



*WE GREET all our parishioners and readers on the Great Feasts of the Saviour's Nativity and the Holy Theophany, hoping that the celebration of these festivals may so illumine your hearts and minds that, in the days of encircling gloom before us, your ways may be enlightened and your steps guided and guarded, that you may be among those people of goodwill to whom peace is vouchsafed.*



## FROM THE FATHERS

“THE HOLY DAVID is the more excellent in this: that he confessed himself to be but man, and neglected not to wash out with the tears of repentance the sin of which he had been guilty, in taking Uriah's wife. Herein showing us that none ought to trust in his own strength, for we have a mighty adversary whom we cannot overcome without God's aid. And you will commonly observe very heavy sins falling to the share of illustrious men, that they might not from their other excellent virtues be thought more than men, but that you might see that as men they yield to temptation.”

SAINT AMBROSE OF MILAN, + 397 A.D.

“WHY is He [Christ] conceived not merely of a Virgin, but of *a Virgin espoused* (Luke 1:27)? First, that by the descent of Joseph, Mary’s family might be made known; secondly, that she might not be stoned by the Jews as an adulteress; thirdly, that in her flight into Egypt she might have the comfort of a husband. The Martyr Ignatius adds a fourth reason, namely that His birth might be hid from the devil, looking for Him to be born of a virgin and not of a wife” [see. Esaias 7:14].

VEN. JEROME OF STRIDONIUM, + 420 A.D.

“*SALMOM begat Boaz of Rachab* (Matt. 1:5; from the Gospel of the Genealogy, read on the Sunday before the Nativity). Some believe Rachab to be that Rachab the harlot who received the spies of Jesus, the son of Navi (i.e. Joshua the son of Nun; Joshua 2:1-21, 6:21-25). She saved them, and was herself saved as well. He mentions her to show that just as she was a harlot, so, too, was the congregation of the nations, for they went whoring in their practices. But all those who accepted the spies of Jesus, that is, the Apostles, and were convinced by their words, were saved from among the nations. *And Boaz begat Obed of Ruth*. Ruth was a foreigner but nevertheless she was married to Boaz. So, too, the Church is from among the nations. For like Ruth, these gentiles had been foreigners and outside the covenants, yet they forsook their people, their idols, and their father, the devil. And as Ruth was wed to Boaz of the seed of Abraham, so too was the Church taken as bride by the Son of God. *And Obed begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David the King; and David the King begat Solomon of Uriah’s wife* (Matt. 1:5-6). Again, he mentions Uriah’s wife to show that no one should be ashamed of his forefathers but rather should strive by his own virtue to make them even more illustrious. He also mentions Uriah’s wife to show that all are acceptable to God, even those born of adultery, if only they have virtue.”

SAINT THEOPHLYLACT OF OCHRID, C. 1108 A.D.

# A NATIVITY MESSAGE

from the Ever-Memorable Archbishop Vitaly  
of Eastern America & Jersey City

+ 8th / 21st March, 1960

***Christ is born, give ye glory!***

WE greet the flock, dear to us in Christ, and all Orthodox Russian peoples from our heart on the resplendent festival of the Nativity of Christ, and we prayerfully wish you health, well-being, and joy from the New-born Saviour and for your soul's, salvation.

*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace; goodwill towards men.*

But many people, seeing the present state of the world and the misery, ask: "What is there here to rejoice about? Where is this peace proclaimed by the Angels? What kind of goodwill among men is there now?"

We will respond to this not in the way of men, but with the truthful word of God.

Yes, now it is fitting, even for the most unfortunate and afflicted, for everyone, to rejoice, for when people had lost faith in every sort of human righteousness and had despaired, then in the fulness of time the Righteousness of God was born. That One was born, Who, after the order of Melchisedec, is called *the King of Righteousness* (Heb. 7:2), *the Prince of Peace* (Esaias 9:6), Who Himself bears witness to Himself: *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life* (John 14:6).

All the earth, all peoples, had thirsted for this pre-eternal righteousness. When It was born in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, all people of goodwill rejoiced with the angels, and all people of ill will were troubled with Herod (Matt. 2:3). Just as is depicted in this festal hymn for the Nativity:

*When the Lord Jesus was born of the holy Virgin, all things were enlightened (that is, they understood the meaning, the aim of life). Yet while the shepherds were abiding in the field, while the Magi did worship, while the Angels sang praises, Herod was troubled. For God hath appeared in the flesh, the Saviour of our souls (second verse on Lord, I have cried).*

Into the very midst of the age-old world war between good and evil, Jesus Christ was born unto the joy of those struggling for righteousness and goodness, being their Leader and Saviour, and unto the dread of the evil, being the Conqueror of evil and of death.

