

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wed: Reader Vespers 6:30 PM

Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM

Vespers 5 PM

Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10 AM

September 8, 2024 – 11th Sunday After Pentecost

**Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos | Sunday Before the
Elevation of the Honorable and Life-giving Cross of the Lord**

*Anna, all mothers truly you surpassed, until your daughter should become your Mother. * Anna brought into the light on the eighth of this month God's own Mother.*

Our Lady the Theotokos was a descendant through her father Joachim of the royal tribe of David. Because a child was not born to him, and he was reproached for this, for this reason he did not cease offering to God a double portion of his gifts, being that he was wealthy and a lover of God. Her mother Anna, who also was a descendant of the royal tribe of David, was more noble than anyone else in both her body and her soul.

Because they both grieved over the reproach of childlessness, Joachim went to a mountain, and Anna went into the garden. And both supplicated God with tears to grant them the fruit of the womb. For this they were granted what they longed for, and gave birth to Mary the Theotokos, who is more saintly than all the saints. And so they bore an incomparable and most-excellent beautiful child, for she exceeded



all the beautiful children of humanity. Truly they were blessed for their virtuous and God-loving judgment, rather they became more blessed by the incomparable grace and divine childbirth of which they were made worthy. For by their daughter, namely the Ever-virgin Mary, the birth of the Son of God took place.

Now in what manner Anna was of the royal tribe of David, we will now reveal briefly. Mathan was of the twenty-third generation after David (or more precisely the twenty-seventh according to the genealogy of the Evangelist Matthew). He took a wife named Maria who was of the tribe of Judah, and gave birth to a son named Jacob, the father of Joseph the Betrothed, and three daughters: Maria, Sobe and Anna. Maria gave birth to Salome the midwife, Sobe gave birth to Elizabeth, and Anna gave birth to the Theotokos. Thus Salome, Elizabeth and the Theotokos are grandchildren of Mathan and his wife Maria, and first cousins between themselves. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)



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

Brethren, let the following be in your mind, which was also in [the mind of] Christ Jesus. He who existed in the form of God did not consider equality with God as something to be taken by force. Instead, he emptied himself, found in human form, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to [the point of] death, even death on the cross! Therefore, God highly exalted him, and gave him the Name which is above every name; so that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven, on earth, and 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, as they went on their way, Jesus entered into a village, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. She had a sister called Mary who also sat at Jesus' feet and listened to his word. However, Martha was distracted with much serving. She came up to Jesus, and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Ask her to help me!" But Jesus answered, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things! Yet, one thing is needed! Mary has chosen the good part, and it will not be taken away from her."

As Jesus was saying these things, a woman called out from the crowd and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts which nursed you!" But Jesus said, "Yes, and more than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it."

Homily on the Nativity of the Theotokos

By St. Luke, bishop of Simferopol

The vast majority of people, millions and billions of people, are common people, whom Holy Scripture calls "people of the earth" (2 Chron. 15:5). Why are they called this? Because they resemble gray grass or undergrowth. They don't have higher goals and aspirations in their lives, their minds are very superficial and only deal with living concerns, earthly goods and daily problems. But just as hills and mountains, which are covered with grass and shrubs, occasionally grow large cedars and huge oaks, so also among the people of the earth the Lord God reveals some very great people, who have a high intellect, deep thoughts and their words have great power. They have a very strong will and hold all scientific knowledge. Such people create a new, more perfect life, and they change the relationships between nations and peoples.

This of course is very important, but incomparably more important are those radical changes effected by God by even greater people, through the great ascetics of piety and righteousness, through the great hierarchs, the wonderworkers and venerable ones. In the works of the great philosophers there are many contradictions and often people, who think they could find through them the answer to the age-old question "what is truth?", become frustrated. The history of science knows many cases when scientific theories, which were considered unwavering, lost their importance when confronted with the new achievements of science.

Things are completely different however in the area of the spirit, in the area of higher theological knowledge. There everything is unwavering and eternal. Not long ago we celebrated the day of the martyric death of the Forerunner and Baptist of the Lord John, about whom our Lord Jesus Christ said that among those born of women there has not appeared someone greater than him. In this manner the Lord placed him above all the important scientists, philosophers and artists. He who was maximally a bearer of the Holy Spirit in the greatest degree and a minister of higher truth, was revealed before all of humanity as the most worthy man.

