

The Voice



"Their voice has gone out into all the world;

and their proclamation to the ends of the universe."

Nativity of our Lord 2004/05

Issue Four

The Nativity of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ Рождество Господа и Бога и Спаса нашего Иисуса Христа

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

With these words we joyously greet each other, exclaiming that the Eternal God in His love for mankind, came into this world to reunite His creation to Himself.

According to St. Gregory the Theologian, *God, by coming into the world, brought to us two great gifts – united the Divine Nature with man's nature; and man, through grace having become god, is mysteriously indwelt by the Most Holy Trinity.*

Today the fallen world is not forsaken by God. Even though the world and all therein have been separated from God, even though disease and death have taken all of humanity prisoner, even though discord and coldness have hardened the hearts of man, God in His infinite mercy took on our nature in the Christ Child. He came down into the world to raise us up to the heavenly world. In His humility, lying in the cave as a little child, He restores the glory of His creation and makes man to be god. God embraces us, warms our hearts, enlightens our minds and comforts our souls. He reminds us that we are not alone, we are not left to be orphans, but rather we are called to be sons and daughters of the Light; we are invited once again to be holy. And by taking this invitation to holiness, we become filled by the Holy Spirit and embraced by the Most Holy Trinity.

Yes, indeed, all around, still to this day, there is much suffering, discord and hatred in the world. Waves of uncertainty rise up against us through terrible natural disasters, and through wars and conflicts between nations and peoples. And even our own personal difficulties and trials, at times, weaken our faith. But, dear brothers and sisters, today our Lord reminds us that He has not and will never forsake us. He *is always with us, even until the end of the world.* He brings to us light to guide us to salvation and bestows upon us grace to strengthen our faith and pours out to us His love so that we can love each other and Him, all to His Glory, now and ever and unto ages of ages. **Fr. John Vass, Rector**

Troparion – Tone 4

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, Has shone to the world the Light of wisdom! For by it, those who worshipped the stars, Were taught by a Star to adore Thee, The Sun of Righteousness, And to know Thee, the Orient from on High. O Lord, glory to Thee!

Kontakion – Tone 3

Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, And the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One! Angels with shepherds glorify Him! The wise men journey with a star! Since for our sake the Eternal God was born as a Little Child!

Тропарь – глас 4

Рождество Твое Христе Боже наш, возсия мирови свет разума в нем бо звездам служащий, звездою учахуся Тебе кланяться Солнцу Правды, и Тебе ведети с высоты востока; Господи, слава Тебе.

Кондак – глас 3

Дева днесь Пресущественнаго рождает, и земля вертеп Неприступному приносит, ангели с пастырьми славословят, волсви же со звездою путешествуют; нас бо ради родися Отроча младо Превечный Бог.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, was born of the Most Holy Virgin Mary in the city of Bethlehem

during the reign of the emperor Augustus (Octavian). Caesar Augustus decreed that a universal census be made throughout his Empire, which then also included Palestinian Israel. The Jews were accustomed to be counted in the city from where their family came. The Most Holy Virgin and the Righteous Joseph, since they were descended from the house and lineage of King David, had to go to Bethlehem to be counted and taxed.

In Bethlehem they found no room at any of the city's inns. Thus, the God-Man, the Savior of the world, was born in a cave that was used as a stable.

"I behold a strange and most glorious mystery," the Church sings with awe, "Heaven, a Cave; the Virgin the Throne of the Cherubim; the Manger a room, in which Christ, the God Whom nothing can contain is laid." (Irmos of the 9th Ode of the Nativity Canon).

Having given birth to the divine Infant without travail, the Most Holy Virgin "wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger" (Lk 2:7). In the stillness of midnight (Wisdom of Solomon 18:14-15), the proclamation of the birth of the Savior of the world was heard by three shepherds watching their flocks by night.

