



St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre Orthodox Church

Address: PO Box 134, 108 E Main St, Clinton,
CT 06413-0134

Phone: 860-664-9434

Web: <http://www.stalexischurch.org>

Email: stalexis@ dneoca.org

Fr Steven Hosking

Rector

Phone: 860-866-5802 (Message)

Email: frsteve@stalexischurch.org

Dn Timothy Skuby

Attached

Phone: (808) 341-1813

Email: dntimothy@stalexischurch.org

Services Schedule

Please see our [online calendar](#) for dates and times of Feast Day services.

Bulletin for Sunday, August 29, 2021

Welcome



Jesus Christ taught us to love and serve all people, regardless of their ethnicity or nationality.

To understand that, we need to look no further than to the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Every time we celebrate the Divine

Liturgy, it is offered "on behalf of all, and for all." As Orthodox Christians we stand against

racism and bigotry. All human beings share one common identity as children of God. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatian 3:28)

Members of our Parish Council are:

Joseph Barbera - Council Member at Large
Dori Kuziak - Council Secretary
Carolyn Neiss - Vice President
Marlene Melesko - Council Member at Large
Kyle Hollis - President
Roderick Seurattan - Treasurer

Pastoral Care - General Information

Emergency Sick Calls can be made at any time. Please call Fr Steven at (860) 866-5802, when a family member is admitted to the hospital.

Anointing in Sickness: The Sacrament of Unction is available in Church, the hospital, or your home, for anyone who is sick and suffering, however severe.

Marriages and Baptisms require early planning, scheduling and selections of sponsors (crown bearers or godparents). See Father before booking dates and reception halls!

Funerals are celebrated for practicing Orthodox Christians. Please see Father for details. The Church opposes cremation; we cannot celebrate funerals for cremations.

Announcements

Metropolitan's Visit

I have been in communication with His Beatitude, he has had to reschedule the Assembly for the Archdiocese of Washington for that same weekend that he was tentatively coming to visit us, and therefore will not be able to visit on the weekend of September 18th. No plans have been made to reschedule his visit.

Many Thanks

Thank you to Dori and Matthew Kuziak for coming in over this past week and cleaning the "hall" downstairs. It is now ready for use.

Coffee Hour

I am willing to open up the hall for coffee hour for short periods of time, with the caveat that a through cleaning takes place after each use. We will have a sign up for coffee hour, with the expectation that those who sign up are also responsible for the clean up as well. Of course, any one can volunteer to provide or clean up as they feel so inclined. As with services, I strongly recommend the wearing of masks while inside. We will continue to monitor COVID rates, and will close the downstairs should they climb to 5% positivity.

Outreach Committee Request

The Outreach Committee has contacted Fr. James Parnell from All Saints Church in Hartford and is presently stationed in Djibouti as a Chaplain in the US Army, to request what supplies he may need while deployed. He informed us that he is stationed at a base with a PX and neither he nor his fellow troop members are in need of any supplies or "goodies". He did request that we send supplies to support Caritas Djibouti which is a Catholic orphanage that his camp has an ongoing mission to support. The children are between the ages of newborn to 19 years old. The following supplies are needed and should be brought to church no later than September 19. Any monetary donations will also be used to purchase these supplies.

--Clothing, sandals, shoes for boys & girls (all ages)

--School supplies: Coloring books, pencils/pens, colored pencils, pencil sharpeners, children's reading books

(English, French, Arabic), backpacks, personal dry-erase boards/markers, etc.

--Children's dose medications: Ibuprofen, Acetaminophen, cough syrup, etc.

--First Aid Items: Band aids, antibiotic cream, gauze, ace wraps, hydrogen peroxide, etc.

--Hygiene items: Feminine hygiene products, bar soap, bottled shampoo, body wash

Prayers, Intercessions and Commemorations



Archpriest Dennis,
Archpriest Michael,
Deacon Timothy, Evelyn,
Katheryn, Anne, Aaron,
Veronica, Richard,
Nancy, Susanne, Carol,
Alexander, Gail, Vincent,
Nina, Ellen, Maureen,
Elizabeth, Christopher,
Joshua, Jennifer, Petra,
Olivia, Jessica, Sean,
Sarah, Justin, Valery,
Jason, Dayna, Daniel and

Gregory.

