

SOBORNOST

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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 ~

**February 2, 2025 – Feast of the Meeting of the Lord
in the Temple with Symeon | Sunday of Zacchaeus**

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos

Forty days after His birth in the flesh, Christ was presented at the Temple in accordance with legal convention. And because there in the Temple He was received by persons moved by the Spirit, and especially because Symeon took Him into his arms, this feast is also called a Reception ('Hypapante' in Greek).

The Church appointed this great feast of the Lord and the Mother of God to be celebrated on the 2nd of February, because it is the fortieth day after the 25th of December, when the Nativity of Christ in the flesh is celebrated. In this way the year is divided by the turning points in the Divine Economy and blesses them. At the same time it makes it possible for man to be initiated into the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Son and Logos/Word of God.

The event of the Reception of Christ in the Temple on the fortieth day after His birth is described only in the Gospel of Saint Luke (Luke 2:22-39).



God Himself, that is to say the unincarnate Logos/Word of God, gave the Commandment of purification on the fortieth day to Moses and it had been established for all the Israelites. This Commandment was given to Moses even before the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, before they crossed the Red Sea.

The Commandment is as follows: "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Sanctify to me all the first-born, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man of animal; it is mine" (Exodus 13:1-2). This offering also referred to the first-born male animals, which had to be separated and offered to God. God's Commandment was clear: "that you shall set apart to the Lord all that open the womb, that is, every firstling that comes from an animal which you have; the males shall be the Lord's" (Exodus 13:12).

This offering was a sign of recognition of God's beneficence, and showed that they belong to Him. It is well known that the Commandment to dedicate the first-born male child was given to the people of Israel, through Moses, directly after the killing of the first-born children of the Egyptians, when Pharaoh at once gave permission for the exodus, before they crossed the Red Sea. The explanation of this act is characteristic: "for with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt" (Exodus 13:9).

In another book of the Old Testament, Leviticus, we see that God gives more details about the ceremony of consecration and thanksgiving. The woman who bears a male child is to circumcise him on the eighth day and offer him to the temple on the fortieth day. And with the offering of the child "she is to bring to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting a year-old lamb as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtle-dove for a burnt offering" (Leviticus 12:1-6).

Since the Word of God Himself gave the law to Moses, when he assumed human flesh He had to keep the law, so as not to be a law-breaker, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says that when anyone sees Christ keeping the law, he should not be shocked, nor should he regard as a servant Him Who is free, but he should have a better understanding of "the depth of the economy". This keeping of the law of the offering in the Temple is part of the mystery of the divine kenosis of the Son and Logos/Word of God.

Likewise, according to Saint Gregory Palamas, Christ had no need of purification, but since ritual purification was legislated in the Old Testament for both the parents and the children, He did it in order to obey the law which He Himself had given. Christ had no need of ritual purification, because He was conceived without seed and given birth without loss of virginity. "There was certainly no need for purification, but it was an act of obedience." This obedience had the meaning of the new Adam, in contrast to the disobedience of the old Adam. And if the

disobedience of the first Adam resulted in the fall and corruption, the obedience of the new Adam, Christ, brought disobedient human nature back to God and cured man of responsibility for the disobedience.

The bringing of the children to the Temple on the fortieth day was a feast of purification. The mother and child had to be cleansed of the results of the birth.

Certainly the birth of children is a blessing of God, but it must be realized that the manner in which man gives birth is a fruit and result of the fall; it is the so-called coats of skin, which Adam wore after the fall, and the loss of God's grace. It is in this light that we should see the words: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 50[51]:5). Eventually by dispensation God blessed this way in which man is born, but nevertheless it is a fruit of the fall. Parents as well as children should bear this in mind. The ceremony of purification should be interpreted in this theological framework.

When we reflect on these theological truths, we can see that neither Christ nor the Panagia (All-Holy Mother of God) had need of purification. Conception without seed and birth without loss of virginity do not constitute impurity.

