



## *Fire & Light*

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

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**December 11, 2016**

**Advent Season**

**The Holy Forefathers**

**St. Daniel the Stylite, of Constantinople (490)**

Today let us celebrate the divine memory of the divine Fathers of ancient days: Adam and Abel, Seth, Noah and Enos, Enoch, Abraham, Melchizedek and Job, with Isaac and the faithful Jacob! Let creation cry out and bless the Lord, and exalt Him throughout all ages!

✘ Tuesday, December 13 - St. Herman Day - 6:00am Divine Liturgy

Many Years! Newly Illumined Child David Dill and Servant of God Constantine Spain!

**The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ**

✘ Royal Hours of the Nativity ~ Friday, December 23, 10:00am

✘ Nativity Eve Vigil ~ Saturday, December 24 6:00pm

✘ Nativity our Lord ~ Sunday Divine Liturgy 10:00am



### **For Your Salvation**

✘ "Christ Who is presently human was in composite. He remained what He was; what He was not, He assumed... He came into being because of something, namely your salvation... Man and God... became a single whole, the stronger side predominating, in order that I might be made God to the same extent that He was made man. He was begotten - yet He was already begotten - of a woman. And yet she was a virgin. That it was from a woman makes Him human, that she was a virgin makes Him divine. On earth He has no father, but in heaven no mother. All this is part of His Godhead. He was carried in the womb, but acknowledged by a prophet as yet unborn himself, who leaped for joy at the presence of the Word for whose sake he has been created (cf. Luke 1:41). He was wrapped in swaddling bands, but at the Resurrection He unloosed the swaddling bands of the grave. He was laid in a manger, but was extolled by angels, disclosed by a star and adored by Magi... He had 'no form or beauty' (cf. Is. 53:2) for the Jews, but for David He was 'fairer than the children of men' (Ps. 45:2) and on the mount He shines forth, becoming more luminous than the Sun (cf. Mt. 17:2), to reveal the future mystery.

~ St. Gregory the Theologian

✘ "Faithfully venerate, with honor and reverence, the venerable likeness of the features of the Lord, the Word of God, Who for our sake was made man, thinking to behold the Icon of your Creator Himself. 'For the honor of the Image, says one of the Saints, passes over to the original.' The original is the thing imagined, and from it comes the derivation. For when we see the drawing in the Icon, in our mind's eye we pass over to the true form of which it is an Image, and devotedly worship the form of Him Who for our sake was made flesh, not making a god of it, but saluting it as an image of God made flesh, with desire and love of Him Who for us man emptied Himself, and even took the form of a servant. In the same way also for this reason we salute the Icons of His undefiled Mother, and of all the Saints."

**St. John of Damascus**

✘ "**Angels...** are always being filled full of light, becoming ever more radiant and making blessed use of their natural ability to change. They dance for joy around the First Light, look continuously towards Him and are enlightened directly by Him, as they tirelessly sing the praises of the Fount of light and, being ministers of light, transmit illuminating grace to those lower beings who are being enlightened."

**St. Gregory Palamas**

## *This and That*

➤ The classical question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" can be seen as a primary question in education. I think the only right answer to the question is, "A good person." In education, I think we should be about helping people become good persons. They need some skills, but great learning in the hands of a bad person is not a very good thing. Poor skills in the hands of a good person have a better chance in the long run.... "Christ came not to make bad men good, but to make dead men alive."  
- Fr. Stephen Freeman

➤ "I can't really tell you much you don't already know about the evils of pornography—so I will tell you some things you do know: That there is steadily, inexorably, unendingly more of it, that it is easier than ever for everyone, including children, to access, and that it continues to rend the very moral fabric of our society whether that be the family, the community, the state or the nation. That is because in every case, it rends the moral fabric of each individual who views it or otherwise participates in its production or distribution."

