

Holy Scripture

Every year on November 15, Orthodox Christians enter a period known as the "Winter Fast. This is a time of personal preparation in order that we might joyously greet our Lord on His birthday...Christmas!

In addition to fasting, we are encouraged to spend more time than usual studying and contemplating the Holy Bible. One very good place to devote ourselves to study during this period is the Psalms. St. Athanasius wrote that we "put on Christ" through the study of the Psalms, as they teach us how to pray. They reveal all of human history, from the creation of Adam and Eve to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In fact, the entire Bible is summarized in the Psalms!

Some may ask how are we to understand the Psalms? Our Lord Himself gives us the answer when He says; "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me (Luke 24:44-45). Thus, Jesus tells us that every word of the Psalms (and entire Old Testament) is about...Him! In other words, it is Christ Himself who provides the meaning of the Psalms for us.

Thus in the Psalms, Christ is the King, the Prophet, the Priest, and the Sacrifice, (The Offerer and the Offered...He receives the Gifts which He then offers in the Divine Liturgy). He is also all those who suffer...as He identified with "the least"...including widows, orphans, and the sick (Matthew 25).

The only thing in the Psalms that Christ is not is the sinner. As St. Paul wrote, He became like us in all things except in sin (Hebrews 4:14). Christ fulfilled the law and yet accepted its curse for us. Consequently, we find salvation as we unite ourselves to Him. This is how we read the Psalms.

As we contemplate the Psalms, we learn that the wisdom of "this world"...those spiritually uncomfortable things which we confront in our daily lives... is at war with the Wisdom of God. It is for this reason that "God became man, so that man could become god" (St. Athanasius). If we allow our "free will" to cooperate with the Divine Grace of God, then our eternal salvation through our Lord's Incarnation is realized. Thus, let us each resolve to not only fast during these holy days of preparation leading up to Christmas, but let us also resolve to unite ourselves to Christ through the contemplation and praying of the Holy and inspired Psalms.

Fr. Paul Tsahakis

St Nektarios Greek Orthodox Church, Charlotte, NC

St. Dionysios Hospital/Holy Monastery Holy Trinity/St. Nektarios, Aegina, Greece