The Commandment which God gave to Moses said: "If a woman has conceived and born a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days" (Leviticus 12:2). This passage shows the purity of the Panagia at once, because the woman is unclean who is to give birth when she has been fertilized by a man. The Panagia, however, conceived by the Holy Spirit and not germinally, and therefore she was not unclean. This means that it did not apply in her case, but she went to the Temple in order to keep the law.

God's Commandment was clear: "Sanctify to me all the first-born whatever opens the womb" (Exodus 13:2). This Commandment is at the same time a prophecy, which refers to the Incarnation of the Son and Logos/Word of God. It does not relate absolutely to every first-born male child, for no man, not even the first-born, opens his mother's womb. In his homily on this subject, Saint Athanasius the Great says that the infants do not open their mothers' wombs, "but the man's coming together with the woman". The womb opens at the coming together of the couple and the conception of the child. But Christ opened His mother without destroying her virginity, since He left her closed again, "When nothing had knocked from outside, this infant opened from within".

After mentioning what was done in the Old Testament was a type of the Nativity of Christ, Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite says that Christ alone opened the virgin's womb "in a way worthy of God and beyond comprehension, for, having opened her in being born, He left her closed again, just as she was before the conception and birth."

Christ is the first-born and is characterized as such in Holy Scripture. This characterization certainly does not mean that there is also a second-born and a third-born, but that He was born first, regardless of whether there was a second or third. The term 'first-born' must be associated with the 'only-begotten', as Christ is also characterized in Holy Scripture.

The term 'first-born' also refers to the two births of Christ, that is today, to the pre-eternal birth from a virgin father, without a mother, and the birth in time from a virgin mother, without a father (Saint Gregory Palamas).

Christ is called first-born in three ways. First, because He was born of the Father before all ages. The Apostle Paul says: "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation" (Col. 1:15). And as we saw before, the "first-born" is identified with the "only-begotten". Secondly, He is called first-born in His human birth, and regardless of whether another was born of the Panagia. "And she brought forth her first-born son" (St. Luke 2:7). And thirdly, He is called first-born from the dead because He was the first to rise from the dead, thus making it possible for everyone to be raised at the appropriate time. The Resurrection is also characterized as a "birth", because resurrection is regarded as a birth. The Apostle Paul says: "he is the beginning and the first-born from among the dead" (Col. 1:18). The first meaning of the first-born is connected with the birth according to nature of the Son of God, that is to say, the term refers to theology, and the other two are connected with the incarnation of the Logos/Word and refer to the economy.

According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Christ became first-born in three ways in order to give life to our own human nature. Of course He is not referring to His birth from the Father before all ages. Just as our own human nature is given life by three births, that from our mother, that from baptism and that from the dead, which we hope will happen in the future, so too Christ became the first-born for us in three ways, so that our own human nature would be given life and deified (theosis). For the birth of the body still has to be followed by the spiritual birth.

It is a moving scene when Christ as an infant, as a baby, is offered to the Temple. The Pre-Eternal God Who, as the Logos/Word of God, has always been united with His Father and the Holy Spirit and simultaneously has directed the world, the entire universe, is presented to the Temple as an infant in the arms of His mother.

Although Christ was an infant, at the same time He was "God before the ages", and therefore He was wiser than anyone else. We know that human nature in the womb of the Theotokos was deified by the union of divine and human nature in the person of the Logos/Word, and therefore Christ's soul was enriched with the fullness of wisdom and knowledge. Yet this wisdom was expressed in accordance with His

age, because if it had been otherwise, He would have appeared to be a freak (Saint John of Damaskos). Anyway, although Christ was an infant, nevertheless He was God, having all the fullness of Divinity bodily and all the human wisdom and knowledge by virtue of the hypostatic union of His Divine and human natures.

