

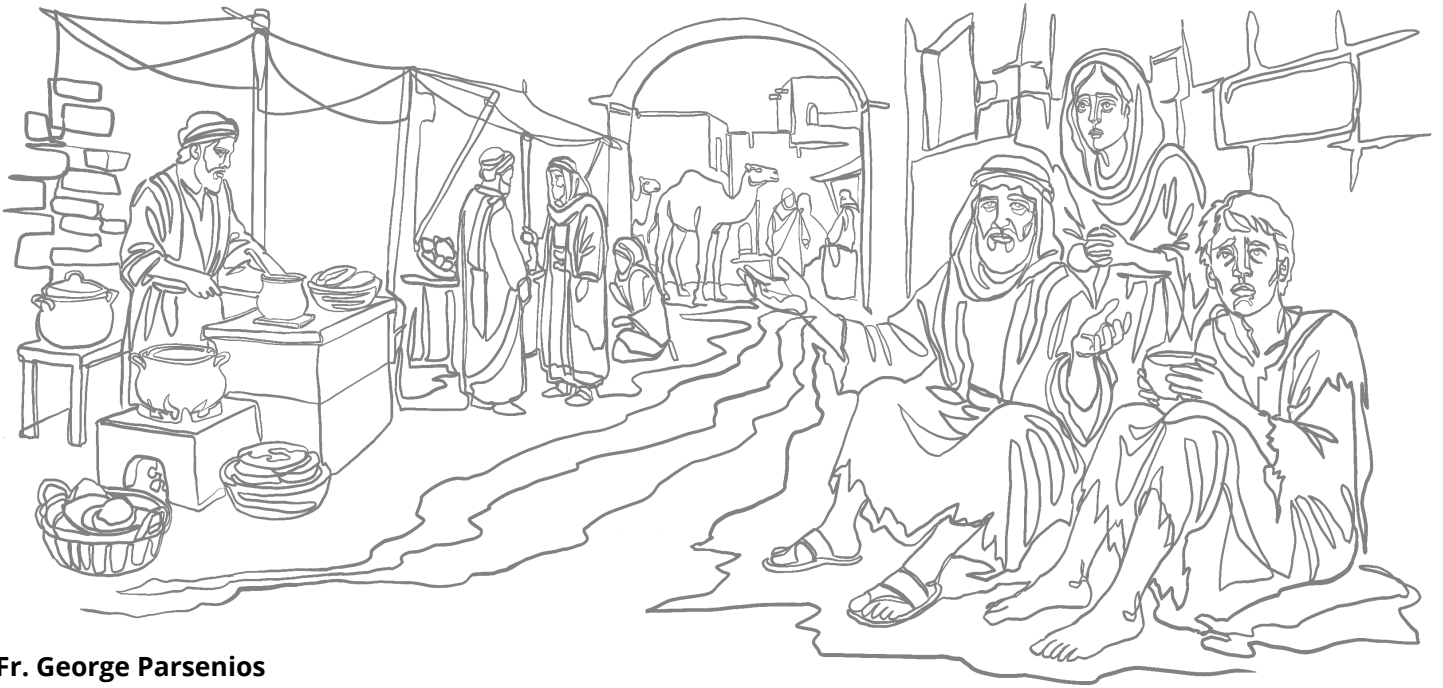


DIAKONIA

A National Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S READING | *Matthew 6:22-33*

"Our Finances and our Faith"



Fr. George Parsenios

When we say in English that someone has “spilled the beans,” we do not mean that someone has poured a can of legumes on the floor. We mean someone has shared private information. Every language has idiomatic phrases meant to be understood in a figurative or metaphorical sense. Because they are not to be taken literally, native speakers understand them clearly, but non-native speakers might be puzzled. Today’s Gospel reading contains just such an idiom that was common in Hebrew when Jesus says, “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light.” At first blush, the statement seems to focus on the sense of sight, or perhaps spiritual insight. But to take the comment so literally is to misunderstand it. Someone familiar with the idioms of the Hebrew Bible would know that Jesus was speaking about showing mercy to the poor. To have a “good eye” meant to look generously on those in need. Proverbs 22:9 says, “Whoever has a good eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor.” We are today reminded, therefore, to share the bounties we enjoy in our lives with those in need. Furthermore, when we heed Jesus’ direction to aid those in need, we must remember the related command to give especially to people who can offer us nothing in return, and not only to those from whom we might expect something back, such as friends or family or business partners (Luke 6:35–36).

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FROM THE ORIGINAL GREEK: Christ (Χριστός)

What does “Christ” mean?

