

# The Confessor's Tongue for September 6, 2009

13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost; Archangel Michael, Martyr Eudoxius

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.

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## September 8: Nativity of the Theotokos

On the eighth day of the Church's new year, She celebrates the Great Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos. The Feast has a pre-feast of one day and a post-feast of four days.

This feast marks the birth of Mary to her parents Joachim and Anna in their old age. The Church attributes great importance to the birth of Mary, the Mother of God, because it was through her and her acceptance of God's will that our Lord became man. This Feast occurs at the beginning of the Church year because Mary's birth marks the beginning of the process that led to our salvation. Without her cooperation and freely-given assent, the eternal Word of God would not have become man. The following hymn from Vespers of the Feast expresses much of the Feast's meaning:

Today is the beginning of joy for all the world; today the winds blow that bring tidings of salvation. The barrenness of our nature hath been loosed: for the barren woman is revealed as the mother of her, who, after bearing the Maker, still remained virgin. From her He who is God by nature taketh what is alien and maketh it His own; through her Christ worketh salvation for those gone astray in the flesh, He who loveth mankind and is the Deliverer of our souls. The Feast marks the "beginning of joy," for through the godly inheritance of many generations, the way had been prepared for the birth of the woman who would be fitting to give birth to God in the flesh. God's plan awaited the coming of the suitable vessel who could bring His Son into the world, giving Him human flesh.

Man's nature, rendered barren by the curse, unable to fulfill his potential for achieving God's likeness, enslaved to sin, death, and the devil, is ended; for Anna, long barren, gives birth to the perfect flowering and offering of the human race, her pure daughter Mary, and Mary, through her purity and willing submission to God, permits "He who is God by nature" to take "what is alien" (i.e. human nature) and to make that created human nature His own. Through her, Christ comes to work salvation for man whom He loves.

The Troparion of the Feast, which expresses the external meaning of the Feast, gives the reason for the claim that Mary's birth is "the beginning of joy for all the world" which "hath brought joy to all the inhabited earth." Through her, Christ is born who delivers us from the curse and from death and pours out upon us blessing and eternal life.

The Kontakion of the Feast, which expresses the internal, or hidden, meaning of the Feast, describes the cosmic effects of Mary's birth: Adam and Eve are set free from death and corruption, and God's people are delivered from sin. A barren woman, Anna, bears a woman, Mary, who sustains our lives, and she does this because of whom she bore: Christ our God.

As usual, we sing or say the troparion and kontakion of the feast at meals and as part of our daily prayers from the Vigil of the Feast through the Leavetaking on September 12<sup>th</sup>.

### Troparion tone 4

Thy Nativity, O Virgin, / hath proclaimed joy to the whole universe! / The Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, / hath shone from thee, O Theotokos! / By annulling the curse, / He bestowed a blessing. / By destroying, death He hath granted us eternal life.

### Kontakion tone 4

By thy Nativity, O most pure Virgin, / Joachim and Anna are freed from barrenness; / Adam and Eve, from the corruption of death. / And we, thy people, freed from the guilt of sin, / celebrate and sing to thee: / the barren woman giveth birth to the Theotokos, / the Nourisher of our Life.

## September 1: The Church New Year

The First Ecumenical Council decreed that the Church's year should begin on September 1<sup>st</sup>. The month of September was the beginning of the civil year for the Jews (Exodus 12:2), the month of the gathering of fruits and the bringing to God of sacrifices of thanksgiving. It was at the time of this feast that the Lord Jesus went into the synagogue in Nazareth, opened the Book of the Prophet Isaiah and read the words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; because He hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance" (Is. 61:1-2; Luke 4:16-21). This month of September is also noted in the history of the Church because it was during September that Constantine the Great was victorious over Maxentius, the enemy of the Christian faith, a victory followed by the granting of freedom of confession of the Christian faith throughout the whole Roman Empire. For a long time, the civil year in the Christian world was reckoned in the same way as the Church's year, from September 1<sup>st</sup>, but it was later changed to January 1<sup>st</sup>, first in Western Europe and then also in Russia in the time of Peter the Great.

