



THE WONDERWORKER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTERN RITE COMMUNITIES OF ROCOR
DORMITION, 2021





The Very Rev. Archpriest Mark Rowe
Vicar General of the ROCOR Western
Rite Communities



Brethren,
Christ is in our midst !

After an unintended hiatus, we are back with another issue of The WONDERWORKER. Thanks be to God !

This issue is slated to coincide with one of our most important Feast days of the Holy Orthodox Church- the Dormition (falling asleep) of the Theotokos and her subsequent translation to heaven. Veneration of the Holy Theotokos (God-Bearer) as the Mother of God traces all the way back to the Cross, when Christ gave His Mother to the Church, similarly entrusting His Church to the Theotokos:

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. – John 19:25-27

Our veneration of the Theotokos, and the celebration of the feasts of the Most Holy Theotokos in the Church is in essence a confession in the Divine Nature of her Son. We confess these truths as Christological dogma. The focus points beyond her, and to the focus for each of us- Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Dormition continues the theme of Christ "destroying death by death" and in our faith in the Resurrection. The Most Holy Theotokos serves as a prototype for each of us by referring to her as the prototype of all of those who will be "translated" from death to life at the General Resurrection. It places her in the position to intercede for each of us to Christ, her Son and Our Savior, and in that particular way, to 'save our souls.'

The icon of the Dormition of the Mother of God also holds a key detail that reaffirms this reality, yet is often not seen nor understood. Symbolism and typology are very important in Orthodox theology, and iconography, as expressed theology, is no different.



Icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos

The icon is both beautiful and inspiring to us for many reasons, but one very important reason in particular I wish to point out is one of the smallest details found in the icon. This detail expresses God's love for mankind in such fullness and love, and yet it is rarely noticed. It is a message of tenderness, and of mercy. It is a message important for us to discover.

When we look at icons of the Most Holy Theotokos, we see images that show tenderness, love and hope. In this icon of the Dormition, God we see the favor returned. In all the iconography where we see the Mother of God holding Christ, often depicted as a child, the roles are reversed in this special icon. Christ is seen to be holding His Mother- as a child.

The attention given to the icon is often focused on her 'falling asleep', but yet a greater and more inspiring detail remains- the mystery wherein Christ comes to receive His mother's soul. She receives in advance what we are to receive if we remain faithful to Christ and His Church. We are inspired, and we rejoice in this glorious truth of the faith.

" Most Holy Theotokos, save us."

A blessed Feast of the Dormition to all. I remain,
Yours in Christ

*The Very Reverend Archpriest Mark Rowe
Vicar-General
ROCOR Western Rite Communities*

EDUCATING CHILDREN IN THE FAITH AT ST ATHANASIVS ORTHODOX CHURCH

by Matushka Shelly Janikowski



Fr. Thomas Janikowski

Recently a dear friend who is not Orthodox asked what Sunday School curriculum I was going to use for the new school year. Knowing that teaching the Orthodox faith is not just confined to a curriculum, I thought for a moment before I replied, “I will be doing pretty much the same as I did last year, using the Church calendar to teach the great feasts, fasts, and holy days of the Church year.”

How simple but how rich! I don’t have to go looking for anything new and creative. The Church in her infinite wisdom and beauty gives me everything I need to teach the Orthodox Faith to our young church family, and it provides the exact same resources to the

“little” church. If we can live out our lives in the Orthodox Faith in love through its great feasts and fasts then we will be on our way to raising as well as becoming saints.

I am the matushka at St. Athanasius Orthodox Church in Davenport IA. I am a convert and when my husband, Priest Thomas, and I started the new mission church in February 2018, I knew I could no longer use any of the previous Sunday School materials I used before I became an Orthodox Christian. I was completely starting over and starting from scratch.

The first thing I did, and in some ways the most important thing, was to develop a little children’s library and get Orthodox resources into my hands and the hands of our youngest members of our new parish. God provided me with an opportunity to meet a most wonderful and very knowledgeable presbytera in Cedar Rapids, IA. She showed me many books in her children’s library and I took some photos and was on my way. Of course, building a library is never finished and it is still a work in progress. However, I have a great start and the biggest portion of the little library at St. Athanasius is dedicated to the lives of the saints. As you know, having good role models is vital as we live out our lives as Orthodox Christians. Potamitis Publishing publishes Paterikon for Kids. These little books are so great! They provide our young parishioners with the opportunity to learn about and develop an appreciation for the lives of the saints. Potamitis Publishing also publishes coloring books, story books, prayer books, and well as other instructional books. There are more than 180 books that you can purchase to help teach your young Christians about the Orthodox Faith and the lives of the saints.

If your Sunday School is like mine, you are not always blessed to have the maximum number of students (or any students!) on any given Sunday. The beauty of the using the church calendar and lectionary is that you get

the great opportunity to teach it again next year. Likewise, every year your students will have the opportunity to learn something new about the faith or repeat/review something they may or may not have remembered from the previous year. The constant repetition of teaching the church calendar and lectionary also makes perfect sense in the one room Sunday School house. I have all ages in my Sunday school. My oldest student is my assistant and helps teach the younger kids. This is a win-win situation because I am allowing Lucia the opportunity to help teach the faith and I'm training my future Sunday school teacher!

I know it is not always easy to come up with something creative for each and every lesson. However, it is nice to occasionally have a special activity to mark special feasts. For example, if you bless baskets at Pascha, have the kids make basket covers on Palm Sunday. Even though there are lots of online resources for crafts and activities, I don't have craft activities every Sunday. Most of my teaching just involves the teaching the lectionary: telling the story, asking questions, and discussing what this means to us as Orthodox Christians. I especially like the Antiochian Christian Education "Let Us Attend" website (see the link below). They have the age appropriate scripture, questions and coloring page all in one .pdf file. It is brilliant! But this is just one site, and there are so many other resources available on the Internet. All you need most Sundays is a coloring page, an Orthodox Study Bible, some water color paints and markers, or crayons and you are on your way to teaching Sunday school! Hint: Make sure to keep the permanent and dry erase markers separate from the water color markers



If you don't have a coloring page for a particular Sunday (or even if you do!), use icons to teach the faith. Icons teach the stories. Get as many icons of the Saints of God, feasts and Sundays of the church year as you can to cover the walls of your church. A picture is worth a thousand words and every Sunday your students will be reminded of the teaching and story associated with that icon. Show the children how to reverence and venerate icons and practice asking the saints for their intercessions. Surrounding your church with icons teaches children the importance of the ongoing lives of the saints in your parish and how they are part of your family. And don't forget to ask the kids to pay attention to the miracles that will come about because of their intercessions. Start a miracle journal in your parish! What a wonderful way to acknowledge the saints and the miracles that come about because of answered prayers.

←Exaltation of the Holy Cross 2019 - Titus and his Cross

I also like to involve the whole parish to make some Sundays more special. For example, during the Sundays of the Apostles Fast, the kids and I learned the "Followers of Jesus" song by Khouria Gigi Baba Shadid and made simple apostles banners. On the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, we had a parish celebration and decorated the parish hall with one of the apostles' banners. The kids sang the song, and we all shared a cake, ice cream, whipped cream,

and blew out the apostles' candles in the sand pan. The kids, only 2, had a great time celebrating the feast as well as the rest of the parish.



Another good reminder is to be ready for the teachable moments that God will provide in your parish. Here is one example of how God blessed me with a little surprise in the church mailbox and as it turned out to be a great teaching/learning moment for both me and the kids. One Saturday, a book showed up in the mail from Matushka T. Anne Mancuso titled “The Sleepy Bear and the Golden Whisper”. That Sunday was the commemoration of the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia and the day on which we keep our Parish “Slava” and anniversary of our founding. I took the opportunity to read her book to them, taught about the life of St. Peter of Krutitsy (who is one of those New

Martyrs of Russia!), and taught about the Jesus Prayer. We also used the opportunity to have the kids practice gratitude and write thank you notes to Matushka Anne. We took a group photo and sent her the picture of her young brothers and sisters at St. Athanasius who enjoyed her book. And now we have another great addition in our little library.

The Orthodox Faith and its beautiful lectionary are inexhaustible and you will never run out of things to teach or learn! Just have fun. When you are living and teaching the faith with joy, it will catch on! And never underestimate the power of learning like a child. I have learned so much teaching the children at St. Athanasius.

With Love in Christ,
Matushka Shelly

Here are some valuable links to Orthodox Teaching Resources
Age appropriate Sunday scripture, questions, and icon coloring pages

Let Us Attend – <http://ww1.antiochian.org/christianeducation/letusattend>

Seasonal and Project Printouts

Draw Near Designs

<https://www.drawneardesigns.com/blog/2020/1/3/free-printable-festal-pennant-banner?rq=great%20feasts%20>

Orthodox Pebbles <https://orthodoxpebbles.com/>

This is where I found the wonderful resources for teaching about Great Lent, Holy Pentecost, and Fabric Learning sets.

Books and More:

Potamitis Publishing-the Ultimate gift to an Orthodox family with children <https://potamitis.us/>

Ancient Faith <https://store.ancientfaith.com/>

Annunciation Press www.APicons.com- they sell great icon coloring books at this site!

