

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

The Stavronian

Monthly magazine and newsletter published by the Holy Cross Synodia



*Ἐπιθρονος Χριστός, Ζωοδότης.
(Φ. Κόντογλου, 1962).*

*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.
Our Metropolitan is His Eminence Bishop Silouan.
Our Patriarch is His Beatitude John X.*

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

Often, goes the Christ in the stranger's guise

ST SIMON'S MIRACLE

A few years ago I read in a religious book about St Simon the Myrrh-gusher of Mount Athos. As is known, this Mountain in northern Greece is home to 20 monasteries and many monks who live in segregated lodgings. St Simon built the monastery of Simonos Petras in the 13th century. He was a strict ascetic who lived in a cave and the last thing he wanted was to build a monastery. However, on a Christmas night he saw a strong light on a big rock on the mountain across his cave. He came out and saw a bright Star and within it, the Nativity as a vision! At the same time the Mother of God told him to build a monastery on that rock!!! Fearing it could be a deception from the devil, he Crossed himself and didn't take any action and continued his ascetic life. However, the Miracle happened again and again, and the Mother of the Lord told him not to disobey any more. He confided it to certain older ascetics because he still was in doubt as to why he could have been chosen, when he had no money or people to work with him. In any case, a series of amazing "co-incidences" provided him with workers, money and materials. Also, a company of pirates who went to steal from him and kill him, saw a miracle which made them become Christians and his first disciples in the new monastery! Just before he passed away on 28th December 1287, he told his Monks that if he were to find some favour from God, he would make sure that their monastery would never suffer from earthquakes or famine because these plagues were out of their hands. However, he said, as they could protect themselves from fires, he would not try to protect the monastery from them. Indeed, the monastery has been burnt 3 times in history but never suffered from earthquakes, even though, many such phenomena have occurred since; ALL other monasteries have suffered greatly and as some specialists have indicated, the rock on which the monastery has been built, is one that collects all earthquake waves and brings them to its surface!

The burnings of the monastery have completely vanished all evidence of where the tomb of the Saint was or details about his myrrh-streaming that certain books spoke of... Hence, the monks who now live there, have asked the pious and virtuous Elder Ambrosios Lazaris to pray to God and tell them where his tomb was. The Elder answered to them thus:

"St Simon's tomb is deep in the earth, below the door that you all pass every morning from the narthex to the main Church... He did this because he was very humble and wanted all of you to symbolically walk on him. He is such a glorious Saint that if he were to come out, the sun would have to hide its face with both its hands! The Saint does not give you his Blessing to take him out because the miracles and healings that'll happen from his myrrh will be so many that people will visit your monastery all the time and you'll end up as coffee-makers rather than monks!"

Indeed, a few years later, when they were trying to build a new warehousing space under their main Church, they hit the top of a dome-shaped tomb... Every machine they used to build further would cease to work or break!!!

When I read the account of his life and especially the last narration, I thought to myself: "Such an amazing Saint... It'd be a great Blessing for us to commemorate him on his Feast day in our Parish by chanting his Matins and celebrate a Liturgy". I thus spoke to our Parish Priest and we prepared what needs to be prepared, while a visit to Mount Athos and Simonos Petras monastery provided us with the hymns we needed (his Matins were nowhere to be found in the usual Church books as the Saint is relatively unknown outside Mount Athos). I also spoke to my chanting teacher whose presence would be nice in order for us to give the Saint the best we could in terms of hymn chanting.

On the Feast Day on 28th December, near the lectern were me, my teacher, my father and another 2 gentlemen. Midway through the Service and when some of the others were chanting, my teacher (who had a chronic sinusitis and a permanently blocked nose!) turned to me and whispered:

-- Do you smell anything?

I took a good sniff of the air around me... That day, my nose was so clean that this air that flowed up my nostril, reached down to my larynx!

-- No, Master... Is it something foul?

