

St. George Newsletter

August 2012

The hymns of Transfiguration

Tropar, tone seven:

Thou wast transfigured on the mountain, O Christ God, revealing Thy glory to Thy disciples as far as they could bear it. Let Thine everlasting Light also shine upon us sinners, through the prayers of the Theotokos. O Giver of Light, glory to Thee!

Kondak, tone seven:

On the Mountain Thou wast Transfigured, O Christ God, And Thy disciples beheld Thy glory as far as they could see it; So that when they would behold Thee crucified, They would understand that Thy suffering was voluntary, And would proclaim to the world, That Thou art truly the Radiance of the Father!

These Transfiguration hymns remind us of the historical circumstances of the Transfiguration itself. They describe first, that this event happened on a mountain. As in antiquity, in the time of the Old Testament, Moses went up unto Mount Sinai to receive the law, so now our Lord Jesus Christ goes up with His disciples unto Mount Tabor. As Christians, we should continually strive for that which is better. We should ascend the mountain of virtue.

There, on the mountain, Christ was transfigured. That is, His outward appearance changed. He, and not only He, but His clothing, became white likeligh. This was a revelation of the divinity of the Savior. As God, as one person of the Holy Trinity, Christ had always existed, and was with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Holy Scripture (both Testaments) testifies to this: "Let us make man according to our image" we read in the book of Genesis. This is the pre-eternal counsel of the Holy Trinity. Three persons of a single God agreeing and conversing among themselves in a manner that

we cannot understand fully. The apostle and evangelist John also testifies: "All things were made through Him [that is, through Jesus Christ], and nothing that was made was made without Him." Christ always had, has, and will have, a divine nature. Yet He took on Himself human nature, and was born of the Virgin. He spent thirty three years before mankind, and appeared to all as a man – unusual, by all accounts, with authority and power – but all the same, as a man who wandered about with no permanent home, and who lived in poverty.

Now, on Mount Tabor, before His suffering and death, He shows three of His apostles (Peter, James, and John), how they can see His divine energy. Again, the evangelist John writes: "No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He revealed." The Lord appeared as man and became visible. To some degree, it has become possible for us to see the divine, through the Transfiguration. St. John writes again: "we shall see Him as He is." Even after death, even for the saints, this is not fully possible. Blessed Theophylact of Bulgaria writes: "we will see Him as He is, that is, not according to nature, for this is impossible for a created person, but as pure ones see the Pure One, and as the righteous see the Righteous One". St. Gregory Palamas clarified that the revelation on Mt. Tabor was a revelation of God's energy, that is, a revelation of God's righteousness, His love, and all that is good in Him. When the apostle Peter writes, that "we all through these [that is, divine gifts] have become partakers of the divine nature", he means that we partake of the energy of the Lord. We try to do the good things that He always does. And as St. Theophylact said, when we become righteous ourselves, we can see righteousness, and Him who is all-righteous, as He is.

According to the kondak, the Lord was transfigured before His death, in order to

strengthen the apostles, and to remind them that He came to die. So they would understand that this is God's plan. This is why He came. Unfortunately, when Christ was crucified, the apostles did not remember this immediately. The same happens with us. Even in our sinful world, there are many revelations of God's power. When our problems start, we often begin to forget or to become blind to these revelations, and fall into despair. The fact that we are still in the Church, that we are reading a church newsletter, testifies that despite our despair, we are not lost! We want to find in the services, in the scripture, in other spiritual literature, the answers to our problems -- miracles, and God's revelation. The disciples were overjoyed when the Lord was with them. When He was crucified, they were afraid, fled, started to rethink things. But in the end, they remembered. They would have been totally justified in thinking that the Lord's appearance was a product of their mental state and grief over His death, that it was only a dream or a vision. But this is not what they thought: they remembered His words and deeds, and they believed. We also decided to be baptized and go to church, as the disciples followed Christ. Both we and they fell into despair. But we and they were not lost! We know that not all is well with us, that we have problems, and despite the fact (and this is truly a fact!) that the Lord is ever-present, and always near, He sometimes seems (because of our own sinfulness) distant. But we have seen the Transfiguration. We have seen the Body and Blood of the Savior in Communion. Let us never forget! There are, and there will be, problems. They need to be there. After all, it is written about the apostles in the Acts: "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must *through much tribulation* enter into the kingdom of God."

The Kingdom of God is real: we will see it in this life and the life to come, if only we do not forget the Resurrection. We can benefit from the experience of the apostles: they forgot, so that we would learn not to forget, but continue to read the Holy Scriptures and pray that we would be strengthened and defended from the enemy, who always sows despair in our hearts. The

witness to the Transfiguration, the apostle Peter writes: "Be sober and vigilant, for our enemy the devil goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

Parish School

Lessons in our parish school begin September 8. School begins at 5:00 pm before Saturday vigils. All children who are able to read (even with some help from their parents) should be participating in our school. What will happen if our children learn to read, write, and multiply well, but they do not know the truths of their faith, and have not become accustomed to Orthodox practices (such as attendance at Saturday vigils)? It's time to study! Even in distant America in our time the spirit of the godless Soviet Union acts on our church! Let us no longer simply formally order memorial services and baptize our children, but go further to observing the words of the Lord: "Go, therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you**". We have to learn. We have to observe. Where there is knowledge of God, there is true happiness that cannot be taken away.

Our students will be studying the epistle of St. James and learning more about the meaning of home and church prayers.