

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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№ November 22, 2015 **№ Advent: The Nativity Fast**

PostFeast of the

Entrance of the Theotokos

Apostles of the 70, Philemon & Archippus,

and the Martyr Apphia, wife of Philemon and St. Onesimus, disciple of St. Paul (1st C) Martyr Cecilia of Rome (288) St. Clement of Ochrid, Macedonia (916) St. Kallistos, Patriarch of Constantinople (1397)

Tomorrow: Inquirer's Class – 6:30pm

NOTE: No Wednesday or Saturday services this week.

Most-Holy Theotokos save us!

1 O come, let us sing

our salvation!

above all gods!

unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of

2 Let us come before His

and make a joyful noise

3 For the LORD is a great God, and a great King

~ Psalm 95

unto him with psalms!

presence with thanksgiving,

What He (Christ) has not assumed, He has not saved...

"The unassumed is the unhealed, but what is united with God is also being saved. Had half of Adam fallen, what was assumed and is being saved would have been half too; but if the whole fell he is united to the whole of what was born and is being saved wholly."

- St. Gregory the Theologian

On the Feast of the Presentation of the Theotokos in the Temple

+Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas

- from The Dawn, Fall 2008

On November 15, the Church will enter the period of the Christian year known as the Nativity Fast (Advent). For forty days our attention will be directed towards the Nativity of Christ, both in the proper parts of the services and in the Scriptural readings. In fact, several days during the month of December are dedicated to the memory of Old Testament Prophets, persons with an extraordinary call to proclaim God's will and announce beforehand the Savior's coming into the world. For example on December 1 we commemorate the Prophet Nahum; December 2, Habakkuk; December 3, Zephaniah; December 16, Haggai; and on December 17, Daniel and the Three Youths. In addition, on the two Sundays preceding Christmas the entire assembly of Old Covenant Prophets are among those many people commemorated who prepared the way for Christ's advent. Of great significance is the Feastday which occurs in the midst of the Fast, on November 21: The Presentation (or Entrance) of the Theotokos into the Temple.

According to Tradition as old as the Church itself, the parents of the Theotokos were Joachim and Anna. Being elderly and having no children, they prayed that God would grant them a child, even in their old age. God answered their prayer by giving to them a daughter. Everything surrounding her birth and infancy was extraordinary. First, her birth was announced by an angel. Second, she was born of a very old and barren mother. Third, when according to custom she was presented in the temple forty days after her birth, the priest Zacharias, father of the Forerunner John the Baptist, received her with unusual joy, taking her into the Holy of Holies, a place reserved only for the priest to enter once a year. Finally, from an early age until her betrothal, the blessed handmaiden was raised in the temple. Her being brought to the temple at the age of three, escorted by young girls carrying candles or lamps in their hands, constitutes the fundamental event commemorated on November 21.

Many Old Testament prophecies which pointed to God's New Covenant with man, had to do with the instrument that He would use to accomplish His purpose. Readers will recall that the first prophecy about Mary occurred at the very moment of man's Fall. God said unto the serpent which had beguiled both Adam and Eve, "Because thou hast done this. ...I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:14-15). Mary is the new Eve, the one who crushes with her perfection and sinlessness the head of evil. In addition, the burning bush which "was not consumed" by fire (Exodus 3:1-6), the uncrossed gate of the temple (Ezekiel 44:1-3), and a host of other Old Testament types or images, tell of this extraordinary creature that was to be the earthly instrument by which God would enter into His own material creation. Psalm 45, recited in part at the Proskomedia prior the Liturgy is a prophecy directly related to the Feast in question: "The King's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the King's palace" (verses 13-15).

Only from such a person as Mary could God take flesh—the perfect human nature of our Lord, Jesus Christ. We call her sinless, even immaculate. By these words we mean that she committed no personal sin. We reject, however, the idea of an immaculate conception, or any approach to the Theotokos which would distinguish her radically from the entire race of mortals, making her something other than human. We also call her Ever-Virgin, because in spite of attempts to prove otherwise, it has never been demonstrated that she had children other than Jesus, nor had she sexual relations with any man.

