

# Struggling to Believe



This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



**May 8 is the feast day of the Holy Apostle John the Theologian.**

Saint John is given the title "Theologian" because his Gospel interprets events and words, delving into their meaning in the light of the divinity of Jesus Christ. Rather than just recording episodes, John (who, by tradition, was aided in his writing by Prochorus) sets them in the context of Jesus the Messiah's coming: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God...(1: 12).

In the first chapter, John names four people—John the Baptist, Andrew, Philip and Nathanael—who recognize Jesus as the Savior, the One who fulfills the promises of Moses and the prophets. It is clearly a struggle to believe at first, at least for Nathanael, but Jesus rewards their recognition by assuring them that they will see "...heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (1: 51).

John had a special closeness to Jesus; as we know, he is referred to as the "beloved disciple," and he is the only one of the four Gospel writers who records two events involving Jesus' beloved Mother. The first is the wedding at Cana (2: 1-11) at which Jesus responds to His Mother's concern for the bridegroom by changing water into wine.

The second is Jesus' direction to Mary, as He hangs on the cross, to take John as her son, and to John that he care for Mary as his mother (19: 26-27). This loving, familial gesture is quite a contrast to Luke's Gospel, for example. There, Jesus' only words from the cross addressed to mothers are these in 23: 28-29: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!'"

Despite his love for Jesus, John doesn't avoid writing about the hostility Jesus faced, and about the struggles of some to believe His words. John 6: 35-44 is one of the readings for this day and the previous day, and in these verses Jesus tells the Jews, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever..."

The Jews "murmur" at this, wondering how He can claim to have come down from heaven when they know very well who His parents are. Their doubt is a bit like that of the Samaritan woman, who at first struggles to believe His claim that He has "living water" because He carries no vessel to draw from the well (4: 11).

But the Samaritan woman did come to believe, as did many of the Jews. Struggle on the way to belief is no sin, and should come as no surprise. Jesus Christ warned us about it when He said, as John writes in 16: 4, "I have said all this to you to keep you from falling away."

#### Troparion - Tone 2

O beloved Apostle of Christ our God,  
Come quickly to deliver your helpless people.  
He on whose breast you leaned, will accept you as intercessor.  
Entreat Him, O Theologian, to disperse the clouds of darkness,  
Granting us peace and great mercy!

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Bulletin for Sunday, May 4, 2014

Holy Myrrhbearing Women • Tone 2

Acts 6:1-7, Mark 15:43-16:8

**Commemorations:** Myrrhbearing Women. Virgin Martyr Pelagia of Tarsus in Asia Minor (ca. 290). The Albanov (Sokol'nitsky) brethren: Ss. Nikita, Kirill, Nikifor, Clement, and Isaac, of Novgorod (14th-15th c.). Hieromartyr Erasmus, Bishop of Formia in Campania (303). Hieromartyr Silvanus, Bishop of Gaza, and with him 40 Martyrs (311). Ven. Nicephorus of Mt. Athos (Albanian—ca. 130).

#### Welcome to Our Visitors

We welcome all visitors to our Divine Liturgy and services. While Holy Communion may only be received by prepared Orthodox Christians, our non-Orthodox guests are welcome to participate in our prayers and hymns and to join us in venerating the Cross and receiving blessed bread at the conclusion of the Liturgy. Feel free to ask questions before or after the services. Literature about the Orthodox faith and this parish can be found at the candle desk. Please sign our guest book and join us for refreshments and fellowships downstairs after Liturgy.

**Please pray for:** Olga, Vera, Richard, Daria, Daria, Evelyn, Sarah, Nancy, Alla, June, Nina, Joan, Luke, Alex, Alan, Nadia, Glenn, Kathryn, Elizabeth, Helen, Mary, Elena, Ivan, Jevon, Dori, Kyra, and Roderick.

**Many Years!** to Anne Hosking and Sharon Marie Watson on the occasion of their birthdays and to Barry and Susan Egan on the occasion of their anniversary.

### Upcoming Events and Services

Tuesday, May 6th  
Great Vespers w/ Litya at 6:00p

Wednesday, May 7th  
Akathist for St Alexis Toth at 8:30a  
Open Doors at 4:30p

Saturday, May 10  
Great Vespers at 5:30p

Sunday, May 11th  
Divine Liturgy at 9:30a  
Church School to follow

In accordance with the teachings of the Orthodox Church and the blessing of His Eminence, Tikhon, Archbishop of New England, we make the second of three announcements of the intended marriage of Walter Fredricks and Renata Bajka on Sunday, May 18th.

On July 10th - 12th, Fr Steven will be attending the Small Parish Forum in Ohio. The purpose of this forum is to share helpful, hopeful ideas and tools for stabilizing and strengthening parish life. In preparation, we would like to convene two parish meetings to discuss our goals and mission of the parish. Our first "informal" meeting will be June 1st.

IF you are interested in representing and being involved in this aspect of stewardship, please talk with Fr Steven.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the founding of this parish and the 10th anniversary of the consecration of this church. We are looking for suggestions as to how to mark these anniversaries, particularly with the the visit of His Eminence, Archbishop Job on October 11th and 12th.

### THE SMALL PARISH FORUM

The OCA's Dioceses have many small parishes. Some have always been small. Some were once large and for various reasons are now much smaller. They need support ~ help and hope. They need to achieve stability -a positive self-image and a sense that small parishes can live a Life in Christ without necessarily becoming "big". And, for those prepared to grow, they need fresh ideas that are adapted and relevant to the realities of small churches. That is what the Small Parish Forum will try to provide.

#### Forum Goals

The following are the goals of the 2014 Small Parish Forum:

#### 1. Stimulate Commitment

Stimulate small parishes to renew and fulfill their founding commitment to be a viable Orthodox community into perpetuity.

#### 2. Offer Worship Tools

Offer tools that enrich and beautify worship as the expression of the best each parish can offer up.

#### 3. Deliver Parish Tools

Provide clergy serving small communities with materials that promote stewardship, governance, education and outreach.

#### 4. Encourage Community Contact

Explore ways that will allow each parish to become involved with the larger community so as to have that community become involved with the parish.

#### 5. Establish Communication Networks

Establish lines of communication networks between parishes that will enable the exchange of useful information.

#### 6. Reduce Stresses

Collaborate to explore stresses faced by small parishes in the hope of lessening and resolving them to the benefit of the parish.

More information will be forth-coming as we prepare for participating in the forum.