I am the light of the world. Those who follow Me will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life. (John 8:12)

I am the Resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Me, though they may die, they shall live. (John 11:25)

**Message from the CYC**

Welcome to the October-December edition of St Nestor.

In this edition of St Nestor we have included the fifth and final part of the article on the sacramental life of the Church, which looks at Marriage.

Feasts over the coming months include the Holy Apostle St Luke the Evangelist (18 October), St Dimitrios (26 October), The Synaxis of the Archangels (8 November), St Nektarios (9 November), the Holy Apostle St Matthew the Evangelist (16 November), The Entrance of the Holy Theotokos into the Temple (21 November), St Catherine the Great Martyr (24 November), St Andrew the Apostle (30 November), St Nicholas (6 December), St Spyridon (12 December) and, of course, the great feast of the Nativity according to the flesh of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (25 December).

The fast for this great Christmas feast begins on the 15th November.

Also we would like to remind you to tune in to “The Voice of Orthodoxy”, a radio program in English which is held every Wednesday evening from 7:30pm-8:00pm on Radio 3XY.

Wishing you all a wonderful Christmas.

With love in Christ.

Central Youth Committee

**Troparion of The Nativity of our Lord**

Your birth, Christ our God, dawned upon the world as the light of knowledge; for then those who worshipped the stars were taught by a star to reverence you the Sun of righteousness, and to know you are the dawn from on high, Lord, glory to you.
A Christian Marriage.

Orthodox theology has always presented Christian marriage as something absolutely unique, and, indeed eternal. In marriage, human love "is being projected into the Kingdom of God" (John Meyendorff), reflecting the intimate union between Christ and the faithful which St. Paul speaks of (Ephes. 5). Married life is a special vocation which requires the grace of the Holy Spirit; and it is this very grace which is conferred in the Marriage Service.

The contemporary Marriage Service of the Orthodox Church is itself divided into two parts: the office of betrothal and the office of crowning. In the first, the rite includes the exchange of rings, demonstrating that both partners enter into marriage of their own volition. At the second, "crowns" placed upon the heads of the partners signify the grace of the Holy Spirit. These crowns are crowns of both joy and martyrdom. Because the couple has been united for eternity, there is joy; but because every marriage involves enormous self-sacrifice on the part of each partner, both also become "martyrs" in their own right.

The complete love each of the partners has for the other, should be the motivating factor in Christian marriage. In such a context, marriage exists not only for the procreation of children, but also that a mutual love may be expressed, sustained and extended to others. While it is not to be denied that God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, children must always be considered a gift from God and not the sole reason for marriage. Certainly, children do contribute to making marriages an authentic image of the Trinity; and St. John Chrysostom spoke of the family as "a little Church".

Divorce.

Because marriage implies a decision of free will on the part of both partners, there will always be the possibility of error. When a marriage fails, the Orthodox Church has generally declared that a true marriage had in fact never existed, i.e., the bond did not demonstrate its necessarily eternal character. It would not be totally accurate, however, to say that the Orthodox Church grants divorces, although such a practice has crept into the practice of some local Churches. Divorce is actually a civil matter which recognizes the breaking of a legal contract; the Church can merely recognize that an attempt at building up a true marriage has failed.

Without going into an exhaustive analysis of the historical and canonical developments, it should be mentioned that the Orthodox Church today normally allows the laity three attempts at establishing a true marriage. A fourth marriage is positively forbidden. Clergy, however, are permitted to marry only once and this must be prior to ordination. Finally, it remains only to comment upon the penitential character assigned to a marriage rite in which both partners are being married for the second or third time. A special service exists for these situations in which the prayers are more somber and the entire service far more subdued. In this way, the Church reminds both the partners and the entire people of God that one lasting marriage is the Christian norm.

The Institution of Marriage.

"God is the author and celebrant of pure marriage. He ordained and instituted it in paradise (Gen. 1:27-28)." Christian marriage is like any other marriage in its external form, structure and organization; it is experienced, however, in a radically different way. Relationships, authority and personal identity are experienced on a wholly other plane: in the context and spirit of the new life in Christ. In a Christian marriage two persons share each other in a unique relationship with the risen and reigning Christ.

Christ's death and resurrection constitute the basis for this new and radical relationship between spouses and between parents and children. In loving and being loved, Christians must be willing to enter, daily, into the light of Christ. It is there that they discover that "all great love is crucified love," as Paul Evdokimov once noted. Sacri-

ficial, self-giving love requires our willingness to die daily to the dreadful condition of our fallen nature, to pride, envy, anger, deceit, insensitivity, selfishness and every other kind of sinful desire and self-delusion that distorts, reduces, and destroys the human person.

In the immense reality of Christ's love, Christian spouses discover and experience the love of the Holy Trinity. It is this love, wrote Olivier Clement, which prece-
des, founds and renews our love. The couple's "self-gift" to each other is to love in a divine way. Such love invests the couple's whole being with the redeeming presence of the Incarnate Love. This Incarnate Love, Christ, integrates and enriches their personal and sexual love, enabling them to transcend the closed finitude of their fall-

enness, and thus allow them to reach ever-new and ever-deeper levels of communion, friendship, maturity, openness and holiness. This Christ-like experience of love reflects and makes credible the reality of God's love for humankind. In this way Christian spouses learn to be-

come servants of redemption.

In marriage every person acquires a new identity: the two become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). Thus, marriage is more than the social and religious sanction of a biological fact. It is, according to Christos Yiannaras: "... the personal relationship of coinherence. Through a
reciprocal relinquishment of the individual will and acceptance of the other's will, the unity of husband and wife comes not to be built on the natural premise of sexual impulse, but on the premise of ecclesial communion, which is self transcendence and self-offering. Marriage draws its identity not from the natural relationship, but from the relationship in the realm of the Kingdom."

Persons who marry in the Lord come to appreciate, in the deepest possible levels of existence, God's commandment to "love thy neighbor as thy self." A husband and wife become intimate lovers, because they are, first of all, neighbor and friend to each other in the most unique and conclusive way. By loving Christ, and through Him each other, they come to know one another's distinct identity, complete one another in a dynamic way, and discover God's image in each other (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:18-24). Drawn to each other, and together to Him, Who is the source of all love, their *eros* is transfigured constantly into unfailing love, into *agape*. Consumed by the face of the Lord, Who is mystically present in their lives, they find joy in exploring the hidden and unfathomable depths of the miracle and mystery of their own personhood.

A marriage in the Lord is sustained by the Holy Spirit, Who grants to the spouses the necessary gifts to secure a godly life in peace, truth, harmony and love. This is not to say, however, that a church marriage is free from problems, temptations, tensions, pains and suffering. Rather, it means only that in the obedience of faith are spouses open to the influence and power of the Holy Spirit, who allows the life of the Risen Christ to emerge in them, so that they may be empowered to transcend the weariness, failures and difficulties of daily, ordinary life. Marital bonds are strengthened and renewed by the exercise of godly patience, humility, fortitude, kindness and mutual trust. The bonds are nourished and sanctified by prayer, the sacraments of the Church, and works of genuine piety and charity.

