

Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast

April 14, 2013

Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor; Subdeacon Daniel J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris, Cantors
Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 – 8.

GLAD TIDINGS

+++ We are in the Great Fast. We encourage our faithful to observe the spirit of this holy season by fasting, practicing charity and increased prayer life. Please observe the penitential prescriptions of the Church during this entire period.

+++ On Friday evening, we celebrate the Presanctified Divine Liturgy at 7: 30 PM. Please join us in prayer and praise. Confession of sin takes place before and after the celebration.



In Love Of God

We know that God makes all things work together for the good to those who love God and are called according to His decree Romans 8: 28.

The Lord keeps all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy Psalms 145:20.

He who obeys the commandments he has from me is the man who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father. I too will love him and reveal myself to him" John 14: 21.

Listen ,dear brothers. Did not God choose those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom he promised to those who love him? James 2:5.

Of this wisdom it is written: "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned upon man what God has prepared for those who love him" 1 Corinthians 2: 9.

Love, then, consists in this: not that we have loved God, but that he has loved us and has sent his Son as an offering for our sins. We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him. We, for our part, love because he first loved us 1 John 4: 10, 16, 19.

But if anyone loves God, that man is known by him 1 Corinthians 8: 3.

Happy the man who holds out to the end through trial! Once he has been proved he will receive the crown of life the Lord has promised to those who love him James 1: 12.

The Lord's Prayer

With the Our Father, Jesus both taught us how to pray and gave us a summary of the Gospel

Observing Jesus at prayer, the disciples asked him for instruction on how to pray (cf. Luke 11: 1). In response, He taught them the *Our Father*, a prayer that is so familiar to us that we often say the words without thought or reflecting on their meaning as they fall from our lips. The *Our Father* is found in Scripture during the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus also introduced us to the values of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5 – 7). The *Our Father* embodies the Beatitudes which is often recognized as the self-portrait of Christ as well as the blueprint for holiness.

From the earliest times, the *Our Father* was passed on to those who were baptized. Reborn in Christ, as communicants of the Church, we become then capable of speaking to our heavenly Father with the very Word of God. The true home of the *Our Father* is in the celebration of the Eucharist, which totally embodies its seven petitions.

In the *Our Father*, we approach God the Father with simplicity and trust. When the eternal Son became man, He revealed the Father to us. The Holy Spirit joins us to Christ so that we may have knowledge of the Father and become his children. As we call upon God as our Father, the Holy Spirit rekindles our desire to live as his devoted sons and daughters.

Every word counts and has precise value in the *Our Father*, beginning with the simple encapsulating, “our.” To address and call God “our” Father is to affirm our relationship with him. Saying “our” Father, we also say that the Church of Christ is the communion of those who call God their Father. Thus the *Our Father* is implicitly a prayer for the unity of the Church and the unity of the entire human family.

In adding the phrase, “who are in heaven,” we acknowledge the utter grandeur of God, who is not diminished or domesticated when we call him *Our Father*.

After the opening words, come the seven petitions. The first three praise our God for his glory even as we ask to be drawn more deeply into that encompassing glory. The last four ask God to bend down to assist us in our need: “to feed and nourish us, to forgive us, to sustain us in temptation and to free us from the influence and temptation of the evil one.”

With very first petition, “hallowed be your name,” we ask to be made holy by professing God’s name and by making it known to the ends of the earth.

In the second petition, “your kingdom come,” we pray for Christ to come in glory at the end of time and also ask to share in the holiness of the kingdom of God. In effect, we are asking to be equipped to build a civilization of love.

The third petition, “on earth as it is in heaven,” involves praying for a share in the perfect and loving obedience of Christ, to be Christ-like. We ask the Father to unite our will with that of his Son, just as He has done in the lives of the Ever Virgin and all the saints. We also seek God’s plan of salvation be realized in our lives and that we may know and do his will.

The final four petitions relate to our human condition and begin with a prayer for our “daily bread.” Here we ask our heavenly Father for what we need while recognizing that we do not live “...on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Matthew 4: 4. Thus, we seek to be nourished by the living Word of God and by the Body of Christ in the Eucharist.

In the fifth petition, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” we ask God to forgive our sins, confident as we are in the power of his forgiving love. As we say these words, however, we bind ourselves to the heart of Christ as we hear him saying, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” Matthew 5: 7. Even God’s mercy cannot enter a heart that is hardened by hatred. In opening our hearts to the love of Christ, we find the grace to forgive our enemies. When we do so, we share in divine mercy and the peace of God’s kingdom.

By the sixth petition, “Lead us not into temptation,” we seek from God his ever faithfulness, to stand by us so that we may clearly know right from wrong, have the graceful strength to persevere in holiness, and be one with Christ who overcame temptation through prayerful devotion.

