



St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre Orthodox Church

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Services Schedule

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

Bulletin for Sunday, January 12, 2025

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:

Carolyn Neiss- President Greg Jankura - Vice President
Boris Doph - Treasurer. James Ifkovic - Secretary
Sharon Hanson - Member at Large

Luba Martins - Member at Large
Brett Malcolm - Member at Large

Pastoral Care - General Information

Emergency Sick Calls can be made at any time. Please call Fr Steven at (860) 322-2906, 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

House Blessings

Please schedule your house blessings over the next few weeks (throughout the month of January). Simply give Fr Steven a couple of dates and a time will be fixed for anytime of the day as schedules allow. Please don't assume that Fr Steven will simply show up without an invitation. House blessings will be concluded with the Feast of the Presentation (Feb 2nd).

Liturgical Calendars

Calendars are available at the back of the church. We are asking for a donation of \$5

for the calendar. If you would like a planner, I have a few available, these are available gratis.

Presentation on Mother Olga

Next weekend, January 18th, will be the presentation of the newly canonized Olga Michael. I will have a signup sheet at the candle desk for the potluck. Everyone is invited; bring a friend, bring several!

Outreach Ministry

Outreach Ministry would like to thank all who contributed to our Advent project this year. We were able to present over \$1100 in Walmart, Aldi's, TJ Maxx and Big Y gift cards to a local family in need. Your generosity was greatly appreciated.

Prayers, Intercessions and Commemorations



Many years! to Natalie Kurcharski on the occasion of her Name's Day (Tatiana) and to Gail Kuziak on the occasion of her birthday.

Memory Eternal to Victor Kuziak on the anniversary of his repose.

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.

Please let Fr. Steven know via email if you have more names for which to pray.

- Departed: Frank
- Clergy and their families: Fr Sergei B, Fr Vladimir, Matushka Anne,
- Catechumen: Kevin, James
- Individuals and Families: Luba, Suzanne, Rosemary, Daniel & Dayna, Kristen, Charles, Victor, Susan, Gregory
- Birthdays and Name's Days this Month: Gail Kuziak (B-14 Jan), Fr Deacon Timothy (N-22 Jan),
- Anniversaries this Month:
- Expecting and Newborn: Keree, Steve and their unborn child, Katie and Aaron and their unborn child, Steven and Ashley and their unborn child Christopher
- Traveling:
- Sick and those in distress: Thomas, Sheri, Joanna, Joshua, Remy, Stormy,

- Scott, Anne, Noah, Nancy, Cathy, Joe, Gail Galena, Sophia, Gregory, Tomas, Nancy, Nicholas, Carol, Marlene

Today's commemorated feasts and saints

29th SUNDAY AFTER

PENTECOST — Tone 4. Afterfeast of the Theophany. Sunday after

Theophany. Martyr Tatiana of Rome and those who suffered with her (226-235). Ven. Martinian, Abbot of Belozersk (1483). Martyr Mertius of Mauretania (284-305). Martyr Peter Apselemus of Palestine (309-310). Ven. Eupraxia of Tabenna, in Egypt (393).

- Again we pray for those who have lost their lives because of the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East: that the Lord our God may look upon them with mercy, and give them rest where there is neither sickness, or sorrow, but life everlasting.
- Again we pray for mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, for those who are suffering, wounded, grieving, or displaced because of the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East.
- Again we pray for a cessation of the hostilities against Ukraine and the Middle East, and that reconciliation and peace will flourish there, we pray thee, hearken and have mercy.

Parish Calendar

St Alexis Parish

January 12 to January 20, 2025

Sunday, January 12

St. Tatiana
Sunday after Epiphany
9:30AM Divine Liturgy

Monday, January 13

Afterfeast of the Theophany of Our Lord
and Saviour Jesus Christ
8:00AM Video Consult with Anita Gallegos

Tuesday, January 14

Leavetaking of the Theophany of Our Lord
and Saviour Jesus Christ
Gail Kuziak
Stephen Wexell
8:30AM Matins