- Jeffrey R. Holland – The Plague of Pornography, UCAP Conference

➤ Western people today, conservatives and liberals alike, experience the prevailing liberal social atmosphere as the unquestioned norm of modern life, whether they know it or not. And even if they do know it, they are terrified of being thought "abnormal" by their fellow citizens by dissenting from it. Further, middle-class Americans, since at least the turn of the 20th century and increasingly during the 1920's and 1950's, have ranked "niceness" and "being nice" among the cardinal moral and civic virtues. In more conservative eras niceness has meant being "respectable." But from the 1980's forward, as life in the Western democracies has been progressively liberalized, *nice* has evolved as the equivalent of *liberal*, and *liberal* has come to mean "non-judgmental," "tolerant," "uncritical," and open to every new thing, every new value, every new standard approved by liberals as something every citizen has a moral duty to approve.

- Chilton Williamson, Chronicles

➤ Let us be monks....

The monk knows that no matter what political regime should come to power, this world, so beautiful and so bittersweet, will always be a world of sin and death; it will always be less of a home than a wayside inn.

...The ideologue has no clear sense of the pilgrimage. He believes in *progress*, and the imperfections of the world offend him; they must be eliminated. Fortunately for him, those imperfections are external to his person. Sometimes they are social conditions, including those that come naturally to mankind, such as the stubborn particularities of the family...The secular ideologue is a religious fanatic without religion...

The monk is for weakness, the ideologue for power. The monk wants God to work in him, the ideologue to operate upon others. The monk is humble, the ideologue debases himself in order to climb the greased pole of ambition. The monk listens to the word of the Lord, the ideologue listens for any slight change in the prevailing wind. The monk says, "I am but an unprofitable servant," the ideologue adds items to his resume.

The monk knows that no matter what political regime should come to power, this world, so beautiful and so bittersweet, will always be a world of sin and death; it will always be less of a home than a wayside inn....

The monk knows peace, the ideologue only *action*. The monk belongs to a communion; the ideologue, to a party. The monk knows that there is nothing new under the sun; the ideologue desperately wants there to be something new. For the monk, the political is a practical necessity, like outhouses; for the ideologue, everything, even the personal, is political, and therefore a matter of dread seriousness. The monk knows that the Lord numbers every one of our hairs; the ideologue is the forensic inquisitor who wants to number them for us. Let us be monks, my friends; and never underestimate the temptation to be the other.

~ Anthony Esolen, Touchstone

## **The Forefathers of Christ**

Only at the fulfillment of a long period of preparation and after God had made ready the Holy Virgin as a vessel of sufficient holiness to receive Him did our Lord Jesus Christ appear on earth. He has brought into existence Heaven and earth, peoples and nations, times of plenty and times of misery, so that by them, He could gradually prepare us for this Advent... Thus, the generations succeeded one another...until the birth of our God as a little Child, the fruit of all the promises and the hope of all the Righteous.

† The Memory of ADAM and EVE, the First-created: The father of our race who was delivered from hell by Christ, the Second Adam.

† The Memory of the Righteous ABEL, son of Adam: He was the first to prefigure Christ as the innocent victim of jealous brothers.

† The Memory of the Righteous SETH, son of Adam: He was the stock for a renewed posterity like unto Christ Who is for us the first-born of a new line, the line of the sons of the Resurrection.

† The Memory of the Righteous ENOS, son of Seth: He was the first to call upon the name of the Lord.

† The Memory of the Righteous NOAH, son of Lamech: He was a saviour of the human race who preserved in the ark the seeds of all that lived as our Saviour preserves us in the ark of the Church.

† The Memory of the Righteous SHEM, son of Noah: For his piety, he was elected as the father of the glorious lineage of Abraham.

† The Memory of the Righteous JAPHETH, son of Noah: Ancestor of the peoples of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean, he prefigured the entrance of the pagans into the ark of the Church.

† The Memory of the Righteous Patriarch ABRAHAM, son of Terah. He is the father of those saved by faith.