**Conditions and Characteristics of Marriage.**

The essential condition for marriage in the Church is that the partners come to it out of their own free will. The decision to marry in the Lord is a highly personal one. It is to be arrived at prayerfully, in the counsel of one's own heart. The freedom to choose one's own partner is restricted only by those canonical, legal or moral impediments that would distort, damage or frustrate the purpose of marriage.

A church marriage is indissoluble. It is understood to be a life long event; a dynamic, unfolding, loving relationship that unites two unique personalities into a single body, without change and confusion. It becomes a covenant relationship between two persons who willingly accept the challenge and opportunity to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephes. 5:21). Marriage is established and constituted with appropriate prayers and signs of the Church; since it is God Himself, Who is the creator and the celebrant of marriage. Through her canonically ordained bishops, and/or presbyters, the Church, as the redeemed community, calls upon God to unite and sanctify the spouses and to prosper them in life and faith.

Marriage and family are understood to be patterned after the divine life of the Holy Trinity. With this model in mind, we recognize and uphold the absolute equality of the spouses. However, we are able to recognize differentiation in their nature and also in their relationship to one another. In the words of Thomas Hopko:

"... the mode of being and action of the male in creation is different from the mode of being and action of the female within the same nature of created being. More specifically ... the male and female are not the same and are not interchangeable in the unique forms of their common humanity."

Spouses relate to each other according to an order established by God; with the man as the head and the woman as the partner. This is a model based on the relationship of Christ and the Church. The man, as head, is called to love, cherish and respect his wife. The wife, as partner, is called to honor and respect her husband (Ephes. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19). A husband and wife complement each other, and, in this very complementarity, are able to recognize and experience their distinctiveness as well as their inherent equality.

A church marriage presupposes a monogamous relationship. Monogamy is implied in the Book of Genesis, upheld by the Prophets, confirmed by Christ, and sustained by the Church. Monogamy is consistent with the Christian ideal of agape. A monogamous relationship, based on the love of God, empowers the spouses with the will to overcome the evil inclinations toward division, envy, conceit, lust, arrogance, deception and manipulation. By preserving personal dignity and seeking to ensure equality, stability and purity in marital relations, monogamy fosters and promotes the aims of Christian marriage.

**The Purpose of Marriage.**

The essential and primary purpose of marriage is to unite two free persons into a communion of love for their mutual companionship, support, enjoyment, and personal fulfillment and completion. Genuine companionship is founded on mutual trust, which in turn is nourished by honesty, commitment, fidelity, tenderness, steadfastness of faith and single mindedness.

The task of living and growing together in holiness is aided by sexual fulfillment, since sexuality implicates the person whose substance is imprinted on the body. For the Christian, writes Olivier Clement:

"... sexuality must become a dimension of the person, a language of the relation between persons. This unity of the flesh denotes not only the union of the bodies, but the inter wovelessness of two lives."

Sexual fidelity and enjoyment nurture the distinction between, and allow for the development of the maleness of the husband and femaleness of the wife. But, like all human conditions and relations, sexuality, also, has been tinged by ancestral sin. Like all unhallowed things of the fallen world, human sexuality unbalanced can remain
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opaque, closed and graceless. It can deteriorate into narcissistic, abusive and predatory behavior, or sink into depravity and perversion. It can become an addiction of the worse kind. The other in the sexual relation becomes a body of desire; an object to be possessed, used and abused.

Sexuality needs to be brought into the realm of redemption through marital fidelity, modesty, tenderness, decency and prudence. The sexual experience develops into a means of self transcendence and becomes a window through which God's love and life shine into marital love and life. The human body becomes a body of communion and an opportunity for personal growth and transparency. The physical relationship is transformed into a union of persons, and more.

“Through the natural relationship of marriage,” writes Christos Yiannaras, “the two are united into one flesh, and through the eucharistic relationship of the mystery of marriage, this one flesh, the shared life of two persons, is made incorruptible and immortal.”

Human sexuality is fundamentally good; a gift from God. It exists to further the growth of mutual companionship in marriage by drawing husband and wife into a loving, caring and intimate communion of body and soul. Most importantly, it allows the spouses to become co-creators with God. Creation of a new life from flesh-soul. Most importantly, it allows the spouses to become loving, caring and intimate communion of body and soul. The human body becomes a body of desire; an object to be possessed, used and abused.

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The conception, birth and nurture of children constitute another basic aim and characteristic of marriage. Children are the very crown of the marital union and mysterious presence of God's creative love in the lives of two people. However, a childless marriage, due to biological infertility, is no less complete than a marriage with children.

Children are worthy of great love and careful upbringing. St. Paul tells parents to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephes. 6:4). While providing for their physical well-being, parents must also protect their children against sin, provide them with spiritual guidance, and create for them a loving environment in which they can develop into mature, caring human beings. The complex task of raising children requires patience, openness, faith and immeasurable love and understanding. According to Father Alexander Elchaninov, "the most important thing is that children should see their parents leading an intense interior life." Sexual relations are related to the mutual fulfillment of the spouses and then to child-bearing. The decision, therefore, to suspend fertility through the use of contraceptives is not necessarily in violation of natural law. Regarding this matter, Metropolitan Chrysostomos Zapheris notes the following:

While the Orthodox Church fully acknowledges the role of procreation in the marital sexual act, it does not share the deterministic understanding of the act ...which ignores love as a dimension of great value in sexual intercourse between husband and wife.

Creation of new life requires serious, prayerful, honest and sincere reflection. While some forms of contraception are more admissible than others, it is clear that abortion is not an acceptable form of birth control. The decision to regulate the size of one's family is the personal responsibility of the spouses. A serious commitment to the Gospel, however, precludes decisions that are based solely on hedonistic, selfish and prideful reasons. We do well, at this point, to remember the words of a noted Orthodox theologian:

“Since Christ's resurrection a realm of non-death has opened up in the opacity of the world ...Contrary to widespread opinion, my body is not myself. It is my self only when it belongs to Christ, when it takes its place in the stream of life of the communion of saints, in the fountainhead of living water of the Body of Christ.”

When a Marriage Fails

Unfortunately, marriages can fail and cause painful and distressful conditions that lead to separation and divorce. Divorce produces as much anguish as death because it is the withering away of a living relationship into emotional and spiritual deadness; often times after cruel and humiliating experiences. The Church admits divorce and remarriage as a concession to human frailty and imperfection. These concessions reflect the Church's pastoral concern for wounded souls and her refusal to abandon divorced persons in their sin, failure, weakness, distress, dilemma and pain. Thus, choice here is between right and wrong marriages in the context of a lifelong union and pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God.

The Marriage Rite

The service of marriage currently in use by the Church consists of two separate, independent and self contained rites, that have been linked together for many centuries: Engagement which is also called "The Service of the Betrothal"; which is also referred to as "The Service of

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Crowning.

