

The Confessor's Tongue for February 1, 2009

33rd Sunday After Pentecost: Martyr Tryphon

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

February 2: Meeting of Christ in the Temple

The Nativity cycle of feastdays concludes with the Great Feast of the Meeting of Christ in the Temple on February 2nd, the fortieth day after the Nativity of our Lord. This feast is closely connected with the Nativity, for just as Christ's divinity was revealed at His Nativity and His Baptism, so it is also manifested at His meeting in the temple with Simeon and Anna.

According to the Law of Moses, all Hebrew parents were to bring their first-born son and a sacrifice in thanksgiving on the fortieth day after birth to the temple to be consecrated to God. The law was established in remembrance of the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt—freedom from slavery, when the first-born Hebrews were spared from death.

In fulfillment of this law, the Theotokos with Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem, and for their sacrifice brought two doves—the sacrifice of a poor family. At that time, the Elder Simeon by the Holy Spirit recognized the infant Jesus as the Christ, the anointed one of God, as did the Prophetess Anna. Thus these two joined the company of shepherds and magi as being among the first to recognize Him for who He was.

The spirit of the festal service is the same as that of the Nativity and Theophany: to glorify the manifestation of God on earth, to extol Christ's divinity, and to give honor to the most pure Virgin Mary as the Mother of God. St. Cyril of Alexandria speaks beautifully of the profound content and significance of this feast in his sermon for the day:

The Eternal, is both a small Child and the 'Ancient of Days' (i.e. God). A child at the breast and, at the same time, the Creator of ages. I behold a Child and recognize God. The Child is nourished, and, at the same time, he gives life and joy to the world. The Child is in swaddling clothes, and, at the same time, he delivers me from the bonds of sin... This Child—the angels glorify him, the archangels bow before him. The Principalities tremble in his presence, the Powers praise him, the Cherubim minister to him, the Seraphim bless him, fountains and seas yield to him... This Child conquered death, overcame the devil, abolished Adam's curse, ...washed away all sins, condemned all heresy, adorned all creation, saved Adam, renewed Eve, summoned all the nations, and sanctified the universe... Therefore, let us brighten this day with candles, as befits the children of light, and let us bring to Christ the Light of spiritual illumination.
(Prologue 1)

The Feast of the Meeting of Our Lord has a post-feast until February 9th. During the festal time, the troparion and kontakion of the feast are said along with our daily prayers and at meals.

Troparion, tone 1

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos full of grace, / for from thee hath shone forth the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, / who doth illumine those in darkness. / Be glad also,

thou righteous elder, / for thou hast received in thine arms the Deliverer of our souls, // who bestoweth upon us Resurrection.

Kontakion, tone 1

Thou who hast sanctified by Thy birth a virgin womb / and fittingly blessed the hands of Simeon, / Thou art come, O Christ our God, and on this day hast saved us. / Give peace to thy commonwealth in time of battle / and strengthen the Orthodox people whom Thou hast loved, // O Thou who alone lovest mankind.

Singing at St. Maximus

Subdeacon Anthony Stokes

Note: Some of the points in this article are specific to St. Maximus Parish, while some are more broadly applied to congregational singing in general.

There are many different traditions in Orthodox Church music with regards to who sings during the services. They can be broadly summed up in three ways:

1. A trained choir or group of chanters does all of the singing, sometimes almost giving a concert feel to the services. This is a typical style of Greek parishes.
2. Everyone in the church sings everything. There may not even be a choir director, just a chanter that begins the pieces. This is the traditional method found in Old Believer parishes and somewhat in the Carpatho-Russian tradition.
3. A Mixture of 1 & 2. A choir or chanter leads the congregation in much of the singing, while there may be parts of the service only sung by the choir or chanter.

In the Orthodox Church in America, and somewhat in the Antiochian Archdiocese in America, you will find that most churches fall into category 3. That includes us here at St. Maximus. Our choir is there to lead the congregation in singing, not to perform a concert or to be the only people singing. Notice that I underlined the word lead. The choir should do the leading, not the congregation. We will see why throughout this article.

In addition to falling into category 3, we are also a multi-cultural Church when it comes to our music. Even though the OCA has Russian roots, we use music from the Byzantine, modern Greek, Serbian, Romanian, Georgian, Arab traditions, as well as newly written music by Orthodox American composers. If there is ever a specific piece of music or type that you would like us to sing, please see me.