An angel of the Lord (St. Cyprian says this was Gabriel) came before them and said: "Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2:10-11). The humble shepherds were the first to offer worship to Him Who condescended to assume the form of a humble

servant for the salvation of mankind. Besides the glad tidings to the Bethlehem shepherds, the Nativity of Christ was revealed by a wondrous star to the Magi. St. John Chrysostom and St. Theophylaktos, commenting on St. Matthew's Gospel, say that this was no ordinary star. Rather, it was "a divine and angelic power that appeared in the form of a star." St. Dimitrios of Rostov says it

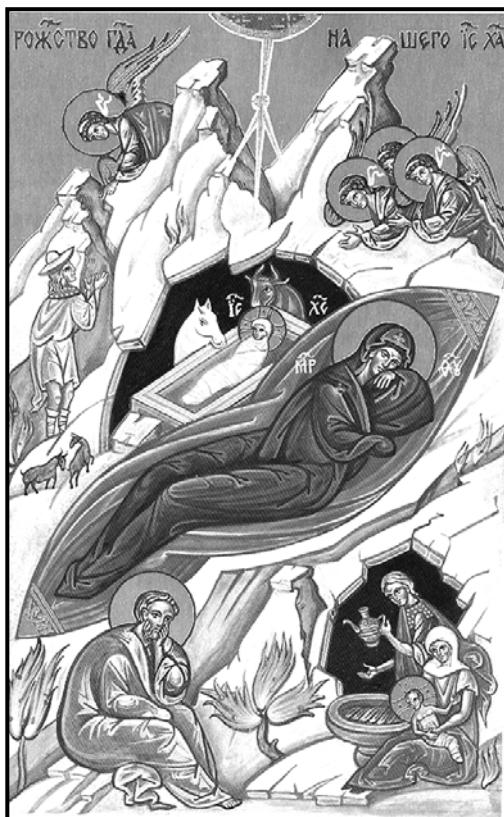
was a "manifestation of divine energy" (Narrative of the Adoration of the Magi). Entering the house where the Infant lay, the Magi "fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented Him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Mt 2:11).

The present Feast, commemorating the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, was established by the Church. Its origin goes back to the time of the Apostles. In the Apostolic Constitutions (Section 3, 13) it says, "Brethren, observe the feast-days; and first of all the Birth of Christ, which you are to celebrate on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month." In another

place it also says, "Celebrate the day of the Nativity of Christ, on which unseen grace is given man by the birth of the Word of God from the Virgin Mary for the salvation of the world."

In the second century St. Clement of Alexandria also indicates that the day of the Nativity of Christ is December 25. In the third century St. Hippolytus of Rome mentions the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, and appoints the Gospel readings for this day from the opening chapters of St. Matthew.

In 302, during the persecution of Christians by Maximian, 20,000 Christians of Nicomedia (December 28) were burned in church on the very Feast of the Nativity of Christ. In that same century, after the persecution when the Church had



received freedom of religion and had become the official religion in the Roman Empire, we find the Feast of the Nativity of Christ observed throughout the entire Church. There is evidence of this in the works of St. Ephraim the Syrian, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. John Chrysostom and other Fathers of the Church of the fourth century.

St. John Chrysostom, in a sermon which he gave in the year 385, points out that the Feast of the Nativity of Christ is ancient, and indeed very ancient. In this same century, at the Cave of Bethlehem, made famous by the Birth of Jesus Christ, the empress St. Helen built a church, which her mighty son Constantine adorned after her death. In the Codex of the emperor Theodosios from 438, and of the emperor Justinian in 535, the universal celebration of the day of the Nativity of Christ was decreed by law. Thus, Nikephoros Kallistos, a writer of the fourteenth century, says in his History that in the sixth century, the emperor Justinian established the celebration of the Nativity of Christ throughout all the world.

During the first three centuries, in the Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Cyprus, the Nativity of Christ was combined together with the Feast of His Baptism on January 6, and called "Theophany" ("Manifestation of God"). This was because of a belief that Christ was baptized on anniversary of His birth, which may be inferred from St. John Chrysostom's sermon on the Nativity of Christ: "it is not the day on which Christ was born which is called Theophany, but rather that day on which He was baptized."

In support of such a view, it is possible to cite the words of the Evangelist Luke who says that "Jesus began to be about thirty years of age" (Lk 3:23) when He was baptized. The joint celebration of the Nativity of Christ and His Theophany continued to the end of the fourth century in cer-

tain Eastern Churches, and until the fifth or sixth century in others.

