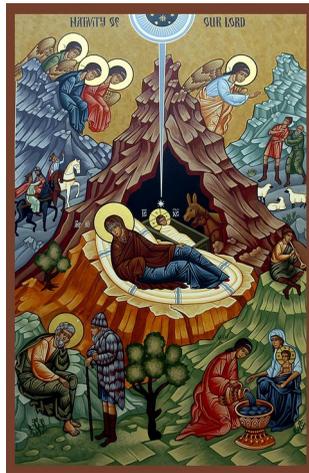


**The Orthodox Parish
of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross,
Lancaster, UK.**

The Stavronian

a monthly magazine & newsletter publicised by the 'Holy Cross Synodia'



*The Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross,
belongs to the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland.
The Patriarchate of Antioch is third senior of the Orthodox Churches.
The Patriarch is His Beatitude John X.*

***The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch
(Acts 11:26)***

A HISTORY OF SILENCE - “SILENT NIGHT”

A rustling of paper
The squeak of the chair
The cough
The sniff and sneeze
The dropped pencil
The ruler being placed on the desk
The buzz of the electric light
The hum of the traffic outside
The wind and rain on the windows
The voice saying: “*Stop writing please boys!*”

On the board outside in large red letters on the white background SILENCE - EXAMINATION IN PROGRESS. Complete silence is hardly possible.

The history of silence, ironically it seems, starts, as physicists say with the “big bang” - I say ironically because there was no one there to hear it unless you believe in God and since the big bang may have happened in a vacuum, there was no sound.

Our lives more than ever are filled with sound; it seems as though we cannot do without distractions; from the mp3s to the music that invades our Christmas shopping, those irritating electronic carols when it isn't even Christmas yet. You could accuse me of the “grumpy old man syndrome”, but there is, I believe, the need for everyone to have space, peace and quiet.

4'33" (pronounced *four minutes, thirty-three seconds* or, as the composer himself referred to it, *four, thirty-three*) is a three-movement composition by American avant-garde composer John Cage (1912-1992). It was composed in 1952 for any instrument (or combination of instruments), and the score instructs the performer not to play the instrument during the entire duration of the piece throughout the three movements (the first being thirty seconds, the second be-

ing two minutes and twenty-three seconds, and the third being one minute and forty seconds). Although commonly perceived as “four minutes thirty-three seconds of silence” the piece actually consists of the sounds of the environment that the listeners hear while it is performed. Over the years, 4'33" became Cage's most famous and most controversial composition. The writer composer is trying to show that there is no such thing as silence -that there is a movement and dynamic- he invites us to listen.

Silence sometimes has a bad press in the Bible - often when it is used, it refers to God silencing His people to stop their mouths: [Job 12:20](#); “*He silences the lips of trusted advisers and takes away the discernment of elders*”. [Psalm 63:11](#); “*But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God's name will praise him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced*”. [Jeremiah 50:30](#); “*Therefore, her young men will fall in the streets; all her soldiers will be silenced in that day, declares the Lord*”. [Matthew 22:34](#); “*Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together...*”

In a positive way however, silence is the space in which God speaks. A relationship between two people involves dialogue - speaking and listening. If we cannot listen we cannot have a relationship. My silence allows others to speak and your silence allows you to hear me. At the very heart of God's universe is a dialogue between heaven and earth - from creation onwards it has always been so. It is in fact what happens in an iconic way with the Holy Liturgy. When Christ came to earth there were those who heard him and those that did not. If you want to acquire a quality of reception on your radio you have to turn it on and tune in until your radio receiver allows you to hear. Our hearts, minds and souls are like radio receivers - if you want to

acquire a quality of prayer you must tune your heart towards God in a qualitative receptive silence.

Silence between notes makes music, silence between words makes language - otherwise we have cacophony and noise. Any teacher can vouch for that truth and every pupil knows it.

We need space and silence. When the desert father went into the silence of the desert in the fourth century they found the devil and themselves before they found God. When Jesus went into the desert he was tempted too by the voice of the devil. St Seraphim went into the desert of the Northern Thebaid in Russia as a hermit but not before he had learned obedience and humility within a community. Without obedience to a rule one would go mad. Silence can be torture and is a torture with white noise. Yet in solitude we can listen to other things -the birds of the air, the wind, the sea- we never have complete silence for the whole of Creation is either singing or groaning. We can be part of a communal silence in the monastic tradition -the silence of a community is a dynamic silence- it is not the silence of the one -the monolith- but of corporate sharing -full and replete- like the dynamic of the Holy Trinity.