Mary has a place of high honor in Christian Tradition. She is referred to as being "more honorable than the cherubim and more glorious without compare than the seraphim." She is called Theotokos, or God-bearer. She is even known as the Mother of God, for the One to whom she gave birth is God, but unites perfectly within Himself His own divine nature and our human nature as well, identifying Himself completely with the whole race of mortals. During the Feast of the Presentation much is made of the Virgin as the abode of God, the one who enters the Holy of Holies to become herself the Tabernacle of the Righteous One. The veneration of the Theotokos, the high honor given her in the Church, is a fulfillment of the Prophetic words that she herself spoke:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior; for He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Luke 1:46-48). The angel Gabriel had addressed her in these words: "Hail, thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1: 28). The woman who called out from the crowd in the Gospel lesson read at all major Feasts of the Theotokos, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee," was answered by our Lord, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11: 27-28). Mary is considered to be the individual, par excellence, who heard the word of God and kept it.

The consequences of denying the Theotokos her rightful place in the life of Christians are more serious than one may think unless he considers all its implications. The Church's theology insists upon the two perfect natures of Christ: He is both fully God and fully Man. The Virgin Mary was the perfect human being from whom Christ's human nature was taken. Man's redemption was made possible through the union of God and man in Christ, and it is over the very fundamental question of the personality of Christ that the Church throughout her history has had to wage its bitterest battles. In fact, the main work of the Third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus 43 I AD) was to combat Nestorianism, a heresy which denied Mary the title, Theotokos. At least partially, as a result of this fifth century controversy, the very specific Greek term for Christ's mother is used, untranslated, in Orthodox Church services, even to this day. To this one title is ascribed great importance, because in a very specific way it bears witness to the salvation given to us in Christ.

De-emphasis of the sinlessness of Christ's mother, insistence upon her having other children by Joseph, and failure to remember her part in the history of the salvation of mankind, have contributed to a general misunderstanding of the Incarnation in all its fullness and power. These are but preliminary steps towards a denial of the virgin birth, and with it the divinity of Christ, the Holy Trinity, and so on.

Thus, this Feast of the Presentation of the Theotokos stands at the beginning of the season in which we commemorate the Incarnation, the intervention of God in time and history:

"Heaven and earth rejoice, beholding the spiritual Heaven, the only Virgin without blemish, enter the house of God, there to be reared in reverence. To her Zacharias in amazement cried: 'O Gate of the Lord! Unto thee I open the gates of the temple: rejoice and go round it in gladness. For I know and believe that the deliverance of Israel shall now come to dwell openly in our midst, and that from thee shall be born God the Word, who grants the world great mercy." (From the Aposticha for the Feast)

"Today is the foreshadowing of the good pleasure of God and the herald of the salvation of men. The Virgin is revealed in the temple of God, and beforehand she announces Christ to all. Let us therefore cry to her with mighty voice: Hail! Thou fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation." (Troparion of the Feast)

{Translations of liturgical hymns by Mother Mary and Bishop Kallistos Ware, from the Festal Menaion.}

St John of Damascus - Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, Chapter 12.

That the holy Virgin is the Mother of God: An argument directed against the Nestorians

Moreover we proclaim the holy Virgin to be in strict truth the Mother of God. For inasmuch as He who was born of her was true God, she who bare the true God incarnate is the true mother of God. For we hold that God was born of her, not implying that the divinity of the Word received from her the beginning of its being, but meaning that God the Word Himself, Who was begotten of the Father timelessly before the ages, and was with the Father and the Spirit without beginning and through eternity, took up His abode in these last days for the sake of our salvation in the Virgin's womb, and was without change made flesh and born of her. For the holy Virgin did not bare mere man but true God: and not mere God but God incarnate, Who did not bring down His body from Heaven, nor simply passed through the Virgin as channel, but received from her flesh of like essence to our own and subsisting in Himself. For if the body had come down from heaven and had not partaken of our nature, what would have been the use of His becoming man? For the purpose of God the Word becoming man was that the very same nature, which had sinned and fallen and become corrupted, should triumph over the deceiving tyrant and so be freed from corruption, just as the divine apostle puts it, For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:21 If the first is true the second must also be true.