In the final petition, we pray, “...deliver us from evil.” Here we ask to be delivered from the grasp of the evil one who works to harm us both physically and spiritually. We make this prayer not only for ourselves, but indeed, for all within the Body and Bride of Christ, as well as for the world. We pray with confidence because we believe that Christ already conquered sin and death by his own death and Resurrection.

The last word of the *Our Father* is added by the Church, “Amen,” by which we express our assent to the prayer Jesus taught us. May our lives also express our assent to this prayer which is itself a compendium of Christian faith.

Contemporary Pagans

When men destroyed the law of nature and thought that creation created itself, or honored it more than they should, making it equal to You, God of all, You did not allow them to go astray, but revealed Your holy servant Moses, and through him you gave them the written law to explain that of nature, and You showed creation was Your work and exposed and expelled the error of polytheism Book Eight of Apostolic Constitutions.

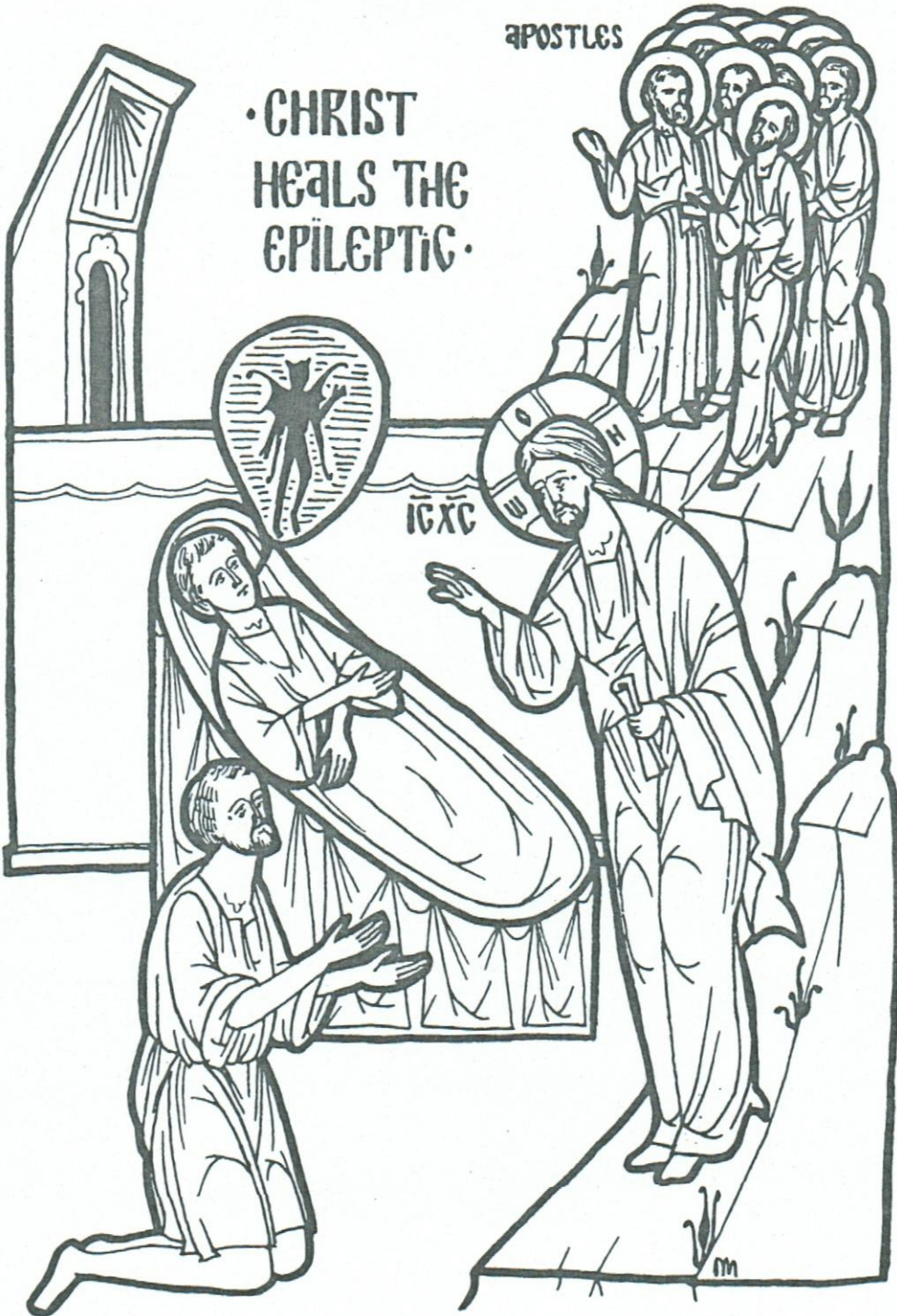
One of the phenomenal growing “religious” movements today is called by its followers *neo-paganism*. Witchcraft or respectably, *wicca* from the old English word for witch is rearing its head once again on the American scene. Of course, we must immediately put aside notions of witches from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* with their bubbling cauldrons. The practitioners of *wicca*, the *neo-pagans* for our time are found in all walks of life and all ages. This interest has made especially great inroads among young people. It has been popularized by such TV shows as *Sabrina* and the *Smurfs*. Americans are accepting and receptive towards it.

