

# The Voice In The Wilderness

*"A voice crying in the wilderness:  
Prepare ye the way of the LORD..."*

*Matthew 3:3*

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## August 6 The Transfiguration of the Lord, Jesus Christ

In order to strengthen the faith of His disciples when they would see His suffering, Jesus Christ took three disciples, Peter, James and John, and led them up on a high mountain to pray. According to ancient Church Tradition, it was the beautiful *Mount Tabor* covered with luxurious growth from the foot to the summit.

As the Savior was praying, the disciples slept from fatigue. When they woke up, they saw Jesus Christ transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun and His garments became white as snow and glistened as light. There, two prophets, Moses and Elijah, in heavenly glory appeared with Him, and they were talking with Jesus about the suffering and death which He would have to endure in Jerusalem.

Extraordinary joy filled the hearts of the disciples during this time. Peter exclaimed, "Lord, it is well that we are here. If you wish, I will make three booths here: one for You, and one for Moses,



and one for Elijah," not understanding what He was saying. Suddenly, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and they heard the voice of God the Father saying, " *This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him !*"

When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces. Jesus Christ came to them, touched them, and said, "Rise, and have no fear." When the disciples lifted up their eyes, they saw Jesus Christ as He usually appeared.



The Icon of the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus Christ commanded them to tell no one about the vision until He was raised from the dead.

The Holy Orthodox Church celebrates the glorious Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ, on August 6<sup>th</sup>. This day is one of the major feast days. By His Transfiguration, the Savior has showed us how people become in the future life, in the Kingdom of Heaven, if they follow God's Law and how the entire earthly world would be transfigured. The Lord also reminds us that we can be transfigured even now if we lead a truly Christian life.

On the Feast of Transfiguration, after the Liturgy, fruit is brought to the church to be blessed for eating: grapes and, in general, fruit from orchards such as apples, pears, and plums in order to ask the Lord's blessing on the fruits of the harvest.

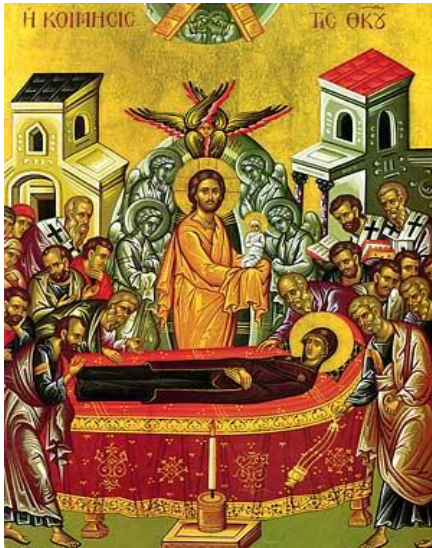
*Note:* See the Gospels of Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36.

### **Troparion of the Feast.**

Thou wast transfigured on the mountain, O Christ our God, showing to Thy disciples Thy glory as each one could endure; shine forth Thou on us, who are sinners all, Thy light ever -unending through the prayers of the Theotokos. O Light -giver, glory to Thee.

### **Kontakion of the Feast.**

On the mount Thou was transfigured, and Thy disciples, as much as they could bear, beheld Thy glory, O Christ our God; so that, when they would see Thee crucified, they would know Thy passion to be willing and would preach to the world that Thou, in truth, are the Effulgence of the Father.



## August 15 THE FEAST OF THE DORMITION OF OUR MOST HOLY LADY, THE THEOTOKOS AND EVER-VIRGIN MARY

The Feast of the Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary is celebrated on August 15 each year. The Feast commemorates the repose (dormition and in the Greek *kimisis*) or "falling-asleep" of the Mother of Jesus Christ, our Lord. The Feast also commemorates the translation or assumption into heaven of the body of the Theotokos.

### Story of the Feast

The Holy Scriptures tell us that when our Lord was dying on the Cross, He saw His mother and His disciple John and said to the Virgin Mary, "Woman, behold your son!" and to John, "Behold your mother!" ([John 19:25-27](#)). From that hour, the Apostle took care of the Theotokos in his own home. Along with the biblical reference in Acts 2:14 that confirms that the Virgin Mary was with the Holy Apostles on the day of Pentecost, the tradition of the Church holds that she remained in the home of the Apostle John in Jerusalem, continuing a ministry in word and deed.

At the time of her death, the disciples of our Lord who were preaching throughout the world returned to Jerusalem to see the Theotokos. Except for the Apostle Thomas, all of them including the Apostle Paul were gathered together at her bedside. At the moment of her death, Jesus Christ himself descended and carried her soul into heaven.

Following her repose, the body of the Theotokos was taken in procession and laid in a tomb near the Garden of Gethsemane. When the Apostle Thomas arrived three days after her repose and desired to see her body, the tomb was found to be empty. The bodily assumption of the Theotokos was confirmed by the message of an angel and by her appearance to the Apostles.

As you can see, this great Feast of the Church celebrates a fundamental teaching of our faith—the Resurrection of the body. In the case of the Theotokos, this has been accomplished by the divine will of God. Thus, this Feast is a feast of hope, hope in Resurrection and life eternal. Like those who gathered around the body of the Virgin Mary, we gather around our departed loved ones and commend their souls into the hands of Christ. As we remember those who have reposed in the faith before us and have passed on into the communion of the Saints, we prepare ourselves to one day be received into the new life of the age to come.

We also affirm through this Feast as we journey toward our heavenly abode that the Mother of God intercedes for us. Through Christ she has become the mother of all of the children of God, embracing us with divine love.

