



## *Fire & Light*

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

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 854-4235

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

✠ **September 2, 2012** ✠

**Martyr Mamas of Caesarea in Cappadocia (275)**

**St. John the Faster, Patriarch of Constantinople (595)**

**Sts. Anthony & Theodosius of the Kiev Caves Monastery (1074)**



⇒ *Many Years! Newly Illumined Child Joseph Preston!*

⇒ **Dates Ahead:**

✠ **This Saturday, Sept. 8 – 10:00am Divine Liturgy ~ Nativity of the Theotokos**

✠ **Child Maxim Landar Baptism – 3:00pm**

**Fri. Sept. 14 – Feast of the Elevation of the Cross**

**Sept. 15 – Saturday night Psalm-a-thon**

**Sept. 16 – Church School begins / Junia Boyer - baby shower**

**October 7 – Annual Parish Meeting / Oct. 28 - 35th Anniversary Banquet**



### **On the Absolute Necessity of God's Grace**

✠ The farmer plows the earth, cleans, sows seed and awaits the mercy of God. If God does not send rains and helpful winds when they are necessary, the farmer's toils are in vain. It is the same with us. If God doesn't send the purifying waters of His grace, we remain devoid of fruit; and our works become the fodder of demons. For our passions drown them, and we don't harvest anything. We must not forget that virtuous deeds, which are not done for the right reason become evil deeds.

**Blessed Elder Joseph the Hesychast (1959)**

### **Nothing from Nothing....**

Atheism: The belief there was once absolutely nothing. And nothing happened to the nothing until the nothing magically exploded (for no reason), creating everything and everywhere. Then a bunch of the exploded everything magically rearranged itself (for no reason whatsoever) into self-replicating bits which then turned into dinosaurs...And they mock *our* beliefs! ...

– Internet

### **Atheism: The Boast of Our Time**    *“Self-appointed unbelievers...”*

by Iconographer Photios Kontoglou (20<sup>th</sup> C)

Atheism! The great title and boast of contemporary man. Whoever receives it (to receive it you only need to be tonsured a monk of the faithless) appears to others as wise even if he is illiterate, serious even if he is ridiculous, official even if he is insignificant, important even if he is unimportant, a scientist even if he is incompetent.

I do not refer to the person who truly wishes to believe but cannot, even if the deep rooted reason of unbelief is always pride, this viper that hides so cunningly in man that he cannot understand. Whatever it may be, the people who struggle and fight against their faithless self, they have our sympathy. For them we, who believe, beg God to help them believe as He did to the father with his sick child, by begging Christ to heal him. And He replied “If you believe, everything is possible to the believer”. And the father cried loudly and with tears replied, “I believe Lord. Help me in my little faith!”

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## This and That

### Re: Conservative churches are growing...

It's true to an extent, because "conservative" churches make demands on members in terms of practice and belief, whereas "liberal" churches nowadays often provide members with little more than a question mark. People don't get out of bed for that.

But there's more to religion than doctrine; there's also worship. And, perhaps ironically, churches conservative in doctrine are often liberal in liturgy while churches liberal in doctrine are often conservative in liturgy. "Conservative" congregations have forms of worship so far removed from traditional Christian liturgy that those forms would be either unrecognizable by prior generations of Christians or reckoned as pagan, while "liberal" denominations—the ELCA, TEC—maintain the fundamental forms of traditional liturgy.

Accommodating to culture in hopes of holding on to numbers simply doesn't work. As William Inge once observed, "If you marry the spirit of your own generation, you will be a widow in the next." ... **traditional doctrine and liturgy work together** to give people a transcendent sense of home in a robust culture, the Church.

Leroy Huizenga

Why have Americans of the last several generations lost all ability to recognize **age-old truths**? Like the richer the government, the poorer the people? In this case, I think it has something to do with the fact that people of hereditary wealth now make the decisions about government spending, and they like to be generous—with other people's money.