In the early Church marriages of Christians were accomplished by agreement of the couple with the blessing of the bishop or presbyter, usually given in the context of the Eucharist. By the fourth century, the Rite of Crowning had developed and was performed within the eucharistic celebration. A marriage rite separate from the eucharist began to appear in the ninth century. The formation of two separate rites, one for betrothal and another for marriage, had begun early. The purpose of the Betrothal Service was to confirm and hallow the pledge of the future marriage. It was customary to conduct it at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. The purpose of the Marriage Service was to consecrate the marital union; it was conducted during the course of the Divine Liturgy. In another stage of its development, the Rite of Crowning was celebrated within the context of a Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts. The practice of drawing these two independent rites into a single liturgical event, separate from the Eucharist, began in the tenth century. It soon became common place, and finally, the norm.

The Service of Betrothal is relatively short. It contains a set of petitions and three prayers. It is characterized by the exchange and the putting on of rings. The rings constitute the sign of the couples' voluntary pledge to enter into marriage and to live together in faith, harmony, truth and love.

The Service of Crowning is longer and more complex. Besides petitions, several prayers, and two scripture readings, it contains a number of liturgical actions that include the joining of hands, the partaking of blessed wine from a common cup and a solemn joyous procession. The characteristic ritual, however, is the act of crowning the couple, hence the name of the service. With eloquent words and didactic symbolism this service emphasizes the rich blessings, the special joys and graces of Christian marriage.

A Note on Celibacy

Celibacy is another way of living the Gospel. A person chooses to remain sexually unengaged in order to better obey the Lord's commandments. Monastics also choose to reject pleasures and relationships of the world, not because these are inherently bad, but because they have a far greater desire, to discover the face of God through ascesis. The monk does not suppress eros. He/she transforms it by grace. St. John of the Ladder says it in these words: "blessed is he who has a passion for God no less violent than the lover has for his beloved." The celibate, who is detached from things of the world and accepts virginity for the glory of God, imitates angelic life and manifests the condition of the resurrection life, "when those raised from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage" (Mk 12:25).

Rev. Alciviadis C. Calivas
http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith7106

Preparation for Holy Communion

With the increased participation in Holy Communion which has taken place in recent times, people have increasingly asked the question: "How should I prepare to receive Holy Communion?" Although we cannot hope to answer this question in a short bulletin article, we can raise some of the issues which are at the heart of the debate.

First and foremost we must realize that every Sacrament is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. That is why the participant's name is said in the administration of the Sacrament.

We approach every Sacrament, especially Holy Communion, with faith, love, obedience, and deep penitence for our sins. St. Nilus writes, "It is impossible for the believer to be saved, to receive remission of sins and be admitted to the kingdom of heaven, unless in fear, faith, and love he receives communion of the pure mysteries of the Body and Blood of Jesus."
The early Church Fathers never suggested that we not partake of Holy Communion because of personal unworthiness. On the contrary the Didache (2nd c.) says: "If anyone is holy let him come; if he is not let him repent (and come)." Fr. Coniaris writes:

"We need to realize that no one is ever worthy to receive God within one's soul. It is not a matter of our worthiness but of God's grace. Communion is never a reward for holy living but always the gift of God's grace no matter how much we may have prepared. May we keep our sense of unworthiness so that it may keep leading us to the only One Who can make us worthy. The sense of unworthiness is just the right attitude with which to approach Communion, for it helps us accept the Eucharist as a completely free gift of God's supreme grace. An exaggerated sense of unworthiness needs to give way to humble gratitude for God's grace which accepts especially the unworthy to make them worthy. Is not the Eucharist Matthew's banquet all over again? To the horror of the "good" people, Jesus eats and drinks with sinners!"

Having made some general remarks let's look specifically at some concrete points about preparation for Holy Communion.

First to clear up some misconceptions, the only fast linked specifically to Holy Communion is total abstinence from food on the day one receives (according to the Holy Canons). The custom of receiving Holy Communion only three times a year, namely at Easter, Christmas and the Dormition (Aug. 15) was issued as an imperial Tome in 922 A.D. as a penance for Trigamists (only). It had nothing to do with the average Christian. On the contrary St. Basil speaks of kommunion a minimum of four times a week! St. Nicodemos (the great commentator on the Holy Canons) wrote a pamphlet

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The manner in which Christ healed the blind man was very strange, and caused much questioning among those who witnessed the event. I do not intend to concentrate on the miracle as such, but rather on one detail which is of symbolic significance for anyone who has learnt to look beyond the merely apparent. For the one who has learnt to think, to contemplate, to penetrate the signifiers and reach the signified.

What does the reading mean when it states: "He made mud and spread it on my eyes"? This symbolic gesture of Christ is intended to show us that salvation is in our midst, and that healing is by our side. The earth which we tread upon and exploit is sacred ground. And when man takes it into his hands with a pleasing and grateful spirit, this earth not only produces all kind of fruit (how many colours, aromas and tastes!), but has the capacity of moving us to the point of realizing that God is in and on the soil. Since God created the world and gave it to humankind to enjoy. He placed man and woman in paradise (see Gen. 2:8), which means in the midst of happiness.

And this humble ground which we do not value, respect or honour sometimes, and which has so many natural powers, surprises us with its nakedness and the sheer variety of its products. When we are faithful to the earth, it is our body, and our body is the earth. Sooner or later, they are identified with each other once again; my body and yours will return to the body of the earth from where they came, and they will glorify God in silence - not in rebellion, as when we are alive. So, in this world, within us and around us, is salvation. Do not expect supernatural actions of God on a daily basis: for the heavens to open up and for angels to come down. Do not wait for the invisible God to speak to you in a thunderbolt. God gave all creation for the purpose of thanksgiving and transfiguration. He placed the human person at the centre of the world, between earth and heaven, between visible and invisible. He established the human person not as an abuser of the gift, but as priest and celebrant and beholder of the divine. To take creation in his hands and offer it as we offer the bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Christ.

The blind man was a tragic figure because, as we chanted in the relevant hymn of the Church: "I could not see the sun shining, nor even could I see the image of Him who made me."

The reality is that the blind man is less tragic and unfortunate than us who think we can see. We who have our health, our sight, with everything around us observable like an open book, in fact remain blind. Our eyes function, but we do not use them in a manner that is worthy of God. We have ears, but do we listen to His word? We have hands, but have we performed His will? We have legs, but have we brought His Gospel to those who have yet to know it? We have the sense of smell, but do we perceive that from all created things a fragrance rises, to the glory of God?

And in spite of this, only man pollutes the earth and creates ecological problems. Which other creature of God, which animal - even the wildest - has created an ecological problem in the world? Neither the lion, nor the ravens have managed to bring to extinction any species created by God in the Six Days of Creation. Man is close to extinguishing so many species of both flora and fauna. Man is in danger of extinguishing the human race itself.

