



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **December 18, 2011** ✠

27th Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday before the Nativity

The Holy Ancestors of Christ

Martyr Sebastian of Rome (287)

"O inexpressible Mystery
and unheard-of paradox:
the Invisible is seen,
the Intangible is touched,
the Eternal Word becomes
accessible to our speech,
the Timeless steps into time,
the Son of God becomes
the Son of Man."

~ St. Gregory of Nyssa

✠ **Wed. Dec. 21 6:30pm Pre-Nativity Compline** ⇒ **No Inquirer's Class**

Schedule for

The Nativity of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ

✠ **Friday, December 23 ~ 10:00am** - Royal Hours of the Nativity

Saturday, December 24 ~

⇒ **3:00pm ~ Christmas Eve Supper**

✠ **6:00pm ~ Christmas Eve Vigil Service (Compline & Matins)**

✠ **Nativity Divine Liturgy – Sunday, December 25 - 10:00am**



Post-Nativity Dates: The 12 Days of Christmas - Dec. 25 to Jan. 4

Friday, December 30 - Nativity Potluck Party at the Ritchey's - 6:30pm

Feast of Theophany ~ January 5 and 6 ~ Vespers and Liturgy

~ Blessing of Water and Blessing of Houses begins ~

Old Calendar Nativity – Saturday, January 7 – 10:00am

Sunday, January 8 - Children's Play (Life of the Theotokos, Part II)

& Visit from St. Nicholas

Sunday, January 22- Ice Skating Day



The Purpose of the Incarnation

✠ "What is the purpose of the Incarnation of the Divine Logos which is proclaimed throughout the Scriptures, about which we read and which yet we do not recognize? Surely it is that He has shared in what is ours so as to make us participants in what is His. For the Son of God became the Son of man in order to make us human beings sons of God, raising us up by grace to what He is by nature, giving us a new birth in the Holy Spirit and leading us directly into the Kingdom of Heaven. Or, rather, He gives us the grace to possess this Kingdom within ourselves (cf. Luke 17:21), so that not merely do we hope to enter it but, being in full possession of it, we can affirm: 'Our life is hid with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3)."

~ St. Symeon the New Theologian (1022)

We Offer Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh

✠ "We offer gold to the new-born King, if we shine in His sight with the brightness of the wisdom from on High. We offer Him incense, if we enkindle - on the altar of our hearts - the thoughts of our human minds, by our holy pursuit of prayer; so as to give forth a sweet smell to God by our heavenly desire. We offer Him myrrh, if we mortify the vices of our bodies by our self denial."

~ St. Gregory Dialogus, Pope of Rome (6th C)

THE THIRD ECUMENICAL COUNCIL From *The Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God* By St. John the Wonderworker of Shanghai and San Francisco (Conclusion)

The Council had five more sessions, on June 10 and 11, July 16, 17, and 22, and August 31. At these sessions there were set forth, in six canons, measures for action against those who would dare to spread the teaching of Nestorius and change the decree of the Council of Ephesus.

At the complaint of the bishops of Cyprus against the pretensions of the Bishop of Antioch, the Council decreed that the Church of Cyprus should preserve its independence in Church government, which it had possessed from the Apostles, and that in general none of the bishops should subject to themselves regions which had been previously independent from them, "Lest under the pretext of priesthood the pride of earthly power should steal in, and lest we lose, ruining it little by little, the freedom which our Lord Jesus Christ, the Deliverer of all men, has given us by His Blood.

The Council likewise confirmed the condemnation of the Pelagian heresy, which taught that man can be saved by his own powers without the necessity of having the grace of God. It also decided certain matters of church government, and addressed epistles to the bishops who had not attended the Council, announcing its decrees and calling upon all to stand on guard for the Orthodox Faith and the peace of the Church.

At the same time the Council acknowledged that the teaching of the Orthodox Ecumenical Church had been fully and clearly enough set forth in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith, which is why it itself did not compose a new Symbol of Faith and forbade in future "to compose another Faith," that is, to compose other Symbols of Faith or make changes in the Symbol which had been confirmed at the Second Ecumenical Council.

