

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church

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The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (09.24.2023.)

Matthew 25:14-30

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (KJV)

The Sunday before the Exaltation of the Precious Cross

John 3:13-17

And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the

Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (KJV)

God' Holy Church focuses on the Elevation of The Precious and Life-Giving Cross this week. Serious believers are mindful throughout life of Christ's love exemplified by His voluntarily ascending The Cross.

The Cross is the Sign of Victory. The Cross revealed the Lord Jesus Christ as the Conqueror of Death. By His death on The Cross, Jesus Christ conquered death and established hope for eternal life.

Focusing on the message and the power of The Cross guides believers through life from the Baptismal font to departure from this life and beyond.

Eternal life awaits believers living the life pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner keeps the believer mindful of Christ's love on The Cross. The Jesus Prayer offers the hope of forgiveness made possible by Christ on the Cross.

The Jesus Prayer keeps believers united with Christ throughout earthly life and facilitates the repentance necessary for a God-pleasing life. The Jesus Prayer reminds the believer of his or her own sinfulness and the need to repent.

The constant appeal for mercy to Jesus Christ as the Son of God transforms and empowers the believer. Repeating the pleas to Jesus for mercy redirects the believer away from sin.

Unity with and empowerment by the Crucified and Resurrected Jesus Christ enables believers to put sin behind. Jesus Christ within the believer becomes dominant as the believer repents through the love and power of The Cross.

The Holy Mysteries of the Church bring renewal to repentant believers. The Holy Mysteries of Confession, Communion and Holy Unction enable believers to focus on the talents given by God and to apply them in God-pleasing ways.

God's Holy Church provides the Gospel lessons for today about The Precious and Life-Giving Cross and the Parable of the Talents to nourish believers and guide them to repentance and a God-pleasing life.

Only by allowing Jesus Christ to fully live within the heart, mind and soul will the believer reach the heights of the full stature mentioned in the Scriptures. Always be mindful for the goal the Apostle Paul established for the Ephesians.

Holy Apostle Paul expressed the goal relevant for all with these words: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the **stature** of the fulness of Christ." (Eph.4:13)

The Christian life intends constant repentance and responsibly addressing the Crosses of daily life. The Lord Jesus Christ established the example for all believers when He died on The Cross in order to rise from the Tomb.

Believers are to repent, die to the sin and be renewed in Christ by His love and mercy. Conscious and conscientious believers are always aware of personal sin and the need for constant repentance.

Christ's love demonstrated on The Cross empowers and renews believers. Praying The Jesus Prayer, constantly repenting with Christ's help and with unity in Christ brings newness and renewal in life.

The Divine Liturgy is the opportunity and the experience of unity with newness in Christ. Today is the day to repent. Now is the time to say by the power and love of The Cross: "Lord Jesus Christ Son of God have mercy on me a sinner."

The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost. The Sunday before the Elevation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross. Holy Mother Theodora of Alexandria. Venerable Sergius and Herman of Valaam. September 11/24, 2023. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic

Oration on the Nativity of the Holy Theotokos Mary (St. John of Damascus)

1. Come, all nations, every race of men, every language, every age and every rank! Let us joyfully celebrate the nativity of joy for the whole world! For if children of pagans used to mark with every honor the birthdays of demons, who deceive the mind with a false story and obscure the truth, as well as of kings, each offering a gift according to his ability, and [they did] this even while [the objects of devotion] were destroying their lives—by how much more ought we to honor the nativity of the Theotokos, through whom the whole human race has been restored, [and] through whom the pain of our ancestress Eve has been transformed into joy? For whereas the latter heard the divine statement, "In pain you shall bring forth children" (Gen 3.16), the former [heard], "Rejoice, favored one!" (Luke 1.28). The latter [heard], "Your recourse shall be towards your husband!" (Gen 3.17)⁵ and the former, "The Lord is with you!" (Luke 1.28).

What then should we offer to the Mother of the Word other than an oration? Let the whole of creation make festival and sing of the most holy birth-giving of the holy Anna. For she bore for the world an inviolable treasury of blessings. Through her the Creator transformed all nature into a better state by means of humanity. For if a human being stands between mind and matter, since he is the bond between all visible and invisible creation, the creative Word of God, having become unified with the nature of humanity, was unified through it with the whole of creation. Let us then celebrate the dissolution of human sterility since our incapacity for blessings has been dissolved.

