

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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January 8, 2017

Postfeast of Theophany

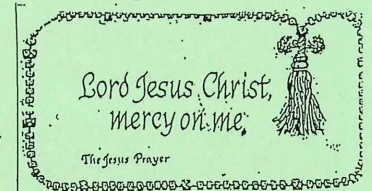
St. George the Chozevite (6th C)

St. Domnica of Constantinople (474)

St. Emilian the Confessor, Bishop of Cyzicus (9th C)

Martyr Abo the Perfumer of Tiflis, Georgia (790)

THE BLESSING OF HOMES



Christ is born! ~ Christ is baptized!

➤ **Next Inquirer's Class – Tuesday, January 17, 6:30pm * House blessings have begun.**

St. Paisios of Mt. Athos

“Holy Baptism delivers us from the curse of the ancestral sin and from all sins. When a person is baptized, he is vested with Christ, delivered from ancestral sin and the Grace of God abides in him. However, the bad inherited traits remain. Perhaps you do not think that God could remove those as well, through Holy Baptism. He can, but He allows them to remain so that we may struggle and be crowned with victory.”

“Whoever says: *‘This is my personality; this is how I was born; I have inherited repulsive traits; I grew up under these conditions, therefore I can’t correct myself’* is like saying: *‘Not only are my father and mother to blame, but also God Himself!’* Do you know how troubled I am when I hear such things? This is how one reviles both their parents and God. The moment one begins to think this way, the Grace of God ceases to act.”

“Some people find it advantageous to say that a particular weakness of theirs is part of their makeup (who they are), just so they can justify themselves and make no effort to be delivered from it. Such people say: *‘God has not granted me any gifts! It’s not my fault! Why do people expect things from me that are beyond my capabilities?’* That’s how they take advantage of opportunities. They justify themselves — content with their thinking, and living their life as they always have. If we keep on lamenting: *‘These weaknesses are inherited; the other ones are part of my character’*, how can we ever correct ourselves?’ This kind of thinking dispels our spiritual leventia.(*)

(* - “Spiritual manliness”, which means generosity coupled with pluck (i.e., to take hold of something - in this case, a passion - and quickly remove it from our character [with the help of God’s Grace]).

Put a Cork in it!

“*[St. Paisios responds to the question: ‘My heart is very cold again. Why do I end up in that condition?]*: Because you leave your head unscrewed, and your brain swells with all the air! I put in a cork and tightened it, but you keep throwing it away. Now we must put in a bigger cork, and screw it very tightly. Have you any idea how much Christ would offer you, if you did not have this shortcoming? When we are not vigilant, the devil sneaks up, pierces our head with his spear - that is, with conceit - inflates it like a balloon and then raises us into the air.”

Pearls of the Holy Fathers (16)

An elder said: 'He who is honored and praised more than he deserves suffers great harm thereby; whereas one who is not honored by men at all will be glorified above.' *Sayings of the Fathers*

Wondrous are Thy works, O Lord! Wondrous art Thou Thyself, sitting on the throne of Thy glory in Christian temples. O Lord, most righteous Judge, most merciful and Almighty Savior! Glory to Thine invincible goodness, glory to Thine immeasurable power, King of all the ages!

St. John of Kronstadt

Pray to be among the few, for the good is rare; wherefore, few, also, are they who enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

St. Basil the Great

What is the sign that a man has attained to purity of heart, and when does a man know that his heart has entered into purity? When he sees all men as good and none appears to him to be unclean and defiled, then in very truth his heart is pure.

St. Isaac the Syrian

To love is easy and sweet. Oh! if we could only see the heart of a man who bears the evangelic yoke of Christ, you would see in it a paradise of joy and gladness, you would see there the Kingdom of God, even though on the surface he was worried and surrounded by grief and tribulations, as a rose is surrounded by thorns. There can be nought but comfort and true joy in a heart in which reigns the Kingdom of God.

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

Our soul cannot yield spiritual fruit unless our heart is dead to the world. **St. Isaac the Syrian**

According to the teaching of the Fathers, any impression which, touching the heart, fills it with a great agitation, must come from the region of the passions. Therefore impulses which spring from the heart should not be followed at once, but only after careful examination and fervent prayer. God preserve us from a blind heart! It is well know that passions do blind the heart and screen the shining sun of the mind that we should all strive to gaze at.

