

BURNING BUSH



Monastic Journal

WINTER 2014

Volume 27

Issue 3

Христос се насте! Мăрйти-л!



Christ is born! Glorify Him!

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THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

Fr. Roman Braga

The Nativity of our Lord split history in two. It opened the minds of philosophers towards a new aeon. It broke stereotyped patterns of human thinking introducing the mystery of the Incarnation as an indispensable element to know divine human realities. Through the dark centuries of history and prehistory, man sought Truth with suffering, as a necessity and a requisite of the restless human heart. However, this knowledge was not possible without the transcendent descending into the material universe. Through the Incarnation the unity of opposites was realized—the identity between subject and object; the dialogue between heaven and earth became possible, thus communication between man and God. This is why the Orthodox hymn of the Feast of the Nativity proclaims it is Christ “Who has shown to the world the light of understanding.”

Almost two thousand years have passed since the “Word of Truth” became incarnate. On that cold winter night, in a small cave in Bethlehem, in that dark and humid stable, God descended and changed the course of history. He laid a new foundation for the destiny of mankind on earth. Consequently, the civilization and culture of our planet acquired a new meaning. The knowledge of truth became more than an intellectual system, even more than an intellectual revolution. In the Divine economy this act is unique. Only the creation of man had such an impact, because that revolutionary act of creation is equal to the appearance of conscience in the material universe; it is a crucial moment when existence was divided into two parts—subject and object.

How the Son of God became the Son of Man is a mystery hidden from before all ages in the bosom of the Father, and incomprehensible even to the angels, but it is possible to be understood through the logic of Faith, for “where God wills the order of nature is surpassed. Perhaps it is wrong to speculate about the Nativity of Christ our Savior; however, it has become a habit of theologians to shape all dogmas around the pattern of the human mind. But we must understand that the Nativity is a historical fact; it is not a mere hypothesis open to speculations. Simple Christians did a much better job—they clothed this Feast in poetic folklore only to

keep this mystery fresh and not dried up by theological reasoning. The theology of simple people is contemplation, prayer and singing, and in this way they are much closer to the Truth. “Descending and descending is the Holy Lord to this earth.” In this hymn is expressed the simple narrative of a concrete historical fact, told in amazing realism, devoid of any philosophy.

If we analyze the Christmas carols of various countries we see how our God became matter, descended from eternity and entered into history. He took the organic substance of our nature which had been created by Him and shaped Him and shaped His holy and divine person in which heaven and earth were united.

Christmas has no place for abstractions, God became an historical person; His nativity is a fact, as is the cave in Bethlehem, and the stable, and the manger, the cattle and the straw. Through the Nativity of Jesus matter is divinized, it acquires new dimensions; matter becomes a condition for the salvation of our souls. Without matter man cannot be saved: man is baptized with water, is chrismated with oil, communes with Christ by means of bread and wine, because all these elements are part of the material body of our Lord Who was born in Bethlehem. Part of His body was transfigured through His Resurrection in such a way that today the matter of this universe sits in His body on the right of God the Father in the Holy Trinity.

Therefore, the deepest sense of the Feast of the Nativity is the transfiguration of the material universe. God and the world become permanently united in one, without confusion, without losing their own identities. In speaking of the transfiguration of matter, we should not think of the dynamic aspect of matter, which supposedly becomes energy at a certain speed. That energy is still physical. We understand here the goal of mankind and the universe as that spiritual coming back to «a new heaven and a new earth»—when the new drama of this world will end.

We regret that sometimes too much artificiality has been introduced into the Feast of the Nativity. There is a well known expression «Christmas is for children.» There is some truth to this saying—Christmas is for those children who grow not only in stature but in wisdom also, following the example of Christ, being obedient to their parents in all things.

Christmas is for simple and wise mothers who are silent and humble and who, lacking better conditions in life, would be satisfied even with a stable, wishing only that there be peace in the world and joy and love of God.

Christmas is for fathers who with calloused hands daily make a commitment before Divine and human justice to protect their families from potential physical and moral dangers.

Christmas is for countrymen, for shepherds and workers, for all those who have offered their labor as a sacrifice to God.

Christmas is for the poor because the Son of Man did not have in this world a place to lay His head.

Christmas is for the rich who detach their minds from earthly things, as the magi from the East laid their precious gifts at the feet of Christ the Savior.

Christmas is for the ill and lonely, for the abandoned and destitute; Christmas is a sign that God has not turned His face away from us and has not forgotten us; He cares for us and still loves us.

Christmas is for wise Christian philosophers an object of adoration and not a speculation or an occasion for sophisticated intellectual adventures.

