

ORTHODOX CRANBERRY: A Pastoral Outreach of St. Anthony Orthodox Church

10 September 2017

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TONE 5 — SUNDAY BEFORE THE ELEVATION OF THE CROSS. Afterfeast of the Nativity of the Theotokos.

Martyrs Menodora, Metrodora, and Nymphodora, at Nicomedia (305-311). Apostles Apelles, Lucius, and Clement of the Seventy (1st c.). Martyr Barypsabas in Dalmatia (2nd c.). Ss. Peter and Paul, Bishops of Nicaea (9th c.).

FIRST ANTIPHON

Lord, remember David and all his meekness. We heard of it at Ephrata; we found it in the fields of the wood.

(R.): *Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us! Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early. (R.:) Glory... Now ... (R.:)*

SECOND ANTIPHON

The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; and He will not turn from it. Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. *Save us, O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, Alleluia! (R.:) There will I make the horn of David to bud; I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed. (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten ...)*

LITTLE ENTRANCE AND HYMNS

Come let us worship and fall down before Christ! O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, save us who sing to Thee: "Alleluia!"

TROPARION OF THE RESURRECTION (Tone 5): Let us believers praise and worship the Word; coeternal with the Father and the Spirit, born of the Virgin for our salvation. For, He took pleasure in ascending the Cross in the flesh to suffer death; and to raise the dead by His glorious Resurrection.

Thy Na-ti-vi-ty, O Vir - gin, has pro-claimed joy to the whole u-ni-verse;

the Sun of right-eous-ness, Christ our God, has shone from thee, O The-o-to-kos;

by an - nul - ling the curse, he be - stowed a bless - ing;

by destroy-ing death, He has grant-ed us e-ter-nal life.

TROPARION FOR THE NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS (Tone 4): Thy nativity, O Virgin, has proclaimed joy to the whole universe. The Sun of righteousness, Christ our God, has shone from thee, O Theotokos. By annulling the curse, He bestowed a blessing, and by destroying death He has granted us eternal Life!

TROPARION OF ANTHONY THE GREAT (Russian): Like the zealous Elijah thou didst become, and followed John the Baptist in his upright ways. A dweller in the wilderness, thou didst steady the world by prayer. O Father Anthony, intercede with Christ our God for our souls' salvation.

KONTAKION OF THE NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS (Tone 4): By thy holy nativity, O pure one, Joachim and Anna were delivered from the reproach of barrenness; and Adam and Eve were delivered from the corruption of death; thy people do celebrate it, having been saved from the stain of iniquity, crying unto thee: The barren doth give birth to the Theotokos, who nourisheth our life.

EPISTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance. To Thee, O Lord, I have cried, O my God.*

The Reading is from the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians

(Galatians 6:11-18) **Brethren, see with what large letters I am writing to you, with my own hand. It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only so that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law; but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. But far be it from me to glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision: what counts is to be a new creation! Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God. Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.**

It is clear that Saint Paul is writing here about a matter he views as extremely important. The first line about the “large letters” means something like “I want to emphasize in the bold scrawls of my personal handwriting the immense importance of what I have written.” What was the problem? Saint Paul was writing to warn the Galatians against certain Christian leaders who compelled all new converts to the faith to practice circumcision. He warned that such “missionaries” were in fact interested in cultivating their own public image in the Christian community, while at the same time “keeping a low profile” in the larger society, so as to avoid prosecution by the Roman Empire (as long as Christians would be perceived as a type of Judaism, they would not be persecuted, but tolerated, like the Jews). The false missionaries were not “crazy” to insist on circumcision; it was, to them and to many, a definite mark of religious piety. Today, it would be things like not eating certain foods on certain days, dressing in a certain way, abstaining from this or that, etc.

Saint Paul’s point is that, ultimately, all these things must be placed in a different perspective: what truly matters is not that we do this or that, or that we keep this or that rule of piety; what matters is that we become a “new creation”—and this is God’s work in us. Indeed, as the Apostle writes elsewhere (2 Cor 4:6), the same God who spoke at creation, *let there be light*—and, indeed, *it was light*, now shines in our hearts, drawing us out of darkness and re-creating us into children of the light. “A new creation” means that our Christian life is God’s liturgy in us, where we are co-workers with God.

We should also pay close attention to the following verse: **Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God.** What is “the Israel of God”? Since the Apostle is writing to Christians, it is quite obvious that “the Israel of God” refers to the community of believers in Christ—the Church! Saint Paul sees the Good News as the work of God by which the Gentiles were received into the fold of God’s people; the “dividing wall” between Israel and the Gentiles has fallen down, and “Israel” was extended into encompassing both Jews and non-Jews, and, potentially, the entire world. Ultimately, then, what matters is no longer blood lineage (as the Apostle writes at Gal 3:28: “neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor male and female”) but rather entering the people of God, “the people who seek the Face of the God of Jacob” (Ps. 24:6), being “one in Christ Jesus.”

GOSPEL READING

From the Holy Gospel according to John

(John 3:13-17) **The Lord said, "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."**

The Church has selected this text to be read on the Sunday prior to the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14). To put it briefly, the Gospel of John makes the following two points.