The present order of services preserves the memory of the ancient joint celebration of the Feasts of the Nativity of Christ and Theophany. On the eve of both Feasts, there is a similar tradition that one should fast until the stars appear. The order of divine services on the eve of both feastdays and the feastdays themselves is the same.

The Nativity of Christ has long been counted as one of the Twelve Great Feasts. It is one of the greatest, most joyful and wondrous events in the history of the world. The angel said to the shepherds, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Then suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, glorifying God and saying: Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Those who heard these things were astonished at what the shepherds told them concerning the Child. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen" (Lk 2:10-20).

Thus the Nativity of Christ, a most profound and extraordinary event, was accompanied by the wondrous tidings proclaimed to the shepherds and to the Magi. This is a cause of universal rejoicing for all mankind, "for the Savior is Born!"

Concurring with the witness of the Gospel, the Fathers of the Church, in their God-inspired writings, describe the Feast of the Nativity of Christ as most profound, and joyous, serving as the basis and foundation for all the other Feasts.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

God Is With Us!

Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko ¹

(submitted by Martha Elliott)

The vigil services of Christmas and Epiphany begin with the chanting of great compline, at the heart of which is the solemn singing of the canticle from the prophet Isaiah.

**God is with us!
Understand all nations,
And submit yourselves,
For God is with us!**

Hear this, even to the farthest bounds of the earth.
Submit yourselves, O mighty ones;
If you rise up again in your might,
You will again be overthrown.
The Lord shall destroy all who take counsel together,
And the word which you speak shall not abide with
you.
For we do not fear your terror,
And we are not troubled.
But we will ascribe holiness to the Lord our God
And Him we will fear.
And if I put my trust in Him
He shall be my sanctification.
I will set my hope on Him
And through Him I shall be saved,
Lo, I and the children whom God has given me.
The people who walked in darkness have seen a
great light.
Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them
has light shined.
For unto us a Child is born,
To us a Son is given.
And the government shall be upon His shoulder,
And of His peace there will be no end.
And His name shall be called the Angel of the Great
Council;
Wonderful; Counselor;
The mighty God, the Everlasting Father;
The Prince of Peace;
The Father of the world to come!
(Is 8:9-10, 17-18,; 9:2, 6-7 LXX)

The point of Isaiah's canticle is not that God is with one particular group of people and not another. The point is rather that God is with all

people in the coming of the promised Messiah. The writings of the prophet himself make this teaching quite clear, as the interpretation of the gospels and the apostolic writings of the Christian New Testament plainly testify.

Behold My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen, in whom My soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the Nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. Thus says God, the Lord who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is My name; My glory I give to no other, nor my praise to graven images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them." (Is 42: 1-9)

Jesus is the chosen servant of God. He is the one anointed with God's Spirit. The very word "Messiah" means the *Anointed One*. He is the light to the nations In Him shall of the gentiles hope. For, as the Lord says through Isaiah, in a line quoted by St. Paul, *I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I.' to a nation that did not call on My name (Is 65:1; Rom 10: 20-21).*

When the Christ appears on earth, God is truly with us, all of us; not only with the Jews but with the Gentiles, not only with the Orthodox Christians and Christians generally but with all

¹Excerpts from Chapter 25, *The Winter Pascha*, St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1984.

people, including those who do not ask for Him and do not seek Him. All peoples and nations are called to understand this and to submit to it, not for God's sake but for their own. It is their honor, not their humiliation. It is their dignity, not their degradation. It is their freedom, not their enslavement. It is their very life.

Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light. (Mt 11:27-30)

This is the message of the "Winter Pascha." God is with us on earth. He is in our very midst as the man Jesus, whose name is Emmanuel. He has revealed His unknowable, inconceivable, ineffable, invisible nature in the most tangible way: as the Child who is born for us, as the Son who is given to us. To understand this and to submit to it is man's greatest glory and joy.

Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, And the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One. Angels with shepherds glorify Him; The wise men journey with a star; Since for our sake the Eternal God was born as a little Child!