Although, however, he says, The first Adam is of the earth earthy; the second Adam is Lord from Heaven 1 Corinthians 15:47, he does not say that His body is from heaven, but emphasises the fact that He is not mere man. For, mark, he called Him both Adam and Lord, thus indicating His double nature. For Adam is, being interpreted, earth-born: and it is clear that man's nature is earth-born since he is formed from earth, but the title Lord signifies His divine essence. And again the Apostle says: God sent forth His only-begotten Son, made of a woman. Galatians 4:4 He did not say made by a woman. Wherefore the divine apostle meant that the only-begotten Son of God and God is the same as He who was made man of the Virgin, and that He who was born of the Virgin is the same as the Son of God and God.

But He was born after the bodily fashion inasmuch as He became man, and did not take up His abode in a man formed beforehand, as in a Prophet, but became Himself in essence and truth man, that is

He caused flesh animated with the intelligent and reasonable to subsist in His own subsistence, and Himself became subsistence for it. For this is the meaning of made of a woman. For how could the very Word of God itself have been made under the law, if He did not become man of like essence with ourselves?

Hence it is with justice and truth that we call the holy Mary the Mother of God. For this name embraces the whole mystery of the dispensation. For if she who bore Him is the Mother of God, assuredly He Who was born of her is God and likewise also man. For how could God, Who was before the ages, have been born of a woman unless He had become man? For the son of man must clearly be man himself. But if He Who was born of a woman is Himself God, manifestly He Who was born of God the Father in accordance with the laws of an essence that is divine and knows no beginning, and He Who was in the last days born of the Virgin in accordance with the laws of an essence that has beginning and is subject to time, that is, an essence which is human, must be one and the same. The name in truth signifies the one subsistence and the two natures and the two generations of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But we never say that the holy Virgin is the Mother of Christ because it was in order to do away with the title Mother of God, and to bring dishonor on the Mother of God, who alone is in truth worthy of honor above all creation, that the impure and abominable Judaizing Nestorius, that vessel of dishonor, invented this name for an insult. For David the king, and Aaron, the high priest, are also called Christ, for it is customary to make kings and priests by anointing; and besides every Godinspired man may be called Christ, but yet he is not by nature God: yea, the accursed Nestorius insulted Him Who was born of the Virgin by calling Him God-bearer. May it be far from us to speak of or think of Him as God-bearer only, Who is in truth God incarnate. For the Word Himself became flesh, having been in truth conceived of the Virgin, but coming forth as God with the assumed nature which, as soon as He was brought forth into being, was deified by Him, so that these three things took place simultaneously, the assumption of our nature, the coming into being, and the deification of the assumed nature by the Word. And thus it is that the holy Virgin is thought of and spoken of as the Mother of God, not only because of the nature of the Word, but also because of the deification of man's nature, the miracles of conception and of existence being wrought together, to wit, the conception the Word, and the existence of the flesh in the Word Himself. For the very Mother of God in some marvellous manner was the means of fashioning the Framer of all things and of bestowing manhood on the God and Creator of all, Who deified the nature that He assumed, while the union preserved those things that were united just as they were united, that is to say, not only the divine nature of Christ but also His human nature, not only that which is above us but that which is of us. For He was not first made like us and only later became higher than us, but ever from His first coming into being He existed with the double nature, because He existed in the Word Himself from the beginning of the conception. Wherefore He is human in His own nature, but also, in some marvellous manner, of God and divine. Moreover He has the properties of the living flesh: for by reason of the dispensation the Word received these which are, according to the order of natural motion, truly natural.