You may ask: How can you call us all blind? It is not I who say this. Everyday experience tells us that we are all blind. I will only remind you of the definition of the creative and sensitive person, i.e. of the poet, given by Yannis Ritsos, one of the greatest poets of modern Greece. Ritsos said: "The poet is one who has overcome blindness". Why did he say this? Because the poets manage to see in the same mundane things which we all see around us, and handle and use on a daily basis, an eternal dimension: the voice of God, as well as His and our fellow human being's 'nobility'. They see the spirit taking tangible form, 'solidified' in specific objects. They see beyond the visible, and hear beyond the audible.

Let us pray that God will enable us to see within ourselves the spiritual blindness, the inner blindness which affects the whole person, and that our eyes will be open to see further and deeper into the daily reality of life.

Amen.

Source: ‘St Andrews Theological College, The first two decades’, St Andrew’s Orthodox Press, 2007
The Ancestors of the Lord

The Sundays of Advent-tide... belong to the cycle of the Sundays after Pentecost and have no direct connection with the mystery of the coming of the Lord Jesus expressed by Christmas. This is why the Church, in wanting to prepare the faithful for the great feast of the Incarnation, has added to the readings and to the prayers of the two Sundays which precede Christmas (whatever these Sundays may be in the order of Sundays after Pentecost) other texts which do have a direct bearing on Advent. These, then, are the two 'Sundays before Christmas' which are in some way superimposed on the two Sundays after Pentecost with which they coincide. In principle on these two Sundays the epistle and gospel for the Sunday after Pentecost should first be read, then the epistle and gospel which are added because of Christmas. Often the texts for the Sunday after Pentecost are omitted, and we restrict ourselves to the readings and prayers that prepare us for the Nativity of Our Lord.

The first of these two Sundays is called 'Sunday of the Ancestors of the Lord'. This year it is celebrated on the 11th December.

The 'Ancestors' are the Patriarchs and the Prophets of the Old Covenant, from Adam to John the Baptist. The Church sings: 'Let us rejoice together, we who are friends of the Fathers, in commemorating their memory...'. One wonders whether these words correspond to any genuine feeling on the part of the majority of believers. Many among us have lost touch with the Old Testament, and neither read nor understand it, and so do not take into account that Jesus Christ is present, though veiled, in all the events and all the texts of Hebrew Scripture. All is centered on him. Many do not recognise in Abel the first martyr, and the prototype of the Good Shepherd as well as the Sacrificer; in Melchisedek the type of the eternal priest; in Abraham the spirit of faith and the type of the Father; in Isaac the spirit of sonship and of sacrifice, in Jacob free election, patient service and conversion; in Joseph the great features of the Passion and of Christ's redemptive work. They forget that through the reading of the Prophets the voice of Jesus himself speaks to our heart. They are not really 'friends of the Fathers' and they do not delight in remembering them. Let us ask our Lord, on this Sunday, to give the good shepherds of our time the impetus to lead their flock to the Good Shepherd as well as to the Sacrificer.

The epistle read at the liturgy for this Sunday, 'When Christ, who is our life, shall appear...' (Col. 3. 4-11), is the one assigned for the 29th Sunday after Pentecost. The gospel is that for the 28th Sunday after Pentecost: 'A certain man made a great supper...'(Luke 14. 16-24). These texts bear on the Nativity of Christ rather than on the Ancestors. The chant called the kontakion also makes a direct allusion to Christmas: 'On this day, and beyond all telling, the Virgin gives birth to the Word in a cave...'.

A special feature of this Sunday is the frequent mention made in the chants of the prophet Daniel and also of the three young men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who, thrown into the furnace for refusing to worship the image of the king, Nebuchadnezzar, were miraculously saved from death. This is explained by the fact that the feast of Daniel and the three young men falls on December 17th, and will thus fall very close to this Sunday. The liturgical texts themselves bring out the symbolic meaning of the episode. On one hand, the three young men (like the three angels who appeared to Abraham) represent the Trinity: 'The young men of God came and went in the fiery furnace, rejoicing in the dew of the Spirit which refreshed them, and representing the mystery of the Trinity...'. They represent the victory of faith over death: 'By their faith they quelled the power of the fire'. Finally they represent - and here is found the link with Christmas — the new burning bush, the fire of the divine presence which does not consume: 'Thy young men, O Christ, when they were in the furnace which was to them like dew, mysteriously figure thy birth from the Virgin, which has illumined us without burning us'. We are reminded that, as the Bible tells us, the three young men were not alone in the furnace: 'Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire... and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God'. These last words shed light on the problem of human suffering. The Son of God himself is always there to be with men in the midst of the furnace.

The Genealogy of Christ

The second Sunday which is specially consecrated to the preparation for the Nativity is that which immediately precedes the feast of Christmas. It is called 'Sunday of the Fathers or of the Genealogy. This year, 2011, it falls on December 18th.

'Turning our thoughts to Bethlehem, let us lift ourselves in spirit to contemplate the great Mystery which is taking place in the cave... Now that the time of our salvation draws near... Prepare thyself, O Bethlehem...'; the choir sings during the service, and mention is made of the patriarchs, the prophets, the holy women of the Old Covenant who 'through faith shine like the stars'. The Church's idea, this Sunday, seems to be to bring the righteous who lived before Christ into the joy of the Nativity 'inviting them all by praises and divine songs to prepare for the birth of Christ'.

(Continued on page 13)
St Thomas the Apostle
(6th October)

The holy Apostle Thomas, also called Didymus, was born in Judaea. His parents were poor but they passed on to him a great love for the Law of Moses. When he was still young, he drew apart from the noisy games of his companions to devote himself to reading and meditating upon the Scriptures. His knowledge of God's word and well-disposed conscience enabled him, without hesitation, to recognize Christ as the Messiah spoken of by the Prophets and to follow him as soon as He called him. He left his boat and his nets and became one of the Twelve. He was persecuted, excluded and stoned by the Jews, yet followed the Saviour everywhere with such burning zeal that when Christ took the road for Jerusalem to offer himself for those who were going to kill him, Thomas said to the other disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him (John 11:16).

When the Saviour of the world had overcome death by rising from the tomb, He appeared to his disciples who were assembled with the doors shut, for fear of the Jews; He showed them the marks of his Passion upon his body, and the disciples were filled with joy. God so provided that Thomas was not then with them and, when the others told him they had seen the Lord risen from the dead, he was unwilling to believe them. In his great patience and forbearance, the Lord appeared again to his disciples a week later, and asked Thomas to certify that He was well and truly risen from the dead in the flesh; He told him to put his finger into the holes in his hands pierced by the spear. In admonishing Thomas for his lack of faith, the Saviour showed that we too are called to recognize Christ as the Messiah upon to thrust our hands into his side, not physically but spiritually, to quench our thirst there at the well-spring of grace (cf.John 20:19-29).

Thomas was with the other Apostles when, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down upon their heads in the form of tongues of fire. He was filled, like the rest, with power from on High for the proclamation of the world's Salvation; and, when the Apostles went their separate ways, it fell to Thomas to bring the Glad Tidings to the distant lands of the the Medes and Parthians (Iran), and as far as India.