The definition that Metropolitan Kallistos gives of prayer is I think so valuable - *"I just sit and look at God and He just sits and looks at me."* Sometimes words are unnecessary - when one is in love with another person words sometimes becomes an interruption to that shared mutual appreciation.

Prayer is a relationship with God and an encounter with the real world not limited by time and space - it is not two dimensional but brings us into the very reality of our being. It brings us into contact with those invisible dimensions which inter-penetrate our life. For life lived without prayer without God is only two dimensional - it is a flat world and it

is lived in relationship only to self. But in fact Visible and invisible coexist as fire is present in red hot iron as hydrogen and oxygen co exist to bring us thirst quenching water. They are not mutually exclusive.

Prayer as Metropolitan Antony Bloom said in "Courage to Pray" is an end to isolation - it is living our life with someone. Prayer makes us aware of God's presence which we would not be if we did not pray - like switching the radio on and tuning in we have to make the effort to hear God speaking. Indeed he who does not pray is in isolation - the more we pray the more we realise our need upon God - the reality of our vulnerable state of mortality comes to the fore, but at the same time we begin to appreciate more grace and divine support. Prayer does not change God prayer changes us, because it is God the Holy Spirit praying in us. C. S. Lewis that great friend of Orthodoxy expresses it like this in his poem on Prayer:

*Master they say that when I seem to be in
speech with you, since you make no replies,
it's all a dream - One talker aping two.*

*They are half right, but not as they
imagine; rather, I seek in myself the things
I meant to say, and lo! The wells are dry.*

*Then, seeing me empty, you forsake the
listener's role, and through my dead lips
breathe and into utterance wake the
thoughts I never knew. And thus you
neither need reply nor can; thus while we
seem two talking, thou art One forever,
and I no dreamer, but thy dream.*

So we need to distinguish between negative silence which is isolation from God and positive quietude calm, *hesychia* which is union with God. The experienced use of mental prayer (or prayer of the heart), requiring solitude and quiet, is called "Hesychasm" (from the Greek

“hesychia” meaning calm, silence), and those practising it were called “hesychasts.” *“A sign of spiritual life is the immersion of a person within himself and the hidden workings within his heart. Acquire a peaceful spirit, and around you thousands will be saved.”* – St Seraphim of Sarov.

In our busy life bombarded by sound - we value things by what we do, what is achieved, the end product, the target fulfilled, the box ticked, but perhaps rather than the measure of doing perhaps we need to recalibrate our lives into being - after all we are not human doings but human beings. We should try to set aside at least half an hour each day for quiet reflection and application: **SILENCE-EXAMINATION IN PROGRESS** - since we shall experience it sooner or later: Revelation 8:1; *“[The Seventh Seal and the Golden Censer] When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”*

Fr Jonathan



THE PRINCE OF PEACE - A CHRISTMAS STORY

The Golden Gate shut behind them. At the same time a terrible roaring shattered the silence of the green valley. A majestic figure sat on the towering rock at the plateau in the middle of the forest. The silhouette of the Lion stood out against the starlit sky.

The Lion made a huge leap and stood at their midst. For the first time no animal dared to approach. The young couple and all the other animals stumblingly stepped back. They turned back to escape. But the Gate was shut. A many-eyed guard with a fiery sharp sword was blocking their way.

Then the Lion attacked the antelope. Immediately the panther charged at the goat. Then the big bear tore apart the tender calf. And the wolf the meek lamb. It had started. **A war had begun.** A cruel, relentless, and above all, prolonged, infinitely prolonged, war. The whole Creation would henceforth *“groan as in the pains of childbirth”* (Romans 8:22). This night was the darkest of all.

... The Lion sat on the towering rock. His eyes gazed intently at the abyss of the night skyline. Something unusual was taking place up there, this darkest night of the year. A new star seemed to dawn and eclipse all the rest. The whole forest was in commotion. This night was hiding a mystery.