This latter decree was violated several centuries later by Western Christians when, at first in separate places, and then throughout the whole Roman Church, there was made to the Symbol the addition that the Holy Spirit proceeds "and from the Son," (Latin: "filioque") which addition has been approved by the Roman Popes from the 11th century, even though up until that time their predecessors, beginning with St. Celestine, firmly kept to the decision of the Council of Ephesus, which was the Third Ecumenical Council, and fulfilled it.

Thus the peace which had been destroyed by Nestorius settled once more in the Church. The true Faith had been defended and false teaching accused.

The Council of Ephesus is rightly venerated as Ecumenical, on the same level as the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople which preceded it. At it there were present representatives of the whole Church. Its decisions were accepted by the whole Church "from one end of the universe to the other." At it there was confessed the teaching which had been held from Apostolic times. The Council did not create a new teaching, but it loudly testified of the truth which some had tried to replace by an invention. It precisely set forth the confession of the Divinity of Christ Who was born of the Virgin. The belief of the Church and its judgment on this question were now so clearly expressed that no one could any longer ascribe to the Church his own false reasonings. In the future there could arise other questions demanding the decision of the whole Church, but not the question whether Jesus Christ were God.

Subsequent Councils based themselves in their decisions on the decrees of the Councils which had preceded them. They did not compose a new Symbol of Faith, but only gave an explanation of it. At the Third Ecumenical Council there was firmly and clearly confessed the leaching of the Church concerning the Mother of God. Previously the Holy Fathers had accused those who had slandered the immaculate life of the Virgin Mary; and now concerning those who tried to lessen Her honor it was proclaimed to all:

"He who does not confess Immanuel to be true God and therefore the Holy Virgin to be *Theotokos*, because She gave birth in the flesh to the Word Who is from God the Father and Who became flesh, let him be anathema (separated from the Church)."

(First Anathema of St. Cyril of Alexandria).

“The Word Was Made Flesh and Dwelt Among Us”

by + Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas, *of Blessed Memory*

“God’s Incarnation, upon which our entire Faith is grounded, presents the ultimate challenge to the world.”

{From a talk titled “Orthodoxy and America” given in 2001 at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Washington, DC, and republished here from The Dawn, 2006.}

The second great fundamental doctrine of the Orthodox Faith that I would stress is that which is expressed by the Evangelist John: “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father; full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Along with the first doctrine mentioned above, that God made man in His image, this teaching about God’s complete identification with man through the Incarnation is unique to the Christian Way. No other religion or faith system has any explanation for the dignity of man nor for the love of God for him. The greatest lie of all time is that we all — that is, the adherents of all religions — worship the same God. So pervasive is this notion that we occasionally hear it expressed by our own people. We, however, must continually affirm our belief in the One True God Who was testified to by the Prophets and fully revealed by Jesus Christ.

The same love of God which prompted Him to create man in the first place likewise moved Him to rescue the one whose destiny was to achieve the likeness of God. St. John says, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16) “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (I John 4:9-10; see also Colossians 1:21) In the eternal Son of God, Incarnate, the God-Man Jesus Christ, the work of restoration was accomplished.

Thus, in one Bishop’s words: “God’s design for His creation was not to be so easily thwarted.” St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians that, “...When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law” (Galatians 4:4). The Incarnation represents the great turning point of history, for Christ became the ‘Second Adam’ whose obedience reverses the disobedience of the first Adam. As humanity fell in Adam, so it is saved through its incorporation into the Second Adam Who gathers together, and ultimately comprises, all of creation within Himself. In His redeeming work, Christ ‘recapitulates,’ or sums up ‘all things’ in Himself (Ephesians 1:10).

What is stated so clearly in the “Pastoral Letter” of the SCOBA bishops (of 2001 - The Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops in America, now called “The Episcopal Assembly”) is the basic theology and anthropology of which we have been speaking. In view of the incontestable doctrinal unity of all the Orthodox Churches (jurisdictions, if you will), the document calls for a visible unity, even an administrative unity, among us. But it is much more as well. It is a call to mission; ...for us the basic understanding of man is his unique relation both to God and the created world.