Exaltation Press www.exaltationpress.com

St. Innocent Press <http://www.stinnocentpress.com/> - this is where you can buy Matushka Anne's book!

St. Nectarios Press <http://www.stnectariospress.com/>

- o Here are two links for children's books on our Patron Saint of ROCOR Western Rite, Holy Hierarch John Maximovitch The New Wonderworker

<http://www.stnectariospress.com/the-story-of-holy-hierarch-john-maximovitch-the-new-wonderworker/>

<http://www.stnectariospress.com/life-of-st-john-wonderworker-of-shanghai-and-san-francisco/>

St.Vladimir's Seminary Press <https://svspress.com/>

Weekly Podcasts and lessons

Tending the Garden of our Hearts – Podcast, and weekly lessons <https://tending-the-garden.com/>

Icons

<https://littlesaints.toys/> If they don't have your patron saint, you can special order your saint!

<https://www.uncutmountainsupply.com/>

<https://legacyicons.com/>

Church goods and Giftshop

Draw Near Designs Marketplace <https://www.drawneardesigns.com/>

Eastern Giftshop - <https://www.easterngiftshop.com/>

Orthodox Music for Children:

Gigi Baba Shadid You Tube channel or purchase on Itunes

Music with Gigi #1 <https://youtu.be/ggodz7tz3Qs>

Music with Gigi #2 <https://youtu.be/zkfls4BDzLo>

Music with Gigi #3 <https://youtu.be/1k-qSY03ZWU>

Music with Gigi #4 <https://youtu.be/l2HYW9lxTcw>

Music with Gigi #5 <https://youtu.be/H8pOXMhvfGA>

Music with Gigi #6 <https://youtu.be/UHKEjw0fwjs>

Music with Gigi #7 <https://youtu.be/oGzWxyKs3FA>

Music with Gigi #8 <https://youtu.be/d6Orww8CQQY>

Music with Gigi #9 <https://youtu.be/rJ0GG6pix8k>

Music with Gigi #10 <https://youtu.be/zzIJsukEn9c>

Building Up the Body of Christ <https://youtu.be/sAQcAr3PJms>

Followers of Jesus <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5AkG0RGFak>

Orthodox ABC's <https://youtu.be/jz9-qFbiHEQ>

DORMITION



Bishop Alexander Mileant

The Dormition (called the Assumption by the Roman-Catholic church). Once, as the Holy Virgin prayed on the Mount of Olives (near Jerusalem), the Angel Gabriel appeared to Her, as he had the first time in Nazareth, holding in his hand a branch with a white flower from Paradise, and announced to Her that in three days Her earthly life would come to an end and that the Lord would take Her to Him. The Lord arranged it so that toward that time the Apostles congregated in Jerusalem from the many parts of the world where they were preaching. At the hour of Her end, a bright light illuminated the room in which the Virgin Mary was lying. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, surrounded by Angels, appeared and received Her most pure soul. The Apostles buried Her holy body, according to Her wish, at the foot of the Mount of Olives in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the cave where reposed the bodies of her parents and of the righteous Joseph. During the burial, many miracles came to pass. By touching the bier of the Mother of God, the blind regained their sight, demons were exorcised, and many diseases were cured.

Three days after the burial of the Theotokos, there arrived belatedly the Apostle Thomas, who had missed the burial. He was very distraught at not having paid his last respects to the Mother of Jesus and wished to see Her body for the last time. When the cave in which the Virgin Mary was buried was opened, Her body was not found, but only Her burial clothes. The Apostles returned to their home in

amazement. In the evening during their prayers, they heard Angels singing. Glancing upward, the Apostles saw the Most Holy Virgin surrounded by Angels, in radiant heavenly glory. She said to the Apostles: "**Rejoice! I am with you for all the days and nights.**"



Icon of the Theotokos

Parish Spotlights

St. Joseph's Orthodox Church

Sarasota, Florida

A plethora of blessings has been captured in pictures and print at St. Joseph's in Sarasota, Florida! For those of you who don't know, St. Joseph's is the home parish of our own Vicar General, Archpriest Mark Rowe. We here at the Wonderworker have managed to cajole Fr. Mark into sending in some recent events from his parish.

Enjoy!

At the parish of St Joseph the Betrothed in Sarasota, FL on Sunday, the 30th of August, being the Feast of the Dormition (transferred) / Pentecost XII , Parish clergy blessed the students and teachers for the upcoming school year. May God guide and protect them !

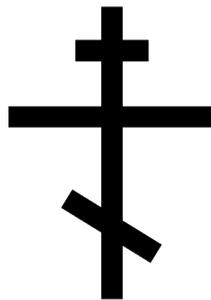


On August 9, The Feast of St Panteleimon and Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, Alexis Jordan was officially blessed to become a catechumen at the Parish of Saint Joseph in Sarasota, Florida.



On the Feast of the Prophet Elijah, Elijah Chase Nadwodny received the Mysteries of Holy Baptism and Chrismation into the Holy Orthodox Church.

The newly-illuminated Elijah was baptized at Saint Joseph Orthodox Church in Sarasota Florida. The celebrant was Elijah's grandfather, The Very Reverend Archpriest Mark Rowe. The Godparents are Naomi Rowe and The Reverend Father Andrew Gomez.





Many years to the newly-illuminated
Elijah !

Chrismations

At
Holy Transfiguration
In Mountain Home, Arkansas



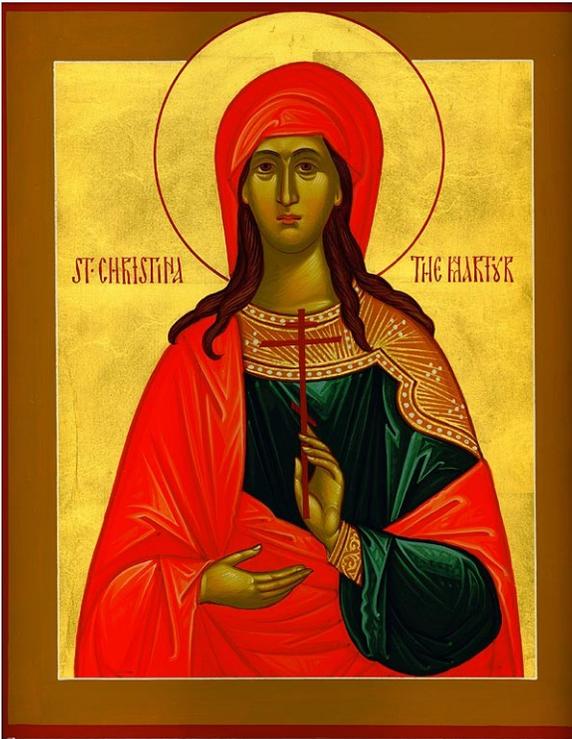
On Sunday, June 27, being the Feast of St Elisha, Jenny Merritt received the Mystery of Chrismation at Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Church in Mountain Home, Arkansas.

She prayerfully chose the patron Saint Genevieve of Paris and we wish her many years !

Saint Genevieve, pray to God for us !



SPOTLIGHT ON THE SAINTS



THE HOLY MARTYR CHRISTINA

The Martyr Christina lived during the third century. She was born into a rich family, and her father was governor of Tyre. By the age of 11 the girl was exceptionally beautiful, and many wanted to marry her. Christina's father, however, envisioned that his daughter should become a pagan priestess. To this end he placed her in a special dwelling where he had set up many gold and silver idols, and he commanded his daughter to burn incense before them. Two servants attended Christina.

In her solitude, Christina began to wonder who had created this beautiful world. From her room she was delighted by the stars of the heavens and she constantly came back to the thought about the Creator of all the world. She was convinced, that the voiceless and inanimate idols in her room could not create anything, since they themselves were created by human hands.

She began to pray to the One God with tears, entreating Him to reveal Himself. Her soul blazed with love for the Unknown God, and she intensified her prayer all the more, and combined it with fasting.

One time Christina was visited by an angel, who instructed her in the true faith in Christ, the Savior of the world. The angel called her a bride of Christ and told her about her future suffering. The holy virgin smashed all the idols standing in her room and threw them out the window. In visiting his daughter Christina's father, Urban, asked her where all the idols had disappeared. Christina was silent. Then, having summoned the servants, Urban learned the truth from them.

In a rage the father began to slap his daughter's face. At first, the holy virgin remained quiet, but then she told her father about her faith in the One True God, and that she had destroyed the idols with her own hands. Urban gave orders to kill all the servants in attendance upon his daughter, and he gave Christina a fierce beating and threw her in prison. Having learned about what had happened, Saint Christina's mother came in tears, imploring her to renounce Christ and to return to her ancestral beliefs. But Christina remained unyielding. On another day,

Urban brought his daughter to trial and urged her to offer worship to the gods, and to ask forgiveness for her misdeeds. Instead, he saw her firm and steadfast confession of faith in Christ.

The torturers tied her to an iron wheel, beneath which they lit a fire. The body of the martyr, turning round on the wheel, was scorched on all sides. They then threw her into prison.