The advent of Christ on earth was portrayed by the Elder Simeon the God-receiver, who for many years awaited *the Expectation of the Nations* impatiently, in this way: *This One is set for the fall and rising again of many ... and for a sign which shall be spoken against (Luke 2:34).*

And Christ Himself bears witness that this was precisely His purpose in coming into the world: *I came to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a Baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straightened till it be accomplished. Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay, but rather division (Luke 12:49-50).* This He said, Who was born in the cave at Bethlehem and to Whom the Angels sang: *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace!*

And actually along this path of struggle against the evil of the world and unrighteousness, along this path of preaching, both by word and deeds, about humility, meekness, love and selflessness, He journeyed from His birth in the cave, when Herod raised a persecution against Him and slew the infants of Bethlehem,

even to Golgotha, to the Passion and Crucifixion, when Pilate had disdainfully asked, *What is truth?* (John 18:38).

The Lord, as He desired with His whole heart, lit a fire upon the earth (one that would not be extinguished in our souls) and He was baptized with that Baptism which is saving for us, and by His third day Resurrection from the dead He manifested the victory of good over the evil of this world, the victory of truth over falsehood.

He also directed His disciples and followers, each one of them, to take up their cross, and to take that same path of warfare, struggle, and bearing the cross, and when departing from them before His Passion, He promised them not an earthly, but His grace-filled, peace, that which the Angels had announced at His Nativity: *Peace I leave with you, My peace give I unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you* (John 14:27).

His life's cross is inescapable for every one of the earth-born. The Lord at His Nativity shone the "Light of Understanding" for each of the faithful, and through His obedience to the Heavenly Father even unto the Cross, He granted victory through the Cross over sin and evil.

Bearing his cross in accord with the Saviour's precepts, the believer perceives that in the struggle of life in the world, he is not alone, that his Leader and Helper is manifest as the Victor over evil and death, and not only sustains him in this earthly life, but has also prepared for the faithful eternal habitations in Heaven, in the house of the Heavenly Father.

For this reason the first Christians, even amid persecutions and tortures, possessed within themselves the peace left them by Christ; they rejoiced and glorified Him, Who for our sake was born in a humble cave. In Nicomedia, the twenty thousand who were burned went to their suffering and to death as to a wedding breakfast; their memory is kept on the fourth day of the Nativity of Christ, 28th December / 10th January.

For this reason too, all we, the Christians of good will, in whatever difficult circumstances in this earthly life we might be, whatever unrighteousness and oppression we might have to bear, we rejoice with the shepherds, the Angels and the wise men, on the day of the Nativity of Christ hymning that peace which was left by Him to His disciples and is now with us.

*Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also ye are called in one body (Col. 3:15).*

And you, the people of ill will, though you might enjoy earthly good things and happiness, shall quake and be troubled together with Herod and Pilate.

*God is with us, know ye nations and be vanquished, for God is with us. For there is born in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11).*



## **A GOOD REASON TO KEEP THE NATIVITY FAST WELL**

“THE ANGELS gave glory to God with shepherds. Why was such honour and glory granted to simple shepherds? Because of their simple-heartedness and their simple way of life, which Saint John Chrysostom likened to the life of Saint John the Forerunner, due to its severity and deprivations. They barely had a loaf of bread, and drank water from a spring when it was possible. In the Psalms it says, *He shall drink of the brook in the way; therefore shall He lift up His head (Ps. 109:7)*. He who eats rich food and drinks expensive drinks cannot lift up his thoughts on high, but wanders and crawls on the earth.”

VEN. AMBROSE OF OPTINA, + 1891 A.D.

## **Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece**

Approved by the Holy Synod at its Fourth Session of 2014,  
December 4/17, 2014

# **The Confession of Faith of the Genuine Orthodox Christian**

## **Part One**

1. I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all Ages. Light of Light, True God of True God, begotten, not made, of one essence with the Father, through Whom all things were made.

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from the Heavens and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became Man.

And, crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, He suffered and was buried.

And on the third day He arose, according to the Scriptures.

And ascended into the Heavens, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father.

And He shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, Whose Kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father, Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified; Who spake through the Prophets.

In One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the remission of sins.

I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.