-- Not at all! It's something amazing, very pleasant... very strong... out-of-this-world I could call it!

-- Hmmm, -- I muttered. -- I smell nothing at all.

We continued with the chanting, but he was restless... The Priest had not used any incense for

quite a while (it's used on specific points during the Service), and the scent was too strong to be compared to incense... He started smelling the lectern, the chairs, the books... even us, his fellow chanters! Suddenly he leaned his head slightly in front of me... and at that time a very strong, fragrant smell hit my nose sensors... Immediately I thought: "What a strong perfume he's wearing today..." A few seconds passed... "Oh, hang on a minute... my teacher NEVER uses perfume!!! ..."

The "perfume" lingered on (inside our noses rather than the ambience you'd say!) for quite a while... It only left gradually at the end of Matins, giving way to the Holy Liturgy which always Celebrates the life of our Lord.

Two points to mention about it: (a) as we later realised, out of the 5 people who chanted and stood closely together, only 3 could sense the scent, a sign that it was not an ambient scent; (b) we sensed it in different degrees. To me and my father it was pleasant and strong but discreet, whereas my teacher whispered to me twice that he liked it very much but couldn't bear its intensity and felt like going out in a hope to dilute it with fresh air! His nose remained unblocked and able to smell the most delicate smells from that point and for a whole week!

From that day we commemorate this amazing Saint every year until today. May he intercede to God for us and the whole world.

THE PARADOXES OF CHRISTIANITY

The Greatest Reason

In our daily life, we often discuss and try to decide what is the most sensible course of action. We teach our children to behave sensibly, we approve of reasonable behaviour in those around us and we weigh matters before making decisions. Moreover, we are practical in the way we approach our daily chores and, in most matters, often asking whether something makes sense or not. Even in church matters, we try to be efficient in the way we prepare for services or plan feasts and celebrations.

I find it difficult to accept inefficient ways of

doing things in small matters and details as well as in great matters. Because I tend to approach the world in a reasonable and practical way, I had a deeply unsettling time a couple of weeks ago when I listened to the Gospel of the woman with the flow of blood and the sermon on how our Lord welcomed interruptions. Listening to the Gospel (Luke 8) I could picture it so vividly. Here is an important and respected man, Jairus coming to beg Jesus to heal his little daughter who is on death's bed. On his way, squeezed by the crowds, Jesus is interrupted by the woman who had suffered with an issue of blood for 12 years (as long as the little girl had been alive). She touches the hem of Jesus' garment and is healed. There is nothing surprising for a person of faith, but what completely puzzled me is what follows. Jesus stops to investigate who touched him. Our Lord's behaviour is very strange. A girl is in mortal danger and He stops to investigate who touched Him in a crowd. The apostles are exasperated because it makes no sense. "*Master, the multitudes throng and press you and you say Who touched me?*" Jairus must be distraught wondering why the Master is dawdling chatting with a random woman in the crowd. This is when I myself sided with the disciples in the name of common sense and practicality. It makes no sense. The woman is healed anyway, so why stop and delay? Then one story after another rushed upon me and I realised that most of the Gospel makes no practical and common sense. The disciples are the voice of reason always advocating the sensible path, but Jesus clearly chooses a different way.

In the passage of the feeding of the 5000 the disciples say "*Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the surrounding towns and country and lodge and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place here.*" (Luke 9:12) It makes perfect sense, but our Lord replies instead "*You give them something to eat*". The disciples strive to bring order around Jesus: they rebuke those who bring infants for Him to bless (Luke 18:15), but the Lord urges them to become like children. They tell the blind beggar at Jericho on the side of the road to stop embarrassing himself by shouting, but Jesus stops to listen to him and heals him. What do we think of the 4 friends who lift the roof to bring their paralysed friend to be healed? It is such shocking behaviour! And why does our Lord wait 2 days before setting off on his journey when he hears his friend Lazarus' life is

in danger? How about the blind man whose sight is restored in complex steps by mixing clay with saliva, placing on his eyes, and then washing at the pool of Siloam? Surely the Lord could have just spoken the word. And ultimately, is it reasonable to accept willingly death on the Cross while being entirely sinless?