Wednesday, January 15

Paul of Thebes

Thursday, January 16

Veneration of Apostle Peter's Precious
Chains
8:30AM Matins

Friday, January 17

Anthony the Great
8:30AM Akathist to St Anthony the Great

Saturday, January 18

Athanasios and Cyril, Patriarchs of
Alexandria
Repose of Victor Kuziak
4:30PM Presentation of St Olga Michael
(part 1)
5:30PM Great Vespers
6:30PM Potluck and Presentation (part 2)

Sunday, January 19

12th Sunday of Luke

Sanctity of Life
9:30AM Divine Liturgy

Monday, January 20

Righteous Euthymius the Great

Saints and Feasts

January 12

Tatiana the Martyr of Rome

Saint Tatiana was the daughter of a most distinguished consul of Rome. She became a deaconess of the Church, and for her confession of the Faith of Christ, she endured many torments. As she was suffering, angels punished her tormentors with the same torments they inflicted on her, until they cried out that they could no longer endure the scourges invisibly brought upon them. She was beheaded during the reign of Alexander Severus (111-135).

January 13

Hilary of Poitiers

The holy Hierarch Hilary was born of pagan parents in Gaul, and was trained in philosophy and rhetoric. At a time when paganism was still strong in Gaul, Saint Hilary understood the falsehood of polytheism, and became a Christian, and a great defender of his new Faith. About the year 350 he was ordained Bishop of Poitiers, when Arles and Milan were in the

hands of the Arians and the Arian Constantius was sole Emperor. Like his contemporary Saint Athanasius, Saint Hilary's episcopate was one long struggle against the Arians. As bishop of Poitiers, Saint Hilary foresaw the future greatness of Martin (see Nov. 12), and attached him to himself. In 355, when required to agree to the condemnation of Saint Athanasius passed by the Council of Milan, Hilary wrote an epistle to Constantius convicting the wrongs done by the Arians and requesting, among other things, the restoration of the Orthodox bishops, including Athanasius. For this, Hilary was banished to Asia Minor, where he wrote his greatest work, *On the Trinity*. Saint Hilary returned to his see in 360, where Saint Martin sought him out again. It was this time that Saint Hilary blessed Martin to found a monastery near Poitiers, where Martin remained until being consecrated Bishop of Tours in 371. In his last years, Saint Hilary, strove for the deposition of Auxentius, the Arian Bishop of Milan, but by affecting an Orthodox confession Auxentius retained his see. Saint Hilary reposed in peace about the year 368. Auxentius died in 374 and was succeeded by Saint Ambrose, who continued Saint Hilary's battle against Arianism.

January 14

The Holy Fathers slain at Sinai and Raitho

As for the holy Martyrs of Sinai and Raithu, those of Sinai contested during the reign of Diocletian, about the year 296; those of Raithu were slain about the middle of the fifth century. On both occasions, the perpetrators of these massacres were a barbarian tribe called Blemmyes, from the parts of Arabia and Egypt.

Because of the Apodosis of the Feast of Holy Theophany also on the 14th of January, the liturgical services to the Holy Fathers slain at Sinai and Raitho are transferred to January 13th.

January 14

Nina of Georgia

The holy virgin Nina was from Cappadocia. According to some, her father Zabulon was a friend of the holy Great Martyr George, whose father was a Cappadocian. The conversion of Georgia by Saint Nina is reported in the Church histories of Rufinus, Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret: Rufinus, writing less than a hundred years after Saint Nina, said that he heard the history in Jerusalem from a Georgian Prince named Bacurius. Saint Nina was taken captive by the Georgians (whom the Greek accounts call Iberians), and while in captivity she lived a very devout life of sobriety and virtue, praying unceasingly night and day; this drew the attention of the Georgians, and to all who asked her about her way of life, she preached the dispensation of Christ. When she healed by her prayer a certain woman's sick child, whom no one

else had been able to help, the report of her came to the ears of the Queen of Georgia, who was herself gravely afflicted with an incurable malady. She asked that the captive women be brought to her, but Saint Nina declined out of modesty, so the Queen commanded them to carry her to Nina. Saint Nina healed her immediately, and the Queen returned home in joy. When she extolled Nina and her faith to the king, he gave her no heed, although she mentioned it to him often. But while hunting in the forest, he was shrouded with an impenetrable darkness in which he lost his way, became separated from his men, and fell into despair; he made a vow that if Christ should deliver him, he would worship him alone. The light of day straightway shone again, and the king fulfilled his vow. He and the Queen were instructed in the Faith by Saint Nina, and they with the whole Georgian nation became Christ's. The King also sent an embassy to Saint Constantine the Great, informing him of their conversion, and requesting that priests be sent to Georgia. Saint Nina reposed in peace in about the year 335. The above-mentioned Church historians speak of her without calling her Nina. She is celebrated in the Roman Martyrology on December 15 under the name Christina.