The practitioners of *wicca*, called wiccans, as they like to be referred to, see themselves as heirs of the pagan religions of old, but living here and now; thus they prefix their own description with *neo* for “new” or “contemporary” religions focused primarily on the deceit and worship of the forces of nature with a view to controlling and appeasing them for both spiritual and material benefit. They, out of ignorance and misunderstanding, think if they create some gods they can comprehend, they might better appreciate their lives in a vacuous world. Wiccans claim that despite the efforts of Christianity to demonize it, paganism was not inherently evil and it really never died out. They maintain it was practiced quietly into our own time and point to the “burning” episodes of history, the sporadic persecution of witches in western Europe and early America as proof of its continued existence.

There may be some truth to these claims. The spread of the faith of Christ in the Roman Empire was initially an urban phenomenon. People who lived in the country, in Latin, the *pagani*, remained largely unevangelized and clung to the old nature religions of their ancestors. With the accession of Emperor Constantine at the beginning of the fourth century, Christianity literally mushroomed in growth as persecutions were governmentally ended. However, many of

apostles

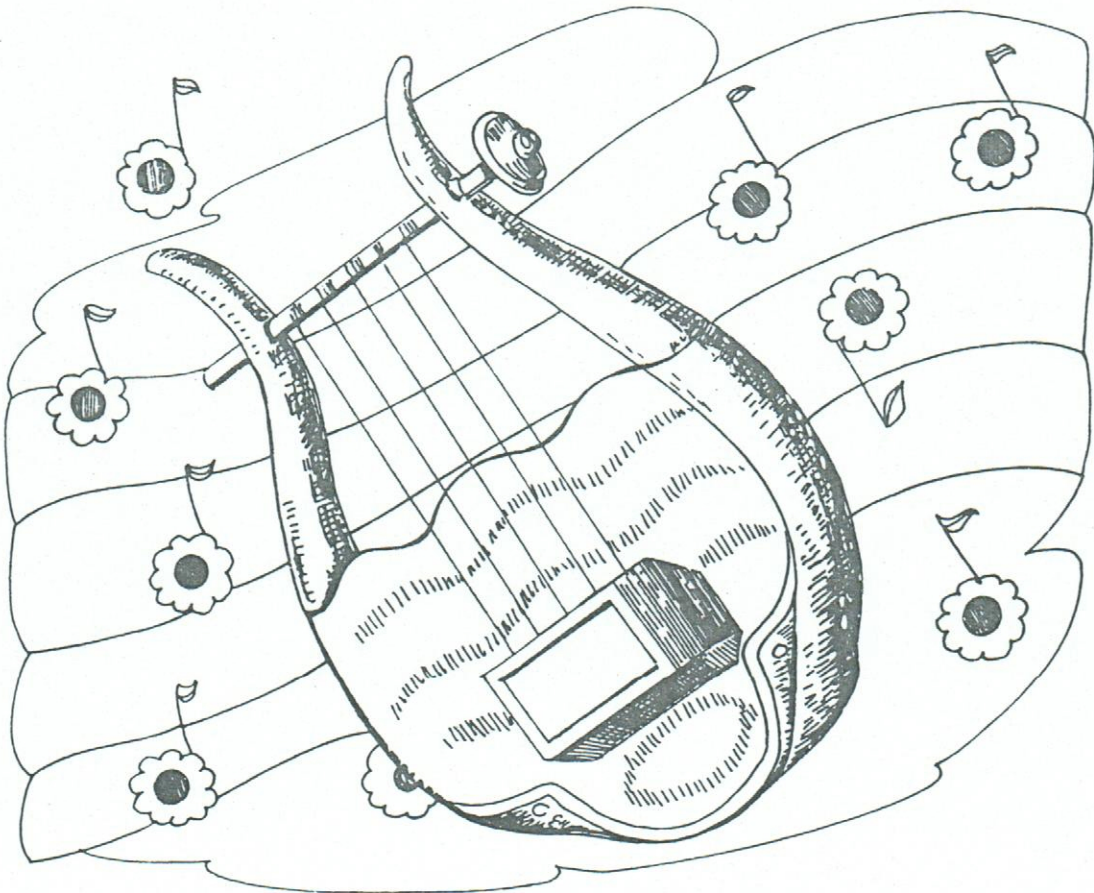
• CHRIST
HEALS THE
EPILEPTIC •



SAUL

The people of Israel wanted to have a king like other countries. A young man named Saul stopped at the house of the prophet, Samuel. Samuel was certain that Saul was meant to be king and blessed him. Samuel gathered the people together and presented Saul as the king. There was a great festival to honor Saul.