The answer is that none of these are reasonable by the world's standards and common sense. But the Lord acts in mysterious ways in order to reveal His majesty and His Glory.

"For My counsels are not your counsels, neither are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "But as Heaven is distant from earth, so is My way distant from your ways, and your thoughts from my mind." (Isaiah 55:8)

I realised how often I am this voice of the disciples, which dares think or, worse, tell our Lord what is the sensible thing to do. But this reason which I rely on so much is on the one hand short-sighted and on the other lacking in love. As the French thinker Blaise Pascal said: *"The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of... We know the truth not only by the reason, but by the heart."*

As people, we often deal in appearances; we are concerned with how things seem and what things look like, with our own image and that of others. We can't help judging by appearances. It is after all the first impression we get of something of someone. Needless to say, God does not judge by appearances, but by secret depths because he can see man's heart, read potentialities completely hidden to us, foolish and superficial as we are. The more we advance spiritually, the more we understand; our eyes are opened to mysteries and divine wonders. And yet the more we realize how mysterious the Lord's ways are and how what passes for wisdom in the world is foolishness in the eyes of the Lord and vice-versa. Thus, can we blame people for being surprised that prostitutes and tax collectors are called to be Saints by our Lord? All the vulnerable of this world: the sick, the lame, the poor, the oppressed, the orphans, in other words the undesirable and unlovable of this world are the beloved of the Lord and they shall be guests of honour in the Kingdom of Heaven. Is there anything sensible and practical in the fact that the Creator of the Universe loves his creation so much that he becomes part of it in order to

redeem it? Where is the sense in God taking upon himself the sins of each one of his unworthy creatures and dying on the Cross for their sake?

The truth is that in spiritual matters, reason has to tip toe around mystery and the miraculous and it has to bow down to Love. The only reason of God is Love. This one reason explains all. It explains why our Lord, moved with compassion stops to talk to each person, feed each person, heal each person, why He allows his friend Lazarus and Jairus' daughter to die... so that they may be raised and so that us foolish people may believe and be saved. The Maker and Master of all things visible and invisible has decreed that the reason at the heart of Creation is Love. So, let us open our hearts and minds so that we may perceive what great reason hides behind the apparent foolishness of love.

Martha and Mary

ENCOUNTERS WITH SAINTS

Saint Philaret the Merciful

I watched a documentary recently about Father Gheorhe Calciu-Dumitreasa, a Romanian priest in a parish in Virginia in the USA who passed away in 2006. One of his parishioners tells the story of how Father Calciu was moved to compassion when the young man had not enough money to pay for the final year of his law degree and gave him a large sum of money which constituted the father's life savings from hard work on building sites. He gave away literally his last penny to help the student. I was very moved by this truly selfless gesture of generosity and by the example. What was particularly moving was that he did not even give up all he had for a starving child but just to help a young man in difficulty. I couldn't help wondering how his wife and son felt about this and thought how it cannot be easy to live with a saintly person.

When I therefore encountered Saint Philaret the merciful, I was forcefully reminded of this incident. Saint Philaret was a very wealthy man, who lived during the eighth century in the village of Amnia in the Paphlagonian district of Asia Minor. He was famed for his love of the poor, his generosity and hospitality. But the real trial of his



St Philaret the Merciful

virtue came when he lost all his wealth in an attack from the Ishmaelites. Poverty did not alter his generosity in the least. He still had some beehives, a cow with a calf and a donkey.

He gave the calf away to a poor man and when his wife Theoseba chided him saying that the cow missed her calf and he had been cruel to give it away, the saint praised his wife for her compassion and gave the cow away to the poor man as well.