2. In addition to this, I embrace and accept the Holy Seven Œcumenical Synods, convened for the purpose of safeguarding the Orthodox dogmas of the Church, and the local Synods that they endorsed and confirmed.

3. I espouse all of the definitions of the right Faith set forth by the Holy Fathers, under the guidance of the illuminating Grace of the All-Holy Spirit, as well as the Sacred Canons, which those blessed men handed down to the Church for the governance of the Holy Church of Christ and the good ordering of morals, composing them in accordance with the Apostolic Traditions and the intent of the Divine teaching of the Gospels.

4. All that the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of the Orthodox professes and teaches, this do I, too, profess and believe, adding nothing, subtracting nothing, changing nothing, either of the dogmas or the traditions, but abiding by these and accepting them with fear of God and in good conscience; all that She condemns as heterodox teaching and repudiates, this do I, too, condemn and repudiate forever.

5. I offer ready obedience in ecclesiastical matters to the Holy Synod, as the highest authority of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece, which constitutes the continuation of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church in Greece, and to the canonical Bishops and Presbyters under Her.

6. I believe and confess that the Orthodox Faith is not “of men,” but derives from the revelation of Jesus Christ, preached by the Holy Apostles, confirmed by the Holy Œcumenical Synods, handed down by the most wise Œcumenical Teachers, and authenticated by the blood of the Holy Martyrs.

7. I accept, along with the decisions of the Holy Seven Œcumenical Synods, those of the First-Second Synod of 861; in addition to these, I unwaveringly espouse the decisions of the Holy Synod convened by St. Photios in Constantinople in 879-880, as well as the Synodal Tome of the Synod of Blachernae in Constantinople,



in 1351, at the time of St. Gregory Palamas and the Holy Patriarch Kallistos I, in the firm belief that these Synods possess Œcumenical and Catholic validity and authority in the Orthodox Church.

8. Moreover, I give assent and credence to the decisions of the Holy Pan-Orthodox Synods convened in 1583, 1587, and 1593, which abhorred and condemned the introduction into the Orthodox Church of the so-called Gregorian (New) Calendar promulgated by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582.

9. In furtherance thereof, I accept and acknowledge as Œcumenical & Catholic documents of the Orthodox Faith both the Patriarchal Tome of 1756 concerning Baptism of the heterodox & the Synodal Encyclical of 1848 of the Most Holy Patriarchs of the East, as well as the Synodal Decree of 1872, which condemned phyletism.

## **Part Two**

1. I regard ecumenism as a syncretistic pan-heresy, and participation in the so-called ecumenical movement, which was inaugurated at the beginning of the twentieth century, as a denial of the genuine Catholicity and uniqueness of the Orthodox Church, firmly believing that one who agrees with and participates in this heresy is lapsed in the Faith and is not in communion with the Church.

2. Likewise, I reject and in no way accept the 1920 Proclamation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople “To the Churches of Christ Everywhere,” on the ground that it contains a complete plan for implementing the heresy of ecumenism in practice and that it anticipates the calendar reform prepared by the so-called Pan-Orthodox Congress of 1923 and put into effect in Greece in 1924, thereby violating the decisions of the three Pan-Orthodox Synods of the sixteenth century.

3. In consequence of the foregoing, I also regard those Orthodox who took part in the foundation of the World Council of Churches in 1948 and who since then have been active and functioning

members thereof, thus cultivating inter-Christian and interfaith ecumenism, as lapsed in the Faith.

4. Finally, I reject and in no way endorse the so-called Pan-Orthodox Consultations (1961 to the present), which facilitated the reprehensible, invalid, and meaningless “Lifting of the Anathemas Between the Eastern and the Western Church” in 1965, and which have since then been paving the way, from an ecumenist perspective, for the convocation of the so-called Great Pan-Orthodox Synod, with a view to the complete acceptance, ratification, and dogmatization of the syncretistic heresy of ecumenism.

