



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205
Church Tel. 205-930-9681 / 205-907-9447

Visit stsymeon.com

January 15, 2017

St. Seraphim of Sarov

St. Paul of Thebes (341)
St. John Calabytes (The "Hut-dweller"- 450)

St. Seraphim Of Sarov



Memory Eternal!

~ Our dear Father Ignatius Crockett + January 12, 2017

Visitation and Memorial Service – Tomorrow – 5:00pm to 7:00pm

Funeral for a Priest – Tuesday, January 17, 10:00am / Burial at Forest Crest

The God-Man ... by St. Justin Popovich

*The God-man Jesus Christ is the unique Logos, the unique mind,
the unique meaning of both man and creation.*

In the end, Christianity is Christianity precisely because of the God-man (Jesus Christ), His **divine-human truth**, and the theanthropic way of life that Christianity offers. This is the fundamental truth against which no compromises can be made. The entire Christian understanding of what is valuable and worthy is defined and determined by this. Christ, as the God-man, is the most valuable being and the infallible measure of all things. We, therefore, must be sincere and consistent to the end. If Christ is not both God and man, then He becomes the most audaciously self-proclaimed being, since he declares himself to be God and Lord. Yet the evangelical historical reality demonstrates and proves unconditionally that Jesus Christ is fully and completely the perfect God-man. No one can be a Christian without believing in the God-man and in his theanthropic body, the Church, in which Christ has entirely deposited His wondrous personality. The saving and life-giving power of the Church of Christ lies in the eternally alive and ever-present Person of the God-man. Any attempt to replace the God-man with a man or to chose only those elements of Christianity which satisfy one's "personal taste" or one's individual understanding changes Christianity into a superficial and weak humanism. Everything under the sun is old except for the Personality of the God-man Christ. He is the only being that is new; he is eternally new. As St. John of Damascus said, "And being perfect God, he becomes perfect man; and thus occurs the newest event of all that is new, the only new thing under the sun." This is what makes the New Testament new and the truth of the Gospel always new and eternal. Since the personality of the God-man is eternally new and youthful in its theanthropic perfection, it cannot be exchanged or replaced; it is always and consistently the same. Therefore, the Gospel is always and everywhere the same: for those who live on earth as well as for the angels in heaven. The God-man Christ is the unique Logos, the unique mind, the unique meaning of both man and creation. Without Him it is impossible for even the smallest ordeal to be accepted in the world or in a human being like us.

{over}

From a purely ontological point of view, the God-man is not a miracle but rather a necessity for a world and a humanity such as ours. For this reason the Holy Gospel says that the divine Logos, being incarnate, "came unto His own" (John 1:11). What is it, then, that makes humanity one of His "own", if it is not the human being's God-like soul? Again it is said, "For we are His offspring" (Acts 17:28). Once again we are identified with Him on account of our God-like soul. Elsewhere the Gospel tells us that the divine Logos is, "the true light that enlightens every man who comes into the world" (John 1:9).

Therefore, when He became incarnate, He came not to strangers but to his own. In proclaiming the God-man we confess our Christ-like humanity, the divine origin of man, the divine grandeur of man as well as the divine value and sacredness of the human person. If this is not how things are, then for what reason are we "like" the divine Logos and "offspring" of God? In essence, the struggle for the God-man is a struggle for humanity. It is not the humanist who is fighting for the true man, the divine-like and Christ-like man, but rather men of theanthropic faith and life.

The exceptional importance of Christianity for the human race lies in the life-giving and unalterable divinity and humanity of Christ. It is this divine-human Christ who gives meaning to everything human and transforms the worthlessness of non-being into the light of all-being. It is only through its divine-human power that Christianity is the "salt" of the earth, a salt which preserves humanity from decomposing into sin and evil. If, however, Christianity becomes decomposed into various humanistic elements, then it becomes lifeless, it becomes a "salt-less" salt, which, according to the ever-true word of the Savior, "is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men" (Math. 5: 13). Every effort and attempt to *normalize* Christianity with the spirit of the age, with the fleeting movements of various historical epochs or with political regimes only removes that distinctive characteristic from Christianity which makes it the unique theanthropic religion in the world. Not conforming the God-man Christ to the spirit of the age but rather conforming and adjusting the spirit of the age to the spirit of the eternity of Christ, to the divine humanity of Christ—this is the unique and true mission of the Church of Christ in the world, of the Apostolic and Orthodox Church. Only in this way will the Church be able to preserve the life-giving and irreplaceable Personality of the God-man Christ, which is in Himself the most valuable being in all the universe, in the visible and invisible worlds as well as the world to come. He is that which is of the highest value and the infallible measure of all. ~ *Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ* † † †