God grant Many Years! To Anastasia Littlefield and Irene Kaiser on the occasion of their birthdays; and to Dn Timothy and Maureen Skuby, to Sarah and Justin Gaulin and to Phyllis Sturtevant and Richard Simon on the occasion of their anniversaries.

Memory Eternal! On the anniversary of His

Beatitude, Archbishop Nikon, on the anniversary of his falling asleep in the Lord.

—

- Pray for: All those confined to hospitals, nursing homes, and their own homes due to illness; for all those who serve in the armed forces; widows, orphans, prisoners, victims of violence, and refugees;
- All those suffering chronic illness, financial hardship, loneliness, addictions, abuse, abandonment and despair; those who are homeless, those who are institutionalized, those who have no one to pray for them;
- All Orthodox seminarians & families; all Orthodox monks and nuns, and all those considering monastic life; all Orthodox missionaries and their families.
- All those who have perished due to hatred, intolerance and pestilence; all those departed this life in the hope of the Resurrection.

—

The Beheading of the Holy Glorious Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist John . Venerable Theodora and her daughter Theopiste (9th c.).
Deposition of the Holy Relics of St. Joseph Samakos the Sanctified (1669). St. Arkadios the Wonderworker, Bishop of Arsinoe, Cyprus (4th c.).

Parish Calendar

Schedule of Services and Events

August 29 to September 6, 2021

Sunday, August 29

Beheading of the Holy and Glorious Prophet,
Forerunner and Baptist John
9:30AM Divine Liturgy

Monday, August 30

Anastasia Littlefield - B
Apodosis of the Feast of the Forerunner
Skuby - A

Tuesday, August 31

The Placing of the Honorable Sash of the
Most Holy Theotokos
Irene Kaiser - B

Wednesday, September 1

+Archbishop Nikon
Church New Year
8:30AM Akathist Praise in God's Creation
6:30PM General Confession

Thursday, September 2

Mammas the Martyr
Voytovich - A

Saturday, September 4

Babylas the Holy Martyr
Gaulin - A
Righteous Priest Aaron
5:30PM Great Vespers

Sunday, September 5

11th Sunday of Matthew
9:30AM Divine Liturgy

Monday, September 6

The Commemoration of the Miracle Wrought
by Archangel Michael in Colossae (Chonae)

Saints and Feasts

August 29

Beheading of the Holy and Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John

The divine Baptist, the Prophet born of a Prophet, the seal of all the Prophets and beginning of the Apostles, the mediator between the Old and New Covenants, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, the God-sent Messenger of the incarnate Messiah, the forerunner of Christ's coming into the world (Esaias 40: 3; Mal. 3: 1); who by many miracles was both conceived and born; who was filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb; who came forth like another Elias the Zealot, whose life in the wilderness and divine zeal for God's Law he imitated: this divine Prophet, after he had preached the baptism of repentance according to God's command; had taught men of low rank and high how they must order their lives; had admonished those whom he baptized and had filled them with the fear of God, teaching them that no one is able to escape the wrath to come if he do not works worthy of repentance; had, through such preaching, prepared their hearts to receive the evangelical teachings of the Savior; and finally, after he had pointed out to the people the very Savior, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, Which taketh away the sin of the world" (Luke

3:2-18; John 1: 29-36), after all this, John sealed with his own blood the truth of his words and was made a sacred victim for the divine Law at the hands of a transgressor.