By means of this infancy He cured Adam's "infantile mind". When God formed Adam in Paradise, Adam was an infant as to grace and sanctification. He did have an illuminated nous, unshaped and an infant in spirit, because he had an infantile mind, he was easily deceived by the evil demon who awakened him to sin and evil. Therefore Christ, having the bodily age of an infant, cured not only Adam's infantile mind, but also his human nature and did what the first Adam failed to do. Thus, by the Incarnation of His Son, God the Father made the deification (theosis) of man more sure and effective. In Christ the devil could no longer deceive human nature, as he had done with ease in the first Adam.

The kenosis (the emptying), of self-humbling, of the Son and Logos/Word) of God, as is also seen in the case of His offering to the Temple, exceeded even the Angel's understanding, for they too were astonished at God's immense condescension. The Prophet Habakkuk prophesies the Incarnation of the Logos/Word of God: "God is coming from Teman, and the Holy One from Mt. Paran. His Majesty covers the heavens, and his glory fills the earth" (Habak. 3:3). The word for 'glory' means the incarnation and the Divine kenosis of the Logos/Word of God. 'Covered the heavens' means that it covered, blanketed even the height of the Angels, since even the Angels were astonished on seeing the immense and inexpressible condescension of the Logos/Word of God.

God has appointed that the offering of the first-born male should be accompanied by the offering of an unblemished lamb or a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons. In Leviticus it says: "she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtle-dove as a sin offering, to the door or the Tabernacle of Meeting" (Leviticus 12:6). Saint Luke the Evangelist says that Christ's parents brought Him to the Temple "to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons'" (St. Luke 2:24).

Christ's parents did not offer a lamb as the law provided, because they were poor. The wealthy classes offered a year-old lamb, while the poorer classes offered a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons (Procopios). Christ really was born into a poor family and grew up as a poor man. In the end, Christ's poverty consisted not so much in the fact that He was born and lived in poverty, but rather that He became Incarnate and assumed human nature. As Saint Gregory the Theologian says, while He was rich, He became poor so that we might become rich with His Divinity.

The law provided that a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons be offered, because the turtle-doves signify the wisdom of the parents who were joined together according to the law of marriage, while the two young pigeons referred to the Panagia and Christ, because Christ was born of the Virgin and remained Virgin Himself to the end. Thus, while the former signified the honorable and blessed marriage, the latter symbolized the virginity of the Panagia and of Christ (Saint Gregory Palamas).

The offering of the Lord which the law provided was a figure of Christ. As Saint Cyril of Alexandria points out, "the turtle-dove is very loquacious among sparrows of the field, but the dove is gentle and meek." This symbolizes Christ, for Christ babbled like a pigeon to all the world and filled His own vineyard, that is, us who believe in Him, with His sweet voice, and like a dove He was meek to the utmost degree. Clearly then, this offering referred to the incarnation of the Merciful God.

One of the most important and central persons in the Reception, apart, of course, from Christ and the Panagia, was Symeon, "the righteous and devout", who was granted to welcome Christ, to take Him in his arms and to recognize Him by the power and energy of the Holy Spirit. In fact he is a great personality both in that he saw Christ and in what he said at that moment.

The name Symeon corresponds to his life and expectation, but also to God's revelation to him, because in the Hebrew language the word Symeon is interpreted as obedience (Saint Nicetas) or as "whom the Lord heard" (Saint John Chrysostom).

The Evangelist Luke characterizes him as a man who lived in Jerusalem and was just and devout, "waiting for the consolation of Israel". At the same time he says that he had the Holy Spirit and that he had been informed that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ (St. Luke 2:25-26). All these signs are characteristic of an inspired man. This is why Holy Scripture is not interested in man's origin and the elements of his human make-up, because he had another life, a life of the spirit.

Actually Saint Symeon the receiver of God, came to the sanctuary by the power and energy of the Holy Spirit. He had the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Spirit he received the information that he would see Christ before he died, and through the Holy Spirit he came to the sanctuary (St. Luke 2:25-27). This expresses the truth that one must have the Holy Spirit and be taught by Him. The Holy Spirit does not reveal the mysteries to men who are unclean and did not have it previously...

