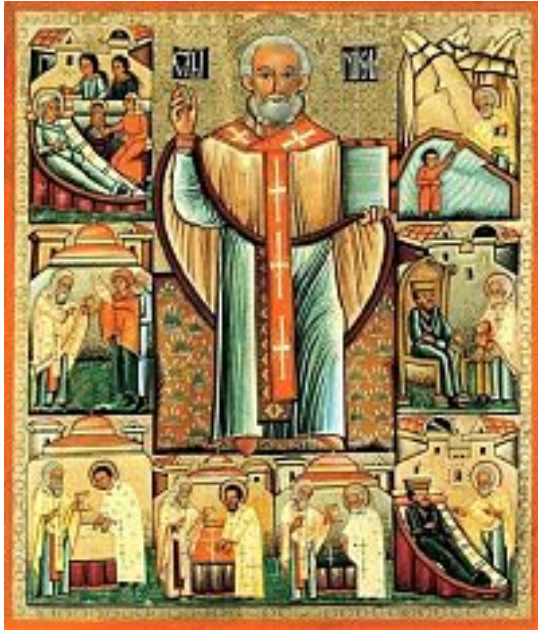
The truth of things revealed thee to thy flock as a rule of faith,/ a model of meekness, and a teacher of temperance./ Therefore thou hast won the heights by humility,/ riches by poverty./ Holy Father Nicholas, intercede with Christ our God that our souls may be saved.

Kontakion Tone 3

Thou wast a faithful minister of God in Myra,/ O Saint Nicholas./ For having fulfilled the Gospel of Christ,/ thou didst die for the people and save the innocent./ Therefore thou wast sanctified as a great initiator of the grace of God.

This glorious saint, celebrated even today throughout the entire world, was the only son of his eminent and wealthy parents, Theophanes and Nona, citizens of the city of Patara in Lycia. Since

he was the only son bestowed on them by God, the parents returned the gift to God by dedicating their son to Him. St. Nicholas learned of the spiritual life from his uncle Nicholas, Bishop of Patara, and was tonsured a monk in the Monastery of New Zion founded by his uncle. Following the death of his parents, Nicholas distributed all his inherited goods to the poor, not keeping anything for himself. As a priest in Patara, he was known for his charity, even though he carefully concealed his charitable works, fulfilling the words of the Lord: Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth (Matthew 6:3). When he gave himself over to solitude and silence, thinking to live that way until his death, a voice from on high came to him: "Nicholas, for your ascetic labor, work among the people, if thou desirest to be crowned by Me."



Immediately after that, by God's wondrous providence, he was chosen archbishop of the city of Myra in Lycia. Merciful, wise and fearless, Nicholas was a true shepherd to his flock. During the persecution of Christians under Diocletian and Maximian, he was cast into prison, but even there he instructed the people in the Law of God. He was present at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea [325] and, out of great zeal for the truth, struck the heretic Arius with his hand. For this act he was removed from the Council and from his archiepiscopal duties, until the Lord Christ Himself and the Most-holy Theotokos appeared to several of the chief hierarchs and revealed their approval of Nicholas. A defender of God's truth, this wonderful saint was ever bold as a defender of justice among the people. On two occasions, he saved three men from an undeserved sentence of death. Merciful,

truthful, and a lover of justice, he walked among the people as an angel of God. Even during his lifetime, the people considered him a saint and invoked his aid in difficulties and in distress. He appeared both in dreams and in person to those who called upon him, and he helped them easily and speedily, whether close at hand or far away. A light shone from his face as it did from the face of Moses, and he, by his presence alone, brought comfort, peace and good will among men. In old age he became ill for a short time and entered into the rest of the Lord, after a life full of labor and very fruitful toil, to rejoice eternally in the Kingdom of Heaven, continuing to help the faithful on earth by his miracles and to glorify his God. He entered into rest on December 6, 343.

St. Nicholas feeds the Athonite Fathers during the Fascist Occupation

"What are you doing?" the unknown priest asked. "Is this all the wheat you have? No more?"

The fathers at the Athonite monastery replied that this was all they had indeed. It was December, and they were unable to buy any more because of the Fascist Occupation. It should be noted that 10,000 okas' weight of wheat was needed a year for the monastery's survival, and that they could not even buy one oka of it.

The unknown priest took a few wheat kernels in his hand, blessed them and threw them on top of the rest of the wheat. He blessed the four points of the horizon, the monastery, and the sea, and then was about to leave.

"Where do you come from?" the fathers asked him. "Stay to have some bread and olives."

"I come from very far away -- from Myra in Lycia," he said and departed.

One of the brothers had in the meantime gone for some food to offer the visitor, but the elder, who turned out to be the monastery's protector, had vanished. The remaining 150 okas of blessed wheat lasted for half a year, that is, from the month of December when St. Nicholas appeared to them, until the following July when the new crop came in."

(From An Athonite Gerontikon; taken from: <http://www.orthodox.net/stnicholas/miracle-nicholas-athos.html>)



The Funeral Hymns of St. John of Damascus

Some of the most beautiful hymns of the funeral service were written by St. John of Damascus, who celebrates December 17th. The story behind them, and the texts themselves are very moving:



St. John was once a powerful and wise member of the royal court. He however abandoned all this and became a monk. "Only once did John disobey the instructions that were his rule of life in the monastery. A fellow monk had lost his brother and could not be consoled. Knowing of John's ability to compose music and poetry, he begged him to write a funeral hymn for his dead brother. Because his elder had left the monastery for a few days, John refused, for he had agreed to do nothing without the elder's direction and consent. Finally, however, he felt so sorry for the bereaved monk that he consented, and wrote one of his most beautiful hymns--which has become part of the Orthodox funeral service.