2. But why has the Virgin Mother been born from a sterile woman? For that which alone is new under the sun, the culmination of miracles, the way had to be prepared by means of miracles, and what was greater had to advance slowly from what was more humble. And I have another more exalted and divine reason. Nature has been defeated by grace and stands trembling, no longer ready to take the lead. Therefore when the God-bearing Virgin was about to be born from Anna, nature did not dare to anticipate the offshoot of grace; instead it remained without

fruit until grace sprouted its fruit. For it was necessary for her to be the first-born, she who would bear the “Firstborn of all creation” in whom “all things subsist” (Col 1.15,17). O blessed couple, Joachim and Anna, all nature is indebted to you! For through you it has offered a gift to the Creator which is more excellent than all [other] gifts: a holy mother who alone is worthy of the Creator. O most all-blessed loins of Joachim, from which a wholly unblemished seed was sent forth! O renowned womb of Anna, in which slowly, with additions from her, an all-holy infant grew, and once it had taken shape, was born! O belly that contained within itself a living heaven, vaster than the immensity of [all] the heavens! O threshing floor which contained the heap of life-giving grain, since Christ himself declared: “Unless a grain of wheat which falls into the earth dies, it remains just a single grain . . .” (John 12.24). O breasts that suckled her who fed the Feeder of the world! O marvel of marvels and miracle of miracles! For it was necessary that the ineffable and condescending incarnation of God should be prepared by means of miracles. But how shall I advance further? My understanding is confounded, while fear and longing have divided me. My heart quakes and my tongue has been paralysed. I cannot bear my happiness! I am overcome by miracles! I am possessed by longing! Let longing be overcome! Let fear be banished! Let the harp of the Spirit sing, “Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth exult!” (Ps 95[96].11).

3. Today sterile gates are opened and a virginal, divine gate comes forth, from which and through which God (cf. Ezek 44.1–3), who is beyond all existing things, will enter “into the world” (Heb 1.6) “bodily” (Col 2.9), according to Paul who heard ineffable things (cf. 2 Cor 12.4). Today a rod was begotten from the root of Jesse (cf. Isa. 11.1), out of which a divine flower will arise for the world. Today he, who once in ancient times established the firmament out of water and raised it up to the heights, has prepared heaven on earth out of earthly nature. And truly, this [heaven] is much more divine and miraculous than that [firmament]. For the One who at that time prepared the sun, arose from this [earthly nature] as a Sun of righteousness (Mal 4.2). There are two natures, despite the ravings of the Akephaloi! There is one hypostasis, despite the curses of the Nestorians! For the eternal light, which came into existence out of eternal light before the ages, the immaterial and bodiless One, takes a body from this [woman] and comes forth from the bridal chamber as Bridegroom although he is God; and later, having become earthborn, he will rejoice as a giant to run the course of our nature (cf. Ps 18[19].6), to journey through sufferings towards death, to bind the strong man and seize from him his goods (cf. Matt 12.29), that is, our nature, and to lead the wandering sheep back up to the heavenly land (cf. Matt 18.12).

Today the “Son of the carpenter” (Matt 13.55), the universally active Word of him who fashioned all things through him, the strong arm of God the Highest, with the Spirit as his own finger, after sharpening the blunted axe of [our] nature, has prepared for himself a living ladder whose base has been set on earth and whose top [reaches] to heaven itself. God has come to rest in her; the type that Jacob saw was of her (cf. Gen 28.12); God descended without change through her, or in other words, having accommodated himself, he was seen on earth and lived along with humankind (cf. Bar 3.37). For these [events sum up] his descent, his gracious