This was Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee, the son of Herod the Great. This man had a lawful wife, the daughter of Arethas (or Aretas), the King of Arabia (that is, Arabia Petraea, which had the famous Nabatean stone city of Petra as its capital. This is the Aretas mentioned by Saint Paul in II Cor. 11:32). Without any cause, and against every commandment of the Law, he put her away and took to himself Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, to whom Herodias had borne a daughter, Salome. He would not desist from this unlawful union even when John, the preacher of repentance, the bold and austere accuser of the lawless, censured him and told him, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife" (Mark 6: 18). Thus Herod, besides his other unholy acts, added yet this, that he apprehended John and shut him in prison; and perhaps he would have killed him straightway, had he not feared the people, who had extreme reverence for John. Certainly, in the beginning, he himself had great reverence for this just and holy man. But finally, being pierced with the sting of a mad lust for the woman Herodias, he laid his defiled hands on the teacher of purity on the very day he was celebrating his birthday. When Salome, Herodias' daughter, had danced in order to please him and those who were supping with him, he promised her -- with an oath more foolish than any foolishness -- that he would give her anything she asked, even unto the half of his kingdom. And she, consulting with

her mother, straightway asked for the head of John the Baptist in a charger. Hence this transgressor of the Law, preferring his lawless oath above the precepts of the Law, fulfilled this godless promise and filled his loathsome banquet with the blood of the Prophet. So it was that that all-venerable head, revered by the Angels, was given as a prize for an abominable dance, and became the plaything of the dissolute daughter of a debauched mother. As for the body of the divine Baptist, it was taken up by his disciples and placed in a tomb (Mark 6: 21 - 29). Concerning the finding of his holy head, see February 24 and May 25.

August 31

The Placing of the Honorable Sash of the Most Holy Theotokos

Although the historical accounts differ somewhat, the Deposition that is celebrated today took place most likely during the reign of Emperor Arcadius (395-408), when the precious Cincture of the Mother of God was brought from Zela of Cappadocia to Constantinople, and placed in the Church of the Theotokos in the section of Chalcoptatia.

September 01

Ecclesiastical New Year

For the maintenance of their armed forces, the Roman emperors decreed that their subjects in every district should be taxed every year. This same decree was reissued

every fifteen years, since the Roman soldiers were obliged to serve for fifteen years. At the end of each fifteen-year period, an assessment was made of what economic changes had taken place, and a new tax was decreed, which was to be paid over the span of the fifteen years. This imperial decree, which was issued before the season of winter, was named *Indictio*, that is, *Definitio*, or *Order*. This name was adopted by the emperors in Constantinople also. At other times, the latter also used the term *Epinemisis*, that is, *Distribution* (*Dianome*). It is commonly held that Saint Constantine the Great introduced the *Indiction* decrees in A.D. 312, after he beheld the sign of the Cross in heaven and vanquished Maxentius and was proclaimed Emperor in the West. Some, however (and this seems more likely), ascribe the institution of the *Indiction* to Augustus Caesar, three years before the birth of Christ. Those who hold this view offer as proof the papal bull issued in A.D. 781 which is dated thus: *Anno IV, Indictionis LIII* -that is, the fourth year of the fifty-third *Indiction*. From this, we can deduce the aforementioned year (3 B.C.) by multiplying the fifty-two complete *Indictions* by the number of years in each (15), and adding the three years of the fifty-third *Indiction*. There are three types of *Indictions*: 1) That which was introduced in the West, and which is called *Imperial*, or *Caesarean*, or *Constantinian*, and which begins on the 24th of September; 2) The so-called *Papal Indiction*, which begins on the 1st of January; and 3) The *Constantinopolitan*, which was adopted by the Patriarchs of that city after the fall of the Eastern Empire in 1453. This *Indiction* is indicated in their

own hand on the decrees they issue, without the numeration of the fifteen years. This *Indiction* begins on the 1st of September and is observed with special ceremony in the Church. Since the completion of each year takes place, as it were, with the harvest and gathering of the crops into storehouses, and we begin anew from henceforth the sowing of seed in the earth for the production of future crops, September is considered the beginning of the New Year. The Church also keeps festival this day, beseeching God for fair weather, seasonable rains, and an abundance of the fruits of the earth. The Holy Scriptures (Lev. 23:24-5 and Num. 29:1-2) also testify that the people of Israel celebrated the feast of the Blowing of the Trumpets on this day, offering hymns of thanksgiving. In addition to all the aforesaid, on this feast we also commemorate our Saviour's entry into the synagogue in Nazareth, where He was given the book of the Prophet Esaias to read, and He opened it and found the place where it is written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, for which cause He hath anointed Me..." (Luke 4:16-30).