✘ **Vain in every respect are they who despise the entire dispensation of God, and disallow the salvation of the flesh, and treat with contempt its regeneration,** maintaining that it is not capable of incorruption. But if this flesh indeed does not attain salvation, then neither did the Lord redeem us with His Blood, nor is the Cup of the Eucharist the Communion of His Blood, nor the Bread which we break the Communion of His Body (cf. I Cor. 10:16). For blood can only come from veins and flesh, and whatsoever else makes up the substance of man, such as the Word of God was actually made. By His own Blood He redeemed us... And as we are members of Him, we are also nourished by means of the creation... He has acknowledged the Cup (which is a part of creation) as His own Blood, from which He bedews our blood; and the Bread (also a part of creation) He has established as His own Body, from which He gives increase to our bodies." **St. Irenaeus of Lyons (150 AD)**

✘ **"Be extremely strict in guarding your intellect. When you perceive an evil thought, rebuke it and immediately call upon Christ to defend you;** and while you are still speaking, Jesus in His gentle love will say: "Behold, I am by your side ready to help you." When the whole detachment of the enemy has been put out of action through prayer, again turn your attention to your intellect. There you will see a succession of waves worse than before, with the soul swimming among them. But again, awakened by His disciple, Jesus as God will rebuke the winds of evil (cf. Mt. 8:23-27). Having found respite for an hour perhaps, or for a moment, glorify Him who has saved you, and meditate on death."

St. Philotheos of Sinai (The Philokalia Vol. 3)

Venerable John Calabytes “the Hut-Dweller”



Saint John the Hut-Dweller was the son of rich and illustrious parents, and was born in Constantinople in the early fifth century. He received a fine education, and he mastered rhetoric and philosophy by the age of twelve. He also loved to read spiritual books. Perceiving the vanity of worldly life, he chose the path that was narrow and extremely difficult. Filled with longing to enter a monastery, he confided his intention to a passing monk. John made him promise to come back for him when he returned from his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and take him to his monastery. He asked his parents for a Gospel so that he might study the words of Christ. John’s parents hired a calligrapher to copy the text, and had the volume bound in a golden cover studded with gems. John read the Gospel constantly, delighting in the Savior’s words.

The monk kept his promise to come back for John, and they went secretly to Bithynia. At the monastery of the “Unsleeping” (Akoimitoi), he received monastic tonsure. The young monk began his ascetical labors with zeal, astonishing the brethren with his unceasing prayer, humble obedience, strict abstinence, and perseverance at work. After six years, he began to undergo temptations. He remembered his parents, how much they loved him, and what sorrow he caused them. He regretted leaving them, and was filled with a burning desire to see them again.

Saint John explained his situation to the igumen Saint Marcellus (December 29) and he asked to be released from the monastery. He begged the igumen for his blessing and prayers to return home. He bid farewell to the brethren, hoping that by their prayers and with the help of God, he would both see his parents and overcome the snares of the devil. The igumen then blessed him for his journey. Saint John returned to Constantinople, not to resume his former life of luxury, but dressed as a beggar, and unknown to anyone. He settled in a corner by the gates of his parents’ home. His father noticed the “pauper,” and began to send him food from his table, for the sake of Christ. John lived in a small hut for three years, oppressed and insulted by the servants, enduring cold and frost, unceasingly conversing with the Lord and the holy angels.

Before his death, the Lord appeared to the monk in a vision, revealing that the end of his sorrows was approaching, and that in three days he would be taken into the Heavenly Kingdom. Therefore, he asked the steward to give his mother a message to come to him, for he had something to say to her. At first, she did not wish to go, but she was curious to know what this beggar had to say to her. Then he sent her another message, saying that he would die in three days. John thanked her for the charity he had received, and told her that God would reward her for it. He then made her promise to bury him beneath his hut, dressed in his rags. Only then did the Saint give her his Gospel, which he always carried with him, saying, “May this console you in this life, and guide you to the next life.”