No sooner had Saint Symeon received Christ in his embrace than he exclaimed: "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a

light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Your people of Israel" (St. Luke 2:29-31). This is a magnificent expression, which the Church has taken over and placed at the end of the Vespers service, as well as in other services, such as the Thanksgiving after Holy Communion of the Holy Gifts...."

Righteous Symeon blessed the Theotokos (Mother of God) and Joseph, who followed these events with wonder and amazement. And he then turned to the Theotokos to make two remarkable prophecies to her.

The first referred to the Person of the God-man Christ. "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against" (St. Luke 2:34). This prophecy was realized during Christ's lifetime, but it continues to be realized in the history of humanity and in the personal life of every man.

The God-man Christ is the fall of those who do not believe in Him and the rising of those who do. Golgotha is an example, one thief believes and is saved, the other doubts and is condemned. This happens also in our inner life, Christ falls when we, the baptized, fall through prostitution, and He is raised through our prudence. Likewise it can be understood that Christ will suffer and fall in death, but also many will be raised through His own fall and His own death (Saint Theophylact).

Christ is also "a sign that is spoken against". The word 'sign' can be understood in many ways and many senses. In the first place, Christ's Incarnation, that the Word of God became man, is a sign. At the Incarnation many paradoxical and strange things happened. God became man, the Virgin became a mother. Precisely this sign is contradicted and doubted by many people. Some maintain that He assumed a real body, and others that His body and His actions were illusory. Some think that His body is earthly, others that it is heavenly. Some think that Christ as God has a Pre-Eternal existence from the Virgin and immaculate Mary (Saint Cyril of Alexandria).

Analyzing Saint Theophylact's interpretation that the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God is understood as a sign that is spoken against, Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite says that the heretic who sees the works of Christ, Who has the double energies of man and God and sometimes as man hungers, thirsts, is martyred, crucified, suffers, etc., and sometimes as God performs miracles, drives out demons and is resurrected, etc., is in two minds as to whether Christ is God or man. But the Christian does not have such doubts, because he knows from the experience of the deified saints that although Christ has two natures, Divine and human, He is one in hypostasis and person, and so one and the same Christ acts sometimes in a divine way and sometimes in a human way. And certainly when each nature acts, it acts, "in communion with the other".

Another sign that is spoken against is the Cross of Christ. According to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, "the precious Cross is called a disputed sign". Some accept the Cross and the crucifixion of Christ, regarding it as salvation: that in the Cross He conquered the principles and authorities of darkness, and others deny the cross. They cannot accept that Christ was crucified. Therefore, as the Apostle Paul said, the Cross is a stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. But for us the faithful the Cross is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:23-4).

Saint Symeon's Second Prophecy, which referred to the Panagia (All-Holy Mother of God), is as follows: "Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (St. Luke 2:35).

Apparently this prophecy refers to the pain and sorrow of the Theotokos about the Cross, when she saw her Son, Who is the Son of God at the same time, suffering and enduring. Though the Panagia did not endure or suffer pain during the birth of Christ, precisely because she conceived Him without seed and gave birth without corruption, she has to suffer much at the time His departure.

This way the very sword that would pierce the soul of the Theotokos (Mother of God) at Christ's death on the Cross and would reveal the thoughts of many men which were hidden in their hearts. From the pain which she felt they understood that this was His natural mother.

This reminds us of the case of the two women in the Old Testament who claimed a baby and appeared before Solomon to resolve their difference. Solomon asked for a sword to divide it and give a part to each woman. Then one of them begged him not to kill it, but to give it whole to the other. And the other asked him to kill it so that neither of them should take it. The king gave the child to the one who preferred that the child should live even if the other woman took it. This was proof that she was the natural mother (1 Kings 3:16-28).

