



St. John the Baptist

## ***Fire & Light***

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

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

✠ **August 25, 2013** ✠

**Holy Apostle Bartholomew**

**Holy Apostle Titus of the 70**

**St. John of Carpathos (7<sup>th</sup> C) St. Hilda of Whitby (680) Abbot Nikon (Vorobiev – 1963)**

**The beheading of the**

**Forerunner**

**Became an act of God's  
Providence!**

**By his martyrdom John was  
able to herald the Savior's  
coming to those in the tombs!  
Let Herodias lament and weep  
For she asked for his murder!  
"Preferring fleshly pleasure to  
eternal life and God's holy  
Law! ~ Kontakion**

⇒ **Inquirer's Class – Tuesday August 27, 6:30pm**

✠ **Wed. August 28 6:30pm ~ Akathist to St. John the Forerunner**

⇒ ***Many Years! Newly Illumined Jason, Kathryn, Anne and Karen!***

⇒ **Marriage Blessing Today – 3:00pm ~ Thomas and Irene Lotz ~ *Many Years, as well !!!***

### **About St. John the Forerunner and how Isaiah Prophetied Concerning Him**

***"The voice of him that cries in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (Isaiah 40:3)***

When a king wants to visit a certain place, he sends before him in advance his heralds. To an unusual king an unusual herald is appropriate. The herald of Christ the King in the wilderness was Moses; in Jerusalem, the Prophets; in Nazareth, the Archangel; in Bethlehem, the Magi of the East; on the Jordan, John.

Not one king in the history of mankind has had such heralds. St. John the Baptist was also as unusual and special as were the other heralds of Christ. He was the voice crying in the two-fold wilderness: in the wilderness of Jordan and in the human wilderness. Just as the wilderness of Jordan was fruitless and dry, so the wilderness of the human spirit, was unfruitful and dry. John was not able to make the human wilderness green and fruitful, but he cleared and plowed it and, in that way, was preparing the earth and leveled it [the earth] for the great Sower Who, by His coming, brings with Him the seed and the rain to sow the seed of knowledge and the rain of Grace from on High to make it green and be fruitful.

By repentance, John prepared the way and by baptism in water, made the path straight. The way and the paths these are the souls of men. By repentance, the souls of men were prepared to receive the seed of Christ and by baptism in water to bury that seed deep in the earth of their heart.

The proud and the lowly when they are immersed naked in the water are all as one, equal in their nothingness before the majesty of the All-glorious Christ the Savior: "Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low" (Isaiah 40:4). The word here is not about earthly valleys and hills but of lowly and proud men. As corpses in the grave are all the same before the eyes of a living man, thus all sinners, lowly and proud, slaves and masters are equal before the living God. Such a wondrous vision was seen by Isaiah, the son of Amos, the Prophet of the living God, the one and true God!

O Lord, Heavenly King, to Whom the heavenly hosts worship day and night, look down once again upon our nothingness and because of Thy humiliation and Passion for us, save us!

✠ **If you do not feel like praying, you have to force yourself. The Holy Fathers say that prayer with force is higher than prayer unforced. You do not want to, but force yourself. The Kingdom of Heaven is taken by force.**

**St. Ambrose of Optina (1879)**

## Pearls of the Holy Fathers (2:1)

The more a person thinks in his soul that he is the most sinful of men, the more does hope increase and flourish within his heart by this humility, giving us the confidence that it will be our salvation.

**St. Symeon the New Theologian**

The conflict which we must undergo with the vice of fornication is especially painful and fierce, for it engages both body and soul. Therefore we should strive ceaselessly and with all our strength to keep our heart sober and free of sensuality. This is most imperative during the Liturgy, when we are about to receive Holy Communion, for it is then that the enemy essays every sort of device in order to soil our conscience.

St. Nilus Sorsky

If a man does not carry out the will and law of God 'in his inward parts', that is, in his heart, he will not be able to carry them out easily in the outward sphere of the senses either.