It should be noted that to the present day, the Church has always celebrated the beginning of the New Year on September 1. This was the custom in Constantinople until its fall in 1453 and in Russia until the reign of Peter I. September 1 is still festively celebrated as the New Year at the Patriarchate of Constantinople; among the Jews also the New Year, although reckoned according to a moveable calendar, usually falls in September. The service of the *Menaion* for January 1 is for our Lord's

Circumcision and for the memorial of Saint Basil the Great, without any mention of its being the beginning of a new year.

Hymns of the Day



Tone 1 Troparion (Resurrection)

When the stone had
been sealed by the Jews,
while the soldiers were
guarding Your most pure
body,
You rose on the third

day, O Savior,
granting life to the world.
The powers of heaven therefore cried to You,
O Giver of Life:
“Glory to Your Resurrection, O Christ!
Glory to Your Kingdom!//
Glory to Your dispensation, O Lover of
mankind!”

Tone 2 Troparion (Forerunner)

The memory of the righteous is celebrated
with hymns of praise,
but the Lord’s testimony is sufficient for thee,
O Forerunner.
Thou wast shown in truth to be the most
honorable of the Prophets,
for thou wast deemed worthy to baptize in the
streams of the Jordan Him Whom they
foretold.
Therefore, having suffered for the truth with
joy,
thou didst proclaim to those in hell God Who
appeared in the flesh,
Who takes away the sin of the world,//

and grants us great mercy.

Tone 1 Kontakion (Resurrection)

As God, You rose from the tomb in glory,
raising the world with Yourself.
Human nature praises You as God, for death
has vanished.
Adam exults, O Master!
Eve rejoices, for she is freed from bondage
and cries to You://
“You are the Giver of Resurrection to all, O
Christ!”

Tone 5 Kontakion (Forerunner)

The glorious beheading of the Forerunner
became an act of divine dispensation,
for he preached to those in hell the coming of
the Savior.
Let Herodias lament, for she entreated lawless
murder,
loving not the Law of God, nor eternal life,//
but that which is false and temporal.

Tone 1 Prokeimenon (Resurrection)

Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us /as we
have set our hope on You! (Ps. 32:22)

V. Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise
befits the just! (Ps. 32:1)

Tone 7 Prokeimenon (Forerunner)

The righteous shall rejoice in the Lord / and
shall hope in Him. (Ps. 63:11a)

Communion Hymn

Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him
in the highest! (Ps. 148:1)
The righteous shall be in everlasting
remembrance! He shall not fear evil

tidings! (Ps. 111:6)
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Gospel and Epistle Readings

Epistle Reading

Prokeimenon. 8th Tone. Psalm 18.4,1.

Their voice has gone out into all the earth.
Verse: The heavens declare the glory of God.

The reading is from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 4:9-16.

Brethren, God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the off-scouring of all things. I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

Gospel Reading

The Reading is from Matthew 17:14-23

At that time, a man came up to Jesus and kneeling before him said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; for often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him." And Jesus answered, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me." And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move hence to yonder place,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. But this kind never comes out except by prayer and fasting." As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day."

Wisdom of the Fathers

Once you have begun to seek God with true devotion and with all your heart, then you cannot possibly imagine that you already conform to His will. So long as your conscience reproves you for anything that you have done contrary to nature, you are not yet free: the reproof means that you are

still under trial and have not yet been acquitted. But if you find when you are praying that nothing at all accuses you of evil, then you are free and by God's will have entered into His peace.

St. Isaiah the Anchorite of Egypt

Mitrakos, Thomas. Wisdom of the Divine Philosophers . Orthodox Calendar Company. Kindle Edition.