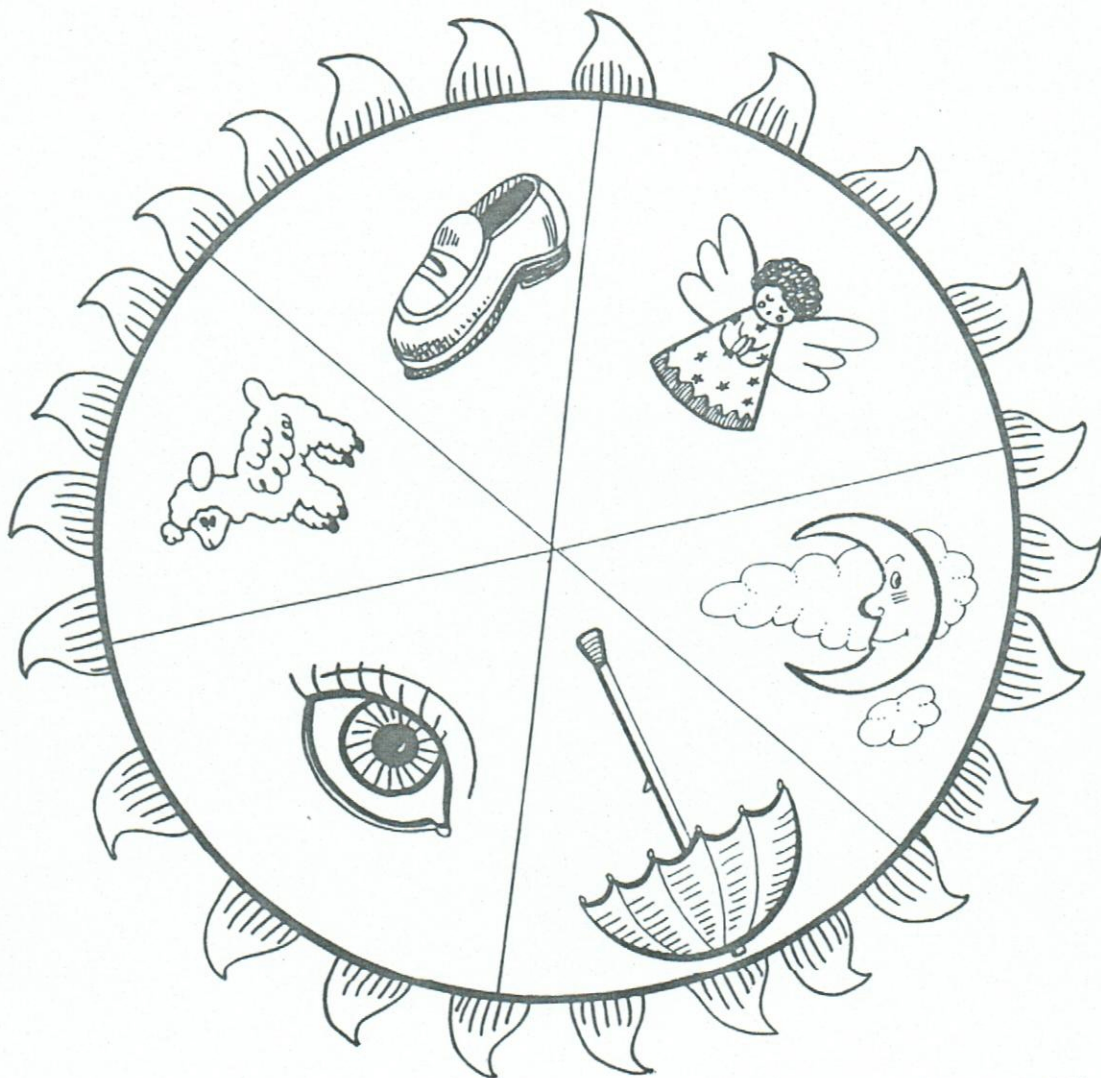
But Saul was not a good king. When his soldiers fought in other lands they kept the riches they found for themselves and did not offer thanks to God. Samuel was told to look for another king. He chose the young shepherd, David. David came to the court to play his lyre for Saul, who did not know then that one day David would replace him and become the greatest king of Israel.