In the same way, the Panagia's sorrow at the Cross showed that she was the real mother, that it was from her that the Lord took flesh. For since the Panagia is the real mother, it means that Christ also has a real body and is not fantasy.

Saint Athanasios the Great says that the phrase "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" means that the Cross of Christ, His Passion, would reveal all the inner dispositions of men, since Peter, out of warmth and zeal, would deny Him, the Disciples would desert Him, Pilate would express regret by washing his hands, his wife would believe through a dream at night, the centurion would believe from the signs, Joseph and Nicodemus would be occupied with matters of the funeral, Judas would strangle himself, the Jews would give money to the guards to conceal the Resurrection. And indeed "there will be some conflict and discord of thoughts and opposing speculations".

This prophecy does not refer only to the Incarnation and the Crucifixion, but also to the whole life of the Church, which is the real body of Christ. Some are saved, remaining in the Church, and others are condemned, denying its saving work. Also, since through Baptism we have received the Grace of God in our heart and it never leaves us, but is simply concealed by the passions, therefore when we sin, we fall, and when we struggle and repent, we are raised up again.

Christ will be "for the fall and rising of many" also in the next life, since all will see Christ, but for some it will be paradise and for others hell.

This last clearly reveals that the feast of the Reception of Christ is not simply a feast referring only to Christ the Lord and pointing to one of the stages of the Divine Economy, but it is also a feast of the person who lives by Christ.

The Church made the feast of Christ's fortieth day also a ceremony, a service for the fortieth day after everyone's birth. On the fortieth day after birth the infant is offered to the Temple by its mother. This offering has a double meaning. First, the mother is blessed for the end of her purification after the bleeding of her confinement. Just as the Church prays for every illness, so also it prays for the woman who has given birth and naturally feels tired and physically weak. It prays for her purification and because, as we know today, the manner of our birth came after the fall. Secondly, it is a celebration of thanksgiving for the birth of a child. Since the conception and birth of a human being is not a work of nature alone, but of God's energy, we feel that it belongs to God. So we offer it to God and He, through our priest, gives it over to us again to bring it up. But in reality it belongs to God.

However, according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, we must offer to God, to the altar above, in place of a pair of turtle-doves, the purity of soul and body, and in place of the two young pigeons we must offer much prayer not only before the face of God, but also before the face of mankind. And just as Christ did all that the law required and returned to His fatherland, filled and advancing in wisdom, so we too are to return to our true fatherland, which is the heavenly Jerusalem, because we are to live spiritually according to Divine law and advance in wisdom and joy and reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, perfected in the inner man and having become dwellings of the Holy Spirit.

According to Saint Athanasios the Great, it is our task to liken ourselves to Righteous Symeon and the Prophetess Anna. We too must receive Christ with wisdom, purity, guilelessness, forgiveness and in general with love for God and mankind. No one can receive Christ, the true life, in any other way.

The Reception of Christ shows that Christ is the life and light of men and that man should aim to attain this personal light and personal life. The Church sings, by way

of exhortation, "Illuminate my soul and the light of my senses, that I may see Thee in purity; and I will proclaim that Thou art God". In order for anyone to proclaim God, he must see Him clearly. Only those who see God, or at least accept the experience of those who see, can become teacher. But in order to see God one must previously be illuminated, shine in soul and bodily senses. Then the feast of the Reception of Christ also becomes a feast of the reception of every believer. (*From the book The Feasts of the Lord: An Introduction to the Twelve Feasts and Orthodox Christology*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to Timothy 4:9-15 EOB

My son Timothy, this saying is faithful and worthy of all acceptance. For this purpose, we work hard and experience rejection, because we have placed our trust in the living God who is the Savior of all, especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. Let no one despise your youth, but be an example for those who believe: in speech, in your way of life, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to public reading, encouragement and teaching. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the council of presbyters. Be attentive in these things. Give yourself to them completely, so that your progress may be manifest to all.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 19:1-10 EOB