Beyond the Sermon



HOMILY ON THE FEAST
OF THE BEHEADING
OF ST JOHN, THE
GLORIOUS PROPHET,
FORERUNNER AND
BAPTIST OF THE LORD

St. Justin Popovic

Today is a little Great Friday, a second Great Friday. For today the greatest man among those born of women, John, the Holy Forerunner and Baptiser of the Lord, is murdered. On Great Friday, people murdered God, crucified God. On today's holy great feast, people murdered the greatest of all men. It is not I who chose to use the expression "the greatest." What are my praises of the great and glorious Forerunner of the Lord, whom the Lord praised more than anyone among men, more than any of the apostles, the Angels,

the Prophets, the Righteous Ones, the Sages? For the Lord declared of him: Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist... (Matthew 11: 11). In all Creation, there exists no greater praise.

This is why today is a little Great Friday. Consider: senseless people murder the greatest of the righteous. Is he getting in their way? Yes, he gets between the perverse King Herod and the dissolute Herodias. God's Truth, God's immutable Truth gets in the way of the lawless, gets in the way of poor sinners, gets in the way of everyone stupefied by the various passions. Consider: do not Christ's opponents even today still shout "Crucify Him, Crucify Him!?" Even today, do not those who oppose Christ still demand the head of Jesus of Nazareth? They call for His head, not to mention calling for the head of John the Baptist.

What is this? Could it be that this world has become a madhouse? People do not want God, they do not want the greatest Righteous One in the whole world. Whom do you want? Whom would you prefer? Whom would you set in Christ's stead? With whom would you replace St. John the Baptist? With yourselves?! O moth! O, tiny mortal insects! Yes, when people become maddened by pride, when out of egotistical pride they lose their reason, they have no need of God, they have no need of God's Truth. They declare themselves to be gods. They present their petty, shallow, false likeness of truth as the great and salvific Truth. They declare their shallow, earthly, perishable images of truth to be the greatest of truths: they posit that we do

not need Christ's Truth, that we do not want God's Truth. Yes, people blind in intellect and spirit do not see, and do not want to see, that man, true man, cannot manage without God. Why? Because this world is full of Herods, full of Pharisees. Herods demand the head of John the Baptist, Herods demand the heads of all of the righteous of the world, and Pharisees, the lying scribes, lying sophists of this world, demand the death of Christ, the Incarnate God.

Yes, today's Feast is a second Great Friday. Why? Because there is no greater transgression than that committed on Great Friday and that committed now, when Herod destroys the greatest among those born of women. Why did the Savior exalt the great Saint John the Baptist, as He did no one else? Why? Because, brethren, the Holy Forerunner encompassed within himself, within his person, all of the virtues of Heaven, all of the virtues in all of the Prophets, all of the Apostles, all of the Martyrs, all of the Angels of Heaven, all of the Confessors. Regard: today we glorify the destruction, the beheading of the first Apostle among the Holy Apostles, for the Forerunner of the Lord was the first sent by God to see and to herald to the world the Savior of the world. Long before the Apostle Peter, before the Apostle Nathaniel, before anyone else, he bore witness to and announced God to the world, God Incarnate in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first Apostle to see the Holy Spirit descending from Heaven onto the Lord Jesus, when he baptized Him in the Jordan, announces Him to be the Son of God, the Savior of the world. [John] is also the first

Evangelist among the Evangelists. He first announced to the world, and pointed out, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bearer of all Good News for mankind.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the Good News of Heaven and earth, God's Gospel for men in this world. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." In those few words, the Holy Forerunner expressed the fullness of the Gospels.

Looking toward the East, he said to the entire human race, from Adam to our days, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." The Kingdom of Heaven? Here it is: the Lord Jesus [come] from Heaven. In Him is the Kingdom of Heaven. Looking toward the West, and seeing people drowning in sins and death, he called to them as well, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." He looked to the North and to the South [and saw] - the same people, all slaves to sin, slaves to death, slaves to the devil. To all he announced the glorious, holy and salvific Gospel, "People, repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." He was such an Evangelist, someone possessed of great power!