† The Memory of the Patriarch ISAAC, son of Abraham. He was

offered up as sacrifice prefiguring the voluntary sacrifice of Christ.

† The Memory of the Patriarch JACOB, son of Isaac. He beheld a ladder between heaven and earth which prefigured the Mother of God by whom God came down to dwell with men.

† The Memory of the King and Prophet DAVID, son of Jesse. He announced the coming of the Messiah, the son and Lord of David.

The Holy Church associates today along with the ancestors of Christ according to the flesh, the prophets and righteous ones, for according to the words of the Lord Himself: "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." Thus in addition to His genealogy according to the law, we also recall:

† The Memory of the Righteous MELCHIZEDEK. Sent by God to Abraham, he mysteriously anticipated our Lord by offering bread and wine, the symbols of the Holy Eucharist.

† The Memory of the Righteous JOB. By his faith and patience in affliction, he prefigured the Passion of Christ, the RIGHTEOUS ONE Who suffered death for our salvation.

† The Memory of the Prophet MOSES and the Priests AARON and UR who held up the arms of Moses in the form of a cross.

† The Memory of the Righteous JOSHUA. He led the Hebrews into the promise land as Christ leads us into the Heavenly Kingdom.

† The Memory of the THREE HOLY YOUTHS. Miraculously spared in the furnace by the descent of the Angel of God, they prefigured the birth-giving of the Mother of God.

By the intercessions of Thy Holy Ancestors and  
of all the Righteous who preceded Thy coming unto this world,  
Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us. Amen.

# Old Testament Glimpses of the Mother of God

At this time of the liturgical year, perhaps more than at any other, we are mindful that the Old Testament is full of what theologian Georges Barrois called “clues to the Christian mystery.” This awareness existed in the Church from the very first, for Christ Himself “beginning at Moses and all the Prophets...explained...in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27). This same awareness does not, however, seem to hold equally true for the Mother of God. The great mystery concerning her appears to have many fewer Biblical “clues,” or, as one of the Church’s hymns has plainly said: “it was not written (about) by many prophets (Feast of the Protection, Matins Canon, Ode 9). Two images chosen from among many in the services of the Feast of the Nativity illustrate how the hidden and precious truth concerning the Virgin Theotokos is expressed when it appears in the prophetic writings.

## The Queen in Golden, Embroidered Vesture

The first service appointed for the Nativity Feast is the Royal Hours. Barely has the service begun when, in the First Hour, Psalm 44 (LXX) is read, in which we find a splendid prophetic portrait of the Mother of God. Historically, the Psalm is a kind of wedding song of a warrior king. Spiritually and prophetically, however, it looks beyond an earthly and temporal kingdom, pointing to the glorious reign of the Savior King Jesus Christ. The beautiful daughter of the King who became through marriage the queen standing at the right hand of the warrior king has been consistently identified by the Church’s hymnography and the Holy Fathers with Mary, the Virgin Bride of God. Although many details in the Psalm are prophetically ascribed to her, perhaps the most striking is her embroidered garment inwrought with gold, which has traditionally been considered an image of the magnificent purity of her soul. St. John of Damascus sums up this tradition in the following:

She stands at His right as a real Queen with much boldness, clad in golden garments, attired in embroidery, according to the prophetic saying. Yea, she (stands at) the royal throne glittering as the glorious Queen of Heaven and earth, and shining inside and outside with the lightings of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as the ever-illuminating Bride and Mother of the heavenly King of Glory, Jesus Christ, our God and Savior...she stands at the right side of the Son, embroidered in the

virtues and gifts of purity, of holiness, everything beautiful, chosen, innocent, as the holiest of Saints, noblest of the cherubim, and incomparably more glorious than the seraphim and all the heavenly hosts, being thus, next to God, venerated, glorified and praised above all beings in heaven and earth. (*The Life of the Virgin Mary – the Theotokos*, Holy Apostles Convent, p.475).