He also gave away to the poor every last sheaf of wheat he had and when the poor could not carry all the wheat, he gave them the donkey too to help carry the load. His hungry wife and children jeered at him and reproached him constantly, but he endured all with patience and humility always putting his trust in the Lord who unfailingly provided for the family.

When the Byzantine empress Irene sent out emissaries to look for a suitable wife for her son, Philaret's granddaughter Maria was chosen for her virtue and thus the family moved to court and became wealthy and influential again. St Philaret refused all honours and always wore modest clothes, giving alms liberally to the poor of the city. He gave a grand feast for the poor. He ordered a servant to take three bags and fill one with gold, one with silver, and one with copper coins. When a beggar approached, Philaret ordered his servant to bring forth one of the bags, whichever God's

providence would ordain. Then he would reach into the bag and give to each person, as much as God willed.

After his death in 792, many miracles were recorded, beginning with the day of his funeral when a man possessed was made well by the side of his grave.

After his death, his wife continued the good work rebuilding monasteries and churches. St. Philaret's feast day is the 1st of December.

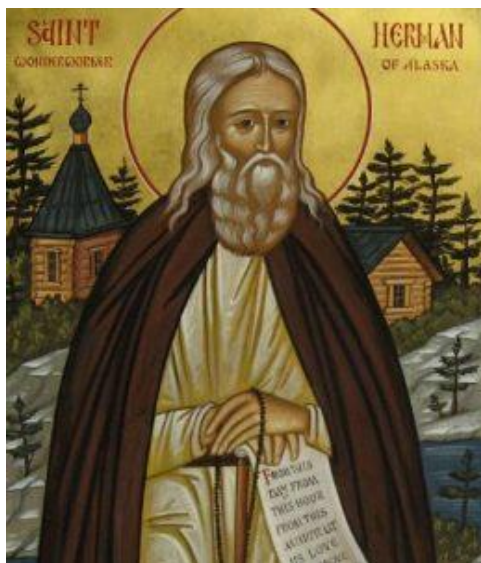
This advent, let us pray to Saint Philaret to come to our aid in making us compassionate to the poor and generous in our almsgiving.

ST HERMAN OF ALASKA

Saint Herman of Alaska (commemorated on the 13th of December) is not one of the extremely well known Saints by the Orthodox Christians, nor is he a modern Saint of our current times, and yet, he is the one who has made a connection with me by stealing my heart and becoming a close participant in my life. We often look at the icons or read about Saints who seem like strangers looking back at us, and there are other Saints who like Saint Herman who warm your heart and speak to your soul when you read and discover about their life.

When I first read about Saint Herman in the lives of saints, he didn't seem like another distant, saintly figure of whose admirable and almost impossible works one hears. I was struck by quite the opposite, someone who tried really hard to live a life pleasing to God, whose life in a very small sense reminded me of my own incomparable journey, filling me with courage, bravery and trust, very much needed at the time.

Saint Herman was born in Russia around 1756-1760. He was a deep believer from his youth, it is said that he has entered the monastic life at around 16 years of age. Firstly, he joined the Trinity Sergius Hermitage where he was miraculously healed by the intercession of the Theotokos. An abscess developed on the right side of his throat, which was rapidly growing, in this condition Saint Herman awaited his death. He fell on his knees and beseeched the Mother of God all night, using a towel, he touched the face of the icon of the Theotokos and covered the abscess with it. In his dream he saw the Theotokos heal



St Herman of Alaska

(image source: orthodoxporttownsend.com)

him. This has taught me to turn to the Mother of God whenever I become anxious about my health, putting my feeble trust and faith in Her powerful intercession. On a few occasions She has brought my very much troubled soul into the port of peace.

After 5-6 years Saint Herman transferred to the Valaam Monastery, and he has deeply fallen in love with it, his Superior Elder Nazarius and brethren. Indeed, this is sometimes the case with spiritual fathers, for me, like perhaps for many others, a soft glance of spiritual father brings joy and strength to continue in one's spiritual life with love and courage.