### Orthodox Christian Celebration of the Feast of the DORMITION

The commemoration of the Dormition of the Theotokos and the preparation for the Feast begin on August 1 with a period of fasting. A strict fast is followed on most of the days (no meat, dairy, oil, or wine), with the exceptions of

fish on the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6) and the day of the Dormition. Oil and Wine are allowed on Saturdays and Sundays.

On the weekdays before the Feast, Paraklesis services are held in most parishes. These consist of the Great Paraklesis and the Small Paraklesis, both services of supplication and prayer for the intercessions of the Theotokos.

The Feast of the Dormition is celebrated with the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom which is conducted on the morning of the Feast and preceded by a Matins (Orthros) service. A Great Vespers is conducted on the evening before the day of the Feast. Scripture readings for the Feast of the Dormition are the following: At Vespers: [Genesis 28:10-17](#); [Ezekiel 43:27-44:4](#); [Proverbs 9:1-11](#). At the Matins: [Luke 1:39-49, 56](#). At the Divine Liturgy: [Philippians 2:5-11](#); [Luke 10:38-42](#); [11:27-28](#).

## Hymns of the Feast

Apolytikion (First Tone)

In birth, you preserved your virginity; in death, you did not abandon the world, O Theotokos. As mother of life, you departed to the source of life, delivering our souls from death by your intercessions.

Kontakion (Second Tone)

Neither the grave nor death could contain the Theotokos, the unshakable hope, ever vigilant in intercession and protection. As Mother of life, He who dwelt in the ever-virginal womb transposed her to life.

## Resources

*The Festal Menaion*. Translated by Mother Mary (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1969) pp. 63-65.

*The Incarnate God: The Feasts of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary*, Catherine Aslanoff, editor and Paul Meyendorff, translator (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995).

*On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies*. Translation and introduction by Brian E. Daley, S.J. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998).

## Spiritual Life

By Subdeacon Thomas Wilson, LMSW

All of us would like to experience a Spiritual life of meaning. For many of us, that is the very reason that we converted to the Orthodox Church. We were seeking answers to questions like "Where did I come From?" "Why am I here?" "How can I know God?" "How can I let God into my life?"

Bishop Kallistos of Xeloni of Blessed Memory led the Denver Diocese of the Greek Orthodox Church during my early days as a convert and answered many of these questions for me. Recently reading an article by Hieromonk Jonah in *Again Magazine* I was once again reminded of his visit. In one special visit to my first parish in El Paso Texas, Bishop Kallistos discussed the fundamental principles of a spiritual life. He had adapted these principles over the years of his ministry from the *Philokalia*, a collection of Orthodox Christian spiritual wisdom from the Saints and shared them with us during his visit:

1. Do Not Resent
2. Do Not React
3. Keep Inner Stillness

Resentment is the result of many things that are going wrong in our spiritual life--- hurt, self-justification, pride, envy---all of these can lead or build into resentment. Resentment itself can lead to depression, addiction, avarice, and greed. The use of the Sacrament of Confession before and after

baptism is a way to help us break loose from resentment and its accompanying unhappiness. True forgiveness of others frees us from the chains of sin. The simple principle of Bishop Kallistos, "Do not resent" helps us to regain the joy of the Kingdom that the Most Holy Trinity wishes us to experience.

The second principle. "Do not react", is the action of taking control and accept responsibility for our own actions. It goes beyond just "turning" one's cheek and not only not hitting back---it means to not resent the other person, not hating the other person, not allowing bitterness to arise for in doing so we commit sin. The principle "do not react" teaches us to not react to thoughts to enter into an inner watchfulness. This inner watchfulness embraces the patristic teaching that by maintaining a conscious awareness of God's presence, our thought will have no power over us. We will maintain our connection to God and not do any harmful thing. We won't react.

The third and final principle is "keep inner stillness". Bishop Kallistos encouraged each of us to learn and practice the Jesus Prayer as a way to enter into a deeper, conscious communion with God. Hieromonk Jonah notes that "The Fathers talk about three levels of prayer. The first level is oral prayer, saying the prayer with our lips...the next level is mental prayer, saying the prayer in our mind...the final level is prayer of the heart..." where we encounter God in the depths of our soul. We become intensely aware of the presence of God within us. We obtain the inner stillness.

It has been said that we are the image of God, however to become the *vera icon* or "true Image", we must cooperate with God and fulfill by our action or synergy with God our process of deification. Our spiritual life thru the use of these three principles helps us to attain the true likeness of God and the blessings of spirituality that attend there. As Father Jonah says "The spiritual life is about our partaking of the Kingdom of God, now, in this life, that we might be filled with His joy."

Resources:

1. Personal Journal entry about Bishop Kallistos visit to El Paso Texas.
2. Hieromonk Jonah Paffhausen, "The Three Fundamental Principles of Spiritual Life", *Again Magazine* Spring 2006, Volume 28, No.1 pp. 9-11, Ben Loman Ca.

## The Jesus Prayer

**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.**

*In Slavonic:*

ГДН Іисусе Христѣ, Сыне Божій,  
помилуй мя грѣшнаго (грѣшную).

Господи Иисусе Христе, Сыне Божий, помилуй мя грешнаго (грешную).

*In Arabic:*

يا رب يسوع المسيح ابن الله الحي ارحمني أنا الخاطيء.

# An Owned Devotion

By Kristen Michaelis

In all the time that I've been Orthodox, I've only really ever been devoted to one saint - my patron, St. John the Wonderworker of San Francisco and Shanghai. All the other saints were just names listed on calendars whose stories I heard piecemeal.

