



PANAGHIA SOUMELA

PERIODICAL PUBLICATION OF
PARACLETOS MONASTERY

DECEMBER 2008

ABBEVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

**PERIODICAL PUBLICATION
OF PARACLETOS MONASTERY**

(Translation by Fr.. Ioannis Vernikos)

1ST ISSUE

DECEMBER 2008

ABBEVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Dear brethren in Christ,

With the Grace of the Holy God and the blessings of our Venerable Shepherd, Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta, we decided to send you this informational bulletin, since many of the visitors and pilgrims to our Holy Monastery, had asked for it.

We would like to inform you for the spiritual opportunities that are offered from our Holy Monastery, in which, if you want and can, you may participate for your spiritual nourishment and edification. For this reason, the bulletin will be regular and will be accompanied with patristic texts of Orthodox teachings, which can quench everyone's souls and can renew our personal way to salvation.

May God bless this humble and good offering towards glorification of His name and to the spreading of His Kingdom.

We beseech the mediation of the Most Holy Theotokos and of all the Saints.

We wish you to you go through in holiness, with your pious families, the Holy Days of Christmas

We devote our first article to the truths of our Orthodox faith; it is a wider analysis of the "Creed." If you study it, it will help you absorb more and solidify on your faith.

CONFESSION OF AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN

I am an Orthodox Christian.

I was baptized and spiritually nurtured in the womb of the Eastern Orthodox Church. My Church is, the ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC and APOSTOLIC CHURCH, which was instituted by my Lord Jesus Christ when the time of fulfillment came, and it is distinguished in the laity and the clergy, who with the ordination and the unbroken apostolic succession are united with the Holy Apostles and with them the Divine Founder.

In my Church, I first met my true God, who is One in Essence and Triune in persons, in other words the loving Father (unoriginate), the Son and Word of God, who was begotten from the Father (birth) and was incarnated for my salvation and lastly the All-Holy and Life-giving Spirit, who proceeds from the Father (procession).

My God is the most perfect personal "Being." He is All-Wise and All-Knowledgeable. He is All-Powerful, Everywhere Present and Everlasting. He is All-Holy, the only Righteous, True and Faithful. Lastly, He is filled with love for all His creation.

It is pronounced in the view of the splendid creation of the world, whose exquisite and admirable harmony, order and expediency presuppose without fail an all-wise creator and constructor. It is confirmed in me with clarity the innate Moral Law of my conscience, the phenomenon of religion, that is catholic, as well as the natural desire of my soul in something Absolute, that literally consumes me and never allows me to be satisfied with absolutely anything.

This, God of mine perfectly freely and from excessive love, first created the invisible and intellectual world of virtuous angels, in order to glorify His name. However, an order part of them with Archangel Satan

rebelled because of arrogance and constituted the order of the evil demons, who since then fight with God and the people.

Later, He created the visible and material world, that formed out of nothing, in time, with only His omnipotent word, in six days and very well and constituted the first miracle of creation.

This most beautiful world was not left to chance, but with the Divine Providence, which is a continuation of God's creation, is sustained and is directed in order to fulfill its final goal.

Lastly, and at the end, my Triune God created the sixth day, the spirit-matter world, myself the man, the coronet of the creation, like a microcosm within the larger-cosmos, or else "little god."

The teaching of the Orthodox Church about man is very optimistic. According to it, I was formed with the special energy of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, from matter and spirit, in one marvelous psychosomatic union, since with my body I am related to the earth and with my immortal soul to my God. Hence, my body is not the cause of sin, but from its formation it is precious and good, for that reason I owe to nourish it with love as the dwelling of my soul.

The incomparable supremacy and my value among the other creations, is also obvious from the characteristic phrase "according to the image and likeness of God," that shows that from the hands of the creator I came out "guileless", straight, without sorrow, virtuous, without any concern, adorned with every virtue.

I was His own image, with logic and free will, gifts that were embellished with the ancient justice, that is to say my power over nature, my erudition, the ability to not die, and my bodily apathy. No desire of sin gloomed my full of happiness life. My God was my only thought and the centre of my life. I could, with the good use of reason and my freedom and with the collaboration of God, reach "the likeness," to become morally perfect and stable in goodness and to really achieve the "theosis-deification."