(Kontakion of the Feast of the Nativity)

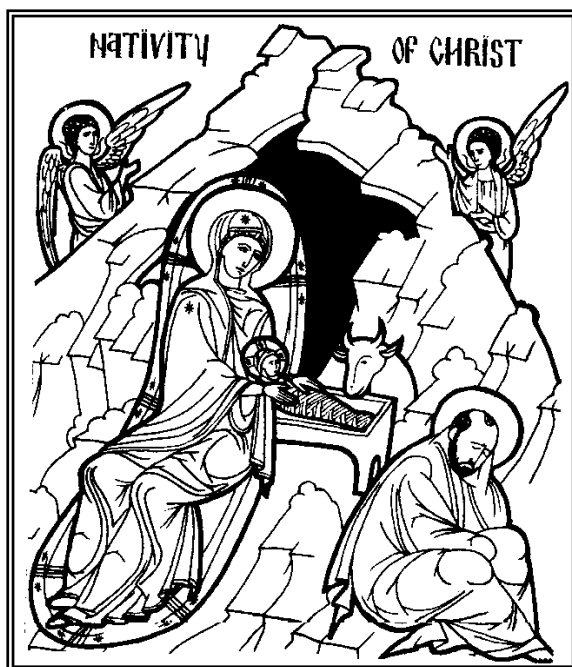
From the Prologue

'And when the fullness of time was come, God sent His only-begotten Son' (Gal. 4:4), to save the human race. And when the ninth month had come after the archangel Gabriel appeared to the most holy Virgin in Nazareth, saying: 'Hail) thou that art highly favoured... thou shalt conceive and bear a son' - at that time a decree went forth from Caesar Augustus that all the inhabitants of the Roman Empire be taxed. In accordance with

this decree, everyone had to go to his own town and there be inscribed. Therefore righteous Joseph came with the most holy Virgin to Bethlehem, the city of David, for they were both of the royal House of David. But, there being a great many people in that small city for the census, Joseph and Mary could not find a lodging in any house, and found shelter in a cave which the shepherds used as a sheepfold. In this cave the most holy Virgin gave birth to the Saviour of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. Bearing Him without pain, as He was conceived without sin of the Holy Spirit and not of man, she herself wrapped Him in swaddling bands, worshipped Him as

God and laid Him in a manger. Then righteous Joseph drew near and worshipped Him as the divine Fruit of a virgin womb. Then the shepherds came in from the fields, directed by an angel of God, and worshipped Him as Messiah and Saviour. The shepherds had heard a multitude of angels singing: *'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill among men'* (Luke 2:14). At that time there also came wise men from the East, led by a wonderful star, bearing their gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh, and

worshipped Him as King of kings, offering Him their gifts (Matt. 2:11). Thus He came into the world Whose coming had been foretold by the prophets and Who was born in the way that they had prophesied: of the most holy Virgin, in the city of Bethlehem, of the lineage of David according to the flesh, at the time when there was no longer in Jerusalem a king of the tribe of Judah, but Herod the stranger was on the throne. After many types and prefigurings, messengers and heralds, prophets and righteous men, wise men and kings, finally He appeared, the Lord of the world and King of kings, to perform the work of the salvation of mankind that could not be performed by His servants. May His be eternal glory and praise! Amen.



The Word Became Flesh

A Sermon by St John of Kronstadt

The Word became flesh; that is, the Son of God, co-eternal with God the Father and with the Holy Spirit, became human – having become incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. O, wondrous, awesome and salvific mystery! The One Who had no beginning took on a beginning according to humanity; the One without flesh assumed flesh. God became man – without ceasing to be God. The Unapproachable One became approachable to all, in the aspect of an humble servant. Why, and for what reason, was there such condescension [shown] on the part of the Creator toward His transgressing creatures – toward humanity which, through an act of its own will had fallen away from God, its Creator? It was by reason of a supreme, inexpressible mercy toward His creation on the part of the Master, Who could not bear to see the entire race of mankind – which, He, in creating, had endowed with wondrous gifts – enslaved by the devil and thus destined for eternal suffering and torment.

And the Word became flesh!...in order to make us earthly beings into heavenly ones, in order to make sinners into saints; in order to raise us up from corruption into incorruption, from earth to heaven; from enslavement to sin and the devil – into the glorious freedom of children of God; from death – into immortality, in order to make us sons of God and to seat us together with Him upon the Throne as His royal children. O, boundless compassion of God! O, inexpressible wisdom of God! O, great wonder, astounding not only the human mind, but the angelic [mind] as well!

