

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church
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The Second Sunday after Pentecost **(07.07.2024.)**

Matthew 4:18-23

And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him. And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. (KJV)

The Nativity of St. John the Baptist

Luke 1:1-25, 57-68,76,80

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed. There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of

the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless. And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men. ⁷ Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God. And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea. And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him. And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

The present Gospel of St Matthew gives a glimpse of the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter, Andrew, James and John immediately followed Jesus when He called them. The newly called Apostles readily left all to follow Jesus.

Peter, Andrew, James and John were convinced deep within themselves about the appeal of Jesus to leave their occupations and families. Jesus said He would transform them from fishermen to fishers of men.

Jesus' power to transform lives is further evident in the present Gospel, The Gospel states Jesus healed sickness and diseases ultimately changing the lives of those afflicted.

We know from the Epistle to the Hebrews that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today and forever."(Heb.13:8) The Lord Jesus Christ calls each person to follow Him and experience transformation.

The Lord Jesus Christ calls believers willing to be healed of their sicknesses and diseases caused by personal sin and errors of judgment. The Lord Jesus Christ is within immediate reach of each person turning to Him in sincere faith.

God's Holy Church is where to turn to Jesus Christ in complete faith. God's Church nourishes the heart, mind and soul. The Church offers the narrow path to the Heavenly Kingdom and eternal life.

Parents do well to teach their children from an early age about the Lord Jesus Christ. The best way for parents to teach their sons and daughters is by living the life in Christ.

Jesus once said: "My mother and my brethren are those which hear the word of God and do it." (Luke 8:21) The word of God is proclaimed and preached in the Church. Attentive listeners incorporate the word of God in their daily lives.

Serious believers seek each day to live the life in Christ. The hunger in the soul yearns for Christ. The hunger in the soul is satisfied only by the authentic Christ. Worldly alternatives to Jesus Christ fail to bring peace to the heart, mind and soul.

Peter, Andrew, James and John personally heard Jesus preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. Peter, Andrew, James and John actually saw Jesus Christ heal the sick and the suffering.

Jesus' words about the Kingdom are proclaimed at each Divine Liturgy. Serious believers embrace Christ's words deep within their hearts, minds and souls. Serious believers allow Christ's words to transform their lives, Saints of the Church are proof of the power of the Gospel to change lives.

Each day is the beginning of the rest of a person's life. Each moment individuals decide if they are going to follow the narrow path of Jesus Christ. The world is full of temptations to pull persons away from following Christ.

Constantly receiving nourishment in the Church keeps believers strong. Prayer and fasting keep the believer committed to the path to the Heavenly Kingdom. The Holy Spirit is ever-present to guide believers in their journey.

Peter, Andrew, James and John are remembered today for the soundness of their decisions to follow Jesus Christ. Sound decision-making enables believers to travel the path to eternal life.

Jesus Christ provides the hope and the strength for believers to overcome obstacles in life preventing entry into the Heavenly Kingdom. Saints and martyrs have cleared the paths to follow to the Kingdom.

God's Holy Church illumines the path to the Kingdom. Parents bringing their sons and daughters to Church place them on the narrow path. Parents traveling the path to the Kingdom serve as living examples for their sons and daughters.

Each Gospel reading serves to nourish the heart, mind and soul. Each Gospel reading opens the path to the Kingdom. The Gospel unites the believer with Jesus Christ.

Life comes from and exists in Jesus Christ. The Church is where to nourish and live the life in Christ. The Church is the safe-haven against the assaults on the soul. Keeping the mind on Christ keeps the perils away.

Peter, Andrew, James and John are known through the centuries due to their willingness to completely follow Jesus Christ. Each person can follow Jesus Christ completely.

Jesus' teachings provide the instructions for following Him. Jesus' teachings are contained the Holy Scriptures. The Divine teachings are put in the proper context in God's Holy Church.

When the heart, mind and soul are filled with Christ's teachings, the person lives in ways pleasing to Christ. Today is the day to empty life of all that is not of Christ. Today and every day are the days to follow Christ completely.

