

INSCAPE January 2015

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and the communion of the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!

WORD (LOGOS) MADE FLESH

Our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ has physically entered into human history through His Incarnation. Today and every day, in celebrating the Feast of the Nativity, we truly experience "*The Undreamed has Happened*" in the consciousness of our hearts.

Among the Byzantine theologians who developed a solid Marian theology, Mary (Theotokos) and the Church and each individual Christian are wombs, "containers that contain the Uncontainable." She is the fertile, virginal Mother Earth that receives from the Holy Spirit, not only at the Annunciation, but as a continued state of total surrender to God, the impregnation of God's Word (Logos). Mary is the prototype of what every Christian must become.

We become true Christians through our *feminine* power of contemplation. We can only wait in joyful expectancy, but God is the Father, the one who first takes the initiative to let His Word enter into us. The womb of Mary is a dynamic archetypal symbol drawn from the Greek Fathers to express to us beyond a clear and distinct idea, even into the farthest reaches of our unconscious, the primeval urge that God has implanted into all of us when He fashioned us according to His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). Deep within us is an unquenchable hunger to surround, enfold, possess, hold, embrace, as a mother does her child in her womb, God's very own life-giving Word. From that inner possession of God's life we give birth to Jesus Christ in the events of our daily lives. Virginally by our total surrender in faith, hope and love, we conceive by the Holy Spirit and then maternally we give birth to God's Word and give that Word to others by our love and humble service shown to them through self-giving.

From the Christian East we can discover an approach that is a prayerful encounter with the mystery the presence of Jesus as the loving communicating Word of God come into our world, dwelling within us in our "hearts" and revealing through His Holy Spirit "so that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the height and depth and length and breadth; and to know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:18-19).

Theology for the Greek Fathers is "contemplative" knowledge given by God to the humble of heart, to the broken and contrite, to the little ones of His Kingdom. Theology is an experience of entering into communication with the very life of God living within us. It is to participate in His inner life that can only be experienced in loving adoration. Evagrius the Solitary (346-399 AD) wrote that "If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian."

Saint Paul instructs all humanity that Jesus Christ is "the image of the invisible God, and the first-born of every creature: and through him were created all things that are in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible; whether imperial thrones or lordships or angelic orders or dominions, all things were in his hand and were created by him; and he is before all things, and by him all things are sustained. And he is the head of the body, the church; for he is the beginning, the first-fruits of the resurrection from the dead, that in all things he might be the first; for it pleased God to complete all things in him; and by his hand to reconcile everything to himself; and through his blood shed on the cross to make peace both for those who dwell on earth and for those who dwell in heaven" (Colossians 1: 15-20).

AN ORTHODOX CHRISTOLOGY

Jesus Christ: True God and True Man

Let us take pattern, my beloved, from our Saviour, who though He was rich, made Himself poor; and though He was lofty, humbled His Majesty; and though His dwelling place was in heaven, yet rode on a colt and so entered Jerusalem; and though He is God and Son of God, He took upon Him the likeness of a servant; and though He was for others rest from all weariness, yet was Himself tired with the weariness of the journey; though He was the fountain that quenches thirst, yet Himself thirsted and asked for water; though He was a watcher that slumbers not, He yet slumbered and slept in the ship in the midst of the sea; and though He was ministered to in the tabernacle of His Father, yet let Himself be served by the hands of men; though He was the healer of all sick men, yet nails were fastened into His hands; though His mouth brought forth things that were good, yet they gave Him gall to eat; though He injured no man and harmed none, yet He was beaten with stripes and endured shame; and though He was Savior of all mortals, He delivered Himself to the death of the cross. (Aphrahat; the Persian Sage)

Glory to that Voice which became Body,
And to the Word of the High One
Which became Flesh!
Hear Him also, O ears, and see Him, O eyes,
And feel Him, O hands, And eat Him, O mouth!
You members and senses give praise unto Him,
That came and quickened the whole body!
Mary bore the silent Babe,
While in Him were hidden all tongues!
Joseph bore Him. And in Him was hidden a nature
More ancient than aught that is old!
The High One became as a little child,
And in Him was hidden a treasure of wisdom
Sufficing for all!
Though Most High,
Yet He sucked the milk of Mary,
And of His goodness all creatures suck!
He is the Breast of Life;
The dead suck from His life and revive.
Without the breath of the air
No man lives,
Without the Might of the Son
No man subsists.
On His living breath
That quickens all,
Depends the spirits
That are above and that are beneath.
When He sucked the milk of Mary,
He was sucking all with Life.
While He was lying on His Mother's bosom,
In His bosom were all creatures lying.