She showed the Gospel to her husband, saying that it was similar to the one they had given their son. He realized that it was, in fact, the very Gospel they had commissioned for John. They went back to the gates, intending to ask the pauper where he got the Gospel, and if he knew anything about their son. Unable to restrain himself any longer, he admitted that he was their child. With tears of joy they embraced him, weeping because he had endured privation for so long at the very gates of his parental home.

The Saint died in the mid-fifth century, when he was not quite twenty-five years old. On the place of his burial the parents built a church, and beside it a hostel for strangers. When they died, they were buried in the church they had built.

In the twelfth century the head of the Saint was taken by Crusaders to Besançon (in France), and other relics of the Saint were taken to Rome.

Pearls of the Holy Fathers (15)

Now that the Kingdom of Heaven has drawn near to us through the condescension of God the Word unto us, let us not remove ourselves far from it by living an unrepentant life. Rather, let us flee the wretchedness of "those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death." Let us acquire the works of repentance: a humble attitude, compunction and spiritual mourning, a gentle heart full of mercy, loving justice, striving for purity, peaceful, peacemaking, patient glad to suffer persecutions, losses, disasters, slander and sufferings for the sake of truth and righteousness.

St. Gregory Palamas

Only the poor in spirit who cling constantly to the Lord by prayer on account of the constant sense of their poverty and need are capable of discovering within themselves the greatness of the name of Jesus.

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

When we are incapable of scaling the peaks of virtue, all we have to do is descend into the ravine of humility.

St. Macarius of Optina

The mouth of a humble man speaks the truth; but he who speaks against the truth is like the servant who struck the Lord on the face.

St. Mark the Ascetic

One cannot befriend a snake and carry it about in one's shirt, or attain holiness while pampering and cherishing the body above its needs.

St. Hesychius the Priest

Glory be to God on high, Who has not permitted the hater of good, the enemy, to pour out upon us all his malice as he would wish; for he would like to swallow men up alive, as the chief Apostle Peter testifies, saying: "As a roaring lion he goeth about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8).

St. Barsanuphius the Great

Since the world hates the Christian, why do you love that which hates you? and why do you not rather follow Christ, Who both redeemed you and loves you?

St. Cyprian of Carthage

Intellect is invisibly interlocked in battle with intellect, the demonic intellect with our own. So from the depths of our heart we must at each instant call on Christ to drive the demonic intellect away from us and in His compassion give us the victory.

St. Hesychius the Presbyter

When we turn our spirit from the contemplation of God, we become the slaves of carnal passions.

Abba Theonas

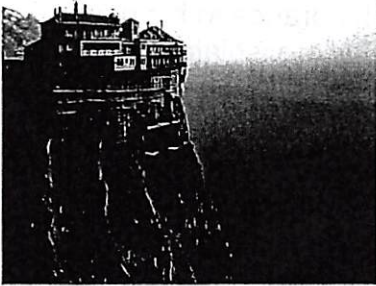
"My children and my heart, knowing that after death here below, repentance has no power, make care for your own souls a matter of importance.

St. Nikon

How blessed and wonderful, beloved, are the gifts of God! Life in immortality, splendor in righteousness, truth in boldness, faith in confidence, continence in holiness; and all these things are submitted to our understanding. What, then, are the things which are being prepared for those who wait for Him? The Creator and Father of the ages, the All-holy One, Himself knows their greatness and beauty. Let us then strive to be found among the number of those that wait, that we may receive a share of the promised gifts.

St. Clement of Rome

And lo, the Star... St. Symeon the Myrrh-gusher (Dec. 28)



And lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. (Matt. 2:9-10)

On December 28, shortly after the Feast of the Nativity, the Church celebrates the memory of St. Symeon the Myrrh-gusher through whom the Lord wrought great wonders. A star, like that which led the Magi to Bethlehem, miraculously revealed to the saint the site upon which, by divine command, he was to found a monastery. The monastery was appropriately dedicated to the Feast of the Nativity and was named New Bethlehem. Today, seven centuries later, it is still one of the flourishing monasteries on Mt. Athos.