Today the Church also celebrates the Nativity of St. John the Baptist. The Gospel states: "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; "(Mt. 11:11)

As we determine the course of our future lives, let us be mindful of St. John's preaching of repentance (Mt.3:1-3) and the honor bestowed upon him to Baptize the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's Holy Church is where we work out our salvation. We learn from the lives of the Holy Apostles and the life of St. John the Baptist how to honor and follow Jesus Christ. Let us follow Christ in earnest each day.

**The Second Sunday after Pentecost. The Nativity of St. John the Baptist.
June 24/July 7, 2024. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic**

The Prologue from Ochrid *Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic*

1. THE NATIVITY OF SAINT JOHN THE FORERUNNER AND BAPTIST OF THE LORD

Six months before his appearance in Nazareth to the All-holy Virgin Mary, the great archangel of God, Gabriel, appeared to Zacharias the high priest in the Temple at Jerusalem. Before announcing the miraculous conception by the unwedded virgin [Mary], the archangel announced the miraculous conception by the childless old woman [Elizabeth]. Zacharias did not immediately believe the words of the herald of God, and thus his tongue was bound by dumbness and it remained thus until eight days after the birth of John. On that day the relatives of Zacharias and Elizabeth gathered for the young child's circumcision and naming. When they asked the father what name he wished to give to his son, since he was mute he wrote on a tablet: "John." At that moment his tongue became loosed and he began to speak. The home of Zacharias was on the heights between Bethlehem and Hebron. The news of the appearance of the angel of God to Zacharias was spread throughout all of Israel, as well as that of his dumbness and the loosing of his tongue at the moment when he wrote the name "John." The news concerning this even reached Herod. Therefore, when Herod sent soldiers to slay the children in Bethlehem, he directed men to the hills, to the dwelling place of the family of Zacharias, to kill John also. But Elizabeth promptly hid the child. Enraged at this, King Herod

sent his executioners to Zacharias in the Temple to slay him (for it happened that it was again Zacharias' turn to serve in the Temple of Jerusalem). Zacharias was slain between the court and the temple and his blood coagulated and petrified on the paving stones and remained a perpetual witness against Herod. Elizabeth hid with the child in a cave, where she died soon after. The young child John remained alone in the wilderness under the care of God and His angels.

2. SAINT NICETAS, BISHOP OF REMESIANA

Nicetas was a friend and the contemporary of St. Paulinus of Nola (January 23). It appears that he was a Slav and as such preached the Gospel among the Slavs in the region of Niš and Pirot. The extent of the change that St. Nicetas wrought among the Slavs is best shown in the hymn which St. Paulinus composed about St. Nicetas:

O what a change! And how fortuitous!

The impassible mountains, which once concealed bloodthirsty robbers, Now shelter monks; disciples of peace. Where once wild beasts were common, There are now the faces of angels.

The righteous hide in caves in which evildoers once dwelt.

The episcopal see of Nicetas was Remesiana, which some understand to be Pirot. In addition to his missionary labors, St. Nicetas also wrote several books, including six books on the Faith and a book about a fallen maiden (which roused many to repentance). Saint Nicetas reposed in the Lord in the fifth century. (*)

(*) That Nicetas was a Slav and lived in Pirot is attested to by Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov in his book *Saints of the Southern Slavs*.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS ORENTIUS, PHARNACIUS, EROS, FIRMUS, FIRMINUS, CYRIACUS AND LONGINUS

They were all brothers and Roman soldiers during the reign of Emperor Maximian. When the Romans were waging war against the Scythians beyond the Danube River, St. Orentius came forth to battle with Marathom, the Scythian Goliath, and slew him. Because of this, the entire Roman army offered sacrifices to the gods, but Orentius and his brothers declared that they were Christians and could not offer sacrifices to the deaf and dumb idols. Despite their military merits, they were condemned to exile in the Caspian region. However, along the way, all seven, one after the other, died from hunger and sufferings and took up their habitation in the Kingdom of Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINTE JOHN THE BAPTIST

By a miracle of God John entered the world,

As once did Sarah's and Abraham's Isaac;

By a miracle of God he remained alive

From Herod's bloody knife.
The knife, the young child John, missed,
But John's father it did not miss.
By a miracle of God John sustained himself
For thirty years in the desert.
To a servant of God, angels are shepherds;
To the poor, angels are guardians!
John grew, a loveable lamb,
That he might serve the Lamb of God,
That he might proclaim the bright day before the sun.
The unknown One, he recognized and glorified.
Of the great prophets, he was the last,
And of God's apostles, the beginning.
Like Elias, with God he spoke,
And like an apostle he loved and rebuked.
Of the high priest, wondrous son,
Of the martyrs of God, first-crowned brother.