First: there is only one access to God, namely the cross of Jesus Christ, uniting earth and heaven; *Second:* those who place their hope in the Crucified One shall inherit the eternal life of his Resurrection.

This is why, as Saint Paul writes, a Christian is not ashamed or embarrassed that God the Son has accepted death by crucifixion; on the contrary, "I glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." The Gospel section ends with a crucial statement that should accompany us in our Christian life: **God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.**

The message preached by our Lord and entrusted for us to live by and to bring to the world is called "the Good News": the good news about a good, gracious, forgiving, and healing God, who draws near to us, brings His Kingdom into this world, opens up the gates of Paradise, and bids us enter; a God who makes repentance—turning around to Him—worthwhile and appealing, because He promises not to bear a grudge; a God who helps us to live and die with courage by showing through His own example that death is the first step into the Resurrection. A good God, who has come to save us, not to condemn us.

Somehow, we must always be reminded that the Good News is truly good; otherwise we tend to remake God in the image of our own fears, and disfigure the Gospel into some kind of "grim news" about condemnation, destruction, and punishment. What kind of God would want to bully us into repenting? And what fruits would such a "repentance" bear? God is waiting that we may be convinced of His love and grace: He sent the Son into the world to save us, not to condemn us; whoever believes in him does not perish but has eternal life!

A NOTE ON THE BIRTHGIVER OF GOD ("THEOTOKOS")

The Church's calendar, inherited from the ancient Jerusalem Temple, counts September as the first month of its New Year. It appears, then, that Church begins its year with the birth of Mary, the Theotokos (September 8) and ends it with her death and translation to everlasting life (August 15). This is neither an accident, nor an arbitrary decision of the Church. Rather, it reflects the Christian view that the Mother of God reflects, in her person, the very nature of the Church: Virgin and Birthgiver of God. A learned monk of the Orthodox Church in America, Fr. Calinic Berger, summarizes our faith very aptly:

The Orthodox approach to the Mother of God remains what it ought to be: warm, filled with love and devotion, yet sober. She is a human being like all of us, and yet she lives such a life. She dies our death because she shares our birth. She was not conceived 'immaculately' in a manner unique and different from all of us; she was not given a special nature, incapable of sin. Neither did she avoid death. Therefore, it was within fallen nature that the Virgin Mary achieved her spiritual perfection. What she did in her life, she did not do in a mechanical, impersonal manner, but with struggle, thereby developing her own personal holiness through her role as the Mother of God. Not only did she live well, but she finished well: she crowned her struggle of spiritual perfection and her unique role as Mother of God with a godly death in the presence of Christ and supremely 'painless, blameless, and peaceful'. The Mother of God is thus a model for all Christians, both in the way she lived and in the way she died.

LITURGICAL CALENDAR FOR SEPTEMBER

Saturday-Sunday, September 16-17: services at St. Anthony's in Butler

Sat, 6:30 pm: Great Vespers; Sun, 9:15 am: Matins and Divine Liturgy

Saturday-Sunday, September 23-24: services at the Cranberry Outreach

Sat, 6 pm: Great Vespers; Sun, 9:30 am: Akathist "Glory to God for all things" and Divine Liturgy

Saturday-Sunday, September 30-October 1: services at St. Anthony's in Butler

Sat, 6:30 pm: Great Vespers; Sun, 9:15 am: Matins and Divine Liturgy

Saturday-Sunday, October 7-8: services at the Cranberry Outreach

Sat, 6 pm: Great Vespers followed by music practice (Deacon Abraham)

Sun, 9:15 am: Akathist "Glory to God for all things" and Divine Liturgy

Saint Anthony's and Cranberry Outreach Relief Effort for the Victims of Hurricane Harvey and people in need in Haiti and Syria

(1) Extra Collection for TX: Beginning today, we will make a supplemental collection and send the funds to the Antiochian Archdiocese. If you are writing a check, please make the check out to the ANTIOCHIAN ARCHDIOCESE of NORTH AMERICA, and in the "memo" section of your check write: "Hurricane Harvey".

(2) Health Kit & Cleaning Kit Assembly / Drop-off Days

- September 24 - Benefiting Texas
- October 22 - Benefiting Texas
- November 19th - Benefiting Haiti
- December 17th - Benefiting Syria

St. Anthony's & The Cranberry Outreach will send our boxes of assembled kits once a month, from September to December. The kits will be either assembled at home and collected at church, or assembled at church after Liturgy (your option) on the dates below and shipped to IOCC. IOCC will then route our kits to where we have designated for distribution.

***We hope you and your family will join us in this effort!
Please invite your friends and family to come along.***

Sunday, September 24, 4 PM: "A VOYAGE THROUGH ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN SACRED CHANT"

St. Bernard Catholic Church (311 Washington Rd., Pittsburgh, PA)

From Byzantine chant and its influence on the ecclesiastic musical worship of the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Ukraine and Russia, to Orthodox hymns in modern English, this will be a spiritual journey through 1500 years of Orthodox musical and hymnologic treasures.

Two of the region's foremost ecclesiastical choirs, **the Pan-Orthodox Choir of Pittsburgh**, and **the Byzantine Choir of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Pittsburgh**, have joined together to express and present these traditions faithfully to their origins in this unique and inspiring musical journey.

Admission free; free-will offerings accepted and will go to support local ministries.