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## CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS

“IT would be desirable to see all rejoicing in this joy [the celebration of the Nativity], and not wanting to know any other happiness, but **not all Israelites make up the whole of Israel.** There will now begin empty enjoyments which inflame the passions: vain wandering of eyes, giddiness from dancing and the like, the empty wandering from one house to the next. Those who like all this, no matter how much you say, ‘Become more modest,’ they stop up their ears and do not listen. And always the holy days of celebration end with making the merciful God turn His eyes from us and with His saying, ‘All these celebrations are abominations unto Me!’ It is really so; many of our socially accepted forms of enjoyment are truly pagan abominations, which is to say that they have been directly carried over to us from the pagan world. Others, although they appeared later, are still thoroughly permeated with the spirit of paganism. It is as if they are purposely multiplied to large numbers during the holy days of the Nativity and Pascha. In allowing ourselves to be captivated by them, we give cause for the prince of this world, Satan, our torturer and God’s antagonist to say to God, ‘What You have done for me by Your birth and Resurrection? Everyone comes to me!’ But the words of the fiftieth psalm resound more frequently in the depths of our hearts: ‘That the Lord mightest be justified in His words, and prevail when He is judged.’”

SAINT THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE + 1894 A.D.

# The Christ-Child Reclining

*“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us”* (John 1:14).

THIS iconographic type of our Saviour Jesus Christ, Who is depicted semi-recumbent on a cradle, symbolizes in Orthodox iconography the Incarnation of the Divine Word and the fulfillment of the following Messianic prophecy of the Old Testament:

*“Having couched, He lay as a lion, and as a lion’s whelp; who shall rouse Him? A ruler shall not fail from Judah, nor a prince from his loins, until there come the things stored up for Him; and He is the Expectation of the nations”* (Gen. 49:9-10).

This passage is directly related to the following verses from the New Testament:

*“Our Lord sprang out of Judah”* (Heb. 7:14); *“behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David”* (Rev. 5:5).

When the Patriarch Jacob was on his deathbed, he blessed his twelve sons and foretold their future and that of their descendants.

Specifically for Judah, he prophesied by Divine inspiration the glorious progress of his tribe, from which the Messiah would come forth.

Christ was awaited with vivid hope and intense expectation by the peoples of the earth, because He would reconcile mankind with God and bring the world spiritual peace through His victory over the Devil, sin, and death.

The characterization of the Incarnate Word as a “lion” and as a “lion’s whelp” (a young and vigorous lion) suggests the royalty and glory of our Saviour, as well as His valour and courage, as victor over the Devil, sin, and death.

\*Source: *St Cyprian* (in Greek), No. 281 (Nov.-Dec. 1997), p. 300.

# Teaching on the Divine Services of the Orthodox Church

BY ARCHPRIEST ALEXANDER RUDAKOV

PUBLISHED IN 1890 IN SAINT PETERSBURG

*Note: In what follows we have substantially expanded on Fr Alexander's original text to make things clearer for contemporary readers.*

**§ 66. The Fulfilment of the Mysterion.** After this, the priest turns to the assembled people with the Apostolic greeting: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all* (2 Cor. 13:14). Then he inspires the participants to estrange their minds and hearts from everything earthly, and to channel them to that which is heavenly, exclaiming: *Let us lift up our hearts.* And to this the chanters respond: *We lift them to the Lord.* Of course, this should not simply be a standard liturgical response made on our behalf, but in prayerful attention, we should strive to do this in deed.

After preparing the faithful, as outlined above, for their worthy participation in the mystical offering of the sacrifice, he now finally celebrates that offering. Following the example of the Saviour, Who, at the Mystical Supper, offered up thanks to God the Father at the breaking of the bread, the celebration of the Mysterion itself begins with the priest exclaiming, *Let us give thanks unto the Lord.* To this the choir responds, *Meet and right it is to worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity one in essence and undivided.* While this is being chanted, the priest silently offers praise and thanksgiving to the Trihypostatic Godhead, firstly for His limitless perfection, secondly for the creation of man and his redemption and for all the benefactions He has bestowed upon us,

and finally that He accepts our ministry, even though the Heavenly Powers stand before Him, *singing the triumphal hymn, shouting, crying and saying*. These last words in italics are said by the priest aloud that all in the church may hear, and they lead on to the next hymn chanted by the choir.

Regarding these last words, we should note that both the Prophet Ezekiel and the holy Apostle John the Theologian, in their mystical revelations, saw the throne of God surrounded by four living creatures, which unceasingly cried out, *Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth!* One of the living creatures had the face of a man, another of a lion, the third of an ox, and the fourth of an eagle. Reflecting on the differing ways these living creatures give glory, the Church also speaks of the various ways of glorifying God among the differing orders of the Angels, and She uses the expressions, *singing, shouting, crying and saying* to signify this. The word *singing* corresponds to the eagle's glorifying, *shouting* to the ox's, *crying* to the lion's, and *saying* to the man's.