Included in my lump of "other saints" was our most blessed Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. Oh sure, I understood much of her theological value. I understood the Church's teachings and pious beliefs concerning her. But, I was not what I would call devoted. I might have thrown a random prayer her way on occasion in addition to the usual prescribed ones, hardly anything special. I just didn't have a real relationship with her. I'd listen to liturgical music addressing her and think it lovely, but I didn't own the words if I sang along. Anyhow, all that changed one Saturday afternoon not so long ago.

On that particular weekend my husband Steve and I were at his parent's house to celebrate some family birthdays. With everyone there for so many days, it was inevitable that things would get tense. By everyone, I mean my husband and his sister. They really can't be around each other for more than a day before she starts getting easily offended and flustered by virtually everything he says and does. She's a sweet woman, really. But she just doesn't understand his humor, and he doesn't understand her boundaries. They simply rub each other wrong.

On that afternoon, we were all lounging in the living room on the extraordinarily spacious leather furniture with the exception of Jill, who was napping. Perched in an inviting chair, I quietly read my book while keeping half an eye on my surroundings. Steve and his sister were kind of poking at each other on the couch in that warm, affectionate way that siblings do, and she saw that one side of my husband's cross has the Theotokos on it.

"Who's that on your cross?," she asked.

"It's Mary, the Mother of God."

"Mary isn't the Mother of God."

I looked up from my reading.

"Oh, come now. Of course she's the Mother of God," my husband began. "Is Jesus God?" he asked.

"Jesus is God's Son. He's part of the Trinity," she stammered.

"Is Jesus God?" He repeated himself a bit more forcefully.

"He's part of the Trinity. He's God's Son." She was dancing around the answer he wanted because it was obvious that he was going to make a simple logical point. You know, Jesus is God. Mary is Jesus' mother. Ergo, Mary is the mother of God.

"Elise, this isn't a hard question. Is Jesus God?"

"No. Jesus is not God." I couldn't believe my ears. She's most of the way through a Master's degree



in Christian Education at a respected Southern Baptist seminary. That she could make this statement began to make my blood boil.

Steve balked. "Well, then, you're not a Christian. Jesus is God."

"Steve, of course I'm a Christian!" She had become seriously offended.

"Keith, is Jesus God?" Steve asked his brother. Keith has completed his Masters of Divinity at the same seminary Elise attended. Steve knew Elise will have to trust Keith's answer as authoritative.

"Yes, Jesus is God." Keith said.

"Thank you." Steve then made his simple, logical point. "Jesus is God. Mary is the mother of Jesus. Therefore, Mary is the Mother of God."

Almost before Steve finished his sentence, Elise's husband stepped in. "Is Mary the Mother of God the Father?"

I couldn't stand it any longer. All this fuss about a title. Why were they so sensitive about Mary? "No. Of course she isn't." With a red face and hurried words, the answer to his question erupted uncontrollably out of me. "And absolutely no one who calls her Mother of God thinks that's what it means. The title of Theotokos, which means 'God bearer' and is often translated 'Mother of God' was given to Mary at an Ecumenical Council of the Church in defense of Christ's divinity. Heretics had claimed that Jesus was not both fully God and fully man, that his two natures were not united in his one person. They claimed that he was just a man. In order to safeguard his divinity, the council clearly defined the dogma surrounding the union of Christ's natures affirming that Christ Jesus was simultaneously fully human and fully divine. At this council, they also affirmed that because of this, it was appropriate and necessary to call Mary Theotokos, or Mother of God. All this fuss about that title is simply silly. All it means is that Christ Jesus is truly and fully God. No one uses it to exalt Mary above the Trinity. That's ridiculous."

There was a painful silence as everyone pretended to be distracted by the television. I kept reading my book, but felt deeply agitated as if I had been attacked at the very core of my being. A few minutes later, Keith spoke up in defense of Elise. He said that the real argument isn't about the title, but about the veneration usually accorded with the title. To Evangelical Protestants, he said, praying to Mary and the saints seems like borderline idolatry.

During the course of our conversion to Orthodoxy, my husband and I had a few discussions with Keith about this in which we fully outlined the reasons why praying to the saints and venerating them is in fact reasonable. Steve and I contended that the burden of proof is really on Protestants, since invoking the prayers of the saints dates back to the second century in historical documents and was not disputed until recently. It was the accepted practice of the entire Church from its inception! Long before the Church had even agreed on what books comprised the Bible, she prayed to the saints and held services over the bones of her martyrs. The saints are not dead, but alive with Christ! Keith had long ago acknowledged this, and we concluded that we would agree to disagree. So, it's just not something we bring up anymore amongst ourselves. For the sake of Elise and her husband, Keith briefly mentioned that we'd already discussed the topic at length, and there was no need to beat the subject to death again.

Nevertheless, Elise's husband once again chipped in with an argument, "Well, technically, Jesus existed at creation, long before Mary gave him flesh. So, she wasn't really his mother. It's just a technicality, but it's another reason to disagree with the title."

*Eeek gads!* I thought. *She wasn't really his mother?* I kept my mouth shut. No use furthering an argument when I knew my words would roll off them like rain drops on an umbrella. They wouldn't hear. They didn't have hearts ready to hear.

The subject was dropped, and I was still feeling deeply disturbed. My faith had not been shaken by the questions they'd raised. I'd asked myself the very same questions on my journey towards the Church. Rather, the most True Truths that I know at the core of my being were being slandered, and I trembled.