An angel of God appeared at night, healing her wounds and strengthening her with food. Her father, seeing her unharmed, gave orders to drown her in the sea. An angel sustained the saint while the stone sank down, and Christina miraculously came out of the water and reappeared before her father. In terror, her father imputed this to sorcery and decided to execute her in the morning. That night he himself suddenly died. Another governor, Dion, was sent in his place. He summoned the holy martyr and also tried to persuade her to renounce Christ, but seeing her unyielding firmness, he again subjected her to cruel tortures. The holy martyr was for a long while in prison. People began to flock to her, and she converted them to the true faith in Christ. Thus about 300 were converted.

In place of Dion, a new governor Julian arrived and resumed the torture of the saint. After various torments, Julian gave orders to throw her into a red-hot furnace and lock her in it. After five days they opened the furnace and found the martyr alive and unharmed. Seeing this miracle take place, many believed in Christ the Savior, and the torturers executed Saint Christina with a sword.

THE HÖLY MARTYR JULIAN OF TARSUS



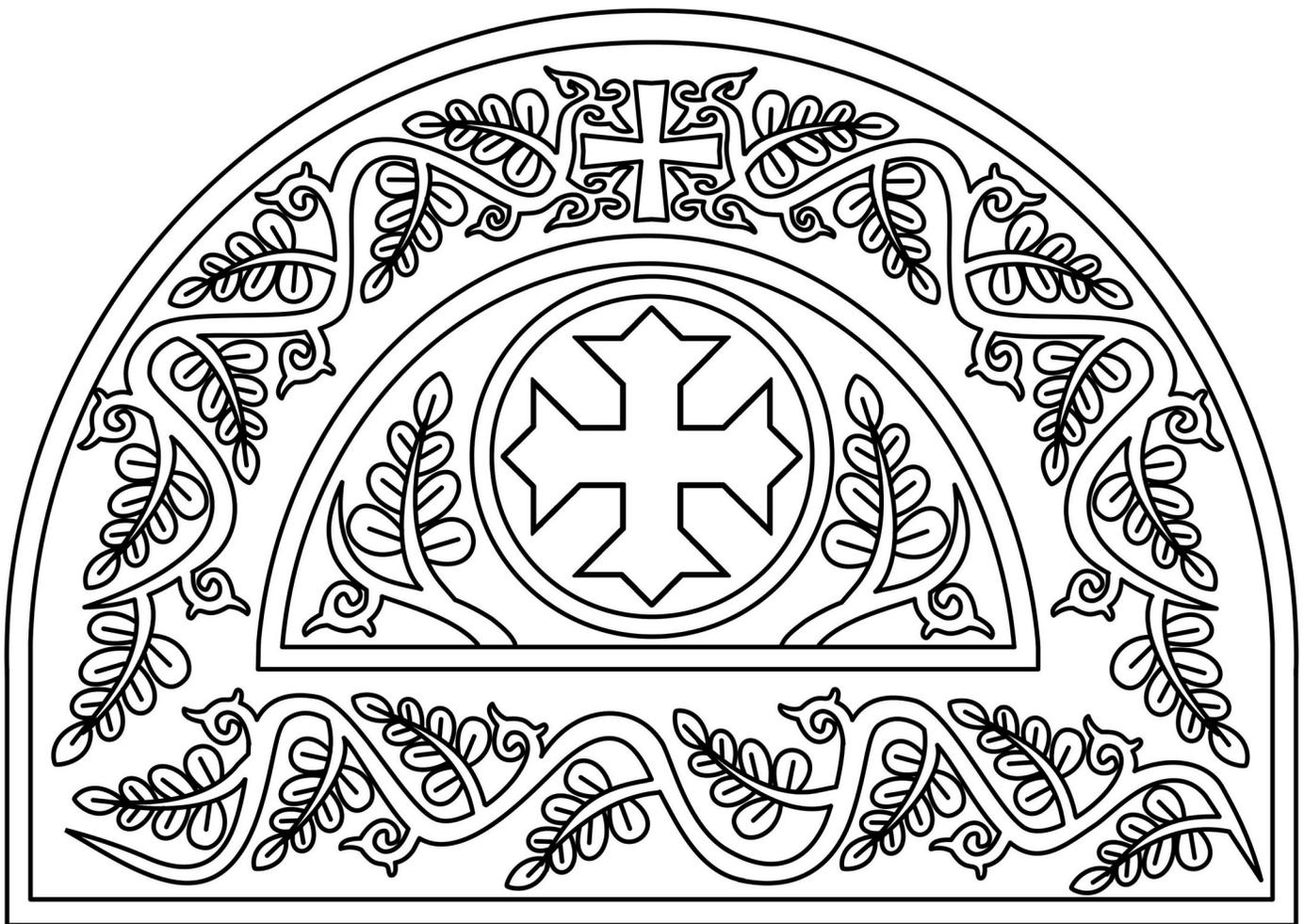
The Holy Martyr Julian of Tarsus was born in the Asia Minor province of Cilicia. He was the son of a pagan senator, but his mother was a Christian. After the death of her husband the mother of Saint Julian moved to Tarsus, where her son was baptized and raised in Christian piety.

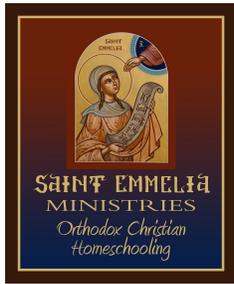
When Julian reached age 18, a persecution against Christians began under the emperor Diocletian (284-305). Among those arrested was Saint Julian. They brought him before the governor Marcian for trial, and for a long time they urged him to renounce Christ. Neither tortures nor threats, nor promises of gifts and honors could convince the pious youth to offer pagan sacrifice and deny Christ. The holy confessor remained steadfast in his firm faith.

For a whole year they led the martyr through the cities of Cilicia, everywhere subjecting him to interrogation and tortures, after which they threw him in prison. Saint Julian's mother followed after her son and prayed that the Lord would strengthen him. In the city of Aegea, she besought the governor to permit her to visit the prison, ostensibly to persuade her son to offer sacrifice to idols. She spent three days in prison with Saint Julian, exhorting him to be strong until the end.

Saint Julian was again brought to stand before the governor. Thinking that the mother had persuaded her son to submit to the imperial decree, the governor began to praise her prudence. But suddenly she boldly confessed Jesus Christ, and even more fearlessly and boldly denounced polytheism. The governor then gave orders to cut off her feet, since she had accompanied her son from Tarsus. They tied the Martyr Julian into a sack, filled with sand and poisonous snakes, and threw it into the sea. The body of the sufferer was carried by the waves to the shores of Alexandria, and with reverence was buried by a certain pious Christian. The martyr's death occurred in about the year 305. Afterwards his relics were transferred to Antioch. Saint John Chrysostom honored the holy Martyr Julian with an encomium.

*(*Excerpted from the OCA website "Lives of the Saints")*





How to Start a Homeschool Co-op

Saint Emmelia Ministries
Orthodox Christian Homeschooling

1. Pray and Seek Advice from your Priest

Begin your efforts by taking time to pray and discuss your desire to start a homeschool co-op with your priest. Delay any major decisions until after the next Feast of the Church.

2. Recruit a Team

Seek out two or three other homeschool parents who share your interest in starting a co-op. You will need each other for shared labor, support and encouragement as the year unfolds.

3. Define your Purpose

Take the time to carefully articulate your purpose in starting a co-op. This will help to guide your efforts and prevent going down rabbit trails in the future.

4. Spread the Word

Use all available platforms to let other Orthodox homeschooling families in your area know about the new co-op. (Area parishes, social media groups, email lists, etc.)

5. Organize an Informational Session

Pick a date to gather those families who are interested to share your vision for this new co-op and to answer questions. Be sure to plan an activity for the children so they included in this first phase! Collect contact information for those who want to be involved.

6. Make a Schedule of Events

Create your schedule of meetings and activities for the year and distribute widely. Be sure to remind families as the date of an event draws near!

7. Feedback & Review

Be sure you remain open to feedback throughout the year, but especially as you plan for the next school year!

Classical Learning Resource Center – provide online courses from an Orthodox perspective
<http://clrconline.com/>

Lumination Press – Orthodox fiction for youth
<https://luminationpress.webs.com/>

Paidea Classics – Supplemental books and educational resources from an Orthodox perspective
<https://www.paideaclassics.org/>

Potamitis Publishing – Children’s books on the lives of the Saints
<https://potamitis.us/>

Portfolio-Based History, Bible and Nature Studies -
<http://www.homeschooljourney.com/>

St. Nectarios Homeschooling Resources
<http://www.clairebrandenburg.com/st-nectarios-homeschooling-resources.html>

St. Raphael School – Orthodox, offers full classes for all ages and once-a-week catechism of middle- and high-school www.RaphaelSchool.org

Tapestry of Grace – A plan of study that helps parents provide a Christian, classical education using a guided unit study approach, with the history of the world as the core organizational theme from a Protestant perspective.
<http://www.tapestryofgrace.com/index.php>

Legal Advice:

Home School Legal Defense Association - This is an **essential starting point** for researching and navigating the law and procedures in each state. For a nominal fee, they can be retained, prior to any incident, for legal advice and defense for member families, as well as other benefits.
<https://www.hslda.org/>

Media:

The Saint Emmelia Podcast – monthly interviews, lectures and discussions on Orthodox homeschooling hosted on Ancient Faith Radio
<https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/saintemmelia>

CiRCE Institute Podcasts – Center for Independent Research on Classical Education
<https://www.circeinstitute.org/podcast>

Saint Emmelia Ministries – Audio recordings of conference lectures and workshops
<https://www.saintemmelia.com/audiovideo>

Saint Kosmas Orthodox Christian Education Association – Audio and video recordings of conference lectures and workshops
<https://saintkosmas.com/media>



Orthodox Homeschooling Resources

Articles:

Making Saints: Toward Establishing Orthodox Schools by Hieromonk Gabriel

<https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/rememberingsion/2018/06/04/making-saints-establishing-orthodox-schools/>

Orthodox Home Schooling by Sarah Loft – A nationally growing home school' movement is an attractive alternative for Orthodox Christian parents.

