

# ✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

February, 2019 - Volume XXIV, Issue 2

St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church  
A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese  
13407 Roxbury Rd., Silver Spring, MD - stgregoryoc.org

*From a  
Sermon by  
St. Sophronius  
d. 638*

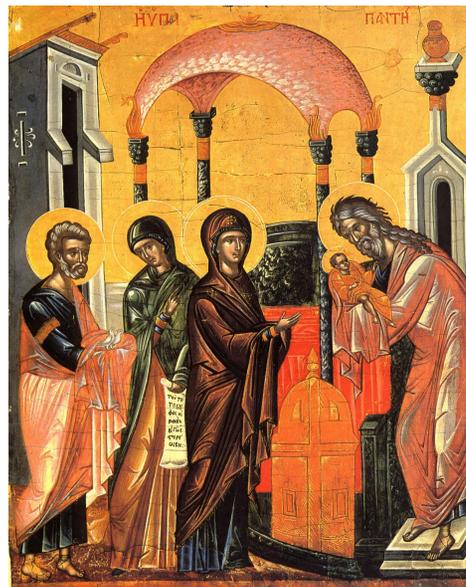
**L**et us all run to meet Him, we who honor and venerate the mystery of the Lord with pious devotion. Let us all go to meet Him with eager minds. Let there be no one who does not share in this meeting, let no one refuse to carry a light.

**W**e add to this the bright shining of candles. In this way we show forth the divine splendor of the coming of Him who makes all things bright, in the abundance of whose eternal light all things are bathed in light when the evil shadows have been driven away. In this way we show the brightness of soul with which we must go to meet Christ.

**T**he most chaste Virgin Mother of God bore in her arms the true light and came to the help of those who were lying in darkness. In the same way we must hurry out to meet Him who is truly light, enlightened by the beams of His brightness and bearing in our hands the light which shines for all men.

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**I**ndeed this is the mystery which we celebrate, that the light has come into the world and has given it light when it was shrouded in darkness, and that the day-spring has visited us from on high and given light to those who were sitting in darkness. That is why we go in procession with lamps in our hands and hasten bearing lights showing both that the light has shone upon us, and signifying the glory which is to come to us through Him.

Therefore let us all run together to meet God.

**T**hat true light which enlightens every man coming into this world, has come. Brethren, let us all be enlightened, let us all be filled with light.

**L**et none of us remain a stranger to this brightness, let no one who is filled with it continue in the darkness, but let us all go forth shining with light, let us all go together bright with that light to welcome with old Simeon that everlasting shining light. Rejoicing with him in our souls, let us sing a hymn of thanks to the Begetter and Father of the light, who has sent the true light and driven away the darkness and made us all to shine with light.

**F**or we too have seen through him the salvation of God which he has prepared before the face of all peoples, and has shown forth for the glory of us who are the new Israel; and we have been freed at once from that mysterious and ancient sin just as Simeon was released from the bonds of this present life when he had seen Christ.

We have embraced Christ in faith as He came to us from Bethlehem, and have been made the people of God instead of Gentiles, for He is the salvation given us by our God and Father. We have seen God made flesh with our very eyes and we are called the New Israel now that we have seen the visible presence of God and have cradled Him in our minds. That presence we celebrate with a yearly festival: we shall never forget it.

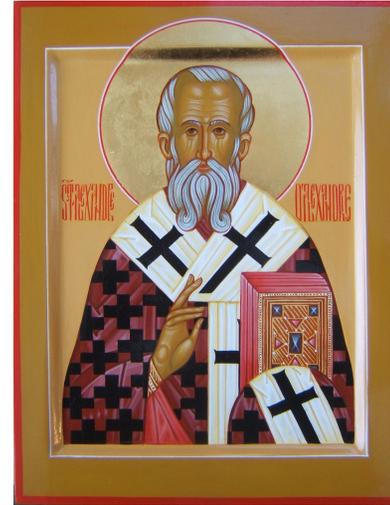
## *St. Alexander of Alexandria*

*Feast Day ~ February 27*

The experience of our Lord while on this earth should serve as a warning to any who would have leadership positions in the Church. He was rejected by the Jewish religious authorities, he was often misunderstood by his own disciples, and he was even betrayed by one of those whom he had personally chosen to follow him. The devil, whose temptation our first parents did not resist, thereby bringing sin into this world, continues to tempt even those who have been chosen to lead Christ's Body, the Church.

