



CHURCH of the LIFE-GIVING FOUNTAIN
“ZODOCHOS PEGHE”
GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA
ΙΕΡΑ ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΗ ΑΜΕΡΙΚΗΣ
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My brothers and sisters,

September is the time of harvest. It is the traditional start of the Church New Year. It is a time of giving thanks for the many blessings that the Lord has shown us. I include the encyclical of Archbishop Demetrius for September.

The Nativity of the Theotokos is remembered on Thursday, September 8th. It serves as a small pointer toward the Nativity of Christ. It is the dedication of our convent in Saxonburg, Pa. On September 14th is the Elevation of the Holy Cross. In our parish in Martins Ferry we will have Divine Liturgy on that day at 9:30 AM.

This month I am starting what I hope will be a series of short articles explaining the main Mysteries, the main Sacraments, of the Church. Although some speak of seven sacraments, that can be misleading. There are numerous ways in which God blesses us and our world, not just some “magic number”. This month I have considered the Mystery of Initiation and New Birth, what is usually referred to as Baptism and Chrismation or Confirmation. In the western church this was separated into two distinct “sacraments”. Some denominations in the west baptize infants but delay confirmation. Some wait until some older age. Some give communion after baptism but before confirmation. Some only allow the bishop to confirm. None, to my knowledge, have chrism oil, although some do use other oils. Only the Orthodox bring these all together.

God blesses us in many ways. Through the sacramental life of the Church and each moment of our daily lives. He calls us all to personally be good stewards of those blessings and share them with those around us. Let us recommit ourselves to the care of His Church, His world, and each other.

In Christ,

Fr. Michael



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God is Glorious in His Saints

September 1st is the ancient beginning of the church year. It dates back to the roman tax year and the season of harvest. It was established by the First Ecumenical Council in 325 when Christianity became legal in the empire. It was on this feast that the Lord Jesus entered the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21), opened the book of the Prophet Isaiah and read the words: The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn (Isaiah 61:1-2).

On September 1st the Church remembers St. Symeon the Stylite. St.Symeon was the son of Syrian peasants. He undertook the most difficult ascetic practices, and sometimes undertook a strict fast for forty days. He eventually took upon himself a form of asceticism that was previously unknown. He stood day and night on a pillar, in unceasing prayer. Symeon helped everyone: healing some of infirmities, comforting those in need, instructing others, and reproaching some who held heretical beliefs. Thus, he turned Empress Eudocia from the Eutychian heresy and brought her back to Orthodoxy.He lived to the age of 103 and reposed in the Lord on September 1st 459.

In 1989 Patriarch Dimitrios, the predecessor of the current Patriarch Bartholomew already instituted September 1st as a special day to attend not only to the harvest, but to our whole relationship with God’s world. Special liturgical services were written for this at the direction of the Patriarch.

On **September 6th** the Church commemorates the miracle of the Archangel Michael at Chonae in Asia Minor. Near Hierapolis, in Phrygia, there was a place called Chonae (“plunging”), and in that place there was a spring of miraculous water. When Apostle John the Theologian, accompanied by Philip, preached the Gospel in Hierapolis, he looked upon that place and prophesied that a spring of miraculous water would open up there, from which many would receive healing, and that the great Archangel of God Michael would visit that place. Soon afterward, this prophecy was fulfilled: a spring of water burst forth and became widely known for its miraculous power.

Later, a young man named Archippus settled there and lived a life of austerity, in fasting and prayer. The pagans did many malicious things to Archippus, for they did not like the fact that

this Christian holy place emanated such spiritual power and attracted so many people to it. The pagans, in their wickedness, rerouted the nearest river in order to flood the church and the spring. By the prayers of Archippus, the holy Archangel Michael opened a fissure in the rock beside the church, and the river's water plunged into it. This is how that place was saved and why it was called Chonae, or "of the plunging," for the river's water that plunged into the open fissure. St. Archippus labored in asceticism there until the age of seventy, and peacefully reposed in the Lord. This is the event commemorated in the icon which is this month's cover.

On **September 8th** the Church remembers the Nativity of the Theotokos. This event is found in the Gospel of James, which is not part of the formal canon of the New Testament but has been read since earliest times. Certainly Mary was born, as we all are. Her parents were the righteous Joachim and Anna who had been without children to an advanced age. They prayed to God for a child, and were answered with a child who would bear a child like no other child.

On **September 9th** we commemorate Sts. Joachim and Anna, the grandparents, the ancestors of God. Our parish is blessed with a relic of St. Anna. These commemorations of the birth of Mary the Mother of God and then of her parents emphasizes the reality of Christ's incarnation, truly human and born of truly human ancestry. They point ahead to the nativity of Jesus Christ: true God and yet also truly born and human.