I'm usually one of those types who avoid confrontation if at all possible. I'm the peacekeeper, the diplomat, the counselor. Although this was a brief exchange without raised voices, the wake of it resonated within me for hours. Eventually the tension inside me became so monumental that I had to escape. So, I drove to the store, blaring the beautiful Byzantine hymn to the Theotokos, "O Pure Virgin Lady" by St. Nektarios in my CD player.

For the first time ever, I owned the words. I began to believe them in my heart and not just my head. I realized that my deep reaction to hearing Mary and the saints falsely spoken of stemmed from my deep - dare I say it - love for them. No longer hidden below the surface of my conscious thought, my devotion to the saints, and especially Mary, had roared forth like a fierce and protective lion keeping watch over my heart. Now, I'm becoming better acquainted with a part of me I'd never known before - the part that is aflame with love for Christ in his saints.

This article first appeared in *The Handmaiden* an Orthodox Women's Magazine and is republished here by permission of the author, Kristen Michaelis. Kristen is a member of St John the Forerunner Orthodox Church in Cedar Park where she lives with her husband, Steve and their family.

**Did You Know...** that deacons, sub deacons, and altar boys represent on earth in their service to the Lord the functions of the holy angels in heaven who serve God. During the Small Entrance, which signifies the beginning of Christ's ministry, the altar boys, as the angelic heralds of God's glory, carry candles in procession which symbolize the Light of Christ and the Truth of God coming into the world. The procession passes through the two Royal Doors, one of which is emblazoned with the icon of the Archangel Michael and the other with that of Gabriel.

As depicted in icons, angels are oftentimes robed in the vestments of deacons (which are similar to the robes of the altar boy). Their wings are meant to symbolize the swiftness, spirit and power of their divine being. In fact, the *orarion*, of both the sub deacon and the deacon's vestments, which falls over the shoulders and cinches the waist, is meant to symbolize the wings of angels. As the deacon prays during the Liturgy he holds the front part of his sash. During the recitation of the Lord's Prayer, the deacon crosses his *orarion* over his back, symbolizing the folding of the angels' wings in adoration before God.



**St Nonna, the Mother of  
St. Gregory the Theologian**

## ***Great Women Saints to Live***

**By:** Saint Nonna, the mother of St  
Gregory the Theologian (August 5)

Saint Nonna, the mother of St Gregory the Theologian (January 25, 389), was the daughter of Christians named Philotatos and Gorgonia, who raised her in Christian piety. St Nonna was also an aunt of a Bishop of Iconium St Amphilochius, (November 23).

St Nonna entered into marriage with Gregory of Arianzus (January 1), the rich landowner of an estate in the Arianzus and Nazianzos districts. The marriage was advantageous by earthly considerations, but grievous for the pious soul of Nonna. Her husband Gregory was a pagan, a follower of the sect of the Supremists (Hypsistarii), who venerated a supreme god and observed certain Jewish rituals, while at the same time they worshipped fire.

St Nonna prayed that her spouse would turn to the holy truth. St Nonna's son, St Gregory the Theologian, wrote about this: "She could not bear this, being half united to God, because he who was part of her remained apart from God. She wanted a spiritual union in addition to the bodily union. Day and night she turned to God with fasting and many tears, entreating Him to grant salvation to her husband."

Through the prayers of St Nonna, her husband Gregory had a vision in his sleep. "It seemed to my father," writes St Gregory, "as though he was singing the following verse of David: 'I was glad when they said to me, let us go into the house of the Lord' (Ps. 121/122: 1). He had never done this before, though his wife had often offered her supplications and prayers for it."

The Psalm was strange to him, but along with its words, the desire also came to him to go to church. When she heard about this, St Nonna told her husband that the vision would bring the greatest pleasure if it were fulfilled.

The elder Gregory went to the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea, where he made known his conversion to Christ. He was baptized, ordained presbyter, and then Bishop of Nazianzos devoting himself totally to the Church. At the same time as his consecration as bishop, his wife St Nonna was made a deaconess. With the same zeal with which she had raised her children, she now occupied herself in performing works of charity.

"She knew," says St Gregory the Theologian, "one thing to be truly noble: to be pious and to know from where we have come and where we are going; and that there is one innate and trusty wealth: to use

one's substance on God and on the poor, especially the impoverished kin.

One woman may be distinguished for frugality, and another for piety, while she, difficult as it is to combine both qualities, excelled all others in both of them. In each she attained the height of perfection, and both were combined in her. She did not permit one duty to interfere with the other, but rather each supported the other.

What time and place of prayer ever eluded her? She was drawn to this each day before anything else, and she had complete faith that her prayers would be answered. Although greatly moved by the sorrows of strangers, she never yielded to grief to the extent that she allowed any sound of woe to escape her lips before the Eucharist, or a tear to fall from her eye, or for any trace of mourning to remain on a Feast day, though she repeatedly endured many sorrows. She subjected every human thing to God.

Her final years brought St Nonna many sorrows. In the year 368 her younger son Caesarios died, a young man of brilliant expectations; and in the following year, her daughter died. The brave old woman bore these losses submitting to the will of God.

In the year 370 Bishop Gregory, then already an old man, participated in the consecration of St Basil the Great as Bishop of Caesarea. St Nonna, who was somewhat younger than her husband, was also ready to enter into the next life, but through the prayers of her beloved son her time on earth was prolonged.

"My mother," wrote her son, " was always strong and vigorous, and free from sickness all her life, but then she became ill. Because of much distress... caused by her inability to eat, her life was in danger for many days, and no cure could be found. How then did God sustain her? He did not send down manna, as for Israel of old; He did not split open a rock, in order to provide water for the thirsty people; not did He send food by ravens, as with Elias, nor did He feed her..., as He once fed Daniel, who felt hunger in the pit. But how?"