The monk was very moved by the lovely hymn and thanked John for helping him in his grief. But when the elder returned and heard of John's deed, he wanted nothing more to do with him for he had disobeyed his rule. John begged the elder to forgive him, but to no avail. The other monks also petitioned the older monk to take him back, even if it meant giving John a penance. The elder finally relented. He gave him the worst job in the monastery, and also forbid him to write any more hymns. John accepted gratefully and willingly carried out all his duties.

One night the elder had a vision. The mother of God appeared to him in a dream and said: "Why have you sealed the spring of fresh water for which the whole world is thirsty? Let it pour freely and comfort those in need. Let John praise God through his songs." The elder then realized that he had dealt wrongly with John and hurried to him, asking forgiveness for his sternness and bluntness. He knelt and bowed low before John to beg his pardon. The talent which had been given to John could now be used to the glory of God."

Tone 1

Where is the pleasure in life which is unmixed with sorrow? Where the glory which on earth has stood firm and unchanged? All things are weaker than shadow, all more illusive than dreams; comes one fell stroke, and Death in turn, prevails over all these vanities. Wherefore in the Light, O Christ, of Your countenance, the sweetness of Your beauty, to him (her) whom You have chosen grant repose, for You are the Friend of Mankind.

Tone 2

Like a blossom that wastes away, and like a dream that passes and is gone, so is every mortal into dust resolved; but again, when the trumpet sounds its call, as though at a quaking of the earth, all the dead shall arise and go forth to meet You, O Christ our God: on that day, O Lord, for him (her) whom You have withdrawn from among us appoint a place in the tentings of Your Saints; yea, for the spirit of Your servant, O Christ.



Another in Tone 2

Alas! What an agony the soul endures when from the body it is parting; how many are her tears for weeping, but there is none that will show compassion: unto the angels she turns with downcast eyes; useless are her supplications; and unto men she extends her imploring hands, but finds none to bring her rescue. Thus, my beloved brethren, let us all ponder well how brief is the span of our life; and peaceful rest for him (her) that now is gone, let us ask of Christ, and also His abundant mercy for our souls.

Tone 3

Vanity are all the works and quests of man, and they have no being after death has come; our wealth is with us no longer. How can our glory go with us? For when death has come all these things are vanished clean away. Wherefore to Christ the Immortal King let us cry, "To him (her) that has departed grant repose where a home is prepared for all those whose hearts You have filled with gladness."

Tone 4

Terror truly past compare is by the mystery of death inspired; now the soul and the body part, disjoined by resistless might, and their concord is broken; and the bond of nature which made them live and grow as one, now by the edict of God is rest in twain. Wherefore now we implore Your aid grant that Your servant now gone to rest where the just that are Yours abide, Life-bestower and Friend of Mankind.

Tone 4

Where is now our affection for earthly things? Where is now the alluring pomp of transient questing? Where is now our gold, and our silver? Where is now the surging crowd of domestics, and their busy cries? All is dust, all is ashes, all is shadow. Wherefore draw near that we may cry to our immortal King, "Lord, Your everlasting blessings vouchsafe unto him (her) that now has gone away. bringing him (her) to repose in that blessedness which never grows old."

Tone 5

I Called to mind the Prophet who shouted, "I am but earth and ash." And once again I looked with attention on the tombs, and I saw the bones therein which of flesh were naked; and I said, "Which indeed is he that is king? Or which is soldier? Which is the wealthy, which the needy?"

Which the righteous, or which the sinner?" But to Your servant, O Lord, grant that with the righteous he (she) may repose.

Tone 6

My beginning and foundation was the form; bestowing Word of Your commandment; for it pleased You to make me by compounding visible and invisible nature into a living thing. out of earth was my body formed and made, but a soul You gave me by the Divine and Life-creating In; breathing. Wherefore, O Christ, to Your servant in the land of the living, in the courts of the righteous, do You grant repose.



Tone 7

Bring to his (her) rest, O our Savior, You giver of life, our brother (sister) whom You have withdrawn from this transient world, for he (she) lifts up his (her) voice to cry: "Glory to You."

Another in Tone 7

When in Your own image and likeness You in the beginning did create and fashion man, You gave him a home in Paradise, and made him the chief of your creation. But by the devil's envy, alas, beguiled to eat the fruit forbidden, transgressor then of Your commandments he became; wherefore back to earth, from which he first was taken, You did sentence him to return again, O Lord, and to pray You to give him rest.

Weep, and with tears lament when with understanding I think on death, and see how in the graves there sleeps the beauty which once for us was fashioned in the image of God, but now is shapeless, ignoble, and bare of all the graces. O how strange a

thing; what is this mystery which concerns us humans? Why were we given up to decay? And why to death united in wedlock? Truly, as it is written, these things come to pass by ordinance of God, Who to him (her) now gone gives rest

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

The death which You have endured, O Lord, is become the harbinger of deathlessness; if You had not been laid in Your tomb, then would not the gates of Paradise have been opened; wherefore to him (her) now gone from us give rest, for You are the Friend of Mankind.

Both now and ever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Virgin chaste and holy, Gateway of the Word, Mother of our God, make supplication that his (her) soul find mercy.