One source even puts this image upon the lips of the Lord Jesus Himself, speaking to His Holy Mother when He came to receive her soul at her Dormition: “*Arise and come to My Kingdom, for thou art the Queen of All...that thou mightest sit at My right hand...Gird thyself with the glorious and gold-embroidered royal garment of thy virtues. Adorn thyself with the luminous glory of thy divine blessedness.*” (ibid. p.461). St. Nikolai of Zicha reaffirms this truth with the added reminder and encouragement that “the soul of each faithful Christian is like the “King’s daughter” as well, for the beauty of each of us is “in Christ and of Christ, Who is within our soul.”

## The Ark of the Covenant

From the second century onward, many Fathers, including St. Irenaeus of Lyons, St. Hippolytos of Rome, St. Athanasios the Great, St. Hesychios, St. Romanos the Melodist, St. Andrew of Crete, and St. John of Damascus, have written sermons and hymns identifying the Old Testament Ark with the Mother of God, calling her the new or living Ark. This prophetic image makes its appearance in the Nativity services in the Sixth Royal Hour, Ps. 131: “Arise, O Lord, into Thy resting place, Thou and the Ark of Thy Holiness.” What exactly was this original Ark, of which Mary is the fulfillment?

The sacred Ark in Israel was made by Moses at God’s command, of fine incorruptible wood covered with gold. Testimonies of the Lord’s Covenant and faithfulness were placed inside, also at the divine behest: the tables of the Law, a container of manna and Aaron’s rod that had budded miraculously. On top of this chest was a kind of throne, the “mercy seat.” “There I will meet with you,” was the Divine promise, “and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat” (Exodus 25:22). This Ark, carried only by the

priests, led the people in the desert and into battle; when housed in a sanctuary, it was kept in the holiest inner place, hidden from sight.

The following contemporary meditation eloquently captures the essence of the Ark as a type of the Most Holy Mother of God:

Do you wish to understand, O believer, how that Ark of old was a likeness of the Virgin? The book of the Law which no man could truly fulfill was placed in that old Ark, but the Lawgiver Himself dwelt in Mary's womb. He came, through her, to fulfill the law of righteousness for us and free us from the burden of the Law. In that chest of old, the container of manna, the physical bread, was placed as a memorial, but in the womb of the Virgin, the Living Bread, the Bread of Life, was formed in the flesh to feed the souls of His people. In that Ark of the Covenant, God placed the rod of Moses, that staff of dead wood which budded like a living tree and worked wonders, to set His people free of their bondage. See, now, how the Tree of Life had budded forth in the Virgin's womb, and come forth to set His people free? Recall how God, of old, came to meet with His priests on the Mercy Seat of that Ark, but understand that through the Virgin, He came forth to meet and commune with all mankind (Bishop Lazar Puhalo, *The Most Holy Theotokos*, Synaxis Press, p. 19).

A significant number of details supports this basic parallel, among them:

✧ The Ark borne by priests – the Theotokos borne by St. Anna, herself of the priestly tribe;

✧ The ancient Ark accompanied by Solomon to its place in the Temple (I Kings 8:1-11) – the Theotokos escorted by Sts. Joachim, also of the royal tribe of Judah, to dwell in the innermost sanctuary of the Temple;

✧ David dancing for joy before the Ark (I Chronicles 15:29) – St. John the Baptist leaping in his mother St. Elizabeth's womb at the approach of the Virgin Mary, the animate Ark containing God;

✧ The punishment for presumptuously touching the holy vessel of the Ark (I Chr.13) – and the divine vengeance wrought upon Athonios the Jew who, at the funeral of the Theotokos, stretched out impure hands to cast the Virgin's body from her bier, and had them cut off by an angel;

✧ The incorruptible wood of Israel's Ark – the incorruptibility of Mary's body.