St. Macarios of Optina

God is at all times nearer to us than any man, nearer than garments, than air or light. . . I live through him in body and soul, I breathe through Him, I think, reason, purpose, talk, venture and act through Him. . . We must condition ourselves in such a way that nothing can displace Him in our thoughts and hearts, nothing, no obstacle of any sort, can obstruct His presence. . . But, when I sin, or when I have a predilection for something, then I am far away from Him, not in distance but in my heart. . . then I am left without His grace.

St. John of Kronstadt

One of the brethren asked Abba Poemen, saying, "Father, what shall I do in the matter of my sins?" The elder said unto him, "Whosoever wishes to blot out his offences can do so by weeping, and he who wishes to acquire good works can do so by means of weeping; for weeping is the path which the Scriptures have taught us, and the Fathers have also wept continually, and there is no other path except that of tears."

Paradise of the Fathers

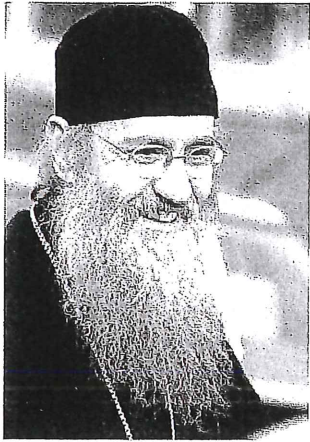
When we wish to build a house we do not put on the roof before building the foundations, for to build a house this way is impossible; first lay the foundations, then build the house and only then put on the roof. So also must we do in relation to spiritual things; first lay the foundations, that is, start to guard the heart and cleanse it from passions; then build the spiritual house, that is, repulse the insurrection against us, raised by evil spirits through the outer senses, and learn to cut off such attacks as quickly as possible; and only then should we put on the roof, that is, complete renunciation of everything in order to give ourselves up entirely to God.

St. Symeon the New Theologian

All sin is due to sensual pleasure, all forgiveness to hardship and distress. **St. Thalassius of Libya**

THE BIRTH AND BAPTISM OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, from Vol. 2 of "Empirical Dogmatics."



When we talk about the birth of Christ we are speaking of two births. One is the pre-eternal birth of the Word from the Father, according to the divine nature, and the other is the birth in time from the All-Holy Virgin, according to the human nature. This refers to Christ's two natures: the divine and the human.

The important thing is that this Word, before His birth in the flesh, is like the Father in every respect. He does not come from nothing. The Word has two births. One birth was before all ages and the other birth was in time, which is the birth as a man, the incarnation. This theological fact is revelational and above all it is empirical, as the glorified flesh of Christ becomes a source of life for the members of the Church, particularly the saints.

It is not only the Old and New Testaments that clearly teach the fact that the Word, the Lord of Glory, Who is God by nature and co-essential (*homoousios*) with the Father, truly took flesh and was born in His own normal and separate humanity of the Virgin Mary—who is literally, really and truly the Theotokos or Mother of God. Thus He became man by nature, not just by indwelling, and, as the Word in flesh, He became co-essential with us through His humanity. This truth is clearly revealed to all who have reached *glorification (theosis)*, from which they learn empirically that Christ is the Word, that He is God by nature and man by nature, and also by nature the source of glory. He passes on to His human nature the existence of the source of glory, by means of which the actual flesh of the Word becomes the source of our life and life-giving; this is because the Word Himself is incarnate, and also because of the union and exchange of natural properties between the divine and human natures of the Word.

In the Old Testament there was the tabernacle of witness, where the pot of manna, the tablets of the covenant and Aaron's rod were kept in the Holy of Holies. Now, in the New Covenant, the tabernacle is the flesh that He took from the All-Holy Virgin. This is why the statement that *the Word became flesh and dwelt* (literally: *tabernacled*) *among us* (Jn 1:14) is so important. This dwelling is the tabernacle. God *tabernacled* among us. How? He became flesh and dwelt among us.

The tabernacle of witness is the created form of the uncreated Temple, because the uncreated Temple is Christ Himself, the Word, this Angel of the Lord. For that reason Christ says, *I am in the Father, and the Father in Me* (Jn 14:10-11) and so on. That Christ is in the Father and the Father is in Christ means, in Hebrew terms, that Christ is the Temple of God. So we have the uncreated Temple, as we have the uncreated Law, which is Christ; and we have a created temple, which is the tabernacle of witness, which they later enclosed in Solomon's temple. This is why the created temple, the temple of Solomon, has been abolished and replaced by the created Temple, the human nature of Christ.