To quote the SCOBA Letter once again: “God created us to be mediators between the visible and invisible worlds. So, we are charged to be stewards of the earth while we offer back to God the creation which He first offered to us.” Liturgically this charge has its most perfect expression in the Divine Liturgy, the Eucharist, which means the thanksgiving, when the celebrant exclaims: “Thine own of thine own, we offer unto thee on behalf of all and for all.” Perhaps one of the most profitable places to start in re-acquainting the faithful with fundamental Christian doctrine is with comments about the Divine Liturgy. An emphasis can be placed on the Liturgy as the main act in which we offer up our whole life to God, in and through Christ, Who Himself made the ultimate,

complete offering for the life of the world.

This sums up the restoration of man as the *priest* of this world. St. Peter tells us: "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (I Peter 2:5) "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.' (v. 9) And, St. John in the Revelation states: "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made its kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1:6; 5:10)

As to man himself, St. Justin Popovich makes this bold but entirely true statement: "Without the God-Man, man is, in fact, without a head and also without himself without his eternal, immortal and god-like self. Outside the God-Man, there is no man, there is only a sub-human, semi-human or non-human." (The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism, p. 141) In other words, without Christ, the God-Man, man's life has no meaning, and if the Incarnation continues to be rejected, the consequences for the human race will be disastrous. And we have to stress that this is not a question of simply ignoring God's entrance into the world of man: opposition to the real Christ is active, because it is perceived rightly as the chief enemy of secularism.

I believe that it is important for people to know that society, this world, does not reject us, that is, Orthodox Christians, for our peculiar, colorful ancient rites, for what is for them externals. As long as we can dazzle them with our pageantry, magnificent buildings, icons, and even our special insights and perspectives as Eastern or Oriental Christians, they have no particular problem with us; we even get a certain amount of favorable press. In fact, we may even be admired because superficially our peculiarity adds to the colorful fabric of our multi-faceted society. But when society finds out what all of the religious externals are a sign of, in other words, when the real implications of the "basics of our theology" are discovered, society does not much care for us.

God's Incarnation, upon which our entire Faith is grounded, presents the ultimate challenge to the world. God became Man, so that man by grace might become God. This call the world generally rejects. Such a rejection comes through the spirit of the antichrist spoken of by the Evangelist John in his first Epistle where he says: "...every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 John 4:3).

Remember what happened to those who witnessed the Lord's miraculous feeding of the five thousand: when they heard what the miracle was a sign of (the eating of His Body and Blood), they no longer walked with Him (John 6:66).

Now what we have just said has very direct implications for our mission, even for example with regard to our reception of individuals who come to us in faith. Many are those who approach the Church, "even our veterans and Cradle Orthodox," enamored by what some call the "trappings" of Orthodoxy, and for a while their enthusiasm is high. They are attracted for many reasons to the Church's music, art, architecture, social activities, rigorous disciplines and mystical theology.

Once the full implications of the life in Christ, however, begin to be revealed to these seekers, then the real pastoral work starts. Once they see that all of this comes to bear directly on their lives, thoughts, words and deeds then we start the process of helping them to appreciate the transforming power of God in their lives brought about through sincere repentance and adherence to Divine Truth.

This world will not deal gently with anyone, and this includes a Church, that does not accept its agenda. There are Christians who have capitulated and have let the world decide their programs, especially in the area of morals. This is a way of accommodation to the world ... On the other hand, we cannot pretend that changes have not taken place among Christians and continue to take place. We do not claim that all of them are wrong and unacceptable, but all new directions must be judged by the Gospel, and Sacred Tradition. ✕ ✕ ✕

For Unto Us a Child is Born

(From *Life Transfigured, Holy Transfiguration Monastery – 1999*)

The Incarnation of Christ is one of the deepest mysteries of our Orthodox Faith. Many great theologians and mystics have pondered on the ineffable humility, the supreme self—emptying, the infinite love of the Word of God Who made all things visible and invisible and yet condescended to lie as a babe in a manger, helpless and dependent as any newborn child.