The life of the venerable Symeon was arrayed with mighty ascetic feats and miracles not only during his lifetime, but even after his repose when there gushed forth from his relics are abundant fount of myrrh in a manner similar to that of the Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessalonica. Where he came from, who his parents were, and where he began his monastic labors, no one knows. Some time in the 13th century, he arrived on the Holy Mountain Recalling the saying of the Fathers that without obedience one cannot be saved, the venerable Symeon sought before all else to find a spiritual elder, one to whom he could entrust his soul without reserve, an elder who would be not only a faithful guide unto salvation and a radiant model of ascetic perfection, but also strict in bodily discipline.

After looking all over the Holy Mountain, he finally chose out of the multitude of monks leading virtuous lives, an unknown elder, perfect in all respects in the ascetic life. He labored in complete submission to his elder, fulfilling all his obediences with love and zeal and soon attained to such great spiritual heights that he became known all over the Holy Mountain for his irreproachable life. Finally, the time came when the elder was convinced that his period of trial was over. Casting aside his paternal kindness towards the venerable Symeon, he decided to dwell with him, as with a brother and on several occasions he even asked for his advice and counsel.

But instead of rejoicing over the benevolence and honor bestowed upon him by his elder, Symeon was utterly grieved. He decided to leave, seeking for himself total reclusion. Expressing his intention to his elder, he asked his blessing amidst a shower of tears, desiring with heartfelt sorrow that the elder would grant his consent. In this way, he took leave of his dear elder for whom he had already become not so much a disciple as another mighty co-struggler in the angelic life.

For a long time St. Symeon searched all over the Holy Mountain for a secluded hermitage where no one would know of his existence and no one would find him. Finally, with God's help, he found a deserted mountainside with caves on the southern part of the Holy Mountain. Knowing that before him lay the relentless struggle of unseen warfare, the saint clothed himself with spiritual armor with the help of the Holy Spirit, taking the cross, prayer, faith, patience, fasting, and everything that could crush the wily schemes of the demons and raise a man to angelic purity and childlike simplicity. It is difficult to recount the fierce schemes and hidden traps with which satan tormented and tried to catch unawares Saint Symeon. The holy ascetic, however, boldly trampled upon the brazen arrogance of his adversary and crushed all his plans. For many years St. Symeon remained secluded within his cave where he manfully endured the constant battle with the unseen enemies of his soul. He lived in sorrows and utter deprivation, lacking even the assurance of his own salvation.

Meanwhile, hearing of the severity of his life and in particular of his spiritual discernment and insight, many monks on the Holy Mountain began to come to him and to receive great spiritual benefit from his soul-profitting counsel, thus fulfilling the word of God: "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid" (Matt. 5:14). Together with those who came to him, Symeon was accounted worthy to receive from the Lord the gift of foreknowledge. However, through his humility he grew weary of such earthly honor, and he sought refuge from the disturbance created by all those who came to him. He was burdened by the stream of visitors which, it seemed to him, only served as a hindrance to his desire for a life of seclusion. He yearned, therefore, to abandon his dwelling for a yet more isolated one. But God, desiring the well-being and salvation of each and every one, prevented the realization of his desire in the following way:

One night, while persevering in prayer, the righteous one saw outside his cave, as if before his very eyes, the effulgence of a divine light; an ineffable fragrance spread all around him and he heard a loud voice: "Symeon, Symeon, thou faithful friend and servant of my Son! Do not go away from here. I shall glorify this place; you shall be its guiding light, and your name shall be glorified." Out of caution, Symeon chose at first not to believe this vision, not desiring to fall into the nets of the evil one; for he knew, according to the word of the Apostle, that Satan could transform himself into an angel of light. Nevertheless, he continued to ponder upon the actual source of the voice. This took place shortly before the Feast of the Nativity of Christ. Then, one night, walking outside his cave, he saw a strange apparition: a star descended from the heavens and came to rest just above the rocky cliffs where later the holy monastery was to be situated. This same vision repeated itself on the following evenings; but the venerable Symeon was still fearful. Was it possible that this was solely one of the consequences of his intense spiritual warfare? And he continued to distrust the vision.