The choir responds to these words with the very words of the Angelic Powers, *Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth!* (*Lord of Sabaoth* means Lord of Hosts.) And they continue: *Heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Hosanna in the highest: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.*

While this is being chanted, the priest continues his silent glorification of God's benefactions, and at the end brings to remembrance how the Lord, on the eve of His death, took bread in His holy hands, gave thanks, blessed it, sanctified it, and broke it, giving it to His disciples and Apostles, saying, *Take, eat: This is My Body, which is broken for you, for the remission of sins.* And likewise taking the cup after the supper, saying, *Drink ye all from it: This is My Blood of the new testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins.* The Saviour's words, *Take, eat ... and Drink ye all of it ...*, the priest intones aloud in the hearing of all in the church, and the choir responds to each pronouncement with the *Amen*.

**The Offering up of the Gifts and their Sanctification.** After this, calling to mind the saving commandment (*Do this in remembrance of Me*) and all that is done for our sakes, the Cross, the grave, the Resurrection, the Ascension into Heaven, and His Second Coming, the priest, with his arms crossed over each other, takes up the chalice and the diskos and raises the Gifts as an offering to God the Father, and exclaims, *Thine own of Thine own do we offer unto Thee, because of all and for all.* If a deacon serves, he elevates the gifts, but the priest makes the exclamation. This means that the gifts that we have received from the people, His faithful ones (the prosphoras and wine), we offer unto Him according to the commandment, because the “because of all” refers to the commandment mentioned above, *Do this in remembrance of Me*, and because of all the peoples, and furthermore because of all the benefactions of the Saviour. And the “and for all” signifies all that is done for us, the Cross, the grave, the Resurrection and the rest enumerated above. In response the choir chants: *We hymn Thee, we bless Thee, we give thanks to Thee, O Lord, and we entreat Thee, O our God.*

As this hymn is chanted, the priest prays silently, and in some usages thrice repeats the prayer, *O Thou Who at the third hour...*, and then bidden by the deacon he makes the sign of the Cross over the Lamb on the diskos, then over the chalice, and then over both together, beseeching God that by the power of the Holy Spirit He change the bread offered there into the Body of Christ and the wine into the honourable Blood of Christ. The prayer ends with a triple *Amen*. Reverencing and censing the Body and Blood of Christ before him on the Holy Table, the priest prays that for those that partake thereof They not be unto judgment or condemnation, but for the remission of sins, inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven and unto Life Eternal.

*.... to be continued in the next issue, with “The Commemoration of the Members of the Church in Heaven and on Earth.”*

# THE COMING MONTH

DECEMBER is taken up completely with the celebration of our **Saviour's Nativity in Bethlehem**. The first twenty-four days are part of the fast which prepares us for this celebration. And the last seven days are the days of the Great Feast itself. In addition to this, on the two Sundays which fall before the feast, we have special commemorations of the **Old Testament Forefathers** and the precursors of the incarnate dispensation of the Lord. The day after the feast is kept as the **Synaxis of the All-holy Virgin Mother**, honouring her unique rôle in the mystery of the incarnation. And on the Sunday following the feast day itself, which this year falls within December, we celebrate the **Righteous Joseph the Betrothed of the Mother of God, the holy Apostle James, the Brother of God and first Bishop of Jerusalem, and the holy and just Prophet, King and Psalmist David**. All these commemorations are to bring us to a deeper and more valuable appreciation of the fundamental teaching of our Faith: that God became man and dwelt among us.

Among the Saints we celebrate this month we have the **Holy New Hieromartyr Seraphim, Archbishop of Phanarion and Neochorion**. His parents were named Sophronios and Maria, and he was born in the village of Bizoula in the Agrapha region of Greece. Being pious themselves, they reared their son in piety. He was put to school, and later he took up the monastic life at the Monastery of the Theotokos in Korona, which is called Cold Spring. There he spent many years growing spiritually. After some time, Seraphim was ordained a presbyter at the recommendation of the abbot, upon whose death he was elected to succeed him as head of the monastery. In 1587, the archdiocese of Phanarion and Neochorion was widowed, and Father Seraphim was elected to be the archpastor of that church. As Archbishop, Seraphim was a true shepherd to all the Orthodox Christians in his care, nurturing and caring for them in every possible way. In 1601, the Metropolitan

