



CHURCH of the LIFE-GIVING FOUNTAIN

“ZODOCHOS PEGHE”

GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

ΙΕΡΑ ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΗ ΑΜΕΡΙΚΗΣ

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God is Glorious in His Saints

On **November 8th** the Church commemorates the **Holy Archangels** Michael and Gabriel and all the Heavenly Hosts. There is no record in the Bible of the creation of the angels. As St. John of Damascus says in His Exposition of the Orthodox faith, they were created “in silence” before the material creation. The angels are ministers doing god’s work and conveying His messages, which is the literal meaning of the word angel. (Evangelical is literally the “of the good news”.) The Angels of God have been honored since earliest times. Not only each person has a guardian angel but also nations have angels. (Daniel Chapters 9-10) The prayers of the Divine Liturgy are full of the angels. At the Entrance of the Gospel: “Master and Lord our God, You have established in heaven the orders and hosts of angels and archangels to minister to Your glory. Grant that the holy angels may enter with us that together we may serve and glorify Your goodness.” We sing as the seraphim do around the throne, “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal” (Isaiah 6). And at the Great Entrance the choir sings and the priest prays, “Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim and sing the thrice holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity set aside all cares of this life that we may receive the King of all invisibly escorted by angelic host. Alleluia.”

On **November 9th** the Church commemorates **St. Nectarios**. St. Nectarios lived in the early 20th century, ending his life on the island of Aegina where he established a convent of nuns. He is well known as a helper for those suffering from cancer.

On **November 14th** the Church commemorates the **Apostle Philip** and **St. Gregory Palamas**. St. Gregory was a great defender of Orthodoxy and a teacher on inner prayer. He insisted that each of us has the potential to directly experience God in our lives. A small men’s monastery established by Bishop Maximos in Ashland County, Ohio, is dedicated to him.

On **November 15th** the **Advent Fast** begins. Like the spring Lenten fast of the **Forty Days** before Pascha this is a forty day period leading up to the Nativity of the Lord on December 25th. It is not as strict as the Paschal Fast and fish is routinely permitted until St. Spyridon on December 12th.

On **November 21st** the Church commemorates the **Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple**. The story of this feast is recorded not in the Bible but in the Gospel of James. The canonical Scriptures do not tell us anything about the life of the Mother of God prior to the Annunciation in Nazareth, other than that she was betrothed to Joseph. The Gospel according to James is among the large number of texts that are not specifically among the Scriptures ordinarily read at the Liturgy but which contain the Tradition of the Church. It relates the Conception and Birth of Mary (which of course did happen even though there is not record in the canonical Scriptures). It tells us the names of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna; that they were childless to advanced age and promised to dedicate their child to God. When Mary was three years old her parents took her to the temple in Jerusalem and the Priest Zacharius, the father of John the Baptist, received her. She then spent twelve years living in the Temple, praying and serving God.

On **November 25th** the Church commemorates **St. Katherine**. St. Katherine was a wealthy, beautiful, highly intelligent and well-educated young woman in Alexandria in the 3rd century. She had a vision in which Christ appeared to her, calling her His bride and giving her a ring. For her steadfast loyalty to Christ she was tortured and beheaded. Her body disappeared and nobody heard anything about her for several hundred years, until a monk on Mount Sinai was directed to bring her relics from the mountain behind Mt. Sinai where the angels had deposited her. Since then her relics are kept beside the altar in the main church of the Monastery beside the Burning Bush at the foot of the mountain and the Monastery is commonly called St. Katherine's. It is the oldest continually occupied monastery in the world.

On **November 30th** the church commemorates the **Apostle Andrew the First-called**. The brother of St. Peter, Andrew was first a disciple of John the Forerunner but when John pointed out the Lord saying: *Behold the Lamb of God* (John 1:36) Andrew began to follow Christ. Andrew founded the church in Byzantium establishing Stachys as the first bishop there. Thus he is considered the patron of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Andrew was martyred in Patras at the west end of the Gulf of Corinth.

