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# THE NARTHEX

The disciples were first called Christian in Antioch (Acts.11:26)

The Newsletter of St Dunstan's Antiochian Orthodox Church, Poole BH14 9JG. The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of Great Britain and Ireland. Metropolitan Silouan. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. Patriarch John X.

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JANUARY – FEBRUARY 2023

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## THE MAN OF SIN

According to certain passages of the New Testament the early Church maintained a clear body of teaching regarding the Last Things, the ultimate end of all creation. The Second Coming of Christ (the Parousia) is not just found in the four canonical gospels but is evident in certain of the epistles and seems to have been a discrete subject of teaching, imparted to catechumens.

I wrote on this last year and make no apology for returning to the same topic, as it strikes me that it becomes ever and more evident that contemporary Christians should be made familiar with this teaching. From the start, however, I must impress upon readers that none of us knows when any of this will occur and bring human experience to its destiny. Nor is it intended that we should be alarmed or excited into believing that these things should be expected very soon. Yet neither should we disregard them or, indeed, cease praying for the Coming of Our Lord and the fulness of His kingdom, for this is the teaching of Orthodox Church. The truth is that we live our Christian life always on the edge, between this world and that which is to come, rightly paying heed to Our Lord's call to vigilance: '*Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!*' [Mk.13:135-37]

The particularly relevant passages of the New Testament are to be found in Paul's letters to the Thessalonians and in the epistles of John. Paul, for example, in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, reminds them that they have already received teaching on Christ's return: '*Concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night... But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.*' [1 Thess.5:1-5]

In the second epistle he is more specific: '*Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things?*' [2Thess.2:3-5] This passage is quite fascinating, not just for those who devoutly read the scriptures, but also for biblical scholars, in that it reveals how the early Church passed on a clear body of specific teaching regarding the last days, and what they knew from revelation should be handed on to those who became Christian. There is no reason, of course, to dismiss these ideas as the invention of storytellers, and every reason to believe that they were revealed by Christ Himself to the apostles.

The man of sin that St Paul refers to is clearly expected to appear before the end; a human being who usurps the position of God in order to be worshipped, significantly, after the 'falling away;' presumably, a time of great apostasy from faith and a rejection of morality. In other words, this figure is not Satan himself, of course, but his servant who deludes the world. For St John, this character is *Antichrist*, that is, a counterfeit, passing himself off as God and beguiling the world into thinking that he is the Messiah; even deluding gullible Christians. The prime evidence, according to St John, is the denial of faith in the incarnation, something that the spirit of antichrist has always denied: '*Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.*' [1Jn.4:3] Again, we see that his readers had already been taught and warned of the coming of Antichrist.



*Ancient Byzantine Church of the Panagia, Thessaloniki*

Returning to St Paul, there is further elucidation of what can be expected as the time draws near: *'And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception*

*among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason, God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.'* [2 Thess.2:6-12] The essential point for the apostle is the final triumph of our Lord over all evil, and for Christians to be on their guard that they be not deluded themselves or, indeed, succumb to any form of unrighteousness.

St John goes on to warn against those who do not keep the teachings of the faith, both dogmatic and moral, and who would undo all his apostolic labours: *'For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God... If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him'* [2 Jn:7-10]

It is understandable, I think, that these passages from the New Testament have, for some time, taken on considerable relevance in our own day. There always were, of course, clear dangers in taking scripture in a literalist and fundamentalist way and applying it to our own circumstances. I need not remind you that the Orthodox Church has always looked to the Church Fathers for guidance in understanding the meaning and relevance of the Bible, the holy book that itself, as an agreed canon of sacred texts, was finally compiled on the authority of the Church's bishops by the end of the fourth century; it is very much the Church's book. In classic Protestantism, the Bible is the one source of authority over the Church; in Catholicism, the Bible is an authority alongside and parallel to Tradition. For Orthodox Christianity, however, the Bible is part of Holy Tradition itself, an organic unity of teaching authority, bearing the Holy Spirit's guidance. How, then, are we to apply these apocalyptic (revelatory) ideas preserved for us in the apostolic tradition?

There are certainly factors in our own times that bear an uncanny likeness to the great 'falling away.' Firstly, we might cite the example of the increasing atheism of the western world and the demise of accepted moral norms and social mores. Many may argue that you do not need religion in order to have ethics. However, without an accepted source of moral authority the boundaries become ever more and more unstable and the victim of subjective opinion. At best, secular morality is mere enlightened self-interest, divorced from the greater aim of personal salvation. Moral degeneracy has, of course, a long history, but linked with modern relativism, the public stage is open to powerful manipulation, and the door is opened for Antichrist.

Secondly, the rise of powerful globalist forces, especially in economics and industry, increasingly usurps the power of the nation state. Elites in unelected and unaccountable supra-national organisations (e.g., G7, G20, IMF, WEF) are able to make decisions entirely removed from democratic control and can centralise power in what amounts to the beginnings of a quasi-world government. In effect, setting up the machinery that will require a leader who can preside over all: and the door is opened for Antichrist.

Thirdly, although hard to imagine at present, certain of the world's great historical religions appear to be moving increasingly towards syncretism and their amalgamation into a mutually accepted system of belief. Liberal Protestantism in particular tends to regard anyone who believes in Christ as their saviour, as a member of *The Church*, a vague and unstructured gathering of any who believe, and obsessively concerned with inclusion that requires no repentance. Such a uniting world religion will invite in its own messiah in place of the Orthodox Christ: and the door is opened for Antichrist.

This calls for real vigilance on our part and that we be very cautious in our dealings with the world and any movement towards globalisation. It is clear that times will be very difficult for the faithful Orthodox when the Man of Sin is revealed; they will be seen a recusant, refusing to worship the anti-messiah and as enemies of a united world. They will undergo suffering like the martyrs of the first three centuries AD, who refused to offer worship to the Roman emperors.