The fate of the original Ark is not known (The Ethiopian Church claims to have it in their possession.). The Jewish historian Josephus indicated that there was no Ark in the second Temple – the Temple into which, according to Tradition, Mary entered as a little child. We do not know if it was destroyed in the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (c.597 B.C.) or taken away by an earlier invading power. But this too is wonderfully expressive. For what need is there of the ancient Ark once the new and living Ark, the fulfillment of the prophetic picture had come?

### Conclusion

Once we begin to meditate on such Old Testament types as these, we realize that what seemed at first to be but “dim figures” (Nativity Canon, Ode 9) is, in reality, full of depth and meaning. In the narrow sense, what the hymnographer who wrote the Canon for the Feast of the Protection said is true – that “not many prophets” foreshadowed the mysteries concerning the Mother of God. And yet, the Saints of God, with the illumined eyes of New Testament faith, have made very broad and bold statements relating to this. St. Andrew of Crete cried out: “Of thee, O Mary, all interpreters of the Spirit sing” (ibid. p.152). And St. Gregory Palamas considered that “*all divinely inspired Scripture was written because of the Virgin who brought forth God Incarnate*” (ibid. p.153). **The Mother of God is the great treasure of the faithful**, whose hidden presence in Scripture – revealed to us by Tradition and the Holy Fathers – calls to mind her imaging the new Holy of Holies of the Temple “not made with hands,” prefigured long ago. Hers is a deep mystery revealed only in the Church and for the Church. ✧ ✧ ✧

*From Holy Transfiguration Monastery Bulletin, with editing.*

## From the Life of Our Holy Father Herman of Alaska (+1837)

"Several years ago," wrote, Yanovsky, the administrator of the Russian colony in Alaska, "Father Herman converted a certain naval captain G. to Orthodoxy from the Lutheran Faith. This captain was well educated. Besides many sciences, he was well versed in languages. He knew Russian, English, German, French, Italian and also some Spanish. But for all this he could not resist the convictions and proofs of Father Herman. He changed his faith and was united to the Orthodox Church.

When he was leaving America, the Elder said to him while they were parting, "Be on guard, if the Lord should take your wife from you then do not marry a German woman under any circumstance. If you do marry a German woman, undoubtedly she will damage your Orthodoxy." The Captain gave his word, but he failed to keep it. The warning of the Elder was prophetic. Indeed, after several years the Captain's wife did die, and he married a German woman. There is no doubt that his faith weakened or that he left it; for he died suddenly without penance."

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Further on Yanovsky writes, "Once the Elder was invited aboard a frigate which came from St. Petersburg. The Captain of the frigate was a highly educated man, who had been sent to America by order of the Emperor to make an inspection of all the colonies. There were more than twenty-five officers with the Captain, and they also were educated men. In the company of this group sat a monk of a hermitage, small in stature and wearing very old clothes. All these educated conversationalists were placed in such a position by his wise talks that they did not know how to answer him. The Captain himself used to say, 'We were lost for an answer before him.'

"Father Herman gave them all one general question: 'Gentlemen, What do you love above all, and what will each of you wish for your happiness?' Various answers were offered ... Some desired wealth, others glory, some a beautiful wife, and still others a beautiful ship he would captain; and so forth in the same vein. 'It is not true,' Father Herman said to them concerning this, 'that all your various wishes can bring us to one

conclusion - that each of you desires that which in his own understanding he considers the best, and which is most worthy of his love?' They all answered, 'Yes, that is so!' He then continued, 'Would you not say, Is not that which is best, above all, and surpassing all, and that which by preference is most worthy of love, the Very Lord, our Jesus Christ, who created us, adorned us with such ideals, gave life to all, sustains everything, nurtures and loves all, who is Himself Love and most beautiful of all men? Should we not then love God above every thing, desire Him more than anything, and search Him out?' " All said, "Why, yes! That's self-evident!" Then the Elder asked, "But do you love God?" They all answered, "Certainly, we love God. How can we not love God?" "And I a sinner have been trying for more than forty years to love God, I cannot say that I love Him completely," Father Herman protested to them. He then began to demonstrate to them the way in which we should love God. "if we love someone," he said, "we always remember them; we try to please them. Day and night our heart is concerned with the subject. Is that the way you gentlemen love God? Do you turn to Him often? Do you always remember Him? Do you always pray to Him and fulfill His holy commandments?" They had to admit that they had not! "For our own good, and for our own fortune," concluded the Elder, "let us at least promise ourselves that from **this very minute we will try to love God more than anything and to fulfill His Holy Will!**" Without any doubt this conversation was imprinted in the hearts of the listeners for the rest of their lives.        ❖ ❖ ❖