~ Clyde Wilson

**Look at the education system.** We have dumped trillions of dollars into it in the last 45 years, since 1965, and what do we have to show for it? We have test scores that continue go down until they revise the tests to make them easier, so the scores will stop going down. You are getting no real progress there. The United States as a country has fallen into the middle level of Western countries in terms of its test scores, and it's headed toward Third World status. — Pat Buchanan

### Kosovo

...The key is in the desire of the Western elite class to use the Balkans as a testing ground for their emerging postmodernist, post-national project. They know that Kosovo is more than a piece of real estate, that it is to the Serbs what Alamo is to Texans or Jerusalem to Jews, that taking it away and letting its churches and monasteries be demolished is an unprecedented exercise in ethnocide.

...The U.S. policy in the Balkans—just like its policy in Libya last year and in Syria today — facilitates the jihadist agenda. American goals paradoxically coincide with the regional objectives of those same Islamists who confront America in other parts of the world. Far from enhancing peace and regional stability, such policies continue to encourage pan-Islamic agitation... Serge Trikovic

### True Conversion

Evangelization of the ego yields fragile converts. Their own ego-driven needs may create a great deal of energy, but with possibly destructive consequences. Fascination with fasts, feast days, cultural artifacts, correctness (the ego's panoply) create a pastoral nightmare and a parish riddled with conflict... True conversion (which happens over an extended period) occurs as we learn to dwell in the heart. Such conversion is an equal requirement within the Church. When it comes to life in the heart — we are all "converts" at best.

— Fr. Stephen Freeman

It was recently stated in my favorite journal that official Catholic charities receive three-fourths of their funds, a billion dollars per year, from the U.S. government. When and where did this kind of thing become routine? In a regime in which a little prayer in a schoolroom or at a ballgame is a violation of church / state separation? I venture that the very same people both the government's absorption of the church and the government's suppression of Christianity.

~ Clyde Wilson

The unbelievers we refer to here are not so. They not only never cried before to open the closed door with pain and contrition, the door of repentance, as that tormented father did, as written in the Bible, but were not even moved neither felt any bitterness from their unbelief, nor assumed any responsibility or blame. All the blame is God's who does not appear to them to tell them, "Come, poke me, touch me, talk to me as you talk between yourselves, analyze me with your chemistry, dissect me with your anatomy blades, weigh me, measure me, satisfy your faithless feelings, and satiate your insatiable logic".

These self appointed unbelievers, when they show off their smartness, pumped up by airs of pride and the cunning agility of their brains, are not in a position to understand how silly and narrow minded they appear to those who believe. Because to believe, they demand certain proofs that make the believer pity them for their limited view they have on spiritual matters. The believer is well aware how far the pondering of the unbeliever can get, for he too as a person has the same logic, the logic of the flesh, worldly logic. While the unbeliever is unaware of what is within the believer, and what is beyond practical knowledge, namely the mysteries that are hidden from the eyes, and because of this he believes they do not exist. With his foolishness he feels smug, and talks with disdain for those that are in a position to feel the deeper meaning of the world, while the unfortunate one is blind and deaf and believes he can hear everything. The believer has spiritual sight and spiritual hearing as well as some type of "super feeling". The unbeliever, how could he comprehend that mystical world with the coarse means at his disposal, namely his bodily feelings? How could he touch the fine and odd messages of the world, when the poor one does not have the aeriels that are needed to receive them?