Finally, Christmas is the gift of God for everyone, children and grownups, sinners and saints, angels and stars, shepherds and magi, and even for inanimate things, because God revealed Himself in the flesh and all nature was imbued by Him.

To Him belong glory, honor and worship unto all ages. Amen. ■

NEWS AT THE END OF THE YEAR

By the Grace of God and the help and dedication of many faithful friends we were able to build a greenhouse this year in order to extend the growing season, and started the work on the Baptistry on the North side of the Church that will be used for the blessing of the water.

We also were blessed to be able to complete more of the iconography in the church and we are presently working in the Nartex. With God's help we also hope to finish soon the main chandelier. ■

THE PRAYER

By Alexis Carrel

Part II

The effect prayer has over the spirit and the body seem to be related not only to the intensity of the prayer but also to the quality of it. This quality remains unknown because we do not have the means to measure the capacity of the love for the neighbor. However, the way a person prays can give an idea of the prayer quality he addresses to God. Even when the prayer is of poor quality and it is resumed to the mechanical repetition of preestablished formulas, it still exercises a certain influence over the person's behavior. The prayer fortifies both the moral as well as the sacred sense, and the place where prayer is regularly practiced is characterized by a persistent sense of duty, lack of jealousy and meanness, and by love for everyone around. This seems to demonstrate that along with the intellectual development, the character and the moral values are much higher for those who practice prayer than of those who do not.

When prayer is regular and truly fervent then its influence becomes very clear. From a physiological perspective it can be compared with the thyroid or the adrenal gland. It consists in some form of mental and organic transformation, and this transformation is progressive in nature. It can be said that in the depths of conscience a flame is lit. Man sees himself for what he is; he discovers his selfishness, his pride, his wrong judgement, he becomes inclined toward the fulfillment of his moral duties, and he tries to acquire intellectual humbleness. Slowly then the realm of grace and forgiveness is revealed to him. Slowly, an interior peace starts to set in, an harmonizing of neurological and moral functions, a higher tolerance for poverty, slander, worries, illnesses, even for the loss of loved ones. A physician observing a patient who prays has great reason to rejoice. The calm that derives from prayer is a strong additive to therapy.

At the same time, prayer should not be compared with drugs because prayer, aside from its internal calming effect, induces an integration of mental functions, a sort of personality blooming, and some time even heroic behavior. Prayer marks its faithful with a

special weapon. The riches that are hidden in the depths of the soul are manifested by the purity of expression, a peaceful attitude, a feeling of serene joy, and as the case may, be also the simple acceptance of the death of the soldier or the martyr. Under its influence, even the less gifted or the ignorant are able to use more efficiently their moral and intellectual strengths. It seems that prayer elevates man above his intellectual, hereditary and educational level; this contact with God fills him with peace, and this interior calmness that radiates from him is carried around all over. Unfortunately, the number of those who know how to pray effectively is very small.

At all times the healing (curative) effects of prayer have attracted man's attention. Even today, in places where prayer is regularly practiced, there are frequent cases of healing, as a result of the petitions addressed to God and His saints. It is also true that in the case of illnesses that are susceptible of fast healing and that respond to ordinary medication, it is difficult to determine the true healing factor. Only when any and all other treatments become inefficient and incapable of healing can we notice with more certitude the curative effects of prayer. The medical office in Lourdes (France) brought a significant contribution to science by demonstrating the reality of the healings that took place there. It can be said that at times prayer has an explosive effect. Sick people have been cured almost instantaneously of cancer, TB, renal infections, and other such illnesses. This phenomena take place almost always the same way: a very sharp pain followed by the feeling of healing. Shortly after signs of physiological symptoms start to disappear the anatomical lesions start to heal also. This miracle is characterized by an increased speed of the healing process.

For these healing phenomena to take place the patient does not necessarily need to pray. Small children, even nonbelievers were healed at Lourdes, but next to them someone else was praying fervently. The prayer for someone else seems to be always more effective than the prayer for oneself. Today, at Lourdes, the healings are less frequent than they were one hundred years ago because patients do not find there the same prayerful and contemplative atmosphere as before. The pilgrims have become tourists and their prayer is ineffective. The history of the saints, even the contemporary ones, is full of miraculous deeds. One thing is certain: prayer

produces tangible results. And there is nothing wondrous about it: to those who knock, the door opens and those who ask receive.

