

ST. LUKE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Diocese of the South, Orthodox Church in America

1415 Woodstock Ave., Anniston, AL 36207

The Very Rev. Archbishop Father Basil Henry

(256) 235-3893 • basilncana@yahoo.com

<https://stlukeanniston.org>

NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **We welcome our visitors.** Please join us for a potluck meal after Liturgy so you can get to know us. Communion is for Orthodox Christians who have fasted before Liturgy but everyone is welcome to the blessed bread an Altar Server will offer.
- Grant, O Lord, a prosperous and peaceful life, health, salvation, and furtherance in all good things to all Thy servants who are celebrating birthdays, namesdays and anniversaries, and preserve them for **MANY YEARS!**
- This week is the last day to eat meat before the **Lenten Fast**. Next Sunday will be out last coffee hour with dairy before Pascha.
- Next Sunday after liturgy is the **Service of Mutual Forgiveness** as we begin Great Lent.

This Week's Fasting, Services and Scripture Readings						
Mon., 2/24	Tues., 2/25	Wed., 2/26	Thurs., 2/27	Fri., 2/28	Sat., 3/1	Sun., 3/2
<i>Cheesefare Week</i>						
						Divine Liturgy 10 a.m.
					Great Vespers 4 p.m.	Forgiveness Vespers
3 John 1:1-15	Jude 1:1-10	Joel 2:12-26	Jude 1:11-25	Zechariah 8:7-17	Romans 14:19- 23, 16:25-27	Romans 13:11-14:4
Luke 19:29-40, 22:7-39	Luke 22:39-42, 45-23:1	Joel 4:12-21	Luke 23:2-34, 44-56	Zechariah 8:19-23	Matthew 6:1-13	Matthew 6:14-21
Service times are subject to change. Please check with Fr. Basil if in any doubt.						



Saint Luke Orthodox Church
Orthodox Church of America

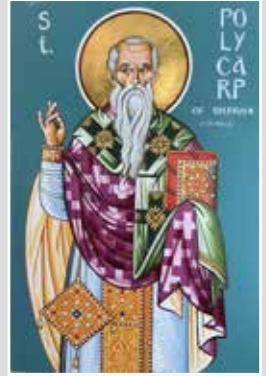
Visit us online for the most current news,
schedule and much more.

https://stlukeanniston.org

SAINTS OF THE DAY

Sunday, Feb. 23rd, 2025 • Sunday of the Last Judgement

Hieromartyr Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (167); Holy 73 Martyrs of Sirmium, under Diocletian (303); Martyr Clement, by the sword; Martyr Thea, by the sword; Ven. Gorgonia the Righteous (370), sister of St. Gregory the Theologian; St. Alexander, founder of the Monastery of the Unsleeping Ones, Constantinople (430); Sts. John, Antioch, Antoninus, Moses, Zebinas, Polychronius, Moses (another), and Damian, ascetics in the Syrian desert (5th century); St. Martha, a virgin-martyr beheaded in Spain (251); St. Polycarp, a priest in Rome who ministered to those in prison (c.



300); St. Serenus the Gardener, martyr (307); St. Romana, an anchoress on the Tiber in Italy (324); Sts. Syncrotas, Antigonus, Rutilus, Libius, Senerotas and Rogatianus, martyrs (4th century); St. Florentius of Seville, Confessor (c. 485); St. Felix, Bishop of Brescia (c. 650); St. Jurmin, an East Anglian prince (653); St. Boswell, Abbot of Melrose Abbey in Scotland (c. 661); St. Mildburga, Abbess of Wenlock Priory (715); St. Medrald, a monk in France (c. 850); St. Willigis, Archbishop of Mainz (1011); Peter Damian, Bishop, Confessor, and Doctor (d. 1072); St. John Theristes (“the Harvester”) of Stylos in Calabria (d. 1129); Ven. Damian of Esphigmenou Monastery, on Mount Athos (1280); St. Cosmas of Zograf Monastery, Mount Athos (1281); St. Moses of White Lake Monastery, monk (1480); New Monk-martyr Damian of Philotheou and Kissavos, at Larissa (1586); New Hieromartyr Lazarus of the Peloponnese (c. 1618); Ven. Polycarp of Bryansk, monk of Bryansk (1620-1621); St. Nazarius, Abbot of Valaam Monastery (1809); St. Seraphim (Zenobius), Schema-Metropolitan of Tetrtskaro, Georgia, monk of Glinsk Monastery (1985); New Hieromartyr Paul Kushnikov, Priest (1918); New Hieromartyr Michael Edlinsky, Archpriest, of Kiev (1937); New Hieromartyr Alexis Nikolsky, Priest (1938); New Hieromartyr Nicholas Dimitrov, Priest (1938); New Hieromartyr Michael Razhkin, Priest (1938); Martyr Sergius Borodavkin (1938); New Hieromartyr Sergius (Bukashkin), Hieromonk, of Novo-Alexandrovka, Moscow (1938); New Hieromartyr Antipas (Kyryllov), hieromonk, of Tatarintsevo, Moscow (1938); New Hieromartyr Philaret (Pryakhin), Abbot, of Trubino, Tver (1942); Other

