



†THE PROPHET NAHUM

THE BOOK OF NAHUM (MINOR PROPHET)

CELEBRATED: DECEMBER 1ST

The Holy Prophet Nahum, whose name means “God consoles,” was from the village of Elkosh (Galilee). He lived during the seventh century B.C. (663 BC-612 BC) The Prophet Naum prophesies the ruin of the Assyrian city of Nineveh because of its iniquity, the destruction of the Israelite kingdom, and the blasphemy of King Sennacherib against God. The Assyrian king Ashurbanipal died in 632 B.C., and over the next two decades, his empire began to crumble. Nineveh fell in 612 B.C.

Nahum differs from most of the prophets in as much as he does not issue any call to repentance, nor does he denounce Israel for infidelity to God. Details of the prophet’s life are unknown. He died at the age of forty-five, and was buried in his native region. He is the seventh of the Twelve Minor Prophets.

The Prophet Nahum and Saint Nahum of Ochrid (December 23) are invoked for people with mental disorders.

ABOUT THE BOOK OF NAHUM

The book that bears the name of the Prophet Nahum is ranked seventh among the Minor Prophets, and it consists of three chapters with the following content: a) inscription (Nah. 1:1), b) the wrath of God against Nineveh and the prophecy concerning the prosperity of Judah (Nah. 1:2-14), and c) prophecies concerning the destruction of Nineveh (Nah. 2:1-3:19).

Nahum 1:4- “He threatens the sea and makes it dry, And dries up all the rivers.”

From the prayers of The Great Blessing of the Waters at Theophany: “The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and were afraid. The Jordan turned back when it saw the fire of the godhead descending in bodily form and entering it. The Jordan turned back as it contemplated the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, descending and flying about you.”

Nahum 1:8-10- “But with an overflowing flood He will make an utter end of its place, And darkness will pursue His enemies. 9What do you conspire against the Lord? He will make an utter end of it. Affliction will not rise up a second time. 10For while tangled like thorns, And while drunken like drunkards, They shall be devoured like stubble fully dried.”

The fulfillment of the prophecy of Nahum comes to fruition at the Baptism of Christ and so too through our baptism as well when the corrupt empire of our “old ways” is destroyed through the grace of Baptism into God’s new Kingdom.



+THE PROPHET HABAKKUK

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

CELEBRATED ON DECEMBER 2ND

The Holy Prophet Habakkuk, the eighth of the Twelve Minor Prophets, was descended from the Tribe of Simeon, and he prophesied around 650 B.C.

The Prophet Habakkuk foresaw the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, the Babylonian Captivity and the later return of the captives to their native land. During the war with the Babylonians the prophet withdrew to Arabia, where the following miracle occurred. When he

was bringing dinner to the reapers, he met an angel of the Lord, and instantly by the strength of his spirit he was transported to Babylon, where at the time the Prophet Daniel was languishing in prison. The food intended for the reapers assuaged the hunger of the exhausted Prophet Daniel (Dan. 14:33-37).

After the end of the war with the Babylonians, the Prophet Habakkuk returned to his homeland and died at a great old age. His relics were found at the time of Emperor Theodosius the Younger (408-450), together with the relics of the Prophet Micah (August 14).

The Fourth Ode of the Psalter (“O Lord, I have heard thy report, and was afraid...”) is based on Habakkuk 3:2-19.

ABOUT THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

Habakkuk 3:3- “God will come from Teman, The Holy One from the mount of shaded leafy trees.”

This verse is quoted in Orthodox hymnology (the Festal Menaion) on the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple (Nov. 21) and on The Nativity of Our Lord. The Prophet Habakkuk prophesied that the Son and Word of God would be incarnate from the Virgin Mary, who he described as a “mount of shaded leafy trees,” from which “the God of all shined forth in fleshly form.” In speaking of the Panagia on the occasion of her Dormition, Saint Theodore the Studite exclaimed: “Rejoice, the shaded virgin mountain from which the holy one of Israel appeared, according to the God-proclaiming Habakkuk.”

One of the many messages the Prophet Habakkuk sends to us is that God is the protector of the aggrieved. Whoever is wronged, slandered, persecuted and suffering, because they remained loyal to the God of their fathers or did not violate the will of God, nor their conscience, they are actually blessed, and they will be benefited by God, be filled with His grace, will rejoice truly and will receive heavenly consolation. Besides, Christ Himself said this, Who blessed those who are insulted, persecuted, maligned and slandered for His name, and He said that they should rejoice, because they will enjoy heavenly good things, which are incomparably higher and sweeter than all the good things of this temporary life.