When the Lord set out to preach His Gospel, to preach with power, He took those words as the beginning and end of His Gospel. From that moment, Jesus began to preach and to declare, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (Matthew 4:17). This is why the Holy Forerunner is the first Evangelist among Christ's Evangelists.

Today, people have come into contact with an Angel in the flesh, an earthly Angel, and a Heavenly man—St. John the Baptist.

It was not only the Old Testament prophet who called the Forerunner the Angel of the Lord, but the Lord Himself said this was an Angel sent to go before Him to prepare the way for Him (cf. Isaiah 40: 3; Matthew 11: 10). Not only a prophet, said the Lord regarding the Baptist, but greater than a prophet—the Angel of the Lord. And people do not want him, and people drive him from this world! Thus, the Holy Forerunner is truly the first Angel in the flesh, the first among those who became the multitude of Angels in the flesh, lamps bringing God's Light, who lived on earth like Angels of Heaven, and were Angels on earth, and in Heaven remained God's people, holy people.

Today we glorify the great feast of the first among the Prophets of the New Testament. He announced to men that the Lord Jesus Christ had appeared to the world not only as the Savior, but as the Enlightener and as the Judge of the world. In his hands were both the hatchet and the spade: on the day of the Dread Judgement, the Lord would clean off the earth's threshing-floor, and would separate the wheat from the chaff, the righteous from the sinners. All of this the great and glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptizer of the Lord had foreseen. Therefore, today we also praise him as the holy New Testament Prophet, killed by the impious, criminal, King Herod.

The Holy Forerunner also received the Lord's witness to the fact that he was the greatest of those born of woman, because he had become the first of all of the Holy Martyrs of the New Testament. See how he suffered for God's truth in this world!

He suffered joyously! In today's principal hymn and prayer to him it is said that he went to his death rejoicing, and that he suffered rejoicing. Thus, he became the first example and inspiration to all of the Holy Martyrs of the New Testament, beginning with St. Stephen the Protomartyr and through today. All of the Holy Martyrs go to their death rejoicing in the Lord Jesus Christ, go to their deaths, knowing that death cannot hold them in its bonds, knowing that death is merely a gate, an open gate through which their holy souls enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. How else, brothers and sisters, can we explain the joy of Holy Great Martyr George's joy while having his body broken: his bones were being broken on the wheel, and he shouted with joy in the Lord, for he could see Him, could see the Angels of God, standing around Him, and the Angels stopping the wheel. See what joy [he experienced] during those awful tortures! And the Holy Great Martyr stands up whole and unharmed before the godless Emperor Diocletian. The first one to reveal that holy joy of martyrdom had been St. John, the Holy Forerunner and Baptizer of the Lord.

Today we also specifically glorify the first Evangelist and Christian Confessor, the first to Confess God in this New Testament world. Consider how fearlessly, openly and directly he confessed God's Truth: O King, it is not right for you to have your brother's wife, your living brother's wife. You have taken your brother's wife away from him. All of the laws of Heaven and earth are against you, and I, I recite these laws of Heaven and earth to you, for it was to do so that I was sent. O King, you cannot have

your brother's wife. Fearless and undaunted, like an immortal lion, like one of the Cherubim in the flesh, he was the first Confessor of Christ's Faith, and he has been followed by multitudes of faces—the world's glorious Confessors of Christ's Faith, Confessors who bear witness and confess before the entire world, before East and West, before North and South, that the Lord Christ is the Sole True God in Heaven and on earth. And this they—the countless multitudes of fearless and undaunted all-conquerors, beginning with the Holy Forerunner and continuing through the present day—do, despite all of the persecution, despite all of the lies of those who strive to rise up against Christ in this world, despite all the heresies, all of the theomachists, and all of the persecutors of Christ. They bear witness to and announce to all the world this Truth: Christ is before all and above all! He is the Sole True God. You, false gods, masks, vile and repulsive masks of false gods, begone! The true God is essential to the human soul in this earthly realm. Who are you self-proclaimed ones? Who? In the graves, in thousands of nets you cast yourselves, and you want to supplant the Lord Christ? How lowly, how impoverished you are! Alas, all of Hell laughs at nothing more than it laughs at you. The demons laugh out loud at you, and you do not hear them; yet we Christians—we hear them.