Divine Liturgy

of St. John Chrysostom

Troparia/Kontakia

Troparion of the Resurrection (Tone 2)

When Thou didst descend to death, O Life immortal,
Thou didst slay hell with the splendor of Thy Godhead.
And when from the depths Thou didst raise the dead,
all the powers of heaven cried out://
“O Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to Thee!”

*(If you are following in the green
Divine Liturgy service book, these
hymns are referenced on page 5.)*

Troparion to St. Luke the Evangelist (Tone 5)

The Holy Apostle, the all-hymned Luke,
who is acknowledged by the Church of Christ
as the recorder of the Acts of the Apostles
and the splendid author of the Gospel of Christ,
let us praise with sacred hymns
as a Physician who healeth the infirmities of man
and the ailments of nature,
who cleanseth spiritual wounds//
and prayeth unceasingly for our souls.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...

Kontakion to St. Luke the Evangelist (Tone 2)

Thou becamest a disciple of God the Word,
with Paul thou didst enlighten all the world,
casting out its darkness//
by composing the Holy Gospel of Christ.

Both now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Kontakion for the Last Judgement (Tone 1)

When Thou, O God, shalt come to earth with glory,
all things shall tremble,
and the river of fire shall flow before Thy judgment seat;
the books shall be opened, and the hidden things disclosed;
then deliver me from the unquenchable fire,//
and make me worthy to stand at Thy right hand, O Righteous Judge!

Scripture Readings

Prokeimenon

Tone 3

(from the Lenten Triodion)

Great is our Lord, and abundant in power, / His understanding is beyond measure.

V. Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God!

The Epistle Reading

1 Corinthians 8:8-9:2

(from the Lenten Triodion)

Brethren, meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord.

Alleluia

Tone 8

(from the Lenten Triodion)

v: Come, let us rejoice in the Lord! Let us make a joyful noise to God our Savior!

v: Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise.

The Gospel Reading

Matthew 25:31-46

(from the Lenten Triodion)

The Lord said, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

(If you are following in the green Divine Liturgy service book, these readings are referenced on page 7.)

(If you are following in the green Divine Liturgy service book, these readings are referenced on page 8.)

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”

Sunday of the Last Judgement

Matthew 25:31-46

From *The Explanation of the Gospel of St. Matthew*
by Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria

31-33. When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Since the first coming of the Lord was not with glory but with dishonor and indignity, He says, *When He shall come in His glory*. For at the second coming He will come with glory, escorted by angels. First He will divide the saints from the sinners, delivering them from tribulations, and set them on His right, and then speak to them. He calls the saints *sheep* on account of their gentleness, and because they yield fruit and useful things for us, as do sheep, providing wool, which is divine and spiritual protection, and milk, which is the sustenance that is needed. The goats are the sinners, for they walk along the precipices and are unruly and fruitless.

34-40. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and ye fed Me: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee hungry, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me. He does not give honor or punishment until He has first judged. For He loves mankind and teaches us to do the same as well, not to punish until we have made a careful examination. In this way *those who are punished after the judgement will have no cause for complaint*. He calls the saints *blessed* as they have been accepted by the Father. He considers them to be inheritors of the kingdom to show that God makes them participants in His own glory as His sons. For He did not say, “receive”, but rather *inherit*, as a man would say of his father’s estate. By *the least brethren* He means either His own disciples or, simply, all the poor. For every poor man is Christ’s brother for the very reason that Christ, too, spent His life in poverty. See also God’s righteousness, how He acclaims the saints; and see the good disposition of their mind, how they deny, with befitting modesty, that they have cared for Him. But the Lord accepts as for Himself the things that were done for the poor.

