



## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 907-9447

Visit [stsymeon.com](http://stsymeon.com)

✠ **January 6, 2013** ✠

### **Holy Theophany of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ**

*Christ is Born! Christ is Baptized!* ~ from the Matins of Theophany

Beyond all thought and without measure is Thy poverty, O Word of God! I know that, for my sake who am fallen, Thou hast, from pity, clothed Thyself in Adam, and all posterity of Adam Thou hast made new again. Obeying Thy command I cry to Thee with faith, Blessed art Thou, our God made manifest, Glory to Thee!

✠ **Tomorrow, January 7: 10:00am Divine Liturgy ~ Old Calendar Nativity**

⇒ **House Blessings begin** – Schedule with Father Alex

Family invitations are not necessary. Getting your house blessed is.

⇒ **New Inquirer's Class** ~ Next Monday, January 14 - 6:30pm

\* A full 12-week course in Orthodox Doctrine and Worship – Open to inquirers and to members who want to learn more about their Orthodox Faith.

### **He will keep My Word...**

"...Let us have faith in Him (Christ) Who has participated in our nature and granted it in return the glory of His own nature, and let us seek how to acquire this glory and see it. How? By keeping the divine commandments. For the Lord has promised to manifest Himself to the one who keeps them, a manifestation He calls His own indwelling and that of the Father, saying, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and will make our abode with him'..."

~ St. Gregory Palamas (1374)

✠ **"The Incarnation of the Word**, and His assumption of human nature took place for the overthrow of death and destruction, and of that envy nourished against us by the wicked serpent, who was the first cause of evil. This is plainly proved to us by facts themselves. And so He set free the daughter of Abraham from her protracted sickness, calling out and saying, 'Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.' A speech most worthy of God, and full of supernatural power; for with the kingly inclination of His will He drives away the disease. And He also lays His hands upon her; and immediately, it says, she was made straight. And hence, too, it is possible to see that His holy flesh bore in it the power and activity of God. For it was His own flesh, and not that of some other Son beside Him, distinct and separate from Him, as some most impiously imagine [Nestorians] ."

St. Cyril of Alexandria (444)

### **Prayer: The Test of Everything**

Prayer is the test of everything. Prayer is also the source of everything.

Prayer is the driving force of everything. If prayer is right, everything is right.

For prayer will not allow anything to go wrong.

St. Theophan the Recluse

## More Thoughts for the New Year

✘ For if you change from inhumanity to almsgiving, you have stretched forth the hand that was withered. If you withdraw from theaters and go to church, you have cured the lame foot. If you draw back your eyes from a harlot, you have opened them when they were blind. These are the greatest miracles.

**St. John Chrysostom**

### Not a Single One

Remember that by believing heartily and steadfastly in Christ we are saved unto the life eternal. Remember, that the holy Church has not allowed a single one of her true followers to perish, but by the Grace of God, has saved them all. The works of the Savior and those of the Church upon believers speak for themselves. The actions of doubt and unbelief in a man's soul, killing his soul and body, also speaks for itself.

**St. John of Kronstadt**

### Much Care

✘ For things sought after need much care, especially in regard to God. For many are the hindrances, many the things that darken, many that impede our perception. For as the sun is manifest, and set forth publicly before all, and we have no need to seek it; but if on the other hand we bury ourselves and turn everything upside down, we need much labor to look at the sun; so truly here also, if we bury ourselves in the depth of evil desires, in the darkness of passions and of the affairs of this life, with difficulty to do we look up, with difficulty do we raise our heads, with difficulty do we see clearly.

**St. John Chrysostom (407)**

### The Sweetest Name

You should trace on the soft young heart (of children) the Sweetest Name – the radiant Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." From that time on there will be the greatest joy and happiness. When Jesus is established in the heart, one will desire "neither Rome nor Jerusalem" for the King Himself, along with His All-hymned Mother and all the angels and saints will themselves come and abide in the child. I and the Father will come unto him, and make our abode with him (John 14:23).

**St. Anatoly of Optina (19<sup>th</sup> C)**

### *The Hearts of Children*

✘ If you succeed in planting the fear of God in the hearts of your children, then the caprice of human behavior will not be able to harm them.

**St. Ambrose of Optina (1891)**

✘ If one trains his child correctly, and the child trains his/her child correctly and so, the succession of good Christians will be like a golden chain.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**The Mother of God ...** is more exalted than the Saints in Heaven. And not only would it be impossible for anyone – on his own – to come anywhere near to honoring her as she deserves, but neither could all those together that have been saved by her Son – even if all were to be united as one voice. The whole Creation would fall short of offering her the glory that befits her, for she has become the Mother of the Creator of all.