humility, his life on earth, [and] the knowledge of him that was given to those on earth. The spiritual ladder, the Virgin, has been established on earth, for she had her origin from earth. But her head [was lifted up] to heaven—for every woman’s head is her husband (Eph 5.23)—but since this woman knew no man, God the Father served as her head, having dealings with her through the Holy Spirit and sending forth his own Son and Word, that all-powerful force, as it were, a divine, spiritual seed. For with the Father’s good will, it was not by a natural union but from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary that the Word, without change and in a manner above the laws of nature, became flesh and dwelt among us. For the union of God with humanity comes about through the Holy Spirit. Let anyone who can admit this admit it! (Cf. Matt 19.12). Let anyone who has ears to hear, hear it! (Cf. Luke 8.8). Let us go beyond corporeal matters! Divinity is impassible, O men, and he who formerly begot [his Son] impassibly according to his nature, begets the same Son impassibly a second time in accordance with the dispensation. And David, the ancestor of God, is a witness [to this], saying, “The Lord said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you’ ” (Ps 2.7). But “today” has no place in the begetting [that took place] before the ages, for this was outside of time.

4. Today the gate that looks eastward, through which Christ will come in and go out (cf. Ezek 44.2–3), has been built, and the gate will be closed; inside it is Christ, “the door of the sheep” (John 10.7), “his name is Orient” (Zach 6.12), and through him we have gained access to the Father, who is the source of light. Today breezes have begun to blow, foretelling universal joy. Let the heavens rejoice on high and let the earth exult; let the sea of the world be shaken! (Ps 95[96].11). For an oyster is born in her, the one who will conceive in her womb from the heavenly lightning-flash of divinity and will bear the pearl of great price, Christ. From her the King of glory, putting on the purple [robe] of flesh and having dwelt among them, will proclaim deliverance to the captives. Let nature skip [for joy]: for the ewe-lamb, from whom the Shepherd will clothe the sheep and tear off the tunics of ancient mortality, is born. Let virginity dance, since in accordance with Isaiah, the virgin has been born “who will conceive in her womb and shall bring forth a son and they will call his name Emmanuel” (cf. Isa 7.14), that is, “God is with us.”

“God is with us.” Learn, Nestorians, and be defeated: [learn] that God is with us. He is not a human being, not an ambassador, but he is the Lord himself who will come and save us. “Blessed is he who comes”; “God is the Lord and has appeared to us” (Ps 117[118].26–27). Let us gather for a feast on the nativity of the Theotokos. Rejoice, Anna, “barren one who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who have not been in labor!” (Isa 54.1). Exult, Joachim, since from your daughter “a child has been born for us and given to us,” and “his name is called ‘Messenger of great counsel’ ” (Isa 9.6), [that is to say], of universal salvation, “Mighty God.” Let Nestorius be put to shame and let him place a hand upon his mouth. The child is God; how could she who gave birth to him not be Theotokos? “If one does not confess the holy virgin to be Theotokos, he is separated from divinity.” The oration is not mine and yet it is my oration, for I have received this most theological inheritance from the theologian Father, Gregory.

5. O blessed and wholly undefiled couple, Joachim and Anna! You were known by the fruit of your womb just as the Lord says somewhere, “You will know them by their fruits” (Matt 7.16). Your conduct was pleasing to God and worthy of the one who was born from you. For having conducted yourselves discreetly and piously, you offered up the precious vessel of virginity who was a virgin before giving birth, a virgin during the birth-giving, and a virgin after having given birth; she alone is virgin and ever-virgin; she alone forever remains a virgin in mind and soul and body. It was indeed necessary that virginity, having sprouted forth from discretion should produce the unique and only-begotten Light in bodily form, who begets not, but who is ever begotten, and whose only distinguishing characteristic is to be begotten, with the goodwill of the One who begot him without a body.

O, by how many marvels and by what alliances has this little daughter become a workshop! Offspring of sterility, virginity that bears a child, a mixture of both divinity and humanity, of suffering and impassibility, of life and death, as if [for him] the inferior had been vanquished by the greater in all things! And all these things, O Master, are for the sake of my salvation! You so loved me that you brought about this [salvation], not by means of angels, nor by any creature, but, just as in the first creation, you worked with your own hand [my] regeneration. And so I dance and boast and rejoice; I return again to the source of the miracles and, filled with the stream of happiness, I again pluck the harp of the Spirit and sing a divine hymn of the nativity.