St. Hesychius the Priest

When the soldiers of the emperor are standing at attention, they cannot look to the right or left; it is the same for the man who stands before God and looks towards Him in fear at all times; he cannot then fear anything from the enemy.

St. Serapion of Egypt

Let us eagerly run our course as men called by our God and King, lest, since our time is short, we be found in the day of our death without fruit and perish of hunger. Let us please the Lord as soldiers please their king; because we are required to give an exact account of our service after the campaign.

St. John of the Ladder

Flog your enemies with the name of Jesus, for there is no stronger weapon in heaven or earth.

St. John of the Ladder

If we want to do something but cannot, then before God, Who knows our hearts, it is as if we have done it. This is true whether the intended action is good or bad.

St. Mark the Ascetic

Let us know the great goodness of God for those who sincerely take refuge in Him and who correct their past faults, by repentance, and let us not despair of our salvation. In truth, as it was proclaimed by the Prophet Isaiah, God washes those who are dirty with sin, whitens them as wool and as snow and bestows the good things of the heavenly Jerusalem on them.

St. Paul the Simple

Blessed is he who, with a hunger that is never satisfied, day and night throughout this present life makes prayer and the psalms his food and drink, and strengthens himself by reading of God's glory in Scripture. Such communion will lead the soul to ever-increasing joy in the age to come.

St. John of Karpathos

Glory is like the human shadow: if you follow it, it runs away; if you run away, it follows.

- St. Martin of Braga

God rejoices when a man offers Him a wise prayer.

- St. Isaac the Syrian

## Encyclical Letter of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America on Marriage (*mid 1970's*)

***"... the two shall become one flesh." (Ephesians 5:31)***

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We find it imperative to address you on an issue of crucial importance for the Christian life. An increasingly secularized world tends more and more to neglect the traditional biblical understanding of marriage and family. Misunderstanding freedom and proclaiming the progress of a humanity supposedly too mature, sophisticated and scientific to follow Christ's Gospel, many have abandoned its moral demands. The consequences are plain for all to see: the family is disintegrating, legalized abortion is killing millions of unborn children, corrupt sexual behavior is rampant. The moral foundations of society are collapsing.

We, the bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, therefore proclaim anew to you, the flock entrusted to our care, the great and holy vision of marriage that is gloriously preserved and manifested in the doctrine, liturgy and canonical tradition of the Church. We do not make this proclamation in the name of an outdated conservatism or because we consider our present society intrinsically more corrupt than the past generations. We speak because we are concerned for the welfare and salvation both of you, the members of our flock, and of all men. We speak of "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes ... concerning the word of life" (John 1:1). We speak because we know the Truth of the Gospel of Christ to be the eternal Truth, the one needful thing, the good portion (Luke 10:42) for all men, in all times and places.

Many – Orthodox, non-Orthodox, and even non-Christians – admire our beautiful Marriage Service. Our task is to show them the vision that this Service reveals, a vision of marriage as an icon of the Trinitarian life of God Himself, and to indicate the responsibility and commitment that this vision of marriage implies.

We therefore appeal to all of you who are responsible for the life of our parishes and for the future of our youth to make a common effort to provide appropriate guidance and help to all in matrimonial matters, both through your own personal examples of pure and upright lives and undefiled marriages and also through words of exhortation and explanation, "knowing how you ought to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:6), and through programs of education.

From the Old Testament Scriptures we learn that God created man "in His own image," "male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27), and, since that beginning, "a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Man and woman are mutually complementary, and this complementarity, expressed in their union and common activity, reflects the very image and likeness of God. This spiritual basis of marriage clearly transcends, without suppressing, the fleshly union of the bodies. Fleshly relations when separated from spiritual ones are depraved; they must be woven into the pure and total love between a man and a woman united in marriage.