<https://www.oca.org/the-hub/the-church-on-current-issues/orthodox-home-schooling>

Two Articles on Orthodox Education: Public School and Home School

<http://ww1.antiochian.org/content/two-articles-orthodox-education-public-school-and-home-school>

Why Orthodox Christian Families Homeschool their Children by Adam Lockridge

<http://myocn.net/orthodox-christian-families-homeschool-children/>

Conferences:

Saint Emmelia Ministries – Regional Orthodox homeschool conferences for families of all ages and stages: <https://www.saintemmeliaministries.com/>

Saint Kosmas Orthodox Christian Education Association – Conference for parents and educators pursuing excellence in Orthodox education. Annual conference in California

<https://saintkosmas.com/>

Curriculum & Resources:

Ages of Grace – Orthodox Charlotte Mason style curriculum being developed by a group of dedicated families all over the world, initially inspired by Katherine Johnson.

https://ages-of-grace.fandom.com/wiki/Ages_of_Grace_Wiki

Antiochian Archdiocese – A selection of content from the Christian Education pages that is of special interest to homeschool families.

<http://ww1.antiochian.org/category/christian-education/especially-homeschools>

Children's Garden of the Theotokos – Waldorf Style purchase-ready curriculum for younger children

<https://www.anaphorapress.com/curriculum>

CiRCE Institute – Supporting with a Classical approach to Homeschooling

<https://www.circeinstitute.org/>

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Rachel's Corner

Dedicated to the Protection of the Holy Innocents - The Unborn

It is often opined that if Christians voted according to their belief systems, the pro-life movement would never lose footing.

Last night, a Catholic nun spoke at the Republican National Convention. Her message was clearly pro-life, and without ambiguity.

Clearly, this was a contrast to Archbishop Elpidophoros of the Greek Archdiocese giving an invocation to the Democratic convention, which many feel was supporting what is the most pro-abortion political ticket of our time.

Regardless of anything else, we must always be pro-life as Christians. It therefore should seem to follow that this single issue should be unquestionably at the forefront of our prayers and preaching.

Sadly, not all Christians vote according to their faith. Surely there are many in Christian leadership who fail to have the fortitude to proclaim our clear and resounding faith and belief in the sanctity of life.

Is it any wonder then, if Christian leaders are weak in this area, then it follows that the average Christian in the pew is left to their own devices in this area?

Christ used the typology of Shepherd and sheep for a reason. Without a Shepherd, the sheep risk guidance and protection, and all the inherent danger that brings.

Note this portion below of the newest letter to the ACNA clergy by their leader, Archbishop Foley Beach:

“ Specifically, regarding the upcoming election in the United States, clergy should attempt to minister to both the Democrats and the Republicans in their congregations and to not take public stands for one candidate or another. God is more concerned about our love and servant spirit than He is for us preaching that He has taken sides. Sadly, every issue is now politicized and the “cancel culture” attitude of writing off those who don’t agree 100% with one’s point of view is pervasive. Let us do unto others as we would have them do unto us.”

- God has taken sides. He sides with all life as sacred. Sacred and precious. Created in His own Image.
- Is it any wonder that Christians are losing the battle of late? This is but one example.
- Any nation that supports the murder of its unborn has no future.
- Be a voice and force for the sanctity of life This is true, authentic and Orthodox Christianity.
- Be Shepherds. Be leaders. Be heard.

Yours in Christ,
Archpriest Mark



Incense

Worshipping with all of the Senses



Eastern Orthodox Censer on Stand
(accredited to OrthodoxWiki)

Incense is a product of aromatic plant matter, often with an oil or resin as a base. In the Orthodox Christian practice, incense is an important liturgical implement which is often considered distinctive to the Faith as well.

Incense is burned in a gold censer and ignited by burning charcoal. Customarily, the censer is suspended by chains and swung; however, a hand censer can be used when necessary. The censer is employed only by the priest and/or deacon to venerate all four sides of the altar, the Holy Gifts, the clergy, the congregation, icons, and the church structure itself.

Ancient World

The use of incense dates back to ancient times but the origin is uncertain. It may have originated in Sumerian and Babylonian cultures, where the gum, resins of aromatic trees, were imported from the Arabian and Somali coasts to be used in religious ceremonies. Its use was common in the pagan worship rituals of the ancient

Greeks, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Assyrians, and Babylonians. In the Roman period there were cases of Christians being martyred for refusing to offer incense to idols.

Temple of Jerusalem

Incense was used as a perfumed offering on the altar of incense in the time of the Tabernacle and in the First and Second Temple periods, being an important component of priestly liturgy in the Temple in Jerusalem. The incense offered in the Temple is described in the Book of Exodus as a mixture of stacte, onycha, galbanum and frankincense.

"And the Lord said to Moses: Take for yourself spices - oil of myrrh, onycha, galbanum that is sweet and translucent frankincense, each shall be in equal proportion. And they will make it incense, perfumed work of a perfumer, mixed, pure, holy work. And you shall beat some of it small and place it before the witnesses in the tent of witness, there where I shall be known to you. It shall be a holy of holies for you. Incense according to this mixture you shall not make for yourselves. It is to you something made holy to the Lord. Whoever makes such as this, so as to be scented with it, shall perish from his people." Exodus 30:34-38 (Septuagint)

Thus in accordance with Old Testament tradition, incense is used in every Church service. It is burned as an offering to God even as it was in the days of the First and Second Jewish temples.

Christian Worship

From an indication in Revelation 8:3-5 incense was used in sub-Apostolic Christian worship, however there is no clear evidence of its Christian use until about the year 500. Censers may at first have been fixed, with the introduction of portable censers originating later. The incensing of the altar, church, and congregation, is first recorded in the 9th century.

Emperor Justinian bestowed 36 golden censers with precious gems to the Cathedral Church of the Holy Wisdom, and according to the testimony of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (908-959), Byzantine Emperors entering the Church offered incense at specific censers.

The faithful will often burn incense using a hand censer in the home during Morning and Evening Prayers, and it is common for the head of the household to bless the Holy Icons and all of the members of the household with a hand censer.

Theological significance

Incense represents prayers of the saints lifting up into the heavens before God. This is evident from the blessing verse of the celebrant of the censer before incensing begins:

"We offer to Thee, Christ our God, this incense as a spiritual fragrance; receive it, we pray, to Thy heavenly altar and send down to us, in return, the grace of Thy Holy Spirit."

And elsewhere:

Psalm 140:2 - *"Let my prayer be set forth before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."*

Incense is also described as being used in heavenly worship, offering the faithful a foretaste of what is to come.

Revelation 5:8 - *"Now when He has taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."*

Revelation 8:4 - *"And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand."*

Composition of the Holy Incense

Biblical and Judaic Usage

The recipe for making the holy incense, given in Exodus 30:34-38, names four components. The same quantity of each was to be taken and, mixed with salt,[note 1] made into a confection.

These were: stacte, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense (*the resin of the olibanum-tree, being one of the various species of Boswellia indigenous to Arabia Felix*).

In later tradition seven others spices were added to these, namely: myrrh, cassia, nard, saffron, kostus, cinnamon, and aromatic-bark.

Josephus speaks of thirteen ingredients, agreeing with the fact that in other sources the following two herbs are mentioned: Jordan amber, and a secret unknown ingredient - known in Hebrew as *ma'aleh ashan*, literally "that which causes smoke to rise" - which has a quality which enabled the smoke to rise up to heaven in a straight column.

Modern Usage

Normally, the resin of the *Boswellia sacra* plant (*frankincense*) is used as a base for incense manufacturing; however, resin from fir trees has also been used. The resin is often infused with a floral oil, producing a fragrant scent when burned.

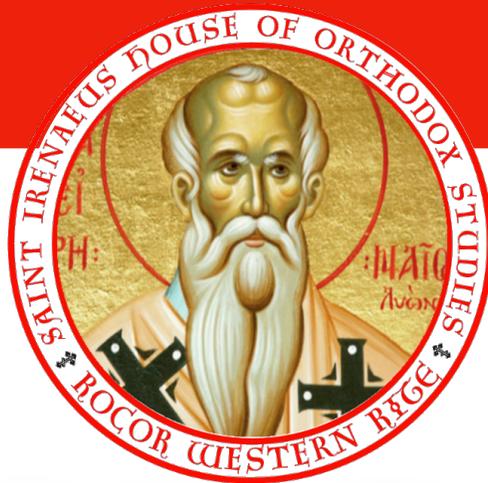


Incense being compounded and dried at Draganac Monastery

In the Athonite tradition, incense is often sprinkled liberally with clay dust to prevent granules from clumping.