With our finite reason, our infirm flesh, our passionate souls, we cannot — and should not — pry too boldly into the “hows” of the Incarnation and Nativity of the Lord. These, as St. Gregory said, are not matters for us to understand” but revealed truths which must compel our reverent awe and thanksgiving.

But the Nativity of the Savior also offers us a very practical revelation of a joyous truth which can be life-changing: the Infant born at Bethlehem is kin to all mankind, and the Birth of God in the flesh makes all the children of Adam brethren of Christ, if only they choose to be made so. If we try with God’s help to really understand this promise of the Incarnation, we shall find great strength and hope, a renewed courage and peace. If we seek a firm conviction of our real inheritance as children of God, we shall be much strengthened on our pilgrimage to eternity. If we have a true desire to be adopted as “brethren of the Lord,” we shall begin also to cast off those things which impede our union with Him.

The Birth of Christ in Bethlehem initiated our restoration as children of God. Baptism, Holy Communion — indeed, all the mysteries of the Church — give us grace and strength to live for Christ and in Christ, now, if only we really wish to do so. But the choice is ours, As Sts. Callistus and Ignatius wrote in the 14th century:

“God gives the power, but does not tyrannically drag or compel us against our wish...He left us the power to come to Him, to believe to become His kin, to serve with fearlessness, zeal and love our truly loving Master and Protector, Who loved us enough willingly to accept death, and a degrading death, for our sakes... to reconcile us with God the Father, and make us heirs of God and His own co-heirs.” (“Directions to Hesychasts,” in writings from the *Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, London, 1983, p. 270).

The gift of this power to choose, the light of this grace, shines on us now, in this feast. How often have we sung, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given” (Isaiah 9:6)? Have we really felt its truth? When we sing in the Vigil of the Feast that “those who sat in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9:2; Luke 1:79), do we feel the presence of this Light in our own lives and hearts? Our lives, like the world around us, may be darkened by sorrows, doubts, unexpected losses, troublesome problems.

True Christianity is always the way of the Cross, and committed Christian life can never be lived far from the shadow of the cross we each must carry. Inevitably, Christianity is not a “comfortable” faith.

But it is a triumphant faith. And it is this light of victory over death and sin that begins to shine already from the manger in Bethlehem, lighting the faces of the shepherds who gaze in wonder, just as it illumines our hearts today. In the midst of our own darkness, we have seen a great light. We are triumphant not because we are perfect, or passionless, or magically freed of problems, but because the Pre-eternal Child born to us is in truth the Living God, Who makes us bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh. Nevermore can we forget that God the Word is nearer to us than the breath in our bodies, able in truth to bear our sorrows and understand our temptations.

Unto us a Child is born, and we are all His own. Let us open the doors of our hearts and draw Him in. Let us live soberly, mindful of our heritage and our duties as children of so great a King. Let us live watchfully, expecting His return. Let us rejoice in the Feast and sustain each other with the reminder of our great calling. And if we forget that calling, let us remember the words of Sts. Barsanuphius and John, words most suited to this Feast:

May our great Brother grant His help to us all; I mean our Lord Jesus Christ, Who deigned to make us His brethren (Heb. 2:11). And we have already become His brethren, and the angels praise us. Oh, Whom do we have for a Brother! He is Mighty to give us strength, Firm to divide the gains, a Warrior to strike down the enemy's attack in the time of battle; the Healer, to heal our inner man, together with the outer, subjugating the latter to the former; the Provider, to give us spiritual food; the Living One, to give us life; the Merciful, to grant us mercy; the Bountiful, to bestow bounty on us; the King, to make us kings; God, to make us gods. Thus, knowing all that is contained in Him, pray to Him, and He will grant you your heart's request, unless you yourself hinder Him ("Directions in Spiritual Work," p. 359). ✕ ✕ ✕

Will there ever be Room for Jesus?