At that time, there was in Jerusalem a man called Ambanes, sent by an Indian king to find an architect with skill enough to build him a palace that should surpass in beauty and adornment any constructed by previous master-builders. The Lord made known to Thomas that this was the providential means for him to fulfil his mission, so he made out to Ambanes that he was a slave, expert in the builder's art. They took ship for India, therefore, and arrived at the court of King Gundaphar. The King was enraptured by the plan of the magnificent palace that Thomas laid before him and left him with a large sum of money for building it, before leaving for a three-year tour of some distant provinces. As soon as he had charge of these riches, Thomas did not delay in distributing them to the countless poor, starving folk whom the King and his nobles had taken no care for at all. As well as relieving the poor, the Apostle worked miracles and preached the Gospel to such good effect that a great many pagans were brought to the faith. When the King sent to know how the building works were getting on, Thomas asked him for more gold on the pretext of finishing the roof. The King was delighted and immediately sent what he asked for; and it never entered his head that Thomas was giving it away as soon as he received it. All the more terrible was his wrath then, when he found out that he had been tricked and that the Saint had given all his money to the poor, Thomas was shut up in a deep pit and the King had the most dreadful torments in store for him. But, that very night, his brother, who was grievously sick, had a vision of an Angel who carried him away and showed him a magnificent palace in the everlasting Kingdom of the righteous. The Angel said to him, 'Behold the palace prepared for your brother, built for him by the Apostle Thomas!' When he came to himself, he described all he had seen to the King, and how much more beautiful than any earthly dwelling was the palace Thomas had built for him in Heaven. Completely overwhelmed, the King repented, released the Apostle and asked for Baptism with his brother.

Saint Thomas then left for another kingdom where barbarity and godlessness held sway with yet more violence. But, in the power of the Holy Spirit, he succeeded in converting Tertia, the King's wife, her son Azanes and her two daughters, Migdonia andMarca. He baptized them and taught them how to follow the way of perfection in ascetic and chastity. This seemed a peculiar and senseless way of life to the lustful King, and it threw him into a rage. He had Saint Thomas seized and ordered five soldiers to spear him through on a mountain outside the city. So it was that the Apostle departed to rejoice for ever with the Lord. He is venerated as the founder of the Church in India.
St Catherine the Great Martyr  
(25 November)  

Catherine was the daughter of Cestus, a wealthy patrician of Alexandria, the capital of Egypt and metropolis of the arts and sciences. She was widely admired not only for her noble birth but also for the exceeding beauty and intelligence that God had given her. Taught by the best masters and most illustrious philosophers, she learnt while still a girl to follow complex lines of argument and obtained a perfect understanding of the philosophical systems of Plato, Aristotle and their followers. She also excelled in the literary sphere, was familiar with the works of all the great poets from Homer to Virgil and was capable of discussing every subject, in a variety of languages learnt from scholars and foreign visitors to the great city. In her quest for knowledge, she had made herself acquainted with all the physical sciences, especially medicine, and there was no area of human wisdom beyond the range of her penetrating intellect. By the time she was eighteen, even the most learned scholars were in awe of her intellectual accomplishments. All this, combined with noble birth, beauty and wealth, made her an enviable match and there were suitors in plenty for her hand. But having a presentiment of the excellence of virginity, Catherine refused them all and made it a condition with her parents that she would accept none but a youth who equalled her in nobility, riches, beauty and wisdom. Her mother, in despair of finding such a one, sent her to seek the advice of a holy Christian ascetic who lived not far from the city. He told Catherine that he did indeed know a man such as she was looking for, and possessed of that surpassing wisdom which is the very source and spring of all things visible and invisible—wisdom neither gained nor appropriated, but his eternal possession. He is noble also above all that we can think of, for He has authority over the whole universe and has made the world by his own power. Master of the worlds, principle of all wisdom and of all knowledge, He is also, the Elder told her, the most beautiful of the children of men (Ps. 44:3), for He is God incarnate: Son and eternal Word of the Father, who became man for our salvation and who desires to espouse every virginal soul. As he bade her farewell, the ascetic gave her an icon of the Mother of God carrying the divine Child in her arms. That night the Mother of God appeared to Catherine, but Christ turned away and would not look at her, saying that she was ugly and unclean because still subject to sin and death. Grief-stricken, she went back to the ascetic who instructed her in the mysteries of the faith and gave her new birth unto eternal life in the waters of Baptism. Then the Holy Virgin appeared to Catherine again with Christ in her arms, who said to His Mother with joy, 'Now I will accept her as my most pure bride for she has become radiant and fair, rich and truly wise!' In token and pledge of this heavenly betrothal, the Mother of God put a ring upon the finger of the maiden and caused her to promise to take no other spouse upon earth.

Now in those days the Emperor Maximin (305-11), like Diocletian before him, tried to make all his subjects show their submission to his power by offering idolatrous sacrifices under pain of torture and death. When these impious rites were taking place in Alexandria, Catherine appeared before him in the temple and declared her allegiance, but severely reproved the idolatrous ceremonies. Struck by her beauty as much as by her boldness, the Emperor listened as she developed her argument and he was overcome by her wisdom. Accepting her offer to engage the foremost scholars and orators of the Empire in public disputation, Maximin sent heralds all over the Roman world to bring together scholars philosophers, orators and logicians. There arrived at Alexandria fifty in all, who presented themselves before the Emperor and the crowd that gathered in the amphitheatre, to confront the slender young girl. Alone, but radiant with the grace of the Holy Spirit, she was in no fear of them, having been assured by the Archangel Michael in a vision that the Lord would speak through her mouth, and cause her to overcome the wisdom of the world by the Wisdom that comes from on high. In that
strength, Catherine showed up the errors and contradictions of oracles, poets and philosophers. She showed how they have recognized for themselves that the so-called gods of the pagans are demons and the expression of human passions. She even referred in support of her arguments to certain oracles of the Sibyl and of Apollo, which dimly tell of the divine Incarnation and life-giving Passion of the Son of God. Overthrowing their myths and fables, she proclaimed the creation of the world out of nothing by the one only, true, eternal God, and the deliverance of man from death by the Incarnation of the only Son of the Father. Having run out of arguments, the fifty orators were reduced to silence. Recognizing their error, they asked the Saint for Baptism, to the fury of the Emperor, who condemned them to be burnt alive on 17 November. Finding Catherine immune to flattery, Maximin had her tortured and thrown into prison, while a dreadful instrument of torture was constructed of four spiked wheels connected by an axle. Catherine was attached to this machine as soon as it was ready, but an Angel came to free her and the death-dealing chariot hurled down the slope killing many pagans on its way.