However, I disobeyed the Divine command and obeyed to the hateful and envious devil. I wanted to become equal with the God, without the Divine Grace, only on my own powers. Thus the heavy and deadly sin was born, that was named "original sin" and from then on the ancient and dreary drama of Eden began.

The image of God within, without being completely destroyed, it got distorted, the primitive righteousness was lost, death, both natural and physical, entered humanity. From that time on, its course began to look gloomy and asphyxiating. Every man that was to come into the world, would bring in him, as like a defilement, this condition of sin, with all the consequences and the depressing burden of guilt, because all people, without even the exception of the Theotokos, we spermatically existed within the first couple of the first-created.

My Mother the Theotokos was not born by the immaculate conception, as the Roman-Catholics believe, but with a natural birth and only at the time of the Annunciation, she was cleansed from the Original sin by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, and she remained relatively sinless "by the grace" ever-virgin, holy, and undefiled.

The great gap that was created between the creature and the Creator, had to be bridged with reconciliation and the restoration of the communication that had been interrupted.

This was absolutely impossible for the sick and blood-soaked creature and even for the angels, but it was utterly possible for the Holy and the Almighty God. The goodness of my Creator, the Omniscient and His full of mercy love, found a way to save and lift up the fallen and sinful man, who existed as a plan before the ages, and it was given for the first time, like a first-gospel (first-Announcement), together with the punishment of the first-created, but which was fulfilled when the fullness of time had come, with the incarnation of the Son and Word of God.

He Himself, my God, having prepared humanity with the deep acknowledgement of sin and with the nostalgia of the divine salvation;

“bent the heavens,” “took the form of servant,” “became flesh” from the Virgin Mary with the Holy Spirit and became part of our history like a man, He who is Timeless and Eternal, separating it into B.C. and A.D. era.

In the born Jesus Christ, we have “one person with two natures,” meaning to the person of God the Word the humanity and the divinity was united “unconfused, unchangeable (against Monophysitism), indivisible, inseparable (against Nestorianism).”

My Lord Jesus Christ is a perfect God and simultaneously a perfect man, having all that the Father has, except the Unoriginate-unborn, and everything that I have, except sin. My Savior, like a second Adam, took my sinful nature and by uniting it to His person with the divine, He truly sanctified it. With His whole life on earth, He worked out and fulfilled the great mystery of my salvation.

As the first-prophet and first-teacher He cleansed my darkened intellect, He taught the only Diving Truth and Knowledge and He freed me from the error.

As a great Archpriest -sacrificer and at the same time a victim-from the excessive philanthropy and from obedience to God the Father, He gave Himself as a propitiation sacrifice upon the Cross for the benefit of all people. In that way He gave the forgiveness of sins, the Divine Grace, the reconciliation and the Divine Adoption.

Lastly, as a King of the new society of the faithful, who recapitulated it with His Precious Blood, descended to the bipartite Hades to preach to the dead, He stepped upon death with his glorious Resurrection, He was ascended into heaven and He sat at the right side of the Father and instituted His Church on earth, to continue the divine work of the salvation which He invisibly governs.

In this Church of mine, that is the body of Christ, and has the militant part of Christians on earth and the triumphant part of those “fallen asleep” in heavens, my Savior has put the all means of

sanctification and my salvation, that exclusively and only with them, when I want it, I can gain my personal salvation.

Within that Church, that for me is my loving Mother, I feel spiritual peace and rest, because the security of salvation is given to me and as the vine tree I suck the spiritual juices, that will bring to me the spiritual blossoming and fruitfulness.

In my Orthodox Church I breath abundantly the oxygen and the aroma of grace of the Holy Spirit, that is offered to me richly through the seven (7) holy Sacraments. First and foremost the Holy Baptism, that is done with the triple immersion and emergence in the water of the font and in the name of the Holy Trinity, frees me from the Original Sin and gives me rebirth as a loving child of God.

The Chrism that follows after the Holy Myrrh, gives me the gifts of the Holy Spirit and His power to be developed in the new Christian life, that began with the Baptism. This two mysteries, as well as the Ordination, can be performed only once in my lifetime, because every repetition is strictly prohibited, in the other however and in particular the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Confession, I can participate whenever I want, in order to have a firm foundation in goodness and in my moral perfection.

In the Sacrament of Confession with the contrition of heart, I come and confess my sins before the spiritual father and receive forgiveness of every personal sin committed, after the Baptism.