*Different types of incense and burners
Courtesy of Legacy Icons
Story credit: <https://orthodoxwiki.org/Incense>*



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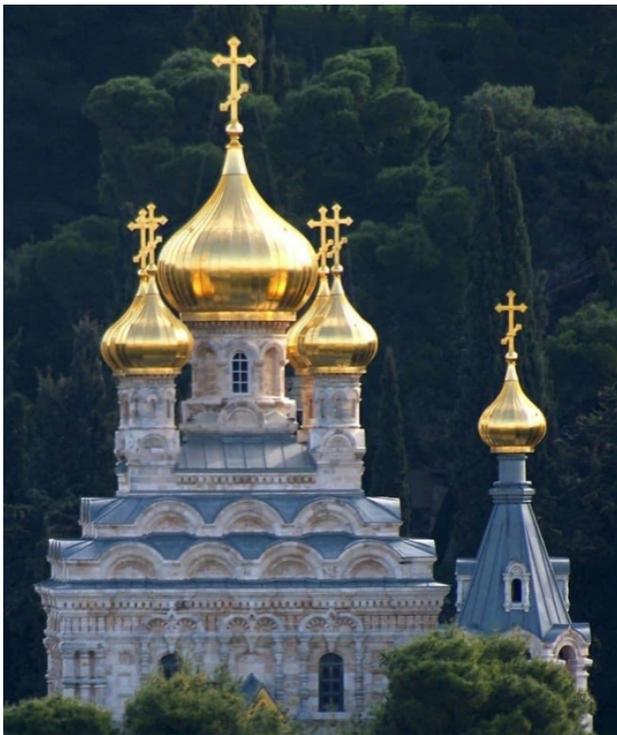
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Russian Church Domes

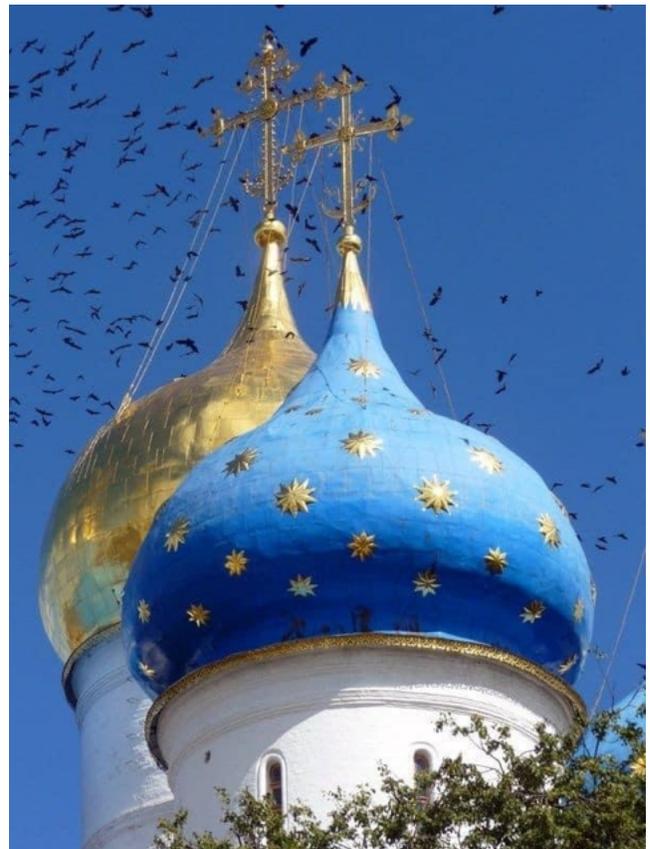
And Their Meaning

A peculiar feature of Russian Orthodox Church is the onion- or helmet-shaped domes. It is known that in the early history of Russian Church, the domes of churches followed the typical Byzantine flat-dome style. Helmet-shaped domes of pre-Mongolian Russian were replaced with onion-shaped domes. They say that such shapes appeared since they allow snow to slide down and not to sustain on top.

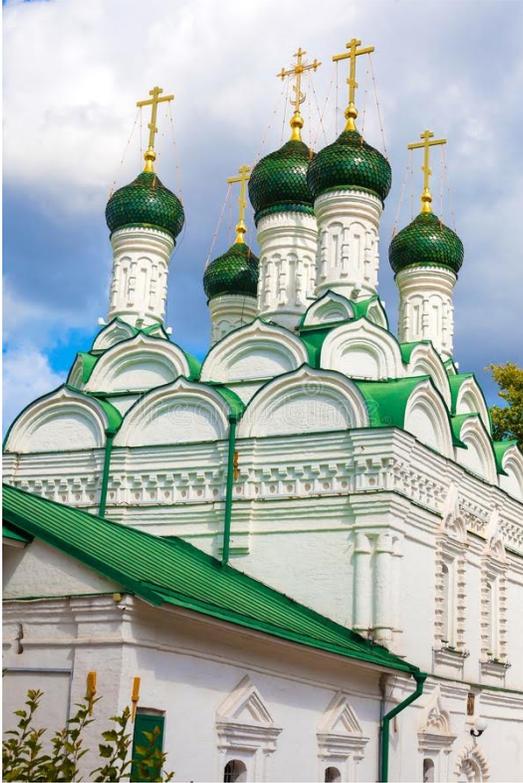
The color of church cupolas can be also interpreted according to the church symbolism.



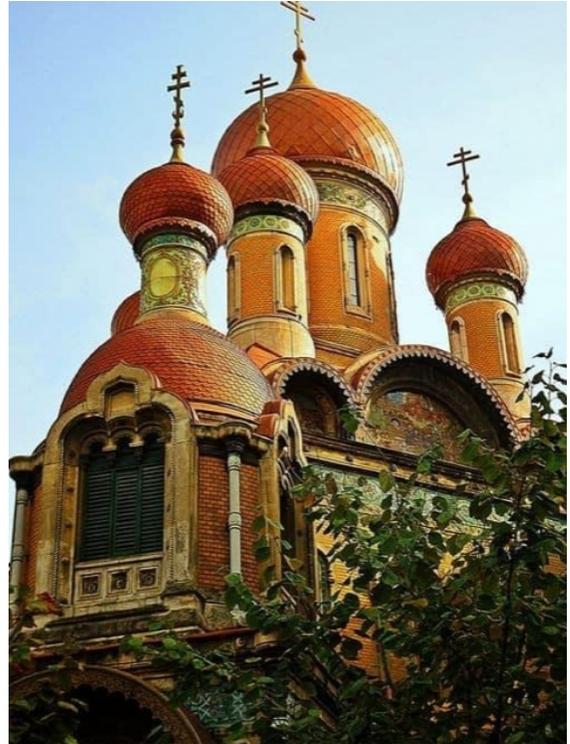
The golden color is the symbol of celestial glory, that is why golden domes crowned main cathedrals consecrated to Jesus Christ and Twelve Great Feasts.



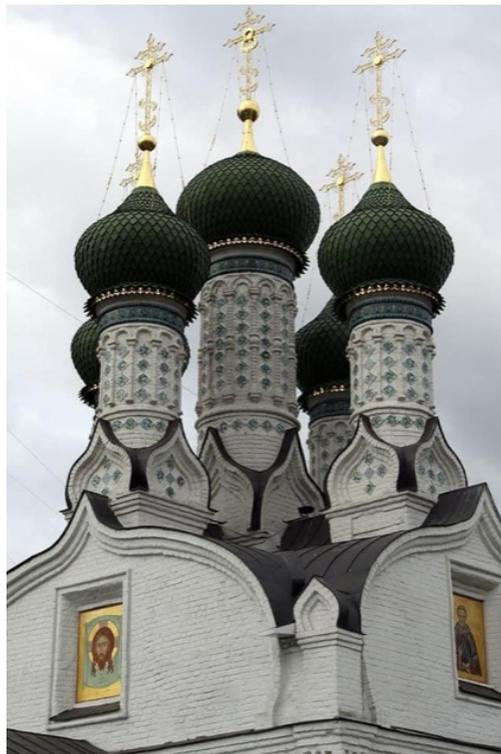
Blue domes with golden stars are characteristic of churches in honor of the Mother of God.



Churches in honor of saints are often topped with green or silver domes.



Red is traditionally signifying the Martyrdom and Passion of Christ and the Saints.



In monasteries and convents one can see black cupolas – symbols of monastic sacrifice.

Cloud-Bearing Mountain Christian Retreat and Training Center and Saint Herman of Alaska Orthodox Church New York



Known for its rugged mountain farmland, rolling countryside, and hidden valleys whose cool streams glide down from the slopes of secret wildernesses, Delaware County in the northwestern Catskill Mountains of New York State is a natural home for a retreat center. This year, Father James Krueger was ordained to the Sacred Priesthood by his eminence Metropolitan Jonah, and has brought the Catskill Mountain retreat center under his charge into the bosom of the Orthodox Church.