of Larissa, named Dionysios the Philosopher, a restless soul, mistakenly thought he could expel the Muslim armed forces in the Ioannina area. Consequently he raised an army of ill-equipped and ill-trained villagers and attacked and killed many Muslims in the area. However, the rebellion was savagely suppressed. Moreover, the Muslims not only killed those involved in the rebellion, but took their revenge on many innocent Christian villagers as well. Dionysios himself was captured, tortured, and horribly executed. During these turbulent times, St Seraphim was compelled to go to Phanarion to pay the taxes owed to the Ottomans. Some Muslims, who knew of his good work among the Christians and wished him harm, began plotting among themselves. They said, "This one also was with Dionysios. How has he dared now to come among us, being a traitor?" They seized upon him and demanded him to abandon his Faith and become a Muslim. Seraphim protested his innocence of the accusation brought against him, and told them, "That I should leave my faith to escape death, I would never accept under any circumstance. That I should leave my sweetest Jesus, my God and Creator, especially now when I am suffering unjustly, and hope because of this to receive from my Master more honour!" When the Muslims heard this, they rushed upon Seraphim, took hold of him, and violently dragged him before the *vali* (governor), whose name was Hamuza Bey and repeated their slanderous accusation. At first the *vali* spoke to the Saint mildly and tried to persuade him to apostatize. However, the Archbishop remained steadfast, and the *vali* then ordered that he be beaten mercilessly. They also cut his nose into small pieces. Seraphim endured everything as though suffering no pain, thanking and blessing God. He was then put into prison where he was given no food or drink in an attempt to break him. The next day, he was brought before the *vali* again, and again he remained true to his Faith, for which he was subjected to ferocious tortures. At last, seeing Seraphim hold steadfastly to his Orthodox Christian faith, the *vali* sentenced him to be put to death by being impaled. Even though he had to suffer this most inhumane form of execu-



tion, the torturers ensured in inflicting it upon him that he suffered every indignity and that it was made as painful as possible. Eventually the stake pierced the whole length of his body. Then Seraphim was lifted up even higher for all to see, and his body remained upon the stake longer than usual to serve as a warning to the Orthodox Christians, and to frighten them into submission. However, the martyrdom had the opposite effect. It gave the Christians courage and hope; they thanked God for strengthening the Archbishop to make such a good confession of faith. Subsequently St Seraphim's head was cut off and sent to Phanarion together with the heads of other clergymen who were also executed as a result of the activities of Metropolitan Dionysios. The Christians felt they should recover the Archbishop's head. They found an Albanian Orthodox Christian to whom they promised money if he were to recover the head. The Albanian was successful, but before he could escape entirely, he was detected and pursued by the Turks who gave chase. Afraid of being caught, he threw the head in the River Peneios. Seeing this, the Muslims gave up the pursuit. Days later the head was recovered by fishermen who took it to the Dousikon Monastery. Later the head was brought to the Monastery of Cold Spring, Seraphim's own monastic house. Thus Archbishop Seraphim of Phanarion and Neochorion gained the crown of martyrdom for the love of Jesus Christ, on 4th December, in the year 1601.



“LET US BEWARE of saying anything about ourselves, for this renders us both odious with men and abominable to God. For this reason, the greater the good works we do, the less let us say of ourselves.”

SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, + 407 A.D.

## POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

*“IF YOU have a moment I was wondering if you could explain whether confession is similar to the Roman Catholic approach? What I mean is whether specific sins must be listed before the priest. I would also like to ask whether one must have been baptized into the Orthodox Church before making a confession?” - M.G, Surrey.*

I AM NOT quite sure what anyone understands by a RC confession these days. First I have never been an RC, and secondly things in their denomination seemed to have changed beyond all recognition in the last few years.

From what I understand of their method, our does differ. First they had confessional boxes, purportedly so that the confessor and the one confessing remained unknown to each other, although this must often have been a fiction. In the Orthodox practice, one is advised to have a confessor that one stays with, he is known to you and you are known him, and the process is not simply one of listing sins, being “forgiven” and going away, as if one had been at an ATM! The priest stands with the person confessing before the Gospel Book and Cross, and is both a witness and a guide for the person confessing. Rather than simply listing sins, although that forms part of the process, one describes one’s spiritual ills, and so a better parallel than the ATM is going to a doctor. The priest may ask questions, and may give advice, and may give you an *epitimia*, a rule of some kind which is prescribed as a help for your spiritual cure. At the end he usually reads a prayer of absolution for you, but may not do that waiting for you to fulfil the *epitimea*, or to have overcome some of your spiritual sickness.

