

THE TRISAGION

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF HOLY TRINITY ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Abolition of Death by J. Mark Barna & Elizabeth J. Barna



Saint John of Damascus teaches that “since the enemy snares man by the hope of Godhead, he himself is snared in turn by the screen of flesh.” God accomplishes this, moved with great compassion for man, that in His goodness and justice, He would not, by His might, simply snatch man from death, not give the victory to another.

His incarnation makes it possible that, “in Him,” all men may live and become truly human, and once again become by grace what God is by nature. The promise of Paradise is restored.

No, in His great wisdom He delivers a “most fitting solution to the difficulty.” He bends the heavens to descend to earth, to take on flesh, not instantly or magically, but completely; receiving His flesh in His pure but human mother's virgin womb, with all the cares and travail that come along with it. God, Who is perfect, becomes perfect Man, the new Adam, that through the flesh of man and the power of God, the power of death may finally and utterly be destroyed. He made him who “had become through his sins the slave of death, himself once more conqueror and rescued like by like, most difficult though it seemed...” (St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book III).

St. John Chrysostom teaches us that the symbols of our defeat in Paradise were the virgin, the tree and death. Eve was the virgin, for she had not yet known Adam. The tree was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Death was the result of Adam's disobedience. Now again we have a virgin, a tree and death; the symbols of defeat now become the symbols of victory! For instead of Eve, we now have the Virgin Mary. Instead of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we have the tree of the Cross. Instead of the death of Adam (separation from God), we have the death of Christ, the God-Man. Death was defeated using the same means by which it had prevailed: the Virgin, The tree and death! Thus, the circular nature of all creation focused on a single point, the Cross of Christ.

When God the Son, the Creator of all things, chose to enter His own creation, He made all things new. The uncontainable One, who holds the whole universe in His hand, chose to lower Himself, to be contained. What greater thing is there than that God should become man? He chose first to be contained in the womb of a virgin mother and then, wrapping Himself in the garment of our own flesh, He chose to be contained within a body of flesh just like our own.

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Schedules

	Coffee Hour	Greeters	Altar Servers*
April 8	Esther Fite, M. & G. Anthony, and Dee Powell	Megan Leathers and David Seisler	Team A
April 15	Great and Holy Pascha, CHRIST IS RISEN!	All Greeters	All Servers
April 22	Julianne Vaughan and Beth Roberts	Beth Roberts and Ed Miranda	Team B
April 29	Mt. Jennifer Cadman and Megan Leathers	Leshyn and Mark Blodorsky	Team A
May 6	Carol Strauss and Joan Miranda	Melody Thompson and Mark Fedun	Team B
May 13	Melody Thompson and Laura Rush	Megan Leathers and David Seisler	Team A

* Team A: C. Dook, N. Fedun, A. Miranda, N. Palko, S. Oeynik, D. Seisler, and J. Seisler
 Team B: M. Dook, P. Dook, K. Kuchersky, J. Miranda, B. Oeynik, Jn. Seisler, and J. Seisler

■ SUNDAY SCHOOL SCOOP

What Can Happen at Church

by Dn. Mark Oleynik

Many of the important dates in our lives do not appear on the calendar. Certainly, we mark the great and wonderful feasts such as Pascha or Nativity or birthdays and anniversaries by time. But there are dates that are of supreme importance to us which have no relation to time. The scriptures read, *"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord"* (Is. 6:1). That is not a date but an experience. Many of us can say similar things: "In the year my health failed I saw the Lord."; "In the year I met my sweetheart I saw the Lord."; "In the year my child was born I saw the Lord."

In the year that King Uzziah died the bottom fell out of Isaiah's life. Uzziah's death signaled the end of a time of great prosperity and consistency. For Isaiah and the entire nation, it ushered in a time of uncertainty, change, and doubt. With the throne of Israel empty and the nation at a dead end, Isaiah, in his helplessness and despair, returned to the temple courts and fell in with the old familiar songs, the familiar scriptures, the familiar priests, the same fragrance of the incense, and the same murmur of the multitude. And then something happened.

Though attending services can be dry and routine, suddenly a life can be lighted up with new interest, new hope. That is what makes attendance at church services so vital, so critical, so important. While others gaze about with wandering minds, some little boy or girl is seeing God and a life is being changed. We should not be surprised that this is so. You should expect nothing better to happen during worship.

What really happened in that service that Isaiah attended? Instead of a dead king and an empty throne, Isaiah saw the throne filled with the presence of the living God. And through the service he heard the exalted song, "Holy, holy, holy."

Extra "Scoops"

SUPER SOUPER SUNDAY

Our Sunday School raised more than \$650 last month for the homeless in State College. The same day, the children at the Chapel of the Holy Spirit raised over \$200 to help a needy resident of Snyder County.

PASCHA PREPARATION WORKSHOP

On Lazarus Saturday (April 7) at 4 p.m. all children are invited to bake Pascha bread, decorate eggs, make crafts, and enjoy fellowship. Bring the entire family.