In the New Testament Scripture, from the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, we learn that marriage is a unique and unbreakable union of husband and wife joined by God Himself: "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). The Marriage Service likewise makes it clear that the bridegroom and the bride are united not by themselves, but by God: "For by Thee is the husband joined unto the wife" (Marriage Service). For this reason the Orthodox Marriage Service is devoid of any oaths or marriage vows on the part of the couple. Their desire and freely given consent are certainly necessary for the marriage, for sacraments are not acts of magic that eliminate the need for

human cooperation. Yet no vow or oath can possibly join a man and a woman together in the gracious and absolute way called for in Christian marriage. The true Christian marriage is effected by God Himself. In such a union, described by St. Paul as "a great mystery" (Ephesians 5:32), human love and desire for companionship become a love pervaded and sanctified by divine grace: water is transformed into the good wine, as it was at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. In a Christian marriage husband and wife manifest in their own lives the union between God and His beloved people; between Christ, the Bridegroom, and the Church, His Bride (Ephesians 5:32). God accompanies husband and wife, bringing them into a unity which will be revealed as perfect and eternal in His Kingdom, and filling their lives with the Holy Spirit so that selfishness and division may be overcome. He sanctifies and purifies their total relationship. According to the prayers of the Marriage Service, God communicates to those being joined in unity and love, faith and oneness of mind, holiness, purity and chastity, joy and glory, and the possibility for eternal life. He unites them in body and spirit, heart and mind.

Obviously, Christian marriage will never find its ultimate fulfillment and happiness in this world. Like all things in Christ, marriage too must pass through the cross, through temptation, suffering, trial and finally death, before coming to its ultimate consummation in the Resurrection and the Kingdom of God which will come in power at the end of the ages. All this Christian couples experience as they strive to realize in their own lives the great gift given to them by God in marriage: "Thou hast set upon their heads crowns of precious stones; they asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest it them" (Psalm 21, the Prokeimenon of the Marriage Service). For those who fight the good fight as good and faithful servants, the crowns become their eternal reward as witnesses to Christ and the wedding garments are transformed into robes of salvation and eternal glory.

Marriage is the most perfect realization of love between a man and a woman: two become one. Love unites in such a way that two lives become one life in perfect harmony. This love, sanctified by God, is the great source of the happiness which is sought in marriage, and in it lies a power that transforms both those who love and those who are loved. Because of this transforming power of love, all the difficulties and defects in family life can be overcome. True love never ceases, whether in this world or in the age to come. Faithfulness and confidence must reign in marriage, for there can be no deception in love. When husband and wife are united by love, they share a common life and help each other in everything they do, for their love for each other expresses itself in mutual help and support.

Such love implies a relationship in marriage which is total in character. Husband and wife must live not for purely individual gratification, but for each other, for such is the meaning of true love. Marriage must be offered to God continually and consciously, and it must always be rooted in the life and teachings of the Church. Husband and wife can achieve their final glorification in the age to come only by self-sacrifice for the sake of one another in this life unto the glory of God. Christian marriage is a specific application of one of Christ's fundamental teachings: "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:39).

The greatest miracle of this divinely sanctified love of marriage is the procreation of good, fair and holy children. In the image of God who brings forth life in love, the Christian marriage, a unity in love established by God, brings forth holy and good life (1 Cor. 7:14).

The perfect marriage can only be one, single and unique. The prototype of marriage, the unity between Christ and His Church, excludes multiple marriages: Christ has only one Church; the Church has no other Christ. Even death cannot break the bond of perfect love. Therefore, the Church does not advocate second or third marriages, even for widows or widowers; rather, they are tolerated as condescension to human frailty and weakness, while fourth marriages are totally forbidden.

