

St Michael's Orthodox Church

A parish of the Orthodox Church in America, Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania

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March 9, 2025 – 1st Sunday of Great Lent
on which we celebrate the “Triumph of Orthodoxy”

Please see the LENT & PASCHA CALENDAR for the entire service schedule until Pascha.

Coffee Hour is offered by: (all coffee hours are Lenten until Pascha)

March 9: SOUPer Bowl Charity Potluck (Lenten)
March 16: Millie Telep & _____ (*need volunteer*)
March 23: Mat. Dolores & Marilyn Petorak

March 30: Ruthie Lasichak & Roxanne Neutts
April 6: Vickie Kravitsky & Charette Radionoff
April 13: Susan Schlasta & Deborah Bernosky

Announcements

Today we will celebrate the 40th Day memorial for Karen Wisneski at the end of Liturgy. *May her memory be eternal!*

Today is our **Annual Meeting**, rescheduled from February 16. *This is the 4th announcement of the new date.*

Our PASCHAL FLOWER DRIVE ends TODAY. If you want to make an offering for Pascha Flowers, it must be turned in today (or at least communicated to us by early afternoon). We must place our order in the next 24 hours.

In your prayers

The ill and the afflicted: Fr. Daniel Donlick, Fr Gregory White, Pdn. Gabriel Petorak, Dn Geoffrey LoBalbo, Mat. Myra Kovalek, Gregory Hansen, Olga Krutz, Maryanne Krisa, Michael Krisa, Barbara Mosley, Mary Ann Serafini, Alexis Meholic, Tom Shaw, George Petorak, Sandy Gillott, Debbie Jadick, Susan Schlasta, Evan Kraky, Laura Piwowarski, Karen Abercia, Daniel Kitchura, Mark Klapatch, Gregory Klapatch, Jerry Soroka.

Homebound: John Drutarosky, Theresa Krenitsky, Barbara Palubniak, Peggy Petrilak, Nicholas Mattise, Jerry & Marilyn Soroka, Paul Kostiak, Dolores Brophy, Paul Mosley, Adam & Mary Ann Serafini, Florence Zielinsky.

The newly-departed: Archbishop Anastasios of Albania (1/25). Karen (Dippel) Wisneski (1/26). Helen Meholic (1/27).

Hymns of the Day

Resurrection (Tone 4)

When the women disciples of the Lord / learned
from the angel the joyous message of Thy
Resurrection, / they cast away the ancestral curse /
and elatedly told the apostles: “Death is overthrown! /
Christ God is risen, // granting the world great
mercy!”

Sunday of Orthodoxy (Tone 2)

We venerate Thy most pure image, O Good One; /
and ask forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ our
God. / Of Thine own will Thou wast pleased to ascend
the Cross in the flesh / and deliver Thy creatures from
bondage to the Enemy. / Therefore with thankfulness
we cry aloud to Thee: / “Thou hast filled all with joy,
O our Savior, // for Thou didst come to save the
world.”

40 Holy Martyrs of Sebaste

Through the sufferings which Thy holy Forty Martyrs endured
for Thy sake, O Lord, / we beseech Thee, O Lover of mankind:
// “Heal all of our infirmities!”

Resurrection (Tone 4)

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!

Sunday of Orthodoxy (Tone 6)

No one could describe the Word of the Father; / but when He
took flesh from thee, O Theotokos, He accepted to be described,
/ and restored the fallen image to its former state by uniting it
to divine beauty. // We confess and proclaim our salvation in
words and images.

Today's Scripture

Epistle: Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-12:2

Brethren: By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented — of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us....

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Gospel: John 1:43-51

At that time, Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael, and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" Nathanael said to Jesus, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these." And Jesus said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

What are Icons and why do we have them?

In the Orthodox Church **the icons bear witness to the reality of God's presence with us in the mystery of faith.** The icons are **not just human pictures or visual aids** to contemplation and prayer. They are **the witnesses of the presence of the Kingdom of God to us**, and so of our own presence to the Kingdom of God in the Church. It is the Orthodox faith that icons are not only permissible, but are spiritually necessary because "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (Jn 1.14). Christ is truly man and, as man, truly the "icon of the invisible God" (Col 1.15; 1 Cor 11.7; 2 Cor 4.4).

The icon-screen in the Orthodox Church exists to show our unity with Christ, his mother and all the angels and saints. **It exists to show our unity with God.** The altar table, the Banquet Table of the Kingdom of God, is placed behind the so-called *royal gates*, between the icons of the Theotokos and Child and the glorified Christ, showing that everything which happens to us in the Church happens in history between those "two comings" of Christ: between his coming as the Saviour born of Mary and His coming at the end of the age as the King and the Judge.

The icons on the royal gates witness to **the presence of Christ's good news, the gospel of salvation.** The Four Evangelists who recorded the gospels appear, and often also an icon of the Annunciation, the first proclamation of the Gospel in the world. Over the doors we have the icon of Christ's *Mystical Supper* with his disciples, the icon of **the central mystery of the Christian faith** and the unity of the Church in the world. It is the visual witness that **we too are partakers in the "marriage supper of the lamb"** (Rev 19.9), that we too are blessed by Christ "*to eat and drink at my table in my kingdom*" (Lk 22.30), blessed to "eat bread in the Kingdom of God" (Lk 14.15).