*Today is the preview of the good will of God,
Of the preaching of the salvation of mankind.
The Virgin appears in the temple of God,
In anticipation proclaiming Christ to all.
Let us rejoice and sing to her: Rejoice,
O Divine Fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation.*



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Apostles on the Iconostasis

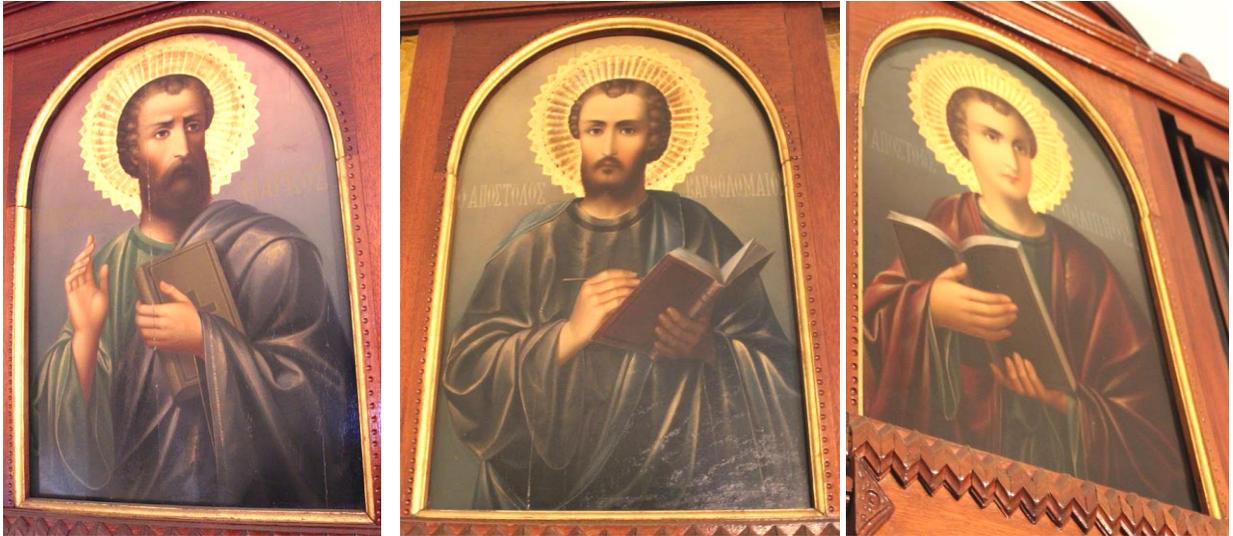


The Iconostasis in our Church is somewhat unusual among Greek Orthodox parishes, in that it has three rows of icons. Last month we looked at the lower main row. This month we will look at the top row which shows us the Apostles. Not all of the twelve are found in our iconostasis. Jude, who is also called Thaddeus to distinguish him from Judas Iscariot is commemorated on June 19th. St. Paul and St. Luke who were not of the original 12 are included.

Beginning from the left/ north of the iconostasis we start with the apostle Simon the Zealot. Simon is commemorated on May 10th. He was the bridegroom at the wedding in Cana where Christ turned the water into wine. (John 2:1-11). Seeing this miracle he left his wife and family to follow Christ. After Pentecost he preached the Gospel first in Mauritania in Africa and was finally martyred in Abkhazia in the Caucasus Mountains at the east end of the Black Sea.

Next, St. Andrew the First-Called who is commemorated on November 30th. St. Andrew was the brother of St. Peter. Originally a disciple of St. John the Forerunner, he was the first to believe in and follow Christ. He preached around the Black Sea, at Byzantium where Constantinople was later established and was martyred in Patras at the west end of the Gulf of Corinth in what is now Greece.