6. O most chaste pair of rational turtle-doves Joachim and Anna! Having kept the law of nature, chastity, you were deemed worthy of things that surpass nature; you have given birth for the world to a Mother of God who knows no husband. Having conducted yourselves piously and blessedly in human nature, you have now given birth to a daughter who surpasses angels and has dominion over the angels. O most beautiful and sweet little daughter! O lily among thorns engendered from a most noble and regal Davidic root! Through you royalty has enriched the priesthood. Through you has come about a change of law and the spirit which was hidden beneath the letter has been revealed, for the dignity of the priesthood has passed from the tribe of Levi to that of David. O rose which has sprung from Judaic thorns and which has filled everything with divine perfume! O daughter of Adam and Mother of God! Blessed are the loins and the womb from which you sprouted forth! Blessed are the arms that carried you and the lips which tasted your pure kisses—the lips only of your parents that you might always be a virgin in every way! Today is the beginning of salvation for the world. “Cry aloud to the Lord, all the earth, praise and exult and sing psalms!” (Ps 97[98].4). Lift up your voice, “Lift it up, fear not!” (Isa 40.9). For a Mother of God, from whom the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world has been pleased to be born, has been born for us in a holy sheepfold.

Skip, mountains, rational natures, reaching up to the height of spiritual contemplation! For the most manifest mountain of the Lord is born, which surpasses and transcends every hill and every mountain, [that is to say], the height of men and of angels, from which Christ the cornerstone (Eph 2.20) was pleased to be cut bodily without hands (cf. Dan 2.34,45); the one

hypostasis which joins together things that were divided—both divinity and humanity, angels and men, those who came from gentiles and the corporeal Israel—[all were joined] into one spiritual Israel. “Mountain of God, rich mountain, curdled mountain, rich mountain, the mountain which God has been pleased to dwell in. The chariot of God is ten-thousandfold, with the divine grace of rejoicing ones” (cf. Ps 36:67[68].16–18), I mean cherubim and seraphim! Summit more holy than Sinai, which is covered not by smoke, nor shadow, nor tempest, nor fearful fire, but by the shining illumination of the all-holy Spirit! For there the Word of God wrote a law on tablets of stone, [using] the Spirit as a finger; but in this [Virgin], the Word himself has been made flesh by [the action of] the Holy Spirit and by her blood, and he has given himself to our nature as the most efficacious medicine of salvation. There it was manna, here the One who gave the sweetness of manna [is contained] in her. Let the celebrated tabernacle which Moses constructed in a desert with all manner of very precious materials, and the [tabernacle] of the patriarch Abraham before that, give way to the living and rational tabernacle of God. For she was the receptacle not just of the activity of God, but essentially of the hypostasis of the Son of God. Let a tabernacle that was entirely covered with gold recognize that it cannot compare with her, along with a golden jar which contained manna, a lampstand, a table, and all the other objects from long ago. For they have been honored as her types, as shadows of a true archetype.

7. Today the Word of God, who makes all things [and] whom the Father emitted from his heart, has fashioned a new book which will be written on by the tongue of God (cf. Ps 44[45].2), as if by a pen which is the Spirit. This [book] was given to a man who knew letters, but who did not read it (cf. Ps 44[45].2; Isa 29.11–12). For Joseph did not know Mary or the power of the mystery itself. O most holy little daughter of Joachim and Anna: you escaped the notice of the powers and principalities and “the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Eph 6.16); you dwelt in the bridal chamber of the Spirit and were preserved intact to become the bride of God and Mother of Son of God by nature! O most holy little daughter: while still carried in your mother’s arms you were a source of fear to all the rebellious powers! O most holy little daughter: you were nourished on breast-milk and surrounded by angels! O little daughter beloved of God, the glory of those who bore you: generation after generation blesses you, as you most truthfully stated! (Cf. Luke 1.48). O little daughter who is worthy of God! The beauty of human nature! The restoration of Eve our first mother—for through your child-bearing, she who fell has been restored! The adornment of women! For if the first Eve fell into transgression and “death entered in” (cf. Rom 5.12; Wis 2.24) through her when she acted with the snake against our first father, yet Mary, obedient to the divine will, deceived the deceitful snake and introduced immortality into the world.