**St. Gregory Palamas**

### Love – Like salt on bread...

✘ "When the divine St. Euthymios the Great was about to depart from this earthly life, he summoned his disciples and said to them: 'My Fathers, beloved brothers in the Lord, and children, I am now setting out for my final journey; as did my Fathers before me. You must show your love for me by keeping the Commandments. Chief of these is love, which is the bond of perfection of the virtues [cf. Colossians 3:14]. For just as salt is to bread, so also is love to the virtues; and without it, one cannot achieve virtue as he ought. Indeed, love and humility are the sure criteria of all genuine virtue.'"

## **On Holy Theophany ~ St. Theophan the Recluse**

In celebrating Theophany, let us be transferred in thought to the very location of the event and let us attend mentally to what happened there. There is Betharaba. You see Saint John on the shore in garments made of camel skin, with a leather belt tied about his loins. An innumerable multitude of people from Jerusalem, Judea and all the country of the Jordan surround him. The Baptism of the Savior has just finished and the eyes of all are turned to the Son of man coming up out of the water. They see nothing else. But sharpen the eye of your mind with faith, and following after John and passing by what is seen by all, direct your attentive vision to what is not seen by all--to the opened heaven, the Dove descending, and the audible voice: "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!" Direct your gaze and do not take your attention from this wondrous sight. O who will give our words the power to worthily hymn the glory of God Who has appeared in the Jordan in Three Hypostases (Persons)!

Together with lost Paradise, the heavens were sealed by God's justice. But as a strong barrier does not hold back a great pressure of water, so the fortress of righteousness finally broke from the fire of God's love--and behold, the heavens were opened! We also open all the powers of our nature and insatiably we shall receive the revealed God and take delight in Him. We satisfy all our feelings, all our thoughts and desires. We are buried in darkness: but here is abundant light! We are wounded by the joyless separation--both from Heaven and from ourselves; but here is the all-enlivening reconciliation. We are weakened by infirmity, but here is the inexhaustible source of every power.

So then--just as after the long darkness of night every creature hungers for light and with eagerness strives to catch the first rays of the rising sun, so we, directing the eye of our mind, enlightened by faith, to the Theophany, eagerly receive the joyous rays of the Divine dispensation of our salvation, released by the merciful word of God the Father- and let us take delight in them!

As the creation compressed by the cold of winter eagerly meets spring which breaks the bonds of cold and receives once again the ordered rejuvenation, likewise we also, with a heart enlivened by the hope of salvation, receive the reconciliation shining in the baptized Lord--let us take delight in Him!

.As during the heat of summer the thirsty earth drinks with every mouth the rain falling from heaven, so we also with every desire of the soul receive each power ready to be poured out on us from the Spirit, descending in the form of a dove--and let us delight in them!

But why do we invite ourselves to this? For are we not already led to the entire economy of salvation? Therefore, should we not all be enlightened, reconciled, and enlivened? O that this would someday be true!

At one time, referring to John the Baptist, the Lord spoke to the Jews with reproach: "He was a burning and shining lamp, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light." Every year, in His Holy Church, the Lord directs the light of His Theophany at the Jordan with John also upon us. Does he not say to us through this: Here is the burning and shining light! See to it that ye be not willing to rejoice in his light only for a while!

See then that ye walk circumspectly. Do not the deceptive shouts of the enemies of our salvation sometimes seductively strike our ear? False wisdom proclaims: come unto me, I have light. Yet it has no light but only a phantom of light. The world says: Come unto me, I will give you peace. Yet it has



## St Theophan the Recluse the Bishop of Tambov – January 10

George Govorov, the future St Theophan, was born on January 10, 1815 in the village of Chernavsk in the Orlov province where his father was a priest.

At first, George attended a primary school at Liven, then a military school. From 1837-1841 he studied at the Kiev Theological Academy, and probably visited the Monastery of the Caves several times. In these surroundings, it was not surprising that he received the monastic tonsure while he was still a student. After graduation Hieromonk Theophan was appointed rector of Kiev's church schools, and later became rector of the seminary in Novgorod. Before he retired from teaching, Fr Theophan served as a professor and Assistant Inspector at the Petersburg Academy.

St Theophan was not completely happy with academic work, so he asked to be relieved of his duties. He was assigned to be a member of the Russian Mission in Jerusalem. After being raised to the rank of Archimandrite, he became Rector of Olnets Seminary. Soon he was assigned as the chief priest of the embassy church in Constantinople. St Theophan was eventually recalled to Russia to become rector of the Petersburg Academy, and supervisor of religious education in the capital's secular schools.

On May 9, 1859 St Theophan was consecrated as Bishop of Tambov, where he established a diocesan school for girls. During his time in Tambov he came to love the secluded Vysha Monastery in his diocese. In 1863 he was transferred to Vladimir and remained there for three years. He also established a diocesan school for girls at Vladimir.