It seemed to her that I, her favorite son (not even in dreams did she prefer anyone else), had appeared to her suddenly by night with a basket of the whitest bread. Then I blessed these loaves with the Sign of the Cross, as is my custom, and I gave her to eat, and with this her strength increased."

St Nonna believed the vision was real. She became stronger, and more like her old self.

St Gregory visited her early the next morning and, as usual, asked what sort of night she had, and if she required anything. She replied, "My son, you have fed me and now you ask about my health. I am well." At this moment her maids made signs to me that I should not contradict her, but to accept her words so that the actual truth should not distress her."

Early in the year 374 the hundred-year-old St Gregory the Elder reposed. After this, St Nonna almost never emerged from the church. Soon after his death, she died at prayer in the temple on August 5, 374.

St Nonna was a model wife and mother, a remarkable woman who devoted her life to God and the Church without neglecting her other responsibilities. Because of her spiritual, social, and domestic concerns, St Nonna would be a most fitting patron for Orthodox women's organizations.



## Bookstore Corner

### **Book Review of *Faith in the Byzantine World* (IVP Histories) by Mary Cunningham**

Review by Subdeacon Thomas Wilson

Have you ever struggled with defining the Orthodox Christian worldview? The foundation of this worldview is the belief in the Triune God. In *Faith in the Byzantine World* by Mary Cunningham, the saints and holy symbols such as Icons and relics, as well as, religious practices such as church attendance, keeping the fasts, and the celebration of feast days are explained as helping to define the Byzantines' sense of cultural identity.

Today the Byzantine world is a tantalizing mystery, even to the modern Orthodox Christian. With *Faith in the Byzantine World*, Mary Cunningham offers you the opportunity to explore this legendary empire and to understand the central role of the Orthodox Christian Faith in its development and success. Covering the Byzantine Empire from A.D. 330 to 1453, this Inter Varsity Press Histories volume traces Byzantine church history and affords close-up views of notable teachings and practices, including the solitary ideal, holy places and holy people, service to the community, the nature of belief, and art, architecture and icons.

In simple, easy to read language, Mary Cunningham describes the development of Christianity during the Byzantine period. She discusses such topics as the role of the Theotokos, the veneration of Saints, the importance of Liturgical worship, and the hierarchy of the church. A pleasant surprise to this reader was the use of ample color photographs of Byzantine buildings, mosaics, and icons that served to illustrate all that Faith in Byzantium meant.

I can easily recommend *Faith in the Byzantine World* by Mary Cunningham to both Orthodox Christians wanting to understand the development of Eastern Orthodoxy in its early centuries and likewise for the inquirer and historian alike, *Faith in the Byzantine World*, introduces the unified and comprehensive worldview of Orthodox Christianity based upon the triune God that was established in the Byzantine Empire and continues to this date in the Orthodox Church. Offered at a remarkable \$10 price tag, *Faith in the Byzantine World* would make a great gift to a friend or family member.

*Faith in the Byzantine World* by Mary Cunningham is published by Intervarsity Press, 2002, 192 pages





## The Orthopraxis of the Transfiguration and the Dormition

The customs and traditions surrounding the Orthodox Feasts of the Transfiguration of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the Dormition of the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary are both special and meaningful. These traditions are wonderful additions to the Orthodox Practices of your family and yourself.

The Feast of the Transfiguration is celebrated on August 6<sup>th</sup>. The feast celebrates the revelation of the uncreated light of Christ's divinity on Mount Tabor. The message is clear: not only does this glory prefigure the glory to come in Christ's resurrection and his Second Coming, but also our own in him. And indeed, again by extension, all creation is to reveal this glory. The events told in the gospels take place around the Jewish feast of weeks (Heb: Shavuoth), a kind of harvest festival.

It is traditional on this feast in Orthodox churches to bless the first fruits: grapes in the Greek tradition, apples in the Russian. Once again, the message is reiterated: that sacraments and sacramental acts, taking the very matter found *in this world*, bless and transfigure them to reveal what they truly are in the mind of God: not elements for analysis, dissection and exploitation [c.f. the modern science of genetics and embryology and what they have done to and with the human person!], but rather, the first fruits of those *future things*. The blessing of grapes, as well as other fruits and vegetables on this day is the most beautiful and adequate sign of the final transfiguration of all things in Christ. It signifies the ultimate flowering and fruitfulness of all creation in the paradise of God's unending Kingdom of Life where all will be transformed by the glory of the Lord.

The commemoration of the Dormition of the Theotokos August 15<sup>th</sup>) and the preparation for the Feast begin on August 1 with a period of fasting. A strict fast is followed on most of the days (no meat, dairy, oil, or wine), with the exceptions of fish on the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6) and the day of the Dormition. Oil and Wine are allowed on Saturdays and Sundays. This feast, which is called in the West, the Assumption, commemorates the death, resurrection and glorification of Christ's mother. It proclaims that Mary has been "assumed" by God into the heavenly kingdom of Christ in the fullness of her spiritual and bodily existence. As with the nativity of the Virgin and the feast of her entrance to the temple, there are no biblical or historical sources for this feast. The Tradition of the Church is that Mary died as all people die, not "voluntarily" as her Son, but by the necessity of her mortal human nature which is indivisibly bound up with the corruption of this world. In the Gospel of the feast, the liturgical services, and in the Dormition icon, the Church proclaims as well that Mary truly needed to be saved by Christ as all human persons are saved from the trials, sufferings and death of this world; and that having truly died, she was raised up by her Son as the Mother of Life and participates already in the eternal life of paradise which is prepared and promised to all who "hear the word of God and keep it." (Luke 11:27-28).

