

# St. George Newsletter

January 2012

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## **Nativity Epistle**

Metropolitan Hilarion

Most Reverend Fellow Archpastors, Most Honorable Fathers, Brothers and Sisters! With profoundly-heartfelt spiritual joy I greet all the faithful children of the Russian Church Abroad, spread all over the world like kernels of God's wheat, with the great and salutary Feast of Christ's Nativity! May the Lord send all of us this joy which saves the world. This gladness is the fruit of the struggle of faith, and stems from the triumph of the Incarnation, from God becoming man, from hearing the celestial doxology from the heavens above the city of Bethlehem.

During the celebratory days which follow the Feast we especially feel God's love for us, sinners. For though mankind turned away from its Maker, the Creator became a creature; Almighty God came down from the heavens and became one of us. He is born a helpless Infant in a humble cave where livestock is herded in bad weather. God becomes man to arrange for a mystical encounter, to destroy the barrier between Heaven and earth which was wrought by man's sin. This encounter must take place within our innermost selves and in our relationships with those in whom the image of God is reflected—our neighbors.

During these holy and joyful days each parish church becomes Bethlehem and the heart of every man becomes the cave. All over the world, God's people fill our churches. But what takes place in the cave of the heart of each one of us when Christ and His Holy Family come knocking? Does our heart open? Does it receive the Lord and what does the Lord find inside? Let us contemplate this, dear fathers in Christ, brothers and sisters. Let us remember the

words of Abba Makarios recorded in the book "Sayings Worth Remembering."

Once, traveling across Egypt with a group of his brethren, Abba Makarios heard the words of a boy directed to his mother: "Dear Mother, a certain rich man loves me, but I hate him. Another man, a pauper, hates me, but I love him." On hearing these words, Abba Makarios was surprised. The brethren asked him: "What do these words mean, and why have they amazed you so, father?" The elder answered them: "In truth, the Lord is wealthy and loves us, yet we do not want to obey Him. However, our enemy, the devil, is poor and hates us: yet we love his impurity."

So, let us open wide our hearts and welcome the Son of God Who has come to earth. Let us add our voice to the doxology of the angels and worship Him with the magi. Let us rejoice in His love and mercy for us. Let each one of us, according to our meager strength, respond with love to His love. Let us find fulfillment in communion with Him. And let each of us exemplify a virtuous Christian life, thereby supporting our neighbor and showing him our heartfelt disposition.

God is with us with His grace and love for mankind always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

## **Nativity Epistle**

Archbishop Kyrill

Brethren, we come once more to the Feast of the Nativity of our Saviour. Once again we stand at the cave, and behold the Incarnation of the Son of God. Like familiar friends we join Him beneath the star, veiling our eyes at His glory. We see the great made small, and the One Who is good beyond our evil, come among us.

But on this day we are made more than “familiar friends”. On this day the Son of God takes our flesh and makes it His. We are drawn into His life. We are made His family. We are sons and daughters of His Father, Whom we now call “Our Father,” as this Lord has taught us. We are His.

And this means we are each other’s. We are no longer strangers, though we are always foreigners and wanderers in this world. We are brethren. We are one family, one Body. And today Christ is born, Who makes us His Body, and says to us in our weakness: “Love one another, as I have loved you.”

We cannot celebrate the Lord’s Nativity alone. We cannot celebrate it in separation or isolation. We cannot celebrate it with judgment, with coldness, or with despair. We can only celebrate it in love, and this love must be one love, offered from one heart. Christian people do not have many hearts or wills or minds: we have only One – Christ Himself. We must stand together as one community, committed to overcoming our sin, fully acknowledging our every weakness, and through this be filled with new life. New life is coming. It is already here. Christ is born in our midst! But before we shout, “Glorify Him!”, let us ask ourselves how we will truly give Him glory, and let us recognize that His glory will only be manifested in us, and we will only show glory to Him, when a stranger who looks upon the icon of our lives together as His Church, exclaims in genuine awe, “Look, how they love one another!”

May Christ’s birth teach us to love, to live with one heart, and to truly see His glory! Amen.

