

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church
A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese
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From the Writings of St. Nektarios of Pentapolis d. 1920

I am the way, the truth, and the life. [John 14:6] What joyful words! What authority is contained within them! How wonderful and laudable a message! What desirable good tidings for men!

These words are replete with life and fully satisfy the desires of the human heart. What a delightful sound! What gleeful news! Truly, how beautiful are the lips that preach the Gospel of peace, that bring glad tidings of good things! How cheerful are the words of Him who announces to mankind the arrival of the expectation of the nations! What expressive words! How lofty and divine! These words contain an entire treasure, a treasure that enriches all of humanity. These words contain the summation of all humanity's desires for all times.

Inside:

<i>St. Sergius of Rakvere</i>	3
<i>Parish News</i>	6
<i>On the Incarnation</i>	7
<i>Calendar</i>	11



Their beauty is heavenly, while the joy they contain is ineffable. Their resonance charms the ears of the listeners as a heavenly melody. As a ray of sunlight, they disperse the dark clouds of ignorance, they enlighten humanity (which sat in *darkness and...the shadow of death* [Mt. 4:16], they awaken it from the sleep of indolence, and they lead it through the contest of life. They radiate the noetic eyes of the soul and render them powerful; they

enable them to gaze upon the light of truth and to come to know the incarnate God, the expectation of the nations, the Son of Man: Him Who confesses that He is the way, the truth, and the life.

So then, the eternal desires of the human race have been fulfilled, the salvific grace has appeared, the light has dawned, the mind has been illumined, darkness has been driven away, the shadow has come to pass, and he who was sleeping has awoken. Man is now able to walk the straight path leading to salvation. He who was ignorant of the truth is now capable of knowing its ineffable beauty and casting away the burden of ignorance that had weighed upon his chest for entire centuries and disturbed his thoughts. Ignorance of the truth was darkness and the shadow of death. Ignorance had diverted humanity from the road of truth, and, consequently, it became surrounded by gloom and darkness. This is why the prophet likens the revealed truth to a great light: *the people who sat in darkness saw a great Light*. [Mt. 4:16; Isa. 9:2] Truly, a great light appeared. As the light of righteousness, it enlightened humanity, which beheld the expectation of the nations, the Savior of the world, the awaited Son of Man: the way, the truth, and the life.

People sought the way, the truth, and the life. God fulfilled this burning desire of humanity by sending His only-begotten Son - Whom He announced to humanity when the first-created people fell. Man sought the road of truth leading to eternal life because he realized that he had strayed away from it. He sought the truth because falsehood had inundated the earth. He sought life because spiritual death had prevailed.

Humanity yearned for the advent of the announced Savior, Teacher, and Redeemer. The prophets and God-inspired men had pre-announced and presaged His coming, and they consoled humanity by exhorting it to expect the forthcoming Teacher Who would teach the entire truth. The Savior's statement: *I am the way, the truth, and the life* is a declaration of His arrival. It was a response to humanity who was awaiting Him. It testifies to the completion and fulfillment of the prophets' predictions. It was an appearance to them who sought His arrival. It fulfilled the desires and quenched the thirst of thirsting humanity. It alleviated the burdened souls, and it enlightened them in darkness. It was the hope of them in despair, the joy of the bereaved, the jubilation of the world, and the delight of the nations. It was the beloved sound that humanity had awaited for many centuries. It was the voice of the anticipated Redeemer. It was the voice of the expectation of the nations, the voice of the Son of Man.

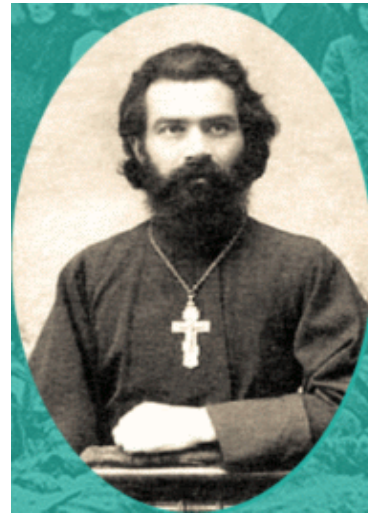
St. Sergius of Rakvere, Martyr

Feast Day ~ December 30

The *antimension* - the cloth, signed by the Metropolitan which is laid on the altar for every Orthodox Liturgy - is the sign that the parish priest has permission to serve the Liturgy on behalf of the bishop. Every antimension has some relics of saints sewn into it. (Historically, the traditional Western equivalent is an "altar stone" with a saint's relic embedded in it). Every time a new

Metropolitan is elected, each parish receives a new antimension and, after the enthronement of Metropolitan SABA, St. Gregory's received an antimension with relics of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, the Four Thousand Martyrs of Nicomedia, and of St. Sergius of Rakvere. Why are these relics, and others which are displayed at times on the altar (ours are of Ss. Gregory, Nicholas, Lucy, and Sebastian) so important to Orthodox Christians?