Seeing the feasts of the holy Martyr, Maximin's own wife was converted and visited Catherine in prison, escorted by the commander Porphyrius, a close friend of the Emperor, and by 200 soldiers, all of whom became disciples of Christ. Catherine received them with joy and foretold that they would soon bear away the crown of valiant athletes of the faith. The Emperor was enraged at such defiance within his household. Forgetful of all human feeling, he had his wife cruelly tortured and beheaded on 23 November. On the following day Porphyrius and his company were put to death. On 25 November, Catherine was brought forth from her dungeon to appear at the tribunal, fairer and more radiant with heavenly joy than when she had entered it, for she saw that the day of her union with Christ had come at last. She was taken outside the city and, after a last prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord who had revealed to her the heavenly joy than when she had entered it, for she saw the deliverance of man from death by the Incarnation of the only Son of the Father. Having run out of arguments, the fifty orators were reduced to silence. Recognizing their error, they asked the Saint for Baptism, to the fury of the Emperor, who condemned them to be burnt alive on 17 November. Finding Catherine immune to flattery, Maximin had her tortured and thrown into prison, while a dreadful instrument of torture was constructed of four spiked wheels connected by an axle. Catherine was attached to this machine as soon as it was ready, but an Angel came to free her and the death-dealing chariot hurled down the slope killing many pagans on its way.

Her body was then conveyed by two Angels from Alexandria to Mount Sinai. There it was discovered in the eighth century by an ascetic who lived in the vicinity. The precious relic was later translated to the Monastery that the Emperor Justinian had founded in the sixth century. It is there to this day, giving forth a heavenly scent and working countless miracles.

(Continued from page 9)

Source: The Synaxarion. The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church. Vol.2 November-December, Holy Convent of the Annunciation of Our Lady, Ormylia(Chalkidike) 1999
The sign of the Cross

The symbol of the Christian Faith has been and will always be the Cross, for it is the sign of our Redemption by Our Lord Jesus Christ Who came to earth to suffer for us by being crucified upon the Cross. When people wish to show that something is dedicated to Christ they mark it with a cross. The Cross is placed on church buildings, on the Holy Gospel, on the sacred vestments, on banners, and over the graves of the departed. All Christians wear their baptismal crosses because they are dedicated to Christ.

HOW TO MAKE THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

When we are at prayer we rededicate ourselves to God by making the Sign of the Cross on ourselves. First we join the first three fingers of our right hand together (the thumb, the index finger, and the middle finger), and we bend the other two fingers down to the palm. We then trace on ourselves the Cross by touching the three joined fingers of the right hand to the forehead, the breast, the right shoulder and the left shoulder. After forming the Cross on ourselves we slightly bow our heads to express our reverence and humility.

When we join our three fingers together it is as if we wanted to say: "I believe in God, One in the Trinity; in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; not in one person, but Three Persons; not in three gods, but One God." When we bend the other two fingers of our right hand down to the palm it is as if we were saying: "I believe that Our Saviour Jesus Christ, Who is at the same time Real God and Real Man, the God-man, came down to earth for our salvation." We touch our forehead to ask God to sanctify our thoughts; our breast, to sanctify our senses; our shoulders, to strengthen our wills for the doing and keeping of God's commandments. When we make the Sign of the Cross we bear the inscription: "I belong to Jesus Christ"; and we show thereby that we want to live and act not for ourselves but for the Lord our God. As the Cross is being made we say the following prayer (unless we are saying another prayer at the time): "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." We say these words to make it clear that we want to belong to God and serve Him alone.

WHEN TO MAKE THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

God is always near us because He is everywhere. He always sees us just as He sees everything. But during prayer we are especially close to God: we stand before Him, speak to Him and He listens to us. Because of this, while praying, we sign ourselves with the Cross more often, and especially before and after each prayer in order that we may not be distracted in saying them. We also make the Cross on ourselves when we enter church or approach any sacred object or kiss an icon, and many times during church services. We should make the Sign of the Cross in the morning in order to obtain the blessing of God for the day; in the evening to ask for his protection during the night; at all the important moments of our life: when in danger, in sorrow, in joy; before all important undertakings that they may turn out well; at mealtime to invoke God's blessing and to give Him thanks.

The first Christians used the Sign of the Cross constantly. Tertullian, a writer of the latter part of the second century, says of it: "At every motion and at every step, entering in or going out, when dressing, bathing, going to meals, lighting the lamp, sleeping or sitting, whatever we do, or whithersoever we go, we mark our foreheads with the Sign of the Cross."

St. Cyril of Jerusalem writes: "Let us not be ashamed to confess the Crucified Christ; let us boldly make the Sign of the Cross on the forehead, and on everything; on the bread which we eat; on the cups from which we drink; let us make it at our going out, and coming in; when we lie down to sleep, and when we rise, when we journey, and when we rest: It is a great safeguard, given to the poor without price, to the weak without labour. For this is the Grace of God; a token for the Faithful, and a terror for evil spirits."

THE POWER OF THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

St John Chrysostom, a Father of the Church, praised in the fourth century the great veneration in which the Sign of the Cross was held by Christians of his time: "More precious than the universe, the Cross glitters on the diadems of emperors. Everywhere it is present to my view. I find it among princes and subjects, men and women, virgins and married people, slaves and freemen. All continually trace it on the noblest part of the body, the forehead, where it shines like a column of glory. It is made over sick animals, over persons possessed by demons, in war, in peace, by day, by night, in pleasant reunions and in penitential assemblies. It is a question of who shall seek first the protection of this admirable Sign. What is there surprising in this? The Sign of the Cross is the type of our deliverance, the monument of liberation of mankind, the souvenir of the forbearance of Our Lord. When you make it, remember what has been given for your ransom, and you will be the slave of no one. Make it, then, not only with the fingers, but with your faith. If you engrave it on your forehead, no impure spirit will dare to stand before you. He sees the blade with which he has been wounded, the sword with which he has re-
The sign of the Cross

(Continued from page 11)

ceived the deathblow." This teaches us how we ought to reverence the Cross.

With good reason has the Sign of the Cross been so highly venerated by the Holy Martyrs and Confessors of all times, for by their own experience they have learned that it is a symbol of power. Armed with this sacred Sign, the Martyrs went forth to battle with the wild beasts in the amphitheatre, walked calmly to the stake to be burned, bowed their necks to the sword or exposed their bodies to the last. They braved the terrors of the dungeon or went willingly into exile. Even tender virgins and children defied the power of the tyrant and suffered death in its most terrible forms. Many other Christians went alone into the desert wastes to practice lifelong penitence, sustained and encouraged by the same never-failing source of supernatural strength. It will be our strength also in times of trial, our victory in temptations, and our pledge of perseverance.

WHAT THE SIGN OF THE CROSS MEANS TO US

For Orthodox [Christians] the Sign of the Cross is a wield and a safeguard against temptations and dangers that threaten the life of the soul. Whenever we are oppressed by temptations we may repulse them by the Sign of the Cross. St. Cyril of Jerusalem says: "Let us make the Sign of the Cross boldly and courageously. When the demons see it, they are reminded of the Crucified; they take to flight; they hide themselves and leave us."

