

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church
A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese
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From a Homily of St. Nicolai of Ochrid d. 1956

Our God is almighty, and His power is without limit and beyond description. By His Word, He created all that was created: *By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made* [Ps. 33:6]. It is by His Word that He makes men's bodies. By the Word of the Lord, lifeless earth is changed into

the bodies of men, of animals, and of vapor, and vapor into ice and snow. By this same Word, the water in the vine is changed to wine, *wine that maketh glad the heart of man*. [Ps. 104:15] Is it, then, strange that the Word of God, incarnate as Christ our Lord, turned water into wine at Cana?

For us men, darkened by sin, it is a great wonder; for our nature, weakened by sin, it is an unattainable marvel. But

Inside:

St. Babylas of Antioch	3
Parish News	5
Manifest in Manifold Ways	7
The Lord Has Made Known His Salvation	8
Calendar	11



is not the working of wonders a normal activity for the Creator? When the servants had filled the great water-pots with water, the Lord Christ said to them: *Draw out, now, and bear unto the governor of the feast*. [John 2:8] He did not say: "Let the water become wine" - He only thought it, and the thought of God had the same power as His word.

Why is it said that this was the "beginning of miracles", when the Lord had apparently worked many other wonders before this? Because, my brethren, the turning of water into wine was a fundamental miracle - the essence of all His miracles. Human nature was diluted, and needed to be turned into wine. The divine spark in man had been extinguished, and needed to be re-kindled. Sickness is like water; health is like wine.

Impurity through evil spirits is like water; purity is like wine. Death is like water; life is like wine. Whenever the Lord healed the sick, cleansed the unclean, raised the dead or enlightened those in error, He turned water into wine.

O Lord our God, Thou wonderful Turner of water into wine, bring Thy divine flame to our extinguished fire. Turn the water of our being into divine wine, that we may be like to Thee; and, being so, may live in Thine immortal Kingdom with Thy glorious angels. To Thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

St. Babylas of Antioch

Feast Day ~ January 24

The question of whether government can control the practice of religion is constantly before us today, but it is an old question that many martyrs of the Church in centuries past have faced. St. Babylas, the thirteenth bishop of the city of Antioch, was one who gave his life in response to that question.

Nothing is known of the life of Babylas until he appeared on the pages of history during the reign of Emperor Decius (249-51) in the city where the name “Christian” originated. Following in the footsteps of his predecessors St. Peter (the first Bishop of Antioch) and St. Ignatius (d. 108), St. Babylas was steadfast in his conviction that governmental policies should never restrict Christian worship. At a time when many Christians went through the motions of making offerings to the state idols in order to live peacefully and avoid harassment or punishment, Bishop Babylas stood as a reminder that Christians should never compromise with Truth.

Although there are numerous conflicting historical references to this event, the following is the most commonly accepted one: When Emperor Decius came to Antioch for a pagan festival, he decided to witness a Christian celebration - most likely as an opportunity to test the will of the Christians and his own power over them. When the bishop heard of this, he barred the church against the emperor and demanded that he - for his sins - place himself with the penitents who had to remain outside the doors until their period of penance was over and they had been restored to communion.

The Emperor, furious at being publicly rebuked by a Christian bishop, very soon took his revenge. He first had the church burned down and then he arrested Babylas and put him in chains.



St. Babylas declared that the chains were as important to him as the imperial crown was to the emperor and that suffering for Christ was as important to him as power was to the emperor. Bishop Babylas, bound with his chains, was paraded through the city to humiliate him and then was tied to a tree and burned with fire. Later, St. Babylas' weakened body was taken back to the prison where he and three of his spiritual children and their mother, Christodoula, were beheaded.

The remains of these Christian martyrs were buried in Antioch, but St. Babylas' relics were moved a century later to a church built in his honor by the Caesar Constantius Gallus. It is said that this was the first instance of the “translation” of a saint's relics (something which later became common). This church was located in the town of Daphne, a suburb of Antioch, and had been intended to counteract the attention paid to the nearby Temple of Apollo. When the Emperor Julian, the “Apostate”, came to this temple to consult the oracle, he received no answer and the pagan priests told him it was because of the nearby presence of a Christian saint. So Julian had the relics translated once more - back to their original burial site in Antioch. Several days later, the temple was destroyed by a mysterious fire and, while the Christians were blamed, the fire was probably due to a lightning strike. Another church was built (partially with the physical labor of Bishop Meletius) on the other side of the River Orontes to hold the relics of St. Babylas. An eye witnesses of these events was a 14-year-old boy named John, who later became St. John Chrysostom and wrote about them.