Father Krueger and his wife Maureen have been welcoming pilgrims and seekers at Cloud-Bearing Mountain Christian Retreat & Training Center for the past four years. The Center offers a wide

variety of programmed retreats and classes, directed individual retreats, and silent directed retreats, with an emphasis on training in the Christian spiritual life apropos for householders living and working in the world. While Krueger has always founded the activities of the Center in the Orthodox faith, he is overjoyed now to be in the fullness of the Church.

The name “Cloud-Bearing Mountain” is a reference to Mount Sinai and the Mount of Transfiguration mentioned in Exodus and the Gospels respectively, and to the Christian’s spiritual ascent into the cloud of unknowing of mystical prayer, as taught by Dionysius the Areopagite. Over the years, the Center has welcomed overnight visitors from as far afield as Saskatchewan, Canada, and as close to home as down the road. Beside the overnight retreat programs, Father James has regularly run classes, discussions, and special liturgical celebrations. The Center is now also home to Saint Herman of Alaska Orthodox Church. The Kruegers continue to receive guests during the COVID–19 pandemic, understanding that growth and formation in the Christian spiritual life can only be had in authentic, face-to-face relationships.

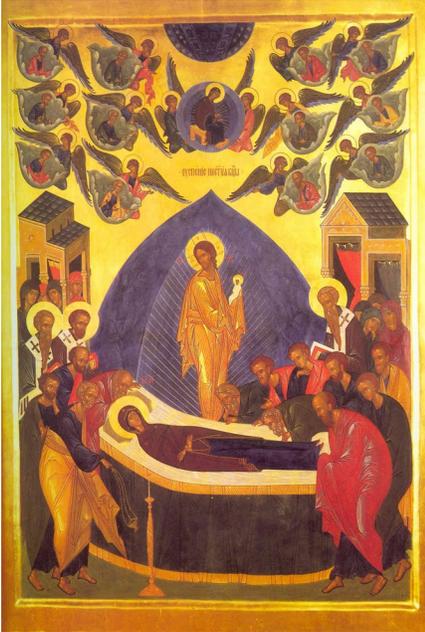


You can learn more about Cloud-Bearing Mountain Christian Retreat and Training Center, view its program schedule, and sign up for its e-mail list by visiting the website, www.cbmountain.org.



"Deathless Death"

A Meditation Offered at
Our Lady of the Angels Religious Community at Na Pua Li'i Hermitage, Hawai'i Island



*O how does the source of life pass through death to life?
She dies according to the flesh, destroys death by death,
and through corruption gains incorruption, and makes her
death the source of resurrection. (St. John of Damascus)*

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Why should not the Mother of God, be assumed directly into Heaven as Moses and Elijah had been? If Enoch might "walk with God" and then "he was not, for God took him" (Gen 5:24), then surely the Queen of Heaven and Earth, perfectly good and completely sinless, might also receive this most high honor. But then let us expand the question: should not God, a Person of the

Holy Trinity, also be assumed directly into Heaven without tasting death? What is it about the God-man Jesus and like the Most Holy Theotokos that brings them to the threshold of human life and then cross over into death?

"The Deathless Death" — these are the words of the great Father, St. John of Damascus in describing the Dormition of the Theotokos. Yes, at the heart of this Great Feast of the Church lies a paradox — Deathless Death — a contradiction in two words, which is the most concise form of mystery. The Most Holy Mother of God, he calls "the source of life." She is "the source of resurrection." Tall words? Perhaps, yet no taller than "Mother of God," a title conferred upon Mary of Nazareth in gravest reverence and veneration by the Council of Ephesus, one of the Seven Great Councils, and, by that fact, the highest authority (standing beside Holy Scripture) for all Christian teaching and belief.

She is the Mother of God, words to which we have become accustomed, and perhaps we no longer stop to ponder this, for here we have ventured into the deepest depths of Christian mystery. Listen to the words of an ancient Orthodox Christmas hymn, the "Taladh Chrionsda" (the Christ Child's Lullaby) from Scotland:

*Your mild and gentle eyes proclaim
A loving heart with which you came,*

A tender, helpless, tiny babe with boundless gifts of grace.

King of kings, most Holy One,

God and Son Eternal One,

You are my God and helpless Son,

High Ruler of mankind.

She is Ever-virgin, yet ever our Mother, for God the Son at His death said from the cross, "Behold your Mother!" (Jn 19:27). And to paraphrase C.S. Lewis, once the womb of a girl and maiden contained something larger than the universe.

St. John of Damascus trenchantly called her source of life. We might unpack this one further layer to say that she is the source of the source of life, the Mother of the Eternal Word, the Logos and Lord of Life. We might fill-to-overflowing our meditation on this great feast day by simply listing the abundance of mysteries associated with her, where the human and the divine shade into each other until boundaries are lost.

She is the living gate through which the God-man entered our lifeworld. Yet these ineffable things had been mostly invisible throughout her life. I say "invisible," for might we gaze at her and see her perpetual sinlessness? Yes, it is true that every boy and girl is born into the world without sin, perfect and good. It is true that each of us might choose never to sin, by the grace of God. But our eyes might not see the still-perfect state of a sinless soul, not until the end of life's journey.

Fully Seven of the Twelve Great Feasts of Orthodoxy either center on the Most Holy Theotokos or feature her prominently: her Nativity (September 8), her Presentation (November 21), the Nativity of Christ (December 25), Jesus' Presentation (February 2), The Annunciation (March 25), Pentecost (Forty days after Pascha), and finally her Dormition (August 15). But it is this final feast, today's feast, in which her sinless state becomes fully visible to the world, and to us. And it is her sinlessness, which is to say, her perfect faithfulness, which we celebrate.

As the Fathers have taught, no one is born into this world fatally gored by the grievous wound of original sin, but we are born into a world that is broken by sinfulness. The Fathers understood that the sin of Adam and Eve, at bottom, was the youthful sin of impatience. Eventually, our first parents would have matured into the fullness of the divine state, sharing divine knowledge, including that of good and evil. But Eve seized what was not yet hers to have. It was her unfaithfulness, her lack of humility, her presumption and pride, that brought sin into the world, just as we bring sin into our lives through that very same presumption, pridefulness, and unfaithfulness.

St. Irenaeus wrote that the life of Jesus of Nazareth recapitulated Adam's life. Jesus of Nazareth picked up where the immature Adam had left off and completed our first father's broken life unto faithful completion. Mary of Nazareth, the God-man's Mother, completed this same course picking up where the unfaithful Eve had stumbled, perfecting what our first mother had failed in.

Life in rebellion against God — whether it is the rebellion of the fallen angels, the rebellion in Eden, or the rebellion we see all around us today — is disordered life, for only God's kind of life is life.

Life proceeds from Him, and well-ordered life leads back to Him as it was from its beginning: good, right, and divine.

Rebellion, which we call sin, is a subversion of life. The tree is bent and grows back into the ground. The human figure is defaced and becomes, if unchecked, more and more grotesque over time. That is, sin is disease which causes life to rot. We call this process death.

Before the day of her "sleeping in the Lord," the faithfulness of God's Mother had been mostly invisible to us. For she is the woman wrapped in silence. She is the quiet woman. She is humility itself. By its nature well-ordered life does not stand out. It is the grotesque life which calls attention to itself. We do not marvel at her purity at the moments of her Nativity or her Presentation, for they are quietly present. At her Annunciation her virginity is also unseen. Yes, the Archangel Gabriel says that "the Power of the Highest will overshadow you" (Lu 1:35). "But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Lu 2:19), for what could they mean in practice? At the Nativity, we see that she has been chosen for the highest honor that can be bestowed upon a human: to be the holy vessel for God on earth. But she is (perhaps) fifteen, and much of her life remains to be lived.

It is only at death when all things become known. Only at death will the final tally of a human life be told. We see that the end of the Blessed Mary's life is no less remarkable than its beginning. By tradition, the Archangel Gabriel appears announcing the date of her sleeping. By tradition, the Apostles, who had been preaching the Gospel to the ends of the earth, are transported to Jerusalem to be near to her. The Lord Jesus descends from Highest Heaven with ranks of angels. And, the Most Holy Mother of God falls asleep. Immediately, her soul, represented in holy icons as an infant in swaddling clothes, the image of moral perfection, is taken into Jesus' arms and thence to Heaven.

Among the Twelve St. Thomas alone arrives too late to say his goodbyes, so he is taken to Gethsemane, where three days earlier she had been laid beside her parents, Ss. Anna and Joachim. But the tomb is empty. For her body also has been assumed into Heaven.

Like that of her Son, hers is a "deathless death." She crosses the line only briefly into the brokenness and consequence of sin's corruption in order to reveal it to be null and void, having no power over her. For what claim can Satan bring against a blameless soul? And here is the tally and full meaning of her life: what claim can the House of Disease and Death make upon a spotless life?

St. Paul explains,

For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile;

you are still in your sins! Then also those who have

fallen asleep in Christ have perished. (1 Cor 15:16-18)

Why did the perfect Christ cross the line into the corruption of death? Why was He not assumed directly into Heaven like Enoch or Moses or Elijah?

It was His deathless death which revealed His power over death. As St. Paul writes triumphantly at the conclusion of the great Chapter 15,

"O Death, where is thy sting?