The Apostle Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, in his own way, writes about what is possible for a believer to sense and what can an unbeliever sense. We preach, he says, the wisdom of God that is embedded in mystery and is hidden, the wisdom that God destined before time, for our glory and none of the rulers of this world came to know (namely, the wise men of worldly wisdom), and He uncovers it, that which according to the Scriptures no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor has ascended to the heart of any man, the things that God prepared for those that love Him. For us God revealed them through His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit probes everything, even the depth of God. What man knows the essence of man but only the spirit of man that is within him? Likewise the mysteries of God no one knows but only the Spirit of God. We did not receive the spirit of the world (namely that of philosophy and worldly knowledge) but the Spirit of God to understand all the things that He gave us. And these (the gifts) are not expressed with words that human wisdom uses, but words that the Holy Spirit teaches, speaking spiritually with spiritual people. Unfortunately men of worldly knowledge (the rational) do not accept what is spoken by the Spirit of God, because they believe them to be nonsense and are thus not in a position to understand how to examine it spiritually. The spiritual man examines every person while he cannot be examined by anyone.

Unbelief has always existed. However, today with the atrocious vanity that consumes us, we display it as if it accords us great value. Whoever believes in God and revealed truth is ignored as narrow minded and foolish and is the brunt of all jokes. He is looked at as "defective" by most people, especially the people that know how to achieve in this life "success", by making money and having a good time, giving not a cent to anyone, according to the saying, "Let's eat and drink for tomorrow we die". For this, he who believes in God needs to be courageous and ignore worldly honors and material interests. The one that boasts that he believes in nothing, 1) The world has him in high regard and respect, even so the more non-believer he claims to be, that much more regard and respect is shown to him by the clever and serious world. Such a man frowns upon others, is of few and heavy words, is short tempered and gruff, and is seen as a "positive man", a "strong man". 2) Everything happens to him conveniently and is neither bothered nor is he worried for anything. He has no responsibilities or is pestered by anything. "Down here", he says, "is both hell and paradise. Life is to be enjoyed, for us clever ones. Those sleeping or drugged let them

die."

Besides there is no easier thing than be an unbeliever! Just press one switch and everything comes conveniently. The devil said to Christ, "Kneel and worship me and the stones will become bread".

So says the smart one: "For man to sit with four hundred brains, waste time with stupidity like the old women, with gods, with hell and paradise, with lampadas (oil lamps), with censings, with chalices, with priests and nuns! And in what age? In our age where science sends men to planets! Listen my friend can you believe how stupid is the world?"

That's what they say about believers, the smart ones and the honorable of this world, who are applauded by many, who regard them as sensible in everything because they do not chase shadows but are strong minded and succeed in everything they try.

Yes, they succeed for a short time, for unbelief is "a wide gate and a broad road", which unbelievers do not believe "leads to perdition" as Christ said, but "to worldly prosperity". Belief however is "a narrow gate and a grief stricken road" which the unbelievers do not believe "leads to life" but "to worldly unhappiness and disdain". "Many are they that enter through the wide gate" according to our Lord, and "few are those who find the narrow gate".

All the unbelievers say that if they witness a miracle they would believe. However, belief does not happen by force, but with the involvement of the soul. For this, to all who ask for a miracle to believe it is not granted, according to our Lord's address to the Pharisees, "This evil and adulterous generation demands for a sign to be given it".

However, even if an unbeliever witnesses a miracle, his pride would not allow him to believe, for he fears that he may be seen as gullible and become disdained.