The question is still with us: does the government have the right to impose restrictions on the practice of religion? Politicians debate the question in congress, lawyers argue for one side or the other in court, there are “rights” groups on each side of the issue pressing for “protections”. For Christians, the question has already been answered. The martyrs of the Church - St. Babylas of Antioch among them - gave their lives to show that not even emperors, presidents, congressional mandates or civil laws can prevent the followers of Christ from praying, celebrating the sacraments of the Church, and living by their faith. With St. Paul, devout Christians know that *neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* [Romans 8:38-39]

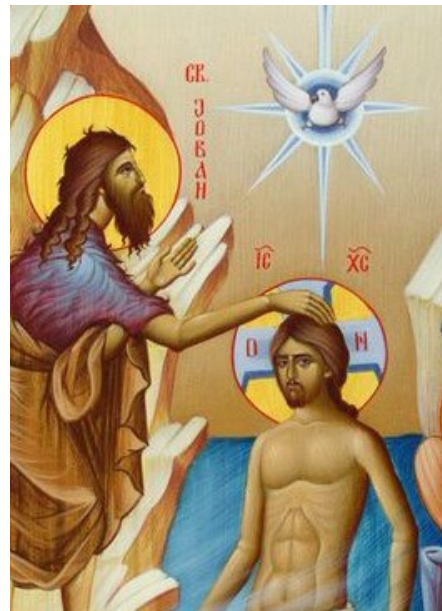
Holy Babylas, pray for us that we may be steadfast against all efforts to limit our worship of the holy and blessed Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Sources: *Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and Other Saints* by Alban Butler; *Orthodox Saints* by George Poulos; *Prologue from Ochrid* by St. Nikolai Velimirovic; online articles from Orthodox Church in America, Orthodoxwiki, and Wikipedia.

Parish News

We begin the month and the year with the celebration of the Circumcision of Our Lord on Monday, Jan. 1. Matins will be at 9:30 and Mass at 10AM, followed by a pot-luck brunch. As is our parish custom, we will remain for a “game day” in the parish hall.

The Feast of the Epiphany, on Saturday, January 6, will also be observed with Matins at 9:30 and Mass at 10AM. After brunch



in the parish hall, all are invited to the home of Fr. Nicholas and Kh. Becky, next door to the church, for their house blessing. It is the custom in Orthodoxy for the priest to bless the homes of the faithful during the season of Epiphany. Please speak with Fr. Nicholas or Fr. Raphael to schedule yours.

The annual March for Life will be held in Washington on Friday, January 19. More information about the location of the Orthodox Christians for

Life banner - the meeting place for us - and the services surrounding this event will be given soon. Pray for the unborn and mothers in crisis.

St. Gregory's Annual Parish meeting will take place after Liturgy on Sunday, January 21. This is an opportunity for all members to hear about the work of the Parish Council, other facets of our parish life, and to hear financial reports.

The collection of canned and packaged food for the Food for Hungry People program during Advent and Christmas will continue through the day of Epiphany, when it will be taken to the Manna Food Bank for distribution to the needy.

The women of the parish are invited to participate in a one-day retreat, sponsored by the Antiochian Women of the East, at St. Nina's Monastery in Union Bridge, Maryland, on Saturday, January 13. Please speak with Kh. Becky if you are interested in joining with others to attend.

Made Manifest in Manifold Ways

by Abbot Theodore

Throughout this season of Epiphanytide (Theophany in the Eastern Tradition) we hear in the Sunday Gospels of the beautiful and varied ways in which the Truth of God-made-man in Christ was revealed in word and deed as those around him, family, friends, and followers were led slowly but steadily to awareness that this was no “mere” man, but that God was, in him, doing something wondrous and profound.

Heralded by a unique star; greeted by a mysterious voice at his baptism in the Jordan; changing water into wine to help an embarrassed host; calming the wind and waves for his frightened disciples - who gave voice to the astonishment felt, no doubt, by all around Jesus: *What manner of man is this, for the winds and the sea obey him?* [Matt. 8:27]

By presenting a series of such episodes to us in the wake of the Christmas season, Holy Church is challenging us to understand that the Nativity is not merely a beautiful human story, but is the beginning of an astonishing Divine intervention in the life of humankind: an intervention culminating not only in “signs and wonders”, in wise words and good example, but in the saving Cross and Resurrection of Christ, his Ascension, and his sending of the Holy Spirit to bring the world of God to fulfillment in each and every person who recognizes his or her need, and accept God’s help.