Let us glorify God! With the coming of the Son of God in the flesh upon the earth, with His offering Himself up as a sacrifice for the sinful human race, there is given to those who believe the blessing of the Heavenly Father, replacing that curse which had been uttered by God in the beginning; they are adopted and receive the promise of an eternal inheritance of life. To a humanity orphaned by reason of sin, the Heavenly Father returns anew through the mystery of re-birth, that is, through baptism and repentance.

People are freed of the tormenting, death-bearing authority of the devil, of the afflictions of sin and of various passions.

Human nature is deified for the sake of the boundless compassion of the Son of God; and its sins are purified; the defiled are sanctified. The ailing are healed. Upon those in dishonor are boundless honor and glory bestowed. Those in darkness are enlightened by the Divine light of grace and reason.

The human mind is given the rational power of God – we have the mind of Christ (Cor. 2, 16), says the Holy apostle Paul. To the human heart, the heart of Christ is given. The perishable is made immortal. Those naked and wounded by sin and by passions are adorned in Divine glory. Those who hunger and thirst are sated and assuaged by the nourishing and soul-strengthening Word of God and by the most pure Body and Divine Blood of Christ. The inconsolable are consoled. Those ravaged by the devil have been – and continue to be – delivered.

What, then, O, brethren, is required of us in order that we might avail ourselves of all the grace brought unto us from on high by the coming to earth of the Son of God? What is necessary, first of all, is faith in the Son of God, in the Gospel as the salvation-bestowing heavenly teaching; a true repentance of sins and the correction of life and of heart; communion in prayer and in the mysteries [sacraments]; the knowledge and fulfillment of Christ's commandments. Also necessary are the virtues: Christian humility, alms-giving, continence, purity and chastity, simplicity and goodness of heart.

Let us, then, O brothers and sisters, bring these virtues as a gift to the One Who was born for the sake of our salvation – let us bring them in place of the gold, frankincense and myrrh which the Magi brought Him, as to One Who is King, God, and Man, come to die for us. This, from us, shall be the most-pleasing form of sacrifice to God and to the Infant Jesus Christ. Amen.

Translated into English by G. Spruksts, from the Russian text appearing in Chapter 2 of "Solntse Pravdy: O Zhizni i Uchenii Gospoda Nashego, Iisusa Khrista" ["The Sun of Righteousness: On the Life and Teaching of Our Lord, Jesus Christ"], by Protopriest [Saint] Ioann [John] (Sergiev) of Kronstadt, pp. 4-6. English-language translation copyright © 1983, 1996 by The Saint Stefan of Perm' Guild, The Russian Cultural Heritage Society, and the Translator. All rights reserved.

Pure is the present night, in which the Pure One appeared, Who came to purify us! Let our hearing be pure, and the sight of our eyes chaste, and the feeling of the heart holy, and the speech of the mouth sincere!

The present night is the night of reconciliation; therefore, let no one be wroth against his brother and offend him!

This night gave peace to the whole world, and so, let no one threaten. This is the night of the Most Meek One; let no one be cruel!

This is the night of the Humble One; let no one be proud!

Now is the day of joy; let us not take revenge for offences! Now is the day of good will; let us not be harsh. On this day of tranquility, let us not become agitated by anger!

Today God came unto sinners; let not the righteous exalt himself over sinners!

Today the Most Rich One became poor for our sake; let the rich man invite the poor to his table!

Today we received a gift which we did not ask for; let us bestow alms to those who cry out to us and beg!

The present day has opened the door of heaven to our prayers; let us also open our door to those who ask of us forgiveness!

Today the Godhead placed upon Himself the seal of humanity, and humanity has been adorned with the seal of the Godhead!

St. Ephraim the Syrian

From *Children of the Church* Volume 1, Issue 1

A Nativity Sermon

Pope St. Leo the Great (5th century)

Dearly beloved, today our Savior is born; let us rejoice. Sadness should have no place on the birthday of life. The fear of death has been swallowed up; life brings us joy with the promise of eternal happiness.