Saint Herman may be known best for his missionary work in North America, in the Aleutian Islands. Ten monks from the monastery of Valaam were sent, but in the end, only Saint Herman remained, and he lived on Spruce Island which he called New Valaam. Similarly, many of us come from various countries around the world, Saint Herman shows how to embrace this with courage, love and acceptance of God's will for our life. I have always admired and was inspired by his daily efforts of managing to live in the wilderness of Spruce Island, the amount of endurance, hard work and labour required to live there was immeasurable. One of his disciples said that no one could imitate his life. He has converted and taught the Native Alaskans about the Orthodox faith, he

has endlessly interceded and appealed for them in his letters to the Russian government. When the epidemic struck the island, Saint Herman never spared himself, he visited the sick, never tiring or stopping. Looking at myself I am catching myself wondering, if I had given a hundred percent effort to help another, whether it is in practical or prayerful terms, or have I been taking care of and sparing myself instead.

I have found a description of Saint Herman which I would love to share, mainly because this is exactly how I imagine him in my heart. Yanovsky writes a detailed description of Father Herman. "I have a vivid memory, -- he said, -- of all the features of the Elder's face reflecting goodness; his pleasant smile, his meek and attractive manner, his humble and quiet behaviour, and his gracious word. He was short of stature. His face was pale and covered with wrinkles. His eyes were greyish-blue, full of sparkle, and on his head there were a few grey hairs. His voice was not powerful, but it was very pleasant."

O Holy Father Herman of Alaska, pray to God for us!

Marta Radford

THE STAR OF CHRISTMAS

St Matthew 2:1,9-11

² Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." ...

⁹ When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹ And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

In an American Senator's household it was the custom to open gifts on Christmas morning from

under the Christmas tree. An important rule of the household was that the first child to awake had to wake the rest of the family. One Christmas the youngest child burst into her parents' bedroom at 4.30 a.m. her face radiant with excitement. She insisted, "Daddy, Mummy, come quickly!" The parents thought that their daughter had spotted the bicycle they had bought her for Christmas. All the family went down the staircase to the living room towards the Christmas tree which was near the window facing east. The little one passed the Christmas tree without a glance, completely unaware of the bicycle and pile of presents. Taking them to the window she pointed her finger towards the night sky: "Look! The Star of Bethlehem! I've seen the Star!"

Wise men, women and children still seek, find and worship Jesus Christ -- the Light of the world!

Fr Jonathan

SERVICES IN DECEMBER

Dear Friends in Christ,

After the lockdown, the Church of our parish reopens its doors to the faithful. Please carefully read the [safety regulations](#) and [risk assessment](#) before attending the worship. Particularly,

- wear a mask,
- sanitise your hands at the entrance,
- maintain a 2-meter distance with others,
- follow the one-way system.

If you have any symptoms of coronavirus or if you have underlying health condition, please stay at home! Note that **Christmas feast will not be served** as per safety reasons.

To register for attending the this month, **fill in [this form](#) before 23:00 on Friday 4 December**. You will receive a confirmation email confirming the dates of your attendance on Saturday 5 December. We will assign the places on a rotational basis and will make sure that you have the opportunity to attend the Church at least once this month. If you have booked and cannot now come, please email [Miroslav Barabash](mailto:Miroslav.Barabash) so that someone else can come in your place.

Due to the safety regulations, the Church cannot accommodate all the faithful on the Christmas day. However, the Christmas Period

lasts for 40 days, hence there will be multiple opportunities to attend the worship afterwards. We must be patient, careful and watchful at this time.

NAMES OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES TO BE REMEMBERED THIS MONTH

Dec. 2: *Necoula*

Dec. 5: *Mary*

Dec. 6: *Shukria*

Dec. 10: *Ebraheem*

Dec. 14: *Alexandru*

Fr Tosko, Katerina, Peter, Kostadina, Russi

MEMORY ETERNAL!