41-46. Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry, and ye gave Me nothing to eat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, or in prison, and ye visited Me not. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee hungry,

or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee? Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

He sends those on the left into the fire which had been prepared for the devil. For as the demons are without compassion and are cruelly and maliciously disposed towards us, it is fitting that those who are of like mind with them, and who have been cursed by their own deeds, should merit the same punishment. See that God did not prepare the fire for men, nor did He make hell for us, but for the devil—I make myself liable to hell. Tremble, then, O man, and understand from this that these men were not punished as fornicators, or robbers, or perpetrators of any other vice, but for not having done good. Indeed, if you consider things well, the robber is he who has much and does not give alms, even if he does no obvious injury. For whatever he has in excess of his needs, he has stolen from those who are in need and who have not received anything from him. If he had shared these things with them, they would not be in need. Now that he has locked these things up and kept them for himself, for this very reason they are in need. So he who does not give alms is a robber, doing injustice to all those whom he could have helped but did not, and for this reason he and those like him shall go away into eternal punishment which never ends; but the righteous shall enter into eternal life.

Just as the saints have unceasing joy, so too the unjust have unceasing punishment, despite the gibberish of Origen who says that there is an end to hell and that sinners will not be punished for ever, but that there will be a time when they enter the place of the righteous because they have been purified by suffering in hell. Origen is clearly refuted here, both when the Lord speaks of *everlasting punishment*, that is, never ending, and when He likens the righteous to sheep and the sinners to goats. Just as a goat can never become a sheep, neither can a sinner ever be cleansed and become righteous after the Judgement. *Outer darkness* (mentioned in the preceding parable of the talents) is that which is furthest from the light of God and for that reason renders the punishment more harsh. There is another reason that could be mentioned, and that is that the sinner is in darkness even in this life, as he has fallen away from the Sun of Righteousness, but as there is still hope of conversion, this is not yet the outer darkness. But when he has died and an examination has been made of the things he has done, then the outer darkness in its turn receives him. For there is no longer any hope of conversion, but he undergoes a complete deprivation of the good things of God. While he is here in this life he enjoys to some degree the good things of God, I mean, the tangible things of creation, and he believes that he is in some manner a servant of God, living out his life in God's house, which is this creation, being fed by Him and provided with the necessities of life. But then he will be altogether cut off from God, having no share at all in the good things of God. This is that darkness which is called *outer* by comparison to the darkness here, which is not *outer* because the sinner is not yet completely cut off from this time onward.

You, then, O reader, flee from this absence of compassion, and practice almsgiving, both tangible and spiritual. Feed Christ Who hungers for our salvation. If you give food and drink to him who hungers and thirsts for teaching, you have given food and drink to Christ. For within the Christian there is Christ, and faith is nourished and increased by teaching. If you should see someone who has become a stranger to his heavenly fatherland, take him in with you. While you yourself are entering into the heavens, lead him in as well, lest while you preach to others, you yourself be rejected. If a man should cast off the garment of incorruption which he had at his baptism, rendering him naked, clothe him; and if one should be infirm in faith, as Paul says, help him; and visit him who is shut up in the dark prison of this body and give him counsel which is as a light to him. Perform, then, all of these six types of love, both bodily and also spiritually, for we consist of both soul and body, and these acts of love are to be accomplished by both.

Explanation of the Icon of the Last Judgement

It may have been the last day to enjoy meat before our journey to Pascha, but I'm first reaching for the cup of coffee I'll need to respond to inevitable questions from inquirers and members still new to the faith. I'm rarely disappointed and today is no exception as I see Stephen approach.

"An interesting service. I thought I knew everything about the Second Coming from my Evangelical days but now I'm thinking I don't know anything. For instance, this icon on the center stand has a lot going on. Can you explain it a bit further? I can see some connection to today's Gospel reading but there's a lot I don't understand."

"Well, Stephen, we should realize the Second Coming is a reality. It's not some future event we're waiting for. During the Liturgy we just celebrated, when the bread and wine are offered to God and transformed, what is called the Anaphora, the priest says *Remembering, therefore, this saving commandment and all that has been done for our sake: the Cross, the tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the enthronement at the right hand, and the second and glorious coming again.* We **remember** the Second Coming. It's already reality! Because we are already in the Kingdom when we celebrate the Liturgy and receive Communion."