The holy bishop visited parishes throughout his diocese serving, preaching, restoring churches, and sharing the joys and sorrows of his flock. It was very difficult for Bishop Theophan to live in the world and become involved with vain worldly disputes. Many abused his trust, but he could not bring himself to chastise anyone. Instead, he left such unpleasant tasks to the Archpriest of his cathedral.

He was present at the uncovering of the relics of St Tikhon of Zadonsk in 1861, and this made a tremendous impression on him, for he had much in common with that saint. He had loved St Tikhon from early childhood, and always spoke about him with great enthusiasm. When St Tikhon was glorified as a saint on August 13, Bishop Theophan's joy knew no bounds.

In 1866 his request to be relieved of his duties as Bishop of Vladimir was granted. He was appointed as Superior of the Vysha Monastery, but soon resigned from that position. He was permitted to live there and to celebrate services whenever he wished. He also received a pension of 1000 rubles.

As he prepared to leave his diocese, he wished to focus on his own salvation, and to concentrate on undisturbed communion with God. On July 24, 1866 he bade his diocese farewell, leaving the world for a life of reclusion, and to devote himself to writing spiritual books. Through these books, St Theophan has become the spiritual benefactor of all Orthodox Christians. Although he sought the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mt. 6:33), a reputation as a writer of great significance for the whole world was also added to him.

Bishop Theophan wrote many books, but received no profits from their sale. He tried to keep them as inexpensive as possible, and they quickly sold out. He wrote about topics which others before him had not fully treated, such as how to live a Christian life, how to overcome sinful habits, and how to avoid despair. He tried to explain the steps of spiritual perfection systematically, as one who had himself gone through these various steps. Some of his books include THE SPIRITUAL LIFE AND HOW TO BE ATTUNED TO IT, THE PATH TO SALVATION, and LETTERS ON THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. He also translated the PHILOKALIA in five volumes, and THE SERMONS OF ST SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN.

For the first six years in the monastery, Bishop Theophan attended all the services, including the early Liturgy. He stood still in church with his eyes closed so that he would not be distracted. He often celebrated Liturgy on Sundays and Feast Days.

Beginning in 1872, he cut off all relationships with people (except for his confessor) and no longer left his cell to attend church. He built a small chapel in his quarters and dedicated it to the Lord's Baptism. For ten years he served there on Sundays and Feast Days. For the last eleven years of his life he served every day by himself. Sometimes he would sing, and sometimes he kept completely silent.

Whenever anyone visited him on business, Bishop Theophan would reply with as few words as possible, then immerse himself in prayer. If anyone sent him money, he would distribute it to the poor, keeping only a small portion to purchase books.

Whenever he was not occupied with writing or praying, the reclusive bishop worked at carpentry or painting icons. He received from twenty to forty letters each day, and he answered all of them. He was able to discern each writer's spiritual condition, then give detailed answers to the questions of those who were struggling for the salvation of their souls.

His eyesight deteriorated in his latter years, but he did not curtail his work because of it. In the evening, his cell attendant would prepare everything for the bishop to serve Liturgy the next morning. After finishing the Liturgy, Bishop Theophan would knock on the wall to signal the cell attendant to serve him tea. On days when there was no fasting, he would eat lunch at 1:00 P.M. This consisted of one egg and a glass of milk. At four o'clock he would have some tea, and then no more food that day.

Bishop Theophan began to get weaker at the beginning of 1894. He was still writing on the afternoon of January 6, but when the cell attendant came to check on him at 4:30 he found that the bishop had departed to the Lord.

St Theophan's body lay in the small church in his cell for three days, then three more days in the cathedral. There was no trace of corruption, however. He was laid to rest in the Kazan church of the Vysha Monastery.

Several of St Theophan's books have been translated into English, and are reliable spiritual guides for Orthodox Christians of today. St Theophan's gift was the ability to present the wisdom of the Fathers in terms which modern people can understand. Since he lived close to our own time, many readers find his books "more approachable" than the earlier patristic literature. He treats the life of the soul and the life of the body as a unified whole, not as two separate elements, and reveals to people the path of salvation.

## **HOMILY ~ On long-suffering Job**

**The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away... (Job 1:21).**

Brethren, let the righteous one fear nothing; all shall be well with him. The whole of Sacred Scripture shows us that God will never forsake the righteous. The example of Job shows us this as clearly as the sun. Job had seven sons and three daughters; he had riches, respect among the people, and friends. And he lost all of this in one day. He did not grumble against God but fell down upon the ground and worshiped and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return thither (Job 1:20-21). Then Job lost his health, the last of what he had, and his entire body, from the top of his head to the heels of his feet, was covered with sores and pus. And Job sat in ashes and lifted up praise to God. His wife tried to persuade him to renounce his God, but righteous Job said to her: Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? (Job 2:10). His friends reproached him, saying that he was sinful and proud in his understanding and righteousness before them, but Job humbly prayed to God and patiently endured all his wounds and misfortunes.