In the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, with fear, faith and love, I partake the Pure Body and Precious Blood of my Lord Jesus Christ unto forgiveness of my sins and life everlasting. Within this and with an inconceivable and mystical way, I live my union with the Incarnated Word of God, I become christbearer and godbearer, I am deified.

When again I find myself in physical and spiritual illness, I will run to my Holy Church in order to receive treatment from her priests, which, after they have prayed in the name of Christ and anoint me in a

cruciform with the holy oil, they will have the service of the healing, the Holy Unction.

Also, if I would like to follow the great creation of life, the Marriage, once again my Church bless my free union with a special Divine ceremony and will sanctify me in my mystical union- that is compared with the union of Christ and the bride Church- and will fortify me to realize her divine and high goals.

Lastly, in my Church, in the Orthodox adoration of my God, I feel my earthly life extending itself beyond the narrow limits of this world and living in the antechamber of eternity.

My soul like the spiritual bride of Christ is foretasting the Heavenly Kingdom, that the Holy God has prepared "to those that love" and it will be perfected in His Second and Glorious Coming and the final judgment of the living and the dead. My deification shakes my whole being, and makes me to live on earth like a man, but to act like a god. This is my Orthodox Faith. The Faith of my Forefathers, Fathers, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Preachers, Evangelists, Confessors, Martyrs and every spirit perfected in faith. This is the Faith that I confess and preach to all and forever and I will fight by the grace of God, to uphold undefiled and right until the end.

I open my heart and my hands to a warm embrace to all the schismatics and heterodox my brothers, that want to come to Orthodoxy and I pray for them.

I will not though permit to anyone ever, according to my ability, to alter or tear the unwoven garment of my Church.

You, my Lord Jesus gave your precious Blood for her. Here, I am ready, give me Your grace to defend her. Light the fire of my humble soul for the Cross and the martyrdom. Amen.

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE



**“ Rejoice heaven, and earth be glad;
for God is with us in flesh,
he is being brought to birth from a Virgin girl
and wrapped in swaddling clothes;
while he looses the bonds of our offences
as he is compassionate.”**

(Canon of the Forefeast, Ode 1. December 21st)

Our beloved brethren in Christ Born,

The heaven rejoices and the earth is glad; God comes, is incarnated and revealed as a babe, in a humble manger from a Virgin girl.

Oh depth of wealth and wisdom and knowledge of God! We remain ecstatic before the highest event of human history, in that of the inconceivable mystery of Incarnation, of the kenosis (of the self-emptying) of God the Word, which transcends us to the Land of the Uncontainable as much it rouses us into angelic hymns, doxologies, thanksgivings and entreaties.

All who believe truly and rightly (in an Orthodox way), are able to touch the Revealed God, our Holy God, the ever-unknown but now known, our loving Father, the all-merciful, who destroys

the series of our offenses, the sweet Jesus, who takes on Himself not only the payout of our sins, but also perfects us, in order to deify us through grace and make us partakers of His heavenly Kingdom.

Christ-Infant is there, my brethren, in the humble manger and awaits for us to lay down the repugnance of our passions; He is there and awaits, to cleanse our distorted, due to our sins, consciousness; He is there and awaits us, to deposit our secular attitude, the blasphemous and irreverent rationalism, our avarice, our selfishness, our vainglory, our hatred, our inhospitability, our eudemonism, our monolithic self-efficiency, our detachment from the Church, our innovation and modernism. He is there for 2000 years the same, solid and unalterable and He awaits even today our all-fierly and wholehearted repentance.

Every year on the feast of the Nativity, as it is every day, hour and moment, the mercies and compassions of our Infant Christ are renewed. Let us also renew the shed of our tears. Let us pour out our hearts before Him, as the water flows on earth and let us implore for the forgiveness of our iniquities and of the entire world.

“The time is near.” Christ, who became the Babe, holds all the gifts of His Sacred Manger, love, joy, peace...ready to disperse generously to all that with the fear, faith and love worship Him.

May the redemptive grace of our Born Savior, restore our souls, especially yours personally and that of your beloved families.

Christ is Born!

We wish to you and your families to have a Blessed New Year.

FROM EVERGETINOS BOOK

An Elder once narrated the following story:

One time, a Bishop visited a village on a Sunday and said to his deacons:

- Look for the priest of the village to celebrate for us the offering of the Holy Mysteries (i.e. the Divine Liturgy.)