I let that sink in before I continued. "So the elements in this particular icon are depicting what we know about the reality of the Second Coming. The image can be divided both horizontally and vertically. Let's start with the top. What do you see?"

Stephen looked closely, "It appears Christ is inside a circle surrounded by angelic beings."

"That circle is what we call a *mandorla*. It's used to depict moments that are outside time and space. Its also found in icons of Pascha, the Ascension, All Saints, Transfiguration, and the Dormition with the Mother of God, the Theotokos. These images capture heavenly glory, mystery, and majesty.

"In Matthew Christ's return is described: *For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be* (Matthew 24: 27). The image on our icon is depicted by Mark for us: *And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, the Lord goes on to describe, with the holy angels* (Mark 8:38).

"We find an almost identical appearance in the icon of the Ascension you see on the iconostasis. The two events are really bookends. At the beginning of Acts (1:11) the Angels gently admonish the Apostles, *Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.* And in the hymns for Ascension Vespers we sing, *The Cherubim were amazed at Thine Ascension, O Lord, beholding Thee, the God Who dost sit enthroned upon them, ascending upon the clouds; and we glorify Thee, for Thy mercy is good. Glory to Thee!*" In that icon Christ is blessing us as he ascends; at the Last Judgement he is directing the righteous towards Heaven with his right hand and with his left hand the condemned are consigned to Hell. On a side note, this also explains the slanted bottom bar found on Russian crosses.

Stephen nodded, "That makes sense. So explain the presence of Mary and John the Baptist. Why are they

standing beside him?”

“The Theotokos and Forerunner together like this are called the *Deesis*, a Greek word meaning adoration or intercession. You often see them on the iconostasis together like this. According to an excellent article on the OCA’s website, *They are interceding on behalf of humans on earth to the One given the responsibility for judging human sheep from goats*. These two are the closest to achieving perfection on earth than any other human. They are proof that it is possible to live our lives in obedience to God’s will. *Their prayers are intercessions for human beings on earth and those who are making the transition from life on earth to life everlasting*. [ibid].”

“To either side of them are the Apostles who are appointed by Christ to sit in judgement with him. *And Jesus said to them, ‘Verily I say to you, that ye who followed Me, in the regeneration [i.e. the Resurrection], whenever the Son of Man shall have taken His seat upon the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’* (Matthew 19:28). The Synaxarion from Matins reads, *the thrones will be set for judgment*.

Stephen looked close and asked me, “Are those angels behind the apostles? They’re dressed in church robes.”

“You’re observant. They are wearing deacon’s vestments because both groups serve at the altar of the Lord. The angels and the apostles are both there to serve Christ as Judge. Recall the first verse of our Gospel reading today. *The Lord said, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.* (Matthew 25:31). The hymns for last night and this morning mention many times the presence of the angels at the last judgement. For instance, in the Lord I Call verses at Vespers we hear, *God sitteth in judgment, O what fear there shall be then, with the angels standing in Thy presence trembling and the river of fire flowing before Thee*.

“An excellent paper I read recently makes clear the role of the angels. *The angels’ mission is broad. It includes serving and glorifying God, protecting the world from the forces of evil, protecting all living creatures while alive in this world, and at Judgment Day, awakening of the dead, and summoning the world to the Last Judgment*.

“Below Christ we see the two archangels. The Greek identifies them as Michael (in red) and Gabriel (in blue) on either side of the Cross. They are interceding for humanity. In the hymns from the Feast of the Angels, during Matins (Ode III), we sing *O ye captains of the heavenly hosts, foremost among those who are enthroned on high, and awesome in divine glory, O Michael and Gabriel, supreme commanders, chief captains of the angels, and all ye bodiless ones, ministers of the Master: praying unceasingly on behalf of the world, ask for the remission of the sins we have committed, and that we may find mercy and grace on the day of judgment*.

“Between the two angels, really at the center of the icon, is the Cross. When Christ says in Matthew 24:30, *Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*, the Fathers agree the sign he is referring to is the Cross. With the Cross you generally see as well the elements of the Passion—the spear, the sponge, the crown of thorns.

Stephen agreed, “That is understandable. But I see something really different with the Cross. A table of some kind with two people on either side.”

“This is a fascinating element, the *Hetoimasia*. In English, it’s called the Throne of Preparation. This is a concept that was present in pre-Christian societies. The empty throne to represent the absent king. At the First Ecumenical Council a throne was left empty to represent the authority of the Emperor Constantine. But by the Second Council the throne represented the authority of Christ usually with a Gospel and the Emperor sat to the side. So we see it in icons of the Holy Fathers.