Description of Conception of the Theotokos



According to the ancient tradition of the Church, since Saint Anna, the Ancestor of God, was barren, she and her husband Joachim remained without children until old age. Therefore, sorrowing over their childlessness, they besought God with a promise that, if He were to grant them the fruit of the

womb, they would offer their offspring to Him as a gift. And God, hearkening to their supplication, informed them through an Angel concerning the birth of the Virgin. And thus, through God's promise, Anna conceived according to the laws of nature, and was deemed worthy to become the mother of the Mother of our Lord.

Elder Paisios on Sts. Joachim and Anna

"-Elder, tell us about St. Joachim and St. Anna, the Ancestors of God. At one point you started to tell us something.

-From a young age I had great reverence towards the Ancestors of God. Indeed, I had said to someone that, when they make me a monk, I would want them to give me the name Joachim. How much I am indebted to them! Sts. Joachim and Anna are the most dispassionate (in other words without corrupting passions) couple which ever existed. They did not have any carnal attitude.



This is how God made man and this is how he wanted men to be born, dispassionately. But after the fall passion entered the relationship between man and woman. As soon as a dispassionate couple was found, as God created man and as he wished men to be born, the Panagia was born, this pure creation, and then Christ became incarnate. My thoughts tell me that Christ would have descended earlier to earth, if there were a pure pair, such as were Sts. Joachim and Anna.

The Roman Catholics fall into error and believe, supposedly from piety, that Panagia was born without original sin. While Panagia was not free from original sin, she gave birth however as God wished to be born to men after creation. She was all-pure(1), because Her conception occurred without pleasure. The Holy Ancestors of God, after fervent prayer to God to grant them a child, conceived not by sexual lust, but by obedience to God. This fact I had experienced on Sinai. (2)

(1) The Theotokos was born according to a natural manner and not virginally. "She was all-pure", because as St. John of Damascus writes in his homily "On the Birth of our Most-Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary", she was conceived "chastely" but increased with her struggle the holiness given to her from her parents, warding off all unnecessary and soul-endangering thoughts before experiencing them."

(2) The Elder lived in asceticism on Sinai, at Sts. Episteme and Galaction, from 1962 to 1964. This occurrence he did not reveal to us."

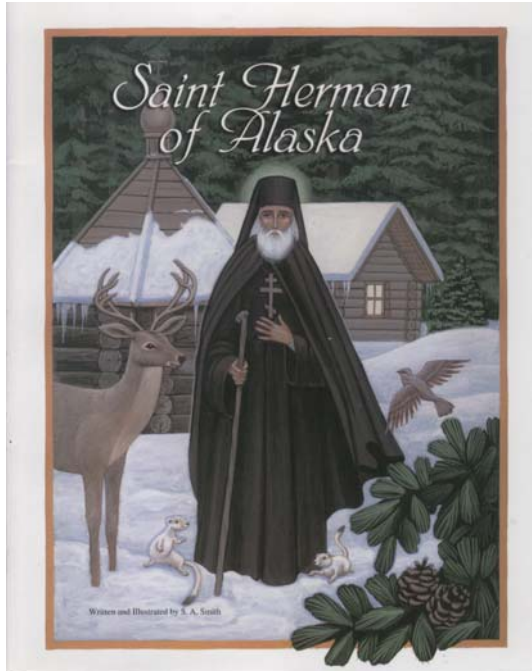
(Source: Elder Paisios the Athonite, Book IV: Family Life, Holy Hesychasterion of "St. John the Evangelist the Theologian", Souroti, Thessaloniki 2007; amateur translation of Greek text



**A compilation of Saint Herman's teachings on spiritual life
drawn from his letters and conversations**

The Way of a Christian

Without exalting myself to the rank of teacher, nonetheless, fulfilling my duty and obligation as an obedient servant for the benefit of my neighbor, I will speak my mind, founded on the commandments of Holy Scripture, to those who thirst and seek for their eternal heavenly homeland.



A true Christian is made by faith and love of Christ. Our sins do not in the least hinder our Christianity, according to the word of the Savior Himself. He said: I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; there is more joy in heaven over one who repents than over ninety and nine just ones. Likewise concerning the sinful woman who touched His feet, He said to the Pharisee Simon: to one who has love, a great debt is forgiven, but from one who has no love, even a small debt will be demanded. From these judgements a Christian should bring himself to hope and joy, and not in the least accept the torment of despair. Here one needs the shield of faith.

Sin, to one who loves God, is nothing other than an arrow from the enemy in battle. The true Christian is a warrior fighting his way through the regiments of the unseen enemy to his heavenly homeland. According to the word of the Apostle, our homeland is in heaven; and about the warrior he says: we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph.6: 12)].

The vain desires of this world separate us from our homeland; love of them and habit clothe our soul as if in a hideous garment. This is called by the Apostles the outward man. We, traveling on the journey of this life and calling on God to help us, ought to be divesting ourselves of this hideous garment and clothing ourselves in new desires, in a new love of the age to come, and thereby to receive knowledge of how near or how far we are from our heavenly homeland. But it is not possible to do this quickly; rather one must follow the example of sick people, who, wishing the desired health, do not leave off seeking means to cure themselves.

(From a Letter of June 20, 1820)

Love of God

Once the Elder was invited on board a frigate that had come from St. Petersburg. The captain of the frigate was a man quite learned, highly educated; he had been sent to America by Imperial command to inspect all the colonies. With the captain were some 25 officers, likewise educated men. In this company there sat a desert-dwelling monk of small stature, in an old garment, who by his wise conversation brought all his listeners to such a state that they did not know how to answer him. The captain himself related: "We were speechless fools before him!"