WORD WHEEL

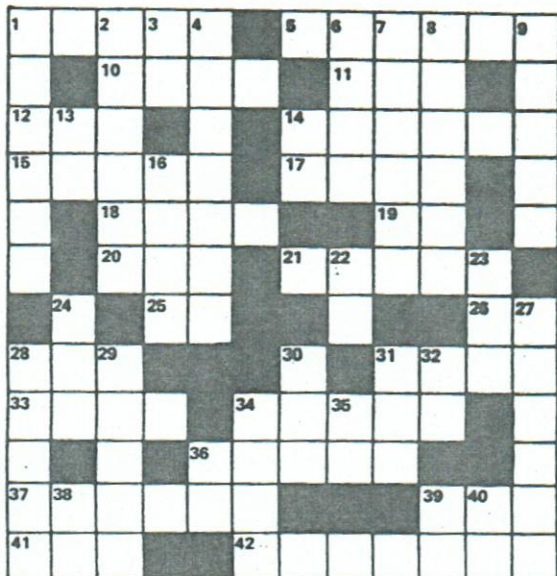
Write the beginning letter of each object to find the hidden word that answers the question.

What Was The Name Of A Prophet?



Answer: Samuel

I KINGS



ACROSS

DOWN

- The Book of _____ is a religious history of Israel.
- The _____ occupies the center of attention in Kings.
- Prefect of Ramoth-Gilead.
- Large constrictor snake.
- An acid (Chem. abbrev.).
- Shimei was told not to cross the Kidron _____.
- A lover.
- Prayer, appeal.
- Charity; work of mercy.
- Cubic centimeters.
- A Chinese weight.
- Ash-colored.
- Holy Name (abbrev.).
- Engineman (U.S. Navy; abbrev.).
- A head covering.
- Father of Shimei.
- King of Israel after Zimri.
- One intolerantly attached to his opinion only.
- Israel's most prominent king.
- Prophet; followed Elijah.
- Ruled Israel after Abijam.
- Temple completed in this month.
- Solomon's palace was called the Forest of _____.
- Solomon told Shimei not to cross the _____ Valley.
- Mother of Rehoboam.
- General Motors (abbrev.).
- Succeeded David as king.
- Mountain north of Jerusalem.
- Idol of the Ammonites.
- The Forest of Lebanon was Solomon's _____.
- Solomon married the daughter of the king of _____.
- Negative answer.
- Vice-president (abbrev.).
- Ruled Israel after Baasha.
- Saint (abbrev.).
- Father of Abner.
- Male sheep.
- Prophet; anointed Solomon king.
- Mountain of God.
- A track, path.
- Temple begun in this month.
- Our Creator.
- Electronics Technician (abbrev.).
- Chief god of the Canaanites.
- Soldier in U.S. Army.
- "Das heist." ("that is to say...").
- Chemical symbol for lutecium.
- Airman (U.S. Navy; abbrev.).
- South (abbrev.).



I KINGS

these new converts were motivated not by the love of Christ, but by the love of wealth, power, acceptance and influence that Christians were now beginning to accrue.

It should come to us as no surprise that shortly past the mid-century point the Emperor Julian called the Apostate, who abandoned his lightly espoused Christian faith, sought to re-establish his own version of paganism which he called Hellenism. Naturally he found many so-called Christians willing to join him in his endeavor. But even before his death, it was apparent paganism under any name or description, was spiritually bankrupted. While attempting to manipulate the forces of nature with spells, sacrifices, and specious rituals to insure good harvests and health for its participants, it certainly had come to the end of its journey as man's needs are concerned. In ancient religious practice the teachings of philosophers as Plato and his followers, "natural religion" was being called into question. For many educated people, it was this dissatisfaction and emptiness that caused many to embrace Christianity in the first instance.

However, centuries later, despite a history of surface Christianity, some people continued to practice the superstitions and pagan beliefs of earlier generations. Rulers often forced mass conversions to Christianity without proper education and spiritual formation which we see in the much exalted example of Prince Vladimir and the baptism of Rus'. People underwent the outward ritual, but did not pursue any formal learning and enlightenment. When we see the problem repeated in myriad kingdoms, we see how difficulties of spiritual bankruptcy can arise.

We see some of the survival of this in many backgrounds and areas today. While some pagan customs were used by the Church to teach the gospel message, in the transformation to the Nativity of our Lord from the pagan Birth of the Sun god to the Birth of the Invincible Sun of Righteousness, is but one example. How Christianity succeeded with this transformation is still a question, given the remarkable degeneracy this holy day has fallen into with the aid of so-called believers who celebrate it as a time of intense partying frivolity and uncontrolled consumerism and silly gift-giving. Certainly the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord in the flesh is not a paramount or even understood reason for the feast day. The practice of dying and writing eggs for the feast of the Resurrection is an example of a pagan practice being "baptized" and Christianized and transformed by the Church into a popular vehicle to teach Resurrection truth. And here, too, there is a question of whether or not people indulging in and

perpetuating the practice of egg coloring or “pisanki” with the correct Christian approach and mentality is still to be determined.