O ever-virginal little daughter who needed no man to conceive! He who has an eternal Father was borne in the womb by you! O earth-born little daughter who carried the Creator in your God-bearing arms! The ages competed as to which one would be exalted by your birth, but God’s will, which had been determined beforehand, defeated the competition of the ages—God having created the ages [in any case]—and the last became first and were in happy possession

of your nativity. Truly you became more precious than the whole of creation. For from you alone the Maker received a share, [that is], the first-fruit of our dough. For his flesh is from your flesh, and his blood is from your blood, and God suckled milk from your breasts, and your lips were united with the lips of God. O incomprehensible and ineffable matters! The God of all things, having known in advance your worth, loved you; and because of this love, he predestined you, and “at the end of times” (1 Pet 1.20) he brought you into being and revealed you as Theotokos, Mother, and Nurse of his own Son and Word.

8. They say therefore that opposites are cures for opposites, but opposites do not come out of opposites. Even if each thing has sprung up as a tissue of opposites, it has sprung from a superfluity [of these] in its source. For just as sin, by bringing about death for me through that which is good, [reveals itself] as sinful to an extreme degree, so does the Cause of good things bring about for us by means of opposites that which has sprung up. “For where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom 5.20). For if we had preserved our first fellowship with God, we would not have been deemed worthy of the greater and more miraculous one. And now, when we were deemed unworthy of the former fellowship since we had not preserved what we had received, we have both found mercy in God’s sympathy and been received yet again, with the result that the fellowship became secure. For he who has received us again is able to preserve undivided unity.

For then the whole world, having fornicated, continued to fornicate (cf. Hos 1.2), and the people of the Lord were led astray “by the spirit of fornication” from the Lord their God (Hos 4.12), who had taken possession of them “with a mighty hand and with a high arm” and led them by means of signs and miracles out of the Pharaoh’s “house of slavery” (cf. Exod 13.14; Deut 4.34; Ps 135[136].12; Jer 39.21), and led them through the Red Sea, and “guided them with a cloud by day and all the night with a light of fire” (Ps 77[78].14). And their heart turned towards Egypt and the people of the Lord became not his people, while he who was merciful became unmerciful, and he who was beloved was no longer loved. It is for this reason that a Virgin is now born as an adversary of the ancestral fornication, and she is given as bride to God and bears the mercy of God. And the people of God, who formerly were not his people, are re-established; he who was merciful became merciful, and he who was beloved came to be loved. For indeed the beloved Son of God, in whom he was well pleased, is born from her!

9. “A luxuriant vine” (Hos 10.1) has sprouted from Anna and bloomed with a cluster of grapes of sweetness, a drink of nectar for those who dwell on earth which wells up into eternal life. Joachim and Anna have sown in themselves [a source] leading to righteousness and harvested a fruit of life. They have illumined in themselves a light of knowledge and have sought out their Lord; and an offspring of righteousness has come to them. Let the earth and children of Zion take courage! “Rejoice in the Lord your God” since “a wilderness has budded”; a barren woman has born her fruit! Joachim and Anna, like spiritual mountains, “have dropped sweetness” (Joel 3.18). Be glad, most blessed Anna, for you have born a female [child]. This female [child] will be Mother of God, gateway of light and source of life, and she will do away with the accusation

against the female sex. “The rich of the people shall supplicate the person” (cf. Ps 44[45].13) of this female. Kings of nations will venerate this female, offering gifts. You will lead this female to God, the Universal King, as if “robed in golden-tasselled garments” (Ps 44[45].14), which are the well-ordered comeliness of her virtues, and adorned in the grace of the Spirit whose glory is within. For whereas the husband who comes from outside represents the glory of every woman, the glory of the Theotokos is from within, [since it is] the fruit of her womb.