The crowning which takes place in the Marriage Service reveals the bridegroom and the bride to be a new community in Christ. The husband is the head of this community, as God is the head of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3) and as Christ "is the head of the Church" (Ephesians 5:23). His headship is not a

power over his wife and family, but a divinely-given responsibility, to be discharged after the image of Christ, the perfect man. “. . . a man approved of God among you” (Acts 2:22). His headship is a service of love and sacrifice. He is to nourish and cherish his wife and family “as Christ does the Church” (Ephesians 5:29). The wife is the helpmate of her husband, his beloved companion for life, his source of joy and wellbeing. In Eve, the mother of life, the fullness of life was revealed, for without her Adam was alone and had no companion fit for him (Genesis 2:18). As the bearer of life in the conception of children, the wife has an immediate concern for life and its quality. It is she who gives content to the life of her husband and family: purity, kindness, peace, gentleness and the concern for others. Her true adornment is “the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious” (1 Peter 3:4).

To live up to its high calling, the Christian family must be firmly established in the Faith. Husband and wife must strive to learn more about the Faith and to accept its teachings as the law of their life. It must become for them the authority, against which all else that they read, hear or see is tested and evaluated. It is especially important that the Christian family participate in the life of the Church; by praying at home, by coming to the church services, by participating in the sacraments, by observing the Church’s fasts and feasts and by keeping her traditions. It is also important that the Christian family participate in the general life of their parish and have as friends those distinguished by a firm personal faith and purity of life.

Each Christian must seek the advice and guidance of the pastors of the Church. Especially before entering into marriage, Orthodox men and women must contact their pastor, so that he might explain the true nature of marriage in the Church and help them better to understand all the demands of a truly spiritual and moral family life. Each family likewise must continue to live under the guidance and with the help of the Church and her pastors.

With the help of God all the difficulties and misfortunes which are inevitable in life will be overcome, because what is impossible for man is possible for God. With faith in God, the husband will be truly capable of leading the family in the way of salvation toward the Kingdom of God, loving his wife and his children more than himself. With the help of God, the wife will be capable of being a source of purity, holiness and love for the entire family. And the children born for God in such a family from the beginning will be brought up as Christians. Such a family will be a beautiful model and source of faith, goodness and kindness for all those around it.

The Christian ideal of marriage and family, manhood and womanhood, is incomparably more exalted, balanced and fulfilling than those broken, one-sided or totally erroneous ideologies of today’s world which reduce the meaning of human life to the satisfaction of sexual appetites, material security, or to other such limited functions and desires. In Christ man is revealed as son and friend of God. He is able to become a member of Christ in soul and body. In the Christian marriage, he is able to achieve an eternal, unique and total union in love.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: be true men and women. Be faithful to the Christian ideal of marriage and family. Let our Christian families be united in mutual love and concern. Husbands and wives: love each other; love your children. Children: respect your parents. “Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21). “Mortify immorality, impurity, evil desire . . . on account of these the wrath of God is coming” (Colossians 3:5-6).

**+ IRENEY, Archbishop of New York, Metropolitan of All America and Canada, + SYLVESTER, Archbishop of Montreal and Canada, + JOHN, Archbishop of Chicago, + JOHN, Archbishop of San Francisco and the West, + NIKON, Archbishop of Brooklyn, + KIPRIAN Archbishop of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, + VALERIAN, Archbishop of Detroit and Michigan, + THEODOSIUS, Bishop of Pittsburgh, + DMITRI, Bishop of Hartford and New England, + GREGORY, Bishop of Sitka and Alaska, + JOASAPH. Bishop of Edmonton, + HERMAN, Bishop of Wilkes-Barre**

# On Christian Marriage

DIOCESE OF CHICAGO AND MID-AMERICA: April 9, 2013

## Statement from the Diocesan Chancery on the Contemporary Question of *Homosexual Marriage* to the Clergy and Flock of the Diocese, March 16/29, 2013

The Supreme Court of the United States is presently considering two cases which deal with the question of homosexual marriage. Given the ubiquitous coverage the news media is providing on this issue it is important that our clergymen and parishioners fully understand the position of the Church in this regard.