He was silent as a Babe,
And yet He was making His creatures execute

All His commands.
For without the First-born
No man can approach unto the Essence
To which He is equal.
The thirty-three years He was on the earth,
Who was ordering all creatures,
Who was receiving all the offerings of praise
From those above and those below.
He was wholly in the depths
And wholly in the highest!
He was wholly with all things
And wholly with each.
While His body was forming within the womb,
His power was fashioning all members!
While the Conception of the Son was fashioning in the womb,
He Himself was fashioning babes in the womb.
Yet not as His body was weak in the womb,
Was His power weak in the womb!
So too not as His body was feeble by the Cross,
Was His power weak in the Cross.
For when on the Cross He quickened the dead,
Yea, rather His Will,
Just as when He was dwelling wholly hanging upon the Cross,
His power was yet making all creatures move! (Saint Ephrem the Syrian)

Let us, therefore, my beloved brethren, be eager to find Christ and see Him as He is, in His beauty and attractiveness. We see many men who are moved by the desire of transitory things to endure many toils and labors. They will travel great distance and even disregard wife and children and every other glory and enjoyment and prefer nothing to their purpose in order that they may secure the attainment of their goal...shall we not deliver our souls and bodies to death for the sake of the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15), the Creator and Sovereign of all things? Whither shall we flee from His face? (Psalms 19:7)...Since then, brethren, we cannot withstand the Lord or flee from His face, come, let us give ourselves as slaves to Him, our Lord and God, who for our sakes "took on Himself the form of a slave" and died for us. Come, let us be humbled under His mighty hand (1 Peter 5:6), which makes eternal life to spring forth for all, and imparts it abundantly through the Spirit of those who seek it. (Saint Symeon the New Theologian)

O new commingling! O strange conjunction! The self-existent comes into being; the uncreated is created, that which cannot be contained is contained, by the intervention of an intellectual soul, mediating between the Deity and the corporeity of the flesh. And He who gives riches becomes poor, for He assumes the poverty of my flesh, that I may assume the richness of His Godhead. He that is full empties Himself, for He empties Himself of His glory for a short while, that I have a share in His fullness. What are the riches of His Goodness? What is this mystery that is around me? I had a share in the image; I did not keep it. He partakes of my flesh that He may save the image and make the flesh immortal. He communicates a second communion far more marvelous than the first, inasmuch as then He imparted the better nature, whereas now Himself partakes of the worse. This is more godlike than the former action, this is loftier in the eyes of all men of understanding. (Saint Gregory Nazianzus)

Listen, my soul; God has come to us; Our Lord has visited us. For my sake, He was born of the Virgin Mary, He who is born of the Father before all time. For my sake He was wrapped in swaddling clothes, He who covers heaven with the clouds and vests Himself with robes of light. For my sake He was placed in a lowly manger, He whose throne is the heavens and whose feet rest upon earth. For my sake He was fed with His mother's milk, He who feeds all creatures. For my sake He was held in His mother's arms, He who is borne by the Cherubim and holds all creatures in His embrace. For my sake He was circumcised according to the Law, He who is maker of the Law. For my sake, He who is unseen, became visible and lived among men, He who is my God. My God became one like me, like a man; the Word became flesh, and my Lord, the Lord of Glory, took for my sake the form of a servant and lived upon earth and walked upon earth, He who is the King of Heaven. He labored, worked miracles, conversed with men, was like a servant, He who is the Lord of all. He was hungry and thirsty, He who provides food and drink for all creatures. He wept, He who wipes away all tears. He suffered and mourned, He who is the consoler of all men. He consorted with sinners, He who alone is just and holy. He who is omnipotent toiled and had nowhere to lay His head, He who lives in light inaccessible. He was poor, He who gives riches to all men. He wandered from town to town and from place to place, He who is omnipresent and fills all space. And thus for thirty-three years and more, He lived and labored upon earth for my sake---I who am His servant. (Saint Tychon of Zadonsk)

CHRIST THE MEDIATOR

Christ is the mediator through whom all those good things which God has bestowed upon us, or rather which he is continually bestowing upon us, are given. It was not good enough for him to play his part as mediator once only, in obtaining for us all for which he interceded; he intercedes for us continually, not as ambassadors do, by words and pleas, but actively. How does he do this? He unites to himself, and makes us each, according to our individual merit and purity, sharers through him in those graces which are his own.

Just as the sight of the eye comes from light, and those who are deprived of light cannot see, so continual union with Christ is necessary to the soul, if it is to live fully and enjoy the tranquility. As the eye cannot see without light, so the soul cannot have true life and peace without Christ, for he alone reconciles us to God and is the Author of the peace without which we would still be God's enemies, without hope of sharing in the benefits which come from him.

So, if any man has not been united to Christ at the beginning (by Baptism), or, having been thus united, has not remained in union, he counts as God's enemy, and must therefore be excluded from his riches.