On the weekdays before the Feast, Akathist Services to the Virgin Mary (Slavic churches) or Paraklesis services (Greek and Antiochian Churches) are held in most parishes. In the Antiochian church these will consist of the Great Paraklesis and the Small Paraklesis, both services of supplication and prayer for the intercessions of the Theotokos. On the Feast Day it is traditional to bring flowers to the church to place beneath her icon during the service and then take them home after the service to place before the family icon of Mary. In some parishes it is the custom to actually bless the flowers on the feast of the Dormition of the Holy Theotokos.



## Food for the Kingdom



The Feast of the Transfiguration and the Feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos and Virgin Mary are two Orthodox Feasts that have some specific practices that influence the meals traditionally eaten in Orthodox Countries. Here are several recipes that will help you to prepare a special treat for the feasts.

### Shrimp & Grape Salad

Plump shrimp and sweet grapes in a light vinegar and fasting-mayonnaise dressing lend just the right touch to your Transfiguration Feast. Serve this with chilled sliced tomatoes, white sparkling wine and crusty bread with Olive Oil for a true feast.

#### Ingredients:

- 1 TB extra virgin olive oil
- 1 lb medium shrimp, peeled with veins removed
- 1/2 tsp garlic granules
- sea salt to taste
- 3/4 cup celery, minced
- 1/4 cup fresh chives, minced
- 1 cup green, seedless grapes, halved
- 1 TB white wine vinegar
- 1 TB high heat sunflower or safflower oil (or any light-flavored, expeller-pressed oil)
- 1 TB fasting mayonnaise (like Nayonnaise)
- 1 tsp agave nectar
- freshly ground pepper to taste

#### Directions:

1. Heat olive oil in a skillet over medium heat.
2. Add shrimp, garlic powder and salt. Sauté until shrimp are just pink and cooked through.
3. Transfer shrimp and pan juices to a bowl. Refrigerate just until cooled.
4. Add celery, chives and grapes to shrimp.
5. In a small bowl, whisk the vinegar, olive oil, fasting-mayonnaise, agave nectar and salt to taste.
6. Toss into shrimp. Before serving grind fresh black peppercorns over the top.

Serves 4-6

## Transfiguration Salad : Bulgar, Apples, and Grape Salad

This is a perfect salad to serve during your Transfiguration feast as it honors both Slavic and Byzantine traditions for the Feast with its use of apples and grapes.

### Ingredients:

1/2 c Bulgur (Health Food Store)  
1/2 c Boiling Water  
2 tbs Apple Juice  
2 tbs Lemon Juice  
1/8 tsp Finely Grated Lemon Rind  
1 Celery Stalk  
1 lg Red Apple Cored & Diced  
1/2 Carrot Grated  
1 tb Minced Italian Parsley  
1 cup Red Seedless Grapes

### Directions:

1. Place The Bulgur, Water, Apple & Lemon Juices & Lemon Rind in A Small Bowl.
2. Cover & Allow To Soak Until The Liquid Is Absorbed,(Between 30 Min. & 1 Hour.)
3. Halve The Celery Stalk, Then Cut Wider Half in Two Lengthwise.
4. Cut The Celery Into Thin Slices On The Diagonal.
5. Place the Bulgur, Celery, Diced Apple, Grated Carrot, Grapes & Parsley in a Serving Bowl And Toss Until Combined.
6. Chill If Desired Before Serving.

Serves 6.

## Applesauce Crazy Cake

This cake is great for the Dormition Fast and for celebrating the Transfiguration .This cake can be mixed in the pan it is baked in.

### Ingredients:

1 ½ cup all purpose flour (you may use ½ white, ½ whole wheat if you wish)  
1/3 cup sugar  
1 Tsp of baking powder  
2 tsp pumpkin pie spice  
½ tsp baking soda  
½ tsp salt  
1 ¼ cups of applesauce  
1/3 cup of vegetable oil  
1 tsp vanilla  
1/2cup raisins  
½ cup chopped pecans

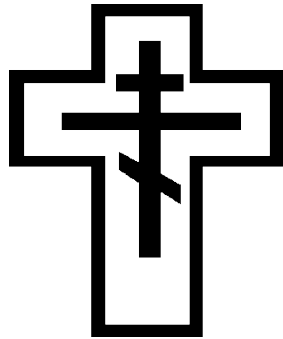
### Directions:

1. In 8 or 9-inch square pan, combine flour, sugar, baking powder, Pumpkin pie spice, baking soda, salt, blend well.

2. Stir in apple sauce, oil and vanilla; mix well. Stir in raisins and nuts. Use a rubber spatula to scrape any ingredients clinging to sides, corners or bottom of pan into the batter and even the batter in the pan.
3. Bake at 350F for 25 to 30 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Makes 9 servings.

This will make a dense, moist snack cake or breakfast cake.

*From the  
Pastor's  
Desk*



Hymn that many  
never hear  
praises Holy  
Trinity

One of my favorite hymns is called The Polyeleos. Polyeleos is a Greek word; it means “many mercies.” The hymn is called The Many Mercies because it is a musical version of Psalms 135 and 136, and, in those psalms, the word “mercy” shows up over and over and over again.