“The psalmist refers to it in several verses: *Justice and judgment are the preparation of your throne; mercy and truth shall go before your face.* (88:15 LXX). *And the Lord forever endures, he has prepared his throne for judgment: and he will judge the world in justice, the peoples in uprightness.* (9:8-9 LXX).

“The *Hetoimasia* is both altar and throne that is not empty but an invisible presence. *Prestol* — the Slavic word for an Orthodox altar — means “throne”. There is a connection with the Ark of the Covenant which is both the altar of God and the Seat of Atonement. This also gives us a connection with the altar in front of us where Christ this morning came to us as both the offering and the offerer of the sacrifice.



“Christ’s authority can be unseen but present because He is uncircumscribable. As the priest says after the Great Entrance, as he sets the chalice on the altar, *In the grave bodily, but in Hades with Thy soul as God; in Paradise with the thief, and on the throne with the Father and the Spirit wast Thou Who fillest all things, O Christ the Inexpressible.* And a few minutes later, as he consecrates the gifts, *Your holy dwelling and from the throne of glory in Your kingdom, and come to sanctify us, You Who are seated on high with the Father and are invisibly present here with us.*

“So much more could be said but I think I would need more coffee. Don’t get me started about its inclusion in the icon of Holy Wisdom. But to finish this part, we see Adam and Eve on either side, just as they are on the icon seen at Pascha, the Harrowing of Hell. Here they are representing all of humanity.

“And on the throne itself, is usually a book (sometimes a dove). The book represents both the Gospel book commonly found on Orthodox altars, and the book of Revelation 5:1: *And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.*”

Stephen shook his head and answered, “Wow! There really is so much more than I expected. I need to get home but can we meet for coffee later this week and continue this.”

“I’d be happy to. How about our usual two o’clock Tuesday at the library cafe?”

Tuesday afternoon I brought my coffee over to Stephen’s chair. “I brought a copy of the icon so we don’t get confused.”

“I may still get confused but thanks. So, below the altar thing I see scales.”

“In the Apocalypse we read *He is holding the scales of judgment and is surrounded by the books that contain the works of each person* (Revelation 20:11-13). We see the angels offering our good deeds on one side and the demons bringing our vices, even trying to weigh down the left side unfairly. Its important to understand that it is God who holds the scales which means He is the Judge. The demons are there to accuse but can do no more. Fr. Seraphim Rose reminds us ... *there are no visible ‘houses’ or ‘booths’ in the air where ‘taxes’ are collected, and where there is mention of ‘scrolls’ or writing implements whereby sins are recorded, or ‘scales’ by which virtues are weighed, or ‘gold’ by which ‘debts’ are paid – in all such cases we may properly understand these images to be figurative or interpretative devices used to express the spiritual reality which the soul faces at that time.*

“In last Sunday’s Gospel reading Christ makes very clear the importance of succoring the impoverished but its important to remember it is our repentance and God’s mercy that saves us. Good deeds and virtues don’t save us but they are still an important part of our journey of theosis.”

Stephen pointed at the stream flowing away from Christ’s left and asked, “Is that the River of Fire Daniel spoke of?”

“Good memory. In Daniel 7:10 the Prophet says *A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.* During the Sunday morning service (Matins) read before Liturgy, there is a summary of days commemoration called the Synaxarion. Last Sunday we heard, *After this suddenly like lightning from heaven the Lord will come, going before His holy Cross, and a river of boiling fire will go before Him, cleansing the earth of its defilement. The antichrist will be seized immediately along with his servants and will be committed to eternal fire.* Similarly we find in a document by Palladios the Monk, *Then shall come at the command of the Lord a river of fire from the East, and very fierce — with a frightful crackling and terrible thunder, as if all creatures would perish.*

“Keep in mind that any words in this life describing the age to come are metaphorical, not literal. Any suffering in the age to come will not be to satisfy God; our sins are forgiven, they’re nailed to the Cross. It will be more the pain of experiencing the Reality of God.

Stephen nodded, “I think you’re right. I feel like I’ve see that creature at the bottom in another icon.”