### A DESCRIPTION OF ST. HERMAN

Yanovsky writes of St. Herman. "I have a vivid memory," he said, "Of all the features of the Elder's face reflecting goodness; his pleasant smile, his meek and attractive mien, his humble and quiet behavior, and his gracious word. He was short of stature. His face was pale and covered with wrinkles. His eyes were grayish-blue, full of sparkle, and on his head there were a few gray hairs. His voice was not powerful, but it was very pleasant."

## **St. Spyridon and the Purloined Goat (St. Spyridon is remembered Dec.12)**

St. Spyridon the Wonderworker, bishop of Tremithus in Cyprus (+348) was a shepherd and keeper of livestock before his consecration as bishop, and continued this work even after his elevation of the holy episcopacy.

One day, after our Holy Father had returned from Antioch, a certain government steward came in order to buy some goats from him and to negotiate with the Saint about their price. It was intent to buy 100 goats, but the man put down the price for 99, wishing to deprive the holy one of the price of one goat.

Therefore when the Saint and the meat-monger came into the fold, our clairvoyant father said to the steward, "Come in, my son, and take as many goats as you have paid for." But he, not discerning that which was said to him by our father, and being overcome by his passion of greed, took 100 goats as he had given the price of them.

As he led them from the fold, one of them ran hastily back into the fold again. But that rapacious man returned, wishing to take it as though it were his own. Again, therefore, he carried it away like a captive, leading it to the other 99, not as one seeking out the stray sheep, but wishing to defraud the shepherd. But straightway it returned again. When the goat had done this many times, therefore, the codger grew dispirited and, holding it on his shoulders, he, the erring one, seized the unerring goat. But the goat cried out exceedingly, thereby proclaiming the injustice of the miser, and it struck his head with its horns, so that all they which beheld the clamor of the irrational creature marveled. But the dispassionate and longsuffering and most compassionate father said to the buyer, "Behold, my son, perhaps you did not give his price, and for this reason he cries out and writhes about this way?"

Coming to himself, and perceiving that his bad intent was made known, he prostrated himself before the wonderworking Father and asked forgiveness from him for this scheme and sin, and gave him the price for the hundredth goat. Thus, when the goat, with all haste and quiet, joined itself to the 99, the buyer marveled and glorified God, Who accepts the correction of our evil desires.

*Through the prayers of our Holy Father Spyridon the Wonderworker, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us!*

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✧ According to the Holy Fathers, our salvation would be an impossibility were it not for the Church's Holy Sacraments, which embody us in Christ, and render us of the same Body and of the same Blood as Christ.  
**Elder George of Gregoriou Monastery**

✧ One must act in such a way that the soul does not turn to God only when one is standing in prayer, but should do so as far as possible throughout the day. It should be an unceasing offering of oneself to Him.  
**St. Theophan the Recluse**

✧ When I speak of having God in our mind, it does not mean that we see God, but that God sees us. This is the right attitude: we act in the presence of God, knowing that He is looking at us.  
**Elder Sophrony (+1996)**

✧ People mostly pray as if there were no God in them, or as if He did not heed their prayers. Let us ascribe to the Lord at least the same amount of attention that good parents show to the requests of their children, at least that provident and attentive love which good parents have for their children.  
**St. John of Kronstadt**

✧ A place does not save you. There is no place where you can flee from yourself.  
**St. Nikon of Optina (1931)**