In short, God listens to man. The effects of prayer are not an illusion. We cannot reduce the sense of the sacred to the anxiety man has due to the dangers that surround him and of the mysteries of the universe. However, prayer should not be a simple sedative, nor a remedy for our fear of illness, suffering and death. What is then the significance of holiness? And what is the place prayer takes up in our lives? What is the place nature itself designates in our lives? It is a very important place; at all times people in the East have practiced prayer. The Roman city was first of all a religious community. The Romans built temples everywhere. Our Medieval ancestors filled the whole of Christian land with Gothic cathedrals. Today, in the New World, the pilgrims who came from Europe established the western culture. All along our history, prayer was a necessary element just as necessary as the need for conquering, for working, loving or building. The sense of holiness seems to flow from the depths of our being, a fundamental activity. Its variations in a social group are mostly tied to the other fundamental activities, to the sense of morality, character and sometimes even to the sense of beauty. This significant area in us has degenerated and sometimes even disappeared.

We must remember that man cannot, without risk, behave according to fantasies (illusions). In order to succeed, man must live his life according to invariable rules that depend on his own makeup. We assume a great risk when we let die in us a fundamental activity, be it physiological, intellectual or spiritual. For example, the lack of physical activity in some intellectuals can be just as disastrous as can be the lack of intellectual activities in an athlete. We have examples of how the loss of spiritual and moral sense in the majority of a nation's population can lead to its dissolution and enslavement. The fall of ancient Greece was preceded by such a phenomena.

From a practical stand point the moral and spiritual activities are related to one another. Man did not succeed, as Socrates hoped, to develop a moral system that is independent of the spiritual one. The societies where the necessity for prayer disappears are not too far from becoming degenerate. For this reason, all civilizations, religious or not, must be concerned by this lack of development of all essential activities that man is capable of.

What is the reason why the sense of the sacred plays a significant role in man's life? What is the mechanism that exercises an effect upon us? Man believes that he lives apart from the natural environment in which he lives, without realizing that his life is an integral part of the entire cosmic universe, a universe that is intangible, invisible and immaterial. The need for oxygen can be compared with the sense of the sacred, and prayer can be compared with the respiratory (breathing) function. Prayer must be considered as a catalytic agent between all the natural functions, a natural function between body and soul.

Therefore, the sense of the sacred, with respect to other spiritual activities, is very significant because it puts us in contact with God, and God lives within us. For our optimal development prayer is indispensable. We must not consider prayer as the activity of the "poor in spirit." The German philosopher Nietzsche considered the act of prayer as shameful; in fact it is not any more shameful than to drink water or breathe. Man needs God the same way he needs water and air. ■



TODAY AND TOMORROW'S CHRISTIANITY IN SYRIA

Deacon Meletie Shattahi

We cannot talk about today's Christian situation in Syria without talking about the general situation in the country. For more than three years now the war in Syria is described by mass-media as a civil war. The local reality indicates that it is more a war between the political powers of this world, each pursuing their own interests in a foreign land. This way, the powers of the world resolve their problems at a minimum cost, while Syria pays the highest cost—its own life.

Christianity was born here in the East 2014 years ago. On the way to Damascus Christ revealed Himself to Saul, and in Damascus Saul became the Apostle to the Gentiles. It is in Antioch that the Holy Apostles called themselves "Christians" for the first time; from here the message and the name has been spread to the entire world.

The Christian persecution in Syria began in the VIII-th century and it never ended. God has allowed some quieter years, but these periods of peace did not last long. Therefore for the Church of Antioch the persecution and the suffering never ended. The Church got used to the suffering.

Since the departure of the French in 1947 Christianity has experienced in Syria a flourishing period up to about three years ago. During this period of about sixty years, unlike the generation of our grandparents the present generation forgot what persecution is. For this reason, when in 2011 the unrest in Syria started the Christians were not prepared; it was a shock and a rapid transition from freedom to persecution.

The Christians are not, however, the only ones who suffer in today's war; others suffer just as much, especially the moderate Muslims. For the fanatic and extremist groups, all those who do not fight the regime, are considered its supporters and therefore must be killed. Evidently, Christians know that their weapon is prayer. The moderate Muslims did not engage in fighting either and are aware of the dangers coming from the extremist groups. In areas where these groups have entered, the fate of Christians and Muslims alike was death. Horrible attacks and destruction took place in the areas where these groups have entered.

The village of Maaloula is the only village where the language of Christ, the Aramaic language, is still spoken. In this same village is the monastery of St. Tecla where her relics are also. The village has been attacked and destroyed and the treasures of the monasteries that go back to the 5th and 6th centuries have been entirely plundered. The village was set afire and 13 nuns from the St. Tecla monastery have been taken prisoners. By God's grace in March of 2014 they have been released and the National Guard was able to free the village on Holy Thursday of this same year. Also, the oldest church in the world, dating back to the year 59 was destroyed along with the monastery of St Symeon the Stylite, as well as another 140 churches and monasteries.