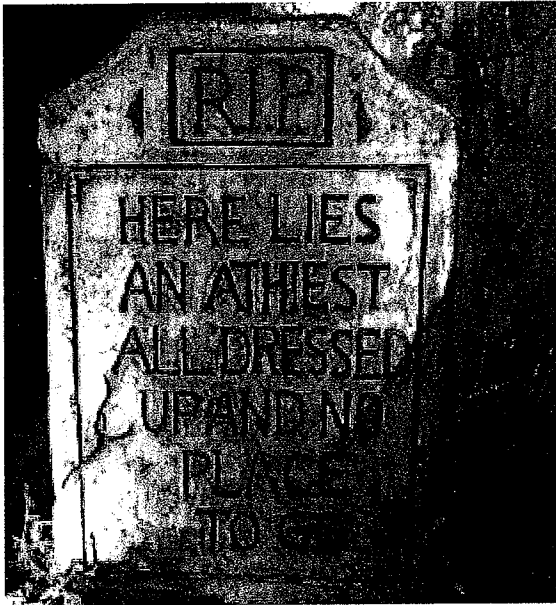
Sometime ago I wrote five or six brief articles on the miracles that were happening in a village on the island of Mytilene, with the title "Amazing Mysteries". Many readers were moved a lot, especially the humble and illiterate people, "the babes of the world and the weak ones". The clever ones however paid no attention to it and a few of them mocked me and wrote me that I write nonsense. But "God is not mocked". From then to now the miracles have not ceased and progressively became more numerous and terrifying. People that see them, write me about them in detail and I compile them in a book that will be like a hot iron for unbelieving mouths [it concerns the book "Great Sign" that was published by "Astir" regarding the miracles of Sts. Raphael, Nicholas and Irene]. During this age, discoveries are made of ancient churches with relics of those who appear living to simple people, in their sleep or while they are awake or in icons and other heirlooms. Everything could have been found and could have quickly and completely uncovered this terrible crater, that would have swept the unbelievers with its sacred lava, if there were greater means at the disposal of the poor ones who dig with fire like faith.

However, whatever it may be, with God's grace "the Healer of the sick and the Replenisher of those lacking", it will come to a good end, this blessed task, and will triumph our indestructible faith, and it will be heard to the ends of the world with a thundering voice saying: "Who is so great a god as our God? You are the God who alone works wonders".

*From the magazine, "Orthodox Philotheos Martyrdom" by Orthodox Kypseli Publication.*

# A Secular Death

~ Fr. Stephen Freeman, *Glory to God for All Things*



Almost no event shatters the confidence of the secular world like death.

Regardless of a person's achievements, fame or wealth, death not only destroys but threatens to mock. Many older funeral customs evolved in a relatively non-secular context. It is not surprising that funerals in the secular world are changing May 18, 2012 quickly: their content speaks volumes about the nature of secularized religion.

A 2009 article states:

Nearly 50 years ago, only 5 percent of the funerals in North America involved cremation. That percentage increased to 20 percent 30 years later, and in the past

15 years that percentage is pushing past 40 percent, which amounts to about 1.5 million cremations by next year.

I have served as a pastor in the American Southeast since 1980. Over the past 32 years I have seen a vast change in popular thought about funerals. Orthodox tradition and practice is quickly being viewed as too expensive, too focused on religion, and too concerned with the body.

Contemporary funerals (frequently termed a "celebration of life") often have no "body" present. As memorials, the emphasis is on remembering the past – and in the most positive manner. Some celebrations have the feel of a "production," complete with large projection screen and digitally produced music. Most funeral homes are glad to provide the production work.

In contrast, an Orthodox funeral concentrates on a different memorial. It is God's eternal memory of those who have fallen asleep that is asked. Our own memory is weak, and biased, itself destined to fade within less than a life-time.

I have often been told that a funeral is "for those who grieve." This is a deeply secular understanding of death. Secularism thinks that those who have died have need of nothing – they are gone as if they never were. Those who remain have the burden of guilt and grief – it is their needs that should be our present concern.

Death challenges the secular world at its weakest point. Secular life is essentially meaningless. There is an old phrase which describes those who fear something so much that they seek to ignore its presence as "whistling past the graveyard." It is even easier to whistle past the graveyard if you never go near one.

Iron and Wine (2004) offered the world perhaps the first love song about cremation:

She says "If I leave before you, darling  
Don't you waste me in the ground"  
I lay smiling like our sleeping children

One of us will die inside these arms  
Eyes wide open, naked as we came  
One will spread our ashes round the yard

The song has the honesty of recognizing that death at least yields something tangible.