On **September 14th** the Church commemorates the Finding and Elevation of the True Cross of Christ. After St. Constantine legalized Christianity, his mother St. Helen, went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land to visit the sites of Christ's life. When seeking the site of the crucifixion and the tomb of Christ in Jerusalem it was learned that the pagan Emperor Hadrian had wanted to destroy the site as a center of devotion by Christians and had built a temple to the pagan gods over the site. St. Helen had that temple demolished. In the ruins of that pagan temple she came across a clump of fragrant basil and picking a handful discovered the Holy Cross. Actually she found three crosses. While the empress wondered how to recognize which of these was the Cross of Christ, a funeral procession passed by. Patriarch Macarius told them to place the crosses, one by one, on the dead man. When they placed the first and second cross on the dead man, the dead man lay unchanged. When they placed the third cross on him, the dead man came back to life. By this they knew that this was the Precious and Life-giving Cross of Christ. They then placed the Cross on a sick woman, and she became well. The patriarch lifted up the Cross for all the people to see, and the people sang with tears over and over again: "Lord, have mercy!" Our parish is blessed to have a small relic of the Precious Wood and the True Cross.

On **September 24th** the Church commemorates St. Silouan the Athonite. A simple Russian monk who lived his whole monastic life at the St. Panteleimon's Monastery on Mt. Athos in the early 20th century, he prayed, "Lord, I pray for all the people of the world that they may come to know you through Your Holy Spirit."

September 1, 2016 Beginning of the Ecclesiastical New Year Day for the Protection of our Natural Environment

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We give thanks to our merciful and holy God for this blessed opportunity to begin another ecclesiastical year, and we anticipate the witness of His presence and power in our lives and in our worship and work of spreading His Gospel. In addition to the observance of this day as the beginning of a new liturgical cycle, it has also been designated by our beloved Ecumenical Patriarchate as the Day for the Protection of our Natural Environment.

The connection of these two observances is significant in a number of ways. First, this is the beginning of the agricultural year and the cycle of harvesting, tilling, and sowing that is essential to our physical existence. On this day we affirm very clearly the priority of proper stewardship of the natural order to provide for the physical well-being of all humankind.

Second, this is the beginning of our annual observances that connect the present with our witness of the salvific events of the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of our Lord. In our services throughout this cycle, we connect time, space and our natural order to the One who created it and transcends it as we celebrate and experience the power of God's grace.

Third, as we hear and sing in the hymns of this day, it is a day of hope in which we share with God's creation the longing for redemption (Romans 8:22-23). It is a day leading us to dedicate the days and months ahead to offering a witness of love, justice and peace.

We anticipate the blessings and provision of our Creator, and as we receive them we will offer thanksgiving and praise. We gather at the beginning of this ecclesiastical year with hearts filled with joy. Our experience of an abundant life in Christ leads us in our mission to the world—to be His voice, to offer the Gospel of truth and love, and to guide others to salvation and His promise of eternal life.

May you have a blessed ecclesiastical new year and feast, making its beginning filled with expectations of the glorious works and blessings of Jesus Christ our Lord.

With paternal love in Him,

†DEMETRIOS Archbishop of America



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At a time which most of us do not remember, we became members of the Orthodox Church, members of the Body of Christ, members of the family of which Christ is the First-Born (Romans 8:9). How did this happen? Through the sacrament, the mystery, of Christian initiation centered in Baptism. Today Baptism is commonly something that happens in infancy, and thus that most of us do not remember personally. Originally most people were baptized as adults as Christianity was first spreading in the world.

As we experience it today, Orthodox Christian Baptism may be considered to have three parts: catechumenate, immersion and chrismation. The catechumenate was originally the time when one had decided to become Christian but needed preliminary instruction and preparation. In the Divine Liturgy there are traditionally prayers for catechumens in preparation after the Scripture reading and homily. Today this is seen in three actions: the rejection of Satan (together with prayers by the priest “exorcising” the influence of darkness from the person), the acceptance of Christ as “King and God”, and the profession of Christian faith in the form of the Nicene Creed. When the person to be baptized is an infant, then these are done on his or her behalf by the sponsor, the *anadochos*, who both brings the child to the fount and receives him after immersion. An adult speaks for himself.

After the catechumen prayers in the narthex we continue to the front of the church where the baptism fount is prepared.

