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and God himself. The same dynamic occurs in Genesis 18 (the hospitality of Abraham). The story, as told, allows for the plausible denial that Jacob wrestled with God. But Jacob himself is under no illusion. "I have seen God face-to-face," he says and the story only makes sense if we allow that meaning.

And that brings us to the first problem: how can a man wrestle with God? How can the text suggest that Jacob sees God face-to-face, much less holds him in an unbreakable grip throughout the night? I don't know, but it does.

And this is the striking character of the Biblical witness. What some would dismiss as primitive nonsense, the Bible presents as an unvarnished account. The God of the Christians can not only enter into a wrestling match, He can lose!

Passages such as this should not be taken as some extreme anthropomorphism. They should be taken at face value and allowed to speak the mystery with which they were written. This story was told, and no editor's hand throughout the centuries has ever sought to fix it or make it more palatable.

Of course, the God of Jacob is also the Incarnate God/Man Jesus Christ. He is not only susceptible to wrestling, He is capable of being nailed to a Cross and suspended above the earth.

And this is so much the point. As one who has spent plenty of time in the middle of the night pondering my life, God, and everything else – I can say that those things worth considering are never just vague generalities. I have never wondered how I might love mankind, but I have agonized more than once over how I might love a single person. We never wrestle in general – real wrestling is quite personal, particular and face-to-face.

The spiritual life, rightly lived, is a constant movement towards the particular. It becomes more specific with every moment. Modern religious thought is rife with vague words. It tempts us with generalized associations and abstract

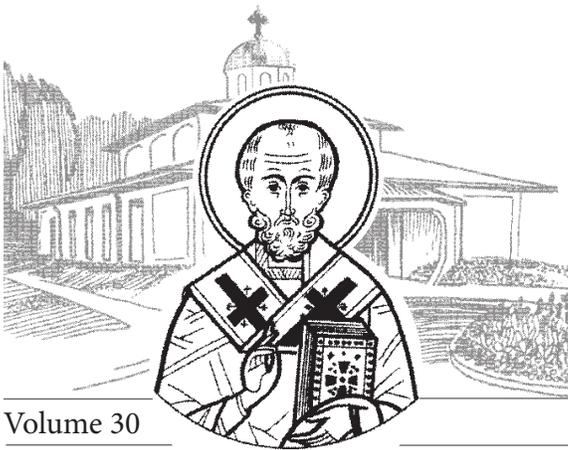
loyalties. At its worst, it marries itself to utility and seeks to "do good" and "help" people – and measures its goodness and help with the yardstick of some vague and noble goal. Utility is the measuring stick of the infernal regions. The generalities of Utilitarianism breed pride. The arrogance of modern man is found in the absurdity of his broad designs: "The War on Poverty." "Take Democracy to the World." "Equality, Fraternity, Liberty." But it is the intricacy and intractability of very specific human persons and their struggles that humble us.

This pattern of action is seen in God Himself. For God, not even a single sparrow falls but He knows it. The hairs of our head are numbered, and He calls us each by name. God cannot be avoided by hiding in the crowd, for He seeks us out and challenges us to wrestle. He waits for us to seize Him and hold Him and demand His blessing. He longs for us to grip Him in such a manner that He can wither a thigh and change our name.

It is specifics that leave us sleepless. Generic Christianity has very few wrestling matches beyond the demands of civility. I recall that my own struggle in becoming Orthodox was deeply driven by its specific demands. "Is this really necessary? Is it not enough to just agree with it and maybe hang a few icons?" But Church is never, properly, a vague generality, a loose associational preference. It is a terrible demand, crushing in its refusal to compromise. Our modern tendency towards generalities, including within the topic of Church, is born of a false set of practices that rob the soul of every edge and boundary. Carried far enough, even God cannot get a good grip on us. Our souls become slippery, able to slip out of every contradiction and inconvenience.

But it is the true God who lies awake at night and troubles the sleep of the anxious and sets the conscience on fire. God is ready to wrestle with us, and even delights Himself in losing.

For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His special treasure. (Ps 135:4)



# Weekly Bulletin

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church

A Community of the Orthodox Church in America

Witnessing to the Apostolic Faith in Lake County for over 42 Years

*Father Andrew Clements*, Pastor

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2016

Number 32

<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Aug 14</b>	<i>8th Sunday after Pentecost / Tone 7 / Forefeast of Dormition / Prophet Micah</i>
		9:30 am Divine Liturgy      Coffee Hour
		5:00 pm Great Vespers & Litya for Dormition / Blessing of flowers
<b>Monday</b>	<b>Aug 15</b>	<i>The Dormition of the Mother of God</i>
		9:30 am Divine Liturgy / Blessing of flowers
<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Aug 20</b>	<i>Prophet Samuel</i>
		4:00 pm Confession
		5:30 pm Great Vespers      Confession
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Aug 21</b>	<i>9th Sunday after Pentecost / Tone 8 / Apostle of the 70, Thaddeus</i>
		Readings: 1 Cor 3:9-17      Matt 14:22-34
		9:30 am Divine Liturgy      Coffee Hour

**ATTENDANCE / STEWARDSHIP / Aug 7**

Operating	\$2,825.00
Uganda Children	53.00
Icons	40.00
Charities	10.00

**COUNCIL MEETING**

Thursday, Aug 18 at 7:00 pm.

**PRAYER CORNER + + + + +**

Eleanor Alexander (Tom's mom), Perry (Capitan), Bess (Chongris grndma), Mary & Bruno, Subdeacon Leonard, Donna, (Fross rltv), Fr Ted Bobosh, Helen Cizmanski (Andy D's mom), Linnea Kaminsky (Matt's mom), Cathy Theophylactos, Ron Bede, Linda Stiscak (Furman sis-n-law), suffering Christians in Ukraine and the Middle East.

**Anniversaries:** Peter & Sharon Georges (8/16), Greg & Diane Kochan (8/18).

**Birthdays:** Rachel Lannon, Claire Falkov (8/14), Cindy Banjoff (8/16), Adam Chongris (8/17), Galina Povozahev (8/20).

**Newborns:** Keegan (Shane & Maryann), Matthew (Michael & Katie), Mason (Matt & Michelle), John (Shawn & Sarah) Nina (Jessica & TJ), Mason (Mark & Christy).

**Expecting:** Chris & Vallery, Vitaly & Luba, Dan & April, Tom & Ellen, Jimmy & Heather, Nick & Lindsey, Bob & Lucinda, Dan & Catherine, Dima & Lea.

## Wrestling with God

by Fr Stephen Freeman

One of the most interesting stories in the Old Testament is found in Genesis 32. There we hear the story of Jacob wrestling with God. Or is it the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel? Jacob had to face his brother Esau the next day. His anxiety comes through even in that ancient account. The text says that Jacob wrestled "with a Man." But this is not the end of the matter. They wrestle throughout the night. Jacob has a grip on the Man and refuses to release him.

"I will not let you go until you bless me!" he says.

The Man injures Jacob, "knocking his hip out of joint" (possibly withering it). But Jacob does not release him. The Man asks, "What is your name?" Jacob answers. And then he is told, "Your name will be 'Israel,' for you have wrestled with God and with man and prevailed."

Jacob asks for the Man's name. "Why do you ask my name?" comes the reply.

And the story concludes by telling us that Jacob named the place, "Peniel," ("Face of God"), "because," he said, "I have seen God face-to-face and my life is preserved."

It is an amazing story. It is not the first time in Genesis that a story shifts between the identity of a man (or angel)

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