Not long ago, on the day of the Dormition of the Theotokos, I told you how our Lord and God Jesus Christ placed His Forerunner above all who have been born of women, but this does not apply to the Most Holy Virgin Mary, because she is above even the Cherubim and Seraphim.

If we honor and celebrate with great respect the birthdays of great people, then with what joy should we celebrate today, where we honor the birthday of her from whom shone the Sun of Righteousness, our Lord and God Jesus Christ, Who received from her human flesh. In the dismissal hymn of this great feast we hear

the wonderful words: "Your birth Theotokos proclaimed joy throughout the ecumene...." Not only for the human race, but for the entire ecumene, as well as the invisible world, for the world of angels, great joy shone forth today. Above all great people, therefore, even above John the Forerunner, above the Archangels and Angels, the Lord God placed the Most Holy Immaculate Virgin Mary. And rightly did He give her this place, because the Holy Spirit overshadowed her, in order for this woman to become the Mother of the Pre-eternal Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Most Holy Spirit of God made the heart of Mary to an unparalleled degree more pure than the hearts of all people. Our Lord Jesus Christ considers the purity of her heart most important of all, which is why in the Beatitudes He said: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Uninterrupted communion with God, the vision of His face, is the greatest reward our Lord Jesus Christ promises to those who keep the nine commandments, which we call the Beatitudes.

Let us remember what our Savior says about the human heart. His words explain why He honors so much purity of heart. The Lord said: "For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come — sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, evil eye, blasphemy, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person" (Mk. 7:21-23). If this is the case and, according to the words of Christ, the roots of evil are in the human heart, then certainly from the same heart come all the good and pure thoughts and actions. Because the heart is the center of love and love is the fulfillment of the law.

The heart of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary scattered light of exceptional purity and love not only throughout the earthly world, but the day of her glorious birth "proclaimed joy throughout the ecumene", the world of the invisible powers.

Brothers and sisters, let us also guard within our hearts the joy of this glorious and blessed day of her birth. Let us try with all our strength to always keep our hearts pure, that we may be worthy of the love of the Panagia, who always intercedes for us before her Son our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom, together with His Beginningless Father and Most Holy Spirit, belongs glory, honor and worship unto the ages of ages. Amen. (*trans. John Sanidopoulos*)

Homily for the Sunday before the Elevation of the Cross

by St. Luke, bishop of Simferopol

There are many, many texts in Holy Scripture that amaze the mind and heart of every pious and reverent person. But today, on the Sunday preceding the Exaltation of the Cross of Christ, I will stop your thoughts on the most amazing

words - the words of the Apostle Paul and the words of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

I want these words to amaze you and shock you, so that you imprint them forever in your hearts: “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Col. 1:19-20).

This is what Saint Paul says in his letter to the Colossians, and he says the same thing in the second letter to the Corinthians: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

And I am also a messenger of God, and I ask you, my flock: be reconciled with God! How amazing, how marvelous, that God Himself is asking us to be reconciled to Him.

What is this? How can this be? Should we not ask God to forgive us, the accursed, us sinners, should we not ask Him to be reconciled with us? And He Himself asks, humbly asks, that we be reconciled with Him, we, the accursed ones, we, who always offend His holiness, that we be reconciled with Him. Can there be greater humility than the humility of God the Father manifested in these words! He Himself, as it were, asks forgiveness from us, He Himself asks that we be reconciled with Him.

“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh — who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands — that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” (Eph. 2:11–16).

Again the words that the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross was needed in order to reconcile us with God, to abolish enmity, diabolical enmity, of which there is so much in the human race. He did this to reconcile us to God. Shall we not be

reconciled now, if God Himself asks for reconciliation? Are we going to keep fighting? How much of this enmity, how terrible it is! The Cross of Christ destroyed this enmity between Christians, Christ erased the head of the devil with His cross.

You heard in the current Gospel reading also amazing words: "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." The Lord cares about all of us so that no one perishes, perishes in ignorance of Christ, in unbelief in Him, He wants each of us to have eternal life. "For God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him."

A time will come, a terrible, amazing time, when Christ will come a second time: he will come to judge the world, to judge all of us, the damned. But the first time He came not to judge the world, but to save the human race with His Blood, to save those who believe in Him with all their hearts, and not only those who believe, but those who fulfill His commandments.

"He who believes in Him is not judged, but the unbeliever is already condemned, because he did not believe in the Name of the Only Begotten Son of God." The believer is not judged, the Last Judgment is not terrible for him, but the unbeliever is already condemned for not believing in the Son of God.