Third from the left is St. Paul, commemorated on June 28th. Originally called Saul and a persecuter of Christians, he became a great devotee of Christ. Accompanied by St. Luke, he preached throughout Asia Minor, as Luke recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. He wrote many letters to the Churches that he established and some of these letters have become a part of the New Testament. He was martyred in Rome.



The fourth Apostle from the left in our iconostasis is St. Mark the Evangelist, a kinsman of St. Barnabas. He is mentioned in the Acts "He (Peter) came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying" (Acts 12:12). After the Ascension of the Lord Christ, Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas as they preached the Gospel in Antioch, Seleucia, Cyprus, Salamis, and Perga Pamphylia, where he left them and returned to Jerusalem. After the apostolic council in Jerusalem, he went with Barnabas to Cyprus. Later Mark joined the Apostle Peter in his travels, including to Egypt. Mark is said to have written his Gospel at the dictation of St. Peter. After the martyrdom of St. Peter in Rome, Mark went again to Egypt to preach Christ's Gospel, becoming the first bishop there. In 68 AD Mark was martyred by being dragged through the streets of Alexandria.

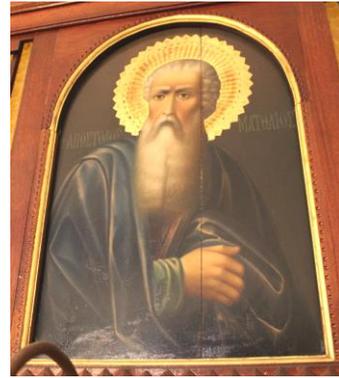
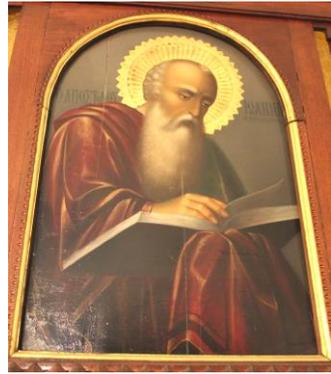
The fifth Apostle from the left in our iconostasis is St. Bartholomew. In St. John's Gospel he is referred to as Nathaniel but in Acts and later tradition he is called Bartholomew (son of Talmai in Aramaic). In Chapter 1 of John's Gospel, when he was told by Philip that he had found the Messiah of Moses and the prophets had written, Jesus of Nazareth, Nathaniel Bartholomew responded, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" But when he met Christ he immediately recognized him as the Son of God and King of Israel. Bartholomew is commemorated on June 11th together with St. Barnabas. After the Pentecost he preached the Gospel in Syria and Armenia together with Philip. He was martyred in Armenia and his body was placed in a lead coffin and thrown into the Black Sea. Yet the coffin floated and eventually came to the city of Beneventum in Italy.

The sixth Apostle from the left in our iconostasis is St. Philip who is commemorated on November 14th, the day before the pre-Christmas Advent season begins. There are two Philips in scripture, one a member of the Seventy and this one who is one of the 12 great apostles. He was born in Bethsaida beside the Sea of Galilee. He was the fifth of the disciples called, after Andrew, Peter, James and John. He then told Nathanael. After Pentecost he preached in Asia Minor with Sts. John and Bartholomew. In Hieropolis the pagans crucified Philip upside down.



In the center of the top row of icons in our iconostasis is this icon of the Holy Trinity. How to portray the unlimited God in a limited form? Our icon shows God the Father as a man with a grey beard and Christ as a young man holding a gospel book and the Holy Spirit as a dove hovering between the other two figures. Of course God the Father has no face to portray, certainly not just an old man. Other representations show the three 'angels' visiting Abraham, or the Throne with a Gospel and the Dove. The Trinity is always beyond our