MYRRHOPHORES

Sunday School girls (2nd grade through high school) who wish to serve as Myrrhophores at Lamentations on Holy Friday evening will be given flowers to carry as the epitaphion (shroud) is sprinkled with rose water and when it is processed around the church. This tradition recalls the important role that women had at Christ's crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Participants must practice beforehand. See Dn. Mark.

EGG HUNT

On St. Thomas Sunday our younger children (up to fifth grade) will hunt for eggs at Holmes Foster Park following the Divine Liturgy. Bring your baskets!

A Life Changed

by Becky Oliver

"Thanks for coming here and not going to party." That was one of the first things that Mother Ivone said when I arrived at the Hogar Rafael Ayau orphanage in Guatemala City, Guatemala. It was also the moment where I realized I was giving up my time to serve others. Instead of going home, I traveled to Guatemala on OCF's Real Spring Break. Over the week, I worked on service projects and played with the children. By the end of week, I had such new perspective on life and what it meant to be a true Orthodox Christian.

What Can Happen at Church

(continued from page 3)

And then having seen God, Isaiah came into a true understanding of himself, crying out, "Woe is me!" That is always the experience people have when they see God. We discover who we are in the light of eternity. We become humble and partake of the grace of poverty of spirit. Once Isaiah saw himself in a different light, immediately came an urgent call for service. His response: "Here am I; send me." The Church is the greatest recruiting station, never

failing to find someone who will answer the call to go to the farthest ends of the earth. That is what worship can do for the world.

We are entering a most splendid time of the Church year this month. We have dozens of services to gather together to experience the presence of God. Bring yourself and your children as often as you can. Things do happen in church. ■

■ CHAPEL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Serving the Flock in a House

by Fr. Basil Biberdorf

The Chapel of the Holy Spirit was blessed with a visit from our Bishop Melchisedek on Forgiveness Sunday, February 26. But far more than visiting the Chapel, His Grace served the flock, preaching and presiding over the Eucharist, in a house.

One part of the house, the bathroom, was a central element of Vladika's homily. He recounted the story of novices at the Great Meteora monastery in central Greece being sent to Athens to study at the university. When their bishop, Dionysius, came to visit the novices' apartment, he only looked in the bathroom, because "how people keep the bathroom is how they live." Vladyka elaborated on this point, emphasizing the need to clean the "lavatories" of our souls, to enter our "bathrooms" in order to clean them out in the course of the Great Fast. After all, the state of our souls determines our state at the resurrection, and we will all see the face of Christ at the end. To which His Grace reminds us, "The face of Christ can be, and often is, the face of our worst enemy, for whom Christ also died."

Thus, we must "cast off the works of darkness...and put on the armor of light," (*Rom. 13:12*), entering the dark bathrooms of our souls in order to scrub the flesh and its lusts, so that we are not controlled by them. These points should all be on our mind, especially as we enter into the closing weeks of Great Lent.

Bishop Melchisedek spoke further, drawing the historical connection between the Chapel's worship and Christianity's roots. St. Gregory the Theologian (AD 329-391) served in a house chapel, for when he arrived as the Orthodox archbishop of Constantinople, all of the churches in the city were possessed by heretical Arians. (When St. Gregory left two years later, there were no Arian churches left in the city.)

This was not new for the Church. The earliest Christians regularly celebrated the Eucharist in private homes, as mentioned in *Acts 2:46* ("...breaking bread from house to house...") and *5:42* ("...in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."). When Paul (still named Saul) wanted to persecute Christians, he had to do it by visiting homes: "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison." (*Acts 8:3*). As these passages show, praying in a home does not mean we are any less "Church," but rather are the very same Church that witnessed to Jesus Christ in the earliest years after his Ascension.

We are all grateful for His Grace's visit to the Chapel, for leading us in worship, for proclaiming the Gospel to us, for feeding us Christ's Body and Blood, and for teaching us the way in which we should go. We look forward to his next visit. ■

The Abolition of Death by Christ *(continued from page 1)*

Through His ministry, Christ shows God's continuing love for mankind. He illustrates the kingdom of heaven to those who would see, and He gives instructions as to how God expects men to treat each other. Through His transfiguration He shows His divinity and illustrates definitely that the soul and body continue on after death, as He is seen conversing with Moses and Elijah. He Himself is raised in the body, bearing the marks of His passion.

Christ and the prophets preached repentance and a return to God... However, man did not only sin, but through his sin, he chose death. Saint Gregory of Nyssa teaches that, "As the beginning of death came through one man and was then transmitted to human nature, in a similar way the beginning of the Resurrection came through one, the God-Man, and then was extended to the whole of humanity" (*Catechetical Homily 16*).

Satan, through death, held captive the souls of all those who lived since Adam. He held them as "treasures in darkness and hoards in secret places" (*Is 45:3*). But Christ came to save all mankind. The only way to reach them was to descend to them. The only way to do that was through death. Satan saw to it that Christ's death was perhaps the most... torturous death yet invented: death on the cross. Evil presumed it had triumphed over the King of Glory when, in reality, it had only played a part in the glorious plan of salvation.