Christ’s baptism in the Jordan is the prototype, the pattern of our baptism. Christ, of course, did not need baptism Himself. Baptism is a washing away of sin, both original or ancestral as well as personally committed. It is also our entrance into the Church, the Body of Christ. Christ is without sin and Himself the Head of His Body of which we become members.

“It is not the water which gives these blessings, but the command of God and the descent of the Holy Spirit, mystically joining with our own freedom. Water serves as a sign of cleansing.” (St. Gregory of Nyssa)

The water is therefore blessed with a series of prayers. “That this water may become for him/her a washing of regeneration for the remission of sins and a garment of incorruption. ... Do You Yourself, O Loving King, be present now also through the descent of Your Holy Spirit and Hallow and Sanctify this water. Give it the Grace of Redemption, the blessing of the Jordan.”

The one to be baptized is anointed with blessed oil: "Sovereign Lord and Master, God of our Father, who did send to them in the Ark of Noah a dove bearing a twig of olive ... bless this Oil by the power (+) and operation (+) and descent of the Holy Spirit (+) that it may become an anointing of incorruption."

And then the person is immersed three times in the fount. "The water," says blessed Basil, "has the symbolic meaning of death, and accepts the body as into a coffin." "Through three immersions and the same number of invocations is the great mystery of Baptism performed." Why three times and with full immersion? Three times in honor of the Holy Trinity. And the Greek *baptizo βαπτίζω* "I Baptize" refers to "sinking the ship". And as St. Basil puts it, this is what we have received from those that have gone before us since the days of the apostles.

After the immersion the godparent (*anadochos*, literally the "one who receives back from the fount") stands with the newly baptized for the chrismation. This is another anointing, this time with the myrrh oil blessed by the Patriarch and his synod and passed to the local priest by the local bishop. It is therefore a clear indication of the unity of the Church from the individual person and parish right up to the Patriarch. And that unity is found in the Holy Spirit. Thus the repeated proclamation "The Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit!" The newly illumined is anointed on the forehead, the eyes, the nostrils, the mouth, the ears, the chest, the hands, and the feet.

Then the newly baptized is clothed in a new white "garment of righteousness". The Priest leads the newly baptized person together with the god-parent around the baptismal fount three times while chanting "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Alleluia!" (Galatians 3:47)

Anciently the reception of new Christians happened on certain major feastdays of the Church: Lazarus Saturday, Holy Thursday, Holy Saturday, Pentecost, Christmas and Theophany. Even today the Triagion in the Divine Liturgy is replaced with "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Alleluia!"

Originally baptism would have occurred during or in connection with the Liturgy. Normally now, the newly baptized immediately receives Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, putting the final seal on the Mystery. In this way the Church family grows. Through baptism we are "initiated" into the Church and become members of the family.

Greece has acknowledged that its current refugee camps are nearing capacity. With over 57,000 refugees and migrants living in camps as they wait for the asylum application to be processed, the Greek government has acknowledged that more needs to be done in order to make the conditions more comfortable. Yiannis Mouzales, the Alternate Minister for Migration Policy, shared his plan to ease the current, overcrowded conditions at the existing camps by building additional camps on the island of Crete. Greece is hoping that it will make the conditions at the camps a little bit better for the refugees and migrants.

Mouzales said, “In the second phase, we’d like to ask Crete to accept about 2,000 refugees or migrants, who will be distributed around the island. The prefecture and municipalities can work out how to distribute them and we will respect their proposals.” However, they also said that they will do their best to separate the ethnic groups to make sure that they live amongst their own people and with their families. Construction for the camps is expected to start in November of 2016. Greece is a major point of entry for refugees and migrants who have left their war torn countries of Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. The country had a major surge of migrants in 2015, The numbers have since gone down considerably, thousands of refugees have made Greece their home while waiting to hear about the status of their asylum applications.

Since 2012, in cooperation with Apostoli (the humanitarian arm of the Church of Greece), the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, and Greek-American organizations, IOCC has already **provided over \$23 million to the people of Greece**. Thank you! Without the support of donors like you, this assistance isn’t possible. During the last three winters nearly three dozen social institutions in northern Greece received heating fuel. Thousands of orphans, elderly, abused children and the disabled have benefited and they’re hoping to receive more from you this year. More than 6,300 people receive food assistance each month.

IOCC is working to ease the hardships facing these vulnerable Syrian refugee families. Along with providing bunk beds and sleeping bags to travel weary families on Samos, IOCC is also providing hot meals, hygiene kits and baby supplies to them and to asylum seekers on Chios and mainland Greece.

Remember, 92 cents of every dollar you give goes to our humanitarian work. The other 8 cents is for administration and fundraising costs.

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