Christ as God-man is like God the Father and the Holy Spirit in every respect according to His divinity, and like man in every respect according to His human nature. The phrase that Christ is *the image of the invisible God* (Col. 1:15) refers to His uncreated divine nature.

This is exactly what the Apostle Paul says in the characterization of *the image of the invisible God*, Christ, that is. When he says *image* he does not mean something created, because there cannot be a created image of God. It is different if we speak about an image of Christ; in that case we have an image of something created, because Christ is man and we have an icon of Christ the man, not of Christ's divinity. But when we say that Christ is the image of God, as God is not incarnate, how can God have a created icon? He is the image of the invisible God as an uncreated reality, not as a created reality.

The incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity was in the pre-eternal plan of God, because through the union of the divine and human natures in the Person of the Word, the *glorification* of every human being could come about. From this perspective, the Theotokos was in God's pre-eternal plan. St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain wrote a specific text about our Lady the Theotokos, in which, by quoting the Fathers' words, he asserts that *All the intelligible and perceptible world came into being for this end, that is, on account of the Lady Theotokos, but the Lady Theotokos came into being on account of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The All-Holy Virgin is in the pre-eternal plan of God, as the troparia and the Fathers of the Church say. This is a matter of description. It is not a philosophical question about whether or not the All-Holy Virgin is necessary for the incarnation. It is a fact that the All-Holy Mother of God is ever-virgin. We cannot philosophize about something that is a fact and say that the incarnation could have come about even without the All-Holy Virgin, or from a Mother of God who was not a virgin.

The All-Holy Virgin was the greatest gift of the creation and humanity to Christ. The successive purifications of her forebears, her own struggle and, most of all, the grace of God, made her worthy to become the Mother of the

Son and Word of God. She experienced *glorification* in the Holy of Holies. We know from the Tradition about the *glorification* of the All-Holy Virgin, who entered the Temple at three years old. She reached the Holy of Holies, which means that the All-Holy Virgin at three years of age had attained to the experience of *glorification*. She lived in the glory of God. She also beheld God from at least the age of three, and in this way she was made ready to be the Mother of God.

Christ is co-essential (*homoousios*) with the Father according to His divine nature and co-essential with us according to His human nature. Some people in the early Church claimed that Christ was co-essential with the Father and with His Mother. He cannot be co-essential with His mother and His mother co-essential with us, without Christ being co-essential with us.

The Church ruled at the Third Ecumenical Council that the All-Holy Virgin was to be called Theotokos, because she did not give birth to a mere man, but to the Word of God. The teaching about the Theotokos is therefore included in the infallible teaching of the Church. Furthermore, the Theotokos occupies a position of utmost importance in the Church. In the Mysteries (Sacraments) of the Church the whole catholic Church is present: Christ with the Theotokos, the Prophets, the Apostles and the saints.

The faithful have a spiritual relationship with the Church. Anyone who loves Christ also loves the All-Holy Virgin, who assisted in the mystery of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God and from whom Christ took human nature and glorified it. The relationship of the faithful with the All-Holy Virgin is not, therefore, simply sentimental but spiritual. Furthermore, the glory of the Theotokos is not a theoretical teaching, but empirical, as many saints have seen the glory of the Theotokos.

In any case, the human nature that was assumed by the Word and united immutably, inseparably, indivisibly and unconfusedly with the divine nature, was glorified *at the same time as it was assumed* in the womb of the Theotokos. Christ was not gradually perfected, as human beings are. Christ is God according to essence, whereas man is glorified according to participation. Also, according to the Fathers of the Church, Christ brings about *glorification*: He is Himself the source of man's *glorification* and does not "undergo" *glorification*. Christ is God and glorifies others,

like the other Persons of the Holy Trinity, whereas man is glorified. Christ revealed this glorified human nature to human beings by stages.

There is no question of Christ having passed through the stages of *perfection*, *purification* and *illumination* in order to reach *glorification* or *theoria*. There was no progress towards perfection in Christ, since He had *glorification* or *theoria* or participation in the union of uncreated glory from the very conception of His human nature in the womb of the All-Holy Virgin. He did not possess this by the grace of God, but naturally, seeing that He was God by nature and the actual hypostasis of the Word, Who was the only one of the Holy Trinity to become man by nature, uniting Himself with His own normal human nature, with all its natural properties, including the will and energy that are common to human nature in general.