Father Herman gave them all one common question: "What do you, gentlemen, love above all, and what would each of you wish for his happiness?" Diverse answers followed. One desired wealth, one glory, one a beautiful wife, one a fine ship which he should command, and so on in this fashion. "Is it not true," said Father Herman at this, "that all your various desires can be reduced to one - that each of you desires that which, in his understanding, he considers best and most worthy of love?" "Yes, it is so," they all replied. "Well, then, tell me," he continued, "can there be anything better, higher above everything, more surpassing everything and in general more worthy of love, than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who created us, perfectly adorned us, gave life to all, supports all, nourishes and loves all, who Himself is love and more excellent than all men? Should not a person then love God high above all and desire and seek Him more than all else?" All began to say: "Well, yes! That is understood! That speaks for itself!"

"And do you love God?" the Elder then asked. All replied: "Of course, we love God. How can one not love God?" "And I, sinful one, for more than forty years have been striving to love God, and cannot say that I perfectly love Him," answered Father Herman; then he began to show how a person should love God. "If we love someone," he said, "we always think of him, strive to please him, day and night our heart is occupied with this subject. Is it thus that you, gentlemen, love God? Do you often turn to Him, do you always think of Him, do you always pray to Him, and fulfill His holy commandments?" It had to be acknowledged that they did not! "For our good, for our happiness," concluded the Elder, "at least let us make a promise to ourselves, that from this day, from this hour, from this very moment we shall strive to love God above all, and fulfill His holy will!" Behold what an intelligent, superb conversation Father Herman conducted in society; without doubt this conversation must have imprinted itself on the hearts of his listeners for their whole life!

(Yanovsky, in Life of Monk Herman of Valaam, 1868)

The Providence of God



A terrible accident has a power to awaken us to the realization of the existence of various calamities and dangers surrounding us, from which the Providence of God preserves us. At the same time it convincingly persuades us to acknowledge our own infirmity and weakness and to seek the Father's protection and His most powerful defense, which affirms us in the Wisdom and the Word of God, which came down from above by the will of the Heavenly Father under a curtain of flesh like

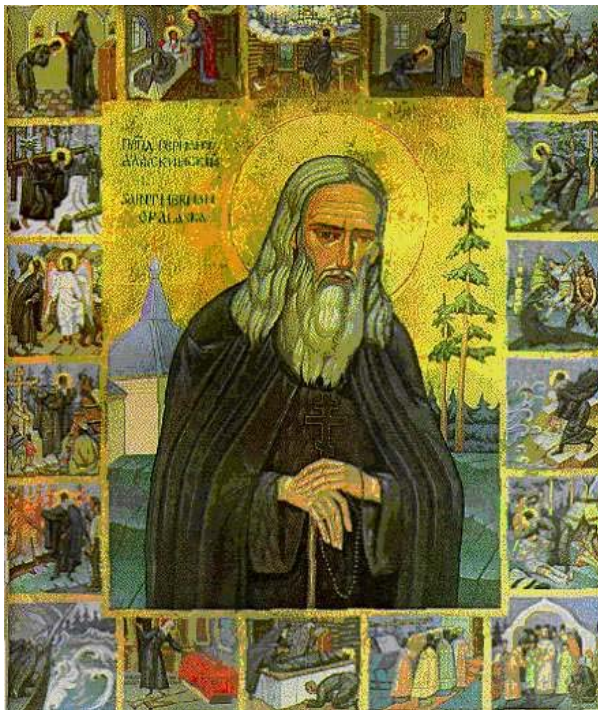
ours, woven by the Divine Might from the Immaculate Virgin, for our salvation. He became man and taught us to pray that we be not led into temptation. This reminds us from what Father we have our existence, and this in turn should make us seek our heavenly Fatherland and our eternal inheritance.

(From a Letter to Baranoff, 1809)

Spiritual Power

I was thirty years old when I met Father Herman. Here it should be said that I was brought up in the naval corps, knew many sciences and read much, but unfortunately, of the science of sciences, that is God's Law, I scarcely understood the surface, and that theoretically, without applying it to life, and I was only in name a Christian, while in soul and in deed I was a freethinker, a deist, as are nearly all who are brought up in the military corps and in public institutions. How unfortunate that no attention is given this: that God's Law is everywhere taught superficially, even in the seminaries; yes, and even from the theological academies there come out students, even Masters, who are very learned, but do not have an active faith in their heart, and thus do not live in a Christian way.

All the more did I fail to recognize the godliness and sanctity of our religion, in that I had read many atheist writings of Voltaire and other philosophers of the 18th century. Father Herman immediately noticed this and wished to convert me. But this was not easy! I had to be convinced, to be shown the sanctity of our religion; and, therefore, much time, knowledge, and the ability to speak well and convincingly was required.



To my great amazement, the simple, uneducated monk, Father Herman, being inspired by grace, spoke and argued so wisely, powerfully, and convincingly that, it seems to me, no kind of learnedness and earthly wisdom could withstand his words. In actual fact Father Herman had a great innate intelligence and sound thinking, had read many spiritual patristic books; and most important, he had the grace of God! But since in a short winter's day I had no time at all to devote myself to him, he therefore came to me every day for evening tea, and sometimes also for dinner, and we conversed with him until midnight, and sometimes after; he never stayed the night. Neither rain nor snow nor storm kept the zealous Elder from visiting me and returning the half mile home alone at midnight! He came to me regularly every day in an old ryassa, without a coat; I warmed him with tea and I conversed with him without ceasing: on God's

Law, on eternity, on the salvation of the soul, on Christian life, and other things. A sweet discourse flowed from his mouth in an unceasing, entralling torrent . . . !