It is necessary to preserve the fruit of prayer. It is spoiled and lost very often due to idle talking right after prayer and from dreaming, which is also idle talking, only with yourself. Silence after prayer is very beneficial: it keeps the prayer in the mind, heart, and even in the mouth, audible to you. *St. Nikon of Optina*

### For Consideration from the Prologue

*St. Nikolai of Zicha*

"Insofar as ye did it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me" (Matthew 25:40), says the Lord. It is the same in the giving of alms as it

is in Communion: in Communion, under the form of bread and wine, we receive the living Lord Christ Himself; when giving alms, in giving to the poor we give to the living Lord Christ Himself. There was a man in Constantinople who had a rare compassion. Going through the streets of the city, he put his gift into the hands of the poor and immediately went on his way to avoid hearing their thanks and becoming known. When one of his friends asked him how he had become so compassionate, he replied: "One day in church, I heard the priest say that what we give to the poor we give into the hands of the Lord Christ Himself. I didn't believe this, thinking that it couldn't be so, Christ being in heaven. Once, though, on the way home, I saw a poor man standing in the beggar's place—and the face of Christ shining over his head. Someone passed by and gave the beggar a piece of bread, and I saw the Lord stretch out His hand, take the bread, and bless the giver. From that moment, I've always seen that Face over the heads of the beggars, and therefore, with great fear, I give all the alms I can."

God gave us this life so that we would have time to prepare for the next one. This one is short, but the next one has no end. Although this life is short, during its course one may lay in provisions for all of eternity. Each good work goes toward this end like a small contribution; for all such contributions comes the overall capital, the interest of which will determine the upkeep of the saver for all of eternity. He who makes larger contributions will have a richer upkeep, while he who makes smaller contributions will have a lesser upkeep. The Lord will render to each one according to his works. We must presently devote all our concern to making a few more contributions to that account. This concern is neither complicated nor difficult, as the Lord Himself confirms when He says *For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.*

*St. Theophan the Recluse in The Spiritual Life*

### **On the Benefit of Hearing the Word Even When It Is Not Remembered**

A brother said to an old man, "See, Abba, I frequently ask the Fathers to give me an earnest reminder for the salvation of my soul, and I do not remember a thing of what they tell me." Now the old man had two empty vessels, and he said to the brother, "Go, bring one of the vessels and pour water in it: rinse it, pour it out, and put it back in its place, all shiny." The brother did this several times. Then the old man said to him, "Bring both vessels at once." And when he had brought them, he said, "Of the two, which one is cleaner?" The brother answered, "The one I pout water in and cleaned." Then the old man said to him, "Son, thus it is with the soul that frequently hears the Word of God; though the soul remembers nothing of what she asked, she is

nonetheless cleansed more than the soul that did not inquire."

*Comment: Thus our reading of Scripture and especially our attendance at the Divine Liturgy and other services benefits us greatly even if do not remember something specific from what we read or heard. Just coming to church, standing quietly before God, listening attentively, and opening our hearts to Him has a great effect on our souls.*

### **Bishop Kallistos on Orthodox Worship**

Those unfamiliar with Orthodox worship may at first be surprised at the large amount of repetition that occurs in the services. They will find that things are appointed to be said or sung three or more times, while throughout the canons and other hymns the same basic ideas, in varying images and terminology, are repeated again and again. This constant reiteration, so far from indicating poverty of thought or a liturgical garrulousness, is designed to serve a definite purpose. Orthodoxy makes little or no use of that form of spiritual recollection known in the west as 'meditation', when a period of time is set aside each day for systematic thought upon some chosen theme. Its place is taken in the Orthodox Church by corporate liturgical worship. As an Orthodox Christian stands in church, hour by hour, during the vigil of some Great Feast or at the services on an ordinary day, he hears the same necessary and saving truths continually underlined, now in one way and now in another. In this fashion, the theological significance of the different mysteries of the faith is deeply and indelibly impressed upon his mind, becoming almost second nature; and if he prays with attention during his time of corporate worship, he has no need for a special period of discursive meditation to emphasize their meaning still more. The words that are read and sung in church are by themselves sufficient to provide him with abundant nourishment for his life in Christ.

In the true Orthodox tradition, there is no divorce between theology and worship, between private meditation and public prayer. All genuine worship, while embracing the emotions, must also be reflective, intelligent, and essentially theological; for, as the Fathers expressed it, we are the 'logical [*logikos*] sheep' of Christ. And at the same time, all genuine theology must be a living theology—not an abstract exercise of the reasoning powers, but a vision of God's kingdom, attained first and foremost through liturgical celebration.

### **Upcoming Events 2009**

7 September, Labor Day Picnic noon, Liturgy 10:00.  
8 September, Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos, Matins 7:45, Liturgy 9:00 a.m.  
4 October, Annual Parish Meeting  
11 October, Blessing of Automobiles after Liturgy

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**