Because of the Apodosis of the Feast of Holy Theophany also on the 14th of January, the liturgical services to Saint Nina are transferred to January 13th.

January 15

Paul of Thebes

Saint Paul, first among hermits, was born about 227 in the Thebaid of Egypt. In 250 he fled into the wilderness because of the persecution raging at that time under Decius. Having lived a solitary life in a certain cave for ninety-one years, he reposed in 341, at the age of 114, and was buried by Anthony the Great, who had been directed thither by God several days before the Saint's repose.

January 16

Veneration of Apostle Peter's Precious Chains

Herod Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the Great and king of the Jews, grew wroth against the Church of Christ, and slew James, the brother of John the Evangelist. Seeing that this pleased the Jews, he took Peter also into custody and locked him up in prison, intending to keep him there until after the feast of the Passover, so that he could win the favour of the people by presenting him to them as a victim. But the Apostle was saved when he was miraculously set free by an Angel (Acts 12:1-19). The chains wherewith the Apostle was bound received from his most sacred body the grace of sanctification and healing, which is bestowed upon the faithful who draw nigh with faith.

That such sacred treasures work wonders and many healings is witnessed by the divine Scripture, where it speaks

concerning Paul, saying that the Christians in Ephesus had such reverence for him, that his handkerchiefs and aprons, taken up with much reverence, healed the sick of their maladies: "So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them" (Acts 19:12). But not only the Apostles' clothing (which certainly touched the bodies of the sick), but even their shadow alone performed healings. On beholding this, people put their sick on stretchers and beds and brought them out into the streets that, when Peter passed by, his shadow "might overshadow some of them"(Acts 5:15). From this the Orthodox Catholic Church has learned to show reverence and piety not only to the relics of their bodies, but also in the clothing of God's Saints.

January 17

Anthony the Great

Saint Anthony, the Father of monks, was born in Egypt in 251 of pious parents who departed this life while he was yet young. On hearing the words of the Gospel: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor" (Matt. 19:21), he immediately put it into action. Distributing to the poor all he had, and fleeing from all the turmoil of the world, he departed to the desert. The manifold temptations he endured continually for the span of twenty years are incredible. His ascetic struggles by day and by night, whereby he mortified the uprisings of the passions and attained

to the height of dispassion, surpass the bounds of nature; and the report of his deeds of virtue drew such a multitude to follow him that the desert was transformed into a city, while he became, so to speak, the governor, lawgiver, and master-trainer of all the citizens of this newly-formed city.

The cities of the world also enjoyed the fruit of his virtue. When the Christians were being persecuted and put to death under Maximinus in 312, he hastened to their aid and consolation. When the Church was troubled by the Arians, he went with zeal to Alexandria in 335 and struggled against them in behalf of Orthodoxy. During this time, by the grace of his words, he also turned many unbelievers to Christ.

Saint Anthony began his ascetic life outside his village of Coma in Upper Egypt, studying the ways of the ascetics and holy men there, and perfecting himself in the virtues of each until he surpassed them all. Desiring to increase his labors, he departed into the desert, and finding an abandoned fortress in the mountain, he made his dwelling in it, training himself in extreme fasting, unceasing prayer, and fierce conflicts with the demons. Here he remained, as mentioned above, about twenty years. Saint Athanasius the Great, who knew him personally and wrote his life, says that he came forth from that fortress "initiated in the mysteries and filled with the Spirit of God." Afterwards, because of the press of the faithful, who deprived him of his solitude, he was enlightened by God to journey with certain Bedouins, until he came to a mountain in the desert near the Red Sea, where he passed the remaining

part of his life.