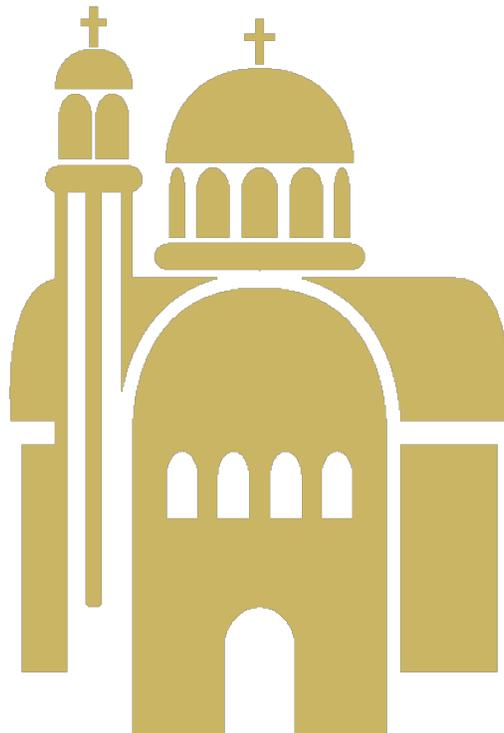
O Hades, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor 15:55)

So all our labors to follow Jesus, the "pioneer and perfecter" of this journey to God (Heb 12:2) toward death, yet eluding death by His grace and blazed trail, also are not in vain (1 Cor 15:58).

Death. Only death can be the great revelation of every human life. Only death can be the moment when all our life freezes into an unrevisable record of all our thoughts and deeds. The day is done. All possibility of regret and repentance is behind us. The full sum of all that we are finally is known. On earth, we call it the Final Judgment. But the verdict has been shaping up long before we actually fall asleep. If our life has been one rebellion after another and one excuse after another, then the grotesquery of our lives is a verdict we have slowly been rendering ourselves. But if we should seek humility, quiet self-deprecation, and follow the Lord Jesus and His Most Chaste Mother in their faithfulness, then our sleeping in the Lord will be a quiet afternoon or a vigil of quiet joyfulness in the night. And our passing into Heaven will be difficult to perceive, for it will not be very different from the grace-filled life we have known day by day. Here, truly, is the peace of the Lord.

Quiet Woman, Woman Wrapped in Silence, whose sleeping and waking are not so different, "Ora pro nobis! Pray for us!" for we long to be just like you.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.



All Saints of North America Orthodox Mission Gets a Chapel

Report by Fr. Benedict Simpson +



Steeple of Building "C" of the Due West United Methodist Church Campus in Kennesaw, Georgia

On August 22nd, 2021 the clergy and laity of All Saints of North America Orthodox Mission signed a year-long mutual agreement for the use of a chapel located within the "C" building on their Kennesaw, Georgia campus. This space will be All Saint's dedicated chapel every Sunday going forth.

Parking is ample and generous with several handicapped parking spaces available for visitors and members alike. The chapel is quite roomy and the architecture resembles a ship in its ceiling treatments and broad sweeping wood beams. Cross-shaped stained glass accents are placed prominently in the space and a Reflection or Prayer Garden is nestled directly to the left of the chapel. The latter will come in handy for baptisms and chrismations; one of which is scheduled for October of this year!



All Saints is Georgia's first ROCOR Western Rite Mission and was originally planted in Decatur, Georgia. It was through prayerful consideration that the choice was made to move north into the Marietta, Acworth and Kennesaw area, as there is very little Orthodox presence in these locations. Now, these areas have a local parish to come to and worship close to their own homes. All Saints features ongoing catechism classes, Children's Sunday School and a robust food

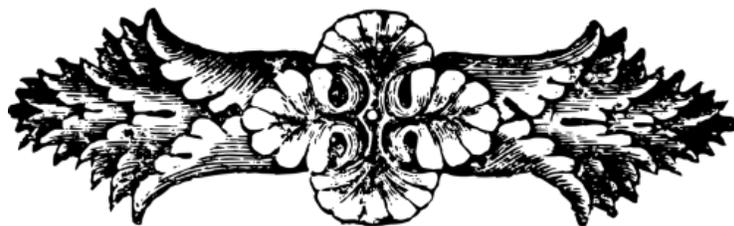
ministry for the hungry and homeless. It is also the home parish for Joseph the Carpenter, Subdeacon Joseph Zurmuehl's ministry of making icon stands, altars and other wooden implements for liturgical use. Subdeacon Joseph will be bringing some examples of his work to the upcoming conference and will be taking orders. Look for his new website coming out soon!



Top L: Sunday morning Liturgy at All Saints w/ Fr. Benedict, Subdeacon Joseph & Subdeacon Gregory. Top R: Subdeacon Gregory



Catechumen Romanus surveying the Prayer Garden where he will likely be baptized in this very spot come October



The Making of a Catechumen at

All Saints of North America

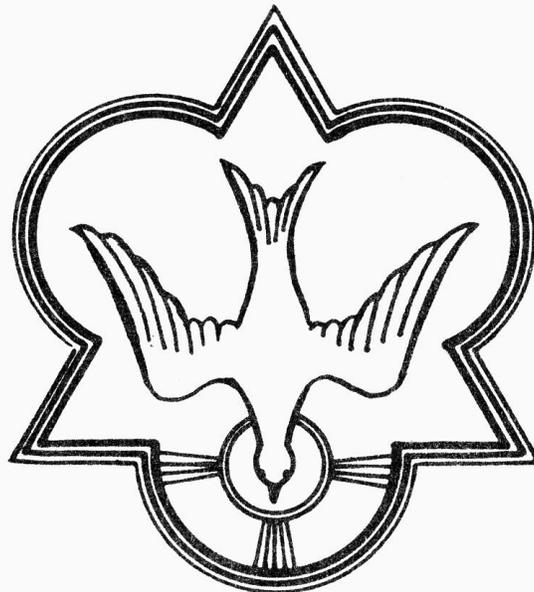
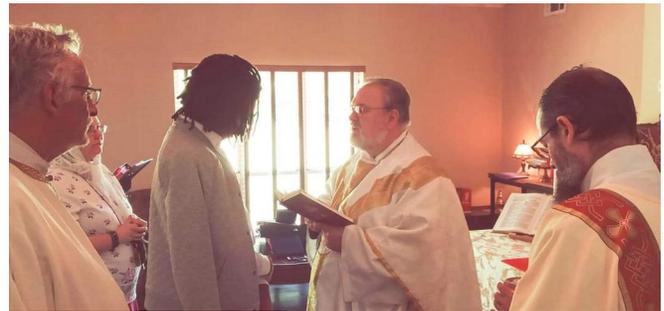
Kennesaw, Georgia



On May 9th, we welcomed a new catechumen to the Holy Church! Tyzeke travels from Conyers, Georgia to our humble mission in Kennesaw, Georgia every Sunday (nearly 65 miles!) to attend catechism and services.

May God bless him for his faithfulness! It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us that he officially be made a catechumen in the Holy Church. He has chosen the name "Romanus" after

Romanus the Melodist. Given that he works in the music and media industry, this is fitting! May God bring to completion the good work He has begun in him!!!



NEWS FROM
ST BARTHOLOMEW'S
CHATTANOOGA TENNESSEE

From Fr. David Prestridge



Greetings! From the Buckle of the Bible Belt.

St. Bartholomew's has been extremely blessed since we last were mentioned in the Wonderworker. In spite of the difficulties and consequences due to the recent pestilence, we have moved to a beautiful new location in the historic district of Chattanooga. We were blessed with new converts, visitors and 11 new members.

Since this time in August of 2020 we have baptized 12 souls into the Holy Orthodox Church under our Fig Tree. This is a great accomplishment for a small Orthodox parish in an area dominated by mainline protestant denominations. We have been fortunate in having many "Come and See" the truth of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

We have had three families move to other towns in the past 4 months, but they stay in touch and have all continued to attend other Orthodox churches in their new locations. "One sows and another reaps."

We are nevertheless thriving, blessed and thankful. Hardly a Vespers or Divine Liturgy occurs without new visitors. They return and become catechumens.

Last year, close to this time, we were able to entertain the campers from St. Gabriel's Youth Camp from the Monastery of the Glorious Ascension in Resaca, GA. They were treated to a trip to the Chattanooga Aquarium, Lunch, a visit to St. Bartholomew's, and fun in a Chattanooga City Police cruiser provided by our Sgt. Ric (Michael) Engle of the CPD. It was through his suggestion, urging and help that I was able to become the first Orthodox Chaplain the Chattanooga Police Department ever. That has been quite an experience and I am thankful for the opportunity.



We were honored on the day the campers came to also be visited by our Vicar General: Fr. Mark, along with Deacon Gregory from Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Church in Mountain Home, AR, (the current and future home of St. Gabriel Orthodox Youth Camp),and Fr. Benedict Simpson

from All Saints of North America parish in Atlanta, GA. So we had quite a time.