+ST. STYLIANOS OF PAPHLAGONIA

COMMEMORATED ON NOVEMBER 26TH

Saint Stylianus was born in Paphlagonia of Asia Minor sometime between the fourth and sixth centuries. He inherited a great fortune from his parents when they died, but he did not keep it. He gave it away to the poor according to their need, desiring to help those who were less fortunate.

Stylianus left the city and went to a monastery, where he devoted his life to God. Since he was more zealous and devout than the other monks, he provoked their jealousy and had to leave. He left the monastery to live alone in a cave in the wilderness, where he spent his time in prayer and fasting. He read and re-read two books in the desert: the book of nature and that of Holy Scripture. His heart, his understanding, his soul, his whole being was fervently given over to God. A divine and sacred trembling would pass through his ascetic flesh, as his soul delved ever deeper into the beauty of the divine creation. The holy passion of Saint Stylianos' love for the most holy Name of God shook him to the core. The whole of his strength was concentrated on this divine love. And so the saint abandoned his fleshly existence. He ceased to care at all about food and nourished himself on desert plants. When there were none of these, God did not leave him in want. God, Who works wonders for His saints, for them and through them, did not allow the blessed man to fade away from hunger. He kept him alive by sending him food at the hands of angels, as He had done with the Prophet Elijah and

Saint Mark the Athenian, the philosopher, among others.

Saint Stylianus was known for his love of children, and he would heal them of their infirmities. Even after his death, the citizens of Paphlagonia believed that he could cure their children. Whenever a child became sick, an icon of Saint Stylianus was painted and was hung over the child's bed. His Love for Children and Healings God rewarded his blessed intent and gave him the wonderworking power to cure ailing children. Mothers from near and far, hastened to him, in pain and faith, bearing sick and crippled children on their shoulders, seeking a cure for their offspring. Some walked for days on end in the wilderness to find the hermit's cave. When they arrived, they fell at his feet with tears in their eyes, glorifying God that they had finally found the saint and asking him to cure their children. Full of kindness and compassion, Stylianos would take the sick infants into his arms and, with tears in his eyes, beg God to cure them. The Lord of the Heavens would listen to his heartfelt prayer and the saint worked a miracle. Sick children regained their health. At the hour of his death, the face of Saint Stylianus suddenly became radiant, and an angel appeared to receive his soul.

ELEMENTS OF THE ICON

Holding a Child- He is Known as a protector of children, Saint Stylianus is depicted in iconography holding an infant in his arms. Pious Christians ask him to help and protect their children, and childless women entreat his intercession so that they might have children.

The Open Scroll- ΠΑΙΔΩΝ ΦΥΛΑΞ ΠΕΦΥΚΑ ΘΕΟΥ ΤΟ ΔΩΡΟΝ — PAIDON PHYLAX PEPHYKA THEOU TO DORON, meaning loosely "The Protector of Children is a gift from God."



+ST. GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN (NAZIANZUS)
ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE

C. 329 – 25TH JANUARY 390

COMMEMORATED ON JANUARY 25TH

Saint Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople, a great Father and teacher of the Church, was born into a Christian family of eminent lineage in the year 329, at Arianzos (not far from the city of Cappadocian Nazianzos). His father, also named Gregory (January 1), was Bishop of Nazianzus. The son is the Saint Gregory Nazianzus encountered in Patristic theology. His pious mother, Saint Nonna (August 5), prayed to God for a son, vowing to dedicate him to the Lord. Her prayer was answered, and she named her child Gregory.

When the child learned to read, his mother presented him with the Holy Scripture. Saint Gregory received a complete and extensive education: after working at home with his uncle Saint Amphilochius (November 23), an experienced teacher of rhetoric, he then studied in the schools of Nazianzos, Caesarea in Cappadocia, and Alexandria. Then the saint decided to go to Athens to complete his education.

On the way from Alexandria to Greece, a terrible storm raged for many days. Saint Gregory, who was just a catechumen at that time, feared that he would perish in the sea before being cleansed in the waters of Baptism. Saint Gregory lay in the ship's stern for twenty days, beseeching the merciful God for salvation. He vowed to dedicate himself to God, and was saved when he invoked the name of the Lord.

Saint Gregory spent six years in Athens studying rhetoric, poetry, geometry, and astronomy. His teachers were the renowned pagan rhetoricians Gymnorias and Proeresias. Saint Basil, the future Archbishop of Caesarea (January 1) also studied in Athens with Saint Gregory. They were such close friends that they seemed to be one soul in two bodies. Julian, the future emperor (361-363) and apostate from the Christian Faith, was studying philosophy in Athens at the same time.

Upon completing his education, Saint Gregory remained for a certain while at Athens as a teacher of rhetoric. He was also familiar with pagan philosophy and literature.

In 358 Saint Gregory quietly left Athens and returned to his parents at Nazianzus. At thirty-three years of age, he received Baptism from his father, who had been appointed Bishop of Nazianzus. Against his will, Saint Gregory was ordained to the holy priesthood by his father. However, when the elder Gregory wished to make him a bishop, he fled to join his friend Basil in Pontus. Saint Basil had organized a monastery in Pontus and had written to Gregory inviting him to come.

Saint Gregory remained with Saint Basil for several years. When his brother Saint Caesarius (March 9) died, he returned home to help his father administer his diocese. The local church was also in turmoil because of the Arian heresy. Saint Gregory had the difficult task of reconciling the bishop with his flock, who condemned their pastor for signing an ambiguous interpretation of the dogmas of the faith.

Saint Gregory convinced his father of the pernicious nature of Arianism, and strengthened him in Orthodoxy. At this time, Bishop Anthimus, who pretended to be Orthodox but was really a heretic, became Metropolitan of Tyana. Saint Basil had been consecrated as the Archbishop of Caesarea, Cappadocia. Anthimus wished to



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separate from Saint Basil and to divide the province of Cappadocia.

Saint Basil the Great made Saint Gregory bishop of the city of Sasima, a small town between Caesarea and Tyana. However, Saint Gregory remained at Nazianzos in order to assist his dying father, and he guided the flock of this city for a while after the death of his father in 374.

Upon the death of Patriarch Valentus of Constantinople in the year 378, a council of bishops invited Saint Gregory to help the Church of Constantinople, which at this time was ravaged by heretics. Obtaining the consent of Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory came to Constantinople to combat heresy. In the year 379 he began to serve and preach in a small church called “Anastasis” (“Resurrection”). Like David fighting the Philistines with a sling, Saint Gregory battled against impossible odds to defeat false doctrine.

Heretics were in the majority in the capital: Arians, Macedonians, and Appolinarians. The more he preached, the more did the number of heretics decrease, and the number of the Orthodox increased. On the night of Pascha (April 21, 379) when Saint Gregory was baptizing catechumens, a mob of armed heretics burst into the church and cast stones at the Orthodox, killing one bishop and wounding Saint Gregory. But the fortitude and mildness of the saint were his armor, and his words converted many to the Orthodox Church.

Saint Gregory’s literary works (orations, letters, poems) show him as a worthy preacher of the truth of Christ. He had a literary gift, and the saint sought to offer his talent to God the Word: “I offer this gift to my God, I dedicate this gift to Him. Only this remains to me as my treasure. I gave up everything else at the command of the Spirit. I gave all that I had to obtain the pearl of great price. Only in words do I master it, as a servant of the Word. I would never intentionally wish to disdain this wealth. I esteem it, I set value by it, I am comforted by it more than others are comforted by all the treasures of the world. It is the companion of all my life, a good counselor and converser; a guide on the way to Heaven and a fervent co-ascetic.” In order to preach the Word of God properly, the saint carefully prepared and revised his works.

In five sermons, or “Theological Orations,” Saint Gregory first of all defines the characteristics of a theologian, and who may theologize. Only those who are experienced can properly reason about God, those who are successful at contemplation and, most importantly, who are pure in soul and body, and utterly selfless. To reason about God properly is possible only for one who enters into it with fervor and reverence.

Explaining that God has concealed His Essence from mankind, Saint Gregory demonstrates that it is impossible for those in the flesh to view mental objects without a mixture of the corporeal. Talking about God in a positive sense is possible only when we become free from the external impressions of things and from their effects, when our guide, the mind, does not adhere to impure transitory images. Answering the Eunomians, who would presume to grasp God’s Essence through logical speculation, the saint declared that man perceives God when the mind and reason become godlike and divine, i.e. when the image ascends to its Archetype. (Or. 28:17). Furthermore, the example of the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets and also the Apostles has demonstrated, that the Essence of God is incomprehensible for mortal man. Saint Gregory cited the futile sophistry of Eunomios: “God begat the Son either through His will, or contrary to will. If He begat contrary to will, then He underwent constraint. If by His will, then the Son is the Son of His intent.”

Confuting such reasoning, Saint Gregory points out the harm it does to man: “You yourself, who speak so thoughtlessly, were you begotten voluntarily or involuntarily by your father? If involuntarily, then your father was under the sway of some tyrant. Who? You can hardly say it was nature, for nature is tolerant of chastity. If it was voluntarily, then by a few syllables you deprive yourself of your father, for thus you are shown to be the son of Will, and not of your father” (Or. 29:6).

Saint Gregory then turns to Holy Scripture, with particular attention examining a place where it points



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out the Divine Nature of the Son of God. Saint Gregory's interpretations of Holy Scripture are devoted to revealing that the divine power of the Savior was actualized even when He assumed an impaired human nature for the salvation of mankind.

The first of Saint Gregory's Five Theological Orations is devoted to arguments against the Eunomians for their blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Closely examining everything that is said in the Gospel about the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity, the saint refutes the heresy of Eunomios, which rejected the divinity of the Holy Spirit. He comes to two fundamental conclusions. First, in reading Holy Scripture, it is necessary to reject blind literalism and to try and understand its spiritual sense. Second, in the Old Testament the Holy Spirit operated in a hidden way. "Now the Spirit Himself dwells among us and makes the manifestation of Himself more certain. It was not safe, as long as they did not acknowledge the divinity of the Father, to proclaim openly that of the Son; and as long as the divinity of the Son was not accepted, they could not, to express it somewhat boldly, impose on us the burden of the Holy Spirit" (Or. 31:26).

The divinity of the Holy Spirit is a sublime subject. "Look at these facts: Christ is born, the Holy Spirit is His Forerunner. Christ is baptized, the Spirit bears witness to this... Christ works miracles, the Spirit accompanies them. Christ ascends, the Spirit takes His place. What great things are there in the idea of God which are not in His power? What titles appertaining to God do not apply also to Him, except for Unbegotten and Begotten? I tremble when I think of such an abundance of titles, and how many Names they blaspheme, those who revolt against the Spirit!" (Or. 31:29).

The Orations of Saint Gregory are not limited only to this topic. He also wrote Panegyrics on Saints, Festival Orations, two invectives against Julian the Apostate, "two pillars, on which the impiety of Julian is indelibly written for posterity," and various orations on other topics. In all, forty-five of Saint Gregory's orations have been preserved.

The letters of the saint compare favorably with his best theological works. All of them are clear, yet concise. In his poems as in all things, Saint Gregory focused on Christ. "If the lengthy tracts of the heretics are new Psalters at variance with David, and the pretty verses they honor are like a third testament, then we also shall sing Psalms, and begin to write much and compose poetic meters," said the saint. Of his poetic gift the saint wrote: "I am an organ of the Lord, and sweetly... do I glorify the King, all atremble before Him."

The fame of the Orthodox preacher spread through East and West. But the saint lived in the capital as though he still lived in the wilderness: "his food was food of the wilderness; his clothing was whatever necessary. He made visitations without pretense, and though in proximity of the court, he sought nothing from the court."

The saint received a shock when he was ill. One whom he considered as his friend, the philosopher Maximus, was consecrated at Constantinople in Saint Gregory's place. Struck by the ingratitude of Maximus, the saint decided to resign the cathedra, but his faithful flock restrained him from it. The people threw the usurper out of the city. On November 24, 380 the holy emperor Theodosius arrived in the capital and, in enforcing his decree against the heretics, the main church was returned to the Orthodox, with Saint Gregory making a solemn entrance. An attempt on the life of Saint Gregory was planned, but instead the assassin appeared before the saint with tears of repentance.

At the Second Ecumenical Council in 381, Saint Gregory was chosen as Patriarch of Constantinople. After the death of Patriarch Meletius of Antioch, Saint Gregory presided at the Council. Hoping to reconcile the West with the East, he offered to recognize Paulinus as Patriarch of Antioch.

Those who had acted against Saint Gregory on behalf of Maximus, particularly Egyptian and Macedonian bishops, arrived late for the Council. They did not want to acknowledge the saint as Patriarch of Constantinople,



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since he was elected in their absence.

Saint Gregory decided to resign his office for the sake of peace in the Church: “Let me be as the Prophet Jonah! I was responsible for the storm, but I would sacrifice myself for the salvation of the ship. Seize me and throw me... I was not happy when I ascended the throne, and gladly would I descend it”

After telling the emperor of his desire to quit the capital, Saint Gregory appeared again at the Council to deliver a farewell address (Or. 42) asking to be allowed to depart in peace.

Upon his return to his native region, Saint Gregory turned his attention to the incursion of Appolinarian heretics into the flock of Nazianzus, and he established the pious Eulalius there as bishop, while he himself withdrew into the solitude of Arianzos so dear to his heart. The saint, zealous for the truth of Christ, continued to affirm Orthodoxy through his letters and poems, while remaining in the wilderness. He died on January 25, 389, and is honored with the title “Theologian,” also given to the holy Apostle and Evangelist John.

In his works Saint Gregory, like that other Theologian Saint John, directs everything toward the Pre-eternal Word. Saint John of Damascus (December 4), in the first part of his book AN EXACT EXPOSITION OF THE ORTHODOX FAITH, followed the lead of Saint Gregory the Theologian.

Saint Gregory was buried at Nazianzos. In the year 950, his holy relics were transferred to Constantinople into the church of the Holy Apostles. Later on, a portion of his relics was transferred to Rome.

In appearance, the saint was of medium height and somewhat pale. He had thick eyebrows, and a short beard. His contemporaries already called the archpastor a saint. The Orthodox Church, honors Saint Gregory as a second Theologian and insightful writer on the Holy Trinity.

HIGHLIGHTS OF ST. GREGORY’S LIFE

The works of Saint Gregory the Theologian include orations, letters, and poems. Everything he penned bears the mark of a polished rhetorician.

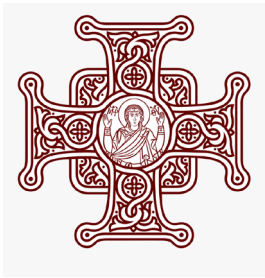
His forty-five orations were used as models in the schools of rhetoric. His five Theological Orations, which were preached in the Church of the Resurrection in Constantinople, wherein he explains the Nicæan doctrine of the Trinity, won him the title of “Theologian”. The first oration is a preliminary discourse against the Eunomians. With the second oration he speaks of the existence, nature, being, and attributes of God, insofar as man’s finite intellect may comprehend the Trinity. Both the third and fourth theological orations speak of the divinity of the Son. The fifth oration is on the Holy Spirit.

His most notable discourses and moral essays include a defense of his flight and treatises on his consecration to Sasima, on the plague of hail, on peace, on love of the poor, on the indissolubility of marriage, and on moderation in theological discussion, as well as a farewell discourse given at Constantinople.

He also authored sermons for feasts, two for Pascha, one for the Nativity of our Lord, one for Theophany, and one for Pentecost. His panegyrics on saints include those to Saint Cyprian and Athanasius, and on the Maccabean brothers and their mother Solomonia.

He also wrote political pamphlets, the two Invectives Against Julian. These were delivered at Nazianzus after the slaying of Julian. The orations mention the emperor’s attempt to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, and its failure, and his defeat in the Persian campaign. Saint Gregory illustrates the might of God’s justice, and the consolation of His providence in our affairs.

The Patrologia Graeca of Migne contains 243 epistles. They are finely written with his customary scrupulous attention to the rules of style, and elaborate Byzantine politesse, with



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dashes of wit and irony.

His poems, written during the last ten years of his life, are filled with pertinent autobiographical data.

During his latter years, Saint Gregory also included a collection of Saint Basil's letters with his own, and gave his friend the first place. When asked the reason for this, Gregory explains: "I have always preferred the great Basil to myself, though he was of the contrary opinion; and so I do now, not less for truth's sake than for friendship's. This is the reason why I have given his letters the first place and my own the second. For I hope we two will always be coupled together; and also I would supply others with an example of modesty and submission" (Div. III, 8, Ep. liii, "To Nocobulus").

FROM ST. GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN'S PASCHAL HOMILY

Yesterday I was crucified with Him; today I am glorified with Him.

Yesterday I died with Him; today I am made alive with Him.

Yesterday I was buried with Him; today I am raised up with Him.

Let us offer to Him Who suffered and rose again for us ... ourselves, the possession most precious to God and most proper. Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us.

Let us become Divine for His sake, since for us He became Man.

He assumed the worse that He might give us the better.

He became poor that by His poverty we might become rich.

He accepted the form of a servant that we might win back our freedom.

He came down that we might be lifted up.

He was tempted that through Him we might conquer.

He was dishonored that He might glorify us.

He died that He might save us.

He ascended that He might draw to Himself us, who were thrown down through the fall of sin.

Let us give all, offer all, to Him who gave Himself a Ransom and Reconciliation for us.

We needed an incarnate God, a God put to death, that we might live.

We were put to death together with Him that we might be cleansed.

We rose again with Him because we were put to death with Him.

We were glorified with Him because we rose again with Him.

A few drops of Blood recreate the whole of creation!



†THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

COMMEMORATED PALM SUNDAY; ONE WEEK BEFORE THE RESURRECTION

MATTHEW 21:1- 11

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.” All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:

“Tell the daughter of Zion,
‘Behold, your King is coming to you,
Lowly, and sitting on a donkey,
A colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. And a very great

multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

“Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ Hosanna in the highest!”

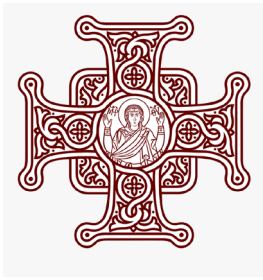
And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, “Who is this?”

So the multitudes said, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.”

MARK 11:1-11

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples; and He said to them, “Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it. And if anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it,’ and immediately he will send it here.” So they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it. But some of those who stood there said to them, “What are you doing, loosing the colt?” And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go.

Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it. And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: “Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ Blessed is the kingdom of our father David That comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve.



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LUKE 19:28-40

When He had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. And it came to pass, when He drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mountain called Olivet, that He sent two of His disciples, saying, "Go into the village opposite you, where as you enter you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Loose it and bring it here. And if anyone asks you, 'Why are you loosing it?' thus you shall say to him, 'Because the Lord has need of it.'" So those who were sent went their way and found it just as He had said to them. But as they were loosing the colt, the owners of it said to them, "Why are you loosing the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of him." Then they brought him to Jesus. And they threw their own clothes on the colt, and they set Jesus on him. And as He went, many spread their clothes on the road. Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying: " 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!' Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." But He answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."

JOHN 12:12-19

The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' The King of Israel!" Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: "Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, Sitting on a donkey's colt." His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him. Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!"

ABOUT THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

Homily by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (30 March 1980)

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

Today Christ enters the path not only of His sufferings but of that dreadful loneliness which enshrouds Him during all the days of Passion week. The loneliness begins with a misunderstanding; the people expect that the Lord's entry into Jerusalem will be the triumphant procession of a political leader, of a leader who will free his people from oppression, from slavery, from what they consider godlessness - because all paganism or idolworship is a denial of the living God. The loneliness will develop further into the dreadful loneliness of not being understood even by His disciples. At the Last Supper when the Saviour talks to them for the last time, they will be in constant doubt as to the meaning of His words. And later when He goes into the Garden of Gethsemane before the fearful death that is facing Him, His closest disciples, Peter, John and James - whom He chose to go with Him, fall asleep, depressed, tired, hopeless. The culmination of this loneliness will be Christ's cry on the cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Abandoned by men, rejected by the people of Israel He encounters the extreme of forsakenness and dies without God, without men, alone, with only His love for God and His love for mankind, dying for its sake and for God's glory.



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The beginning of Christ's Passion is today's triumphal procession. The people expected a king, a leader and they found the Saviour of their souls. Nothing embitters a person so much as a lost, a disappointed hope; and that explains why people who could receive Him like that, who witnessed the raising of Lazarus, who saw Christ's miracles and heard His teaching, admired every word, who were ready to become His disciples as long as He brought victory, broke away from Him, turned their backs on Him and a few days later shouted, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." And Christ spent all those days in loneliness, knowing what was in store for Him, abandoned by every one except the Mother of God, who stood silently by, as She had done throughout her life, participating in His tragic ascent to the Cross; She who had accepted the Annunciation, the Good Tidings, but who also accepted in silence Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce her heart.

During the coming days we shall be not just remembering, but be present at Christ's Passion. We shall be part of the crowd surrounding Christ and the disciples and the Mother of God. As we hear the Gospel readings, as we listen to the prayers of the Church, as one image after another of these days of the Passion passes before our eyes, let each one of us ask himself the question, "Where do I stand, who am I in this crowd? A Pharisee? A Scribe? A traitor, a coward? Who? Or do I stand among the Apostles?" But they too were overcome by fear. Peter denied Him thrice, Judas betrayed Him, John, James and Peter went to sleep just when Christ most needed human love and support; the other disciples fled; no one remained except John and the Mother of God, those who were bound to Him by the kind of love which fears nothing and is ready to share in everything.

Once more let us ask ourselves who we are and where we stand, what our position in this crowd is. Do we stand with hope, or despair, or what? And if we stand with indifference, we too are part of that terrifying crowd that surrounded Christ, shuffling, listening, and then going away; as we shall go away from church. The Crucifix will be standing here on Thursday and we shall be reading the Gospel about the Cross, the Crucifixion and death - and then what will happen? The Cross will remain standing, but we shall go away for a rest, go home to have supper, to sleep, to prepare for the fatigues of the next day. And during this time Christ is on the Cross, Christ is in the tomb. How awful it is that, like the disciples in their day, we are not able to spend one night, one hour with Him. Let us think about this, and if we are incapable of doing anything, let us at least realise who we are and where we stand, and at the final hour turn to Christ with the cry, the appeal of the thief, Remember me, Lord, in Thy Kingdom! Amen.

ELEMENTS OF THE ICON

Christ riding a Donkey's Colt- It is often overlooked that the donkey on which Christ rode was not a full sized donkey but a foal, a donkey that was too young for normal people to ride. This echoes the Savior's words in the book of Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." light enough for a young donkey who couldn't bear the weight of a normal man...

THE APOSTLES LOOKING ON IN AMAZEMENT- The Apostles did not understand why the crowd was reacting the way they were. (John 12:16) His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.



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THE PALM FRONDS AND COATS- Typically laid at the feet or along the path of a triumphal emperor, these palm fronds and coats mark the crowd's rejoicing at the coming of their king. It is important to note the mindset of the Judeans at the time. They were under Roman occupation. They were expecting the messiah to come as a conquering army and to establish a worldly government and to abolish the romans. In fact, one of the main arguments to this day against Jesus Christ as Messiah according to Jewish tradition is that he did not establish a government where the Jewish people would rule the world. In a truly humble manner, Christ subverted the expectations of all the Jewish rulers at the time. This expectation of Christ ruling a government, or establishing an earthly kingdom leads many to misunderstand the Good News of Christ even today. Which is why Christ chose to ride a donkey's foal rather than a horse, or an elephant. Even in His triumph he teaches us an inverted view of authority, power, and strength through an act of humility, gentleness, and love.

THE CHILDREN- Matthew 21:15, 16- "Keep the feast with the children and holding branches in your hands, sing Hosanna" - so we declare at the Vespers of Palm Sunday. Many liturgical hymns of this day emphasize the perfect praise of the Children, which unlike that of the adults, was innocent, fitting, unashamed, and from hearts of pure love. We are called to glorify Christ in the same spirit (Matthew 18:1-4). In contrast, the adults' praise carried earthly expectations and agendas which, when left unfulfilled, led them to rebel against Jesus just five days later.

THE CITY OF JERUSALEM AND THE EAST GATE OF NICANOR- The East Gate of the Court of Jerusalem is mentioned in Ezekiel 44:1-3 "Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the Sanctuary, which faces East; and it was shut. And He said to me, "This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut. Only the Prince may sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; He shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gate, and shall go out the same way"

For Christ to ride through the East Gate of Jerusalem was blasphemous because the prophets foretold that only the messiah would pass through it. This was scandalous to the adults who would understand the significance of that action. The Orthodox Church looks not only to Christ as the coming Prince that Ezekiel foretold, but also a prophecy concerning the Theotokos and to the fact that she only bore one child, Jesus Christ. The East Gate is referenced during Lent when we chant the Akathist Hymn where we refer to her as the East Gate to the Court of Jerusalem itself.

THE MOUNTAIN- The Mount of Olives from where Christ was staying the night before and riding into Jerusalem.

THE OLIVE TREE- The Olive tree, which would have been found on the mount of olives, serves as a narrative device in the icon, but is also of theological importance. This tree (Xylos) is foretelling the coming "tree" of the cross upon which Christ will soon be crucified. Its prominence in the icon shows the importance of the preeminence of the cross in all byzantine iconography.



†THE MYSTICAL SUPPER

COMMEMORATED THURSDAY OF HOLY WEEK

MATTHEW 26:17-35

Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, “Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?” And He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, “My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.”’

So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover. When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. Now as they were eating, He said, “Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.” And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, “Lord, is it I?” He answered and said, “He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that

man if he had not been born.” Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, “Rabbi, is it I?” He said to him, “You have said it.”

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.” And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

MARK 14:12-26

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they [d]killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, “Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?” And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, “Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says, “Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?”’ Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us.” So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover. In the evening He came with the twelve. 18Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me.” And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, “Is it I?” And another said, “Is it I?” He answered and said to them, “It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish. 21The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born.” And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.”



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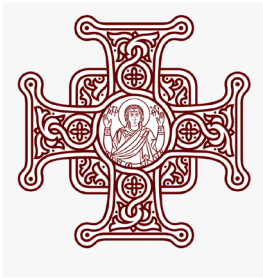
Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

LUKE 22:7-23

Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.” So they said to Him, “Where do You want us to prepare?” And He said to them, “Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. Then you shall say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, “Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?”’ Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready.” So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover. When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you. But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table. And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!” Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing.

JOHN 13:18-30

“I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.’ Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.” Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. Then, leaning back on Jesus’ breast, he said to Him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.” And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.” But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, “Buy those things we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor. Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.



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ABOUT THE MYSTICAL SUPPER-

At the Mystical Supper in the Upper Room Jesus gave a radically new meaning to the food and drink of the sacred meal. He identified Himself with the bread and wine: “Take, eat; this is my Body. Drink of it all of you; for this is my Blood of the New Covenant” (Matthew 26:26-28).