Musically speaking, The Many Mercies is not a difficult hymn to sing; however, to really do it well, you need at least three or four people. You need someone to sing the verses and someone to sing the refrain and someone to do a little harmony and someone to step in when the person singing the verses get tired - and that happens more often than not, because the hymn takes about 15 minutes to sing.

Now I realize that a 15 -minute hymn sounds a bit odd to most folks, but here's something that is going to sound even more bizarre: usually, when we sing The Many Mercies, there is no one around except the three or four people who are doing the singing. That's right: on a typical Sunday morning, when we do this wonderful hymn, there is no one in the church building to actually hear it.

That doesn't mean that the folks in my parish are slackers. Far from it: you see, on Sunday morning, we have two different services. The first service is called Orthros or Matins ; it begins at 8 a.m. and concludes right around 10 a.m.; the second service is called the Divine Liturgy, and it begins immediately after Orthros at 10 a.m., and it ends about 11:45 a.m.

So, if folks come to both Orthros and the Divine Liturgy, they are looking at close to four hours of worship. That's hard to do; if you have young children or you are not in good health, it's almost impossible to pull off. What folks usually do then is come for the last 30 minutes of Orthros and stay for the Divine Liturgy.

But The Many Mercies is sung pretty early during Orthros, so most people never get to hear; this beautiful hymn - and that leads to some obvious questions: Why spend 15 minutes singing a song that no one is going to hear? Why not just leave it out or sing it at a time when more people are around?

Those are reasonable questions, but here's what you need to understand: When we sing The Many Mercies, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are always listening. In fact, that's the main reason why we sing the hymn - to honor the Most Holy Trinity.

It's nice when there are people in the church building to listen to the hymn, and it's especially fun when they join in and sing along. However, when we sing The Many Mercies, the folks in our parish are not the main audience; the main audience is always the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Look at it this way: every hour of every day, beautiful and amazing things happen all throughout this cosmos, but most of those beautiful and amazing things are only witnessed by the Most Holy Trinity. Flowers blossom; stars blaze; clouds billow; we don't see any of those things, but the Father, Son and Holy Spirit delight in them. There are gorgeous fish that live their entire lives hidden away on the floor of the sea; there are exquisite insects in the rain forest that live only a few weeks; we aren't even aware that these creatures exist, but they bring joy to the Most Holy Trinity.

We humans are not the measure of all things. Our presence doesn't authenticate reality. That's what the Father, Son and Holy Spirit do, and that's why we sing that 15 -minute hymn even though there isn't anyone around to appreciate it - we are simply doing what the flowers and the stars and the clouds and the fish and the insects do. We are praising the Most Holy Trinity; we are singing before the biggest, most appreciative and most attentive audience in the entire universe.

Aidan +

## St. John's Community News

### Special Services in August

- August 1-4, Paraklesis to the Virgin Mary 7 pm
- August 5 Great Vespers for Transfiguration at Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church
- August 6 Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord Orthros 8am Liturgy 10 am
- August 7-11 Paraklesis to the Virgin Mary 7 pm
- August 14 Great vespers of Dormition of the Theotokos 7pm
- August 15 Feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos Orthros 7am Liturgy 9 am
- August 24 Jesus Prayer Service 6:30 pm
- August 28 Vespers for the Beheading of the Forerunner 7 pm
- August 29 Feast of the Beheading of the forerunner Orthros 7 am Liturgy 9 am
- August 31 Vespers for the Indiction of the New Year 7 pm

### Parish News

**Soup and Saints** will be held on Tuesday evenings on August 15, 22, and 29 at 6:30 pm

**Parish Council** will meet on August 13 at 12:30 pm. All members of the Parish are welcome to attend the council's meetings.

**Orthopraxis of Orthodox Engagement and Marriage Workshop** will be held on August 12 at 3pm. Our topic this month will be the Orthopraxis of Orthodox Engagement and Marriage. A new series of Orthopraxis Workshops will begin next month starting with establishing the Domestic Church. These classes are meant to educate catechumen and the newly illumined of the church in the daily Orthodox practices of living the Orthodox Christian life. Anyone interested in living a more traditional Orthodox Christian life is welcome to attend.

## Names Days, Birth Days, Anniversaries

### Birthdays

Aug 1- Vicki Jones Aug 5 -Vera Poe Aug 24-Timothy Carmack Aug 26- Reader Mark Trainer

### Names Day

Sts Sophia with her Daughters Faith, Hope, and Charity (Aug 5) Vera Poe  
Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary (Aug 15) - Mary King and Virginia Nials

### Memorials

*Eternal Be her Memory!* Donations in memory of the reposed Handmaiden of God Lorraine Khoury have been made to the building fund by June Conte and Nicholas T. Garguilo.

Our prayers and thoughts are with the family of our pastor on the loss of Father Aidan's Grandmother this past month.

## *Father Aidan attends the 2006 Clergy Symposium*



On Monday July 17, 2006 His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP, Bishop ANTOUN, Bishop BASIL, Bishop JOSEPH, Bishop MARK, Bishop THOMAS, Bishop ALEXANDER, and members of the clergy of the Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America gathered together at the 14th Biennial Clergy Symposium held at the Antiochian Village. Father Aidan Wilcoxson, our pastor was able to attend. Priests from every diocese came to greet each other and welcomed the new priests to their first Clergy Symposium. Christ's love was truly present!

# APPEAL FOR INTERVENTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

On July 20, 2006 the Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America appeals to President Bush for intervention in the Crisis in Lebanon and the Middle East.