Christ gradually revealed the stages of perfection in Himself (in other words, the *glorification* of human nature in Himself) to set an example to those who are on the way to perfection. He assumed everything that was common to human nature (except sin) not in external appearance, as the Docetists claimed, in order to delude those observing His



human life, but in reality.

After the incarnation of the Word, exactly the same method of revelation and *glorification* that took place with the Prophets is repeated with the Apostles. The difference now is that the Word reveals Himself in the natural and uncreated glory of His nature, which is shared with the Father and the Holy Spirit, by means of His own-humanity. This humanity did not advance towards the continuous vision of divine glory, but was glorified through its union—not by grace but by nature—with the Word from the beginning of its existence in the womb of the Theotokos.

Christ did not progress as a human being towards *glorification*, but was conceived as a glorified man, not by virtue of the union that the saints experience with the divine nature, but by virtue of the one unique natural or hypostatic union with the divine nature and energy. Thus Christ, as man, participates by nature in the divine glory and is the natural source of this glory. The *glorification* of the Prophets, Apostles and saints is a union by grace with the natural glory and energy of the divine nature, but the *glorification* of the human nature of the Word is its hypostatic union with God the Word and the resultant union with the divine nature. All glorified creatures see the divine glory and share in it. Only Christ, because He

is the Word by nature, sees and participates by nature in the divine essence.

The saints understand this from their experience. When they reach *glorification*, the *theoria* of Christ's glory in His human nature, they realize that Christ is the source of the uncreated Light, whereas they themselves are participants in the Light. The fact that Christ was perfect from the beginning was made clear on many occasions, even during His struggle with the devil. In Christ this state of perfection was natural and not acquired. For that reason **His struggle with the devil in the wilderness and His forty-day fast were not an achievement but a manifestation of perfection.** At the same time it was a real fight with temptations, not from within but from the devil.

Christ voluntarily assumed the passible and corruptible aspects of human nature because He really took flesh. However, the so-called *blameless* or natural passions—hunger, thirst, weariness, sleep—did not act in Christ by compulsion. Christ's divine nature had authority over them. So Christ was hungry when He wished to be, thirsty when He wished to be, slept or rested when He wished to. The saints understand this to some extent from their experience. They too, when they reach *glorification* according to grace, observe a suspension of the natural and blameless passions: hunger, thirst, sleep and so on. In Christ this happened naturally because He was true God, and the human nature followed the divine nature.

The incarnate Word not only possesses the state of *theoria* naturally, not by grace, but even as man He Himself is the natural source of *glorification* and glory. If some of the natural and blameless passions are suspended in those who by grace are in a temporary state of *glorification*, how much more must those passions have no natural place in Christ, Who is glorified by nature and the source of *glorification* as man.

So one can see why it is a basic doctrine of the Orthodox Church that the Word as man wants to have the natural and blameless human passions, and really to share in them, transforming them into a source of our salvation and a means by which we ourselves can overcome the devil and pass through the stages of *purification* and *illumination* on our way to *glorification*. On the one hand these passions are a result of the Fall, but at the same time, through the glory of the Cross, they become the source of our salvation, perfection and *glorification*, and the means by which the devil is defeated and destroyed. Paradoxically, the devil is destroyed by means of the very passions by which he attempts to destroy man. The most basic weapon with which Satan tries to destroy human beings is death, but through death Christ and the saints destroy the devil.

It should be noted at this point that the Triune God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—is present everywhere in

the world according to energy but not according to essence. The God-man Christ, however, is absent from the world according to His essence as Word, but *the human nature of Christ is everywhere present according to essence*, by reason of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures. This issue is linked with the teaching about the essence and energy of God, but also about the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ.

The foundation of this teaching is the actual experience of *glorification*. These distinctions that the Fathers of the Church make are not the outcome of philosophical speculation. They know from the experience itself that in the experience of *glorification* the one who is glorified is united with God according to energy.

At Christ's Baptism in the River Jordan, John the Forerunner was accounted worthy to experience the Triune God: *And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him. And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* (Mk 1:9-11).