Then at midnight, or after, the Elder went home alone with his staff in every kind of storm and cold weather; no one accompanied him on the slippery rocky path; but angels accompanied him and supported him: "For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways" (Ps. 90:11). And Christian love warmed him, with which he was penetrated for the salvation of his neighbor.

By such constant conversations and by the prayers of the holy Elder the Lord completely converted me to the true path, and I became a real Christian. For all this I am obliged to Father Herman. He is my true benefactor.

(Letter of Yanovsky, November 22, 1865)

Converser with Angels

At the end of the 1930's and the beginning of the 1940's, when the Russian Orthodox Church in America was under the Synod Abroad, I spent more than three years as a pastor in Alaska, where right and left I heard a great number of stories about Father Herman, the Wonderworker of Alaska. People told of his ascetic life, of his miracles, many cases of miraculous help from the water of his spring, from placing earth from his grave on diseased places, cases of sight restored to the blind, of the healing of every kind of cripple, and so on. Of course, one doesn't remember everything. It was a long time ago, and for some reason I didn't write anything down then. I remember very well that a great deal was said. I myself spoke with those who had received miraculous help by the prayers of God's saint.



While I was serving in Kodiak as a priest, the Aleuts there also told me much about Father Herman and of this the following two incidents stand out sharply in my mind; as I recall, I've never come across them anywhere in print, but they seem nonetheless quite authentic.

The Aleuts related that when Father Herman was still alive and lived on Spruce Island, the local inhabitants used to go to the Elder for some reason or other. And more than once it happened thus: They approached the chapel where he celebrated divine services, and they heard superb choral singing, a multitude of voices singing. They wondered where the people had come from. And all this time the singing was clearly audible, and such harmonious, sweet singing . . . They opened the door into the little chapel, and there Father Herman stood alone reading, chanting half aloud, celebrating the

Lord's service. And of course he was alone and there was no one there with him. Father Herman was not a priest, and he could only read and sing as on the cliros. And such a thing was noticed more than once. It was angels of God who sang praises to the Lord with him. The biography of Father Herman records the following incident. The Elder was asked: "How do you live alone in the forest, Father Herman? Don't you become bored?" He replied: "No! I am not alone there! God is there, as God is everywhere. Holy Angels are there. How can one become bored with

them? With whom is it better and more pleasant to converse, with men or with Angels? With Angels, of course!"

Archpriest Prokopy Povarnitsyn

A Miraculous Feast

He answered and said unto them, "*Give ye them to eat*"... *And they all ate and were filled* (Mark 6:37,42).

The Aleuts told me also the following incident, which took place on Spruce Island not long before Father Herman's death. Two American natives came to the Elder on the island, either hunters or fishermen. In any case, they came to look at the Elder, because much was said about him even during his lifetime. They were very hungry and, having greeted the Elder, asked him to feed them. The Elder readily agreed, but told them that they would have to wait a little, to which they agreed. Father Herman went to the little canal not far from his cell, which flowed into the creek, and that into the ocean. The Elder went down to the water and caught a little fish with his hands. He brought it to his cell and began to prepare it. The natives, seeing that one such little fish would hardly satisfy their hunger, called the Elder's attention to this. But the Elder only replied that they should not worry. And what happened? When the meal was ready and the Elder served it to them, he not only fed them until they were full, but there was a great deal left over from this little fish. Astonished and miraculously fed, they left and told many people of this. This story came down to me.

Everything set down here I personally, being three years in Alaska, heard from the local Aleut inhabitants.

Archpriest Prokopy Povarnitsyn



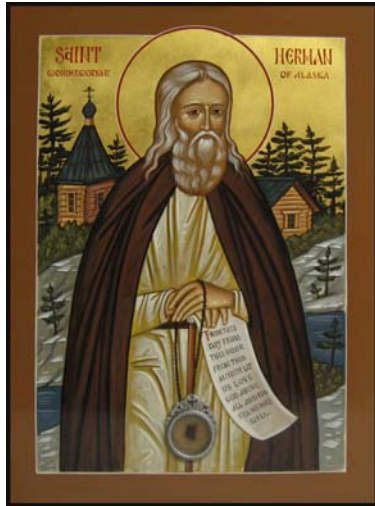
St. Herman of Alaska
The first "American" saint
1756 - 1837

St. Herman was born in the town of Serpukhov in the Moscow Diocese around 1756. At the age of 16, he entered the monastic life at the Trinity-St. Sergius Hermitage near St. Petersburg. While here he developed a severe throat infection from which he nearly died. After fervent prayer before an ikon of the Theotokos, he fell into a deep sleep. During this sleep, He dreamed that he was healed by the Virgin and upon waking, he had completely recovered. A few years later he moved to the Valaam Monastery on Lake Ladoga.

While at Valaam, he was under the spiritual guidance of the Elder Nazary who had played a significant role in the revitalization of Spiritual life in Russia after the decline of spirituality which resulted from the interference in Church life on the part of Peter the great and Catherine the great. At

this time Gregory Shelikov, head of the Golikov-Shelikov Company - licensed to exploit the resources of Alaska - visited Valaam and requested monks to work in a new Alaskan mission. Father Herman was among the eight monks selected.

The monks arrived on Kodiak Island on September 24, 1794, and immediately set out on the task of educating and converting the natives. Eventually only Fr. Herman survived from this original mission.



The members of the mission felt that it was their duty to protect the Alaskans from harm and exploitation. They defended them against the often cruel treatment of the Russian-American Company which controlled the colony under the leadership of Alexander Baranov. As a result of their protests, and because they tried to place the natives under imperial protection by administering an oath of allegiance to the Czar to them, Baranov threatened the monks with physical violence and even placed them under house arrest.