When St. Alexander was chosen in the year 313 to be the Patriarch (also called the Pope) of Alexandria, he was faced with problems from within the Church on three fronts: political, theological, and practical. The persecutions of Christians that Alexander had witnessed before St. Constantine issued the Edict of Milan had ended, and all the followers of Christ must have felt great relief and joy that they could now worship the Savior without fear. But the devil was still at work and his tactics now brought turmoil to Christianity through some who claimed to be Christians themselves - even those who were in positions to lead the Church.

The first problem that Pope Alexander faced came from one of his bishops, Melitius of Lycopolis. This bishop was one of those who were "hard-lined" regarding the return of repentant



Christians who had weakened and apostatized during the persecutions. He had been openly critical of Pope Achillas, Alexander's predecessor, whose policy was to be merciful as our Lord had commanded. Meletius had gathered supporters for his position and he now continued to make public accusations against his Patriarch; he had even consecrated other bishops in opposition to him. Bishop Melitius was brought before the Council of Nicea for censure, but St. Alexander argued for the same mercy to be extended to him, so he was allowed to remain a bishop but without episcopal responsibilities.

The second of Alexander's problems was also an issue that had been "brewing" throughout Christianity from the beginning and that was the question of when Pascha should be celebrated. There had been many different opinions on this subject - many with good arguments in their favor. Should the celebration be historically accurate and continue to be tied to the Jewish calendar? Should it always be on a Sunday (also historically accurate, as the Resurrection occurred on the third day from the Friday Crucifixion), but if so, then which Sunday? This divisive controversy was one of the main issues to be resolved at the great council which was being proposed to Emperor Constantine, but in the meantime, rival sects formed to carry on the dispute and argue for their preference to be the practice of the whole Church. Alexander issued a treatise on the subject which helped to bring about some calm before the final decisions at the Council in 325 when the Alexandrian Church was given the responsibility for determining the date of Pascha and sending that decision to all the other patriarchates.

By far the greatest problem which Pope Alexander had to deal with was that of the priest, Arius. Arius had rejected that revelation which the Church had received regarding the Person of Christ. He argued that Christ was not co-eternal with the Father and not of the same substance (or essence) as the Father. Arius was very persuasive and had managed to spread this heresy throughout Alexandria and beyond. Pope Alexander called synods in 320 and 321 to condemn and anathematize Arius, but Arius simply took his heretical ideas to Palestine. The Council of Nicea confirmed Alexander's excommunication of Arius.

In 326, five months after he returned to Alexandria from attending the Council, Pope Alexander fell asleep in the Lord, asking for the election of his deacon, Athanasius, as his successor. St. Athanasius would take up his mentor's battles, particularly that against the continued spread of Arianism.

St. Alexander was a faithful shepherd of his flock. He spent the thirteen years of his pontificate showing mercy to the repentant in the Church's policies, urging unity in the Church's practice of the celebration of Pascha, and defending the Church against the heretical theological speculations of a misguided priest. Even today, the devil is at work in the Church when clergy work against each other and create controversy and turmoil among the faithful. We give thanks for the example of St. Alexander of Alexandria and ask for his intercessions for the resolution of controversies in the Church today. Holy Alexander, pray for us.