## RESOLUTION

The Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP Saliba, and his diocesan bishops: His Grace Bishop ANTOUN of Miami and the Southeast, His Grace Bishop JOSEPH of Los Angeles and the West, His Grace Bishop BASIL of Wichita and Mid-America, His Grace Bishop THOMAS of Oakland and the East, His Grace Bishop MARK of Toledo and the Mid-West, His Grace Bishop ALEXANDER of Ottawa, Eastern Canada, and Upstate New York, along with the priests and deacons of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese, who serve some one million faithful, and who are gathered at the Antiochian Village during their 14th Clergy Symposium make the following resolution:

**Whereas** for the past 60 years the Middle East region has been one of the most explosive areas in the world, and

**Whereas** all efforts in the past failed to bring a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, and

**Whereas** the recent hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel have brought much bloodshed, death, and destruction to both Lebanon and Israel, and

**Whereas** the Prime Minister of Lebanon, Fouad Siniora stated recently that over 300 Lebanese have been killed and 500,000 people have become refugees in their own country, and

**Whereas** much destruction and devastation has occurred to the Lebanese airport, seaports, roads, bridges, and the entire infrastructure of Lebanon that we appeal to the President of the United States of America, Mr. George W. Bush, to use his good office

1. To bring immediate cessation of hostilities on both sides.
2. To help in the exchanging of prisoners of all warring parties in the region.
3. And that her Excellency, the Secretary of State, Dr. Rice, be dispatched to the region to utilize her diplomatic skills to bring about a just and lasting peace for the entire Middle East.

## *Supportive Business Spotlight: Sasha's Deli*

Many businesses in the Austin Area have helped the parish by allowing us to place folders about the Parish, one such business is Sasha's Deli. You may wish to go by and let them know how you appreciate their support of our Parish by allowing the placement of our brochures. Sasha's Gourmet Russian Market. Owner & Russian native Sasha Lifschitz opened his business to provide a source of hard to find Russian specialties to the Eastern European residents of Austin. Sasha's carries goods from many of the Russian republics: Russian cheeses, smoked fish, delicious pickled straw mushrooms, deli meats, freshly prepared fish salads, Russian breads & pastries, mineral waters, exotic teas, & traditional canned goods like eggplant spread & pickled vegetables. Sasha's now has a cafe serving lunch daily. Their homemade delicacies are available for eat in or take-out. The menu features Russian salads, soups, homemade pelmeni (traditional meat-filled dumplings), & blinchiki (Russian blintz, or crepes). Sasha's is located at 7817 Rockwood Lane #102, Austin, TX 78757. Their phone number is (512) 459-1449. Thank you Sasha's Deli for your support!

# ORTHODOX KID'S PAGE

## Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ



One day the Lord Jesus Christ took Peter and James and John with him to a high mountain. While Jesus was praying there, Peter began to notice that something strange began to happen. Jesus began to glow. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light you see from a powerful light.



Suddenly, while Jesus was shining - there appeared with him two men - Moses and Elijah - and they began talking with Jesus. Peter,



James, and John looked at each other in surprise because they knew that Moses had died over a thousand years before and Elijah had not been seen for a close to a thousand years after he left earth in a Chariot of fire.

Peter was really excited by this and wanted to set up tents to shelter Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Peter had just spoken this to Jesus when a bright cloud surrounded them all - and a voice came from cloud saying "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

How would you feel if you heard and saw something like that?

What Peter and James and John felt was fear. They were really afraid!

They were so afraid that they fell down face-down to the ground and hid their faces. But Jesus came and touched them and told them "get up, don't be afraid". When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. And Jesus then led them off the mountain, saying as they went "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

That is a pretty incredible story isn't it?



It tells us about something that we have ourselves have never seen. And it might be very hard to believe that story if it wasn't for two things. The first thing is this - Peter witnessed it happen - and he wrote the story down in his Second Letter to the Church. It is kind of like how many important things that have happened but we have not seen are witnessed to - like the wedding of our parents or our baptism- but everybody knows that it happened because witnesses signed a document saying that they were there to see it.

We can believe the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus because Peter, James, and John were there to see it happen - and because they have written it down in their writings in the Gospels and the Epistles of the New Testament. Their witness tells us that Jesus is very special for He is the Son of God - the one with whom God is so well pleased and for whom God has done so many things. The Transfiguration of Jesus tells us that Jesus is the Son of God and that we should indeed listen to him.

## Hymns of the Feast:

### **Apolytikion:** Grave Tone

You were transfigured on the Mount, Christ God revealing Your glory to Your disciples, insofar as they could comprehend. Illuminate us sinners also with Your everlasting light, through the intercessions of the Theotokos. Giver of light, glory to You.

### **Kontakion:** Grave Tone

You were transfigured upon the mount, O Christ our God, and Your disciples, in so far as they could bear, beheld Your glory. Thus, when they see You crucified, they may understand Your voluntary passion, and proclaim to the world that You are truly the effulgence of the Father.

### Family Helps:

1. Before the Feast Day, discuss the story of the Transfiguration of the Lord and the importance that it had for the disciples and for us.
2. Read the Story above and have a copy of the Icon of the Transfiguration. Have the children point out the persons shown on the Icon and what they are doing in the story.
3. This Feast has an afterfeast period of 7 days from August 7-14. As a family sing the Festal Hymns during your family prayers and at meals.
4. Prepare a fruit Basket and take it to church on the feast of the Transfiguration so Father can bless it. Take the fruit to a sick friend or an older person in the hospital or nursing home.
5. Make a fruit salad to celebrate this first fruits festival of the Church. Talk about the Lord Jesus as the first fruit of the Resurrection.