Further in the horizon a small company appeared. A humble little donkey was slowly climbing up towards the clearing. Sat on his back, a young woman, a tender daughter still, was gently clutching on her bosom a newborn baby. A white-haired old man was walking by their side. And this unusual, new Star was guiding their footsteps in the darkness. The tree tops were bowing humbly

to the ground at their passage, venerating those unknown travellers.

Suddenly, before the night travellers made it to the clearing, a loud thundering shattered the silence of the dark forest. A horseback column was galloping towards them.

“*We found them!*” shouted the captain. But as the column thrust menacingly forward, a terrible roaring shattered the silence of the dark forest. The Lion made a huge leap and stood between the night travellers and the soldiers on horseback showing his terrible teeth to the soldiers. Stunned, the animals of the forest followed immediately their king. The scared horses would tear from their reins and got up on their hind legs. The captain went wild. “*Archers!*” He screamed out of his mind.

In vain. All bows fell immediately to the ground when they touched the animals’ bodies. Like hitting steel. The horses grew uncontrollable. Any minute and they would flee back to the high land in a wild stampede.

The leader dismounted in a frenzy. Blind in his fury he hurled himself down in a bold leap and thrust himself to the baby. Menacingly he raised his sword to slaughter it, but the sword froze in mid air. To his horror and shock he saw before him the sweet face of his own wife, holding his own baby in her bosom!

His knees bent, his body collapsed to the ground. Sitting on the humble donkey the Daughter was looking in his eyes with infinite compassion. A bright, otherworldly halo was opalescing in rays around Her face! The soldier felt small, powerless before this Godly Babe, who seemed so vulnerable and helpless in the arms of his fragile mother, yet everything seemed to bow before Him.

Quietly all the animals surrounded in worship the human *synodeia*. The nod of the little child, invisible, yet omnipotent, was gently leading the lion and the calf

together, the bull and the bear, the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the goat. Under the “spell” of this otherworldly Mystery, the soldiers dismounted in awe and knelt side by side with the wild animals.

Time had stopped. The Golden Gate was open again. No longer does the fiery sharp sword guard the gate of Eden. The Babe mystically summoned all back to Paradise. A prophecy of old took flesh:

*The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling
together; and a little child will lead them.*

*The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
The infant will play near the cobra’s den,
and the young child will put its hand into
the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor
destroy on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled
with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea...*

Isaiah 11:6-9

The Babe raised His Hand, a tiny, soft hand, yet capable to govern the whole Universe. The Babe blessed them with the Sign of the Cross. **The Prince of Peace had been born on earth.** The ancient, cosmic warfare would soon come to an end. *Maran Atha!*

Fr Demetrios Bokos

Adapted and translated by Kleio Kechagia

The original text can be found at the blog [Αντέχουμε...](#) (in Greek).



ANIMALS IN THE CAVE AT BETHLEHEM

At His birth our Lord was laid in a manger, which is a feeding trough for animals. Animals were kept in caves in ancient times. In some parts of the West Bank today families still share their cave dwellings with their animals. So the cave is the “stable” for animals in the Nativity Story. In the iconography of the Nativity scene, apart from the Blessed Mother and Joseph contemplating the mystery, the only company the Messiah has in his first few hours as a babe in the flesh on earth are the lowly ox and the humble donkey.

The humble nature of Christ’s origins should not surprise us, since the manner of His birth was prophesied many hundreds of years prior to the event. The presence of the Ox and the Donkey in the Nativity icon fulfills one of many prophecies in the Old Testament book of Isaiah: “*The ox knows his owner, and the donkey his master’s crib*” (Isaiah 1:3) Here the animals are also shown providing warmth to the Christ child by their breath. He who breathes Life into the world is warmed by the breath of his creatures. These dumb creatures give glory to the Word made flesh.