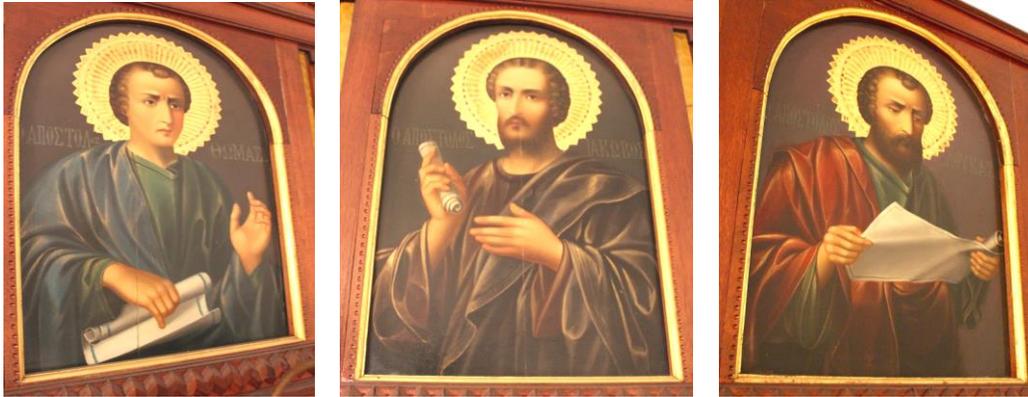
comprehension and iconography only points in the direction of faith.



The next icon in our iconostasis is St. Peter holding the keys. Peter, the brother of Andrew, was the second called but eventually first of the Apostles. He is commemorated on June 29th together with St. Paul. A fisherman named Simon, son of Jonah, he was named Cephas/Peter by Christ (John 1:42). He was the one who confessed "You have the words of eternal life ... You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6: 68-69). Peter wrote two letters which are in our Bible and was martyred in Rome.

Beside St. Peter we have St. John the Apostle, Evangelist and Theologian. An apostle, called from his fishing together with his brother James. An evangelist, he wrote the Fourth Gospel in our New Testament as well as three letters and the Revelation which he received on the Island of Patmos. This Revelation or *Apocalypse* in Greek is the basis of the icon we have in the main row of our iconostasis as explained last month. Since Papa Kolonas, the first priest of our parish came from Patmos, there is a special connection with St. John. John was the young apostle who was beside the Lord at the Last Supper and the only apostle who remained with him at the Cross. The Lord entrusted His mother the Virgin Mary to the care of St. John. His primary feast is on May 8th, his repose on September 26th.

The next icon proceeding north on the top of our iconostasis is St. Matthew. Matthew also wrote a Gospel. He was originally a tax-collector called Levi before being called by Christ to be an apostle (Matthew 9:9). He then changed his name to Matthew, "gift of God". After Pentecost he wrote his Gospel, quite possibly in Aramaic before translating it into Greek, and eventually went to Ethiopia to preach where he was finally martyred.



The next icon proceeding north in our iconostasis is the Apostle Thomas. Thomas is commemorated on October 6th. A large relic of Thomas is preserved at the Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos where his day is a great feast. It was Thomas who encouraged the other disciples when Jesus was going to raise Lazarus, saying, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:26). It was also Thomas who confirmed the Resurrection even by his initial doubt. (John 20:24) After Pentecost, Thomas preached in many places, finally being martyred in India.

Beside the icon of St. Thomas in our iconostasis is St. James. There are two apostles named James. James the son of thunder, the brother of St. John the Theologian. This James was one of Christ's closest disciples, present with Him both on Mt. Tabor at His Transfiguration and in the Garden of Gethsemane. After Pentecost he preached in Spain but returned to Jerusalem. Herod had James beheaded in 45 AD (Acts 12:2) and thus he became the first of the 12 to die for Christ. He is commemorated on April 30th. The Apostle James, son of Alphseus was also one of the twelve, He was the brother of the Evangelist Matthew and is commemorated on October 9th. There is another James (Iakovos) in the New Testament, James the Brother of the Lord, who was a son of Joseph by his first wife Salome. This James was one of the 70 lesser apostles, wrote the epistle which has his name and was the first Bishop of Jerusalem. He is remembered October 23rd.