Saint Athanasius says of him that "his countenance had a great and wonderful grace. This gift also he had from the Saviour. For if he were present in a great company of monks, and any one who did not know him previously wished to see him, immediately coming forward he passed by the rest, and hurried to Anthony, as though attracted by his appearance. Yet neither in height nor breadth was he conspicuous above others, but in the serenity of his manner and the purity of his soul." So Passing his life, and becoming an example of virtue and a rule for monastics, he reposed on January 17 in the year 356, having lived altogether some 105 years.

January 18

Athanasios the Great and Cyril, Patriarchs of Alexandria

In the half-century after the First Ecumenical Council held in Nicea in 325, if there was one man whom the Arians feared and hated more intensely than any other, as being able to lay bare the whole error of their teaching, and to marshal, even from exile or hiding, the beleaguered forces of the Orthodox, it was Saint Athanasios the Great. This blazing lamp of Orthodoxy, which imperial power and heretics' plots could not quench when he shone upon the lampstand, nor find when he was hid by the people and monks of Egypt, was born in Alexandria about the year 296. He received an excellent training in Greek letters

and especially in the sacred Scriptures, of which he shows an exceptional knowledge in his writings. Even as a young man he had a remarkable depth of theological understanding; he was only about twenty years old when he wrote his treatise "On the Incarnation." Saint Alexander, the Archbishop of Alexandria, brought him up in piety, ordained him his deacon, and after deposing Arius for his blasphemy against the Divinity of the Son of God, took Athanasios to the First Council in Nicea in 325. Saint Athanasios was to spend the remainder of his life laboring in defense of this Holy Council. In 326, before his death, Alexander appointed Athanasios his successor.

In 325, Arius had been condemned by the Council of Nicea; yet through his hypocritical confession of Orthodox belief, Saint Constantine the Great was persuaded by Arius's supporters that he should be received back into the communion of the Church. But Athanasios, knowing well the perverseness of his mind, and the disease of heresy lurking in his heart, refused communion with Arius. The heresiarch's followers then began framing false charges against Athanasios. Finally Saint Constantine the Great, misled by grave charges of the Saint's misconduct (which were completely false), had him exiled to Tiberius (Treves) in Gaul in 336. When Saint Constantine was succeeded by his three sons Constantine II, Constans, and Constantius, in 337, Saint Athanasios returned to Alexandria in triumph. But his enemies found an ally in Constantius, Emperor of the East, and he spent a second

exile in Rome. It was ended when Constans prevailed with threats upon his brother Constantius to restore Athanasios (see also Nov. 6). For ten years Saint Athanasios strengthened Orthodoxy throughout Egypt, visiting the whole country and encouraging all: clergy, monastics, and lay folk, being loved by all as a father. After Constans's death in 350, Constantius became sole Emperor, and Athanasios was again in danger. On the evening of February 8, 356, General Syrianus with more than five thousand soldiers surrounded the church in which Athanasios was serving, and broke open the doors. Athanasios's clergy begged him to leave, but the good shepherd commanded that all the flock should withdraw first; and only when he was assured of their safety, he also, protected by divine grace, passed through the midst of the soldiers and disappeared into the deserts of Egypt, where for some six years he eluded the soldiers and spies sent after him.

When Julian the Apostate succeeded Constantius in 361, Athanasios returned again, but only for a few months. Because Athanasios had converted many pagans, and the priests of the idols in Egypt wrote to Julian that if Athanasios remained, idolatry would perish in Egypt, the heathen Emperor ordered not Athanasios's exile, but his death. Athanasios took a ship up the Nile. When he learned that his imperial pursuers were following him, he had his men turn back, and as his boat passed that of his pursuers, they asked him if he had seen Athanasios. "He is not far," he answered. After returning to Alexandria for a while,

he fled again to the Thebaid until Julian's death in 363. Saint Athanasios suffered his fifth and last exile under Valens in 365, which only lasted four months because Valens, fearing a sedition among the Egyptians for their beloved Archbishop, revoked his edict in February, 366.