At that time, Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through town. There was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, and could not because of the crowd, because he was short. He ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Jesus who was [about] to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up, saw Zacchaeus, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house!" He hurried, came down, and received Jesus with joy. But when the people saw it, they all grumbled, saying, "He has gone in to stay with a man who is a sinner!" Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have wrongfully obtained money from anyone, I restore four times as much!" Then Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Homily on the Gospel for the 15th Sunday of Luke

By St. John of Kronstadt

Today's Gospel, beloved brethren, teaches us by the example of the chief of the publicans, Zacchaeus, the good science of giving alms to the poor, to repent in

deed, and not only in word, and to satisfy our neighbors for the offenses we have committed against them (Luke 19:1-10). It teaches all, both rich and poor, the science of active repentance, the science of giving generously and within one's power of alms to the poor and by recompense to the offended, to acquire the great and rich mercy and favor of the Lord and the eternal salvation of the soul.

Zacchaeus was a publican, a tax-farmer, or a collector of taxes from his fellow citizens; and the tax-farmers often collected taxes, not without sin, and not without greater sin they extorted, so to speak, taxes from the people, often by all kinds of oppression and unrighteousness, if only to take twice or three times more than they themselves paid to the Roman officials appointed from Rome to collect, and to enrich themselves as much as possible at the expense of the people's need. And Zacchaeus, for this reason, was very rich and was very disliked by the people, who called him a sinner. But this sinner – wondrous are You, Lord, in all things! – with the coming of the Lord to Jericho and to the house of iniquity, came to his senses, knew the ugliness and ruinousness of the love of money, gain, unrighteousness with hardness of heart, and sincerely repented to the Lord of all his iniquities and became a righteous man. "Lord!" he said, "I will give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have wronged anyone in any way, I will repay fourfold." O blessed voice of the repentant publican, who felt all his blessedness from the visit to his house by the first Goodness and the Source of the blessedness of rational creatures! How the publican was suddenly reborn! He who had previously known only the art of making money and getting rich, now suddenly learned the good science of giving and distributing and carefully unwinding the ball that he had previously diligently wound.

May this serve as an example for you and me, brothers and sisters! Even now, my brethren, among us Russians, although not specifically among us, there are many cruel tax collectors, who are flattered by easy gain and unrighteous enrichment, but it is a pity that they are not like the publican of the Gospel. Zacchaeus, having acquired unjustly, gave all to the poor, of whom there were many at that time, not only in ours, and to whomever he had wronged, he returned fourfold; but our publicans, who soon acquire much more than Zacchaeus, enrich themselves only and do not think of distributing their unjustly acquired things to the poor, or even - what insolence and pride - laugh at those who give or distribute to the poor, who, in their opinion, are not deserving of a piece of bread. You see, all these beggars are idlers and drunkards, all of them, supposedly, to the last one. It is true, it is easier to condemn everyone, while it takes a long time to sort out, to distinguish a real beggar from a fake one. Let us assume that even among the beggars there is some sin, all people are sinners, and among them there are real drunkards and idlers. But I will say a word to these stern judges, not mine, but the Lord's, what

will they say against them? With what judgment you judge, you will be judged, and with what measure you measure, it will be measured to you (Matt. 7:2). Are you pure and righteous before God, who judge the least brethren so severely? And you, I would say to them, are you eternal conscientious workers, abstinent, chaste, uncorrupted to the depths of your heart, not acquisitive, your wealth has been acquired through righteous labors, your conscience does not convict you of lies, unrighteousness, bribery, idleness, idle play that nourishes self-interest, envy, vanity, rivalry, mutual hostility and dislike, feasting, all kinds of luxury, etc.? And you dare to raise an eyebrow and condemn the younger brethren to hunger strike and almost starvation? Do the poor have an iron nature, made of steel, and not an obsequious and weak one, like the rest of us, that they are not allowed to drink, eat, or warm themselves in a warm corner, after standing in the cold for several hours? No, our tax collectors are cruel, although they were born and brought up in the Christian, heavenly, loving faith, and live and enjoy its innumerable blessings. Anyway, do they use it? The publican of the Gospel shines as a bright star of active repentance and mercy: we must imitate him.