There is one confession which is appointed before Baptism. Before one is baptized, one has to make a lifelong confession to the very best of one’s ability. In this case the prayer of absolution is not usually read, because one is absolved and cleansed in the

Baptism itself. Sometimes, people making their way to Orthodoxy can come to ‘confession’ in order to receive help or guidance, but of course in such instances again they cannot receive absolution because they are not yet united to Christ.

Hope this helps; do not worry about asking questions. I may take a time to reply, as I did in this instance, but it is the only way you can learn.



## KIND LETTER FROM GREECE

### ST. PHILARET THE MERCIFUL ORTHODOX WOMEN’S GUILD

Protocol No. 119/2  
Fili, Greece, 03/11/2015

Reverend and beloved-in-Christ, Fr. Alexis: Evlogeite!

We are deeply moved and cannot express in words our profound gratitude to you and those with you who, with such love and generosity, time and again support the work of the St. Philaret the Merciful Guild. To quote the great ancient Greek philosopher Sophocles, exhorting us to cultivate the virtues:

“One word frees us of all the weight and pain in life: that word is love.”

We are wonderstruck at your self-sacrificial love! In these difficult moments through which our country is passing, when thousands of people have been brought to despair by the crisis, we feel you supporting us as true brethren, in that you help to bring comfort and relief to many of our fellow brothers and sisters who are experiencing pain and impoverishment, covering them with your cloak of love.

We pray that the Protector of our Guild, St. Philaret the Merciful, bless your work and ever protect and assist you!

On behalf of the Guild and its members,

President: *Athena Choriatopoulou*

*This letter was sent as Thank-You for the alms we have collected through our **Orthodox Aid Fund** and, during his frequent visits to his flock in this country, have given to **His Grace, Bishop Ambrose** to take to Greece for the “Soup Kitchens” run by our Church there.*



## **NEWS** from the communities in England of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece

### ***TWO HIERARCHAL VISITS***

HIS GRACE, **Bishop Sofronie of Suceava**, presided at the Divine Liturgy at Saint Edward’s Church on Sunday, 19th October / 1st November, the feast of the **Holy Martyr Varus and the Righteous Cleopatra and John**. The Bishop came to England with **Father Deacon Nicolae Capitanu**, who at the end of the Divine Liturgy translated the Bishop’s sermon phrase by phrase for the non-Romanians in our congregation. In his sermon, His Grace spoke of the spiritually destructive nature of the contemporary celebration of Hallowe’en, and mentioned with regret the fate of the people who had recently been killed revelling in that celebration in Bucharest. After the Divine Liturgy, while parishioners were having the Parish Breakfast, His Grace stayed on in church to celebrate a Baptism (*see below*).

HIS GRACE, **Bishop Antonie of Ploiești**, celebrated the Divine Liturgy with us on Sunday, 3rd / 16th November, the feast of the **Five Martyrs of Persia**. Bishop Antonie celebrates according to the Romanian usage which is rather more complex than our usual one, but he was accompanied by **Archdeacon Glicherie of the Monastery at Cucova**, who ably guided us through. After the Liturgy, Bishop Antonie and Fr Glicherie joined us at the Parish Breakfast, and then His Grace, who was that day celebrating the anniversary of his consecration, returned to the church to hear confessions of the Romanian faithful. On both occasions the Brotherhood clergy concelebrated with our Romanian guests, and on both occasions the church was packed to overflowing with worshippers, which was a great joy.

### ***BAPTISM AT SAINT EDWARD'S***

DURING his visit to Brookwood, Bishop Sofronie celebrated the Baptism of **Edward**, the infant son of **Alexandru Rotundu and Maria Bocanet of Cubitt Town, East London**. Edward is named after the heavenly patron of our church, **Saint Edward the Martyr**, and his godparents are **Father Deacon Nicolae Capitanu and Alexandra Rotundu**. After the Mysterion, the family offered light refreshments to all the participants in the Mortuary. May Edward continue in the confession of a godly faith all the days of his life. ***Many Years!***

### ***PARISHIONER'S GOOD INITIATIVE***

ELENA STANBRIDGE, who lives in nearby St John's, between Brookwood and Woking, has started a **collection of clothes for people in Russia and Ukraine**. With regard to Russia, the clothes will be sent to the Church of St John the Fore-

runner in Kuybyshev, and that of the Holy Apostles Peter & Paul in Novosibirsk, where Elena has family connections. **Abbess Alexandra of the Convent of St John of Shanghai in Egorovka, Ukraine**, has offered valuable advice for distribution in that country. We ask parishioners and readers to contribute to this collection, and also to give money to help finance the posting of the clothes. For the latter we have a red collection “tin” which will be on the meal table at the Parish Breakfasts. Please give generously. Clothing may be left at the Brotherhood and we will give it to Elena.

