



Weekly Bulletin

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church

A Community of the Orthodox Church in America

Witnessing to the Apostolic Faith in Lake County for 50 Years

Father Andrew Clements, Pastor

Volume 37

2023

Number 2

Sunday	Jan 8	<i>30th Sunday after Pentecost / Tone 5 / Sunday after Theophany</i>	
		9:00 am	Church School
		10:00 am	Divine Liturgy / Coffee Hour / Anniversary Presentation
Saturday	Jan 14	<i>Leavetaking of Theophany</i>	
		5:30 pm	Great Vespers
Sunday	Jan 15	<i>31st Sunday after Pentecost / Tone 6 / Venerable Paul of Thebes</i>	
		Readings:	1 Tim 1:15-17 Luke 18:18-27
		9:00 am	Church School
		10:00 am	Divine Liturgy Coffee Hour

ATTENDANCE / STEWARDSHIP / Dec 25

Attendance	140
Operating	\$6,244.00
Maintenance	65.00
OCA Assessments	438.00
Charities	213.00
Christmas Card	90.00
Uganda	100.00

ATTENDANCE / STEWARDSHIP / Jan 1

Attendance	145
Operating	\$3,196.00
Maintenance	87.00
OCA Assessments	1,505.00
Icons	10.00
Charities	88.00
Christmas Card	20.00
Uganda	150.00

PRESENTATION TODAY

Please join us during Coffee Hour for an overview of our 50th Anniversary Celebration. The entire year will be used to mark this milestone in the history of our Parish and this FYI presentation will hopefully help us all participate more fully.

IN OUR PRAYERS

Peter Georges returns to Uganda this week. Please keep him in your prayers.

YOUTH GROUP

Saturday, Jan 14 at 3:00 pm. Calendar says 3:30 pm but we need more time for planned events.

HOUSE BLESSINGS

Please sign up in the Foyer.

PRAYER CORNER + + + + +

Perry (Capitan), Julian, John Clements, Sarah Crivella, Joella (LuAnn D's dghtr), Paris Santone (Debbie C's nephew), Kristin & Cameron Robinson, Anna Como, Evelyn Kontra (Renda frnds), Nick Covelli, David Campbell (Deb's bro), Norma K (Maryann S's frnd), and the suffering Christians in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Birthdays: Tess Lannon, Nicolina Hoover (1/8), Michelle Ray (1/9), Danil Bozhukov (Antinoff) (1/10), Fr Andrew, Renee Kirouac (1/13).

Newborns: Lannon Marie (Jairus & Riley Morton).

Expecting: David & Maria, Scott & Alysse, Mitch & Winnie, Brian & Katya.

Newly Illumined: Edward, Joanna, Joshua, Emmelia, James, Mary & Ruth.

Newly Departed: Gregory Ponomarenko (12/8, Fr A's frnd), Edith (12/24, Scott C's mom).

The Final Destruction of Demons - Holy Baptism

by Fr Steven Freeman

"Final" is not a word you often hear in Christian teaching. Most Christians leave the final things until, well, the End. But this is not the language of the fathers nor of the Church. A good illustration can be found in the Orthodox

Celebrating our 50th Anniversary

service of Holy Baptism. During the blessing of the waters the priest prays:

And grant to [this water] the grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan. Make it the fountain of incorruption, the gift of sanctification, the remission of sins, the remedy of infirmities; the final destruction of demons, unassailable by hostile powers, filled with angelic might. Let those who would ensnare Your creature flee far from it. For we have called upon Your Name, O Lord, and it is wonderful, and glorious, and awesome even to adversaries.

What can it possibly mean to ask that the waters be made “the final destruction of demons”?

The nature of the waters of Baptism reveals the Orthodox understanding of the world. These waters, now in a font, are none other than the waters of the Jordan. They are an incorruptible fountain and all the things we ask for. They are the final destruction of demons because they are nothing other than Christ’s Pascha. The waters of the font are Christ’s death on the Cross and His destruction of Hades. They are the resurrection of the dead.