Sometime between 1808 and 1818, Fr. Herman went to Spruce Island, which he called "New Valaam". He spent the rest of his life on the island, where he cared for orphans, ran a school and continued his missionary work. He lived the ascetic life of Orthodox Monasticism which has been standard since the time of the desert fathers. He built a small chapel, school and guest house. Food for himself and the orphans was produced from his own experimental garden. He wore the simplest clothing and cell was practically empty. His life was devoted to prayer and to following the services he could do as a simple monk who had not been ordained.

His love for the native peoples grew continually. His greatest pleasure was being with the children under his care. When a ship from the United States brought an epidemic to the Alaskans, he remained with those stricken with disease constantly comforting the dying and praying with them. His love grew to the point that he could see into the hearts of his spiritual children and help them.

The natives regarded him as their intercessor before God. When there was a tidal wave on the Island, Fr. Herman took an ikon of the Theotokos, place it on the beach and assured the people that the water would not rise beyond the place where the ikon was, and it did not. When there was a great fire on the island, he dug a trench and stayed the flames.

Prior to his death he foretold that there would be no priest to bury him and that he would be forgotten for 30 years. He died on December 12, 1837, and was forgotten until the first investigation of his life in 1867 by Bishop Peter of Alaska. This investigation was followed by publications of his life in 1894, 1900, and 1952. In 1952 an Akathist Hymn was composed, and on March 11, 1969, the Great Council of Bishops solemnly proclaimed the Act of the Universal Church Canonization of the Staretz Herman to Sainthood in the Orthodox Church in America: "Taking into consideration the long and undisputed witness of the grace of God, appearing

through the servant of God, the Staretz Herman of Alaska." The Canonization was performed on August 7 - 9, 1970.

Glorification of St. Herman of Alaska

St. Herman of Alaska, the first "American" saint, was the first to bring Orthodoxy to this continent. He came to America as a young monk in 1794 as part of the original Russian Orthodox mission to Alaska. He lived there until his repose, and for more than four decades

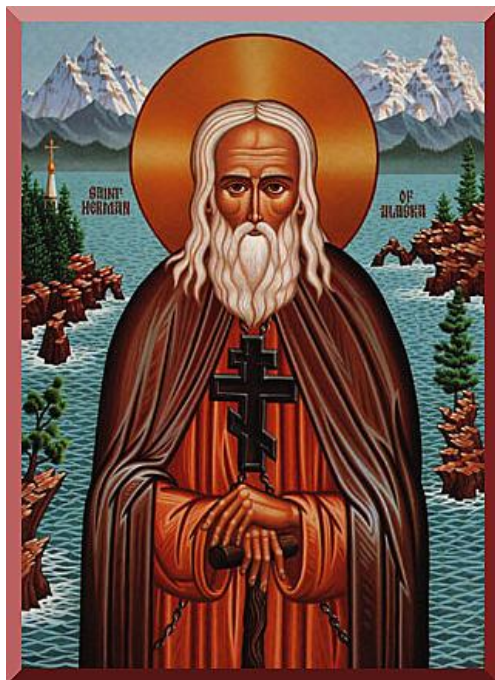


taught the natives by word and example. With his own severe asceticism a secret, he ministered to both physical and spiritual needs of the people. And his memory is preserved, fresh and personal, among their descendents to this day. Ironically, however, he is unknown to so many other Americans. By his prayers may we, also, truly receive the Gospel he brought and follow the way that he taught.

The coffin with St. Herman's relics

"Although much time will pass after my death," Father Herman used to say to his disciples, "My memory will not be forgotten and the place of my dwelling will not be empty. A monk, similar to me, fleeing the glory of men, will come and will live on Spruce Island. And Spruce Island will not be without people."

St. Herman of Alaska



"After my death," Father Herman used to say, "there will be a plague and many people will die from it, and the Russians will join with the Aleuts." It is true that about six months after the death of the Elder, there was a smallpox epidemic in Alaska that caused such an atrocious number of fatalities that in several villages only a few people remained alive. This compelled the colonial authorities consolidate the Aleuts: thus from twenty villages there remained only seven.

"My little one," Father Herman once asked Constantine Larionov, when he was no more than twelve years old, "what do you think? Will the chapel which they are now building be abandoned?" "I do not know Apa," answered the boy. "And really," said Constantine, "I did not understand the question then, although the whole conversation remains lively in my memory." The Elder, being silent for a while said "My child, remember that in time there will be a monastery here."

"Thirty years will pass after my death, all those who live now on Spruce Island will be dead, you alone will remain alive, and you will be old and poor; then they will remember me," Father Herman used to say this to his disciple, the Aleut Ignatius Aliaga. "It is remarkable," explains Ignatius, "how a man similar to us could know all these things way ahead of time! He was not a simple man! He saw our thoughts and he would make us involuntarily open them up to him and receive instructions."

"When I die," the Elder would tell his disciples, "you bury me next to Father Ioasaph. Kill my bullock at once. He has served me enough. Bury me by yourselves and do not tell of my death in the harbor. The inhabitants of the port (Kodiak) will not see my face. Do not send for a priest and do not wait for one to come: your waiting will be in vain! Do not wash my body, place it on the board, fold the arms on the chest, bind me in my mantle and with its edges cover my face and my head with my klobuk. If someone should wish to say good-bye to me, let him kiss the cross (in my hands); do not show anyone my face. After lowering me into the earth cover me with my blanket." This blanket, as we have already mentioned, was the board that was always in his cell.