When the Eve of the Nativity of Christ arrived, he saw in a dream a brilliant star and heard a divine voice: "Symeon! You must build a monastic dwelling here. I myself shall help you. Cast aside your doubts, or you shall be punished for your unbelief." The same voice spoke to him three times. At that time (as he later related to his disciples) it seemed to him that he was in Bethlehem of Judea, in the very place where the shepherds were tending their flocks, and he heard the sweet sound of angelic singing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men: fear not, for, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:14). "After this," said the Saint, "all fear and uneasiness were dispelled from my soul and I rejoiced in spirit, and secretly beheld the scene in Bethlehem; there, before the manger, the Sovereign Lady stood before the Divine Child, lying in swaddling clothes."

Several days after the Feast of the Nativity, three rich men, brothers after the flesh, came to the venerable one. They confessed all their sins and began persuasively to entreat him to permit them to live in obedience under his direction. After a brief period of trial and testing, St. Symeon revealed unto them, as to his own sons according to the spirit, the divine vision. More than once he related to them the vision concerning the building of a monastery on the neighboring cliffs, asking them not to speak of this to any, one while he was still alive until the proper time. Hearing all this, the brothers with love offered to the saintly elder all of their earthly wealth for the construction of the monastery, and in accordance with the Saint's wish and blessing, they offered immediately to prepare everything necessary for such an important and God-pleasing labor.

All necessary preparations were made. They had yet to learn, however, of the exact site for the foundation upon which the monastery was to be built. When St. Symeon directed the brothers to the location where the church and other buildings were to be constructed they were horrified, seeing the sheer cliffs which, according to his orders, were to serve as the monastery's foundation. "Are you trying to fool us, Abba?" they asked the Saint, "or are you speaking the truth? How can this be the site, when that cliff might be quite dangerous for the workers and even more so for those that will dwell here! If this is your desire, we shall surely oppose you!"

Patriarch Kirill, the Russian Orthodox Patriarch, told Russian media recently:

What's happening in the Western countries is that, for the first time in human history, legislation is at odds with the moral nature of human beings. What's good and evil? Sin and righteousness? These could be defined in both religious terms and non-religious terms. If you take a good character from English, American, or Russian fiction, you will see that all of them possess the same qualities. Why? We have different cultures and different political systems, but for all of us good is good, and evil is evil, and everyone understands who the good guys are, and who the bad guys are. So how do we distinguish? With our heart, with our moral nature. This moral nature, created by God, served as a foundation for the legislation which is designed. Laws defined moral values in legal terms, telling us what's good and what's bad. We know that stealing is bad and helping people is good, and laws define what stealing is and what the suitable punishment for it is.

Now, for the first time in human history, the law allows something that doesn't correspond to our moral nature. The law contradicts it. It's not the same thing, of course, but we could compare this to an extent to the apartheid in Africa or Nazi laws – when the law went against inherent moral values, people rebelled. They knew it wasn't right; it was artificial; it was part of some ideology and not in sync with their moral nature. So the Church can never approve of this. We say that the Church can never redefine good and evil, sin and righteousness, but we don't condemn people who have different sexual preferences. It's on their conscience and it's their business, but they shouldn't be discriminated against or punished, as used to be common practice in some states. However, under no circumstances should this be accepted as a social norm no different from the social norm that stems from our moral nature, meaning marriage between a man and wife who create a family and have children. That's why we believe this new trend poses a significant threat for the existence of the human race.

The Church has to address this and say it's a bad thing, but we've seen that authorities in some countries have been trying to silence clergymen. One Protestant pastor went to jail for calling same-sex marriage a sin in his sermon. Again, this is very reminiscent of what was happening under Soviet totalitarianism. In the countries that declare their commitment to freedom of speech, you can get punished for expressing your opinion. That's a dangerous trend, and I hope it will peter out and the natural order of things will prevail. I don't even want to think about what might happen to us otherwise. Our prayers and our work are so that humanity lives on and follows the principles dictated by our moral nature.