Please send us the names of your departed loved ones and date of their departure in order for them to be remembered.



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*

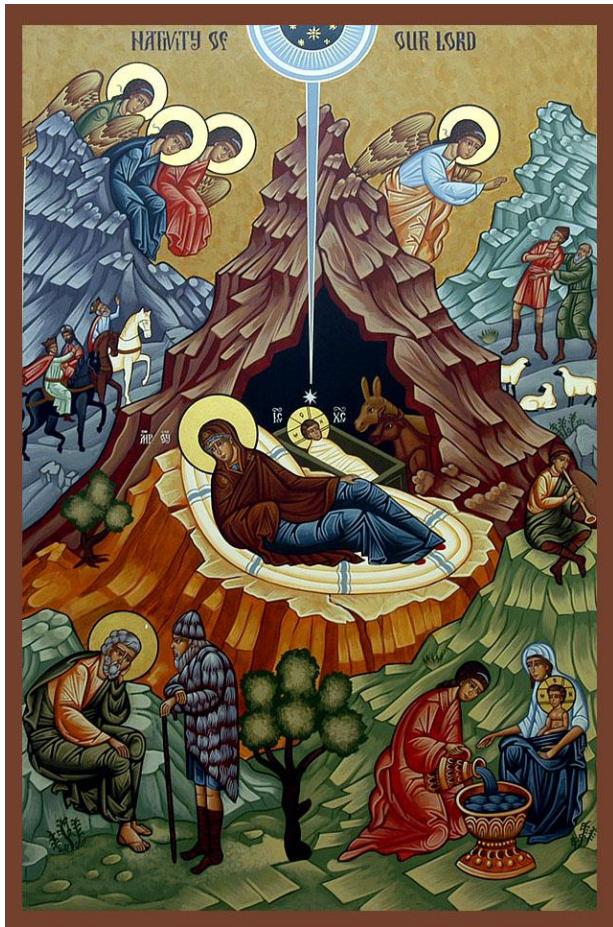
Fri. 4th	18:30	The Little Paraklesis to the Mother of God
Sat. 5th	10:00	Memorial
	18:30	Great Vespers
Sun. 6th	10:00	Holy Liturgy** of St John Chrysostom. St Nicholas the Wonderworker
Tue. 8th	18:30	Vespers for The Conception of the Most Holy Theotokos by the Righteous Anna
Fri. 11th	18:30	Little Paraklesis
Sat. 12th	08:30	Orthros for St Spyridon the Wonderworker, Bishop of Trimythous
	18:30	Great Vespers
Sun. 13th	10:00	Holy Liturgy**. The 27 th Sunday after Pentecost
Fri. 18th	18:30	Little Paraklesis
Sat. 19th	10:00	Memorial
	18:30	Great Vespers
Sun. 20th	10:00	Holy Liturgy**. Sunday of the Righteous Ancestors who pleased God
Thru. 24th	10:00	Holy Liturgy** of St Basil. Eve of the Nativity of Christ
Fri. 25th	10:00	Holy Liturgy** of St John Chrysostom. Nativity according to the Flesh of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
Sun. 27th	10:00	Holy Liturgy** of St John Chrysostom. Sunday after the Nativity

* The services are provisional and may be changed at short notice. Services will take place in Skype unless otherwise stated. Please, join a [Skype group](#) to watch or participate in a current service. The live services are also broadcasted simultaneously in the [Facebook group](#) of the Church.

** Services in Church.

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





For further information please contact:

Father Jonathan Hemmings

67 Sibsey Str., Fairfield, Lancaster, LA1 5DQ

Tel: 07951 722 877

Email: frjah@yahoo.co.uk

www.orthodox-lancaster.org.uk

www.antiochian-orthodox.co.uk

The following blogs of Old Stavronians are available in Romanian, Conștiinta Ortodoxa, in English, Orthodox city hermit, and in Greek, Orthodoxy rainbow.