Living in a free society as we do, we should first be thankful that we have the opportunity to practice our Orthodox Faith without inordinate interference from the government. In recent history this was not the case in Russia, and is still not the case in many countries throughout the world. In a free society all views can be shared in the public arena – both views which agree with as Orthodox Christians and those we disagree with. We call upon our flock to be guided first and foremost by the Holy Tradition of the Church in discerning whether any contemporary question is something that is compatible to the Orthodox Faith. If an Orthodox Christian chooses to engage in public political discourse this should be done with moderation and with a firm intention and watchfulness not to fall into extremism. Extremism is not conducive to softening hearts or bringing others to the Faith. Laymen who choose to engage in political speech should not state that they speak on behalf of the Church. Strictly speaking such an authoritative statement can be made only by a bishop or with a bishop's specific blessing.

It should also be made clear that living a homosexual or any other sinful lifestyle is not compatible with Christianity and this has always been the teaching of the Church. That being stated, it is also crucial to state that the Church is a Spiritual Hospital and all those wishing to receive the healing freely offered by God through their repentance and God's Grace are fully welcome. This includes those who have participated in immoral or unnatural acts of any kind as well as those who are tempted by such sins. The Church is empathetic to those who suffer in such a way and offers them support, healing, and Christian love. Those actively engaging in any immoral or unnatural pursuits cannot live a full sacramental life within the Church. However, this does not mean that we seek to drive away or ostracize those who have transgressed in such a way. Rather, we must make all efforts to draw those in such an unfortunate situation back to chastity and the opportunity to again partake in the Life-Giving Mysteries of the Church and to engage the struggle for their salvation within the parish community.

It is entirely possible that the decision will eventually be made to recognize homosexual marriage by the federal government. Several states have already made such decisions. **Under no circumstances will the Church recognize homosexual marriage, accord it the status of traditional marriage, or bless such unions.** However, this is not to state that those who have entered into such a union have stepped beyond a line from which they cannot return. The Church has always strongly condemned heresies (such as Novatianism, Montanism, and Donatism) which deny the possibility of repentance for those having committed certain sins. It is crucial that our clergymen not shy away from the position of the Church as regards the sinfulness of homosexuality and other unnatural expressions of the God-given gift of human sexuality – but it is also crucial that such statements be made with love and with a corresponding invitation to repentance and reconciliation with the Church.

We call upon all to pray for our land – that the Lord will forgive us our collective societal sins as well as our personal sins and provide us a safe haven which allows us to work out our salvation in peace.

# On Infant Baptism

From the beginning of New Testament Christianity at the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2: 38-39) to our time, unbroken and uninterrupted; the Orthodox church has baptized babies. Entire households (Jewish, proselytes and Gentiles) were baptized by Christ's original 12 Apostles (I Corinthians 1: 16; Acts 11: 14, 16: 15, 33, 18: 8) and that practice has continued with each generation.

## The Early Church

Polycarp (69-155), a disciple of the Apostle John, was baptized as an infant. This enabled him to say at his martyrdom. "Eighty and six years have I served the Lord Christ" (Martyrdom of Polycarp 9: 3). Justin Martyr (100 - 166) of the next generation states about the year 150, "Many, both men and women, who have been Christ's disciples since childhood, remain pure at the age of sixty or seventy years" (Apology 1: 15). Further, in his Dialog with Trypho the Jew, Justin Martyr states that Baptism is the circumcision of the New Testament.

Irenaeus (130 - 200), some 35 years later in 185, writes in Against Heresies II 22: 4 that Jesus "came to save all through means of Himself - all. I say, who through him are born again to God - infants and children, boys and youth, and old men."