The village of Sadad suffered the invasion of the extremist groups who committed horrible crimes by killing 60 Christian women and children, by destroying all the churches, churches that date back to the 6th and 7th century.

Another village where the terrorist groups attacked was Deir Atieh; here the terrorists made note of the all the Christians, searching for them to kill them; However, the Muslims hid their Christians neighbors in their own homes, saving them thus from the massacre. Same situation took place in the village of Adra where Christians had to hide in the homes of their Muslim neighbors.

At the present time two Metropolitans and seven priests have been abducted; four priests have been killed along with a great number of confessors for the faith, and more than 450,000 people have been evacuated from their homes.

We ask ourselves why does God allow such suffering? We find the answer in the Holy Scripture: “For My counsels are not as your counsels, neither are your ways My ways” (Is. 55:8). God allows us to suffer now as others before us have suffered. Why should we refuse such a gift, such an easier opportunity for salvation? We have no other faster chance to return to the Church as we have now. The most serious test for man’s faith is suffering. The true Christian is the one who sustains the hardships and who does not deny his faith. At this time when we and our brothers Christians pray for each other and also for us Syrians, lets not ask God to protect us from death but instead to give us the strength and courage not to deny our faith when the moment of death arrives.

The Christian does not have a country in this world. There is no such thing as Romanian, or Syrian, or Greek, or Serbian Christian. It is only the Orthodox Christian who seeks the eternal place, the Kingdom of Heaven: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10). Today the faithful Christians of Syria, even though they are persecuted, hope for their eternal place near the Savior Who sacrificed Himself for us, giving us the example of how we also should sacrifice for the entire Church. Humility, the mother of all virtues, is born out of suffering; we should not therefore seek rest. Now it is the Church of Syria that is sacrificing; it may come a time when another Church will sacrifice for the faith. What is important is the fact that we must understand that nothing happens without the will of God.

The present crisis shows to the faithful that the Church takes care of its children, as a true mother. It is also teaching us that the Church

is not composed of clerics and laymen, but we are one single family, and the Church is always next to its people, and we cannot surpass this present situation if we do not stay together, helping each other.

As far as tomorrow is concerned, only God knows what it will be. As we mentioned before the Church of Antioch always suffered and today's war is not the worst. In 1861, in one single day 60,000 Christians were killed in Damascus only. Between 1860 and 1916 the Turks killed in Syria over six million Christians. The Syrian people, however, in spite of all the hardships have remained faithful and will continue to live on that blessed land, hoping to become chosen people of God, for the glory of His name. ■

(Translated from an article published in Vol. VII, 2014 of "Cuvinte către Tineri," Putna Monastery, Romania).

NEWS OF FATHER ROMAN'S CONDITION

Since he was diagnosed with prostate cancer and metastasis to the bones in July of 2013, Father Roman has been a living example of patience, endurance and love. He spends the days resting most of the time, but also observes with meticulous accuracy the prayer rule he maintained all his life. Morning prayers, evening prayers, prayers before and after communion, all are read at the appropriate times. The study of the Bible and the reading of the Psalter are also performed with regularity, and he tells us that he still he gets new insight in the wisdom and truths of the Holy Scriptures. He comes to church for Divine Liturgy and some major feast days.

He has maintained his usual positive and pleasant disposition amid the decline of his physical strength.

Father Roman and all of us are grateful for all your prayers. ■

THE CHURCH ICONOGRAPHY

Those who have visited the monastery in recent months have noticed the progress and the completion of the iconography on the North and South walls, as well as under the balcony.

We are currently working on the iconography in the Nartex. By God's grace and all of your prayers we hope to finish by the Feast of the Nativity.

The icons from the Nartex that are now available for sponsorship are listed below, along with the icons that are still available from the rest of the church.

FRONT OF THE CHURCH:

St Phoebe and St. Priscila	\$ 800.00 each
St. Tatiana and St. Olympia	\$ 800.00 each
St. Arsenius	\$ 600.00
Icon of Christ with Martha & Mary	\$1,500.00
Icon of the Vision of St. Pachomius	\$1,000.00
Icon of the Myrrhbearing Women	\$1,800.00

FULL FIGURE ROMANIAN MALE SAINTS

\$ 800.00 each (unless noted otherwise)

St. Ianache Văcărescu
St. Daniel the Hesychast
St. John Jacob of Neamț
St. George of Cernica
St. Nicodemus of Tismana
St. Paisius Velichkovsky
St. Joseph of Varatec
St. Dosoftei
St. Antim Ivireanul

FULL FIGURE SAINTS OF NORTH AMERICA

\$ 800.00 each

St. Juvenaly of Alaska
St. Innocent of Alaska
St. Raphael of Brooklyn.