The time was approaching for the departure of the Elder. One day he called his disciple Gerasim to his cell to light candles before the icons and to read the Acts of the Apostles. After some time his face shone and he loudly pronounced: "Glory to Thee O Lord! " Then, ordering Gerasim to stop the reading he said that it was pleasing to the Lord to prolong his life one week more. After a week, again according to his order, the candles were lit and the Acts of the Apostles were read. The Elder quietly leaned his head on the chest of Gerasim, the cell was filled with fragrance, his face was shining - and then Father Herman was no more! Hence, he reposed with the sleep of the righteous in the 81st year of his long-suffering life, December 13, 1837.



The Holy Prophet Daniel

(December 30)



The Holy Prophet Daniel and the three children, Ananias, Azarias and Misael were of the royal tribe of Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar destroyed and plundered Jerusalem, Daniel, as a boy, was taken off into slavery together with Jehoiachin, King of Judah, and many other Israelites. The account of his life, sufferings and prophecies can be found in detail in his book. Utterly given to God, Daniel from his early youth received from God the gift of great discernment. His fame among the Jews in Babylon began when he denounced two lecherous and unrighteous elders, and saved the chaste Susannah from an unjust death. But his fame among the Babylonians stemmed from the day when he solved and interpreted the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar. For this, the king made him a prince at his court. When the king made a golden idol in the Plain of Dura, the Three Children refused to worship it, for which

they were cast into the burning fiery furnace. But an angel of God appeared in the furnace and soothed the flames, so that the Children walked in the furnace untouched by the fire, and sang: 'Blessed art Thou, Lord God of our fathers!' The king saw this marvel, and was amazed. He then brought the Children out of the furnace and did them great honor.

In the time of King Belshazzar, when the king was eating and drinking with his guests at a feast out of consecrated vessels taken from the Temple in Jerusalem, an invisible hand wrote these three words on the wall: 'Mene, Tekel, Upharsin'. No-one could interpret these words but Daniel. That night, King Belshazzar was killed. Daniel was thrice thrown into a den of lions for his faith in the one, living God, and both times God preserved him alive. Daniel saw God on His throne with the angelic powers, often saw angels, had insight into the future of certain people, of kingdoms and of the whole human race, and prophesied the time of the coming of the Savior on earth. According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, Daniel and the Three Children lived to great old age in Babylon, and were beheaded with the sword for the true Faith. When Ananias was beheaded, Azarias held out his robe and caught his head, then Misael caught Azarias's head and Daniel Misael's. An angel of God carried their bodies to Judea, to Mount Gebal, and placed them under a rock. According to tradition, these four men arose at the time of the death of the Lord Jesus and appeared to many, then fell asleep again. Daniel is counted as one of the four Great Prophets (with Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel). He lived and prophesied halfway through the thousand years before Christ.



The Orthodox Christian family

Part II- The children.

By Elder Paisius the Athonite



Just pray for the grace of God to act. Now, when your child is already grown up, there is only one thing you can do: show your love and pray to God to act for the benefit of your child, because if you, the parent, treated him with love and kindness, then no matter where he goes, no matter with whom he interacts, at a certain moment he will see that the atmosphere outside the family is unhealthy and that everywhere people are hypocritical and out for gain. In this way your child will return home naturally. But if there is quarreling, anger, offensive language at home, then his heart will have no desire whatsoever to return. O, how attentive we must be, because these teen years need only love and prayer.

Be careful when you exhibit - albeit unconsciously - special love for one of your children and spend time with him exclusively, perhaps because of his illness or handicap. This may cause a serious trauma in the heart of your other child, who will probably be consumed with jealousy. At this point you will have great psychological problems in your relations with your children, and if you do not pay attention to this, you will do great harm both to your children and to yourself. And you shall be entirely to blame. Thus, pay attention!

The elder wrote to a brother in Christ: "Concerning your child, of whom you wrote to me, I am of the opinion that a stern attitude towards him will make him even worse. Talk to him of good

things and in a kind manner, and afterwards do not put pressure on him, but just show him how you grieve that he has chosen another path. Fulfill your responsibility by giving him advice, and then entrust your child to God.

I believe that your effort will have great results if it is accompanied by prayer. If, when you suffer from your child's excesses, you start putting pressure on him, there will be no result, because the child is agitated by the flesh and the devil, who is attacking him. Perhaps everything will pass of its own accord. Do not be upset, later things will get better. Try as much as possible not to push the child away from you, so that he would not break off and run away from the family, because later it may happen that he will not want to return because of his egoism, and you will lose him for good.

In general, do not be upset: God will not abandon your child. And God will not judge the sins of contemporary children on an equal footing with the sins of the children of our times."

When children behave poorly, it is preferable to scold them in the morning, then they will have the whole day in front of them and will be distracted by other impressions. If you scold them in the evening, their mind will become clouded, which can lead to even more stupid behaviour.

Children should be treated with kindness, because modern children are filled with egoism and do not react at all to scolding. If we begin to scold them, their soul immediately becomes filled with bad thoughts. They cannot understand that we scold them for their own good, because we love them. We must "bind" our children to God and nurture within them the understanding that it is necessary to do good.

If very young children die, they go straight to heaven, for they are comparable to angels. And when, in turn, their parents die, these little angels welcome their parents with lighted candles. The father and the mother receive a spiritual reward for these angels. And, conversely, if a child grows up and chooses the wrong path for himself, his parents suffer greatly.

Small children are like angels, but when they begin to attain a certain age, at which an element of sensual pleasure appears, - they become like wild animals.