## Parish News

On Saturday, February 2, we will celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple with Matins at 9:30AM and Mass at 10, followed by a pot-luck brunch. This feast is also called the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as she

came to the Temple in Jerusalem not only to present her Son, but also to receive the ritual purification required by the Jewish law after childbirth. Another name for this feast is Candlemas, as all the candles to be used in church during the year are blessed at this service. There will be a procession with lighted candles symbolizing St. Simeon's naming of Jesus as "a light to lighten the Gentiles."

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Our Food for Hungry People collection of canned and dried goods weighed in at 126 pounds. The food was donated to the Manna Food Center in Gaithersburg. Thanks to the Caldwell family for the delivery.

At our Annual Parish meeting in January, Patrick Woolley was elected to service on the Parish Council to replace Sharon Green, who had completed a second term. Thank you to all who help with the practical work of our parish by serving on the Council.

House blessings will continue until Saturday, February 23, before Vespers. Please speak with Fr. Nicholas or Fr. Raphael to arrange for your home to receive a blessing. After sprinkling the house with holy water blessed at the Feast of Epiphany, and praying for God's blessing upon the house and those who live there, the principal door of the house is marked with the initials tradition gives to the three wise men; the CMB may also stand for *Christus mansionem benedicat*, "May Christ bless this house."

The preparation for the penitential season of Lent begins with Septuagesima on February 24. The joyful exclamation, "alleluia" and the Gloria in excelsis will be put aside for this season and purple will be the color for the vestments and altar coverings as through the "gesimas", we gradually approach Lent.

# Contemplation

By Fr. Nicholas Alford

Contemplation, or *theoria* in Greek, refers to the effort to see and to know what is good and true and right and holy. In other words, contemplation leads us to God.



The Orthodox Christian life is filled with helpful influences: Holy Scripture, the services and prayers of the Church, our hymnody, our icons, the examples of the saints, the fellowship of other Christians...each contributes to enrich our lives and provide us with a solid foundation upon which to consider how we should live.

Contemplation for the Orthodox Christian is not a merely speculative

enterprise, but completely practical. As we seek to look upon God and the ways of God - with our eyes and with our minds and with our hearts - we are shown how we are to be, we are reminded of the life we were created for, the meaning and purpose of our lives is revealed. We pray to draw nearer to God and unite ourselves to Him.

In the midst of our busy and confused world, there are so many distractions and delusions that we must be intentional in our contemplation or we will inevitably become focused on something other than God. Watchfulness, repentance, and the ascetic struggle all help us to concentrate on the path toward health and wholeness.

St. Paul urges us to “pray without ceasing” [1 Thessalonians 5:17]; we can do this when we fill our lives with prayers, such as the Jesus Prayer, but we can also do it as we strive to make our lives prayerful, as we remain focused on God and His ways, as we work to see Him, to know Him, to serve Him, and to love Him.

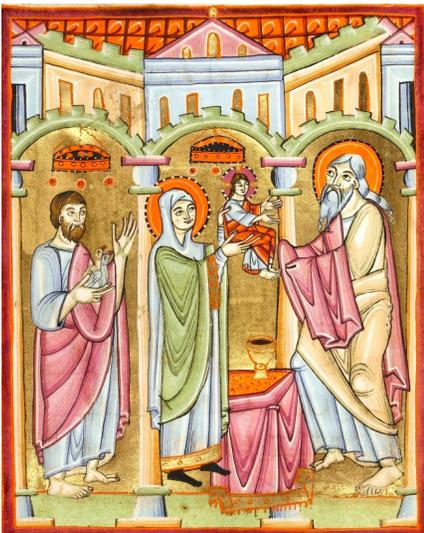
*(from the Parish Resource Manual for the 2018 Parish Life Conference of the Eastern Dioceses)*

## The Presentation of the Lord

by St. Nikolai of Ochrid

On the fortieth day after His birth, the most holy Virgin brought her divine Son to the Temple in Jerusalem, to consecrate Him to the Lord and to purify herself according to the Law [Leviticus 12:2-7, Exodus 12:1]. And though neither the one nor the other was necessary, nevertheless the Lawgiver would not in any way transgress the Law which He had given through His servant and prophet Moses.