"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:15-20). Will any of you turn out to love darkness? Will the deeds of any of you be so obscure, so God-hating, that it will be necessary to hide them under cover of darkness!

Do not all of you love with all your heart, with all your thoughts, with all the breath of your soul the Lord Jesus, who shed His Blood for us, the Blood with which the Lord reconciled the world to Himself, did not reconcile Himself, but reconciled us to Himself so that we would not perish.

The humility of Christ is truly immeasurable, for we read in the Apocalypse of John the Theologian such amazing words of Christ: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20), as a beggar asks Him... Is there anyone among you who will not open? Christ stands at the door of the heart of each of you and slowly, slowly knocks, and waits - whether the door will open, whether you will let Him in. And one has only to open the door for Him to come in and serve the supper with you.

May it be with each of you! May the Lord celebrate His supper with us, the accursed, whom God had need to reconcile with Himself! (*trans. John Sanidopoulos*)

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Prooimion – O undefiled, in your birth Joachim and Anna were freed from the reproach of barrenness, and Adam and Eve from the corruption of death. We your people celebrate being redeemed from the penalty of sins, and we cry to you: “The barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God and nurse of our life.”

The prayer, along with the lamentation of the barren and the childless Joachim and Anna, was acceptable as it came to the ears of the Lord and bore fruit that was life-bearing for the world. Joachim completed his prayer on the mountain, while Anna bears her reproach. After a miracle, but joyfully, the barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God and nurse of our life.

O good child of Anna, how shall I hymn you or praise you, since you were born as a holy temple? Joachim on the mountain prayed to receive fruit from the womb of Anna, and the prayer of the holy man was accepted. After the pregnancy, bliss, joy in the world. The barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God and nurse of our life.

Formerly Joachim brought gifts to the Temple, but they were not received; the priests did not wish to accept them, since they were from a childless man, scorned by all, but at the proper time, he and Anna brought in the Virgin, with gifts of thanksgiving, rejoice with them: “The barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God and nurse of our life.”

When the tribes of Israel heard that Anna had given birth to the pure Virgin, they rejoiced with great gladness. Joachim held a great feast and celebrated in splendor, and when he came to prayer he summoned the priests and Levites, he placed Mary in their midst to be magnified: “The barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God and nurse of our life.”

She who causes the streams of life to gush forth for us will go to the Temple, to be reared and receive nourishment from the angels, she will become the temple and tabernacle of the Lord. Virgins with lamps will lead the Virgin, who will bear the divine Sun, and these glorious things will come to pass because the barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God and nurse of our life.

O mystery brought about on earth! After the birth Anna prayed to our God and Maker who knows all in advance: “You have heard me, O Lord, as You heard Hannah who was accused by Eli of being drunk. She promised Samuel after his

birth to the Lord to become a priest. Just as You did formerly, you have given me, too, a gift; the barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God and nurse of our life.”

“It is a great thing for me, good Lord, that I have given birth to one who will produce You, the Master and Lord before all time. You will guard Your mother as a virgin after Your birth. I present her to You, O Merciful One, in the Temple. She will be the gate of the One from on high whom with joy the barren gives birth to, the Mother of God and nurse of our life.”

Did not the faithful Sarah, long ago, before her son Isaac was born, desire to give birth, even though she was infertile? She received the Lord in human form, along with two archangels, and His word to her on this occasion was, “You, Sarah, will have a child.” Now, rejoicing, she cries to the world, “The barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God and nurse of our life.”

Now, at the proper time, Mary becomes radiant, and she did not leave the temple of the saints. Zachariah observed that she was past the bloom of girlhood, and he submitted to lot the choice of bridegroom for her; and Joseph was betrothed to her from God; for she was given to him when it was revealed in the rod from the Holy Spirit; and Anna, rejoicing for her, cried out, “The barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God and nurse of our life.”

Revered one, your child is entirely holy; you have produced the boast of the world, acceptable in her right to honor among men, for she is a strength and support and refuge for those who trust in her. Every Christian has her as protection and shelter and hope of safety even as she is from your womb, as the barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God and nurse of our life.

O exalted God, Creator of all, Who created the universe at a word, and equipped man with wisdom, You are the only Lover of man. O Merciful One, grant peace to Your people. As You guard the faithful rulers, watch over and keep steady along with the shepherd the flock also, in order that everyone may cry out, “The barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God and nurse of our life.”