Over and around the central gates are icons of the saints. The doors in the first row usually have icons depicting deacons or angels, God's servants. The first row also has an icon of the person or event in whose honor the given building is dedicated, along with other prominent saints or events. There may be rows of icons of the apostles, the major feasts of the Church, the prophets and other holy people blessed by God, all crowned on the top by the cross of Christ.

Besides the iconostasis, Orthodox Church buildings often have icons or frescoes on the walls and ceilings. In the altar area it is also traditional to put icons of the saints who composed Church liturgies and hymns. Directly behind the altar table there is usually an image of Christ in glory—enthroned or transfigured or resurrecting, and sometimes offering the eucharistic gifts.

– excerpt from Fr. Thomas Hopko, *The Orthodox Faith*, vol. 2: Worship (Yonkers, NY: OCA & SVS Press, 2016).

On the Interpretation of the Holy Bible, Part One

His Eminence Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

Christians initially (in the first century A.D.) knew the Holy Scriptures, consisting of the Old Testament and some widely circulated texts of the New Testament. It is worth remembering that printing was not available at that time. Consequently, the complete Bible, with both Testaments and all its books, was not accessible to everyone until the advent of the printing press (Johann Gutenberg, died 1468). From the first century, Christians were accustomed to reading excerpts from these sacred texts during worship gatherings, especially in the Divine Liturgy (the Sacrament of Thanksgiving). The structure of the liturgy from the beginning included petitions and praises, followed by readings from the Scriptures, then the sermon, and the remainder of the liturgy.

The interpretation of Scripture held great importance among Christians. The Church recognized various complementary interpretations based on the approach of the interpreters. The Church rejected an interpretation only when it conflicted with sound doctrine.

Jesus inaugurated the Christian reading of the Old Testament when He read from the book of Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"* (Luke 4:18-19, referencing Isaiah 61:1-2). He then applied this passage to Himself, declaring to His audience: *"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"* (Luke 4:21). Christians read the Old Testament in the light of Christ. This approach unlocked many prophecies found in the Old Testament about Christ, the Trinity, the salvific plan, and other matters.

From this perspective, the principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture was born. Divine revelation unfolded gradually, beginning with Abraham (18th century BC) and culminating in Christ, who revealed God to us directly: *"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"* (John 14:9). Later texts clarified earlier ones, making them comprehensible. The Scriptures are taken as an integrated whole, and no part is isolated or studied independently of the others.

Let us consider some examples. Matthew the Evangelist, writing for Christians of Jewish origin, cited many Old Testament prophecies to demonstrate their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. For instance, when Joseph was perplexed about Mary's pregnancy, the angel of the Lord revealed the divine mystery to him, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy: *"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel, which means, God with us"* (Matthew 1:22-23, referencing Isaiah 7:14).

Regarding John the Baptist, the Evangelist states: *"This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make his paths straight'"* (Matthew 3:3, referencing Isaiah 40:3).

In Matthew 4, it says: "When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: *"Land*

of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Matthew 4:12-16, referencing Isaiah 9:1-2).

Finally, Christ Himself declared: *"But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled"* (Matthew 26:56). The Bible is a complete unit, with Christ as the central axis—concealed in the Old Testament and fully revealed in the New Testament.

Another example: In the creation narrative in Genesis, God speaks in the singular when creating the world (*"And God said, 'Let there be...'"*). However, when creating humanity, He speaks in the plural: *"Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness"* (Genesis 1:26). The Trinity was not fully revealed in the Old Testament but was hinted at through events such as Abraham's three visitors and Isaiah's vision of the seraphim proclaiming, *"Holy, holy, holy."* With the coming of Christ, the fullness of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—was made clear through the events of the Annunciation, Theophany and Ascension. This foundational interpretation in Orthodox theology underscores that humanity is created in the image of the Trinity—created to be communal and relational, just as the Holy Trinity.

This subject is vast and cannot be fully addressed in an article of this length. To train oneself in this interpretation, one must turn to the Old Testament readings designated by the Orthodox Church in Vespers of the Lord's feasts in particular, and of great feasts and saints in general. Liturgy is the primary school of theology par excellence. Let us consider some examples.

On the eve of the Nativity (Paramon), we read eight readings from the Old Testament. When we read, *"A shoot will come up from the stem of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him"* (Isaiah 11:1-2), we understand that the shoot is an image of Christ.

On the eve of the Elevation of the Cross (September 14), we learn that the wood that turned the bitter waters of Marah sweet is an image of the Cross, which transforms the bitterness of sin into the sweetness of grace (Exodus 15:22-16:1).

In Vespers of the Nativity of the Theotokos (September 8), we understand that the ladder Jacob saw connecting heaven and earth, with angels ascending and descending (Genesis 28:4–10), is a prefiguration of the Virgin Mary, through whom Christ united heaven and earth. Similarly, the sealed eastern gate in Ezekiel (43:27–44:4) symbolizes the Virgin Mary, through whom Christ, the Gate of Paradise, was born to open the way for us.

On Great and Holy Saturday, while catechumens are baptized, the faithful hear fifteen Old Testament readings, all of which prefigure baptism.

Through regular participation in worship, we acquire a true Orthodox understanding of Scripture, seeing the Old Testament as an integral part of God's salvific plan.