Fr. George Parsenios



The Greek term *Χριστός*/*Christ* translates the Hebrew word *māshīah*/*messiah* which means “Anointed One.” The word *χρίσμα*/*chrism* means “ointment,” so anyone consecrated by the application of ointment is “anointed.” The word “Christ”

is not so much a name as it is a title for Jesus, which is why he is often called not just “Christ,” but “The Christ.” In Ancient Israel, many figures were anointed with oil to indicate their

holy office, such as priests, prophets, and kings like King David. After the Davidic line of kings in Jerusalem was dethroned for centuries by foreign invaders, the Israelites hoped for a figure from the line of David to restore them to their former independence. The famous Dead Sea Scrolls provide important evidence for this hope and express an expectation for various types of Messianic figures. Christians understand Jesus to be “the Christ” in the sense that he comes from the line of David as a victorious King. His victory, however, is not over a foreign oppressor like the Romans, but over the far more ancient and pervasive enemies of our race: sin and death and the Evil One.



Public Domain Illustration of St John's Eve from the 1912 Russian edition of the works of Nikolai Gogol

THIS WEEK'S LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY

St. John's Eve

Ben Malian, MTS

The Nativity of St. John the Baptist (June 24th) was once a major holiday for Christians throughout Europe. Falling six months *before* the Nativity of Christ (reflecting the extent of Elizabeth's pregnancy at the time of her visitation by the Virgin Mary), the feast roughly aligns with the summer equinox; unsurprisingly, it was widely celebrated as a “summer Christmas.”

As the shortest night of the year, St. John's Eve was thought to be an especially “thin” time when a variety of strange and even supernatural phenomena were likely to occur. In the Slavic world, the Christian feast replaced a pagan midsummer holiday known as Kupala. Like elsewhere across Europe, bonfires (often called “St. John's fires”) were an essential part of the night's often riotous festivities.

Nikolai Gogol, an eminent Ukrainian Orthodox author of the 19th Century, composed an eponymous short story about a peasant boy tricked by Satan on the infamous night. The bizarre tale ends with Satan left “sobbing pitifully in his lair”—the townspeople having abandoned his favorite haunt...the local tavern.

HOUSE OF GOD

Beauty & Symbols, A Sacred Space



Archdiocesan Cathedral of The Holy Trinity in NYC. Photographer: Dimitrios Panagos

Father Thomas FitzGerald, ThD (1947–2024)

The Orthodox Church believes that God is the Creator of heaven and earth. The Creator is present through His creative energies of His handiwork. This means that the material world, being valuable and good, is an important means through which God expresses Himself. The Orthodox Church affirms this conviction through her extensive use of material creation not only for the embellishment of her places of worship, but also in her sacramental mysteries and services. For example, when the bread and wine – “the first fruits of creation” – are offered in the Eucharist (Holy Communion), they are also a symbolic offering of all creation to God its Creator. Since there is no hesitation in using the gifts of creation, the interior of an Orthodox church is frequently very beautiful. Designed to create an atmosphere which is special, the building is filled with a feeling of joy and an appreciation of God’s bounty. Orthodoxy recognizes that beauty is an important dimension of human life. Through iconography and church appointments, the beauty of creation becomes a very important means of praising God. The divine gifts of the material world are shaped and fashioned by human hands into an expression of beauty which glorifies the Creator. As the pious woman poured her most precious oil on the feet of Our Lord, Orthodoxy seeks always to offer to God what is best and most beautiful.

The church interior is both the background and the setting for Orthodox worship. The art and architecture are designed to contribute to the total experience of worship, which involves one’s intellect, feelings, and senses. The Eucharist and the other sacramental mysteries take place in God’s midst, and they bear witness to His presence and actions. Therefore, in the Orthodox tradition there is a very strong feeling that the church is the House of God and the place where His glory dwells. For this reason, all Orthodox churches are blessed, consecrated, and set aside as sacred spaces. The whole church bears witness to God’s indwelling among His people. As one old admonition says: “Let the Christian consider well when he enters the church that he is entering another heaven. That same majesty of God which is in heaven is also in his church, and on this account the Christian must enter with reverence and awe.”



YOUR FAITH IN ACTION

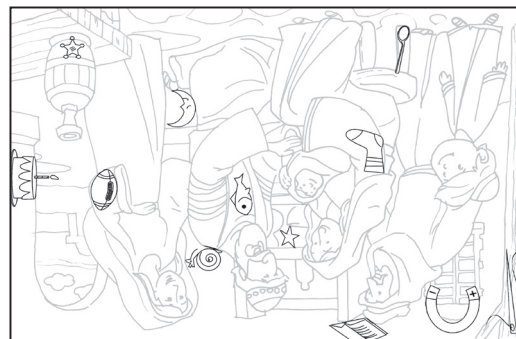
This week, choose one intentional act each day that reflects the sacred—pause for prayer, show kindness to someone in need, or bring beauty into your surroundings.



Hidden Pictures The Birth of John the Baptist

Just For Kids!
(...and the young at heart)

Find these objects hidden in the picture below: book, cake, fish, football, magnet, moon, needle and thread, snail, sock spoon, sherref's badge, star.



ANSWER KEY