In our own memory, many older people, primarily European born, invoked “Perun,” the ancient Slavic pagan god of lightening and thunder when cursing another. He was the chief of gods, corresponding to the Roman Jupiter or the Greek Zeus. Despite the efforts of Christian missionaries to identify him with the devil, his name has not been forgotten by those descendants who speak English only today. Many of these people can point out a woman in their midst who was described as a “bosorka” or witch who cast spells to bring good luck or bad on others. All these survivals from ancient pagan practice attest the possibility and viability of idolatrous survival under Christian patronage. The Church did not fulfill its responsibilities the way it should have. Legally it proscribed their existence, but spiritually failed to reach and convert the soul.

The official intolerance of all forms of paganism that was shown historically by the Church had its origin in the Church’s view of pagan worship, specifically idolatry. While modern wiccans deny they are idolaters in the commonly understood sense, they do worship and use “magic” to commune with rather amorphous deities known as “gods and goddesses.” The Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians observes, “...we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is only one God” 1 Corinthians 8: 4. However, the apostle also writes to another group of believers, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” Ephesians 6: 12.

Early Christians and later Fathers of the Church came to believe that idols, the gods and goddesses of antiquity, were in fact extensions of demons that seduced human beings into foolishly worshipping them. The insightful Old Testament poetry teaches us, “For all the gods of the nations are demons; but the Lord made the heavens” Psalms 96: 5. In his first *Apology*, St. Justin Martyr, writing about the year 165 AD, comments on similarity to communion ritual of the cult of Mithras with that of the Church saying, “...the evil demons have imitated this and ordered it to be done also in the mysteries of Mithras.”

All pagan worship, that is, nature worship, is ultimately based on deception, substituting the worship of creation for the Creator. The Wiccan Council of American Witches, 'Principles of Belief' openly states, "We practice rites to attune ourselves with the natural rhythm of life-forces marked by the phases of the moon and the seasonal quarters and cross quarters. We recognize that our intelligence gives us a unique responsibility toward our environment. We seek to live in harmony with nature, in ecological balance offering fulfillment to life and consciousness within an evolutionary concept." Contrast this with the Apostle Paul once again, "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" Romans 1: 21 - 23.

Quoting again the wiccan "*Principles of Belief*," "We conceive the creative power in the universe as manifested through polarity: a masculine and feminine, i.e. the gods and goddesses, and that this same creative power lives in all people, and functions through the interaction of the masculine and feminine. We value neither one above the other. We value sexuality as pleasure, as the symbol and embodiment of life, and as one of the sources of energies used in magical practice and religious worship." The Apostle to the Gentiles accurately anticipated such nonsense when he taught, "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves; who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever" Romans 1: 24, 25.

Wiccans at least in the "*Principles of Belief*" deny they worship satan, in fact they deny both the existence of demons and evil: "We do not accept the concept of 'absolute evil' nor do we worship any known entity as 'satan' or the 'devil' as defined by Christian Tradition. We do not seek power through the suffering of others, nor do we accept the concept that personal benefits can only be derived by denial to another."

In enumerating these, modern pagans seek to avoid the stereotypes most people have, although from an Orthodox Christian perspective and experience, worship of any but the Creator will eventually lead to worship of the devil. To quote St. Paul once again, "...for satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works" 2 Corinthians 11: 1. Wiccans deny the existence of heaven or hell and believe in reincarnation in some form or another. One witch says, "What is the purpose of religion? Some people would say, 'hope.' But I say, hope for what? Hope for the afterlife? Hope for something better than this? Unfortunately, this answer assumes a view that there is something wrong with this life, with the life we are living. It is evident that Christians have a low opinion of the human condition, and that their belief in the afterlife of heaven and hell reflects this opinion. However, wiccans is a religion that celebrates life and nature. We are a people who believe this earth is our paradise. Therefore, we do not want to escape or move to a higher plane. We want to stay right here! This concept is one of the reasons we believe in reincarnation."

On the contrary, to what this author states, the Church always has affirmed, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have life everlasting. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" John 3: 16, 17. We can ask modern witches "If the world is paradise, then why bother with wiccan nonsense to improve oneself?" The Church of Jesus Christ confesses that through the Incarnation of Christ, His death and Resurrection, and of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, this fallen world is already being changed and this change will culminate in the second coming of Jesus Christ. As we say in the Creed, "I look to the Resurrection of the dead and the life the world to come."

Modern witches affirm they believe in universal tolerance. Citing the Council of American Witches "*Principles of Belief*," we read, "Our only animosity toward Christianity, or toward any other religion or philosophy of life, is to the extent that its institutions have claimed to be the one true right and only way and have sought to deny freedom to others and to suppress other ways of religious practice and belief." This is a truly "american" democratic appeal to free-thinking masses.