O desired and thrice-blessed female! “Blessed are you among woman and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” (Luke 1.42). O female, daughter and mother of the King, daughter of King David and Mother of God, the Universal King. O divine, living image in whom God the Creator has rejoiced, possessing a mind which is governed by God and which is devoted to God alone, whose whole aspiration has been directed towards that which alone is desirable and worthy of love and whose anger is directed only against sin and against him who engendered it, [offering] a life that is better than [human] nature! For you did not live for yourself, just as you were not born for your own sake. Hence you lived for God, on whose account you have come into life, in order that you may assist in the salvation of the whole world, [and] in order that the ancient plan of God for the incarnation of the Word and for our deification may be fulfilled through you. [Your] appetite is to feed on the divine words and to be fattened on them, like “a fruitful olive in the house of God” (Ps 51[52].10), like a “tree planted by the streams of waters” (Ps 1.3; cf. Rev 22.2) of the Spirit, like a tree of life, which gave its fruit at the time predetermined by God, [fruit which is] the incarnate God, the eternal life of all things. You draw on every thought that is nourishing and useful for the soul, but you reject every one that is superfluous and harmful for the soul before even tasting it. Your eyes are “continually before the Lord” (Ps 24[25].15), seeing eternal and unapproachable light (cf. 1 Tim 6.16). Your ears hear the divine words and delight in the harp of the Spirit; through them the Word entered that he might become flesh. Your nostrils are charmed with the scent of the Bridegroom’s ointments, who is himself a divine ointment which is willingly poured out to anoint his own humanity, for “Your name is ointment poured out,” says Scripture (Song 1.2). Your lips praise the Lord and are attached to his lips. Your tongue and throat discern the words of God and are filled with divine sweetness (cf. Ps 118[119].103). Your heart is pure and unblemished, seeing and desiring the unseen God.

A womb in which the Uncontained dwelt and breasts of milk from which God, the little child Jesus, was nourished! Ever-virginal gateway of God! Hands which carried God and knees, a throne that is higher than the cherubim, through which “weak hands and feeble knees” (Isa 35.3) were strengthened! Feet which were guided by the law of God as by a lamp of light, and which run behind him without turning back until they have drawn the beloved One back to the one who loves him. Her whole being is the bridal chamber of the Spirit; her whole being is a city of the living God which “the flowings of the river gladden” (Ps 45[46].5); [that is] floods of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. She is “all fair,” entirely the “companion” of God (cf. Song 4.7; 5.16). For she who was raised above the cherubim and the seraphim, as a transcendent being, was called “companion of God.”

10. O marvel above all marvels! A woman has become higher than the seraphim since God has been seen “made a little less than angels”! (Cf. Ps 8.6). Let the most wise Solomon be silent and let him not say, “There is nothing new under the sun” (cf. Eccl 1.9). O Virgin full of divine grace, holy temple of God which the Spiritual Solomon, Prince of Peace, constructed and inhabited; you are not adorned with gold and lifeless stones, but in place of gold you shine with the Spirit. Instead of precious stones you have Christ, “the pearl above price” (Matt 13.46), the coal of divinity (cf. Isa 6.6–7). Beg that it may touch our lips so that purified, we may praise him together with the Father and the Spirit, crying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts!” (Isa 6.3), one divine nature in three hypostases.

Holy God: who is Father, well pleased in you and in the accomplishment from you of the mystery which he had determined before the ages. Holy, Strong: the Son of God and Only-begotten God, who has brought you forth today as first-born from a barren mother in order that, since he himself is Only-begotten from the Father and “First-born of all creation” (Col 1.15), he might be born from you a virgin mother as only son, “first-born among many brethren” (Rom 8.29), like us since he partook of flesh and blood from you (cf. Heb 2.14). But he did not bring you forth from a father or from a mother alone, in order that to the Only-begotten alone should be reserved [the title] of Only-begotten in every way: for he alone is [181] Only-begotten from the Father alone and alone [born] from a mother alone. Holy Immortal: the all-holy Spirit, who with his own divine dew kept you unharmed from the divine fire. For this is what the bush of Moses hinted at in advance.