What reconciled God to humankind? Simply this, that he was his beloved Son become man. Likewise, he is reconciled personally to every man who wears the stamp of the Only Begotten, and bears his Body, and shows himself to be one spirit with him. Without these things, each of us remains the old man, hateful to God, and having nothing in common with him. (Nicholas Cabasilas)

CHRIST THE RECAPITULATOR

For in what way could we be partakers of the adoption of sons, unless we had received from Him through the Son that fellowship which refers Himself, unless His Word, having been made flesh, had entered into communion with us? Wherefore also He passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God...But what He did appear, that He also was: God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power and vivify man; and therefore His works are true. (Saint Irenaeus)

For, as when the likeness painted on a panel has been effaced by stains from without, he whose likeness it is must needs come once more to enable the portrait to be renewed on the same wood; for, for the sake of the picture, even the mere wood on which it is painted is not thrown away, but the outline is renewed upon it; in the same way also the most Holy Son of the Father, being the image of the Father, came to our region to renew man once made in His likeness and find him as one lost. (Saint Athanasius)

By whom was man to be recalled to the grace of his original state? To whom belonged the restoration of the fallen one, the recovery of the lost, the leading back of the wandered by the hand? To whom else than entirely to Him who is the Lord of his nature? For Him only who at the first had given the life was it possible, or fitting, to recover it when lost. This is what we are taught and learn from the Revelation of the Truth, that God in the beginning made man and saved Him when he had fallen. (Saint Gregory of Nyssa)

THE CHURCH: THE BODY OF CHRIST

Men, women and children, profoundly divided, as to race, nation, language, manner of life, work, knowledge, honor, fortune...the Church recreates all of them in the Spirit. To all equally she communicates a divine aspect. All receive from her a unique nature which cannot be broken asunder, a nature which no longer permits one to take into consideration the many and profound differences which are their lot. In that way all are raised up and united in a manner which is truly Catholic (pertaining to the whole Body of Christ, the Church). In her, none is in the least degree separated from the community, all are grounded, so to speak, in one another by the simple and indivisible power of faith...Christ, too, is all in all. He who contains all in Himself according to the unique, infinite and all-wise power of His goodness---as a center upon which all lines converge---that the creatures of the one God may not live as strangers or enemies one with another, having no place in common, where they may display their love and their peace. (Maximus the Confessor)

I cannot grieve God by keeping silent what He ordered to be spoken and confessed. For if, according to the divine Apostle, it is He Himself who has set in the Church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly doctors, it is clear that he has spoken through them. By all of Holy Scripture, by the Old and New Testament, by the holy doctors and synods we are taught. (Saint Maximus the Confessor)

And yet He has made the Church His Body, and He builds it with love through the increase of the faithful, until we shall all be united in one perfect Man, unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). If then the Church is Christ's Body, Christ is the Head of the Body, forming the countenance of the Church with His own features. Perhaps it is this that the friends of the Bridegroom saw when they were given heart: in her they see more clearly that which is invisible. It is like men who are unable to look upon the sun, yet they can see it by its reflection in the water. So the friends of the Bridegroom see the Sun of Justice by looking upon the face of the Church as though it were a pure mirror, and thus He can be seen by His reflection. (Saint Gregory of Nyssa)

In Christ, that which is uncreated, eternal, existing before the ages, is completely inexpressible and incomprehensible to all created intellects. Yet that which was revealed in the flesh can to a certain extent be grasped by human understanding. It is toward this element in Christ that the Church, our teacher, looks, and of this does she speak, inasmuch as this can be made intelligible to those who listen to her. What I am chiefly referring to here is the mystery of salvation, by which God was revealed to us in the flesh...And after He had united to Himself by the sacrifice of first-fruits the mortal substance of the flesh He had received from an immaculate Virgin, He continued to sanctify our common humanity by His own immortality. This He does through those who are united with Him according to their share in the mystery, by nourishing His own body the Church, and by harmoniously fitting to it all the various limbs that grow by faith in Him. (Saint Gregory of Nyssa)

We are called the Body of Christ, according to the words of the Apostle "You are the Body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Corinthians 12:27) not because by losing our own bodies we become His body, nor because He personally passes into us or is particularized into members; but because, like the flesh of Christ, our flesh also is freed from the corruption of sin. For as Christ by nature was without sin as a man, both in flesh and soul, so we too who believe in Him and have put Him on in the Spirit may, by exerting our will, be in Him without sin. (Saint Maximus the Confessor)

All above quotes are from the *Pilgrimage of the Heart; A Treasury of Eastern Christian Spirituality...* edited, with introduction and epilogue, by George A. Maloney.

In the months to follow, we will explore and experience the mystery of the "heart" as related to the spirituality of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Through *Inscape*, there will be a most feeble attempt to use the symbol of human language to somehow express that which is beyond words, concepts, images, emotions and feelings. May God grant this endeavor to be fruitful.

Father John Michael Zboyovski