– St. Romanos the Melodist, *O.35, On the Nativity of Mary*

St. Niketas the Hidden of Constantinople

Saint Niketas the Hidden lived in Constantinople and occupied the position of "chartolarios" ("keeper of records"). They call him "the Hidden," because living in the world amid the bustle of the city, with secret exploits of faith, he attained spiritual perfection and was a great saint of God. His saintly life was revealed through unusual circumstances.

Two friends, a certain priest and the deacon Sozon, had quarreled. The priest died, and the deacon grieved that they had not been able to be reconciled. He told an experienced Elder of the sin that tormented his conscience. He gave Sozon a letter and ordered him to give it to the first person whom he would meet at midnight at the temple of Hagia Sophia, the Wisdom of God.

St. Niketas the Chartolarian appeared before him. Having read the letter, he began weeping and said that it made him responsible for this, and that it was beyond his strength, but with the prayers of the Elder who had sent Sozon, he would strive to accomplish this. Making a prostration before the church doors, St. Niketas said: "Lord, open to us the doors of Thy mercy," and the doors of the temple flew open by themselves. Leaving the deacon at the threshold, St. Niketas began to pray, and Sozon saw that he shone with a strange light.

Afterwards they went from the church, and the doors again closed. Approaching the church of the Blachernae Mother of God, St. Niketas again began praying and again the doors opened in front of them. In the church there shone a light, and from the altar came two rows of priests, among whom Deacon Sozon recognized his dead friend. St. Niketas quietly said: "Father, speak to your brother, and cease the enmity between you."

Immediately the priest and Deacon Sozon greeted each other. They embraced one another with love and were reconciled. The priest went back, and the doors closed by themselves. St. Niketas said to the deacon: "Brother Sozon, save your soul both for your sake, and for my benefit. To the Father who sent you, say that the purity of his holy prayers and his trust in God made possible the return of the dead."

After these words St. Niketas became invisible to Sozon. Having returned to his spiritual Father and Elder, the deacon thanked him with tears, that through his prayers, the great hidden Saint of God Niketas the Chartolarios had removed the sin from both the living and the dead. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Also Commemorated Today

(On the Sunday before September 14)

St. [Chrysostomos](#) of Smyrna and the Hierarchs with Him, Together With Clergy and Laity, (including St. [Ambrose](#), Metropolitan of Moschonisia, St. [Prokopios](#), Metropolitan of Iconium, St. [Gregory](#), Metropolitan of Kydonia, St. [Euthymios](#), Metropolitan of Zela (or Zilon), and St. [George](#) Karastamatis, priest) Massacred in the Asia Minor Catastrophe (1921-23)

(On September 8)

New-Martyr deacon [Alexander](#) of Sokikamsk, Perm (1918)

New Martyr Demetrius, priest (1937).

St. [Ioane](#) (Maisuradze) (1957) and St. Giorgi-Ioane (Mkheidze), (1960), confessors, of Georgia
New Martyr [Alexander Jacobson](#) at [Solovki](#) (1930).
Venerable [Serapion, monk](#), of Spaso-Eleazar Monastery (Pskov) (1480).
Venerable [Lucian](#), abbot of Alexandrov (1654).
Icon of the Nativity of Most Holy Mother of God of [Pochaev](#) (1559)
[Kursk Root](#) Icon of the Theotokos
Icon of [Sophia](#), the Wisdom of God
Venerable Arsenius, abbot of Konevits (1447).
St. [Ethelburga](#) ([Æthelburh](#)) of Kent, Abbess of Lyminge (647)
New Martyr [Athanasius](#) of Thessalonica (1774) (Greek).
St. [Sophronius](#) of Aghtalea in Georgia, bishop (1803) (Greek).
Martyrs [Rufus](#) and Rufianus (Greek)
Martyrs [Severus](#) and [Artemidorus](#) (Greek)
St. [Kinemark](#) (Cynfarch), disciple of St. Dyfrig. (5th c.)
St. [Corbinian](#), bishop of Freising (Germany)(730)
St. [Disibod](#) (Disen) of Disenberg, monastic founder (700)(Germany)
St. [Sergius](#), Pople of Rome (701)

Social Team for September 15

Team 5 - Marlena Cooper, Mary Watts, Andrew Joseph, Deborah Koory. Thank you!

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Tina Crull, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Johnson family, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Helen, Brian, Luke and Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Fr. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine & the Holy Land, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)