

Protect the sinner without doing him wrong. But strengthen his courage for life; then the mercy of the Lord will bear you.

Support with your word the weak and the distressed in spirit whenever you can; then the hand that bears the universe will support you.

Participate with those who are suffering in heart, in passionate prayer and mourning of the heart; then before your demand a fountain of grace will be opened.

Be strenuous in prayer at all time before God, with a heart full of chaste deliberations mingled with passion; then He will preserve your mind from impure thoughts, so that the way of God be not disordered in you.

Saint Isaac the Syrian



**Sunday 7 September 2014 is the Sunday before Holy Cross**

**Matins Gospel:** Mark 16:1-8

**Epistle:** Galatians 6:11-18

**Gospel:** John 3:13-17

**Resurrectional Apolytikion:**

When the women Disciples of the Lord had learnt from the Angel the joyful message of the Resurrection, casting away the ancestral condemnation triumphantly they said to the Apostles: 'Death has been despoiled, Christ God has been raised, granting the world His great mercy.'

To receive *Evangelion* by email, email [evangelion@goarch.co.za](mailto:evangelion@goarch.co.za) and put "Subscribe" in the heading.

Back issues are available online at <http://www.goarch.co.za/media/evangelion>

### ***Readings and saints for this week:***

**Monday:** Luke 1:39-49, 56; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 10:38-42, 11:27-28  
Nativity of the Theotokos; Sophronios of Iberia

**Tuesday:** Galatians 4:22-27; Luke 8:16-21  
Synaxis of the Holy Ancestors of God; Martyr Severian

**Wednesday:** 2 Corinthians 13:3-13; John 3:16-21  
Martyrs Menodora, Metrodora & Nymphodora; Empress Pulcheria

**Thursday:** Galatians 1:1-3, 20-24; 2:1-5; John 12:19-36  
Theodora of Alexandria; Righteous Euphrosynus

**Friday:** Galatians 2:6-10; John 11:47-54  
Apodosis of Nativity of the Theotokos; Hieromartyr Autonomos

**Saturday:** 1 Corinthians 2:6-9; Matthew 10:37-42, 11:1  
Saturday before Holy Cross; Forefeast of the Exaltation



## ***Evangelion***

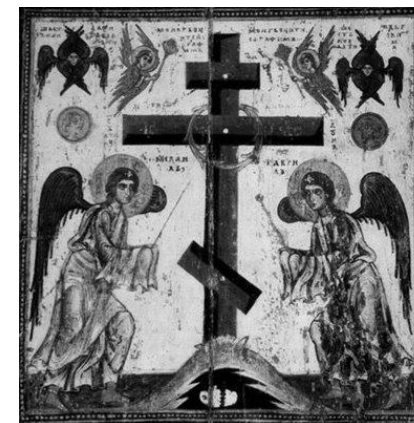
*A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith*

7 September 2014

### **Looking to the Cross of Christ**

Today is the Sunday before the Feast of the Elevation of the Venerable and Life-Giving Cross and so the Church helps us to prepare for this great Feast by focusing our attention on Jesus' words in Saint John's Gospel.

In today's Gospel He tells us how God sent His Son to us to save us, for He wishes all to be saved and to have eternal life. In this Gospel Jesus Christ uses Old Testament imagery and applies it to Himself. When the people of Israel were afflicted by snake bites while wandering in the desert, God commanded Moses to fashion a bronze serpent so that everyone who looked at it would be healed. This healing was a foreshadowing of the ultimate healing that we find in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Just as looking at the serpent enabled the Israelites to be healed, so we need to look to the Cross of Christ in order to find healing and salvation.



The Gospel tells us that God desires our salvation, but it also tells us that we need to respond to Him. God will not force salvation on us; instead we need to acknowledge our own need for healing and turn to Him. The Fathers tell us that, just as the people of Israel had to leave behind their slavery in Egypt, so we need to turn our backs on sin and to enter into the promised land of salvation. By looking to the Cross, we seek to be healed from our sins as we seek the vision of God's Glory that is displayed on the Cross of Christ

Abba Joseph told Abba Isaac: "Once I was with Abba Poimen and saw him fall into ecstasy, Because I had great boldness with him I made a prostration and said to him "Tell me, where were you?" He was forced to admit, "My thoughts were there at the Cross of the Saviour, where Holy Mary the Mother of God was standing, and so I always wanted to cry like that."