Indeed, the deacons searched and found the priest. He appeared to be simple and uneducated villager. So, they led him before the Bishop and the Bishop urged him to celebrate the Divine Liturgy.

After this simple priest entered the Holy Sanctuary, the Bishop sees him, from the moment that he stood before the Holy Altar, to be fully covered with fire and not to be consumed by it.

When the Divine Liturgy was over, the Bishop calls the priest close to him at the vestry and says to him:

- Bless me, worthy servant of God.

Astonished the priest replies to him:

- How is it possible that a Bishop who ordains the priest, to be blessed by the priest?

- I do not have the power, the Bishop replied again, to bless a priest who consecrated the Holy Gifts to God being aflame from supernatural fire and not to be consumed. Certainly the lesser in value is blessed by the greater.

With utmost humility the priest replied: Is it ever possible, Honorable Master, a Bishop or a priest, to celebrate the awesome and life-giving Mysteries and not to be girdled by divine fire?

The Bishop, as soon as he heard this from the simple priest, he marveled so much, the purity of the man and the unpretendness of his ways. He departed, greatly benefited.¹

¹ Evergetinos Book 1 vol. 4 pg. 31-32

ANNOUNCEMENTS



Foremost, we would like to inform you about the “spiritual schedule” of our Monastery.

The Nuns begin their daily schedule at 4:00 a.m. The early-hour service includes “Mesonyktikon” the Midnight Hours and Matins². At 8:00 a.m. they have a short breakfast and begin their work until 2:00 p.m. when they have a meal –supper. From 2:30-4:30 p.m. the Nuns withdraw for prayer-study and rest. At 4:30p.m., there is Vespers along with the

² *Mesonyktikon*, Midnight’: first office of the day in the Byzantine rite, celebrated theoretically at midnight, but in most monasteries immediately before orthros. On Mount Athos, it begins at around 3 a.m. or earlier. On weekdays it has two distinct parts. The first part is dominated by Septuagint Psalm 118, the Amomos, which contains the verse, ‘At midnight I arose to confess you for the judgments of your justice.’ This long meditation on God’s law is prescribed for Matins every Saturday and most Sundays, and is therefore read daily in the monastic cycle. This is followed by a series of short hymns and prayers, beginning with the troparion ‘Behold, the Bridegroom is coming in the middle of the night’. The second part is a short office of supplication for the departed. Sunday Mesonyktikon takes the form of a canon in honor of the holy Trinity, followed by a series of megalynaria. The eight canons, one for each tone, are by Metrophanes, bishop of Smyrna, and form a poetic compendium of Orthodox Trinitarian theology.

service of the “Paraclesis³” Supplication of the Theotokos after which the work is continued until 8:00 p.m. At 8:00 p.m., there is the service of the Small Compline⁴ with the Akathist. Upon completion, they withdraw to their cells for their personal spiritual duty and their small vigil.

We would also like to inform you that with the efforts and blessings of our Metropolitan, every Saturday we will have Divine Liturgy. The Matins service will begin at 6:00 a.m. and will end at 10:00 a.m. By the order of His Eminence, the venerable priests will be coming to the Holy Monastery at 8:30 a.m.

³ The Supplication is service of intercession to the Lord, the Mother of God and the saints. The Supplication to the Mother of God is a magnificent literary work which contains beautiful hymns that lift the soul of the afflicted and it can be read or chant throughout the whole year. The small Paraclesis is also read in sickness and troubles of every kind.

⁴ *Apodeimpon*, Compline is the final church service of the day in the daily liturgical cycle, prior to going to sleep. Small Compline is served on most nights of the year with the exception of Great Lent. The service is composed of three Psalms (50, 69, 142), the Small Doxology, the Nicene Creed, the Canon followed by *It is Truly Meet*, the Trisagion, Troparia for the day, *Lord, have mercy* (40 times), the Prayer of the Hours, the Supplicatory Prayer of Paul the Monk, and the Prayer to Jesus Christ of Antiochus the Monk and the prayer to the guardian angel. Then the mutual forgiveness and final blessing by the Priest.



The miraculous icon of Panaghia
Soumela, in which we dedicate
the first Chapel of our
Monastery



PARACLETOS GREEK ORTHODOX MONASTERY

790 GIN HOUSE RD
ABBEVILLE, SC 29620

Ph: 864-348-7545

E-mail: paracletos@wctel.net

Web-site: greekorthodoxmonastery.net