The great Athanasios passed the remaining seven years of his life in peace. Of his fifty-seven years as Patriarch, he had spent some seventeen in exiles. Shining from the height of his throne like a radiant evening star, and enlightening the Orthodox with the brilliance of his words for yet a little while, this much-suffering champion inclined toward the sunset of his life, and in the year 373 took his rest from his lengthy sufferings, but not before another luminary of the truth -- Basil the Great -- had risen in the East, being consecrated Archbishop of Caesarea in 370. Besides all of his other achievements, Saint Athanasios wrote the life of Saint Anthony the Great, with whom he spent time in his youth; ordained Saint Frumentius first Bishop of Ethiopia; and in his Paschal Encyclical for the year 367 set forth the books of the Old and New Testaments accepted by the Church as canonical. Saint Gregory the Theologian, in his "Oration On the Great Athanasios", said that he was "Angelic in appearance, more angelic in mind; ... rebuking with the tenderness of a father, praising with the dignity of a ruler ... Everything was harmonious, as an air upon a single lyre, and in the same key; his life, his teaching, his struggles, his dangers, his return, and his conduct after his return ... he treated so mildly and gently those who had injured

him, that even they themselves, if I may say so, did not find his restoration distasteful."

Saint Cyril was also from Alexandria, born about the year 376. He was the nephew of Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, who also instructed the Saint in his youth. Having first spent much time with the monks in Nitria, he later became the successor to his uncle's throne in 412. In 429, when Cyril heard tidings of the teachings of the new Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius, he began attempting through private letters to bring Nestorius to renounce his heretical teaching about the Incarnation. When the heresiarch did not repent, Saint Cyril, together with Pope Celestine of Rome, led the Orthodox opposition to his error. Saint Cyril presided over the Third Ecumenical Council of the 200 Holy Fathers in the year 431, who gathered in Ephesus under Saint Theodosius the Younger. At this Council, by his most wise words, he put to shame and convicted the impious doctrine of Nestorius, who, although he was in town, refused to appear before Cyril. Saint Cyril, besides overthrowing the error of Nestorius, has left to the Church full commentaries on the Gospels of Luke and John. Having shepherded the Church of Christ for thirty-two years, he reposed in 444.

Hymns of the Day



Tone 4 Troparion (Resurrection)

When the women disciples of the Lord learned from the angel the joyous message of Your Resurrection, they cast away the ancestral curse

and elatedly told the apostles:
"Death is overthrown!
Christ God is risen,//
granting the world great mercy!"

Tone 1 Troparion (Feast)

When You, O Lord, were baptized in the Jordan,
the worship of the Trinity was made manifest.
For the voice of the Father bore witness to You,
and called You His beloved Son;
and the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the truthfulness of His word.
O Christ our God, You have revealed Yourself//
and have enlightened the world, glory to You.

Tone 4 Kontakion (Resurrection)

My Savior and Redeemer
as God rose from the tomb and delivered the earth-born from their chains.
He has shattered the gates of hell,
and as Master,//
He has risen on the third day!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to

the Holy Spirit

Tone 4 Kontakion (Martyr Tatiana)

In your sufferings you shone brightly
in the royal purple of your blood,
and like a beautiful dove you flew to heaven,
passion-bearer Tatiana.//

Therefore, always pray for those who honor
you!

now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Tone 4 Kontakion (Feast)

Today You have shone forth to the world, O
Lord,
and the light of Your countenance has been
marked on us.

Knowing You, we sing Your praises:
"You have come and revealed Yourself, //
O unapproachable Light."

(Instead of "It is truly meet...", we sing:)

Magnify, O my soul, the most pure Virgin
Theotokos,
more honorable than the heavenly hosts!

No tongue knows how to praise you worthily,
O Theotokos;
even Angels are overcome with awe praising
you.

But since you are good, accept our faith;
for you know our love inspired by God!
You are the defender of Christians, and we
magnify you.

COMMUNION HYMN

The grace of God has appeared for the
salvation of all mankind.
Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise

Him in the highest! □ Alleluia, Alleluia,
Alleluia!

Gospel and Epistle Readings

Epistle Reading

Prokeimenon. 1st Tone. Psalm 32.22,1.

Let your mercy, O Lord, be upon us.

Verse: Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous.