## Church Councils and Apologists

Similar expressions are found in succeeding generations by Origen (185 - 254) and Cyprian (215 - 258) who reflect the consensus voiced at the Council of Carthage in 254. The 66 bishops said: "We ought not hinder any person from Baptism and the grace of God..... especially

infants. . . those newly born." Preceding this council, Origen wrote in his (Commentary on Romans 5: 9: "For this also it was that the church had from the Apostles a tradition to give baptism even to infants. For they to whom the divine mysteries were committed knew that there is in all persons a natural pollution of sin which must be done away by water and the Spirit."

Elsewhere Origen wrote in his Homily on Luke 14: "Infants are to be baptized for the remission of sins. Cyprian's reply to a country bishop, Fidus, who wrote him regarding the Baptism of infants, is even more explicit. Should we wait until the eighth day as did the Jews in circumcision? No, the child should be baptized as soon as it is born (To Fidus 1: 2).

To prevent misunderstanding by rural bishops, perhaps not as well-schooled as other or even new to the faith, the Sixteenth Council of Carthage in 418 unequivocally stated: "If any man says that newborn children need not be baptized . . . let him be anathema."

Immediately after Baptism, the infant is anointed with the HOLY CHRISM (which has been consecrated by the Patriarch or Primate of the local Church) and this roughly corresponds to the Western Churches' "Confirmation". Thus in doing this, the Orthodox Church retains the ancient tradition - and so the newly Baptised and Chrismated Christian is admitted to Holy Communion.

I could never understand why in the Western Churches a child is Baptised and then, in effect, immediately excommunicated and barred from Communion until it is a teenager when it is then confirmed and then admitted for the first time, rather belatedly, to Communion!

# The SCIENCE OF SPIRITUALITY

Did you know your spiritual practice can change your Brain?

Recent scientific research shows:

- Prayer and spiritual practice reduce stress and anxiety.
- Just twelve minutes of focused prayer per day may slow down the aging process.
- Contemplating a loving God as taught in the Orthodox Church rather than a punitive God reduces anxiety, depression, and stress and increases feelings of security, compassion, and love.
- Anger and prejudice generated by extreme beliefs can permanently damage your brain.
- Intense prayer and meditation permanently change numerous structures and functions in the brain altering your values and the way you perceive reality.

These are the findings of neuroscientist Andrew Newberg. His research team has concluded that active and positive spiritual belief changes the human brain for the better.

If you want to change your life you have to realize that part of your effort is changing your brain. This is work we do in cooperation with Grace, called Synergia. The Orthodox way of life as taught by our Church will lead you to a better life and a union with

God. Our aim as Orthodox Christians is to acquire the Holy Spirit so that we are able to do His will and not just our own will. This requires we overcome our tendency to follow habits that we have programmed into our physical brains. Prayer, worship and ascetic practices coupled with the sacraments of the Church can change your life. They help you form new habits that lead you closer to God and a more fulfilling life.

## Ten Points for Living an Orthodox Christian Life

### 1. Praying Daily

Have a regular prayer rule that includes morning and evening prayer.

### 2. Worshiping and Participating in Sacraments

Attend and participate in the Divine Liturgy receiving Holy Communion regularly as well as regular participation in Confession.

### 3. Honoring the Liturgical Cycle of the Church

Follow the seasons of the church and participate in the fasts and feasts of the Church.

### 4. Using the Jesus Prayer

Repeat the Holy name whenever possible throughout the day or night.

### 5. Slowing Down and Ordering Your Life

Set priorities and reduce the stress and friction caused by a hurried life.

### 6. Being Watchful

Give full attention to what you are doing at the moment.

### 7. Taming the Passions

Overcome your habits, attachment to your likes and dislikes, and learn to practice the virtues.

### 8. Putting Others First

Free yourself from your selfishness and find joy in helping others.

### 9. Spiritual Fellowship

Spend time regularly with other Orthodox Christians for support and inspiration.

### 10. Reading the Scriptures and Holy Fathers

Be inspired by the lessons of the Holy Scriptures, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and the lives of the Saints of the Church.

*from the St. George Church, Greenville, SC, bulletin*