FULL FIGURE MALE SAINTS

\$ 800.00 each

St. Atanasius the Athonite
St. Paul of Xeropotamou
St. James the Persian
St. Sergius
St. Bachus
St. Theodore Stratilates
St. Procopius
St. Justin the Philosopher
St. Nicetas
St. Xenophont
St. Arcadius

FULL FIGURE FEMALE SAINTS

\$ 800.00 each (unless noted otherwise)

St. Euphemia
St. Veronica with the Napkin (\$ 1,000.00)
St. Cecilia
St. Vasilisa
St. Natalia
St. Julita

HALF FIGURE FEMALE SAINTS

\$ 500.00 each (unless noted otherwise)

Sts. Mermione
Philonella
Zenaida

St. Nona (*Mother of St. Gregory the Theologian*)
St. Emilia (*Mother of St. Basil the Great*)
St. Anthousa (*Mother of St. John Chrysostom*)
St. Felicity

HALF FIGURE MALE SAINTS

\$ 500.00 each (unless noted otherwise)

St. Cyrus & John (\$ 500.00 each; \$ 900.00 for both)
Sts. Hermolaus, Tryphon (\$ 500.00 each; \$ 900.00 for both)
Sts. Photius, Anicetus & Thalleleus (\$ 500.00 each; \$ 1,200.00 all 3)
St. Samson
St. Nicodemus of Mt. Athos

ICONS IN THE NARTEX

Icon of the Last Judgement	\$ 6,000.00
St. Elias and Prophet Elisha	\$ 3,000.00
Prophet David	\$ 800.00
Righteous Enoch	\$ 800.00
Prophet Ezekiel	\$ 800.00
Icon of the Good Samaritan	\$ 1,500.00

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BURNING BUSH JOURNAL IN ELECTRONIC FORM

About five years ago we have attempted to send out the journal in electronic form due to the increased cost of the printing and postage. Unfortunately we were not able to provide at that time a properly working system.

The costs of printing and especially of postage continues to rise. We are in the process of trying again to establish a working system that will allow us to send the journal in electronic form to those who so desire. Because some readers may wish to continue to receive the journal in printed format, we will attempt the electronic transmission only to those who are willing to receive it electronically.

To achieve this goal we ask that all of you who want and can receive it electronically please send us your e-mail address (along with your name and regular physical address) and we will compile a list for the next issue of the journal.

You can also email us at: hdmpress@dormitionmonastery.org.

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Donations can be made by check as before, on the website (handled through Pay Pal) and / or by calling the monastery with a credit card. For security reasons we ask that you do not send your credit card number via e-mail.

**FEAST OF THE NATIVITY & THEOPHANY
2014 - 2015**

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Wednesday, December 24 Eve of Nativity	Royal Hours & Typica Vesp. Liturgy of St. Basil Vigil Service	8:00 am 10:00 am 6:00 pm
Thursday, December 25 Nativity of the Lord	Akathist, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy of St. John Vigil Service	9:00 am 10:00 am 6:00 pm
Friday, December 26 Synax of the Theotokos	Akathist, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy of St. John Lunch & Caroling Vigil Service	9:00 am 10:00 am 12:30 pm 6:00 pm
Saturday, December 27 Protomartyr Stephen	Akathist, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy of St. John Vigil Service	8:00 am 9:00 am 6:00 pm
Sunday, December 28	Akathist, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy	9:00 am 10:00 am
Wednesday, December 31	Matins, Hours & Typica Vigil Service Thanksgiving Service	5:00 am 6:00 pm 11:30 pm
Thursday, Jan. 1, 2015 Circ. of our Lord St. Basil the Great	Akathist, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy of St. Basil	9:00 am 10:00am
Monday, Jan. 5, 2015 Eve of Theophany	Matins Royal Hours, Typica Vesperal Liturgy of St. Basil Blessing of Water follows Liturgy Vigil Service	5:00 am 6:30 am 8:00 am 6:00 pm
Tuesday, Jan. 6, 2015 Feast of Theophany	Akathist, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy of St. John Blessing of Water Vigil Service	9:00 am 10:00 am 11:30 am 6:00 pm
Wednesday, Jan. 7, 2015	Akathist, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy of St. John	8:00 am 9:00 am

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LIVING

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Prayer Lists and donations can be mailed to:
Dormition Orthodox Monastery
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Rives Junction, MI 49277

or:
Emailed to: dormitionmonastery@dormitionmonastery.org.
Donations can be made also on line on our website through Pay Pal.