From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers

## Joining Heaven and Earth

*An Introduction to the Orthodox Understanding of Icons*

Although images had been used by Christians since the earliest times, there were also people who questioned the Church's use of icons. They usually based their objections on the prohibition of images found in the Ten Commandments:

*You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath ... you shall not bow down to them and serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God. (Exodus 20: 4-5)*



These people argued that God was invisible and so could not be depicted in images and that to depict God in images was idolatry. As time progressed, they were also influenced by the rise of Islam, which rejected both the doctrine of the Incarnation and the use of images. But they were also influenced by some heresies that did not accept Christ's full humanity.

Things came to a head in the iconoclast controversies in the eighth and ninth centuries. The iconoclasts were literally "smashers of icons" and went about destroying them and persecuting those who defended them. Orthodoxy finally triumphed, and in the process the Church was able to articulate her faith and explain what the veneration of icons meant and why it was important.

While the Old Testament forbade the depiction of God in images, with the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, God had Himself taken on a human body that could be depicted. Saint John of Damascus wrote:

*If you have understood that the Incorporeal One became man for you, then it is evident that you can portray His human image. Since the Invisible One became visible by assuming a human body, you can make a picture of Him who was seen.*

*Since He who has neither body, nor form, nor quantity nor quality, who transcends all grandeur by the very excellence of His nature, who, being of divine nature, assumed the condition of a slave, He thus reduced Himself to quantity and quality by clothing Himself with human features; therefore paint on wood and present Him for contemplation, who desired to become visible.*

The Second Council of Nicaea also distinguished between the worship that is due to God alone and the veneration and honour that we give to those people and things through which God comes to us. The icon teaches us that everything that God has made is good and that physical matter is good and has a role to play in our salvation. Not only is matter created by God, but it has been assumed by Him in the Incarnation. To quote Saint John of Damascus again:

*I shall not cease to venerate matter, for it is through matter that my salvation has come to pass.*

*To be continued...*

---

Icons are a tradition useful in many respects, but especially in this, that the Incarnation of the Word of God is shown forth as real and not merely fantastic.

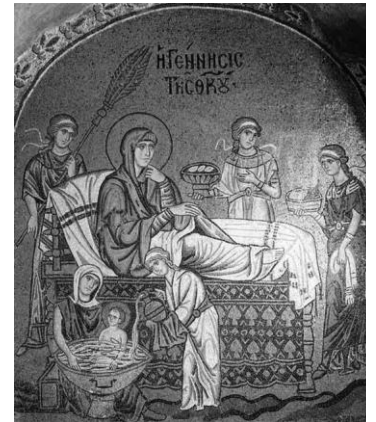
The Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council

## The Nativity of the Holy Theotokos

Tomorrow we celebrate the birth of the Mother of God, or Theotokos, one of the twelve Great Feasts of the Church. Most of the direct references to her birth come from one of the apocryphal gospels, the Protoevangelium of James, which have been taken up and further developed in the liturgical texts of the Church. However, although the Scriptures do not refer to the actual birth of the Mother of God, they are full of indirect references to it, for the whole history of the Old Testament is a preparation for the coming Christ into our world. And a key part of this preparation was the preparation of the one who was to give birth to the Son of God. In the words of Saint Photios the Great:

*After God had bestowed on man the enjoyment and mastery over everything in the Garden, it was meet for him who was entrusted with so great authority to be disciplined and trained with some command. However, after transgressing this command, the Creator did not overlook His creatures though they had plunged themselves into such great error. It was needful, therefore, that one Person of the Trinity become man, to make it manifest that the recreation too, like the creation, was their own work. Incarnation entailed a pregnancy and a mother. So it was needful that a mother should be prepared down below for the Creator, for the recreation of shattered humanity. She was to be a virgin, just as the first man had been formed of virgin earth; so the recreation too should be carried out through a virgin womb, and that no transitory pleasure, even lawful, should be as much as imagined in the Creator's birth; for the Lord suffered to be born for the deliverance of him who was a captive of pleasure.*

*Who then was worthy? Clearly it was she who this day strangely issued from Joachim and Anna, the barren root. It was needful, yea needful, that she who from the very cradle had by a superior reason preserved her body pure, her soul pure, her thoughts pure, should be marked out to be the Creator's Mother. It was needful that she who had been brought to the temple as an infant, who had trodden the untrodden places, should appear as a living temple for Him Who gave her life. It was needful that she who had been born in a wondrous manner from a sterile womb, and had removed her parents' reproach, should also make good the failure of her forefathers; for she, the descendant, was able to repair the ancestral defeat, who brought forth the Saviour of our race by a husbandless birth, and molded His body.*



---

Today the barren gates are opened and the virgin Door of God comes forth. Today grace begins to bear its first fruits, making manifest to the world the Mother of God, through whom things on earth are joined with heaven, for the salvation of our souls.

From Vespers for the feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos