

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

(301) 638-5035 Church
4419 Leonardtown Road
Waldorf, MD 20601

Rev. Father Joseph Edgington, Pastor
(703) 532-8017

fredgington@gmail.com

www.apostlethomas.org

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wed: Moleben to the Theotokos 6:00 AM

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM, Great Vespers 5:30 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Children's Sunday School 9:30 AM | Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.

September 8, 2019 – 12th Sunday After Pentecost

Nativity of the Theotokos | Sunday Before Cross Elevation

The Nativity of Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary: The Most Holy Virgin Mary was born at a time when people had reached such a degree of moral decay that it seemed altogether impossible to restore them. People often said that God must come into the world to restore faith and not permit the ruin of mankind.

The Son of God chose to take on human nature for the salvation of mankind, and chose as His Mother the All-Pure Virgin Mary, who alone was worthy to give birth to the Source of purity and holiness.

The Nativity of Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary is celebrated by the Church as a day of universal joy. Within the context of the Old and the New Testaments, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was born on this radiant day, having been chosen before the ages by Divine Providence to bring about the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God. She is revealed as the Mother of the Savior of the World, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Most Holy Virgin Mary was born in the small city of Galilee, Nazareth. Her parents were Righteous Joachim of the tribe of the Prophet-King David, and Anna



from the tribe of the First Priest Aaron. The couple was without child, since Saint Anna was barren.

Having reached old age, Joachim and Anna did not lose hope in God's mercy. They had strong faith that for God everything is possible, and that He would be able to overcome the barrenness of Anna even in her old age, as He had once overcome the barrenness of Sarah, spouse of the Patriarch Abraham. Saints Joachim and Anna vowed to dedicate the child which the Lord might give them, to the service of God in the Temple.

Childlessness was considered among the Hebrew nation as a Divine punishment for sin, and therefore the righteous Saints Joachim and Anna had to endure abuse from their own countrymen. On one of the feasts at the Temple in Jerusalem the elderly Joachim brought his sacrifice to offer to God, but the High Priest would not accept it, considering him to be unworthy since he was childless.

Saint Joachim in deep grief went into the wilderness, and there he prayed with tears to the Lord for a child. Saint Anna wept bitterly when she learned what had happened at the Jerusalem Temple. Never once did she complain against the Lord, but rather she prayed to ask God's mercy on her family.

The Lord fulfilled her petitions when the pious couple had attained to extreme old age and prepared themselves by virtuous life for a sublime calling: to be the parents of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, the future Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Archangel Gabriel brought Joachim and Anna the joyous message that their prayers were heard by God, and of them would be born a most blessed daughter Mary, through Whom would come the Salvation of all the World.

The Most Holy Virgin Mary surpassed in purity and virtue not only all mankind, but also the angels. She was manifest as the living Temple of God, so the Church sings in its festal hymns: "the East Gate... bringing Christ into the world for the salvation of our souls" (2nd Stikhera on "Lord, I Have Cried", Tone 6).

The Nativity of the Theotokos marks the change of the times when the great and comforting promises of God for the salvation of the human race from slavery to the devil are about to be fulfilled. This event has brought to earth the grace of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of Truth, piety, virtue and everlasting life. The Theotokos is revealed to all of us by grace as a merciful Intercessor and Mother, to Whom we have recourse with filial devotion. (*from oca.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians 2:5-11

Brethren, Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it something to be held onto to be equal with God,

but emptied Himself of His privileges, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 10:38-42, 11:27-28

At that time, it happened as they went that Jesus entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed *is* the womb that bore You, and *the* breasts which nursed You!" But He said, "More than that, blessed *are* those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

A Word From the Holy Fathers

The Lord, Who lives in the heavens, wishing to appear on earth and abide with men, first prepared a dwelling place of His glory: His Most Pure Mother. For it is the custom of kings that in whatsoever city they desire to live, a place of residence be prepared for them beforehand. And as the palaces of earthly kings are constructed by the most skilled craftsmen, of the most costly materials, and on the most elevated sights, which are more beautiful and spacious than all the other dwellings of men, in the same manner the palace of the King of Glory must be erected. In the Old Testament, when God desired to dwell in Jerusalem, Solomon built a temple for Him, employing Hiram, a most wise master, who possessed full knowledge of every art and science, and was skilled in every enterprise.

He constructed the temple with materials of great value: with costly stone, with aromatic woods of cedar and cypress brought from Lebanon, with pure gold, and upon a high place: that is, upon Mount Moriah. The temple was of great beauty. On its walls were portrayed the likeness of cherubims, and of various trees and flowers. The temple was so spacious that the whole Israelite people could be

accommodated without crowding, and the glory of the Lord would descend in fire and a cloud. Nevertheless, that temple did not suffice to contain within itself the Uncontainable God, for even though Solomon built Him a temple, *“The Most High dwell not in temples made with hands. ‘What house will you build me’, says the Lord: ‘or what is the place of my rest?’”* At the beginning of the new era of grace, the Lord was pleased to create a temple not made by hands: the Most Pure, Most Blessed Virgin Mary. By what builder was this temple erected? In truth, by One most wise; by the very Wisdom of God, as the Scripture says, *“Wisdom has built itself a temple.”*

All things created by the Wisdom of God are good and perfect, therefore, as it was the Wisdom of God that created the living temple of the Word (as she says of herself through the words of the Holy Spirit, *“The Lord established me in the beginning of His way”*) it was not possible that in her there could be any sort of imperfection or sin. The Perfect God created a perfect temple; for the Most Radiant King, a most radiant palace; for the Most Pure and undefiled Bridegroom, a bridal chamber most pure and undefiled; for the Spotless Lamb, an unsullied dwelling place. A Faithful Witness abiding in the heavens said to her, *“You are most fair, my love; there is no spot in you.”* And the Holy Damascene says, *“She is wholly the bridal chamber of the Spirit, wholly the city of God, a sea of Grace, wholly good, close to God.”*

With what materials was this palace built? In truth, with the most costly, for she, being like precious stone, was of royal lineage, descended from David, who placed a stone in his sling, and with it killed Goliath. The stone foreshadowed the Stone that is Christ, fashioned, as it were, from aromatic woods, of cedar and cypress. The Virgin Theotokos was born of priestly ancestors as well, who offered God sweet smelling sacrifices. Her father, the Holy Righteous Joachim, was the son of Barpathar, who traced his ancestry to Nathan, the son of David. Her mother, the Holy Righteous Anna, was the daughter of Matthan the priest, who was of the line of Aaron. Thus, the Most Pure Virgin was by her father of royal descent, and by her mother, of high priestly lineage.

Of what precious materials, from what an ancestry was the most illustrious, animate palace of the King of Glory fashioned! As structures built of stone and wood in Solomon’s palace were esteemed all the more for the pure gold with which they were covered, so in the case of the Nativity of the Most Pure Theotokos, the nobility of her royal and high-priestly lineage is rendered yet more honorable by the chastity of her holy parents, which is more to be valued *“than thousands of gold and silver. She is more precious than costly stones, and nothing that is dear is to be compared to her,”* for the Most Pure Virgin was born of parents possessed of chastity, which is loftier than all nobility, was, as the Holy

Damascene testifies, writing of the Righteous Ancestors of God thus, *“O blessed couple Joachim and Anna! Truly, by the fruit of your loins are you known to be blameless, according to the words of the Lord, ‘You shall know them by their fruits. ‘You ordered your lives in a manner pleasing to God, and worthy of her who was born of you. Having lived in chastity and righteousness, you brought forth the treasury of virginity, the Virgin, who was a virgin before giving birth, as she gave birth, and even after she gave birth. She alone, being in mind and soul, and body ever a virgin, abides always in virginity. It was fitting that this virginity, be born of chastity. Like a pair of doves, Joachim and Anna! You, having chastely observed the laws of nature, have been granted by God that which is above nature, and have brought into the world the Virgin Mother of God. While in the flesh, you have piously and virtuously borne a daughter who is higher than the angels and reigns over them. Most fair and sweet Daughter! Lily, sprung up in the midst of tares from a root most noble and august! By you the royal priesthood has been enriched!”*

With words such as these does the Holy Damascene clearly indicate the manner of parents who bore the Mother of God, and of what costly materials the palace of the Heavenly King was erected. Where was this living palace built? In a most exalted place, as the Church testifies, saying, *“Truly you are higher than all things, O Pure Virgin.”*

Nevertheless, it was not so in respect to locality, but rather her virtues and God’s benefactions. The place where the Most Blessed Virgin was born was a little town in the land of Galilee called Nazareth, which was subject to the city of Capernaum. It was inglorious and obscure, and its inhabitants were held in disdain, even as it was once said of Christ, *“Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”*

But the Lord, *“Who dwells on high and looks down on things that are lowly,”* was well pleased that His Most Pure Mother be born not in Capernaum, which in its pride was lifted up to heaven, but rather in humble Nazareth, indicating that that ‘which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God,” while that which is despised and disdained by them is regarded by Him as lofty and honorable. Moreover, by its very name Nazareth hints the height of the virtues of the Most Pure Virgin. For as by His nativity in Bethlehem, which name means “House of Bread”, the Lord mystically signified that He is the Bread come down from heaven for the life and strength of men. So by the birth of His Most Pure Mother in Nazareth He denotes sublime things. For the name “Nazareth” means a blossoming place, sacred, removed from the things of this world, adorned as it were, with a crown, and guarded.

All these epithets are clearly applicable to the Most Pure Virgin, for she is the flower sprung up from the withered tree of a barren and aged womb, which has renewed our nature which has shriveled with age. She is the flower which does not wilt, but ever blossoms with virginity. She is the most fragrant flower, giving birth to the fragrance of the only King. She is the flower which bears the Fruit which is Christ the Lord, the flower which alone has borne the fragrant Apple. She is sanctified by the grace of the Holy Spirit which has descended upon her and has overshadowed her. She is the holiest of all the saints, as she has borne the Word, Who Himself is more holy than all the Saints. She is excluded from the ranks of the sinners of this world, for throughout her life not even once did she know sin. All of us must say with David, *“I know mine iniquity and my sin is ever before me,”* but she alone can say, *“Without iniquity I ran, and directed my steps.”* She is the guide of all men, who has not only committed no sin herself, but also turns sinners from wicked deeds, even as the Church cries out to her, *“Rejoice, you who dost rescue us from the works of mire.”*

She is crowned with glory and honor; crowned with glory, because she has blossomed from a royal root; crowned with honor, because she has sprung from a high-priestly line. She is crowned with glory, having come forth from glorious, chaste and righteous parents. She is crowned with honor, for she was esteemed worthy of the Angel’s glad tidings and his attendance. She is crowned with glory, as the Mother of God, for what could be more glorious than to bear God? She is crowned with honor as the Ever-Virgin, for what could be more honorable than to remain a virgin even after giving birth? She is crowned with glory, more glorious than the Seraphim, possessed of love for God like that of the Seraphim. She is crowned with honor, more honorable than the Cherubim, having surpassed the Seraphim in wisdom and knowledge of the Divinity.

“Glory, honor and peace to every man who works good,” says the Apostle, and who among the earthborn surpasses the Most Pure Virgin in deeds of virtue? Having fulfilled all the commandments of the Lord, having done all His will, observed all His injunctions, kept all His sayings in her heart, and performed every sort of good deed to her neighbors, she is worthy to be crowned, as one who works all manner of good. She is likewise a repository, in which the treasure of her virginal chastity is guarded so carefully, that not even unto the Angel did she wish to entrust it. Upon seeing the Angel, she was troubled at his words, and considered in her mind what manner of salutation this might be. All these things concerning the Most Pure Virgin are signified by the Name *“Nazareth.”*

Who would not affirm that lofty palace of Christ has been greatly exalted through her virtues and God’s blessings? She is exalted, for she has been bestowed on us from heaven, albeit she was born on earth of earthly parents. She was bestowed

from heaven, for as certain theologians say, the Archangel Gabriel, who brought glad tidings to Zacharias concerning John, and who likewise announced to Joachim and Anna the conception of the Theotokos, conveyed from heaven her most blessed name, saying unto her barren mother, "*Anna, Anna, you shall bear a most blessed daughter, and her name shall be Mary.*" Undoubtedly, she can be called the holy city; the new Jerusalem, descended from God out of heaven, and the tabernacle of God in men's midst. Lofty is this divine tabernacle, for having borne Christ the King, it is exalted above the Seraphim. O "*height hard to climb for the thoughts of men!*"

With what sort of beauty is this noetic palace of Christ adorned? Listen to the sweet words John of Damascus, who speaks of her thus, "*She was offered to God, the King of All, clad in the splendor of virtues, as it were, in a vesture of gold, and adorned in the grace of the Holy Spirit. All her glory is within, for while every wife derives glory from without, from her husband, the glory of the Theotokos is from within, that is to say, the Fruit of her womb.* And again he says, "*O Virgin, full of God's grace, O holy temple of God, which the Solomon who created the world has erected and in which He has dwelt! Not with gold, nor with inanimate stones are you adorned. Instead of gold the Spirit shines in you; in place of precious stones, you have Christ within you, the Pearl of great price.*

Such is the adornment of this palace, the beauty of which far exceeds that of Solomon's temple, in which were depicted the Cherubim, trees, and flowers. Likewise, in this animate temple, in the Most Pure Virgin, a semblance to the Cherubim may be seen; for by her manner of life, which was like that of the Cherubim, she was not only the equal of the of the Cherubim, but surpassed them. If the Church frequently refers to other Saints as Cherubim, singing, "*What shall we call you, O Saints? Cherubim, for Christ has rested upon you?*", how much more is the Virgin Theotokos like a Cherub? For within her Christ abode in the flesh, and in her most immaculate hands God sat as though upon a throne: therefore is she called a Cherubic throne. Moreover, in her person the likeness of fertile trees is depicted, for spiritually she is like a fruitful olive tree or a blooming date-palm in the house of the Lord.

Therefore, she is now called the life-giving garden, as the Church sings, "*From a barren root the God of wonders has made a life-bearing garden to spring up for us: His Mother.*" All this is said in respect to her spiritual beauty, but she was not lacking in physical beauty. Many of the teachers of the Church testify that there has never been, nor shall ever be a virgin as fair as the Virgin Theotokos. When Saint Dionysius the Areopagite saw her, he would have called her God, had he not known that God was born of her. The Divine grace, with which she was filled, shone forth brilliantly from her face. Such was the palace which the Heavenly

King prepared beforehand on earth! She was beautiful in both soul and body, “*as a bride adorned for her husband,*” and, what is more, exceeding spacious: “*Your womb He made more spacious than the heavens, and therein Christ, God uncontainable, has been contained.*”

Palaces are usually constructed in such a manner that not only the King, but a multitude of his attendant servants and those who come to him from throughout the world may be amply accommodated. The spacious abode of the Word, the Most Pure Virgin, accommodates not only God the Word as King, but also us His servants, who draw close to God, Who dwells in her. She contains both God and us in her womb, in her compassionate bosom. The chosen and holy vessel, the Apostle Paul, moved by compassion, said to his beloved, spiritual children, “*Our heart is enlarged; you are not straitened in us.*”

In which of the Saints may be found such all-embracing, Divine compassion as in the Virgin Mary? Here the chaste are accommodated, and the sinner is not excluded. Here the penitent has his place, while he who is despairing and unrepentant has a refuge like a new ark which shelters not only clean, but unclean animals as well; its entrance is not barred. Her compassion easily accommodates all those who sorrow, who are offended, who hunger, who are strangers, who are troubled, and who are sick. For it is not possible for her to be lacking in mercy, whose womb bore for us the Gracious God. The palaces of earthly kings are guarded by armed guards, who do not allow everyone desirous to enter therein to do so, but rather stop and carefully question everyone as to why they have come. But as for the living palace of Christ, although she is surrounded by Cherubim and Seraphim, by the innumerable choirs of Angels, and by all the Saints, at the doors of her compassionate mercy no one hinders anyone who desirous of entering, neither do the guards expel anyone, nor do soldiers drive anyone away after having questioned him as to why he has come, but having prayerfully entered, he receives a gift which profits him according to his petition.

Thus, let us hasten to the compassionate bosom of her who was born of a barren womb, hailing her thus, “*Rejoice, O immaculate palace of the King of All! Rejoice, dwelling place of God and of the Word! To Him, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and to you, O Daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son, and Bride of the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory from us mortals unto the ages, Amen.*”

– St. Demetrius, Metropolitan of Rostov, Homily on the Nativity of the Theotokos

Social Team for September 15

Team 6 is up next week – Tucker, Blaydoe M., Woods, Wright RC. Thank you!

Hurricane Dorian Relief Fund

Glory to Jesus Christ! His Eminence, Metropolitan Gregory, has announced a relief fund effort throughout the Diocese to help those impacted by Hurricane Dorian. We will take a collection next Sunday towards this; all donations will go directly to International Orthodox Christian Charities. Please give generously as you are able.

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Diocesan Website: <http://www.acrod.org>

Camp Nazareth: <http://www.campnazareth.org>

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Dn. Steve Hall, Santiago Alzugaray, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Domieniecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Tucker Karl and family, Robert & Pam Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Alexander Shostko, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectarios and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)