Two things atheists believe that are hard to believe:

1) The idea that, at one moment in time billions of years ago, nothing exploded into something ... that this space dust just kept expanding throughout the universe. Through various unguided processes, this space dust and goop (that came from nothing!) morphed very, very slowly into complex, interdependent biological systems. I just find this implausible, rationally speaking.

2) The notion that any value system has any objective merit at all. One can appeal to the usefulness of a particular belief system, but what's useful to you isn't so for me. If we're all nothing more than atoms bumping into each other, it makes no sense to suggest that any belief or value is better than any other. Better for who? You may not like terrorism, but if it works for someone else, why judge? Chopping off heads makes their life more meaningful ... and that's all we can say about it.

Many things we know to be factual defy common sense. Your entire body is made of tiny particles that rotate around central bodies, and aside from those, most of your body is mostly composed of empty space. This would sound crazy and/or magical to someone without the scientific background to understand it, and yet it is true. It can also be demonstrated by anyone, to anyone. That's what makes it a fact rather than a belief.

- James Bradshaw, internet comment

The matter was left undecided. In the meantime, seeing that he could not convince them to proceed with the work, St. Symeon ordered the trapeza meal to be served. While they were eating, one of the Saint's disciples who was bringing wine to the table, lost his balance through the prompting of a demon, and fell off the cliff into a great abyss, still holding in one hand a pitcher and in the other several glasses of wine. Stricken with horror at this sudden tragedy, the spokesman of the brothers strongly rebuked the venerable one: "Behold, Abba, what has already been wrought by these deadly crags before you have even begun your undertaking. How many similar incidents of such a frightful death will occur if we should agree to build the monastery here?" The Saint did not answer but secretly prayed to the Sovereign Lady Theotokos that he would not be put to shame in placing his trust in her intercession. Who can tell of all thy miracles, O Sovereign Lady, and who can praise thy majesty?

What happened next was entirely unexpected: the brother who had fallen over the precipice suddenly appeared before them. Through the intercession of the Most Holy Theotokos he was not only perfectly whole and unscathed, but he even held the glasses and pitcher from which not a drop of wine had spilled! Such a miracle brought fear and trembling upon the laborers. They fell to their knees before the Saint and beseeching forgiveness said: "Now we know, father, that you are truly a man of God." With heartfelt sincerity they were all grateful to be numbered among the Saint's disciples and were soon accounted worthy of the angelic habit. Then, under the immediate supervision of the venerable Symeon himself, his disciples, formerly simple laborers, proceeded with the construction of the Monastery.

The situation, however, was such that before anything else it was necessary to lay the foundation. According to the instruction of the Saint, they were to use a nearby stone of enormous size. The Elder ordered them to move it, but they, forgetting about the miracle of the unspilled wine, were of the firm opinion that not only was it impossible for them with their combined efforts to move that massive weight, but that it could not even be budged. They stood there bewildered, not having the slightest idea what to do. Seeing this, the Saint approached them and, making the sign of the life-giving Cross on the stone, he single-handedly lifted it upon his shoulder and carried it to the designated site. In this way he demonstrated in actual fact the truth of the word which the Lord spoke unto the Apostles: *"Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, 'Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove'"* (Matt. 17:120).

That such a man, whose body was weakened by fasting and ascetic labor, should lift such a weight far exceeding human strength can only serve as a testimony of God's almighty power and His readiness to help those who turn to Him with faith.

Having established the monastery which he named New Bethlehem, and having spent his life in God-pleasing labors, St. Symeon reposed on the 28th of December, 1287. On the morning of the next day, in the presence of the entire brotherhood, the face of the righteous one shone with a wondrous light. After his soul had ascended unto the choirs of the righteous, a fragrant myrrh issued forth from his holy relics through which St. Symeon worked many miracles to the glory of God, for kings, monks, and laymen.

Many years after the Saint's earthly departure, a pious Serbian king helped to greatly enlarge and rebuild the monastery in honor of its founder. Since that time it has been known as Symeonopetra, or the "Rock of Symeon". Today it is perhaps one of the most awe-inspiring architectural monuments in the world, a standing testimony to the power of faith and God's good will toward men.

(From the Russian *"Athonite Patericon"* by Monk Gerasim)