The Sign of the Cross is likewise a source of knowledge revealing to us the chief mysteries of our Holy Faith, both by the words uttered in making it and by the action itself. The words "in the Name of Him who in sub-

mit. The words "in the Name" instead of "in the names" express the fundamental truth of tri-unity of God; while the mention of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit declares that in this One God there are Three Persons, thus teaching the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

The Sign of the Cross is a prayer. It is an appeal to heaven made in the Name of Him who in submission to the will of His Father, "humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8); of Him who declared, "If you ask the Father anything in my name He will give it to you" (John 16:23). Hence we begin and end our devotions with the Sign of the Cross in order that our petitions may be more acceptable at the Throne of Grace.

When we are assured by Christians of all ages, but especially by those of the first centuries, that we have at our command so powerful a weapon in the Sign of the Cross, it is much to be regretted that we do not make better use of it in our times. Never did the world array before the child of God enemies so numerous or so insidious as at the present time. They assail him on every side, not only with sword and fire, but also with false philosophies, with pride of intellect, with religious indifference, with materialism, with denial of God. It is more difficult to combat for a lifetime against these enemies than it would be to gain the Martyr's crown in a momentary struggle in the amphitheatre. If for the first Christians, trained in the school of the Apostles and their immediate successors, the frequent use of the Sign of the Cross was so necessary, is it not also indispensable to us? Let us then follow the pious custom of our Fathers in the Faith and make the Sign of the Cross more frequently.

MAKE THE SIGN OF THE CROSS REVERENTLY

Still more deserving of censure are those Christians who indeed make the Sign of the Cross, but make it carelessly. It is true there is a tendency to do mechanically what a person does often, but for that very reason, if for no other, particular attention should be bestowed upon such things. It is seriously to be doubted whether persons who make the Sign of the Cross carelessly receive the graces attached to the proper use of the sacred Sign. To those who make the Sign of the Cross hurriedly, without due deliberation, with the whole hand, or simply wave their hand in the air fanning their breast, St. John Chrysostom says: "The demons rejoice in this frantic waving." On the other hand the Cross traced correctly, with faith and reverence, dispels demons, calms sinful passions, attracts Divine Grace, and gives us the strength to do good and expel that which is evil.

We must never be ashamed of the Sign of the Cross lest Christ be ashamed of us. The devil rejoices when he sees anyone neglect to make this sacred Sign for he knows that the Cross is his destruction and a Sign of victory over his temptations. When circumstances require it, one should not hesitate to sign himself with the symbol of Redemption. The Sign of the Cross inspires self-respect by teaching the true dignity of man. It is a reminder that we were purchased with the infinite price of Christ's Precious Blood, that we are brothers of Jesus Christ. It sanctifies our members with the sanctification they derive from His. It stamps the unity of God on our forehead, the seat of the mind; it seals our heart and breast with the remembrance of the love of the Father; it strengthens our shoulders to bear the Cross of the Son; and it maintains an unbroken union of love with the Three Divine Persons by means of the Holy Spirit.

Source: The Orthodox Companion by Rev. David F. Abramtsov, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, Englewood, New Jersey, 1994
10 Top Tips on How to Pump Up your Prayer Life

Someone once asked me “how do we cultivate the inner life”. I’m certainly no expert myself, but try to follow the teachings of our Church in this modern world. Here’s something I use with my adult classes for Orthodox believers:

1. **Have a Time for Prayer**: Make prayer a regular part of your routine – something as regular as brushing your teeth everyday. Set time aside to be with God. Little and often.

2. **Have a Space for Prayer**: Find a private corner where you can have your icons, prayer books, prayer ropes, votive lamp (kantilli) etc.

3. **Use the Bible**: Read the Scriptures slowly and prayerfully, drink them in.

4. **Build up a Prayer ‘library’**: Get a prayer book, and collect prayers that you can use. Learn Prayers of the Church. Use the Jesus Prayer.

5. **Speak from your heart**: Use your own prayers and thoughts too. Be comfortable with God.

6. **Get a spiritual guide**: Establish a relationship with a spiritual father, ideally, with your parish priest if he can hear confession. Otherwise, a local priest who can understand your background and situation, and hear your confession.

7. **Find out about fasting**: Fasting trains you up for prayer. Perhaps start with Wednesdays and Fridays, and then attempt the greater fasts. Speak with your spiritual father about this. If you have a medical condition etc. this should be taken into consideration.

8. **Sanctify all you do**: Remember “This is the day that the Lord has made, Let us rejoice and be glad in it!” God isn’t just a part of life, an added extra. Thank God all the time, let Him know your concerns. Dedicate everything to him.

9. **Use technology to your advantage**: You can download the daily readings and saints to your phone calendar, get Orthodox prayer reminders on Twitter, have the daily readings and commentaries emailed to you, keep up with Orthodox events on Facebook, listen to Orthodox Radio while you work, and learn much more about the Orthodox Faith using the Internet.

10. **Join with others in fellowship and enter the life of the Church**: Become part of a community. The Church is not a building, but a community of Christians who gather together. It is not the priests and the clergy, it is all of you gathering together. Don’t complain that “The Church” isn’t doing enough – blaming the priests – you are the Church; What are you doing?

Marina Robb

(Continued from page 7)

Meditations on Daily Bible Readings:
The Ancestors of the Lord

The gospel read at the liturgy (the whole of Matt. 1) traces back the genealogy of Jesus according to the flesh: ‘The generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; …’. And it continues up to Joseph 'the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ'. We have read or heard this genealogy many times. We may have the impression that this reading is of purely historical and documentary interest. What can this list of names bring us that has any spiritual import? But each one of these names does have a particular meaning, if we remind ourselves of the story of the person who bore it. What needs to be clearly understood is that the ancestors of Jesus were not all just and holy men. Amongst them are also sinners; those who have committed incest, adultery, murder; an alien woman: the names of Judas, of Thamar, of David and Ruth are filled with spiritual significance. Jesus wanted, humanly, to be linked with ‘all that’, and to ‘all those’. He wanted to clear a way for himself through the sins and crimes of men. And so it is the history of each one of us that he takes upon himself and overcomes. For each one of us has some of the features of those of Jesus's ancestors who are the furthest from holiness. In each of us can be found, either dormant or awakened, the sins of the patriarchs and of their children. All the same, however, Jesus must be born in us. We must, in ourselves, overcome and go beyond the misdeeds that certain names in the genealogy of Jesus represent. It is necessary for us to live this genealogy, for us to acquire a personal experience of it, so that through falling and starting afresh we shall eventually reach Joseph and Mary. This does not mean sinning deliberately so that we can identify ourselves more closely with the genealogy of the Lord, but simply means recognising certain elements of this genealogy in the sins that we do commit, and of uniting ourselves in spirit to the progressive purification which prepared for the birth of Jesus. Thus the genealogy of Christ will become an integral part of our own lives.