In our reverence for the life that God has created and our belief that the material (the body) and spiritual (the soul) are interconnected, Orthodox Christians venerate relics, believing that the bodies of the saints continue to be the temples of the Holy Spirit even after their earthly repose. As St. Cyril of Jerusalem said, "Though the soul is not present, a power resides in the bodies of the saints because of the righteous soul which has for so many years dwelt in it, or used it as its minister." We believe that their holiness continues to permeate their bodily remains and even their clothing or other objects associated with them, and that miracles have occurred through these relics.



The relic of St. Sergius in our antimension is from a more modern and less well known saint. The son of a priest, Sergius Florinski graduated from seminary in 1893, married and was ordained to the priesthood in 1900. Fr. Sergius was appointed to serve as a chaplain in the Russian army and spent the remainder of his priestly work in that role. He provided guidance and spiritual counsel to soldiers through the Russo-Japanese War and World War I, accompanying his soldiers into battle carrying a cross instead of a weapon, as was the Russian tradition.

In 1917, as the Russian Revolution unfolded, Fr. Sergius was assigned to the field hospital in Wesenberg (which is now Rakvere, Estonia). The hospital was ordered by the Bolshevik People's Commissariat to dismiss all clergy from the military, but the hospital staff refused and so it was closed in 1918. In December of that year, Wesenberg was occupied by the Red Army and Chaplain Sergius was arrested as a representative of the old reactionary regime and as a suspicious person involved in anti-Bolshevik activity. When ordered to confess his crimes, he said, "I am guilty of one thing, that I am a priest, and for this I sign my name." He was sentenced to death and, along with 80 others, was shot in the woods. After the departure of the Bolsheviks, all who were shot were reburied. Father Sergius was then buried in the Rakvere town cemetery.

In 2002, Father Sergius was glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church as a martyr. During his exhumation in 2003, it was discovered that most of his body had remained incorrupt. Now some of the relics have been disbursed around the world for the veneration of the faithful.

One of the most unlikely places where relics of St. Sergius are displayed for veneration is Pyongyang, North Korea. In 2002, then supreme ruler Kim Jong Il visited Russia and was impressed particularly with the architecture of the churches. Back home, he ordered that a similar church building should be constructed for the Russian embassy staff and, in 2006, the Church of the Nativity of the Theotokos, containing relics of St. Sergius of Rakvere, was dedicated. May St. Sergius intercede for us and especially for all people who suffer under repressive, anti-Christian governments.
Holy Sergius, pray for us!

Resources: Internet articles from Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, Willamantic, CT; website of St. Innocent of Alaska Monastery, Redford, MI; website of St. John the Evangelist Orthodox Church, Beaver Falls, PA; Orthodoxwiki; Wikivoyage.

Parish News

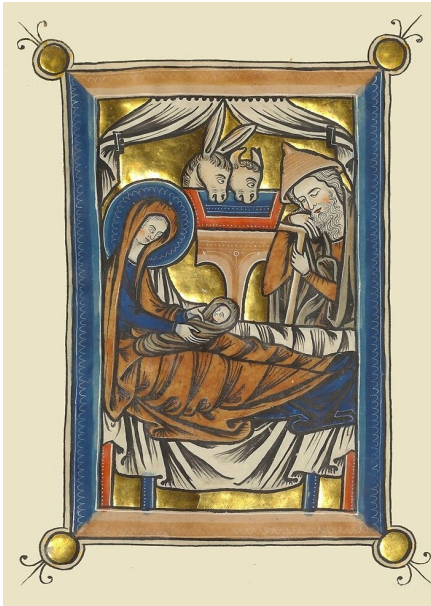
Most of the month of December is devoted to preparing. During the season of Advent, we prepare our hearts to receive again our Incarnate God, who was sent to the world as a human child to show us the way to salvation, and we look forward to His Second Coming.

The Church emphasizes several ways for us to prepare. One is to increase our almsgiving and to do this, we participate in our Archdiocese Food for Hungry People program. We will be collecting canned and packaged food to be donated to a local food bank through Sunday, January 5.

Another way of preparing is to increase our prayers and attendance at the services of the Church. Our annual paraliturgical service of Advent Lessons and Carols will be held on Saturday, December 21, at 6PM in place of Vespers. This quiet service includes prayers, scripture readings, seasonal hymns and other music to help us focus on spiritual preparation for celebrating the Nativity of Our Lord.

There will also be Vespers services each evening at 6PM during the Novena before Christmas, beginning on Monday, December 16. These services will include the "O" antiphons - antiphons on the Magnificat, each beginning with the word O, with reference to the names given to Jesus (Wisdom, Key of David, Emmanuel). The Novena concludes on Christmas Eve.

Repentance is another part of our preparations for the Nativity. Confessions can always be made before Saturday Vespers or by request with Fr. Nicholas and a special time for confessions will be set aside on Christmas Eve at 7PM.



At 8:30PM on Tuesday, Christmas Eve, we will begin our celebrations with a period of Christmas hymns, carols, organ and choir offerings. The first Mass of Christmas will begin at 9PM, followed by a pot-luck feast. On Christmas Day, Mass will be celebrated at 10AM.