**The reading is from St. Paul's Letter to
the Ephesians 4:7-13.**

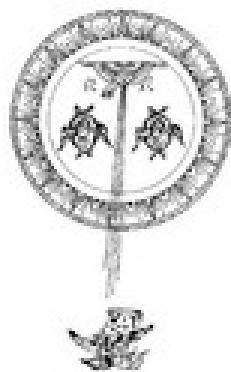
BRETHREN, grace was given to each of us
according to the measure of Christ's gift.
Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on
high he led a host of captives, and he gave
gifts to men." (in saying, "He ascended,"
what does it mean but that he had also
descended into the lower parts of the earth?
He who descended is he who also ascended
far above all the heavens, that he might fill
all things.) And his gifts were that some
should be apostles, some prophets, some
evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to
equip the saints for the work of ministry, for
building up the body of Christ, until we all
attain to the unity of the faith and of the
knowledge of the Son of God, to mature
manhood, to the measure of the stature of
the fullness of Christ.

Gospel Reading

Sunday after Epiphany

The Reading is from Matthew 4:12-17

At that time, when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."



Repentance is the key that opens the door to the Kingdom of God. It is the narrow road that leads to eternal life, to the land where there is no sorrow, no sighing, no pain. It is the beginning and middle of our journey, and it is the gate of Paradise. It is no accident that Saint John the Baptist and Christ started their

respective ministries with the words, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

After Saint John the Baptist had appeared in the desert preaching repentance, Jesus came to him to be baptized. On the Feast of Epiphany (from Greek Ἐπιφάνεια, meaning "manifestation"), also called Theophany (from Greek Θεοφάνεια, meaning a visible "manifestation of God" to humankind), the Trinity (the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit) was revealed. The heavens were opened, and the Spirit of God descended like a dove upon Christ. The voice of God the Father came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Holy Trinity was manifested at this moment, through God's love for us, at the very beginning of the Son's earthly ministry. The Father speaks, and the Holy Spirit comes upon the Son — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; three Persons existing as one God and being manifested and revealed to us for our salvation.

After the Incarnation and before

Wisdom of the Fathers

When in the midst of noise, you manage to reach inner tranquility, you have achieved something of great value. If you cannot find tranquility in the midst of disturbance, you will not be tranquil even in the midst of tranquility. When inner tranquility comes to a man, everything inside him will be tranquil, and he will not be disturbed by anything.

St. Paisios the Athonite

*Calendar Company, Orthodox . Wisdom of the Divine Philosophers-Volume Three (p. 82).
Orthodox Calendar Company. Kindle Edition.*

Beyond the Sermon

the Crucifixion and Resurrection, the ministry of Christ consisted in preaching the Gospel by words and deeds. Jesus grew up in the area called Galilee, where Nazareth and Capernaum were neighboring towns. This is north of Jerusalem, and it took several days' journey to travel between them. While the Lord visited different areas and journeyed to Jerusalem at least three separate times for the feast of Passover, His ministry was based in Galilee. Nazareth and Capernaum, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, and the holy sites in that area, are still there and can be visited today, as well as several monasteries. That area called Galilee was the place where the ancient Jewish tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were established. During the time of the Old Testament, many people still practiced pagan religions there. There was a mixed population of Jewish and non-Jewish people who did not worship the God of Israel. As such, Christ's ministry, from the beginning, brought the light of the Gospel to those areas. As Prophet Isaiah says, the people walking in the darkness of paganism saw a great light, which shone upon the shadow of death. In the Gospel, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life." The appearance of our Savior Jesus Christ abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. As He appeared and began His ministry, He taught us to embark on the road to repentance. It is a road that leads us away from selfishness and toward God. Repentance, from the Greek word "metanoia" (μετάνοια), means a change

of mind, a change of heart, a transformation of our purpose, our vision, and a reorientation towards loving others and loving God more fully. Saint Gregory Palamas says, "Repentance means hating sin and loving virtue, turning away from evil and doing good ... being penitent before God, fleeing to Him for refuge with a contrite heart, and casting ourselves into the ocean of His mercy."

As we celebrate on Theophany, in Holy Baptism we are reborn, which is the beginning of our life story. The Holy Spirit comes upon us, and in a very real sense, God the Father says, this is my son, or my daughter, in whom I am well pleased. Repentance is the compass that leads us to the right destination. It is our spiritual journey. The light of Christ begins to shine in our hearts, like the light of creation, and the light that illumined Zebulun and Naphtali. Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, shines in and through us.