The gospel for this Sunday goes on to describe, in a way which is both very precise and very sober, Joseph’s doubts, the message brought to him by the angel and his confident obedience. The epistle (Heb.11. 9-10,32-40) praises the faith of the patriarchs: ‘By faith he (Abraham) sojourned in the land of promise …’. Isaac, Jacob, Gedon, Samuel, David, and others are mentioned. The logical conclusion is not reached in this reading, but is found in the first sentence of the following chapter: ‘Wherefore seeing we also arecompassed about with a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith . . ’ (12: 1-2).
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<td>7.30-8.45 p.m.</td>
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<td>Divine Liturgy</td>
<td>Geelong Monastery</td>
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**Geelong Monastery**
Cnr Monastery Ct & Bluestone Bridge Rd (in older Melways: Cnr Cox & Rollins Rds), Lovely Banks

**St Eustathios Church**
221 Dorcas St, South Melbourne

**St Paraskevi Church**
22 Marsden Crescent, St Albans

**St Haralambos Church**
Cnr Porter St & Church Rd, Templestowe
Psalm 120 (121)
I have raised mine eyes to the mountains, from where my help shall come.
My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
He will suffer not your foot to slip, nor will your Guard succumb to slumber.
Behold, the Guardian of Israel sleeps not, nor slumbers.
The Lord will be your Guard.
At your right hand will the Lord be your security.
The sun will not burn you by day, nor the moon assail you by night.
The Lord shall guard you from every evil.
The Lord will guard your soul.
The Lord will guard your coming in and your going out, henceforth and forever more.

Psalm 120 may be prayed as a man's dialogue with his soul. As an internal discussion, the soul speaks both for itself and to itself, the pronouns alternating constantly between first and second person. The thoughts in Psalm 120 are clearly those to which the believing mind will cleave, especially in times of trial, when spiritual help is most needed. Whether as participle or finite verb, references to God's "guarding" me appear six times in this psalm's eight verses. God's protection of me is complete ("... shall guard you from every evil"), because He "neither sleeps nor slumbers." This thoroughness of God's protection is emphasized by the twin polarities of sun by day/moon by night and coming in/going out.

For all that, the protection that God provides for me is not a merely individual blessing. This is not a psalm about "God and me." I may pray this psalm and lay claim to its blessings, rather, by reason of my adherence to His Chosen People, the Church. I am a sheep of His flock. My personal confidence in God's guardianship stands within a context determined by His covenanted interventions in human history. The Lord is the Guardian of my soul because He is "the Guardian of Israel." I may trust in Him, because He has made me too a child of Abraham.

This truth tells me, likewise, the meaning of these mountains to which "I have raised mine eyes" and "from where my help shall come." These mountains are my fixed foundations, the everlasting hills of my hope. Let these fountains ever serve, too, as bulwarks to my soul. Let me look upon them always. May the eyes of my soul never stray from gazing toward these mountains, because upon them "the Guardian of Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers."

Indeed, let me, even now, turn my thoughts to these godly mountains of my deliverance. Let me think of high Moriah, the mountain where the Lord provides. Let me climb with Abraham and wood-bearing Isaac to the altar of sacrifice. Let my help come to me, too, from mighty Sinai, in covenant and Law. Let me ascend with Moses and Elijah to stand before Your face. Likewise Lord, make me ever mindful of the mountain where You dispel satanic thought with the keen sword of Deuteronomy. Oh, suffer not that handsome blade to sleep within my hand. Again, in blessed assurance, let my help come from the mountain where You proclaim blessed the poor in spirit. And kindly count me, Sir, among their number. Yet again, may my help come to me from the holy mountain where "such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: 'This is My beloved Son'" (2 Pet. 1:17). With Simon, make me contemplate the glorious cloud, and with the Sons of Thunder. Oh, most certainly, let my help be established on forlorn Golgotha, whose dark ninth plague foreshadows, for three hours, the earthquake and the slaughter of the Firstborn. With Your Mother, let me stand, and the close companions of her sorrow. Ah, but let my help, too, be found on that mountain from which the Eleven are sent forth to make disciples of all nations, for how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who proclaim peace and bring good tidings. And now let my help come to me from mystic Nebo, where I may gaze, as the morning mist begins to clear, across the green, tree-lined Jordan to my wide inheritance. May I not perish, I pray, amidst the sons of Ammon, nor die children of Moab. And at the last, dear Lord, let me stand with John on that great and high mountain, to see the great city, Holy Jerusalem, descending down from heaven, her light like a most precious stone, like a jasper clear as crystal, and with streets of gold, like transparent glass. That city is the final Israel, whose Guardian "neither sleeps nor slumbers." And until that day, Lord, teach me always to raise my eyes to these mountains, "from where my help shall come."

(Source: Christ in the Psalms, Patrick Henry Reardon, Conciliar Press, Ben Lomond, California, 2000)
Saint Nestor
CENTRAL YOUTH COMMITTEE MAGAZINE

Youth Group Meetings

Bentleigh: Sts Raphael, Nicholas & Irene
Monday 8.00 p.m. (9557 4877)

Box Hill: Holy Cross—1st Sunday of every month straight after Church (9090 9087)

Brunswick: St Basil
-All teenagers and youth in their 20’s
Tuesday 7.00 p.m. (9387 7693)
-Young Adults and Married couples group
Every 2nd Wednesday 7.30 p.m. (9387 7693)

Carlton: St John the Baptist
Refer to Northcote details.

Clayton: Three Hierarchs
Monday 6.00 p.m. (9544 5706)

Coburg: Presentation of our Lord
Tuesday 7.45 p.m. (9350 5559)

Dandenong: St Pantaleimon
Thursday 7.30 p.m. (9791 8369)
(www.dandenongyouth.com)

East Keilor: Panagia Soumela
Monday 7.00 p.m. (9331 2010)

East Malvern: St Catherine
Temporarily postponed due to the loss of our hall. (9563 6623)

Fawkner: St Nektarios
Monday 7.00 p.m. (9359 4404)

Forest Hill: St Andrew
Wednesday 8.00 p.m. (9802 0165)

Mooroolbark: St Dimitriis
Tuesday 7.30 p.m. (9375 1119)

Northcote: Axion Estin
Wednesday 7.00 p.m. (9481 7826)

Oakleigh: Sts Anargyri,
Tuesday 7.30 p.m. (9569 6874)
(www.sprint.net.au/~corners/)

Richmond: Holy Trinity
Thursday 6.00 -7.00 p.m. (9428 1284)

South Melbourne: St Eustathios
Tuesday 7.30 p.m. (9690 1595)

Springvale: St Athanasios,
Saturday 6.00 p.m. (9547 8610)

St Albans: St Paraskevi,
Thursday 7.30 p.m. (0421 704 806)

Templestowe: St Haralambos
Tuesday 8.00 p.m. (9846 4066)

Thomastown: Transfiguration of the Lord,
Wednesday 7.30 p.m. (9465 9907)
-Young Adults and Married couples group
Every 2nd Sunday 4.30-6.30 p.m. (9465 9907)

Yarraville: St Nicholas
Monday 7.30 p.m. (9687 1513)