The last Apostle on the far right of our iconostasis is St. Luke the Evangelist. A Greek by birth and a physician by training he saw Christ and believed, becoming perhaps the first convert. He was one of the 70 lesser apostles the Christ sent out to prepare His way. St. Luke wrote a Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Together with Cleopas he saw the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus. After Paul's conversion he traveled with him on his many journeys. St. Luke had a special affection for Mary the Mother of the Lord. As a physician he was a trained painter and painted the first icons of Mary, Christ and the Apostles. After Paul's martyrdom Luke continued to preach in Italy, later in Egypt and Libya and finally in Greece. At the age of 84 he was hanged from an olive tree in the town of Thebes, in Beothia of Greece. He is commemorated on October 18th as well as on other days.

The Church must never speak from a position of strength. It ought not to be one of the forces influencing this or that state. The Church ought to be, if you will, as powerless as God Himself. Who does not coerce but calls and unveils the beauty and truth of things without imposing them.

Metropolitan Savas preaching in Canonsburg on July 26, 2015

I take my cue today from the Epistle for St. Paraskevi, the Epistle to the Galatians, in which St. Paul says, and this should be familiar to you, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”. Where do we hear that? In the baptismal service itself, when the baptized is brought back to the church dressed in white. In a new garment. And we chant, “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”, you’re wearing Christ. You have a new identity. And St. Paul goes on to say: “There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ.”

I don’t think we can appreciate what a bomb that was, what a remarkable and shocking statement that was. There is neither Jew nor Greek; a Jew would have been insulted to hear that. The Jews were the chosen people. The Greeks are pagan idolaters. What do you mean there’s neither Jew nor Greek? For 2,000 years we’ve celebrated our special status. We are a select people. We’re not like the rest. And now you’re coming to tell us that there’s not distinction between us anymore? There is neither slave nor free? What does this mean? I own slaves. We’re the same? There’s neither male nor female? What are you talking about? People, I don’t know if you realize this, and I hope that I’m not scandalizing you. But if you want to know what the Jews were like in the time of Christ, what that society was like: think Taliban without the bombs. This is a very patriarchal society. This is a society where women have a very distinct and subordinate role. And Jesus’ demeanor and his message was very disruptive to the people of that time. First of all, he traveled with a group of disciples, but with a group of women who paid the bills. Wealthy women who made the arrangements for where he would stay and for his meals. And not only do we know there were wealthy women, but the Gospel writers even tell us their names. As if they were important. We don’t usually have names of women in ancient documents unless they’re the mother of someone important.

Jesus, very strange, he allows a woman who has been bleeding for 12 years to touch the hem of his garment. She shouldn’t have been in public. Anyone who touched her would have been defiled by Jewish law. Jesus should have reprimanded her and told her she was unclean. But He says, “Daughter, your faith has made you whole.”

Everybody wanted to know who Jesus was. Are you the Messiah? Pilate asked. Caiaphas asked. But he was very cagey; he dodge the question. “That’s what you say.” Hard to pin down. And yet, he speaks to a woman by the well, a Samaritan woman, not even a Jewish woman. A heretical woman. Who’s been married five times and is living with someone to whom she is not married. A loose woman, apparently. She says when the Messiah comes he will tell us everything and he says, “You’re talking to him.” The only person to whom he reveals that he is the Messiah is this very unlikely woman. The heretic, this half-breed, this woman When Jesus rises from the dead, who are the first people to receive the good news? Women. And these women, by the way, would not have been able to give witness in court. Their testimony is insignificant. The fact that women are entrusted with the message, well what good is that? In fact, when the women bring the message to the apostles, the apostles laugh and suppose that they’re confused – till they see for themselves. So there’s something rumbling in the gospel of Jesus. Something is changing.

