



HOLY ASSUMPTION MONASTERY



JANUARY 2022 NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends,

I don't know many people who are successful with New Year's Resolutions – I'm certainly not! And while I'm not that great on resolve, plenty of people who ARE good at resolve still don't do well with New Year's Resolutions. So, what is the problem?

This verse from the Octoechos sheds light on both the problem and the answer –

I ever commit sins and have no fear of Thee, O Christ, Who seekest my repentance with longsuffering. Grant me the intention to convert and disdain me not, in that Thou art good. (Tone 7, Monday Matins, Canon of Repentance, Ode 1)

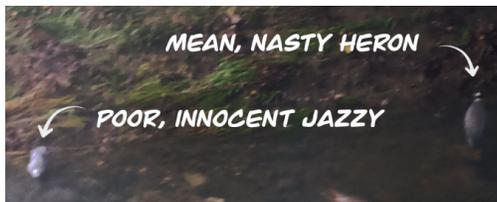
My main problem isn't lack of resolve – it's sin. And the solution isn't finding resolve – it's allowing myself to be found by Christ Who patiently seeks my repentance. So, no resolutions this year, just this prayer "Grant me the intention to convert and disdain me not, in that Thou art good!"

with love in Christ,

Mother Melania and the sisters

ZOO UPDATE - Jazzy flies solo

Just when we thought we had run out of duck adventures, we have a particularly dramatic one to report. Jazzy, one of the hens, somehow flew across the river to the other bank. The other ducks quacked at her for hours, but she was too scared to swim back. The ducks' chief servant and a few of our neighbors almost got her to come back, but she just couldn't find the courage. So, she spent the night on the far bank. In the morning, she was ready to come back EXCEPT for the presence of our local blue heron, who seems to be considering a duck dinner. Eventually, with the help of the Calistoga police department (REALLY!) to scare off the heron, Jazzy swam back to our bank and let her servant carry her to safety. Jazzy seems to have learned her lesson for now, but we are fortifying the area where she most likely got across. As they say, better safe than sorry!!



No, of course we're not trying to influence your opinion!



Jazzy - There's no place like home!

CALENDAR

SUNDAYS - Divine Liturgy, 10AM

St. Basil/Circumcision of Our Lord (Sat Jan. 1) - 9am Divine Liturgy

Eve of Theophany (Wed Jan 5) - 7am Royal Hours; 1pm Vespereal Liturgy; 6pm Vigil

Theophany (Thur Jan 6) - 9am Divine Liturgy

for other services, please see our website

ZOOM RETREATS

SAT. JAN 8, 10AM-12PM: His Grace, Bishop DANIEL - Priests and Parishioners: Sharing the Journey

SAT. FEB 12, 10AM-12PM: TBA

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DECEMBER ZOOM MEETING - Saturday, December 11th, 2021

On Saturday, December 11, the monastery community and friends gathered to hear Fr. Anthony Roeber offer some "Reflections on St. Ephrem the Syrian's Hymns of the Nativity." Fr. Anthony Roeber began by reminding us all that we need to remember who St Ephrem was, when and where he lived, and the audience for whom these hymns were first composed. Some aspects of his poetry, a mix of both the historical and the deeply typological way of hearing Scripture, can sometimes catch us off guard. But most of the 400 surviving authentic hymns he composed continue to have a profound influence on Orthodox hymnody even today.



The hymns were so influential that, although many later Orthodox did not compose or even understand the classical Syriac in which St Ephrem wrote his lyric poetry (madroshe), Greek-language composers such as St. Romanos the Melodist were influenced by St. Ephrem's work. Even in the Latin West of St. Ambrose of Milan, Orthodox Catholic Christians were encouraged to learn how to hold vigils and sing hymns "in the Syrian manner." Today's Eastern Orthodox Christians, even if they do not know the vigils for the Nativity for which this poetry was composed, can catch an echo of the structure by thinking of the Kontakia and the singing of stanzas and refrains such as occur in the Akathist to the Theotokos sung during Great Lent.

Due to limitations of time, Fr Anthony confined his comments to the first and fifth of the Nativity Hymns. St. Ephrem's most crucial theological point in the Nativity hymns concerns his view of the sacred nature of the creation itself (through which God continues mysteriously to unfold his revelation to His people) alongside St Ephrem's view of humanity as "youths" who rebelled and in their pride interrupted the entire creation's purpose – namely, the fulfillment of human beings' union with God and the stewardship of the creation that, even despite their sin, remains "good." This theme is not only sounded in the refrains of the Nativity Hymns (for example "Blessed be the babe by whom Adam and Eve were restored to youth") but finds expression elsewhere in the Hymns of Paradise and St Ephrem's Commentary of Genesis 2: 14-23. This understanding of the ancestral sin resonates to the similar insights of St. Irenaeus of Lyon's teaching about how the Incarnation of Christ sets in motion the "recapitulation"—the restoring of original possibility—of humanity and the entire creation that was interrupted by the youthful rebellion of the first humans. The poetry of St. Ephrem continues to inform the Orthodox faith today in how we hear and read the Scriptures properly and why we are called to reaffirm the goodness of God's creation and its restoration to its full potential.

In the questions and comments that followed, some wondered why we do not today use the poetry and the vigils in our Orthodox worship. Fr Anthony pointed out that we actually do not have any idea of what the musical settings sounded like for the original Syriac poetry. If we were to use the vigils today, we would have to compose appropriate music for the language in which the saint's hymns would now be sung. Other participants wanted to be reminded again of the primary theological purpose behind St Ephrem's poetry and asked where they might find English translations and publications of the Saint's hymns. Although some scholars have noted that St. Ephrem, like so many of the Syrian ascetics, seems at time to focus on the centrality of Christian virginity, he clearly distanced himself from the most radical sects that disdained marriage and sexuality altogether. In his hymnody, he exalts the ancestors of Christ. His poetry traces and exalts the witness of the prophets, the kings, and the women of the Old Testament such as Tamar, Ruth, and Boaz who play a critical role in what Isaiah, David, Solomon, Ephrata, Balaam, Zechariah and Solomon foretold. But it was the "daughter of Eve, who without a man bore a child ... the second Adam" that reveals what otherwise is incomprehensible—that "it is the virgin womb that gave birth." The retreat reflections ended with prayer and the exchange of greetings for the balance of the Nativity Fast and the Feast for which St. Ephrem wrote his lyric poetry.

This Zoom talk can be found at

<https://holyassumptionmonastery.com/december112021reflectionsonstphremthesyrianshymnsfornativity>

Gratefulness (mostly Christmas)

After an overly quiet 2020, we are grateful to God for



Best buddies who didn't start out that way!



Our first ever cookie decorating event (and the cheer it brought to kids!!)



Our church family, who have been with us through thick and thin



Fr. Edward Henderson, who faithfully joins us for Christmas year after year



Our Lord Who was born in a cave for our salvation!