We would be mistaken to treat these weeks as if they were unimportant, “throw away” times in between the high point of Christmas and Pascha. The truth is, that the Savior’s wondrous Birth and glorious Resurrection cannot be understood, appreciated, or made effective in our lives without the context of the rest of the “story”, read out to us on the Sundays following Epiphany and

those that follow Pentecost. But when we allow ourselves, week by week, to be immersed in the whole Truth, nourished upon the True Bread, and refreshed by the Precious Blood, our ears are opened, our vision is clarified, and our lives are transformed according to the likeness of God, manifested in the Ikon of the Father, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

This article is reprinted from the newsletter of the Monastery of Our Lady and Saint Laurence, an Antiochian Benedictine monastery in Cañon City, Colorado.

The Lord Has Made Known His Salvation

from a homily by St. Leo the Great



God’s providence of mercy, having determined to save in the last days the world which was perishing, foreordained the salvation of all nations in Christ.

In this connection, countless descendants to be begotten not by fleshly seed but by fertile faith, were promised of old to the most blessed patriarch Abraham. This posterity was therefore compared to the stars in multitude so that the father of all nations might hope not for an earthly but for a heavenly succession.

Let the whole pagan world enter into the family of the patriarchs, yes, let it enter, and let the children of the promise

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receive in Abraham's seed the blessing which his children according to the flesh rejected. In the three Magi let all the nations worship the Author of the universe; and let God be known, not in Judaea alone but throughout the whole world, so that everywhere his name may *be great in Israel*.

Schooled, then, dearly-beloved, by these mysteries of divine grace, let us celebrate with spiritual joy the day of our first-fruits and the commencement of the nations, giving thanks to the merciful God *for making us fit to share the light which saints inherit, for rescuing us from the powers of darkness, and transferring us to the kingdom of his beloved Son*. For, as Isaiah prophesied *the people of the nations that sat in darkness, have seen a great light and they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shone...*

This is the day which *Abraham saw and was glad*, when he understood that the sons of his faith would be blessed in his seed which is Christ, and foresaw that by believing he should be the father of the nations, *giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what he had promised, he was able also to perform*.

This is the day which David sang of in the psalms: *All the nations you have made shall come and worship you, O Lord, and glorify your name*; and again, *The Lord has made his salvation known; in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice*.

This indeed we know to be taking place ever since the three Magi were called from their far-off land and were led by the star to recognize and worship the king of heaven and earth. And surely their worship of him exhorts us to imitation... You ought to help one another, dearly-beloved, in this zeal, so that in the kingdom of God, which is reached by right faith and good works, you may shine as children of the light, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with God the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>January 2024</h1>						<i>Sunday services: Matins at 9am Sung Mass at 9:30</i>
	1 The Circumcision of Our Lord & Octave Day of the Nativity <i>(New Years Day)</i> <i>Mass at 10AM</i> <i>W</i>	2 Octave Day of St. Stephen; St. Fulgentius, BC, 533	3 Octave Day of St. John, Ap. Ev.; St. Genevieve, V, 512	4 Octave Day of the Holy Innocents, Mm; St. Titus, BC, c. 96	5 Vigil of the Epiphany; St. Simeon Stylites, C, 460; St. Telesphorus, PM, c. 137	6 The Epiphany of Our Lord <i>Mass at 10AM</i> <i>W</i> <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
7 First Sunday after Epiphany; of the Octave of Epiphany; St. Cedd, BC, 664 <i>W</i>	8 St. Lucius & comp., Mm, c. 290; St. Severinus, Ab, 482	9 of the Octave of Epiphany	10 of the Octave of Epiphany; St. Paul the First Hermit, 342	11 of the Octave of Epiphany; St. Hyginus, PM, c.142; St. Theodosius, Ab, c. 529	12 of the Octave of Epiphany; St. Benedict Biscop, Ab, 690	13 Octave Day of Epiphany; St. Kentigern, BC, 603 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
14 Second Sunday after Epiphany; St. Hilary, BCD, 367; St. Nina, V, 335 <i>W</i>	15 St. Maurus, Ab, 584 <i>(MLK Day)</i>	16 St. Marcellus, PM, 309; St. Honoratus, BC, 429	17 St. Anthony, Ab, 356	18 Chair of St. Peter in Rome; St. Prisca, VM, c. 270	19 St. Mark of Ephesus, BC, 1444	20 Ss. Fabian, BM & Sebastian, M, 3rd C <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
21 Third Sunday after Epiphany; St. Agnes, VM, 304 <i>G</i>	22 St. Vincent, M, 304; St. Anastasius, M, 628	23 St. Emerentiana, VM, c. 304; St. John the Almoner, BC, c. 619	24 St. Timothy, BM, 97	25 Conversion of St. Paul	26 St. Polycarp, BM, 156	27 St. John Chrysostom, BCD, 407 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
28 Fourth Sunday after Epiphany; The Second Feast of St. Agnes, VM <i>G</i>	29	30 St. Martina, VM, 228; St. Bathildes, QMa, 680	31			