For this reason St. Paul can say:

Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

The realism of St. Paul’s teaching on Baptism is mystical realism (to coin a phrase). These waters become those waters. This event becomes that event. This time is now that time. Christ’s death now becomes my death. Christ’s resurrection now becomes my resurrection.

How utterly and uselessly weak is the thought that Baptism is merely an obedience to a command given by Christ! The idea that nothing happens in Baptism is both contrary to Scripture and a denial of the very nature of our salvation.

The anti-sacramentalism (and non-sacramentalism) of some Christian groups is among the most unwittingly pernicious of all modern errors. Thought to be an argument about a minor point of doctrine, it is, instead, the collapse of the world into the empty literalism of secularity. In the literalism of the modern world (where a thing is a thing is a thing), nothing is ever more than what is seen. Thus every spiritual reality, every mystery, must be referred elsewhere – generally to the mind of God and the believer. Christianity becomes an ideology and a fantasy. It turns religious believing into a two-storey universe.

The reality of in the Incarnate God was not obvious to those around Him: no surgery would have revealed His Godhood. The proclamation of the Gospel, from its most primitive beginnings (“the Kingdom of God is at hand”), announces the in-breaking of a mystical reality. Many modern theologians misunderstand Christ’s (and St. John the Baptist’s) preaching on the Kingdom to refer to an imminent end of the age. They hear, “The Kingdom of heaven is at hand,” to mean, “the End of the world is near.” Thus

we have protestant theologians creating an “interim ethic” to cover Christian activity in the “in-between” period – between Christ’s first coming and His second. If the coming of the incarnate God into the world did not fundamentally alter something, then the preaching of Jesus was in vain and radically misunderstood by His disciples.

The Gospels presume and proclaim at every turn that in Christ, the Kingdom of God is present. Christ says, “But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Lk 11:20). There is a mystery at work in the presence of the Kingdom. Christ makes statements such as that just quoted, but also frequently says that the Kingdom of God has come near. The Kingdom is a reality and a presence that has both come near us, and come upon us. But in neither case does it simply refer to a later “someday.” The urgency of the proclamation of the Kingdom is not caused by the soon approach of an expected apocalypse. Its preaching is urgent because its coming has already begun!

The sacraments of the Church (indeed the Church itself) should never be reduced to “holy moments” or “instances of miracles” in the life of an otherwise spiritually inert world. If bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, then the Kingdom of God has come upon us! And nothing less.

The sacramental life of the Church is not an aspect of the Church’s life – it is a manifestation of the whole life of the Church. It is, indeed, the very character and nature of the Church’s life. The Church does not have sacraments – the Church is a sacrament. We do not eat sacraments or just participate in the sacraments – we are sacraments. The sacraments reveal the true character of our life in Christ. This is why St. Paul can say:

I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me, etc. (Galatians 2:20)

I am...nevertheless I...yet not I...but Christ.... This is the language of the mystical reality birthed into the world in the Incarnation of Christ. Thus we can say: This is the Body of Christ...nevertheless you see bread...but it is not bread...but Christ’s Body sacrificed for you. This is the Hades of Christ’s death and the Paradise of His resurrection...nevertheless it is the water of Baptism...but it is not water...but Christ’s death and resurrection into which you are baptized.

And so we see the whole world – for the “whole world is sacrament” – in the words of Patriarch Bartholomew. We struggle with language to find a way to say “is...nevertheless...yet not...but is.” This is always the difficulty in expressing the mystery. It is difficult, not because it is less than real, but because of the character and nature of its reality. Modern Christian thought and language that simply dismiss the mystery and postpone its coming, or deny the character of its reality, change the most essential elements of the Christian faith and inadvertently create a new religion.

But we have been taught something different. We have been given the Final Destruction of Demons, the Mystical Supper, the Kingdom of God. Why should we look for something less?