~ Fr. George Tsahakis, Chancellor, Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Atlanta

As we prepare for the Nativity of our Lord on December 25th, let us consider reasons why He was not accepted by everyone He encountered 2,000 years ago. In large part, we discover they are not so different from our own world today.

First, there was no room for Jesus in the economic world. One day, Jesus and His Disciples encountered a mad man, screaming wildly. He told Jesus, "I am legion, for we are many." This poor, tormented man was so confused and pulled in so many different directions, that he was no longer one personality but many. Jesus then commanded the demons to come out of this man and into a nearby herd of swine. The pigs immediately stampeded and ran off a cliff and were killed. The man was healed.

But what was the response of the community? Did they praise Jesus? No, they sent a group to ask Him to leave their town. They were not concerned about the demoniac man. He had been around for so long that he had become a part of the landscape. They were upset that Jesus destroyed a herd of swine to heal him. That hurt their pocketbook. If Jesus remained in their midst, the local economy would be disrupted. They preferred business as usual – not an itinerant miracle worker. So the local delegation asked Jesus to leave. They worked too hard to fool around with a do-gooder. You see, there was no room for Jesus in the economic world.

Neither was there room for Jesus in the legal realm. It had been codified centuries earlier from the time of Moses. One of their laws read: "Whosoever commits adultery shall be stoned to death." It was one of the Ten Commandments. There were no loopholes or plea-bargaining. Thus when the crowd brought to Jesus a woman who was guilty of adultery, they were not prepared for His response. He refused to join them in condemning her. Didn't He know the Torah? Yes, but He also knew about God's mercy. Jesus considered people more important than rules. The crowd did not agree. The law was the law, and it was clear that there was no place for Jesus in this whole matter.

Third, there was no room for Jesus in the realm of the religious order. People like Annas and Caiaphas had lofty positions. Israel had many high priests. Who was this new person Who called Himself teacher, rabbi? Where did He go to seminary? Who were His parents? Where did He get His authority? In short, the chief priests did not welcome Jesus into their clerical profession. In fact, they did everything they could to keep Him out. Jesus' teachings threatened their comfortable lifestyles and position in the community. They thought that it was their duty to oppose Him. They organized themselves; ultimately their plan led to Jesus' Crucifixion on Golgotha. Without a doubt,

there was no room for Jesus in the world of religion.

Finally, there was no room for Jesus in the world of politics. His followers wanted Him to be King. Two of His disciples became so enthusiastic that they asked Him for positions when He came into power. Jesus told them that His Kingdom was not of this world. When He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the crowd was prepared for a coronation ceremony. But Jesus disappointed them once again. He refused to play politics. Instead, He spent His time with people who were not powerful in society. In response, His enemies agreed that He should be crucified. So His earthly crown was exchanged for a crown of thorns. There was just no room for Jesus in the world of politics.

In economic, legal, religious, and political realms – wherever Jesus turned – there was no room for Him. What first began in Bethlehem when the innkeeper turned Him away became a recurrent theme.

What about us today? Do we have room for Christ in our lives? When the innkeeper was presented with this unexpected situation, he faced a dilemma. At that point, he became like each of us. Each of us is asked: Do you have room for the Messiah?

In truth, the Messiah comes knocking at the door of each of our hearts daily – in diverse ways, through a variety of people, in various events. How are we supposed to recognize these opportunities?

Like the innkeeper at His Birth, we are given no advance preparation for His revelation. The innkeeper was ordinary like us. He could have said: "If I only had known that this was the Messiah, I gladly would have opened the door." But if he had known that, he would have responded out of awe, fear, or courtesy, not out of compassion.

So the Messiah comes to us just as He came to the Bethlehem innkeeper. Not in the form of a King with His entire splendor, but in the form of people in need – like Mary and Joseph. And whether or not we receive Christ depends on how we respond to these people and their needs. The innkeeper claimed that he had no room. Isn't the crowded inn a fitting symbol of our lives? So cluttered that there is just no time, no energy, no money, no room left over. There is just no room in our lives for the Christ.