For the Forerunner, at least for the day of the Baptism, this is the experience of *glorification*. When he saw the heavens opened and so on, this means that he had a revelation of the uncreated glory of Christ. That is also why we sing in the troparion of the Feast of Theophany that *the Holy Trinity was revealed* in the Baptism. How is the Holy Trinity revealed in the Baptism? Through the manifestation of the glory of God, which is the experience of *glorification* for John the Baptist.



Let anger be stilled for it disturbs peace and tranquility. This is the day in which God descended to sinners! Let the righteous man be ashamed to exalt himself over sinners. This is the day when the Lord of creation came to servants! Let the master of the house humble himself in similar love to his servants. This is the day on which the Wealthy One became poor for our sake! Let not the rich be ashamed to share their table with the poor.

St. Ephraim the Syrian

The incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense, indeed, He was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us.

St. Athanasius the Great

Post-Modernism and Eastern Europe

It is important to note that the post-modernism about cultural and social matters that has become the default setting in the West in the last couple decades has had a hard time putting down roots in Eastern Europe. It's an odd fact that living under the Old Left (i.e. Marxism-Leninism) inoculated Eastern Europeans from much of the New Left of the 1960s and after, with its emphasis on gender, sexuality, and race. "Critical Studies" didn't get far with people who had to live under the KGB; indeed, East Bloc secret police in the 1980s viewed all this – the feminism and the gay rights stuff especially – as bourgeois deviance and a subversive Western import. Since 1990, Western countries have made actual efforts to import that, but it's met a lot of resistance, and doesn't make much of an impression outside educated circles; which is why when educated Westerners meet, say, educated Poles, "they seem just like us" – because they have accepted, verbatim, what we've told them is normative in a "developed" society.

The Russian Orthodox Church portrays a West that is declining down to its death at the hands of decadence and sin, mired in confused unbelief, bored and failing to even reproduce itself. Patriarch Kirill, head of the church, recently explained that the "main threat" to Russia is "the loss of faith" in the Western style. The practices of "sexual minorities," to use the Kremlin term for LGBT lifestyles, come in for harsh criticism. ...

Faith aside, it's not hard to see why Putin wants to fight off Western values based on individualism in the sexual realm that have unquestionably led to lower birthrates, which is something that Russia, which is already facing demographic disaster, cannot afford. The existence of the country itself is at stake, so we should not expect Putin to back off here, especially because he may actually believe all this as a matter of faith, not just nationalist practicality.

The West, and the United States especially, have helped cause this by active promotion of the post-modernism that Russia now rejects. It is not a figment of Moscow's imagination that the U.S. State Department encourages feminism and LGBT activism, at least in certain countries. When Washington, DC, considers having successful gay pride parades a key benchmark for "advancement" in Eastern Europe, with the full support of U.S. diplomats, we should not be surprised when the Kremlin and its sympathizers move to counter this. My friends in Eastern Europe, most of whom are comfortable with gay rights and feminism, have nevertheless noted to me many times that it's odd that the U.S. Government promotes such things in small, poor Eastern European countries it can intimidate but never, say, in Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, there remains the question of just how universal post-modern Western values actually are outside educated elites. There is ample evidence that many average people in Eastern Europe who fear Russia nevertheless are closer to the Kremlin's positions on cultural matters than to America's. In Georgia, where loathing of Russians generally and Putin particularly is universal, resistance to LGBT rights and feminism remains deep and broad, with the support of the Orthodox Church, while much the same can be said of Moldova, where fears of Russian invasion are acute, but so are fears of Western social values. If you put people in the position of choosing their way of life and its sacred values, as defended by an imperfect leader like Vladimir Putin, or abandoning their way of life, what do you expect?

John Schindler, US Intelligence Analyst

For the truth is that since we are God's good creation we are not free to choose our own stories. Freedom lies not in creating our lives, but in learning to recognize our lives as a gift. We do not receive our lives as though they were a gift, but rather our lives simply are a gift: we do not exist first and then receive from God a gift.

~ Stanley Hauerwas

“Behold, from henceforth All Generations Shall Call Me Blessed” - Questions Often Asked About the Mother of God

Q.: *Why do you pray to the Mother of God?*

A.: Since Jesus Christ died on the Cross and rose from the dead, conquering death for us, there is no reason why we cannot ask those in heaven to pray for us just as we ask those still living on earth for their prayers. After all, in Christ all are alive. Therefore we ask the Ever-Virgin Nary to pray to her Son for us, just as we also ask the angels, the saints, and all faithful believers here on earth to pray on our behalf, as Scripture Commands us to do: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men... I will therefore, that men pray everywhere (I Tim. 2:1,8). We turn readily to our friends and neighbors to ask for their prayers in our time of need; are not those in heaven even more our friends than those on earth? Why should they not intercede for us also before the throne of God?