Chapter 13. Concerning the properties of the two Natures

Confessing, then, the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, to be perfect God and perfect man, we hold that the same has all the attributes of the Father save that of being ingenerate, and all the attributes of the first Adam, except only his sin, these attributes being body and the intelligent and rational soul; and further that He has, corresponding to the two natures, the two sets of natural qualities belonging to the two natures: two natural volitions, one divine and one human, two natural energies, one divine and one human, and two kinds of wisdom and knowledge, one divine and one human. For being of like essence with God and the Father, He wills and energizes freely as God, and being also of like essence with us He likewise wills and energizes freely as man. For His are the miracles and His also are the passive states.

Man, Woman & the Mystery of Christ

An Evangelical Protestant Perspective by Russell D. Moore

The following is an address given by Dr. Moore at the Vatican Colloquium on Marriage and the Family on November 18, 2014.

I am thankful to Pope Francis, Cardinal Müller, and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for the opportunity to address you today.

Poet Wendell Berry responded to the technological utopianism of naturalistic scientism with an observation that I believe frames the entire discussion of what it means to affirm the complementarity of man and woman in marriage. His observation was that any civilization must decide whether it will see persons as machines or as persons. If we are creatures, he argued, then we have meaning and purpose and dignity, but with all of that we have limits. If we see ourselves as machines, then we will believe the Faustian myth of our own limitless power and our ability to reshape even what it means to be human.

This is, it seems to me, the question at the heart of the controversies every culture faces about the meaning of marriage and of sexuality. Are we created, as both the Hebrew Scriptures and Jesus of Nazareth put it, "male and female" from the beginning, or are these categories arbitrary and self-willed? Do our bodies, and our sexes, and our generational connectedness represent something of who we are designed to be, and thus place on us both limits on our ability to recreate ourselves and responsibilities for those who will come after us?

Those of us at this gathering have many differences. We come from different countries, sometimes with tensions between those countries. We hold to different religions, sometimes with great divergences on what we believe about God and about the meaning of life.

But all of us in this room share at least one thing in common. We did not spring into existence out of nothing, but each one of us can trace his or her origins back to a man and a woman, a mother and a father. We recognize that marriage and family are matters of public importance, not just of our various theological and distinctive ecclesial communities. Since marriage is embedded in the created order and is the means of human flourishing, it is not just the arena of individual human desires and appetites. We recognize that marriage, and the sexual difference on which it is built, is grounded in a natural order bearing rights and responsibilities that was not crafted by any human state, and cannot thus be redefined by any human state. It is no accident that questions of marriage and family bring such heated debate, since our consciences, and our very being, testify that these matters are of critical importance for how we shall live.

The Purpose of the Cosmos

As an Evangelical Christian, I come to this discussion with concerns about the common good and human flourishing, but beyond these merely natural goods I have an even deeper concern for what I believe to be the purpose of the entire cosmos: the gospel of Jesus Christ. All of us must stand together on conserving the truth of marriage as a complementary union of man and woman. But I would add that, with that, there is a distinctively Christian urgency for why the Christian churches must bear witness to these things.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus that the alpha and omega of the universe is personal, that the pattern and goal of the universe is summed up in what he called "the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 1:10). One key aspect of this unveiled mystery is that the family structure is not an arbitrary expression of nature or of the will of God. Marriage and family are instead archetypes, icons of God's purpose for the universe. When the apostle appealed to the Genesis 2 account of the creation order, explaining why a man leaves his father and mother to cleave to his wife, and that they become one flesh (Eph. 5:31), he wrote of something that every human being can see, even without divine revelation. After

all, human cultures have died out for a variety of reasons, but no human culture has died out because the people therein forgot to have sexual intercourse. The drive toward marital unity is powerful, so powerful that it can feel as wild as fire. In Paul's Christian theology, this universal truth is because the one-flesh union points beyond itself to the union of Christ and his Church.

In our perspective, the mystery of the gospel explains to us why it was "not good" for the man to be alone, and why Adam wasn't designed to subdivide like an amoeba. He needed someone like him—the beasts of the field were none of them "fit" for him. And yet he needed someone different from him. Fitted together, man and woman form an organic union, as a head with a body. Humanity, then, in the image of God, is created both male and female, with male and female identities that correspond to one another and fulfill one another. We are not created as "spouse A" and "spouse B," but as man and woman, and in marriage as husband and wife, and in parenting as father and mother. Masculinity and femininity are not aspects of the fallen order to be overcome, but are instead part of what God declared from the beginning to be "very good" (<u>Gen. 1:31</u>).