“You have. That’s very observant. The same image is in the icon of the Prophet Jonah. *I called out of my trouble and distress to the LORD, And He answered me; Out of the belly of Sheol I cried for help, And You heard my voice.* (Jonah 2:2). Christ said in Matthew 12:40 *For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*



“So in the Judgment icon the river of fire is carrying the unrighteous into hell. In the icon of Jonah, the prophet is a type of Christ going into the realm of the dead.

“We also see this same image in the icons of the Ladder of the Divine Ascent as the monks are defeated by the demons and fall into the maw of Death.

The figure on the right holding the scroll is Prophet Malachi and the words: “Behold the day is coming when all proud and evil people will burn like straw”

“Let’s move on to something more encouraging. On Christ’s right side we see the different groups of saints. In this icon we see, the women saints, women monastics, the Just, Old Testament figures and the monastic fathers. There are a number of other categories we can talk about later.



“Again, on Christ’s left side we see the angel blowing a trumpet and graves opened up. This reminds us again of the Ascension we sing *God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet!* [Ps. 46:5] Christ returns the same way. Again in the work by Palladios the Monk: *Then therefore first, he sends his angels with dreadful and terrible trumpets, and they trumpet frightfully and fearfully, then the sea shall be disturbed and the earth shall shake and the underworld shall tremble, and the heavens shall be afraid. Then the dead shall rise; the righteous shall rise rejoicing in anticipation of reward. The sinners feel terror, expecting punishment and terrible flames. Then shall come at the command of the Lord a river of fire from the East, and very fierce — with a frightful crackling and terrible thunder, as if all creatures would perish.* I think this almost covers the bottom right corner.”

“Who are the four guys wearing crowns?” Stephen asked.

“They represent the four doomed temporal kingdoms found in Daniel’s prophecy, Babylon, Persia, Macedonia, and Rome (Dan. 7:3-8). We learn in verse 9 they will be cast down and replaced in the new spiritual

kingdom.”

“And the sea monsters swallowing people?”

“I mentioned earlier *the sea shall be disturbed*. These people are not being swallowed but rather the creatures are giving up the dead they had consumed. In Apocalypse 20:13 we read *And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works*.

St. Gregory the Theologian wrote: *But for those who are blinded in mind, that is, for those who have become estranged from God, according to the degree of their present nearsightedness, there will be darkness*.

“In last Sunday’s Matins hymns we heard, ...*ponder the multitude of evil deeds I have done, I tremble for fear of the dread day of judgment*. It is with this repentance, *metanoia*, and God’s mercy, that will enable us to avoid their fate.

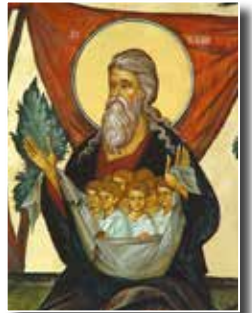
“I’ll be right back. I saw some nice scones to go with our coffee.”

When I had returned and settled in I suggested we might turn towards brighter topics as we finish. “On the bottom left we see Paradise still guarded by Cherubims ([Gen 3:24](#)) – but now open for the righteous to enter. The Apostle Peter is opening the gates guarded by the cherubim. This is a reference to the keys to the kingdom referenced in Matthew 16:19. This authority was bestowed on all the apostles when, post-Resurrection, Christ breathed upon them *and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’* (John 20:22). Following the Apostles are all the Righteous.

Stephen asked, “Who is the guy entering by himself?”

“Remember the repentant thief who we know as St. Dismas. Christ says (Luke 23:43) *Today you will be with me in Paradise*. Meaning that he will be among the first to enter heaven, which once again will be opened for people through the redemptive death of Christ.

“We’re almost finished. The three old men are the Old Testament Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They’re holding to their bosom a flock of righteous souls. Christ said *that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven...* (Matt 8:11). We invoke them especially in the dismissal of Memorial services.



“And I regret that the Theotokos gets last place but I think it appropriate since she prays for us unceasingly. She is unusually without Christ in this image I think because of her title here, the Garden of Paradise. On October 1st we commemorate her Protection and sing: *We know thee, O Theotokos, to be like a divinely planted garden of paradise, the place of the Tree of life, watered by the Holy Spirit, the one who gave birth to the Creator of all* She bore Christ who is the Tree of Life.

“I guess in conclusion we need to realize all iconography is eschatological. Icons depict a reality not only in earthly terms but as realized in the eschaton, in the fullness of all things. So they represent the image as it appears in the fullness of all things.”

by Subdeacon Nicholas Bailey, May, 2024