REFLECTION

One of the differences between the eloquent philosophy of the Greeks [Hellenes] and the Christian Faith is that Greek philosophy can clearly be expressed with words and comprehended by reading, while the Christian Faith cannot be clearly expressed by words, and still less can it be comprehended by reading alone. When you are expounding the Christian Faith, the example of the one who expounds it is indispensable; and for its understanding and acceptance, both reading and the practice of what is read are necessary. When Patriarch Photius read the words of St. Mark the Ascetic on the spiritual life, he noticed a certain lack of clarity in the author, about which he wisely said: "It [unclarity] does not proceed from the obscurity of expression but from the truth which is expressed there; it is better understood by means of practice (rather than by means of words) and cannot be explained by words only. And this," the

great patriarch adds, "is the case not only with these homilies, and not only with this man, but rather with all of those who attempt to expound the ascetic rules and instructions, which are better understood by deeds (in practice)."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous recognition by the Elder Simeon the God-receiver: *And he came by inspiration of the Spirit into the Temple. And when his parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the Law:* (St. Luke 2:27):

1. How this holy elder recognized in the Spirit the helpless Child as Lord and Messiah, while the blinded scribes and priests did not recognize Him, either then or when He worked numerous miracles and revealed unheard-of wisdom;
2. How my soul too, if it has grown old in sin, cannot recognize the Lord.

HOMILY

Against malicious rejoicing

"Rejoice not when your enemy falls; and when he stumbles, let not your heart exult" (Proverbs 24:17).

He is a man; do not rejoice in his fall. He is your brother; let not your heart leap for joy when he stumbles. God created him for life, and God does not rejoice in his fall. And you also, do not rejoice at that which grieves God. When a man falls, God loses; do you rejoice in the loss of your Creator, of your Parent? When the angels weep, do you rejoice?

When your enemy falls, pray to God for him, that God will save him; and give thanks to God that you did not fall in the same manner. You are of the same material, both you and he, like two vessels from the hand of the potter. If one vessel breaks, should the other one smile and rejoice? Behold, the small stone that broke that vessel only waits for someone's hand to raise it to destroy this vessel also. Both vessels are of the same material, and a small stone can destroy a hundred vessels.

When one sheep is lost, should the rest of the flock rejoice? No, they should not. For behold, the shepherd leaves his flock and, being concerned, goes to seek the lost sheep. The shepherd's loss is the flock's loss too. Therefore, do not rejoice when your enemy falls, for your Shepherd and his Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, does not rejoice in his fall.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Good Shepherd, remove malicious joy from our hearts, and in its place plant compassion and brotherly love.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

Services this Week

- **Friday (07.12.2024.)**
 - **The Holy Apostles Peter and Paul**
 - *Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM*
- **3rd Sunday after Pentecost (07.14.2024.)**
 - **Holy and Wonderworker Unmerc. Gosmas and Damian, Martyrs**
 - *Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM*

Donations June 30, 2024

Offering - \$ 1,234.00 Candles - \$66.00 **Dues - \$200.00
Building Fund
Mitchell Saula - \$200**

Large Candles

For Health of Olga Lucas from Sharon & Jim Urban
(2) IMO Devich & Lovrich Families from Tom & Carole McAllister
IMO Christine Bulich, Louis & Mary Daley from Olga Bulich
IMO Charles Bulich from Olga Bulich
IMO of Bartis & Pavich Families from Joe Bartis

UPCOMING EVENTS

Band of Brothers – July 11-13th and 17 – 20th
(Please see Suzette if you are interested in working)

JOIN US FOR



SATURDAY, AUGUST 10TH 2024

NOON TO 6:00 PM

ORCHESTRA SRPSKI SINOVI



Johnstown Slavic Festival – September 20-21st