May the All-Good and Almighty Lord soften our hearts and the hearts of all wealthy and prosperous people. It has become customary to only scold the poor, to despise them, to call them parasites, but no one will bother to give them work or something to do, or to give them clothes so that they can work in the cold, no one wants to. But can scolding and contempt really help grief? Come to these poor people with active help: dress them, feed them, give them something to do - and you will see that they will work with joy. Or, without further trouble, give material assistance to the parish trusteeship for the establishment of the House of Industriousness, so that they can build it and establish permanent work in it, so that our and your parasites do not eat bread in vain, and take care to give them all work within their capabilities - and then there will be no parasites. All of them, by the way, are the fruit of our hard-heartedness, inattention, our pride and self-indulgence - it is not only they who are to blame for their idleness, but society as well. Tell me: what would you do if you found yourself in their midst, if you took their place? May God deliver everyone from their fate, and may the happy ones of this world thank God that, with all the multitude of their sins, voluntary and involuntary, they live in contentment, luxury, that all the blessings flow to them like a river - may they repent of their vain life, of their games and amusements. But let them not forget that when they are very warm and light, and nourished and cheerful, many, many are very cold, hungry, and extremely unhappy. Amen.
(Translated by John Sanidopoulos)

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Our lighted candles are a sign of the divine splendor of the one who comes to expel the dark shadows of evil and to make the whole universe radiant with the brilliance of his eternal light. Our candles also show how bright our souls should be when we go to meet Christ. The Mother of God, the most pure Virgin, carried the true light in her arms and brought him to those who lay in darkness. We too should carry a light for all to see and reflect the radiance of the true light as we hasten to meet him.

The light has come and has shone upon a world enveloped in shadows; the Dayspring from on high has visited us and given light to those who lived in darkness. This, then, is our feast, and we join in procession with lighted candles to reveal the light that has shone upon us and the glory that is yet to come to us through him. So let us hasten all together to meet our God. The true light has come, the light that enlightens every man who is born into this world. Let all of us, my brethren, be enlightened and made radiant by this light. Let all of us share in its splendor, and be so filled with it that no one remains in the darkness. Let us be shining ourselves as we go together to meet and to receive with the aged Simeon the light whose brilliance is eternal.

Rejoicing with Simeon, let us sing a hymn of thanksgiving to God, the Father of the light, who sent the true light to dispel the darkness and to give us all a share in his splendor. Through Simeon's eyes we too have seen the salvation of God which he prepared for all the nations and revealed as the glory of the new Israel, which is ourselves. As Simeon was released from the bonds of this life when he had seen Christ, so we too were at once freed from our old state of sinfulness. By faith we, too embraced, Christ, the salvation of God the Father, as he came to us from Bethlehem. Gentiles before, we have now become the people of God. Our eyes have seen God incarnate, and because we have seen him present among us and have mentally received him into our arms, we are called the new Israel. Never shall we forget this presence; every year we keep a feast in his honor.

– St. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, *Homily on Candlemas*

Venerable Columban, Hermit of Ghent

At the 2nd of February, Colgan and the Bollandists have given St. Columban's Acts, compiled from various sources and authorities. This saint, there can be little doubt, was a native of Ireland; and the Belgian writers agree on this matter. Regarding the family and origin of Columban, we have no authentic accounts. Columban was an abbot, either before leaving Ireland, or after his arrival on the Continent; however, having resigned that dignity, the holy man shut himself up as