11. Hail, sheep-pool, most holy precinct of the Mother of God! Hail, sheep-pool, ancestral abode of the queen! Hail, sheep-pool, which once was the enclosure for Joachim’s sheep but now is the heaven-imitating Church for Christ’s rational flock! Once a year you received a visit by the angel of God, who troubled the water, strengthening and healing one man from the illness that paralysed him (cf. John 5.4), whereas now you contain a multitude of heavenly powers who sing hymns with us to the Mother of God, the source of miracles [and] spring of universal healing. [No longer] do you accept a “ministering angel” (cf. Heb 1.14), but rather “the Angel of Great Counsel” (Isa 9.6), dropping noiselessly onto a fleece as a rain of beneficence (cf. Ps 71[72].6), and upon all nature which was sick and inclined towards corruption, as he restored [it] to health which is free of illness and to life without age. Through him the paralytic [who lay] in you has “leaped like a hart!” (Isa 35.6). Hail, honored sheep-pool, may your grace be multiplied!

Hail, Mary, sweetest little daughter of Anna! For my desire draws me towards you again. How shall I portray your most pious bearing, your robe, your gracious countenance? [You possessed] mature judgement in a youthful body. Your modest dress escaped all softness and delicacy. Your gait was pious and undisturbed, free from foolish ostentation. Your manner was austere, but mixed with gaiety; you were unapproachable by men—a witness to this is the fear that came over you at the unaccustomed address of the angel. [You were] docile and obedient towards your parents, while your humble mind was engaged in the highest contemplation. Your cheerful

speech came forth from a soul that was free of anger. And what other dwelling-place could be worthy of God? All the generations bless you deservedly as chosen glory of the human race. You are the boast of priests, support of emperors, hope of Christians, fertile plant of virginity! For through you the beauty of virginity has been spread abroad. “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Luke 1.42). Those who confess you as Theotokos have been blessed and those who deny you have been cursed!

12. O holy couple, Joachim and Anna, accept from me this birthday oration! O daughter of Joachim and Anna and lady, accept an oration from one who is a sinful servant but who is on fire with love and reverence, and who has clung to you alone as hope of joy, supporter of life, mediator towards your Son, and firm pledge of salvation! May you disperse the burden of my sins and the cloud that overshadows my mind and dissolve my material insensibility! And may you put a stop to my temptations, govern my life in holiness, and lead me by the hand to the blessed state above! May you grant peace to the world and perfect joy and eternal salvation to all the orthodox inhabitants of this city through the prayers of your parents and of the whole body of the Church! Let it be, let it be! “Hail, favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Luke 1.28,42), Jesus Christ, the Son of God. To him be glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit to the infinity of the ages of ages. Amen.

Source: *Wider Than Heaven: Eighth-Century Homilies on the Mother of God* (Grestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008.) (Please refer to this text for extensive footnotes on this Oration.)

Services this Week

- ❖ **Wednesday 09.27.2023. - The Exaltation of the Precious and Life-giving Cross - 09:30 AM Divine Liturgy**
- ❖ **Saturday – 09.30.2023. – Holy Martyrs Faith, Hope and Love with their mother Sophia**
- ❖ **17th Sunday after Pentecost – After Exaltation - 09.24.2023. – 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy**

UPCOMING EVENTS

KOLO SLAVA

Sunday, September 24, 2023

FISH FRY

Friday, October 20, 2023

BASKET PARTY

Sunday, October 29, 2023

Donations August 10, 2023

Offering - \$ 90.00

Donations

- \$100 from Richard and Patti Madzar for the roasting of the lamb for a private dinner, hosted by John Davis for Steve & Carol Purich
- \$100 for Altar Boy Robes in Honor of parents Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Milica Knepp

Donations August 17, 2023

Offering - \$1,451.00 Candles - \$88.00

Large Candles

In Memory of Panie Patty Martinovich from Dan & Dyne Tomak
In Memory of Steve & Stella Baich from Kathy Szmyd
In Memory of Connie Bartis from Kathy Szmyd
In Memory of Irene Martinovich from Dorothy Podolak
In Memory of Lazo & Bosa Vuckovich from Helene Gleason

Please visit our St. Nicholas Web Page <https://stnicholasjohnstown.org>
We have now added a "DONATE" button to make it easier for you to send your donations. Please take a look.

Please join us today for The Kolo Srpska Sestra Slava, The Nativity of the Theotokos for the Blessing of the Slavski kolac and Zito following Divine Liturgy as well as the Turkey Dinner Banquet in the Church Hall. Honored Kuma is Donna Zimmerman. Cost is \$12 for Adults and our children eat free!