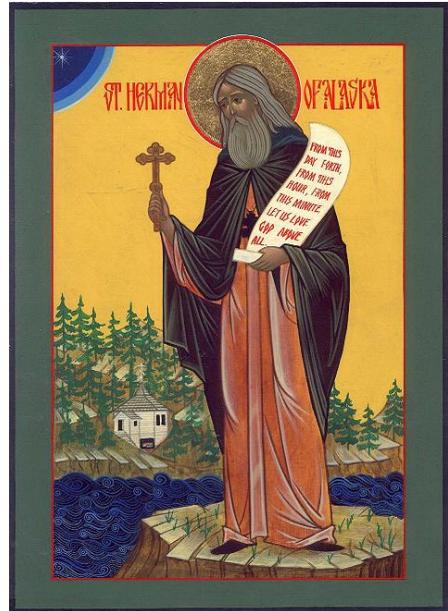
Yet there is more to this depiction than the raw, basic scene. There is a relationship and a symbolism between the ox and the donkey being paired together. Early tradition and some Church fathers interpreted the ox as Israel, and the donkey as the Gentiles since there is a distinction between these two animals. The ox is a “clean” animal, and the donkey is an “unclean” animal as understood within the Torah. According to the Law of Moses they could not be tethered together but according to the Grace and Truth of the Gospel they appear together as witnesses to the Incarnation. So by extension this scene symbolizes both Jews and Gentiles

being accepted and incorporated into the Messianic kingdom. Habbakuk prophesies in 3:2 “*in the midst of two beasts wilt thou be known*”.

Furthermore, there is another significance of our Lord lying between two creatures. Habakkuk is also making reference back to the Holy of Holies where two Cherubim are placed either side of the Mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18). They both reveal and attend the mysterious presence of God.

*The most wise Lord comes to be born,
receiving hospitality
from His own creatures.
Let us also receive Him,
that this divine Child in the cave
may make us His guests
in the paradise of delights!*

Fr Jonathan



RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

The Edicule in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was restored in 2016 by archaeologists supervised by Antonia Moropoulou from the Metsovia Technical University in Athens, Greece. During the restoration, scientists took various mortar samples of the Holy site to analyse and date. Their study has shown that it is the same burial site that St Constantine the Great and St Helen identified as Christ's burial site in the 3rd century.

A [news report](#) was released by National Geographic on Nov. 28th, and the scientific findings will be published by Moropoulou and her team in the Journal of Archaeological Science later in the year.

Apart from the news report, for those interested in the different construction phases of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a brief account is presented by National Geographic on the following link [here](#).

MAJOR CELEBRATIONS THIS MONTH

4th Dec: Great Martyr Barbara

6th Dec: St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia

9th Dec: The conception of the Most-Holy Theotokos by the Righteous Anna

11th Dec: Hieromartyr Metropolitan Seraphim (Chichagov)

12th Dec: St. Spyridon the Wonderworker, Bishop of Tremithus

13th Dec: St. Herman of Alaska, Wonderworker of All America

20th Dec: The repose of St. John of Kronstadt

25th Dec: The Nativity according to the flesh of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

27th Dec: Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen

For the lives of Saints please visit the Calendar of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.calendar.goarch.org

Services at St Martin's in December*

Sat. 2nd	15:00	Memorial, Confessions, Synaxarion and Great Vespers
Sun. 3rd	10:00	Hours and Holy Liturgy
Sat. 9th	15:00	Memorial, Confessions, Synaxarion and Great Vespers
Sun. 10th	10:00	Hours and Holy Liturgy
Sat. 16th	15:00	Memorial, Confessions, Synaxarion and Great Vespers
Sun. 17th	10:00	Hours and Holy Liturgy
Sat. 23rd	15:00	Memorial, Confessions, Synaxarion and Great Vespers
Sun. 24th	10:00	The Great Royal Hours followed by Typica
	19:00	Holy Liturgy of The Nativity of Our Lord in the Flesh, followed by Carols and Mince Pies
Mon. 25th	-	<i>No services today</i>
Sat. 30th	15:00	Memorial, Confessions, Synaxarion and Great Vespers
Sun. 31st	10:00	Hours and Holy Liturgy followed by Parish lunch

*Help setting up the church is greatly appreciated and starts half an hour before the service.



“God cares for everyone. Despair is in effect a lack of faith”
- St. George Karslides -



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The following blogs of Old Stavronians are available in Romanian, [Constiinta Ortodoxa](#), in English, [Orthodox city hermit](#), and in Greek, [Orthodoxy rainbow](#).