Our celebrations will continue on the Second Sunday within the Octave of the Nativity, December 29, and on January 1 - the Circumcision of Our Lord - at 10AM. With

Archdiocesan directives, our celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany of our Lord will be transferred to Sunday, January 5 when we will observe the Blessing of Water and begin the season of Epiphany.

On the Incarnation

You know what happens when a portrait that has been painted on a panel becomes obliterated through external stains. The artist does not throw away the panel, but the subject of the portrait has to come and sit for it again, and then the likeness is re-drawn on the same material. Even so was it with the All-holy Son of God. He, the Image of the Father, came and dwelt in our midst in order that He might renew mankind made after Himself, and seek out His lost sheep, even as He says in the Gospel, *I came to seek and to save that which was lost.* [Luke 19:10]...



Desiring to do good to men, as Man He dwells, taking to Himself a body like the rest, and through His actions done in that body, as it were on their own level, He teaches those who would not learn by other means, to know Himself, the Word of God, and through Him the Father.

He deals with them as a good teacher with his pupils, coming down to their level and using simple means. St. Paul says as much: *Because in the wisdom of God the world in its wisdom knew not God, God saw fit through the simplicity of the News proclaimed to save those who believe.* [I Cor.1:22] Men had turned from the contemplation of God above, and were looking for him in the opposite direction, down among created things and things of sense. The Savior of us all, the Word of God, in His great love took to Himself a body and moved as Man among men, meeting their senses, so to speak, half way. He became Himself an object for the senses, so that those who were seeking God in sensible things might apprehend the Father through the works which He, the Word of God, did in the body.

Human and human minded as men were, therefore, to whichever side they looked in the sensible world they found themselves taught the truth. Were they awe-stricken by creation? They beheld it confessing Christ as Lord. Did their minds tend to regard men as Gods? The uniqueness of the Savior's works marked Him, alone of men, as Son of God. Were they drawn to evil spirits? They saw them driven out by the Lord and learned that the Word of God alone was God and that the evil spirits were not gods at all. Were they inclined to hero-worship and the cult of the dead? Then the fact that the Savior had risen from the dead showed them how false these other deities were, and that the Word of the Father is the

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one true Lord, the Lord even of death. For this reason was He both born and manifested as Man, for this He died and rose, in order that, eclipsing by His works all other human deeds, He might recall men from all the paths of error to know the Father. As He says Himself, *I came to seek and to save that which was lost.*

When, then, the minds of men had fallen finally to the level of sensible things, the Word submitted to appear in a body, in order that He, as Man, might center their senses on Himself, and convince them through His human acts that He Himself is not man only but also God, the Word and Wisdom of the true God. This is what Paul wants to tell us when he says, *That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the length and breadth and height and depth, and to know the love of God that surpasses knowledge, so that ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God.* [Eph. 3:17 ff] The Self-revealed of the Word is in every dimension - above in creation; below in the Incarnation; in the depth, in Hades; in the breadth, throughout the world. All things have been filled with the knowledge of God.

An excerpt from the treatise *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei (On the Incarnation)* by St. Athanasius



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>December 2024</h1>						<i>Sunday services: Matins at 9am Sung Mass at 9:30</i>
1 First Sunday in Advent; St. Eligius of Tournai, BC, 660 <i>V</i>	2 St. Peter Chrysologus, BCD, c. 450; St. Bibiana of Rome, VM, 363	3	4 St. Barbara, VM, c. 306	5 St. Sabbas of Palestine, Ab, 532	6 St. Nicholas of Myra, BC, c. 342	7 St. Ambrose of Milan, BCD, 397 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
8 Second Sunday in Advent <i>V</i>	9 Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (tr.)	10 St. Melchisedes, PM, 314	11 St. Damasus, PC, 384	12 St. Spiridon, BC, 348	13 St. Lucy, VM, 304; St. Herman of Alaska, C, 1837	14 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
15 Third Sunday in Advent; St. Maurus, Ab, 6th C <i>V</i>	16 St. Eusebius of Vercelli, BM, 371 <i>O Sapientia</i>	17 St. Lazarus of Bethany, BC, 1st C <i>O Adonny</i>	18 Ember Wednesday <i>O Radix Jesse</i>	19 <i>O Clavis David</i>	20 Ember Friday; St. John of Kronstadt, C, 1908 <i>O Oriens</i>	21 St. Thomas, Apostle, 1st C; Ember Saturday <i>Lessons & Carols at 6pm</i> <i>O Rex gentium</i>
22 Fourth Sunday in Advent <i>O Emmanuel</i> <i>V</i>	23 <i>O Virgo virginum</i>	24 Vigil of the Nativity <i>Mass at 9pm</i> <i>W</i>	25 The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ; St. Anastasia, VM., c. 304 <i>Mass at 10am</i> <i>W</i>	26 St. Stephen, Proto-martyr, 1st C; of the Octave of the Nativity	27 St. John, Evangelist & Apostle, 1st C; of the Octave of the Nativity	28 Holy Innocents, Mm, 1st C; of the Octave of the Nativity <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
29 The Sunday within the Octave of the Nativity <i>W</i>	30 of the Octave of the Nativity	31 St. Sylvester, PC, 335				