The inherent meaninglessness of an existence that has no transcendence – nothing beyond itself – offers the modern world great temptation. **If we will have no God, then we will invent lesser gods and serve them instead.** Radical environmentalism has become a growing substitute for God. Some lessen their “carbon footprint” by extreme measures – limiting family size by any means possible. Of course, the ultimate lessening of our footprint is to remove ourselves from the planet – to what purpose? Indeed, what purpose the planet itself? Who would laud such noble sacrifice?

The transcendence of a two-storey world – one in which this world only has meaning because of the “next” world – is equally flawed. The world in which we live is not only transcended – it is positively devalued (except in those accounts in which eternity itself is determined within the short span of life on earth). In traditional Western Christianity, this two-storey account of life and death predominates. The world in which we live has no connection to the world in which God dwells, apart from moral concerns. There is no sacramental union, only the token appearances that appear magically in churches from time to time.

In the traditional theology of the Eastern Church, this world and the “next,” are not two worlds. We use the language of place (heaven and earth) for lack of language not for accuracy. There is more to the created order than we see (“all things visible and invisible”). But that which is not seen is not inherently separate from that which is. Sacrament (*mystery* in the East) is a way of describing the relationship between what is seen and what is unseen. Everything is sacrament, icon and symbol.

In such a setting, death is a *change*, but not an end. That which we *see*, the *body*, remains important and worthy of honor. A funeral, the service of remembrance, is a sacramental gathering in the presence of God. The body is honored, even venerated. The life of remembrance, eternal remembrance, begins.

My wife and I have a fifth child, one who died in the 5th month of his gestation. I held him at the time of his still birth. We mourned his loss, and gave him a name. We entrusted his life to the good God who gave him to us. The only relationship I have had with him has been one of remembrance. Each day in my prayers he is remembered along with my grandparents, my parents and in-laws who have gone before. They are not a part of my past, but a part of my present, particularly when I am awake and stand before God, seeing the world as it truly is.

The fiction of sentimentality and the emptiness of secular mourning quickly fade before the great presence of God. The proclamation of Christ’s Resurrection is no pious notion about the world to come. It is the triumph here and now over death – the presence of Life pressing in on us – lifting up the world into the fullness of its meaning – gathering together all things in one.

Memory eternal!

## Atheists are Believers, too

by Pete Enns, Ph.D., August 15, 2010, Mystagogy Blog (excerpt)

... "***For both the religious and atheists, there is mystery.***"

What holds true for religious people when they talk about God holds for atheists when they talk about not-God.

Some atheists claim to have a sure and certain knowledge about spiritual things. "I *know* -- through reason, logic, and evidence -- that God does not exist." These atheists feel that their position is intellectually superior to a belief in God. God does not exist because what cannot be established through "reason, logic, or evidence" is not real.

This sounds rational and objective, but there is a lot of belief tucked away in this assertion. Atheists do not *know* God does not exist; they *believe* it.

To say that God's existence is detectable with certainty through reason, logic, and evidence is a *belief* because it makes some crucial *assumptions*. For one thing, it assumes that our intellectual faculties are the best, or only, ways of accessing God. This is an assumption that privileges Western ways of knowing and excludes other wholly human qualities like emotion and intuition.

It also reduces God to an object, a thing, a being among all other beings, whose existence is as open to rational inquiry as *anything* else. It is an old argument but a good one: any god worthy of the name is the *source* of all being, *and therefore* not one more being alongside all others subject to rational control. Any god like that isn't God at all.

People can think what they want about God. My point here is simply this: no one knows whether our intellectual faculties can determine with certainty whether there is a higher power, prime mover, or whatever you want to call god. That is a belief.

Also, all people, atheists included, believe worthwhile things for which there is no compelling evidence whatsoever. For example, many people -- scientists, philosophers -- believe in the principle of uniformity: what we observe now of the laws of nature happens everywhere in the universe, always has and always will.

I happen to believe this is true, but what I believe isn't the point here. The point is that there is no empirical evidence for this principle, nor can it be logically proven. In fact, there is no evidence for the principle at all unless we assume it to begin with.