Yes, the Holy Baptist, was the first Christian Confessor, and there streamed after him, following as after a helmsman, thousands and thousands of glorious Confessors of Christ in this world.

My brethren, a great Mystery is taking place through this Feast, a Mystery like unto threads stretching through and making up a piece of cloth. In today's Gospel reading, you heard the disciples announce to the Savior that the Forerunner has been beheaded. The mouth that announced You to the world has fallen silent, O Lord! What now? Who are we in comparison to Your great Baptist? The Savior is silent. Then something unusual happens. He calls His disciples together, and with them, He goes out to a place in the desert. What is this? Can it be that the Lord is running away, can it be that he is fleeing from Herod? Consider: He, the All-merciful Miracle Worker, looks upon the unfortunate widowed mother, and resurrects her son, someone unknown to anyone but the mother and Himself. Yet here, Lord, Your Forerunner lies dead, destroyed. Why don't You resurrect him? You resurrected the daughter of Jairus, head of the synagogue. Yet here is the one whom You called the greatest among those born of women, beheaded by the malefactor- king. Lord, guard Your Truth, defend Your first Apostle, Your first Martyr, Your first Evangelist, Your first Angel in the flesh, Your first Prophet, Your first Confessor. Resurrect him! Yet the Savior remains silent, and retreats to a desert place to pray to God. Why, O Lord?

Because the Holy Forerunner must also become the first Apostle to Hades, to death's kingdom - to which had departed the souls of all people from Adam to the time of the coming of the Savior into this world. In that kingdom of death called Hades, i.e. the impenetrable place, where no one can see anything, in that kingdom

was to be found everyone: the righteous and the sinners, all of the people of the Old Testament, up to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sin had brought death into the earthly realm, into the world of men, and the kingdom of death became the sole abode for human souls in this world. The Forerunner had to become the Forerunner in Hades as well, in death's kingdom, so that he might preach there as well to the souls of all human beings: Lo, the One whom you have been awaiting, Whom all you Righteous Ones: Moses, Abraham, David, all of the Holy Prophets and Righteous Ones, have been thirsting to see, has come to earth. Lo, He has come to earth as a man, as the Savior, and he is working such signs and wonders as you, all of you taken together, have never seen. His glance heals people of all diseases, His word resurrects everyone from death, His voice drives demons out of those possessed. Truly the Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ has come to earth. And lo, I go before Him to preach to you as well this best of news: He will come down here to us as well. In a little while He will come down, and you will see Him. You will be able to see what kind of human soul He has, One filled with God and shining with infinite light.

The Holy Forerunner appeared in death's kingdom as the first Evangelist, in order to preach the Good News of Christ to all of the souls in the kingdom of death. He appeared as well to all of them as the first Martyr, to show that people will joyously go to their deaths for True God, the Lord Jesus Christ, Savior of the world, until death is defeated and destroyed. They will not fear death, for they will be more powerful than death.

Through his bodily Resurrection, the Lord grants the body victory over death. The glorious Forerunner also entered into the kingdom of death as the Forerunner of all of the true Confessors of Christ in the world, all of the true Prophets in the world, to announce to all of the souls in the kingdom of death: Lo, death is defeated, the demons destroyed, the kingdom of death will be destroyed when, in a little while, the Lord appears here, and you will be led out of this horror and into heavenly joy, into the Kingdom On High.

This was why the Lord remained silent, why he did not resurrect the greatest man among those born of women, for that man was to complete his apostolic, evangelistic, martyric, confessor's spiritual struggle in Hades, in the kingdom of death.