Turning to Christ is how we participate daily in God's redemptive work. As we grow into the likeness of God, we begin to imitate or resemble Christ in His virtue and love. We begin to bear the image of immortality, of the heavenly Father. This is done through prayer, through constant awareness of the presence of the Lord who loves us, and participation in the sacramental life of the Church.

Christ is the incarnate Word of God, so it is fitting that He begins His public ministry with the words of eternal life. The "Kingdom of Heaven," which we also call the "Kingdom of God," is present in Christ, and to live in the presence of Christ is to live in that Kingdom. In this way, there is both

an “already” and a “not yet” in our lives. The Kingdom is “already” with us in Christ, and we enter in it in our spiritual life with Him, especially in the Divine Liturgy and the Eucharist. At the same time, we expect the “not yet,” that is, the second coming of Christ, both for us and for the world. Saint John the Baptist announced that the Kingdom of Heaven was coming, and now Christ says the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. It is here, and it starts with Him and with us in Him. Repentance is a journey, so it is not something that we fully achieve and finish at some point in this life. It is a constant striving, a life-long opening of the heart to Christ and others, and a rejection of selfish and sinful things. Even the great Saints of God often realized that they had only begun to repent. Saint Maria of Paris, on the occasion of the grief she experienced with the death of her sister, said, “I still do not know the meaning of repentance, but now I am shocked at my own insignificance . . . I want an authentic and purified road . . . No amount of thought will ever result in any greater formulation than the three words, ‘Love one another,’ so long as it is love to the end and without exceptions. And then the whole of life is illumined.”

We always rejoice in hope, for Christ is with us and has brought us into His Kingdom. He brings us into that Kingdom every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, which is why we begin with the words, “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.” The Kingdom comes to us — that is, Christ comes to us — and we mystically enter the Kingdom in the Liturgy, which culminates with our union with Christ

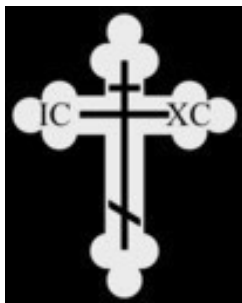
and one another as we receive His Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

Our union with God through Jesus Christ continues in our daily lives through faith, love, prayer, and service. It continues as we open ourselves to the love of God through repentance.

We are like the people of Galilee, Zebulun, and Naphtali. A great Light has shone in the dark regions of the world and in our hearts. The Uncreated Light of God, that is, His own love and power, shines upon us, shines in us, and shines through us. It transforms us. Let us be diligent not to hide this light “under a basket,” as the Lord says (Matthew 5:15). We are the light of the world, and it is our joy and privilege to let our light so shine before others so that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.



The Back Page



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Son, obedient servant of the Lord, do not be so fooled by the spirit of conceit that you confess your sins to your spiritual father as though they were someone else's. Lay bare your wound to the healer. Only through shame can you be freed from shame. Tell him, and do not be ashamed, "This is my wound, Father; this is my injury. It happened because of my negligence and not from any other cause. No one is to blame for this, no man, spirit or body or anything else. It is all through my negligence." He who exposes every serpent shows the reality of his faith, while he who hides them still walks the trackless wastes. St. John Climacus