Why do people accept the principle of uniformity? Because it *can be used* to construct coherent scientific explanations of the universe, and that is a good reason to accept it. But this is not too far from what religious people say about their faith. Religious beliefs *can be used* to construct coherent explanations for things like why there is something rather than nothing.

All of us accept as true ideas that seem to work well, that make sense of our reality. We do not *know* with certainty that they are true because of reason, logic, or evidence; we *believe* they are true because they work.

...Oddly, some Christian fundamentalists and some atheist fundamentalists suffer under the same delusion, that their view on ultimate reality is fully supported by reason, logic, and evidence. Both are wrong. For both the religious and atheists, there is mystery. Atheists are free to be atheists, but they don't know any more than anyone else.

## From the Life of ELDER JEROME of Simonas Petras (+1957)

Fr. Jerome served the Divine Liturgy daily, yet serving so frequently did not make the manner in which he served any less contrite. He was a worthy celebrant of the Most High. Often during the Liturgy, we heard pure children who were participating in the divine worship exclaim, "Look, the elder is not walking on the ground." Indeed, he had been granted divine gifts, and with the pure eyes of their souls they saw him elevated in the air about one or two spans above the ground. He celebrated his divine work as an immaterial liturgist and an angel of the Lord.

Elder Jerome especially loved to speak about the Saint of the day. He would say, "What saint are we celebrating? Bring the book so that we can see what this saint did for Christ. And I - what do I do for Him?" After he would speak a bit about the saint - he knew all the lives of the saints by heart - he would open the book. And although he knew the accounts well, he read as enthusiastically as if it were the first time. His relationship with the saints was fervent and vivid, similar to a relationship with an intimate friend, who pays close attention to you when you speak. His love for the saints was amazing. It was as if he himself lived through their martyrdoms, as if he himself participated in their pains.

While reading, his eyes filled with tears. Because he could not restrain himself and hide his tears, he would say that he was elderly and tired and would give the book to another to continue. Often at the beginning of the reading, he would hand the book to the sacred chanter or to a priest, because he knew that again his pure tears would betray him.

A man who worked near the church had tattered pants. He asked Fr. Jerome whether he had any old ones to give him. "Of course, of course," he said, "wait a moment." The Elder went into the next room and took off his own pants, because he did not have any others. Covered with his cassock, he returned and gave them to the man.

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### LOVE FOR CHRIST'S SAINTS

✠ A touchstone of true Orthodoxy is love for Christ's Saints. From the earliest Christian centuries the Church has celebrated her Saints - first the Apostles and Martyrs who died for Christ, then desert-dwellers who crucified themselves for the love of Christ, and the hierarchs and shepherds who gave their lives for the salvation of their flocks. From the beginning the Church has treasured the written lives of these her Saints and has celebrated their memory in divine services. These two sources - the lives and the services - are extremely important to us today for the preservation of the authentic Orthodox tradition of faith and piety. The false "enlightenment" of our modern age is so all-pervasive that it draws many Orthodox Christians into its puffed up wisdom and without their even knowing it they are taken away from the true spirit of Orthodoxy and left only with the shell of Orthodox rites, formulas and customs.

- Fr. Seraphim Rose (+1983)

### The Same Spirit as them...

✠ All the Saints in Heaven and all true Christians upon earth are "one body and one spirit" (Eph. 4:4). This is why the prayer of believers is heard so easily and so speedily and truly in Heaven, and why there is so much hopefulness in calling upon the Saints. But in order that our prayers should be always easily and speedily heard by the Saints, we must have the *same spirit* as them, the spirit of faith and of love for God and our neighbor, the spirit of meekness, humility, abstinence, purity and chastity, (being) brave, valiant, thirsting after righteousness, and the spirit of compassion - heavenly, not earthly.

~ St. John of Kronstadt (1908)