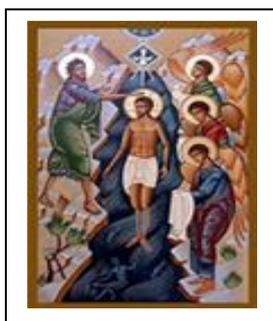
Returning to our forebears in the Faith, we end with this teaching from the end of an ancient Christian treatise called The Didache (The Teaching), written probably around the end of the first century AD. *‘Watch for your life’s sake. Let not your lamps be quenched, nor your loins unloosed; but be ready, for you know not the hour in which our Lord will come. But come together often, seeking the things which are befitting to your souls: for the whole time of your faith will not profit you, if you are not made perfect in the last time. For in the last days false prophets and corrupters shall be multiplied, and the sheep shall be turned into wolves, and love shall be turned into hate; for when lawlessness increases, they shall hate and persecute and betray one another, and then shall appear the world-deceiver as Son of God, and shall do signs and wonders, and the earth shall be delivered into his hands, and he shall do iniquitous things which have never yet come to pass since the beginning. Then shall the creation of men come into the fire of trial, and many shall be made to stumble and shall perish; but those who endure in their faith shall be saved from under the curse itself. And then shall appear the signs of the truth: first, the sign of an outspreading in heaven, then the sign of the sound of the trumpet. And third, the resurrection of the dead — yet not of all, but as it is said: “The Lord shall come and all His saints with Him.” Then shall the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.’*

*Fr Chrysostom*



At the recent meeting of the Directors and Parish Committee it was suggested that we need designated people to give a lead with specific projects, gathering people to help. This was done recently with the cleaning of the church before Christmas. The meeting agreed that we should set up an **Antiochian Community Group** that might organise and oversee these projects. This would be an excellent way of serving our parish community. If you are willing and able to join this group, please give your name and mobile phone number to Madalina Chihai, or to either of the clergy.

## THEOPHANY, THE REVELATION OF THE HOLY TRINITY



‘The Godhead is one in three, and the three are one, in whom the Godhead is, or to speak more accurately, Who are the Godhead... For us there is but One God, the Father, of Whom are all things, and One Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom are all things; and One Holy Spirit, in Whom are all things... But they characterise the personalities of a nature which is one and unconfused... The Father is Father and is unoriginated, for He is of no one; the Son is Son and is not unoriginated, for He is of the Father. But if you take the word origin in a temporal sense, He too is

unoriginated, for He is the maker of time, and is not subject to time. The Holy Spirit is truly Spirit, coming forth from the Father indeed, but not after the manner of the Son, for it is not by generation but by procession.

There ought also to be worshippers on earth, that all things may be filled with the glory of God... therefore man was created and honoured with the hand and image of God... Christ is illumined, let us shine forth with Him. Christ is baptized, let us descend with Him that we may also ascend with Him... He is the All-pure and he is baptized by John... What are we to learn and be taught by this? To purify ourselves first; to be lowly minded... Moses baptized but it was in water... John also baptized... not only in water but also ‘unto repentance.’ Jesus also baptized, but in the

Spirit. This is the perfect baptism... I know also a fourth baptism, that by martyrdom and blood, which also Christ Himself underwent; and this one is far more august than all the others, inasmuch as it cannot be defiled by after-stains. Yes, and I know a fifth also, which is that of tears, and is much more laborious.

St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration on the Holy Lights.*



#### SERVICES

Vespers is served on Saturday 5.00pm (Please enter by the side door). Fr Chrysostom is available for Confession afterwards or by appointment. Fr Filip is available for Confession by appointment. Orthros is served before the Divine Liturgy on Sundays at 8.45am

### JANUARY

Sun 1st Circumcision of the Lord. St Basil the Great. Divine Liturgy 10.30am  
Thurs 5<sup>th</sup> Eve of Theophany. Vespers Divine Liturgy and Great Blessing of Waters 6.00pm  
Sun 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Theophany. 30<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost. Divine Liturgy 10.30am  
Sun 15<sup>th</sup> 31<sup>st</sup> after Pentecost. Sunday of the Blind Man. Divine Liturgy 10.30am  
Sun 22<sup>nd</sup> 32<sup>nd</sup> after Pentecost. Sunday of Zacchaeus. Divine Liturgy 10.30am  
Sun 29<sup>th</sup> 33<sup>rd</sup> after Pentecost. Sunday of the Canaanite Woman. Divine Liturgy 10.30am

### FEBRUARY

Thurs 2<sup>nd</sup> The Meeting of our Lord (Candlemas).  
Sun 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee. Divine Liturgy 10.30am. Fast Free Week  
Sun 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Prodigal Son. Divine Liturgy 10.30am  
Sun 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Last Judgement. Meat fare Sunday. Divine Liturgy 10.30am.  
Sun 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Cheese fare. Expulsion of Adam. Divine Liturgy 10.30am  
Mon 27<sup>th</sup> Beginning of Great Lent.

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*This world is a contest and a field of contest. This time is the time of struggle... the King lays no limit on His warriors until the contest is over; then every man will be brought to the doors of the King of Kings and there tried as to whether he has gained the victory in the contest or has turned his back. There is only one law there: to watch and resist.*

St Isaac the Syrian. *Directions on Spiritual Training.*

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We owe a great debt of gratitude to Nonica and Daniel (and their volunteer helpers) for their tremendous efforts in providing the Christmas decorations in the Church, and for the wonderful restoration of the wood floor of the Church, all offered freely without any remuneration.