A man is created to be other-directed, to pour himself out for his family. Headship in God's design is not Pharaoh-like tyranny but Christlike sacrifice. Jesus said of his Church, in its original twelve foundation stones, that he did not call them servants but friends (John 15:15). The relationship between a husband and wife is not that of a business model or a corporate organizational chart but is instead an organic unity. The more a husband and wife are sanctified together in the Word, the more they—like a nervous system and a body move and operate together smoothly, effortlessly, holistically. They are one flesh, cooperation through complementarity. And in their lives together, as in the life of Christ and his Church, their love is life-giving, including, when God wills, issuing in a new generation.

A Different Patriarchy

The current debates over whether marriage is a good, over whether children need mothers

and fathers, over whether sexual expression should be bound by the covenantal reality of the male—female one-flesh union, spring from a very different reading of the universe, one that assumes an entirely different understanding of human ecology. Western culture now celebrates casual sexuality, cohabitation, no-fault divorce, family redefinition, and abortion rights as parts of a sexual revolution that tore down old patriarchal systems.

But the Sexual Revolution is not liberation at all, but simply the imposition of a different sort of patriarchy. The Sexual Revolution empowers men to pursue a Darwinian fantasy of the predatory alphamale, rooted in the values of power, prestige, and personal pleasure. Does anyone really believe these things will empower women or children? We see the wreckage of sexuality as self-expression all around us, and we will see more yet. And the stakes are not merely social or cultural but profoundly spiritual.

Every culture has recognized that there is something about sexuality that is more than merely the firing of nerve endings, that there is something mysterious here, the joining of selves. In the Evangelical Christian perspective, this is because there is no such thing as a casual sexual encounter at all, when we are speaking in spiritual terms. The Apostle Paul warned that the sexually immoral person sins not just against another but "against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18). He compared the spiritual union formed between Christ and the believer with the union brought about in the sexual act. Even one who is "joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her," he wrote, citing Genesis.

The sexual act, mysteriously, forms a real and personal union. Immorality is not merely "naughtiness," but is a sermon, a sermon preaching a different gospel. This is why attempts to "free" sexuality from marriage as the union of a man and a woman do not lead, ultimately, to the sort of liberation they promise. And therein is our challenge, and our opportunity, for the future.

{to be continued}

Protons and Leprechauns

September 10, 2015 by Fred Reed

My father, now dead, a mathematician without the slightest leaning toward the esoteric, once told me of driving by night with a friend through the hill country of North Carolina. Suddenly a large truck, lights blazing, came over a crest, passed through their car without a sound, and disappeared in the night. My father said that after a moment he asked, "Did you see what I saw?" The friend answered "Yes." They said no more about it, to each other or anyone else. They would have been thought mad.

Over the years I have talked to various people, apparently sane, who have had unexplainable experiences. Some of these had dreamed of the death of someone who shortly thereafter died in the circumstances of the dream. Others were more similar to my father's experience. Several remembered a sudden and terrible sense of the presence of something evil — this latter now called a "panic attack," which explains nothing. Those involved seldom wanted to talk of such things in a scientific age for fear of being ridiculed.

But, one might reasonably ask, what could science, or scientists, know of these things? They can be neither proved nor disproved, nor repeated for study. And of course a number of equally improvable exploitations are ready to hand: the narrator is lying, or suffered a momentary imbalance of this or that neurotransmitter in his brain, or transitory dementia, or the delayed result of the ingestion of hallucinogen, and anyway the whole idea is so silly that we needn't talk about it. Geez, it's the kind of thing they believed in the Dark Ages.

Maybe.