And invariably, just as in Bethlehem, the Messiah comes to us when we least expect Him. Mary and Joseph did not make their appearance at the beginning of the rush season, but late at night when the poor innkeeper was tired and irritable after a hard day's work. Then there came a knock on the door . . . the unexpected knock of Providence.

As we continue with the Fast of the Nativity of our Lord, we are encouraged to watch and wait – to keep our minds and our hearts open for His coming. For the hour approaches when the Messiah comes to both you and me. And like the Bethlehem innkeeper, we will be forced to make a decision. Will our lives be so cluttered with incidentals that there will be no room for God? Or will we open the door and gladly welcome Him in? To the innkeeper, the knock that came that night was just another of a long series of bothersome interruptions. That is how some respond to God in their life. "Yes . . . take the stable! Do anything; just leave me alone."

God knocks at the door of every person. The question is – will there be room enough in your life to let Him in?

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✠ If you wish to be untroubled by anything, be dead in relation to every man, and you will find peace. I speak here touching thoughts, touching all kinds of activities, relationships with men and cares.

St. Barsanuphius the Great

✠ How many trifling and incessant pretexts the hater of mankind offers us for hating our neighbor, so that we are almost constantly angry with others, almost constantly bearing malice against others, and living in accordance with his infernal all-destructive will. But do not let us chase his phantoms; let us put aside all enmity, and love everyone, for love is of God.

St. John of Kronstadt

The Holy Fathers on the Nativity of Christ

"For what greater thing is there than that God should become man?"

Our Lord humbled without humiliation His lofty station which yet could not be humbled, and condescends to His servants, with a condescension ineffable and incomprehensible. God being perfect becomes perfect man, and brings to perfection the newest of all new things (cf. Eccles 1:10), the only new thing under the sun, through which the boundless might of God is manifested. For what greater thing is there than that God should become man?"

St. John of Damascus (8th C)

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

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (150 AD)

The Virgin, the Birth, the Body, then the Cross, the death, the visit to the lower world; these things are our salvation. For the sake of mankind the Son of God was born of the Virgin and of the Holy Spirit. In this process He ministered to Himself; by His own power - the power of God - which overshadowed her He sowed the beginning of His body, and entered on the first stage of His life in the flesh. He did it that by His incarnation He might take to Himself from the Virgin the fleshly nature, and that through this commingling there might come into being a hallowed Body of all humanity; that so through that Body which He was pleased to assume all mankind might be hid in Him, and He in return, through His unseen existence, be reproduced in all.

St. Hilary of Poitiers (368)

Such splendor of heavenly glory was revealed to the simple shepherds of Bethlehem! Up until then, such glory could only be seen by chosen individuals, and this is the first instance that we find in Holy Scriptures of a whole group of mortal men clearly seeing and hearing the immortal, angelic host. This is a sign that, with Christ's coming on earth, heaven is wide open to all who seek it in purity of heart.

St. Nikolai Velimirovich (1880-1956)

The goodness of the Deity has endless love for humanity and never ceases from benignly pouring out on us His providential gifts (cf. Tit. 3:4). He took upon Himself in a most authentic way all the characteristics of our nature, except sin. He became one with us in our lowliness, losing nothing of His own real condition, suffering no change or loss. He allowed us, as those of equal birth, to enter into communion with Him and to acquire a share of His own true beauty.

Thus, as our hidden tradition teaches, He made it possible for us to escape from the domain of the rebellious, and He did this not through overwhelming force, but, as Scripture mysteriously tells us, by an act of judgment and also in all righteousness (Isa. 42:1-4). Beneficently He wrought a complete change in our nature. He filled our shadowed and unshaped minds with a kindly, divine light and adorned them with a loveliness suitable to their divinized state. He saved our nature from almost complete wreckage and delivered the dwelling place of our soul from the most accursed passion and from destructive defilement. Finally, He showed us an extraordinary uplifting and an inspired way of life in shaping ourselves to Him as fully as lay in our power.

St. Dionysius the Areopagite (3rd C)