At that time Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was serving his turn as high priest in the Temple. He stood the Virgin Mary in the place for maidens, not that for married women. On this occasion, there were two very special people present: the elder, Simeon, and Anna the daughter of Phanuel. The righteous elder took his Messiah up in his arms and said: “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.” Then Anna, who had from her youth served God in the Temple in fasting and prayer, and who herself recognized the Messiah, praised the Lord and made known to the inhabitants of Jerusalem the coming of the awaited one.



But the Pharisees, present in the Temple and seeing and hearing all that passed, and being vexed with Zacharias for having stood the Virgin Mary in the place for maidens, made this known to King Herod. Believing this to be the new King of whom the star-followers from the East had spoken, Herod quickly sent to have Jesus killed. But in the meantime the holy family had already escaped from the city and set out for Egypt, under the direction of an angel of God.

This day was commemorated among Christians from the beginning, but its solemn celebration began in the time of the great Emperor Justinian. At that time, Constantinople and its surroundings were struck by an epidemic, with five thousand or more people dying every day. At the same time there was a terrible earthquake in Antioch. Seeing the powerlessness of men to avert these catastrophes, the Emperor and the Patriarch together decided to call for fasting and prayer throughout the whole empire. On the day of the Presentation itself, they arranged processions through the towns and villages to implore the Lord to have mercy on his people. And the Lord did have mercy, the epidemic and the earthquake ceasing instantly. This happened in the year 544. As a result, the Presentation came to be celebrated as a great feast of the Lord.

*O Sion, adorn thy bride-chamber, and receive Christ the King: greet Mary, who is the gate of heaven: for she beareth the King of the glory of the new light...*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>February 2019</h1>						
<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Mass at 9:30AM</i>					<b>1</b> St. Ignatius of Antioch, BM, c. 107; St. Bridget, Abs, 523	<b>2</b> Presentation of Our Lord: Candlemas <i>Mass at 10am</i>  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> <i>W</i>
<b>3</b> Fourth Sunday after Epiphany; St. Blaise, BM, c. 316; St. Anskar of Hamburg, BC, 865 <i>G</i>	<b>4</b> New Martyrs of Russia, 1917 and following; St. Joseph of Aleppo, M, 1686	<b>5</b> St. Agatha, VM, c. 250	<b>6</b> St. Photius, BCD, 891; St. Dorothy, VM c. 313	<b>7</b> St. Romuald, Ab, 1027	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b> St. Cyril of Alexandria, BCD, 444; St. Apollonia, VM, c. 248  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>10</b> Fifth Sunday after Epiphany; St. Scholastica, V, 543 <i>G</i>	<b>11</b> St. Gregory II, PC, 731; St. Benedict of Aniane, Ab, 821	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b> St. Valentine, PrM, 3rd C	<b>15</b> Ss. Faustinus & Jovita, Mm, 120	<b>16</b> St. Nicholas of Japan, BC, 1912  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>17</b> Sixth Sunday after Epiphany <i>G</i>	<b>18</b> St. Simeon of Jerusalem, BM, 1st c.; St. Colman, BC, 675  <i>(President's Day)</i>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b> Chair of St. Peter at Antioch	<b>23</b> Vigil of St. Matthias  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>24</b> Septuagesima; St. Matthias, Apostle, 1st c. <i>V</i>	<b>25</b> St. Walburga of Heidenheim, V, 779	<b>26</b> St. Porphyrius of Gaza, BC, 420; St. Ethelbert, KC, 616	<b>27</b> St. Raphael of Brooklyn, BC, 1915; St. Alexander, BC, 326; St. Leander, BC, 600	<b>28</b> St. Oswald of Worcester, BC, 992		

*Confessions are heard after Vespers, during the Psalms at Matins, and by appointment.*

*Coffee Hour follows Mass.  
Sunday School is during Coffee Hour*