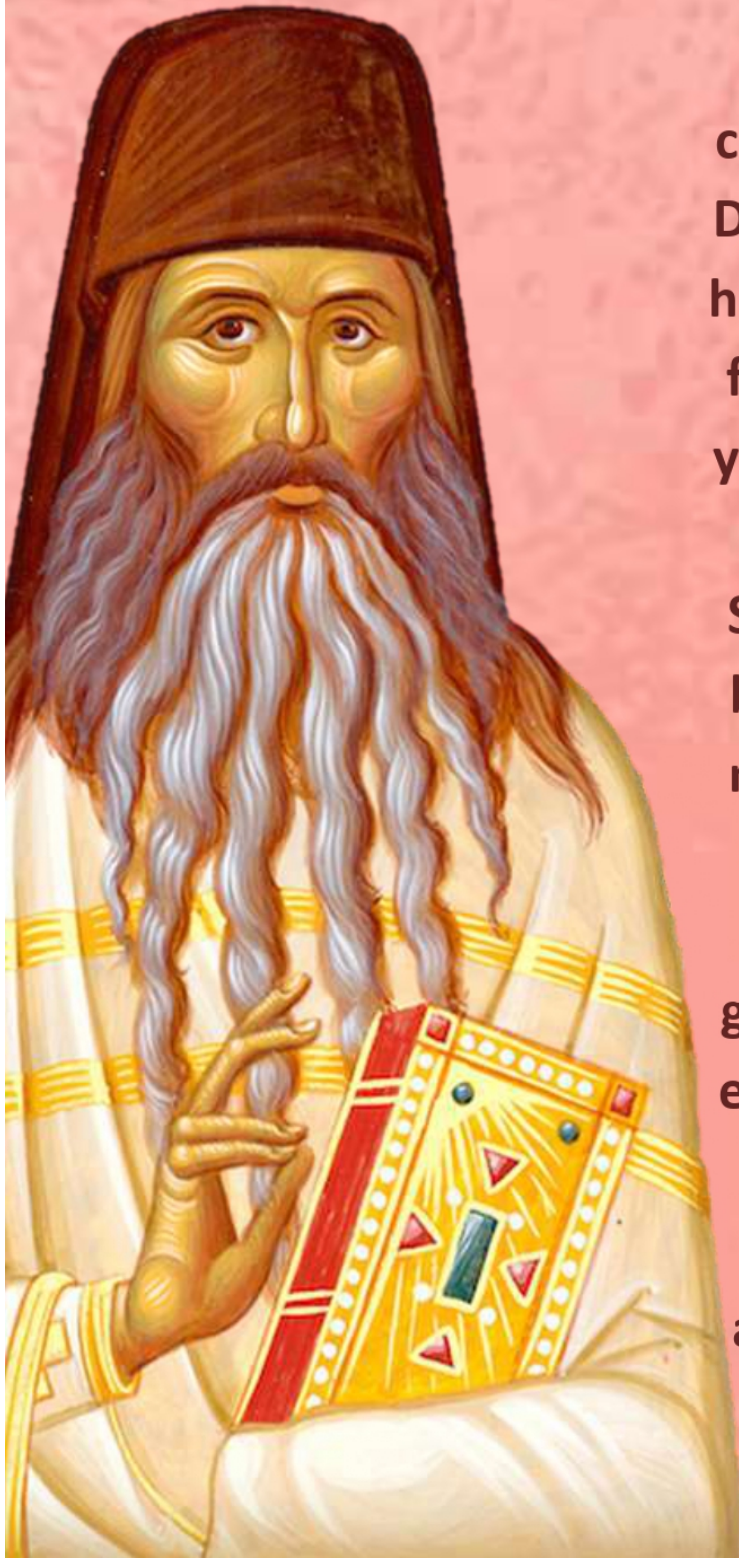
Calendar Company, Orthodox . Wisdom of the Divine Philosophers-Volume Three (p. 128). Orthodox Calendar Company. Kindle Edition.

True repentance is rare, even among the pious, and this is why we suffer so much. If our people were to repent, they would not experience the suffering they are going through now. We complicate our lives terribly by our thoughts and desires. I did not know this before, but now I know that I am to blame for everything—for everything! Now I know why the holy fathers considered themselves to be the worst among all men. +Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica

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We will not be punished or condemned in the age to be because we have sinned, since we were given a mutable and unstable nature. But we will be punished if, after sinning, we did not repent and turn from our evil ways to the Lord; for we have been given the power to repent, as well as the time in which to do so. Only through repentance shall we receive God's mercy, and not its opposite, His passionate anger. Not that God is angry with us: He is angry with evil. Indeed, the divine is beyond passion and vengefulness, though we speak of it as reflecting, like a mirror, our actions and dispositions, giving to each of us whatever we deserve. St. Theognostos of Alexandria

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Do not be afraid to confess the fleshly sins. Do you think you are so holy? God allows you to fall in order to humble you. Get up and walk in fear and trembling. Struggle against them, but do not despair, no matter what happens. Strength in Orthodox firmness comes very gradually; what you do every day helps build it up; and if you fall, humility and self-awareness build it up.

- Fr Seraphim Rose