We have learned to equate food with life because it sustains our earthly existence. In the Eucharist the distinctively unique human food - bread and wine - becomes our gift of life. Consecrated and sanctified, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. This change is not physical but mystical and sacramental. While the qualities of the bread and wine remain, we partake of the true Body and Blood of Christ. In the eucharistic meal God enters into such a communion of life that He feeds humanity with His own being, while still remaining distinct. In the words of St. Maximos the Confessor, Christ, “transmits to us divine life, making Himself eatable.” The Author of life shatters the limitations of our createdness. Christ acts so that “we might become sharers of divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

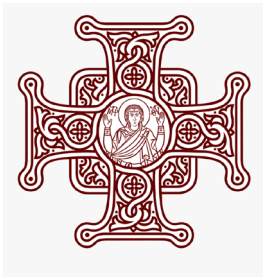
The Eucharist is at the center of the Church’s life. It is her most profound prayer and principal activity. It is at one and the same time both the source and the summit of her life. In the Eucharist the Church manifests her true nature and is continuously changed from a human community into the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and the People of God. The Eucharist is the pre-eminent sacrament. It completes all the others and recapitulates the entire economy of salvation. Our new life in Christ is constantly renewed and increased by the Eucharist. The Eucharist imparts life and the life it gives is the life of God.

In the Eucharist the Church remembers and enacts sacramentally the redemptive event of the Cross and participates in its saving grace. This does not suggest that the Eucharist attempts to reclaim a past event. The Eucharist does not repeat what cannot be repeated. Christ is not slain anew and repeatedly. Rather the eucharistic food is changed concretely and really into the Body and Blood of the Lamb of God, “Who gave Himself up for the life of the world.” Christ, the Theanthropos, continually offers Himself to the faithful through the consecrated Gifts, i.e., His very own risen and deified Body, which for our sake died once and now lives (Hebrews 10:2; Revelation 1:18). Hence, the faithful come to Church week by week not only to worship God and to hear His word. They come, first of all, to experience over and over the mystery of salvation and to be united intimately to the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Eucharist we receive and partake of the resurrected Christ. We share in His sacrificed, risen and deified Body, “for the forgiveness of sins and life eternal” (Divine Liturgy). In the Eucharist Christ pours into us - as a permanent and constant gift - the Holy Spirit, “Who bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God - and if children - then heirs with Christ (Romans 8:16-17).

ELEMENTS OF THE ICON

THE UPPER ROOM- The Upper Room of the icon is signified with the draper cloths that are hanging on the walls. This is a feature of Byzantine art that denotes the event depicted took place indoors. While there is no ceiling depicted signifying that all things on earth are visible to heaven.



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THE CANDLES ON THE TABLES- Denotes that this event took place at night.

THE PASSOVER MEAL BEING SERVED- On the table there is a meal being served which in this icon consists of a few vegetables but more importantly bread and wine.

THE BREAD- The Bread which is featured in a bowl in the center of the table by Christ is the first element of the Mystical Supper that is still celebrated at the very core of Christian worship in the Eucharist.

THE WINE- The Wine present on the table takes a central location in the icon. Its distinct red color draws the viewer to reexamine the nature of the important vessel. Within the vessel is held the wine which will serve as Christ's own precious blood for the sacrifice which is about to take place. The predominance of the bread and wine is another example of the pre-eminence of the cross in all byzantine iconography.

CHRIST SEATED AT THE HEAD OF THE TABLE- Most commonly in Orthodox Churches this icon is placed above the Royal Doors which lead into the Altar where the Eucharist is prepared. This positioning in the Church lends the perspective of the icon to place Christ in the center of the icon. The placement of this icon above the Royal Doors is meant to invite the faithful to participate in the mystical supper, to enter into the Upper Room, where the mystical supper, or Eucharist is being served still to this day in Orthodoxy.

"THE DISCIPLE WHOM CHRIST LOVED" RECLINING IN THE SAVIOR'S BOSOM- This scriptural reference to John 13:23 in which the author tells his first hand account of the Lord's Supper referring only to himself as "The Disciple Whom Christ Loved"

SIMON PETER MOTIONING TO CHRIST TO REVEAL WHO WOULD BETRAY HIM- St. Peter in the Gospel of John is mentioned as gesturing to Christ to implore the savior to reveal who would betray Him. "Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke." Furthermore this gesture indicates the boldness of Peter when he stated "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." (Luke 22:33)

THE 9 OTHER DISCIPLES DISCUSSING AND DISPUTING AMONG THEMSELVES- The movement in the icon of the disciples speaks to scripture where "they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "Is it I?" (Mark 14:19; Matthew 26:22) and how they "Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke." (John 13:22) Two of the disciples are gesturing to themselves asking "Is it I?" (Mark 14:19). Further signified here, within the movement of the disciples is the scripture that reads "A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest." (Luke 22:24)

JUDAS DIPPING HIS HAND INTO THE DISH- "He answered and said to them, 'It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish.'" (Matthew 26:23; Mark 14:20; Luke 22:20) It was customary to wash ones' hands before dining. Judas, by dipping his hands in the bowl of water, is revealing to all that he would betray Jesus Christ.