The role of woman is changing in the Gospel of Jesus. Woman is being given a different status. And we can see that in the Orthodox Church. How many churches are there built to St. Constantine and his mother Helen? How many to St. Irene? How many to St. Sophia? How many to St. Katherine? St. Kyriaki? And today we're celebrating St. Paraskevi. And who are these women for the most part? Virgins, mothers, children.

You know, when the Jews brought to the attention of the Roman authorities how disruptive Paul and the apostles were, they told them, "These men that are going around telling people about Jesus, these men are turning the world upside down." And they are turning the world upside down. Do we remember the names of the Caesars, of the emperors that ordered the execution of these women? Those were the great people. Do we still have building in their honor? They were god incarnate, weren't they? That's what they thought about themselves. In fact, these women were put to death because they wouldn't acknowledge that the emperor was god incarnate. They wouldn't do a very simple thing. All they had to do was sprinkle a little incense on the charcoal in front of a statue and say 'Caesar is King'. No big deal. And yet they said, "No, Christ is King." Okay, okay, let's see how long you tell that story. Make her dance on fire. Put her in boiling water. Pull out her hair. Poke out her eyes. Dismember her. And by the way, let's do this for everybody to see; it's going to be good fun. And these girls, these grandmothers, these women defied the power of the emperor and turned the world upside down. And that's why we remember these great examples of courage and faithfulness and love.

You know, I wonder if you appreciate how important the role of women was in monastic life. Perhaps we think that women who withdrew from the world and became monastics were afraid of marriage, unattractive, whatever it may be. Actually the opposite is true. Women who became monks in those days were doing something extremely courageous. They were saying, "I'm in charge of my property. I'm in charge of my destiny. I'm not signing over the wealth that I've inherited to some man. I'm not running the risk of motherhood." Because motherhood and childbirth was the number one cause of death among women in ancient days. These women were saying, "No, I'm going to remain whole and integral and virgin and I'm going to create with my wealth a place where women like me can live together and praise the Lord. And these women exercised a very powerful witness in the ancient world. They had courage to stand up against secular rulers, and even at times bishops. They were the conscience of the church.

The Gospel of Jesus planted seeds, seeds of life. If you pave over a field, the things living under that field will find a way out. Cracks will form and blades of grass will come out. And that's what Jesus did in His ministry to women. The attitudes of the men of that time were very fixed. They used their tradition to justify their attitudes. His ministry to women is a very powerful one and women understood that. And women responded in a way that produced saints and changed things.

Your life as a Christian should make Nonbelievers question their disbelief in God.

The Earth is the Lord's

Eighth Ode of Matins - Daniel 3:57 - 88

Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord: Praise and exalt Him above all forever
Bless the Lord, all you heavens of the Lord: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord Angels of the Lord: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.

Bless the Lord, All you waters above the heaven: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, All you powers of the Lord: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, Sun and Moon: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, all you stars of heaven: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, every shower and dew: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, all you winds: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, fire and heat: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.

Bless the Lord, Cold and chill: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, dew and rain: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, frost and chill: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, ice and snow: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, light and darkness: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.

Bless the Lord, nights and days: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, lightings and clouds: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.

Bless the Lord, o You Earth: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.

Bless the Lord, Mountains and hills, all things that grow on the earth; fountains and rivers, oceans and monsters of the seas, and all things that move in the waters: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, all you birds of the sky, beasts and cattle: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, you sons of men; Let Israel bless the Lord: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.

Bless the Lord, You priests of the Lord, you servants of the Lord: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, You Spirits and souls of the righteous, You who are humble of heart. Praise and exalt Him above all forever.

Bless the Lord, Ananias, Azarias and Mishael: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.
Bless the Lord, Apostles, Prophets and Martyrs of the Lord: Praise and exalt Him above all forever.

We bless the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Lord. Praise and exalt Him above all forever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Now and ever and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.