It is always a pleasure and a blessing when those of us from far away have the opportunity to come together and worship our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, We are grateful for the opportunity to visit with distant friends and make new ones
That in particular is a primary reason for the great success of St. Gabriel Youth Camp.
The campers have a great love for one another and a great enthusiasm for getting together each year. As a reminder if your parish is able to contribute to the camp in general or sponsor and send a child to camp, don't miss the opportunity to do so.

We thank everyone for their prayers. Whenever you are in the "Bible Belt Buckle" area come and worship with us. There's always something going on.



Fr. David serving at the altar with Subdeacons Joseph (L) and Gregory (R)



ROCOR Western Rite Communities Saint Gabriel Youth Summer Camp

By Archpriest Mark Rowe



This summer was our fourth (4th) year of our ROCOR Western Rite Communities Saint Gabriel Youth Summer Camp. While we are certainly blessed to be celebrating our fourth year, it was also a year we had high hopes for, as we began a new chapter in the life of St Gabriel Camp at our new location in the beautiful Ozarks. Our hosts, Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Church in Mountain Home, Arkansas were as excited as we were to spend a week “*Camping with the Saints of North America*”, which was this year’s theme.

Saint Gabriel Youth Summer Camp is a very important ministry of the Western Rite Communities. By the prayers and generosity of the Western Rite parishes, our Youth Camp is free of charge for the kids and parents. This has been our vision from the inception of our camp, and we have had from 25-35 campers each year, and the camp continues to be completely funded by the parish offerings. This is a huge blessing for the campers and their families, and we are so very thankful for the commitment that our parishes have made to make our Youth Summer Camp a reality.



Camp is generally five (5) days in duration, and each day is jam-packed with learning, arts and crafts, outdoor activities and fellowship. The days include Matins, Liturgy, the Mid-Day Office and Vespers. The campers participate in the divine services, and the homilies at the services are tailored to reinforce the camp theme. To keep cool in the July heat, we took a daily swim trip to the nearby lake, which was one of the most popular activities. S'mores, campfire singalongs and swimming are all youth summer camp staples and play an important role in some of our most cherished memories from camp.

How important is camp? Here are some advantages for campers attending Youth Summer Camp:



1. **Camp instills great values in non-traditional ways.** Much research shows that the core values of young people are formed in their adolescent years. Often, kids don't know why they believe what they believe, but they believe it, nonetheless. Camp in some cases helps them understand theology in a different setting and allows them to ask questions and get the answers to the 'why' they seek.

2. **No Distractions.** One of our famous rules is that we 'disconnect to reconnect.' No cell phones, tablets or other electronic devices are allowed during camp week. When these distractions are taken away, the campers have an opportunity to absorb and learn in an atmosphere and a much deeper way than traditional church schools once-a-week allow.

3. **Camp allows kids to 'own' their faith.** Many church programs are run on the same model that they see in school. They hear new information, have some discussion, and then are on to other things. Camp offers a different perspective. It provides time for campers to get some 'alone time with God.' These are times that are brief enough to be age-appropriate, but this time allows campers to practice some of the spiritual disciplines they are taught and not simply pass time in a classroom.



4. **Camp allows young people to make lasting relationships.** A key factor in the ministry of church camp is that when young people interact with new and old friends who share their beliefs, talk openly about them, and have a life that lives their faith, their own faith increases.



5. **Camp creates friendships that last a lifetime.** This is an area where I have seen the most beautiful results. The campers meet at camp one year as new friends, and continue to see each other year after year, and this has a great impact on them as well as the Church. In our group, many of the campers keep in touch through social media throughout the year, and every year, it seems that it is that much harder to say goodbye at the end of the week. They become friends that care for, pray for, and encourage each other in Christ.

That's all I have for now. Next year (God willing,) will be our fifth (5th) year, and we have HUGE plans for what is expected to be a fantastic time. We covet your prayers and philanthropy and encourage you to join us!

You continue to make a difference in the life of a child. God bless you all! I am,

Yours in Christ's Love

-Archpriest Mark

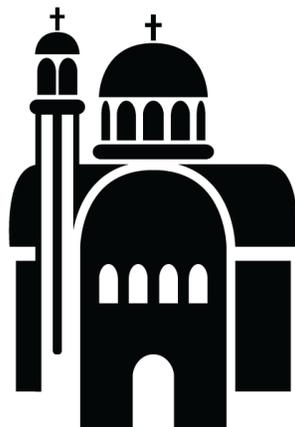
The Very Reverend Archpriest Mark Rowe, Camp Director

Vicar-General, ROCOR Western Rite Communities





*Top L to R: Rifle Range Course, Making T-Shirts, Arts & Crafts
Bottom L to R: Campground at the Church, Fr. Thomas and Fr. David*



Why am I Orthodox?

An Open Letter

Camp Quote:

“Saint Gabriel Summer Camp is a launch pad into all things Western Rite. It is not just something that one does for a week in late July, but rather— like the sower—plants seeds of metamorphosis in all who attend.”

A Veteran Camper Clergy Observation

July 21, 2021

4th Annual Saint Gabriel Youth Camp, Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Church
Mountain Home, Arkansas

This is not only an interesting thought, but a critical question that each bears responsibility to answer.

Many of us, including myself, are “cradle Orthodox” and were baptized as mere infants. The other option is to become Orthodox at some other time, coming from another Christian Tradition, or from no tradition at all. These folks are sometimes—and inaccurately called “converts”.

Whether a cradle or a convert the question of “why am I Orthodox?” needs to be answered. This is how the Orthodox see the Protestant idea of “becoming a Christian at the age of reason”. The question creates more responsibility for the cradle as they were grafted in before any age of reason. “I was born into it” is not a valid response for a cradle over 20 years old. As my friend Fr Barnabas Powell points out “one must be Orthodox on purpose “, both Cradle and Convert.

But let’s look a little closer at the positives and opportunities (challenges) that each group faces when answering our question.

Let’s first look at the Cradle Orthodox. Whether cultural or non-cultural cradles, they made no conscience choice to become Orthodox, but rather were brought up in a family continuity that didn’t separate God-Life-Family-Work etcetera, but rather saw these activities as an organic organism.

The cradle Orthodox went to church even before they could grasp anything academic about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They took communion from the chalice not knowing (or maybe we did)

that “Christ was in our midst.” Depending, they went to all the major feast days, survived the entire Holy Week, were part of wedding services and funerals rites in addition to Sunday liturgy. This was the ocean we swam in, year after year, and by the time we ever thought of the question the answer was just “this is what I am”, No more, no less. Many of us, including myself were nothing more than “baptized orthodox caterpillars”. Doing nothing more than crawling around, eating, attending, and doing what was normative for us—the result of being raised inside the Church. To be “formed” by the Church even though we lacked any understanding of this formation.

What possible occurrence could raise us from our sleep?

Let me tell you my experience and see if it stacks up.

After growing up “inside” the Church from birth to late teens I knew it was the place to be, however not really knowing why. I mean I had been Orthodox for so long it was just natural. I never really explored it at an “age of reason.”

After college I stepped back a bit from my normative Church routine and got married (she became Orthodox), we had kids, moved to Alaska and without conscious thought I wandered away from the shores and life of the church. I never ever forgot who I was and what her loving embrace felt like, but “life” had us on the ropes with six kids so guess who got the back burner? Correct, the church. Many will understand this choice while young, feeling the tug of world gravity and lacking much real experience.

After experiencing “life”—doing what “life” does—challenging us at all points—I returned home to the Church.

It was then that the “miracle of converts” entered. Here were people who had made a conscious decision to be “Orthodox on purpose.” They traveled unbelievable distances to be Orthodox and cost many everything they had; families disagreeing, maybe one spouse at a time, friends thinking they were involved in some ancient cult and the list goes on.

I couldn’t figure out why the “converts” were there. I looked at all the academics of it and it just didn’t make sense to me. Why would these folks stand for hours on end for services, forgoing a comfortable seat replete with stage music and attention-grabbing biblical preaching? I mean we had been trained since birth to do these things and we knew the sacrifice, but did it anyway.

Many questions like these floated through my brain until one day I looked at the parish with a different lens and to my amazement I saw “Butterflies” in these folks that had traveled incredible distances to be Orthodox. Yet I was nothing more than a “baptized caterpillar”. How was this metamorphosis possible with newly Orthodox people! Here I was—an Orthodox veteran—crawling around as a fuzzy caterpillar, while their wings were full and angelic. How was this even possible?

The answer came as I observed more and more: They were “Orthodox on purpose!” This had a profound impact on me, and one that would bring me to the writing of this short essay.

I had always sought temporal “change”, like a new and better job, better living for my family and better human relationships were among the vast and sundry choices for what I perceived as human growth.

Never had I thought about transfiguration or more accurately, metamorphosis as an option for spiritual growth. I had completely become complacent as the “cradle orthodox caterpillar”.

I had loads of orthodox “formation”, but had completely missed the cocoon which came with the Orthodox askesis or self-discipline that I witnessed in the “converts”.

This short essay is really an essay of gratitude, an admission from my humbled soul to those travelers who made the journey through the various Christian traditions—or no tradition at all—to the Pearl of Great Price, Orthodox Christianity, whether Eastern or Western Rite.

Thank you for showing me the way home.

In Christ,
A Humbled “Cradle Orthodox” Clergyman

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