This is exactly what the pagan ancients said to early Christians. Pagans persecuted the Church not because it believed in Christ as they were more than willing to add Him to a pantheon of gods. It was because Christians insisted they could only worship and be faithful to Christ in the Holy Trinity alone, that they were persecuted and charged with "atheism" by their pagan neighbors and accused, in today's liberal language, of being "intolerant" of others. Wicca will continue to grow in the decades to come. It promises its followers the power to manipulate the forces of nature around them, sexual license under the guise of spirituality, and freedom from any concept of sin or adverse judgment. The only commandment of wicca is "Do whatever you wish but cause no harm to others." Doubtless in years to come, the influence of neo-paganism in all its forms will increase, primarily because so-called Christian believers are so luke-warm in their own profession of faith.

Perhaps some United Nations committee is already proposing it as the basis for a world religion that will serve to unite all peoples in a common life-affirming spirituality based on concern for all faith cultures, for the global environment, or some other similar nonsense. True believers in Jesus Christ will then be persecuted once again as "intolerant" or "bigoted" since the only sin the new-paganism, like ancient paganism recognizes is claiming to possess the truth! But, make no mistake, neo-paganism will eventually become the foundation of the religion of the anti-Christ just as ancient paganism gave rise to emperors and rulers like Nero and Domitian who advanced torture and death to induce Christians to renounce the "sinful" belief they possessed the truth and help them become like the rest of society once more.

"And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nothing by the manifestation of His coming; even he, whose coming is according to the working of satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sends them a working of error, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" 2 Thessalonians 2: 8 - 12.