### ***INTERMENTS IN OUR CEMETERY***

IVAN MOJECHOV was laid to rest in Saint Edward’s Cemetery on Friday 7th / 20th November. The funeral was conducted by Ivan’s spiritual father, **Archpriest Maxim Nikolsky of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral, Ennismore Gardens, London**. Ivan is survived by his widow, **Raissa**, who with other family members and friends came down from East London for the interment.

ANTOINE ELIAS was laid to rest here on Wednesday, 12th / 25th November. In the presence of his close family, the funeral was chanted in Arabic by **Archpriest Samir Gholam of the Antiochian Cathedral of St Andrew in Kentish Town, North London**. Antoine, who lived in Woking, was a member of that parish, but many years ago donated to our church a beautiful icon of St Nicolas the Wonderworker.

NINA TOROPOVA was laid to rest here on Thursday, 13th / 26th November, after the funeral chanted by her pastor, **Fr Constantine Litvinenko** of the **Paris Exarchate** (Œcumenical Patriarchate) community in nearby **Guildford**.

May our Saviour show mercy upon His departed servants, Ivan, Antoine and Nina, now and on the day of His dread judgment, and may He grant comfort to the bereaved.

## **WOKING CRIME SUMMIT**

REPRESENTATIVES of our Brotherhood were invited to **Woking Crime Summit**, which took place on 12th November at the **HG Wells Conference & Events Centre** in the town. Fathers Alexis and Niphon attended. The evening was chaired by **Ray Morgan, the Chief Executive of Woking Borough Council**, and the main speaker was **Kevin Hurley, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey**. After the event, in thanking them for the invitation, we felt fully justified in writing: "It appears that police procedures are keeping up with modern trends and that they have improved markedly over the last thirty years. We were also very impressed by Ray Morgan's presentation and his approach to matters."

## **VISITORS**

HEGOUMEN NESTOR, from Vologda, Russia, visited the Brotherhood during the last week in October. He was brought by **Natalia Hagellin**, a member of the parish in Guildford under the Synod of **Archbishop Tikhon**. Father Nestor briefly visited again on the Sunday and was thus able to meet Bishop Sofronie, during his visit here.

TWO FORMER MAYORS OF WOKING, **Councillor Anne Roberts** and **Tina Liddington** visited the Brotherhood on Saturday 7th November, leading a small group of people from **le Plessis Robinson**, France, which is twinned with the borough of Woking. They had visited the main cemetery, and were shown the Shrine Church and Exhibition Room. After refreshments in the Mortuary, they then went on to look at the candle factory and the kitchen garden. Cllr Roberts is fluent in French and was able to help us with translations.

ON the same day, **Father Sebastian Mogirzan from Fălticeni in Romania** visited us, accompanied by his driver, **Catalin Muraru**. He was introduced to our French visitors and given light refreshments. The next day, with the blessing of **Mother Vikentia**, Fr Sebastian celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the **Convent of the Annunciation in London**.

JUST as we were finishing the Parish Breakfast at the Annunciation Convent on Sunday, 22nd November, **Protopresbyter-stavrophore Milun Kostic of the Serbian Orthodox Church**, accompanied by two parishioners, visited the sisters and joined us for the rest of the meal. Afterwards he talked with the sisters while we held our Sunday School lesson in their front room.

ON Thursday, 26th November, **His Grace Bishop Matthew from Kenya** paid us a surprise visit, accompanied by the **Priestmonk Sozomenos of the Saints Constantine and Helena Church in Birmingham** and a layman of that parish.

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## PRACTICAL TIP

ALWAYS we should prepare for confession conscientiously and carefully. A confession ill-prepared and consisting of just a few thoughts because you have to do it before receiving Communion, will not be unto help or salvation and could be unto condemnation. One would not go to a doctor and tell him a couple of your symptoms and expect him to rightly diagnose your condition or profitably advise you. And, in Orthodoxy, we do not have confession as a kind of “wipe-off” exercise. It is part of a therapeutic regime. However, as the Great Feast of the Saviour’s Nativity approaches, exercise even more care and show consideration for the clergy. Make sure that you arrange your confession some time before the feast itself, when you will have more time, and when the priests will not be concerned with a hundred and one other things.