## **On the blessing of homes on Theophany**

priest Sergei Sveshnikov

### **Why Bless a Home?**

The Orthodox Church teaches that we do not have two separate lives—a secular one and a spiritual one—but one human life, and that all of it must be holy. We must not be Christians for

just a few hours on Saturday and Sunday, spending the rest of our life godlessly, that is to say, without God. The person who has united with Christ in the sacrament of baptism cannot be a part-time Christian, but must be faithful to Christ everywhere and at all times—in church, at work, at home, in relationships with other Christians, and in those with non-Christians—we must be faithful to Christ in the fullness of our life.

The Holy Orthodox Church teaches us that a temple is not only a building in which we worship, but that we are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16); that the Body of Christ is not only that of which we partake at the Divine Liturgy, but that we are the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). And just as the Gifts of the Eucharist are treated with reverence and kept in sanctified vessels in the altar, so should every Christian’s life be full of reverence and sanctity not only during a church service, but likewise outside the walls of the temple. A Christian’s home must become a small temple, work—labor for the glory of God, and family—a small Church. The Orthodox Church helps her children strive for holiness in their lives and brings sanctification to every Christian home—a small temple. The Church blesses the very foundation of a home in the same way that it blesses the foundation of a church, it blesses a new Christian home in the same way that it blesses a new temple, and yearly, after the blessing of a parish temple with the water of Theophany, the Church brings this holy water into the homes of the faithful. The prayers for the blessing of a temple are different from those for the blessing of a home, because the function of a home is different from that of a temple, but the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit is one. And just as in the baptism of our Lord all of creation is washed clean and sanctified, every year after the feast of the Baptism of the Lord (January 19, according to the secular calendar) Christians sanctify themselves and their homes with the water of Theophany.

The Church teaches us to sanctify everything: dwellings, places of work, all our pursuits, and the fruits of our labor. And just as a temple and sacred vessels, once sanctified and set aside

for sacred use, can no longer be used for anything profane, in the same way a Christian washed in the baptismal waters, and his home, and all his works can no longer be the dwelling of sin and the works of satan, but only and always—the temple of the Holy Spirit and the fulfillment of the will of our Heavenly Father. This is why the Church blesses everything that can be found in a Christian home; and if something is not worthy of being blessed, then there should not be a place for it in the home of a Christian.

### **How Much Does It Cost?**

The prayer of the Church is priceless; it can be neither sold nor bought. The Church equally blesses the home of every Christian, regardless of his financial situation. However, we must note the obvious: it is not only angels who come to bless our homes, but together with them come the ministers of the altar—people very much like the rest of us, who also must take care of their families, and to whom petrol is dispensed only for money, just like to all of us. Thus, it is customary to make a donation to the clergy for their time and work. The amount of this donation is determined solely by each family's individual circumstances and considerations.

### **The Blessing of a Home**

In order to have your home blessed for the first time or to arrange for a yearly Theophany blessing, you must personally contact the Rector of your parish church. Historically, clergy could walk to every home in their parish and bless it on the very day of Theophany. In our current situation in the United States, when many parishioners live tens of miles from the church, it is important to approach the Rector in advance and arrange for an appropriate time for his visit.

For a yearly Theophany blessing of a home prepare a small table in your icon corner covered with a clean cloth, candles, and a vessel with holy water. For a first-time blessing of a home it is also necessary to prepare a very small amount of pure olive oil.

Although parishioners often wish for the priest to stay for dinner or supper after the blessing of their home, it is necessary to remember that the priest may be blessing several homes in one day and cannot physically eat several dinners and/or suppers in a row. Do not be offended if the priest must hurry away to another home. Long spiritual talks over a cup of tea are very important, but it is equally as important to find for them a proper time on a different day, or to ensure in advance that the priest has time after the blessing of your home.

## **GALA BANQUET 2012**

*Dinner, dancing, and entertainment*

*Friday, February 10th*

*from 6:30 pm*

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375 E 3300 S  
SALT LAKE CITY

**TICKETS**  
**\$100**

**TABLES (10 SEATS)**  
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**(801) 281-5560**

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**SUNDAY LUNCHES**

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