a recluse, in a cemetery, attached to a monastery at Ghent, on the 2nd of February, A.D. 957. He lived here, exercising most austere penance, for the short space of two years, in this city. His death took place, on the 15th day of February, A.D. 959, according to Sanders. He was buried in the Blessed Virgin's crypt, before the altar of St. Andrew, at Ghent and, his tomb was a little retired from the entrance, under a stone arch. The name of this saint was invoked as a confessor, but not as a bishop, amongst other patrons of Belgium, in litanies, which were recited, during times of public necessity or calamity. It appears not possible to state more particulars regarding this saint; for, his Acts have either perished, or have not been published. Like the Apostle St. Paul, this holy man gloried in the testimony of a good conscience, living in simplicity of heart and in the grace of God. He passed away from the world, for which he felt no attachment, to enjoy the happiness of eternal life. (*adapted from omniumsanctorumhiberniae.com*)

Also Commemorated Today

New Hieromartyr [Basil](#) priest, Martyr [Michael](#) (1938)(OC).

New Martyr [Jordan](#) of Trebizond (1650) (Greek).

New Martyr [Gabriel](#) at Constantinople (1676) (Greek).

Martyr [Agathodorus](#) of Tyana in Cappadocia (Greek).

++St. [Ronan](#), third Bishop of the Isle of Man

St. [Columbanus](#) of Ghent, Hermit (959)

St. [Feock](#) of Cornwall, Virgin (unk)

+St. [Laurence](#), Archbishop of Canterbury (619)

St. [Adalbald](#) of Flanders, martyr (652) (Belgium)

+St. [Adeloga](#) ([Hadeloga](#)), Abbess of Kitzingen (c. 745) (Germany)

St. [Apronian](#), martyr, executioner converted by the testimony of Martyr Sisinnius (c. 304)

[Martyrs of Ebsdorf](#) - St. Bruno with Bishop [Marquard](#) of Hildesheim, Bishop Erluph of Werden, Bishop [Theodoric](#) (Theiry) of Minden, Bishop Gosbert of Osnabrueck, and many companions (880) (Germany)

St. [Flosculus](#) (Flou), bishop of Orleans (c. 480) (Gaul)

Memory Eternal!

Dear Faithful of St. Thomas: Helen Pavlik Janowiak fell asleep in the Lord on January 19th. She was almost 98 years old. Helen and her family will be remembered at St. Thomas for donating the altar, two major icons (St. Nicholas/Divine Humility) as well as the icon of St. Gorazd (a relative). Her son John greatly appreciates your prayers, but please don't call for the time being. You may however email him at janow1234@yahoo.com. May God make Helen's memory eternal.



Office of the Metropolitan
312 Garfield Street
Johnstown, PA 15906

January 31, 2025

Protocol No. 2/2025

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Dear Fathers and Faithful:

All of us have seen and heard about the tremendous devastation the wildfires in California have caused. At least 29 people have died from the fires. Thousands have been forced to leave their homes. Thousands of structures and livelihoods have been destroyed. Whole communities have been displaced. While many of the fires in California have been fully contained, the devastation remains.

Long-term efforts are now underway to help this region of our country and its residents recover. This will take a long time and a tremendous amount of resources.

I am asking our Diocesan parishes and faithful to continue to pray for those affected, and if you have not already, please take up a collection for them and forward the monies to International Orthodox Christian Charities, the international humanitarian aid and development agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America. Immediate aid is still needed for the residents of California as are long-term resources. Monies should be forward to:

International Orthodox Christian Charities
110 West Road, Suite 360
Baltimore, Maryland 21204

Be sure to mark checks with "California Wildfire Relief" in the memo line. Alternatively, you can visit the IOCC website California Wildfire donation page at [IOCC Wildfire Relief](#) to make a donation.

Praying for those affected by these wildfires, I remain sincerely

Working in His Vineyard,

+ Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa
Diocesan Bishop

The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Social Team for February 9

Team 5 is up next week – Marlena Cooper, Andrew Joseph, Deborah Koory. Thank you!

Follow Our Diocese On-Line

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

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

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/acroddiocese>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/acrodnews>

You Tube: <https://youtube.com/acroddiocese>

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.)