Q.: *Why do Orthodox Christians call the Virgin Mary "Mother of God"? This term seems to imply that God is not the creator and origin of all things.*

A. We call the Holy Virgin Mary the Mother of God (from the Greek, Theotokos: literally, the "Birthgiver of God") because it is Scriptural: the righteous Elizabeth addressed the Virgin with these words: "*And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?*" (Luke 1:43). Who is this "Lord" of which Elizabeth speaks? It is Christ, the Lord God. For this reason we say, correctly, that the Virgin Mary is the Mother of God. She is not the Mother of God the Father, but the Mother of God the Son, who was begotten by the Father before all ages, and took flesh from the Virgin Mary.

Q.: *Why do Orthodox Christians give so much honor to the Mother of God?*

A.: We honor her because Jesus Christ Himself honored her on several occasions recorded in Scripture. He fulfilled her requests and also gave her special thought even while He was dying on the Cross (Luke 2:51; John 2:3-9; John 19:26-27). Even before Christ was born, she was honored by heaven when the Archangel Gabriel appeared and said to her: "*Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women*" (Luke 1:28). Holy Scripture further proclaims of her that "*henceforth all generations shall call me blessed*" (Luke 1:48), because from her womb came forth God in the flesh. This means that all who believe in Christ and in the Bible must give special honor and veneration to the one that is "blessed among women." It is not enough to merely give attention to her at Christmas time, when she appears in the Manger scenes of western Christian churches. No, this "highly favored one" must occupy a very special place in the hearts of those that follow her Son, just as she did among the first Christians.

Q.: Didn't our Lord, during His earthly life, sometimes place His mother (and His other kinsmen) in a decidedly secondary position, emphasizing spiritual virtues over kinship according to the flesh?

A.: No one who accepts the Gospel can believe that our Lord was in any way lacking respect for His mother. Any seeming disrespect on His part can only be due to a faulty, superficial interpretation of Scripture, due sometimes to 'understandably imperfect translations into modern languages.

When, for example, at the marriage of Cana, His mother tells Him: "They have no wine," and our Lord replies: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" (John 2:1) -one must understand that although the word "woman" might sound disrespectful in modern English, it was not so in the ancient East; it is the very word our Lord used to address His mother as He was dying on the Cross and entrusted her to His beloved disciple (John 19:26). His words to her at the marriage feast in no way indicate disrespect, but only emphasize the importance of the miracle which was to follow (the changing of water into wine) --a miracle which He indeed performed at her request.

When our Lord extends the concept of spiritual kinship to all those who "do the will of God." (Mark 3:34-5) He does not deny such a higher kinship to His own family. We know of several of His kinsmen who were Apostles (James, Jude, Simon – sons of St. Joseph from his first wife – St. Joseph was a widower), and especially "blessed" in this spiritual kinship, of course, was His own mother, of whom alone does the Scripture say that "all generations shall call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). Again, when a certain woman praises His mother for being the one who bore Him, and our Lord says, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28), He is a higher degree of veneration for His mother: she is blessed not Only for bearing Him in the flesh, but even more for being one who "hears the word of God and keeps it."

Q.' Yet in your church services I have heard Orthodox Christians call on the Mother of God to "save" them. How can she "save" anyone, since Christ is the only Savior?

A.: We believe that there is only one Lord God and Savior of mankind, Jesus Christ, No one is equal to Him, and no one but Him can save mankind. We do not turn to Mary, the Mother of Christ our God as to a savior, and we certainly do not put her on the same level as her Son, but we turn to her as to one who helps us by her prayers, just as St. Paul himself said that he had become all things to all men, "*that I might by all means and in any way save them*" (I Cor. 9:22). St. Paul was not claiming to usurp Christ as the savior; he merely wanted to help and strengthen others on the path to salvation. It is in this sense that we Orthodox Christians say, "Most Holy Theotokos save us"--that is, "Please help us toward salvation by your prayers."

Based upon the Missionary Handbook Series, "On Questions of the Orthodox Christian Faith Disputed by Protestants", by Fr. Deacon J. Smolin, serialized in *Orthodox Life*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y.)