No one is shut out from this joy; all share the same reason for rejoicing. Our Lord, victor over sin and death, finding no man free from sin, came to free us all. Let the saint rejoice as he sees victory at hand. Let the sinner be glad as he receives the offer of forgiveness. Let the pagan take courage as he is summoned to life.

In the fullness of time, chosen in the unfathomable depths of God's wisdom, the Son of God took for himself our common humanity in order to reconcile it with its Creator. He came to overthrow the devil, the origin of death, in that nature by which he had overthrown mankind.

And so at the birth of our Lord the angels sing in joy: Glory to God in the highest, and they proclaim peace to men of good will as they see the heavenly Jerusalem being built from all the nations of the world. When the angels on high are so exultant at this marvelous work of God's goodness, what joy should it not bring to the lowly hearts of men?

Beloved, let us give thanks to God the Father, through his Son, in the Holy Spirit, because in his great love for us he took pity on us, and when we were dead in our sins he brought us to life with Christ, so that in him we might be a new creation. Let us throw off our old nature and all its ways and, as we have come to birth in Christ, let us renounce the works of the flesh.

Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God's own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition. Bear in mind who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Do not forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of God's kingdom.

Through the sacrament of baptism you have become a temple of the Holy Spirit. Do not drive away so great a guest by evil conduct and become again a slave to the devil, for your liberty was bought by the blood of Christ.

If we approach the Chalice frequently, then we should prepare frequently. And if we prepare frequently, then we include Confession as that integral part of our preparation.

Let us remind ourselves that pious preparation to receive the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord and God Jesus Christ includes:

- ❖ **Attending** evening Divine Services on the eve of our communion;
- ❖ **Frequent Confession**
- ❖ **Fasting** from all drink and food (and smoking!) from midnight of the previous night;
- ❖ **Reading the Canon of Preparation** to receive the Divine Mysteries the night before **and then the Preparatory Prayers Before Communion** in the morning before coming to church. This canon and the prayers are found in your prayer book. Read these prayers in the morning before Divine Services, **not** the newspaper or your emails.
- ❖ **Reading the Prayers of Thanksgiving** after receiving Holy Communion. These are also found in your prayer book.

Important Parish Phone Numbers

Fr. John Vass, Rector: 410-379-8281
Arsen Stepanov, President: 410-248-8844
Lilli Hoffman, Cemetery Mgr: 410-931-1246

St. Nectarios of Aegina teaches us that: *Christianity is a religion of revelation. The Divine reveals its glory only to those who have been perfected through virtue. Christianity teaches perfection through virtue and demands that its followers become holy and perfect. It disapproves of and opposes those who are under the influence of the imagination. He who is truly perfect in virtue becomes through Divine help outside the flesh and the world, and truly enters another, spiritual world; not, however, through the imagination, but through the effulgence of Divine grace. Without grace, without revelation, no man, even the most virtuous, can transcend the flesh and the world.*

"Modern Orthodox Saints, St. Nectarios of Aegina", Dr. Constantine Cavarnos, Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont, Massachusetts., 1981., pp. 154-187

Indulging People with Love...

St. John of Kronstadt

Father John believed in indulging people with love. To indulge people with love means not to judge, not to take revenge, and to endure and forgive.

"Do not confuse man - this image of God - with the evil which is in him, because evil is only his accidental misfortune, a sickness, a devil's dream; but man's essence - the image of God - is always there". This recognition of God in others is the rule he used in relating to others. He also said, "As far as is it possible, be gentle, humble and simple to all, considering yourself, without hypocrisy, to be spiritually below everyone. Pride is the reason for a cold, pompous and insincere manner towards those whom are considered to be below us, or those from whom we hope to derive some benefit. When people speak ill of you and you feel resentment, it means that you are proud, and pride must be eliminated from your heart by worldly dishonor. Therefore, do not resent and hate those who speak ill of you, but try to love them as you would love people who benefit you, and pray for them. Maintain a peaceful and loving disposition towards your brother even if he deprives you of your last penny; show him that, above all, you love God's image in him. However most people are angry when they are deprived even of a very small part of their property!"

The Voice is a parish newsletter-journal of Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church (1723 East Fairmount Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21231). *The Voice* is prepared and distributed by the pastor and parishioners of Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church. Please forward any questions to 410-276-6171.