Small children should be brought to communion regularly in order to be sanctified, because, unfortunately, they are growing up in a bad, spiritually unhealthy atmosphere.

Parents who have retarded children should not be upset over it, because such children are already saved. The parents must even rejoice that their children are going to heaven without any difficulty. What else can parents wish for their children, when they are guaranteed entry into heaven? If they look at this matter in such a spiritual manner, they will both gain great benefit for themselves and will have a spiritual reward.

Of great importance in a child's life are familial inclinations. If the child's parents are cunning, so will the child be shrewd and cunning. Once I met a boy who had lurid photographs in his pocket. I offered him to give them to me and in exchange get a chocolate for each one. The boy

firmly refused to give me the photographs, preferring the sinful sweetness of voyeurism to happiness with a small chocolate bar.

Man gives flesh to his child. God gives the child a soul. When the child grows up, the parents resign their responsibilities. God gives each baptized person a guardian angel who helps the person all through his life. Why do we hesitate to place ourselves in God's hands? Thus, we must take care of our children up to a certain moment. Afterwards we entrust them to God for the future. And the guardian angel always remains at their side.

Even a small child, who is still not qualified for spiritual endeavors, is able to vanquish the devil through humility. The devil is, of course, quite strong, but at the same time quite rotten. He easily overcomes giants, but can himself be overcome by a child.



From the spiritual teachers

On using time wisely

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven” (Ecc. 3:1)



The holy apostle Paul, warning us not to spend time in vain, lawfully instructs us to use each minute of our life wisely: “See then, – he says, – that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” In talking about “redeeming the time” the apostle makes us aware that time is used to purchase true blessings, just as money is used to acquire all that we need for physical life, and that, consequently, the proper use of time is very similar to the use of money in good hands. A wise master does not spend foolishly, totals up his assets properly, and assigns a special purpose to each sum of money. We should handle time in a like manner: assign hours and minutes for one or another good purpose; redeem each day by doing good deeds for ourselves or others; each year pass as many steps on the way to spiritual perfection as there are days in a year, and not waste a single hour needlessly, doing

nothing, and least of all in using it for sinful deeds.

The day usually begins with our awakening from sleep. How should we look upon the moment of awakening? Just as we would look upon the moment of being born into the world or upon resurrection from the dead, because there is a great similarity between awakening from sleep and being born. When we are asleep, it is as though we do not exist. When we wake up from sleep, it is as though we are being born anew, we are coming alive, we are being resurrected.

The time immediately following sleep should, first of all, be spent in prayer. Each morning brings us the pious joy of glorifying God for the Creator's having allowed us yet again to see His

world, so beautifully designed for us. In beginning the day we are beginning a new life, and in life there are so many grounds for temptation and sin that a weak person absolutely cannot do without the help of God, which is acquired only through prayer. And secondly, time should be spent in reading the word of God: it is the book of life, it contains everything we need to know, to do, to hope for. In the words of St. John Chrysostome, it is God's letter or epistle to mankind. Whoever does not nourish his soul with this celestial gift – starves his soul.

Afterwards comes the time for activity, time for work. Everyone has his own duties, his own affairs, his own job, his own diverse needs. But whatever they may be, there is one cardinal rule for all of them: "Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is," i.e. at the beginning of each deed ask your-self whether or not it conforms to the will of God.

How should we spend the time of leisure or rest? In fulfilling the following words of the apostle's instruction: "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to your-selves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." That is, if you like to read in your free time – read that which reveals to you the wisdom of God. Do you like to go out in society? Do so, but keep to pious discussion, wise conversation, good counsels and discourses. Do you like singing and music? Do sing, but particularly those songs which contain the outpourings of pure and lofty souls. Worldly songs can sometimes corrupt the soul by glorifying passions, vices, and human folly.

In other words, do what you always do, but in reverse: exchange the sensual for the spiritual, the body for the soul, the secular for the religious.

Saint Ignaty Bryanchaninov



Selected Preceptorials of Starets Ambrose of Optina

How to live

"How to live?" – was this extremely important question posed to the Starets from everyone. He would answer in his usual humorous tone: "Live – do not grieve, don't judge anyone, do not vex anyone and my respect to everyone." Often the Staret's tone would produce smiles on the frivolous listeners. However, if one was to contemplate this instruction, the deep meaning would become apparent to anyone. "Do not grieve," that is, so that the heart does not occupy itself with sorrows and misfortunes that are unavoidable to a human being, but rather it be directed to the Sole Source of eternal joy – God. Through Him, a person is reconciled with his sorrows, becomes "submissive" and thereby obtains tranquillity. – Don't judge anyone," "do not vex." Judging and vexing, which are the offsprings of destructive pride, are the two most common activities among people. They are sufficient to decline a person's soul into the depths of hell; even while in the main, on the surface they might think that they are not sins. - "My respect to everyone" – refers to the Apostle's directive: "in honour giving preference to one another" (Romans 12:10) Gathering all these thoughts into one, we can see that in the above pronouncements, the Starets was mainly preaching humility – the basis of spiritual life, the source of all goodness without which one cannot be saved.

MISCELLANEOUS

Photo report from Vladika Peter visit in St. Vladimir Church!





NEWS FROM THE CHURCH CHOIR
CHOIR DIRECTOR - George Tokarev



CHOIR REHEARSALS

Choir rehearsals will be held every Sunday of the month till Nativity of Christ from now right after the Liturgy in the choir loft or in the parish house. 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.

Posted by the Senior-Sister Ekaterina.

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