But maybe not. JBS Haldane, the noted biologist, reported that he once "went into his home and saw himself sitting in his own chair smoking his favorite pipe." 'Irregular' was his characterization, and he attributed the event to "indigestion." This of course was ridiculous. He reported that he sat on himself and either he or the apparition disappeared and life went on. (JBS: The Life and Work of J.B.S. Haldane, by Ronald Clark, p.111) The event predictably was ignored, including by Haldane, as being too far outside of the expected.

In religious societies, such events, real or imagined, were easily explained. Apollo did it, or Yahweh, or angels perhaps, or poltergeists. Nature was thought to be in the hands of sentient beings more or less like humans. It was reasonable to think that they might throw lightning bolts or do all manner of unnatural things. Now we know, or think we do, that nothing can happen except in obedience to the laws of physics. This means that if something does, we will dismiss it.

The second paradox is that of morality. It is clear that a physical system, the only kind we believe to exist, cannot be either moral or immoral. A fire does not burn up a kindergarten full of children from malignity. It burns as it has to. And since we are physical systems as much as the fire is, we are no more moral or immoral than it is.

Evolutionary psychologists argue persuasively that no absolute moral standards exist. They have to insist on this as otherwise there would be something outside of physics and that would upset the whole apple cart.

And so they point to the relative nature of morality. In one decade, short skirts are thought immoral, in another perfectly acceptable; in the Old Testament, stoning adulterers to death was not just moral but a duty; today, no. Bombing cities is immoral when Germans do it to England, but moral when England does it to Germany. In many cultures, horrific torture has been normal, in others a cause for revulsion.

What we call morality is only a set of evolutionary adaptations to facilitate the passing on of our genes (as indeed short skirts might).

The problem here is that evolutionary psychologists, decent people, do not believe what they profess. If I stoned a homosexual to death, as at times in the past has been thought proper, they would be horrified. I could reply, "Why? Your moral objection is merely a prejudice local to this time and place and has no absolute validity. In evolutionary terms the resources consumed by gays would be better spent on having children and passing on society's genes."

Here it is worth noting that evolution is a subset of physics. How is it not? DNA follows the laws of chemistry — that is, physics. Mutations caused by cosmic rays or anything else comport with physics. Nothing that occurs within or without an organism undergoing natural selection contravenes physics — as if it did, we would be back to the paranormal.

Finally, there is the question of death. This is very carefully ignored in the sciences. Biology treats death as merely the cessation of certain reactions. But biologists also die. Do we really believe that nothing comes after death? How do we know? If we admit that we do not know, then there is the possibility of all manner of things in heaven and earth beyond our ken and of uncertain effect on our world. Scientists will pooh-pooh this (all the way to the grave)

Perhaps existence is not the simple wind-up clock we tell ourselves it is.

The closer you come to God...

From Father Thomas Hopko (with a link to a fuller version) that uses the life of Abba Sisoes :

The closer you come to God, the more you realize your sin, your wretchedness, your misery, your failures, your weaknesses. That's simply a law of the spiritual life. We have all these wonderful stories in our Church tradition about that. The Apostle Paul said, "This saying is true and worthy of all acceptance, that the Lord came to save sinners, and I am the *protos*, I am the first, I am the foremost, and God chose me to show his great compassion and mercy toward people."

There's that wonderful story in the Desert Fathers about Abba Sisoes who is dying and he's filled with the Holy Spirit and he exudes the divine, uncreated light, and his face is shining, and he's filled with joy and truth, and he's humble and he's peaceful and he's meek and he's merciful and he's strong, and all the marvelous virtues of God Almighty. And then when they gather around him when he's dying and they know that he's dying because they smell the fragrance of the Holy Spirit all through the desert, they see the light over his cave, they hear the angels singing, and all this stuff—the story is built up.

Then when they're finally at his deathbed, they say to him, "Abba, Father, give us a word before you depart and be with the Lord." And the holy Abba doesn't say, "Accept Jesus as your personal savior or you will go to hell." He doesn't say, "Repent of your sins." He doesn't say, "Why are you still so weak and lowly." You know what he says? He says, "Pray for me, brothers. I have not yet begun to repent. Pray for me, that the Lord will receive me into Paradise."

http://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/hopko/the one true church