

# St. George Newsletter

October 2012

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## **Pilgrimage to Boise to the myrrh-streaming “Hawaii” Icon**

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For weeks before the visit of the myrrh-streaming Hawaii icon of the mother of God to our sister parish in Boise on the occasion of their parish holiday, our rector, Fr. Michael repeatedly reminded us of this even and encouraged us to take the trip. This was even more encouraged by the fact that due to Fr. Michael's absence, services in our own parish of St. George the Great Martyr were cancelled for that weekend. In spite of all of all this, for a long time we did not take the idea of the trip seriously, justifying our spiritual laziness by various circumstances. In some miraculous way, a few days before the set date, each of us for various reasons found it necessary to take the trip. In the end, with God's help, we overcame our indifference and numerous circumstances, which of course arose unexpectedly, and we began our trip on Saturday morning. We planned to attend the evening vigil and the Sunday Liturgy. Although we felt joy on the road for the whole trip, we were not fully aware of what awaited us in the coming hours.

How merciful the Lord is to us Russians emigrants! Our brethren in Russia and in other parts of the world travel thousands of miles and stand in lines for hours only to have a moments contact with a holy relic. The Lord simply gives us the opportunity without great effort to approach holy things, pray before them, and in some circumstances (as with the miraculous Kursk Root icon) bless our homes with their visits.

Truly the ways of the Lord are mysterious!

Here we are in the church right next to Her! Each of us experienced this meeting in a different way. For some, the fragrance of the myrrh-streaming icon seemed to fill the whole church, for others, the fragrance seemed stronger when venerating it. Thus, the icon acted on each of us in our own language of feelings. No matter how different those languages were, we were all united by a great joy in Christ. All of us were “Thomases”, placing our hands in His side. In those moments our faith was transformed into firm knowledge of the fact that God is ever-present and His love is here with us now and always. We see this and smell it in this icon of the Mother of God, soaked in fragrant myrrh. We feel it in receiving anointing with the oil from the icon. We hear it in the beautiful church hymns. We feel it with our hearts, experiencing an indescribable childlike joy in witnessing a miracle.

In its travels around to various churches, the Hawaii icon is accompanied by a reader of the Russian Orthodox parish in Honolulu, Nektary, in whose home the icon first began to stream myrrh. Nektary himself tells the story the best on the website of the parish (<http://www.orthodoxhawaii.org/icons.html>). Looking at reader Nektary during the service, it was noticeable that a great responsibility weighs on the shoulders of this man. For him, fulfilling the will of God is not only words, which we often say carelessly. For him this is labor every day, to which it is difficult to humble one's will and completely submit oneself to the will of He who chose him for this difficult mission. In spite of his visible physical exhaustion, he patiently answered all of our questions after the service. We did not dare to ask him to open the glass cover of the icon, in order to look more closely at the miraculous flow of myrrh, but he, as if sensing our secret hopes, not waiting for us to ask, unlatched the locks of the glass cover, where the icon is kept in a frame. The icon itself

is a paper copy of the Montreal Iveron icon of the Mother of God, mounted on wood. There is glass overlaid. As reader Nektary explained, the glass cover became a necessity after a visitor attempted to destroy the icon, striking it with a knife. Fortunately, this attack was warded off in time, and the attacker was stopped. We were absolutely amazed and overjoyed when we saw that the myrrh flows through this glass. The myrrh not only soaks the paper part of the icon, but also flows abundantly on the surface of the glass and along the top cover. In the lower part of the glass case that holds the icon in its frame a supply of cotton balls is kept to soak up the myrrh that flows. Thus, the myrrh is collected and brought to the suffering, and distributed to all who ask. On that day, the amount of myrrh was very great -- the icon was soaked with it. Reader Nektary informed us that the amount of myrrh is not constant, but during Holy Week, the flow stops completely until the end of Holy Saturday before the bright Resurrection of Christ. Nektary generously gave us cotton balls with the holy myrrh and small paper icons.



What is the mercy of God given to us in holy things?

Such miracles, for a believer, can be compared with parental care. A child knows that he is loved, but nothing compares with his joy when he is held by his mother or father. The miracles revealed to us by God, the mercy sent through miraculous myrrh-streaming icons is the same parental care that the Lord shows to us, thus allowing us to physically sense His presence. With pious joy we leap into His arms, and the words "God is with us" are not only recalled consciously, but spiritually and emotionally surround us.

God is with us when we are with Him. And when we are not with Him, He all the same reminds us that He is near, and His arms are always open to us.