St. John Chrysostom teaches that the only digestible food for death is sin. Through Christ suffered all the temptations of the flesh and spirit that Satan could throw at Him, He triumphed over sin and died a sinless death, without spot or stain...

In His godliness, He submitted to the hate, scourging, humiliation and finally the most hideous death on the cross, outside the gates of the city, with thieves and murderers. We see in this God's ultimate sacrificial love for mankind. In His

humanity, He sinlessly submitted to the same degradation. In this we see mankind's perfected love for God. Here the two are joined and revealed in victory. Here is revealed the same all-encompassing, overflowing love that created the universe. Here is the revelation that this is the moment of creation. This is the ultimate victory from which all of salvation, both Old and New Testament, flows.

Mankind was never created to be a slave of death. Christ, by being raised bodily, establishes how unnatural death really is to man. In all of human history, only one man, Jesus Christ, was created to die. Human nature, which, from Adam to Christ, was defeated again and again by sin, through Christ, received a unique, universal victory. This new man, free of spot or stain..., sacrificed in love for God and Man, restored God's image and likeness, and could not be held captive as His ancestors were.

Hell took a man and encountered God. Christ died and descended into Hell first that "He might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil," and to destroy and annihilate completely the authority of death and Hades. He preached the Gospel of salvation to those who, since the beginning, were captives of sin, in this way liberating and redeeming as many of them as would receive His Gospel (*1 Pet. 3:19-4:6*). As sin is the only food suitable for death, Hell convulsed violently, much as creation had at the fall; and as Christ destroyed its power, it vomited out all those who had received His Gospel (*Hos. 13:14*).

All the while, Christ also remained in the tomb. His divinity and humanity were never divided, nor were His soul and body. All this was accomplished in an ineffable manner by Christ our God. When He rose bodily, His Resurrection was the confirmation and fulfillment of His Incarnation as the restoration of true life to human nature and the final revelation of Christ as the Logos, the Word and Power of the Holy Trinity. ■

Preacher's Book Now Available

Copies of our very own Gary Cattell's *The Christian vs. The University* are now available for purchase in the Holy Trinity Bookstore. The book captures the essence of his preaching ministry through poignant and heartfelt letters of advice addressed to a young Christian convert. Congratulations, Gary!

Fundraiser Raises Nearly \$1,700

Thank you for your generous support of the Men's Mission to Marshall, Alaska at its Annunciation fundraiser dinner. In the coming months, look for more ways to help the construction team raise funds for the July 22-Aug. 3 trip. Donations will soon be accepted online at holyltrinity-oca.org/mission.

Bishop Hosts Spring Gathering

His Grace Bp. Melchisedek invites all Archdiocesan youth and families to come for a relaxed afternoon and enjoy a spring cookout on Sunday, April 29 from 3 to 5 p.m. at his residence (8641 Peters Rd. in Cranberry). Call (724) 941-4293 by April 22 to RSVP.

For the Record

BAPTISM

➤ **Mikhail Shklyayev**, son of Oleg & Olga Shklyayev, baptized March 24, sponsored by Rousko Hristov and Ekaterina Bazilevskaya. Many years!

Every child at the Hogar was happy to see each one of us everyday. Many of them have had very hard lives but still continue to smile and love everyone who comes their way. All the children are obedient in church, and the older ones have responsibilities such as chanting and taking care of the young children. They truly inspired me to be faithful and loving Orthodox Christian.

Although my Break was not spent on an island or on a couch, I was happy to be on OCF Real Spring Break. It was a great to be with other Orthodox students and serve the children and Christ. ■

■ NEWS AND NOTES

St. Vladimir's Seminary Chorale to Perform in NYC

CRESTWOOD, NY – Interweaving icons, sacred texts, and a *cappella* music, the St. Vladimir's Seminary Chorale will present "ORIENT: Sacred Song and Image" on May 7 at 7:30 p.m. in the Actor's Chapel of New York City. The concert will combine the best elements of a professional choral performance with the depth of the Orthodox liturgical experience in a truly beautiful multimedia artistic performance. Tickets are \$25 and can be purchased at svots.edu.

WORLD'S FIRST AIRDROP CHURCH TESTED

MOSCOW [via RIA Novosti] – Priests with the Russian Airborne Troops—many of whom are experienced paratroopers with more than 500 jumps—took a one-week crash course last month to operate the world's only paradrop Orthodox Christian church. The church comes complete with nonbreakable religious items, a crate to carry them, as well as a generator, air conditioning, and a refrigerator.

EARTHQUAKE SPARES MEXICAN MISSION

MEXICO CITY – A powerful 7.4 earthquake on Mar. 20 spared the Orthodox mission here. The cupola was heavily damaged, but all of the parishioners are fine. For information on the active community that is spreading the Faith here, visit fundforassistance.org.



In addition to spending time with the orphans, Becky and her fellow Guatemala Real Break team members painted the dining hall (left), the school's entrance, and the girls' dormitory.