When starting to talk about Orthodox Liturgical Music, the most important thing to learn is this: The text is the most aspect of the musical setting. That is worth repeating: The text is the most aspect of the musical setting. The text should be understandable by everyone. What does this mean for the congregation member that likes to sing along with the choir? Well, a few items should be taken into

account, and they all impact the whether the text is understood or not.

1. If you do not know the words to a hymn, or do not have them in front of you, it is best to not try and make them up or sing notes without words. It is more important for the words to be understood than for extra parts to be sung. There are books available that contain the texts to the non-changing parts of our services. If you like to sing during the services please use one of the books to follow along. If the text is not in the books or in a supplement that is available, then it is best to not sing at all during that part of the service. This is especially true if you know the piece from another parish. We often use different translations and settings of well-known pieces (this also applies to no. 2 below). In fact, the Church Canons dictate that those leading the services (clergy, readers, choir) should never do so by memory, but must always use the service book. Of course there are exceptions to this, but the Church Fathers must have thought that this was an important topic.

2. If you do not know the actual harmony parts to the hymns, it is better to sing melody. Actually, anyone that has not actually seen the music or spent enough time memorizing the actual harmony parts should always sing melody. In the churches that rely only on congregational singing, everyone sings the melody. The reason that this is important is that it can negatively impact what the choir is singing and often it can throw the choir off completely if congregation members are not singing the correct harmonies or words (see No. 1).

3. Probably one of the most important aspects of singing in a church with a choir is what I earlier mentioned about the choir leading the singing. That means if you cannot hear the choir then you are probably singing too loud. This is a common occurrence here at St. Maximus. It is great to be enthusiastic about our worship, but just as everything else in the church (iconography, vestments, etc.), our singing should be as beautiful as we can make it. This is why we have trained singers in the first place: to lead the singing in as beautiful a manner as possible.

It may seem that all of these guidelines are designed for the benefit of the choir, and, in a way, they are, but they have a more general theme of making our worship as beautiful as possible. At the same time, it is important to help the choir stay on focus and undistracted so that they can lead the singing as best they can. Besides observing the points above, other ways that congregation members can help the choir is to look over our current Choir Guidelines. There are currently only ten people blessed to be members of the St. Maximus Choir. That means that only ten people should be in the choir area and reading from the choir stands. There are occasions where people from the congregation, with the best of intentions, make their way into the choir area whether it be to read or sing along or just to find a place to sit. This can be distracting to the

choir members, especially with the singing aspect. Our choir is balanced with a certain number of voices and it can make it difficult to disturb that balance by adding voices that are not regularly part of the mix. This is one reason that we generally do not allow children in the choir. Actually, anyone that cannot read music is generally discouraged from joining the choir. To expand on this issue, I will close with some of the guidelines for becoming a member of the choir here at St. Maximus. Please feel free to discuss any questions about singing in general, or about the choir at our church with me or with Fr. Justin. Our main purpose is not to keep anyone from singing, but to make sure that we offer the most beautiful singing that we can in our services to God.

Qualifications for Choir Members at St. Maximus the Confessor Orthodox Church

- 1) You need permission from the choir director and the blessing of the priest to join the choir.
- 2) Choir members should be Orthodox Christians in good standing, meaning someone who makes regular confessions and communes regularly. The priest reserves the right to bless committed catechumens to sing on a case by case basis.
- 3) You must be able to read music. This includes any children. Generally, children that are younger than Middle School Age (11-12) should not sing in the adult choir. A children's choir could be formed if there is enough interest.
- 4) You should be able to sing a voice part other than the melody (except sopranos) by yourself, without the other parts.
- 5) You should know at least your part to all 8 tones (all parts would be preferred).
- 6) You must attend at least 4 choir rehearsals before joining the choir at a service (at the discretion of the director).

The Choir is a ministry of the Church, just as reading, serving in the altar, or any other liturgical service. This requires a commitment on the part of the choir members.

February Namedays

26 Photina Louise Newcomb (Samaritan Woman)
26 Svetlana Leah Cole (Samaritan Woman)

February Birthdays

6 Louise Newcomb
15 Rick Joines
23 Lauren Garcia

Upcoming Events 2009

2 February Great Feast of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple.
1 March, Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m. All parishioners should make every effort to attend this service, which marks the beginning of the Great Fast.
2-6 March, Clean Week
12-18 April, Holy Week
19 April, Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!