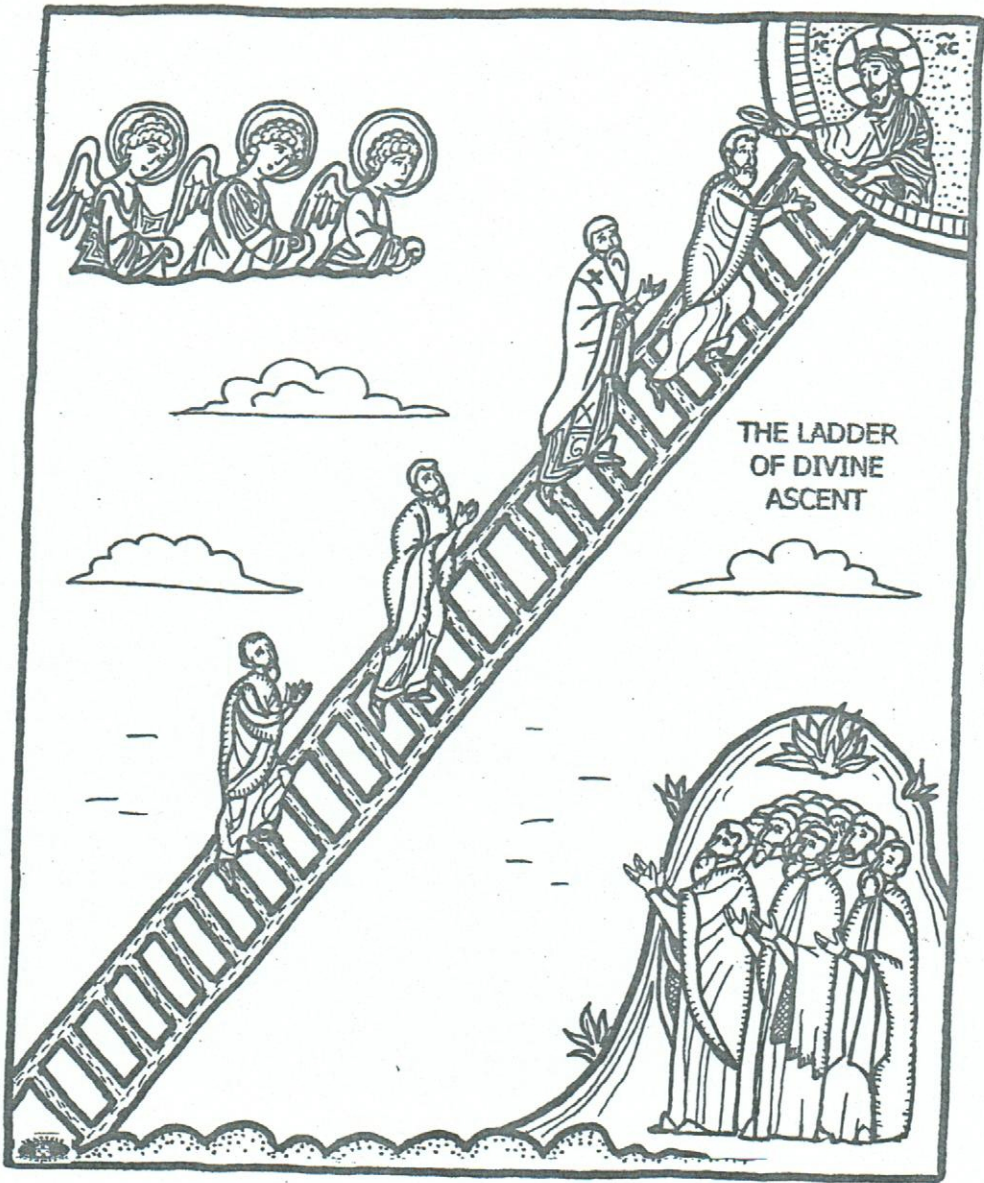
SHIPS AND BOATS




E F N W T P X G E N S E Z A Y M D H
 E N J P N T G P X N H L K H S H U T
 Q S M E R C H A N T S L E S S E V R
 L U A P M O S Q I S L U U A E M E A
 U O F O Q T M E T V U J I L Z D F D
 I H G A Y N Z E A M Q L I R R I R E
 P Z M S V Q Y V D S S L S K S S H C
 A J K P E O W F J J A K P H P C P Z
 B W G I F A Y B I G I D E G I I X E
 O O P H B K F A Q H T R G L H P B R
 J D U S U N J A G Q M I J D S L Y M
 S T K A C V O A R E X B O I E E W X
 R D C R K M N M N I P A V S L S S A
 S U I W A N A S O I N R V M T O Z B
 Z X W K O H H X J L Z G A D T I D S
 V C L A V Q Q N X F O E A T A Y T S
 S P H O E N I C I A N S D Y B B W D
 Z R F O W N R H H C O D M N A F H Q

NOAH	VESSELS	TRADE	GALILEE
ARK	PHOENICIANS	ROME	VOYAGE
JONAH	MERCHANTS	BARGES	SAILS
FISHERMEN	BATTLESHIPS	PAUL	SEAS
SEAFARING	SOLOMON	DISCIPLES	SHIPS





THE LADDER
OF DIVINE
ASCENT

WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE

O John our father, God-bearer, hermit of the desert and angel in the flesh; you received heavenly gifts by your fasting, vigils, and prayers. You healed the sick and those coming to you with faith. Glory be to the One Who gives you strength; glory be to Him Who crowned you; glory be to the Lord Who heals all through your intercession Troparion, Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast.

O John, our leader and father; the Lord has placed you on high as a true guiding star lighting the ends of the earth with the truth of your virtue Kontakion, Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast.


Let the faithful exult in glory; let them sing for joy and take their rest Prokimenon, Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast.

Having heard the Gospel of the Lord, O venerable Father John, you left this world, counting as nothing the riches and glory that it offered. Then you cried out to everyone: Love the Lord and you shall find eternal favor, for nothing is preferable to His love. And when He shall come in glory, you will find repose with all the saints. Through their prayers, O Christ, grant great mercy to our souls Vesper Hymn, Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast.

We now behold a new mother, greater than the wonders of old. For who has ever known a mother to bear a child without the help of man? Who has known a mother to hold within her arms the Source of all creation? It was God's own will to be born in this manner, and you, O most pure Virgin, carried Him as an infant in your arms. Because of this, you can approach God with the boldness of a mother. Therefore, we venerate you and ask you to always beseech Him to have mercy on us and save our souls Vesper Hymn, Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast.

Traversing the path of this life, I have been sorely wounded by the thievery of passions; lift me up, O Christ, I beseech You. My soul has been stripped by thieves; they have left me half dead along the path, wounded by the blows of my sins; now deign to heal me, O Lord. By my passions, O Christ our Saviour, I have been stripped of Your commandments; sensual pleasures have struck me down; pour out the oil of Your love upon me Matins Hymn, Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast.

“HE WHO ENDURES TO THE END WILL BE SAVED”

 In this 4th Sunday of the Great Fast, a 6th century monastic saint known as St. John of the Ladder (Climacus) is commemorated. Although we know little about his personal life, St. John will forever be remembered for his powerful spiritual writing – *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* – which maps out for us in great detail a “*battle plan*” for attaining eternal life.

Take a close look at the icon depicted on the front of this morning’s bulletin – it is rather frightening, isn’t it? The icon very graphically shows the battle between the forces of good and evil that has gone on in the world since the fall of Adam and Eve. The Church gives us a solid foundation with her sacred teachings – a foundation that should provide an excellent start for us on our lifelong climb to reach our ultimate destination: the Kingdom of Heaven. Along the way, the angels are there to assist us and help us as we struggle at each rung of our heavenly ascent. But the demons are there also – tempting us and doing anything in their power to weaken that foundation that our Faith has provided for us. Sadly, as the icon shows us, at times they are successful, for many fall from the ladder and fall from grace before their journey is completed, plunging forever “. . . into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth.” (Matt 22:13)

But while that climb to Heaven is an *arduous* one, it is not an *impossible* one. As we see in today’s icon, the saints who have gone before us are on our side as well, praying and interceding in our behalf. No matter what, we can never give up or let down our guard. Christ’s own words should offer us comfort and hope in all of our spiritual struggles: “He who endures to the end will be saved.” (Matt 24:13)