It happens today, as it did then, that when some misfortune befalls us, our neighbors consider themselves to be more intelligent and more righteous than we are. But the most wise God permitted all these misfortunes to fall on Job in order to test not only Job His servant but also his kinsmen and his friends. When each of them had shown what kind of person he was, when each of them had been tested before God, then God, with His almighty right hand, restored Job to health, returned twice as much wealth as He had taken away, and gave him again seven sons and three daughters. He who has strong faith, brethren, has clear spiritual sight, so that he can see the finger of God in his prosperity as well as in his suffering. He who has strong faith also has great patience in suffering. When God gives to him, he gives thanks, and when God takes away, he blesses: Blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21).

O Lord, the God of the long-suffering and patient Job, teach us to bless Thy name in our sufferings!  
To Thee be glory and praise forever! Amen.

## **HOMILY ~ Daniel the Prophet**

**... And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth (Daniel 2:35).**

Suffering, brethren, can weaken a man's character; however, luxury can weaken it even more. Daniel, the man of God, could not be weakened either by suffering or by luxury. In both instances he remained the same, and in both instances he was equally the messenger of the one Living God and a clairvoyant revealer of God's mysteries. He lived in royal luxury and then in a lions' den. In both instances, he remained unchanged: in royal luxury he fasted, and in the lions' den he did not hunger. The Most-high God rewarded his faithful servant with the great gift of prophecy. The main subject of his prophecies is Christ the Lord. Christ will come and will destroy idol worship throughout the whole earth. He will fill the earth with Himself like no man clothed in the flesh has ever done. He is the One to Whom will be given dominion and glory and a Kingdom, that all people, nations and languages should serve Him (Daniel 7:14). Daniel, the great prophet of God, prophesied the time, the exact time, of the coming of the Lord Jesus into the world.

How we Christians must be ashamed before this Daniel! We see all the promises fulfilled in Christ, and yet we are lax in our faith and in our love for Christ. All was not revealed to Daniel as it is revealed to us who are baptized; nevertheless, he did not turn away from God, not once.

O Lord God of Daniel, strengthen us, give us repentance, and have mercy on us!  
To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

# The Reason for the Season

Linda Bowles, December 25, 2001

It seems that each year, the spirit of Christmas becomes more and more dim, fading from our minds and hearts. It was true when old Ben Franklin said it more than two centuries ago; it is still true today: "How many observe Christ's birthday! How few, his precepts! O! 'Tis easier to keep Holidays than Commandments."

**For many believers, the Birth of Jesus Christ more than 2,000 years ago is easily the most significant event in the history of the human race.**

There is nothing complicated about the reason. Jesus came to live among us, gather our sins unto Himself, and die in atonement for them. He who created us into this life promises to create us again, perfected, into life eternal, making sense of it all. We need only believe.

Despite the renewal of faith, Christians are not as popular in America these days as they were only a few generations ago. Jesus was not a very popular figure either, particularly toward the last few years of the time He spent on Earth. His message threatened too many people, just as it does today.

He was the Truth they feared. His presence gave the lie to the self-serving illusions around which they had built their lives. He was the Light which illumined dark corners and recesses, exposing the black sins they sought to hide.

He was the pure mirror which reflected back to them the image of the evil they had become. His very existence was a threat to their lifestyles and their rationalizations. They could not change nor corrupt Him ... so they killed Him.

It was all said in John 3:19-20: "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that

doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

Centuries have passed. Nothing has changed. They are still trying to kill Him. The fear, even the loathing, of His message is why the celebration of Christmas gets more pagan each succeeding year.

For over 150 years after the Constitution was ratified, children prayed in schools, and teachers were not terrified of using the word "God" in the classroom. At no time did religious freedom in schools put America in any danger of becoming a theocracy, nor was the singing of a Christmas carol considered to constitute such a danger.

No people in the world are more self-effacing than Christians. We are much more inclined to fault ourselves rather than others. We have accepted our own insufficiency. We know we are flawed and desperately in need of redemption, and we are trying hard to do better. We are not trying to have our sins declared virtues – we seek to have our sins forgiven, not approved.

Despite all the calumny and harassment, Christians are generally happy, well-adjusted and uniquely unconfused about the purpose of life.

We are unimpressed by the pompous idea that we are born out of nothingness, to live and die, only to disappear back into nothingness. We know this kind of thinking makes no sense at all, and we recognize this dark rhetoric for what it is: the verbal flailing of disoriented and frightened people who do not have philosophic handles on themselves or the universe in which they live.

As Christians, we know that, in the course of time, from the perspective of eternity, everything is reconciled, every detail attended, every wrong righted, every kindness thanked, every wound healed, every love requited, every sin atoned, every life vindicated, every loss recovered and every loved one found.