Thus, for us Christians today is like unto Great Friday. Just as for the Savior, the Resurrection follows Great Friday, so the Forerunner joyously dies and enters into death, for he sees the victory over death, and knows that the Lord has prepared for him as well eternal life and resurrection from the dead on the day of the Great Judgment.

When the Lord was crucified, He descended into the nether regions, into Hades, into the kingdom of death, with His human Soul. His Body lay in the tomb, but His Soul, the fullness of his Divinity, descended into death's kingdom. And how astonished must have been all of the human souls in Hades, on seeing God in a human soul, shining with ineffable light, light impossible for a human being to imagine. Who would not come to believe in Him? Who, when He appears

in the kingdom of death so filled with Eternal Truth, Eternal Life, Eternal Justice? He appears as conqueror over death. And as death's kingdom could not hold God Who was in Jesus' soul, as it could not hold God in its hands, it fell apart because of Christ's Divinity, because of His Most-holy Soul, in which was the fullness of God. And the Lord led out of death's kingdom all those who had earlier come to believe the Forerunner, and those who had come to believe in Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, to believe that in truth, He was True God in Heaven and on earth.

The Lord led them out, and led them into the Kingdom of Heaven. This is why the Lord Jesus Christ did not resurrect St. John the Forerunner and Baptizer of Jesus.

Today, in glorifying that great and glorious first Apostle, first Martyr, first Evangelist, Precursor to all true Christians of all time, we bow down before his joyous suffering for Christ's Truth and His Holy Gospel, before him as Apostle and Martyr. Consider, that for already 2,000 years, the One who allowed the lawless king to behead him, has been working countless miracles in the earthly realm, living in it alongside the Lord Jesus Christ. For 2,000 years he has been ceaselessly working miracles for all those who turn to him in prayer.

Brothers and sisters, whenever you are in great sorrow, turn to that first Apostle of Christ, and he will help you with all of your burdens. And should some kind of misfortune happen, turn to that first Evangelist. No matter what bitterness might fill your soul, he will sweeten it with Christ's grace, which he will mystically send

down to your tortured soul from the World on High. And when you find yourself in temptations and horrors of this earthly life, run to him, to the Holy Confessor; tell him what is in your heart, pour out your sorrows and spiritual needs and rest assured that in a mystical, divine manner, he will come down into your soul and will save you, and will deliver you from all temptations and woes. But should you need to suffer for the Lord Jesus Christ in this world: should others attack you on all sides, should atheists and those who oppose Christ want to swallow you up, to destroy you for belonging to Christ, should they want to silence your voice, to stop it from speaking of Christ, then remember that first Martyr, and call out to him: O Holy Martyr, first Martyr of Christ in the Gospels, hurry to my aid! Grant that may I die for the Lord Jesus Christ, leave my body like temporary clothing, and by the path of the Holy Martyrs move to Christ's Kingdom! He will entreat the Lord that you might also join the host of Luminaries. Thus, today's little Great Friday becomes for us the great joy of the Resurrection. Friday is small, but Sunday, the Resurrection, is great—resurrection for all Christians of all time. And for us today: for me, for you, for every Christian living today, today's Great Friday is at the same time the Resurrection, for today we glorify the St. John the Baptist who is eternally alive in the Heavens; [we glorify] his victory over the death appointed to him by Herod, his soaring up into the Heavenly Realm, to be the first after the Mother of God, to stand beside the Lord Jesus Christ. You have seen the icon known as the "Deisis" i.e. "Prayer" icon. In it, the Lord sits on the Throne of Glory, as King

of Heaven. On His right is the Most-holy Mother of God, and on His left, the Holy Forerunner. They pray to Him for the human race.

Oh! May his holy prayers be raised up today and tomorrow, and always, and may they be raised up for us Christians-Serbs, and for all the people on this earth, that the Lord lead all to repentance, that He have mercy upon all, that He save all, that all people brought [to Him] by the glorious Forerunner, might forever glorify the One True God in Heaven and on earth, the Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is due all honor and glory, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Translation from the website of the Church of St. John the Baptist, Washington, D.C.

St. Justin Popovic
9/11/2011